Strengthening Civil Society in Myanmar
- the influence of political reforms

A case study on development of Community Based Organizations in the Ayeyarwady Delta

by

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Abstract

After almost half a century of military rule, Myanmar is in its democratisation process gradually opening up to the outside world and re-introducing people’s right to free speech and assembly. Civil society, which was either banned or strictly controlled during the authoritarian military regime, may now have the opportunity to gain ground. It is assumed that international development organisations will play an important role in this development. However, the ambiguity and the actors’ different perceptions of the term ‘civil society’ combined with the Burmese society still being affected by the past military structures may be a challenge for the strengthening of the civil society. These issues have been explored through a case study based on a civil society project implemented in the Ayeyawady Delta in Myanmar, led by the INGO ActionAid Myanmar (AAM). The fieldwork was conducted in fall 2012, and it included 36 eye-opening interviews. The empirical data has been approached through a social constructionist perspective, and studied by applying a narrative analysis, thus providing the basis to study how the informants construct their feelings through their narratives. As the theoretical framework, Marina Ottaway's (and Thomas Carothers) theories about ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ civil society have been applied to discuss the ambiguity of civil society, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and James Ferguson’s theories have been applied to study the relationship between civil society and the state. To discuss the role of AAM and its project implementation, Anthony Ware and Peter Oakley’s theoretical aspects on context-sensitive development have been applied. The thesis indicates that the main actors, the AAM and the villagers, have different understandings of civil society and this creates difficulties in implementing civil society projects in the Burmese context. Furthermore, it appears that the Burmese people are still affected by the past authoritarian ruling, and the informants express a need for everyone to change their mindsets. The political reforms undoubtedly have a positive influence on the Burmese people’s desire and possibilities of participating in civil society. It may, however, require more time in a country like Myanmar to fully adapt to the democratic environment, and hence fully exploit the potential of the reforms.
Map of Myanmar, the Ayeyarwady Delta and the villages visited

Myanmar (Burma)

◆ Township: Mawlamyinegyun

Villages:
1. Thu Htay Kone
2. Ka Tha Myin
3. Thu Htay Kone
4. Yae Kyaw Wa
5. Myo Chaung
6. Yae Phyu Kan
Preface

The development of this thesis has been a unique and eye-opening experience for me, and I am very grateful that I got the opportunity to conduct the studies in rural areas of a country that has been isolated for almost half a century. Apart from being overwhelmed by the warmth of the Burmese people, my fieldwork also taught me the challenges, restrictions and complexities involved when implementing development projects in a country like Myanmar, and I consider this knowledge very important for my own personal development.

The thesis has become a reality with the help of many people - friends, family members, colleagues and warm-hearted Burmese people - and probably also with a bit of luck. I am very grateful to:

First and foremost the villagers living in the Delta, who, in spite of limited resources, warmly welcomed us to their villages and their homes, showed us their lives, and prepared overwhelming meals for us.

Shihab Uddin, Shameem Sheik Dastagir and Aung Min Naing from ActionAid Myanmar, who invited me to Myanmar and allowed me to conduct fieldwork on their projects.

The Thadar Consortium management team, who helped me in obtaining access to the project area, supported and coordinated my fieldtrip and put me in contact with project partners in Yangon. From the Thadar Consortium I am particularly grateful to the project officers/managers who supported us during our fieldtrip in the Delta. These people took very good care of us and contributed to a successful fieldwork.

Ulrich Thomsen and Sabrina Lykkegaard Svidt from the Danish Embassy in Bangkok, who established the contact to ActionAid Myanmar.

Torah, the interpreter, who travelled with me to the Ayeyarwady Delta and interpreted 26 of my interviews. Torah is a very special Burmese girl, and she managed to spice up the long hours of sailing by telling interesting stories.

NIAS (Nordic Institute of Asia Studies): great colleagues, perfect office and working environment, litres of coffee, and a very professional librarian, Per, whose support made the research process much easier.

My father, Bjerne Ditlevsen, who travelled with me to Myanmar. During the fieldwork he had multiple different functions: photographer, research assistant, safety guard, and while I was conducting single-person interviews in the villages, his function was to distract the rest of the villagers, who were eager to eavesdrop on my interviews.

Last, but definitely not least, my supervisor Johan Fischer, whose constructive feedback and positive attitude has encouraged my writing spirit.
Abbreviations

AAI     ActionAid International
AAM     ActionAid Myanmar
BBC     British Broadcasting Corporation
BSPP    Burmese Socialist Program Party
CBO     Community Based Organisation
CSO     Civil Society Organisation
Danida  Danish International Agency
EU      European Union
GONGO   Government Non-government Organisation
INGO   International Non-government Organisation
LDC     Least Developed Country
LIFT    Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund
LNGO    Local Non-government Organisation
MBCU    Myanmar Baptist Church Union
NGO     Non-Government Organisation
NLD     National League for Democracy
PMT     Project Management Team (TC)
RMO     Ratana Metta Organisation
SLORC   State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC    State Peace and Development Council
SVS     Social Vision Services Organisation
TC      Thadar Consortium
TGH     Thingaha
UNDP    United Nations Development Program
USA     United States of America
USAID   United States Agency for International Development
USDP    Union Solidarity and Development Party
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1. Introduction

After half a century of military rule, Myanmar\(^1\) is experiencing what appears to be a democratic transition. In 2011 the military rule was officially replaced by a new government, led by President Thein Sein, which has taken steps towards democratisation, political reforms and the reopening of the country to the outside world. This political process has also enabled the largest political opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi\(^2\) to finally being elected and allowed to enter parliament.

Since the military coup in 1962 the Burmese people have been repressed and limited in their actions, particularly in regard to expressing themselves and meeting in public, and this repression has had a serious negative impact on civil society\(^3\). The political changes the country is now experiencing is by many seen as a possibility of creating a basis for civil society to grow stronger. As expressed by Aung San Suu Kyi in October 2011 “we (the NLD) have tried to promote civil society in Burma, because we think that is the best way to ensure basic democratic values”\(^4\).

In spite of these positive changes, however, the prospects of Myanmar entering a new, democratic era are still uncertain. The ruling elite of the new government is formed by ex-generals - even President Thein Sein himself is a former military general - and the Burmese people still seem to be met by restrictions and supervision. As expressed by a project manager of a church-based organisation, who I interviewed in the former capital Yangon, this democratisation process will take some time, because “we are born again (laughing). For the society development we are born again. And we start... hands up from the eggshell, and everybody can see the sun and the light clearly now. And they are at

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\(^1\) The name Myanmar will be used throughout the thesis. The former name Burma was in 1989 changed to Myanmar by the Military Government. Some countries like USA and UK still persist to use the name Burma.

\(^2\) Daw (‘Lady’) Aung San Suu Kyi, born in 1945 is the daughter of the national hero Aung San, who negotiated the independence from Great Britain in 1947. Aung San Suu Kyi has in her continued struggle for democracy been under house arrest for 15 years. She was released in 2010 and in 2012 she was elected member of Parliament. Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, and she has become a national – and international - icon in her fight for freedom and democracy in Myanmar - which she continues to name Burma.

\(^3\) (Liddell, 1999: 58-62)

\(^4\) (Aung San, 2011)
My interview with the project manager took place in November 2012, when I went to Myanmar in order to experience and explore this unique situation of rapid political changes taking place during a very sensitive period in the history of Myanmar. Due to the history of isolation, censorship and consequently a lack of information, I considered constructing my own empirical data to be paramount in order to get a deeper understanding of the situation, and to be able to obtain answers to my research questions. I was curious to find out whether the Burmese people are actually experiencing more freedom - as was the impression given by the international media - and how the political reforms are affecting their lives, in particular their possibilities and motivation to participate in civil society. I was also curious to find out how the political changes are affecting the work of International NGOs (INGOs) in implementing civil society projects in Myanmar.

1.1 The empirical basis

To provide the empirical basis for my studies the INGO ActionAid Myanmar\(^5\) (AAM) was chosen as the case, primarily because of the organisation's project activities related to the strengthening of civil society groups and promotion of civil rights in Myanmar. Contact to AAM was established through the Danish Embassy in Bangkok, and I am very grateful to AAM and their partnership consortium, the Thadar Consortium\(^6\) (TC), for inviting me to Myanmar and for assisting me in setting up the empirical basis for the master's thesis. The AAM strategy is to support local communities through partnerships with local NGOs\(^7\). The objectives, strategies and methods of AAM and the TC are presented in detail in chapter 3.2.

In order to obtain the empirical data I decided to conduct a qualitative, explorative case study based on an AAM-led civil society/livelihood project implemented in a number of

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\(^5\) ActionAid Myanmar is part of the International NGO ActionAid International (AAI)

\(^6\) Thadar Consortium is a consortium of local, national and international NGOs

\(^7\) (AAM Country Strategy 2012-2017, 2012: 4)
villages in the Ayeyarwady Delta\textsuperscript{8} (the ‘Delta’), eight hours by boat from Yangon. This project is managed by the TC, and the practical project implementation is done through 8 local NGOs (LNGOs), called Implementing Partners (IPs)\textsuperscript{9}. While the empirical data include policy papers and project reports from AAM and the TC, the most important data for this thesis are 36 semi-structured interviews with management staff, coordinators, project officers and villagers conducted in Yangon and in six villages and one township in the Delta.

In relation to the development of civil society there are three key actors: The state authorities, the development organisations (NGOs) and the local people. The empirical basis for the thesis is including only two of these groups, namely the development organisations represented by AAM/TC and the villagers in the Delta. Hence, the thesis, which also includes issues related to the role of the state, is having the key focus on the perspectives of AAM/TC and the villagers in the Delta.

The people interviewed are staff from AAM and TC and villagers from the Delta. The AAM staff consists of two persons; the Program Manager, Mrs. Shameem Sheik Dastagir, and a Fellowship Coordinator named U Aung Min Naing. They both started working at AAM before 2010, and have thus experienced the democratic transition from the perspective of an INGO. The TC staff, including NGO presidents, project managers and officers, are all Burmese. Some of them (three people) are part of the TC Project Management Team (PMT) in Yangon, while the rest (10) are employed at four different IPs (LNGOs) working in the Delta. The villagers living in the Delta are mostly part of the ethnic majority group, the Burmans (Bamar), and while some practices Christianity, the majority of the villagers are Buddhist. It appears that they have been living a quiet life, based on rice-farming and fishing, without being involved in ethnic conflicts. The majority of the villagers are extremely poor, some living in simple huts they term ‘tents’ (observation from fieldwork).

\textsuperscript{8} The Ayeryawady Delta is located in the southwestern part of Myanmar (see map on page ii)
\textsuperscript{9} (AAM/TC Technical Proposal, 2011: 4)
1.2 Three interlinked themes

The empirical data, which are approached from a social constructionist perspective, will form the basis for the analyses in the thesis. The intention is to explore how the different actor’s narratives about civil society, the political reforms and the role of AAM/TC are constructed in relation to the past, present and future. These methodological aspects will be elaborated in detail in chapter 4.

The analyses in the thesis are structured in three interlinked themes:

- Firstly the conceptualisation, role and function of ‘civil society’, approached from a critical perspective. This theme will provide the basis for analysing the influence of the political reforms, as well as AAMs role in it.
- Secondly the influence of the political reforms, primarily in regard to the (past) relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State.
- Thirdly the approach and challenges of AAM/TC in strengthening Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the Delta. This theme is naturally linked to the two previous themes as it focuses on the specific role of a development organisation in strengthening civil society in the Burmese context.

1.2.1 A critical approach to civil society

Today ‘civil society’ is a trendy concept within the discourses of international development aid, and people operating within this sphere appear to conceptualise and treat it as a naturally integrated and essential part of democratisation processes\(^\text{10}\). Among development organisations there seems to be a general agreement that “…civil society is a critical element of democracy”\(^\text{11}\), a statement also supported by Aung San Suu Kyi as mentioned earlier. From the mid-1980s onwards the concept has gradually become more important, and according to the Danish Minister of Development Cooperation, Christian Friis Bach, the Danish Development Assistance, Danida, is

\(^{10}\) Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 4-5
\(^{11}\) Steinberg D., 1999: 2
emphasizing the promotion and strengthening of civil society in the South, and the intention is to invest additional funds in this sector in the next couple of years\textsuperscript{12}.

However, despite the fact that civil society has become a well-known concept, the meaning of it appears to be rather ambiguous. The question is how to define civil society, and in this case, how do the actors, AAM, TC and the villagers understand the concept? Who is considered included and who is excluded, and what is the role and function of civil society? In the context of political transition, civil society is expected to play a role in the process of democratisation, as emphasized both by Aung San Suu Kyi and by the US President Barack Obama, during his visit to Myanmar\textsuperscript{13}. However, civil society may also include aspects like welfare, social protection, funeral service and labour rights, which indirectly contribute to the development of society\textsuperscript{14}. Due to such diverse roles, I believe it is important that the different actors share the same basic understanding of the concept as a basis for developing and strengthening civil society in a country like Myanmar.

The understanding and construction of the term is therefore the first theme to be presented and analysed. A general definition of civil society could be: “\textit{...an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or extend their interests or values}”\textsuperscript{15}. Civil society is considered a sphere operating independently from state and family, and despite the fact that civil society is not considered directly involved in or intertwined with the state, the objective of a civil society organisation may be to influence the state and political life. In this thesis, this general definition, including the groups involved and the function of civil society will be challenged from a critical perspective.

In order to analyse how the actors in my case study understand the concept of civil society, I am going to apply Marina Ottaway’s theories about \textit{traditional} and \textit{modern}

\textsuperscript{12} (Udenrigsministeriet, 2013: 15)
\textsuperscript{13} (Myanmar Times, 2012)
\textsuperscript{14} (Ottaway M., 2011: 188)
\textsuperscript{15} (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 9)
civil society, complemented by similar theoretical aspects by Thomas Carothers\textsuperscript{16,17}. Firstly, these theoretical tools will contribute to an exploration and discussion of the development of civil society in a Burmese context, based on previous research on civil society in Myanmar, in particular by Tom Kramer\textsuperscript{18}. Secondly, the theoretical tools will be applied to analyse how the actors in my case study interpret and understand civil society, both in regard to the concept and the role and function of civil society.

\subsection*{1.2.2 The relationship between the civil society and Myanmar State, and the influence of the reforms}

Regardless of our definitions and understandings of civil society, the Burmese people have undoubtedly been repressed and restricted in terms of expression, assembly and consequently possibilities of participating in and developing civil society\textsuperscript{19}. With the democratic transition there may be a basis for civil society to develop and grow stronger, and the question is how and to what extent this transition, and in particular the political reforms, will influence the development of civil society.

Judging by the media it is the impression that Myanmar has actually opened up to the outside world\textsuperscript{20}. The democratic transition has resulted in, amongst other things, increased freedom of expression, including the press, and freedom of assembly, which are both essential elements for the strengthening of civil society. During my visit to Myanmar I experienced that people in Yangon were freely expressing their opinions about the former military regime – a topic that the Burmese people were not allowed to discuss a few years ago\textsuperscript{21}. But how is the situation in the rural life? Are these positive urban attitudes and beliefs in the political changes similarly evident in the rural villages in the Delta? The objective is to study how my informants are reacting to the political

\textsuperscript{16} Ottaway and Carothers are both employed at the Democracy and Rule of Law Project, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C.
\textsuperscript{17} (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 3-17)
\textsuperscript{18} Tom Kramer is a political scientist and with over 15-years of working experience on Burma and its border regions, which he has visited regularly since 1993 (http://www.tni.org/users/tom-kramer)
\textsuperscript{19} (Fink, 2009: 134)
\textsuperscript{20} (Politiken, 2012)
\textsuperscript{21} Field Diary p. 3
changes, and which influence the reforms are expected to have on their lives and on civil society.

Based on my impression that the past and contemporary relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State may play an important role in regard to the Burmese people's reaction to the reforms, I am going to approach the analysis by applying theories about the relationship between civil society and the state. Here I am going to apply analytical tools from the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the American anthropologist, James Ferguson, with the objective to study the role and function of civil society in regard to the state. These analytical tools will first of all be applied in discussing previous studies on the past and contemporary Myanmar State, conducted by Robert H. Taylor\textsuperscript{22}. Taylor focuses on the historical development of the relationship between civil society and the State, including the functions and responsibilities of the state and the Burmese people's expectations to the state. The question is whether the Burmese people are still affected by the past and the old rules and regulations of civil society, and to what extent can the political reforms change such old structures? Another important study of particular relevance for this thesis is Monique Skidmore's\textsuperscript{23} study on fear\textsuperscript{24}. During the many years of military rule the Burmese people were living in constant fear due to the repressive nature of the regime. Surveillance and restrictions followed by fear of speaking and meeting in public became an integral part of the Burmese people\textsuperscript{25}. How is the situation today, after the first steps of the democratic transition? The intention is to explore whether this atmosphere of fear and mistrust has changed. By drawing on explorations and theoretical discussions of Taylor and Skidmore's research, I am going to apply the analytical tools from Hegel and Ferguson in analysing how the different actors in my case study understand the past and present relationship between civil society and the state, and how they react to the reforms.

\textsuperscript{22} (Taylor, 2009)
\textsuperscript{23} Adjunct Professor Research Fellow, University of Canberra, Australia
\textsuperscript{24} (Skidmore, 2004)
\textsuperscript{25} (Fink, 2009: 137)
1.2.3 *The role of ActionAid Myanmar the Thadar Consortium*

The impact of political reforms may come naturally as a result of new laws, directives or rules issued by the government and implemented by the different levels of authorities. This process may however also be promoted through an active support from e.g. LNGOs or INGOs. After the democratic movement and political reforms, INGOs are less restricted in their activities, and hence they have more freedom to enter and implement projects in Myanmar.

Myanmar has in recent years experienced a number of devastating natural disasters, and being a *Least Developed Country* (LDC)*[^26] the first priority of the INGOs has been emergency relief, through service delivery, in order to meet the most important basic needs of the Burmese people (food, shelter etc.). Subsequently, the focus of attention of certain INGOs, like AAM, has been on the strengthening of civil society with the objective of improving livelihood and creating a strong basis for sustainable democratisation[^27]. While projects meeting the basic needs of poor people are considered politically 'neutral', projects focusing on the strengthening of civil society may be considered politically sensitive in appearing a potential interference or threat to the authority of the state.

In this last part of the analysis I am specifically interested in studying how the political reforms are affecting AAM’s work in regard to strengthening the civil society, and what strategic and methodological precautions AAM takes when operating in Myanmar. Here I am going to draw on findings from my two previous analyses. As already discussed, civil society is a wide concept and in order to make the analysis more concrete I will focus on the ultimate objective of the AAM-led project: the strengthening of *Community Based Organisations* (CBOs) in the Delta. The CBOs are part of civil society, and by focusing on this specific part the analysis may appear more concrete and understandable for the reader. The studies will include questions like: what are the opportunities and challenges when developing and strengthening the CBOs, and what

[^26]: (Taylor, 2009: 458)
strategies and methods are applied in the Delta context? To study this issue I am going to apply a context-sensitive development theory by Anthony Ware\(^\text{28}\), combined with a theoretical perspective on possible obstacles to context-sensitive development approaches by Peter Oakley\(^\text{29}\).

The decision to apply a context-sensitive development theory is indirectly based on my personal experiences with staying and travelling in Myanmar, during which I got the impression that the atmosphere is still rather sensitive. Conducting fieldwork has been challenging and sometimes frustrating. Despite the official acceptance of freedom of speech, topics related to politics are still considered sensitive, thus making it difficult to obtain information about the influence of the political changes. When conducting interviews in the villages in the Delta I was instructed by the TC PMT not to apply sensitive terms like ‘research’ and ‘political reforms’, and I could therefore not ask direct questions related to politics or the former military regime. These restrictions limited my scope of research to focusing solely on the civil society, as the sensitivity of the studies made it impossible to involve the state authorities. This similarly made it challenging to engage with members of the largest political opposition party, NLD. Not following the instructions given could be risky, as touching politically sensitive issues could be perceived as interfering with politics.

The study will therefore be restricted to viewing the influence of political reforms from the perspective of AAM/TC and the civil society. Furthermore, it is not the intention to conduct a detailed evaluation of the achievements of AAM and TC projects, but only to present and discuss the role and the approach taken by AAM/TC and to study how the political reforms influence their work in Myanmar.

**1.3 Strategy and structure of the thesis**

The primary objective of the thesis is to explore how the political changes and the reforms are influencing the civil society, and what opportunities and challenges an

\(^{28}\) (Ware, 2012)

\(^{29}\) (Oakley, 1991)
INGO like AAM will have in strengthening civil society by developing CBOs in Myanmar/the Delta. This objective has arisen out of curiosity to explore the unique, but nevertheless complex, situation unfolding in Myanmar, as presented above and the main question to be answered in this thesis is as follows:

**How are the political reforms influencing the development of Burmese civil society, and how is AAM contributing to this development?**

The answering of this overall research statement / question will be supported by the following research questions:

- How is civil society perceived by the different actors, and do they share the same understanding of the concept?
- Have the political reforms improved the possibilities of strengthening civil society groups and organisations?
- Has the work of AAM/TC in the Delta been enhanced by the political reforms?

In order to create a comprehensive basis to answer these questions, the thesis is discussing and analysing the above mentioned three themes, moving from the overall level of conceptualizing the term ‘civil society’ through the civil society-state relationship and influence of political reforms, and finally to the concrete case of developing CBOs in the Delta.

The thesis is structured in eight main chapters. In the following, chapter two, the theoretical framework, which is built on contemporary as well as classical theories about civil society, civil society-state relationship and context-sensitive development, will be presented. Subsequently in chapter three the complex and sensitive Burmese context will be presented and discussed, primarily by drawing on previous research. Elements from the theoretical framework will be introduced as a means to contribute to the establishment of the context. Having introduced the theoretical framework and context behind the thesis, chapter four will contain my methodological approach and the methods behind the fieldwork, including the processing and analysis of the empirical data. This paves the way for the analysis of my empirical data (chapter five),
which will be divided into three thematic subsections corresponding to the three themes mentioned above. Following the analyses there will, in chapter six, be a discussion and criticism of the methods and theories applied in the thesis, and after that chapter seven will include the overall conclusions of the findings from my studies. In order to put my findings into perspective, the last chapter (chapter eight) will discuss how and to what extent the findings could be applied in other contexts, or in relation to the future situation in Myanmar.
2. Conceptualisation, function and role of Civil Societies
   - the theoretical framework

As civil society is a complex concept, both in regard to its role and to the groups involved, it is important to review and discuss theories describing different types of civil society. Furthermore, due to the fact that the civil society has been strictly controlled by the state, I am going to review theories on civil society-state relationships. I believe it may be challenging for INGOs to operate in this specific context in Myanmar, and to explore this aspect I am going to discuss theories on context-sensitive development.

2.1 The ambiguity of 'civil society'

The definition of civil society is widely debated among the actors within civil society, including the theoreticians\(^{30}\). Some argue that religious or ethnic groups are part of civil society, while others argue the opposite, and some believe that civil society organisations are indirectly linked to the state and hence politically active, while others disagree on this\(^{31}\). Thus, the understanding of the scope and role of civil society, and the relationship between civil society and the state, is ambiguous, and it has changed over time as described below. In order to study this ambiguity, it is relevant to briefly present the historical and conceptual development of civil society.

2.1.1 The conceptual development

While civil society has only recently (within the past 30 years) become part of the development aid and democratisation discourses, the concept has a rich history. Literature containing comprehensive descriptions of the classical philosophies and theories about civil society, show that “...civil society has been a point of reference for philosophers since antiquity in their struggle to understand the great issues of the day: the nature of the good society, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, the practise of politics

\(^{30}\) (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 9)

\(^{31}\) (Ottaway M., Civil Society, 2011)
and government, and, most especially, how to live together peacefully...”

During the early stages of the history of civil society, the philosophy was that “... civil society and the state were seen as indistinguishable, with both referring to a type of political association governing social conflict...”

Civil society functioned as an association of qualified individuals who, together with the state, had the responsibility of ruling the civilians.

This relationship started changing during the years between 1750 and 1850 and civil society was now regarded as “...a defence against unwarranted intrusion by the state, on newly realised individual rights and freedoms...” In recent times this philosophy has formed the basis of civil society theories unfolding during the conflicts in e.g. Eastern European countries during the 1980-90s, where civil society organisations were actively taking part in the development of democracy. The focus on democracy also led to the international development aid community’s increased focus on the concept, and a number of projects were developed and implemented with the objectives to “...help nondemocratic countries become democratic or to help countries that have initiated democratic transitions consolidate their democratic systems”

Civil society became closely linked with democracy and this increased focus on democracy gave birth to democratic movements in many parts of the world. This again resulted in the creation of a multitude of international as well as national NGOs on the global stage.

2.1.2 Modern versus traditional civil society

The development of the conceptualisation of civil society indicates that it is becoming a political tool to pave the way for democratisation. However, civil society also includes a wide range of other, non-political functions, aspects that should not be disregarded by

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32 (Edwards, 2009: 6)
33 (Edwards, 2009: 6)
34 (Edwards, 2009: 6)
35 (Edwards, 2009: 7)
36 (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 7)
37 (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 5)
38 (Edwards, 2009: 2)
39 (Pratt, 2003: 31)
NGOs/INGOs working with civil society\textsuperscript{40}. According to Ottaway, donors and development aid organisations tend to focus on a “...narrow set of organisations: professionalized NGOs dedicated to advocacy or civic education work on public interest issues directly relating to democratization, such as election monitoring, voter education, governmental transparency, and political and civil rights generally”\textsuperscript{41}. This type is, by Ottaway, considered modern civil society, which only includes well-structured organisations, matching the Western standard\textsuperscript{42}. An important reason for this focus may be that “These groups have, or can be trained to have, the administrative capabilities donors need for their own bureaucratic requirements”\textsuperscript{43}.

This rather narrow definition of modern civil society may, however, not be applicable when operating in a LDC country like Myanmar, where the local and national organisations often do not have the capacities required to obtain a strong bureaucratic structure or transparency. According to Kramer “…strict Western definitions of civil society are not applicable to the Burmese context, as they exclude several important local actors...”\textsuperscript{44}. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the focus to also include the traditional groups and organisations that already exist. All countries, industrialized as well as developing, have a traditional civil society which “…is organized more informally, often through networks rather than formally structured organizations, and often following patterns that existed in earlier times”\textsuperscript{45}, and they tend to fade into the larger society\textsuperscript{46}. In relation to development aid these organisations, according to Ottaway and Carothers, have been “…absent from most civil society assistance programs…”\textsuperscript{47}. The inclusion of such traditional civil society groups in the development aid may improve the chances of a more precise project implementation, as “…civil society develops different

\textsuperscript{40} (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 11)
\textsuperscript{41} (Ottaway M., 2011: 186)
\textsuperscript{42} It is important to note that Ottaway and Carothers mostly focus their research on American donors and development organisations, USAID in particular
\textsuperscript{43} (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000:13)
\textsuperscript{44} (Kramer, 2011: 15)
\textsuperscript{45} (Ottaway M., 2011: 187)
\textsuperscript{46} (Ottaway M., 2011: 188)
\textsuperscript{47} (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 11)
characteristics in the various regions." This aspect is of particular importance for NGOs navigating in complex local context situations. Overall, in her article about ‘civil society’, Ottaway initially criticises Hegel’s philosophical understanding (to be presented in detail in the following) of civil society to lie between the family at one extreme and the state at the other, arguing that this definition is too broad and imprecise. However, after having discussed the different aspects of civil society, Ottaway concludes by stating: “...we cannot do better than accept that civil society comprises the entire realm of voluntary associations between the family and the state. It is a vast and complex realm.” Thus, Ottaway admits that it is difficult, if not impossible to make a clear definition of civil society, and perhaps we need to just accept this fact. A possible solution, as suggested by Jasmin Lorch, is to apply a ‘relational’ understanding of civil society, in which it is accepted that “…the characteristics of an embryonic civil society under authoritarian rule differ from those of a mature civil society in the context of a democratic constitutional state.” In other words, it is necessary to apply a broad understanding of civil society. The theories of Ottaway and Carothers will firstly contribute to a discussion on previous research about the Burmese civil society, primarily by Kramer, and secondly they will be applied in the first part of the analysis.

2.1.3 The relationship between civil society and the state

As previously expressed, I believe that the (past) relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State has an influence on how the Burmese people react to the political reforms. From the classical civil society-state philosophers, I have chosen to focus on the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831), from whom I will draw analytical tools to be applied in the second part of the analysis. Hegel's philosophies are considered relevant for this thesis because I believe they may reflect the past (before the political changes) relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State. The classical philosophies of Hegel are today by others being questioned and criticised, in particular by the American

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48 (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000: 15)
49 (Ottaway, 2011: 183)
50 (Ottaway M., 2011: 198)
51 (Lorch, 2006: 120)
anthropologist, James Ferguson, whose theories are rooted in the latest wave of civil society development (1980s until today)\textsuperscript{52}. The reason for applying Ferguson is that I believe his theories reflect the contemporary society structure.

Hegel and Ferguson both focus on the role and function of civil society, particularly in regard to the relationship between civil society and the state, and they may be considered exponents for two different, and rather contradictory, aspects in civil society thinking, as well as of two different historical epochs. The philosophies/theories of Hegel and Ferguson also reflect my personal curiosity and divided understanding of the relationship between civil society and the state. In the following I am firstly going to present Hegel and Ferguson's overall philosophical/theoretical frameworks, in order to create an overview. Secondly, certain theoretical aspects, that are particularly relevant for this thesis, will be selected and presented in detail.

**Hegel’s philosophies.** According to Hegel civil society represents a sphere that is positioned between the state *above* and family *below*\textsuperscript{53}. The state is defined as an “…organic ethical community in which a special class of rulers is charged with the task of maintaining independence and integrity of the ethical whole...”\textsuperscript{54}. In Hegel’s philosophy the state is raised above civil society and the family, possessing an all-encompassing power. In the case of Myanmar the ‘special class of rulers’ have for years been the military possessing not only the political power but in fact also the physical power. The family, civil society and the state do not share the same ethical values, and are understood to be three distinct spheres, and Hegel considers these three spheres to be operating independently of each other\textsuperscript{55}. Furthermore, Hegel believes that these different spheres are distinct in their fields of responsibility. While civil society and the individual families constitute the private sphere with a focus on individuals, the state is considered the public sphere, responsible of the welfare of the society as a whole\textsuperscript{56}.

\textsuperscript{52} (Ferguson, 2004)  
\textsuperscript{53} (Hegel, 1821, par 182A)  
\textsuperscript{54} (Pelczynski, 1984: 5)  
\textsuperscript{55} (Pelczynski, 1984: 11&55)  
\textsuperscript{56} (Pelczynski, 1984: 11)
Within the sphere civil society “...individuals are free to associate to pursue their needs and interests”\textsuperscript{57}. In Hegel’s opinion, however, this was often a basis of conflict, and it “...required a constant surveillance by the state in order for the ‘civil’ to remain”\textsuperscript{58}. While some theoreticians view civil society as a strong, independent counterweight to the state, Hegel believes that the presence of a strong state is necessary in order to maintain order and ‘civility’ within the civil society\textsuperscript{59}. Despite Hegel’s philosophy of the state controlling civil society, he nevertheless shares the common theoretical understanding that in order to properly represent society, and possibly have a political impact, members of civil society should meet in groups, and not act as isolated individuals\textsuperscript{60}.

**Ferguson’s theories.** According to Ferguson the three spheres, family, civil society and the state are intertwined and dependent on each other and this relationship is gradually becoming more evident as a result of globalisation and the influence of transnational organisations\textsuperscript{61}. Thus, there are no distinct boundaries between the three spheres. Furthermore, it is no longer possible to categorise the different local, national and international NGOs as well as interest groups into distinct spheres, as “All of these phenomena fit uncomfortably in the ‘state’ versus ‘civil society’ grid, and indeed cannot even be coherently labelled as ‘local’, ‘national’, or ‘international’ phenomena”\textsuperscript{62}. Several theoreticians agree with Ferguson, arguing that: “States never achieve full closure or complete separation from society...”\textsuperscript{63}, and that: “Social organisations in a mélange, including the state, coexist symbiotically”\textsuperscript{64}. In a paper written together with Akhil Gupta, Ferguson expresses that he does not consider the picture of the ‘up there’ state to be false, however he believes that it is constructed and that attention should be drawn to “…the social and imaginative processes through which state verticality is made effective.

\textsuperscript{57} (Guan, 2004: 3)
\textsuperscript{58} (Edwards, 2009: 8)
\textsuperscript{59} (Edwards, 2009: 6)
\textsuperscript{60} (Pelczynski, 1984: 12)
\textsuperscript{61} (Ferguson, 2004: 397)
\textsuperscript{62} (Ferguson, 2004: 389)
\textsuperscript{63} (Jessop, 2008: 10)
\textsuperscript{64} (Migdal, 2001: 56)
and authoritative”

While Hegel views civil society as a sphere that must be controlled by the state, Ferguson and Gupta believe that civil society, the state (and the family) are more equal, sharing areas of responsibility, and that they are becoming gradually more intertwined.

Ferguson argues: “Instead of opposing the state to something called ‘society’, then, we need to view states as themselves composed of bundles of social practices, every bit as local in their materiality and social situatedness as any other.”

The state, when apprehended empirically and ethnographically “…starts itself to look suspiciously like ‘civil society’.” This happens when, for example, former government officials develop their own NGOs or interest groups, while maintaining important (unofficial) links to the government, or when different levels of authority become involved in community development processes. Overall, Ferguson believes that such development enables “…‘local’ actors to challenge the state’s well-established claims to encompassment and vertical superiority in unexpected ways.”

In conclusion, Hegel’s and Ferguson’s philosophies and theories are contradictory – or supplementary – both in terms of conceptualisation and the relation to the state.

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65 (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 983)
66 (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 992)
67 (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 991)
68 (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 397)
From Hegel and Ferguson, I am going to focus on the following contradictory statements, primarily in the second part of the analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>civil society has to be taken care of and controlled by the state (Hegel) vs. civil society has the potential of maintaining itself and to grow stronger (Ferguson)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>civil society is vertically structured between the state “above” and the family “below”, and all three spheres are functioning independently of each other (Hegel) vs. civil society, the family and the state are functioning as intertwined spheres (Ferguson)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

These contradictory statements are going to be applied as theoretical tools, firstly in order to discuss the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State, the way these two spheres are presented in previous research, and secondly to constitute an analytical basis for the second part of the analysis. Hegel and Ferguson will also be applied in other contexts throughout the thesis.

### 2.2 Development NGOs navigating in civil societies

Due to the ambiguous nature of civil society it may be challenging for international, as well as national NGOs to implement civil society projects in a specific local context. According to Ottaway it is not possible to implement one-fits-all civil society projects. In other words, the donors and NGOs should be aware of the historical, cultural, ethnical, religious and social context prior to the implementation of development

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69 (Ottaway M., 2011: 184)
It requires a context-sensitive development approach and in the following I am going to present and discuss Anthony Ware’s context-sensitive development theory followed by a more detailed presentation of Peter Oakley et. al.’s theories about challenges and obstacles when applying such context-sensitive approaches. The theory behind context-sensitive development is that “Development is not a single linear progression of stages but depends on historical and contemporary context”. A development approach therefore must be sensitive to the local context. This includes: “...sensitivity to unique cultures and sensitivity to difficult political contexts, particularly those suffering conflict and state fragility.” Sensitivity in a political context will play a major role in the analysis, and this issue will be elaborated in detail later. In terms of the Burmese culture, this thesis is focusing on the people's participation in civil society and the relationship between civil society and the state and not on the general practise of religion, cultural traditions and festivals, farming practices etc.

AAM’s bottom-up approach focuses, among other things, on participation and empowerment practices that involve people in the project implementation, as well as encourage and train them to take responsibility and to influence decision-making on higher levels of society. This approach is considered context-sensitive, and it is believed that such approaches will ensure a higher degree of sustainability in the projects. According to Oakley there are three obstacles to these approaches: (1) structural obstacles, such as when decision-making concerning state affairs is strictly controlled by the government, excluding local citizens from participating; (2) administrative obstacles, in which case decision-making data is often complex in nature and “...rarely presented or interpreted in a way intelligible to most rural people”; and (3) social obstacles, where the local people have always been dominated and thus

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70 (Howell & Pearce, 2001: 112)
71 Lecturer in International and Community Development, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Deakin University, Australia
72 (Ware, 2012)
73 (Oakley, 1991)
74 (Ware, 2012: 35)
75 (Ware, 2012: 38)
76 (Oakley, 1991: 8)
77 (Oakley, 1991: 17)
78 (Oakley, 1991: 11-13)
dependent on “the social élite”, leaving them inexperienced in leadership and organisational practises required to participate in implementing and maintaining projects. Oakley is particularly focused on political sensitivity, and he believes that a country’s (past) political structure and administrative system may prove a barrier when operating with participatory, bottom-up and empowerment approaches. Ware supports this theory, arguing that in difficult political contexts “…participants are highly likely to defer to the established orthodoxy of prevailing power structures, not being sufficiently empowered to make contributions that challenge a fragile status quo”79. Implementing bottom-up projects in a country like Myanmar, which until recently has been based on a top-down structure, has, according to Ware, been particularly difficult for INGOs80.

The political structure and administration of the state may be changing now, as a result of the democratic transition, however, according to Ware “Residues of these ancient political values reverberate within contemporary Burmese politics”81. Ware argues that the fear and mistrust may be closely related to these obstacles. Skidmore’s research on fear will be presented in chapter 4, as this particular aspect plays an important role in this thesis.

2.3 Conclusion

The concept ‘civil society’ has changed character over time. From approximately the mid-1750s, civil society was regarded as a defence against powerful, all-encompassing states, partly based on the recognition of individuals possessing basic human rights. This understanding of civil society based on fundamental human rights has in principle continued until today, and in recent time civil society organisations are often seen as promoters of democracy.

However, according to Ottaway and Carothers, such politicised groups only constitute one part of civil society. Civil society can be viewed from a ‘traditional’ and a ‘modern’

79 (Ware, 2012: 53)
80 (Ware, 2012: 5)
81 (Ware, 2012: 85)
perspective: the traditional understanding often includes smaller groups with a loose structure and limited administration, while the modern understanding primarily focuses on well-structured NGOs with administrative capacity. The traditional groups often have a local focus and they are usually faith-based or local welfare groups. The modern groups (NGOs) often have a broader focus including the promotion of democracy. In the context of Myanmar, being a developing country, the traditional groups would be relevant to apply in the discussions and analyses. In practise it may be difficult to distinguish between traditional and modern civil society groups, as they may coexist, one way could be the official registration of NGOs as an indication of an organisation to be ‘modern’. As a result of the political changes, it is expected that there will be an influx of modern civil society organisations. The question is to what extent such modern groups would be allowed to include political aspects as promotion of democracy in the Myanmar context. The theories of Ottaway and Carother will firstly be applied to discuss previous research on civil society in Myanmar, and secondly to analyse my informant’s narratives about civil society (first part of the analysis).

In Hegel’s philosophy the state and civil society are seen as distinct spheres, and the state has the role of controlling civil society. Analytical tools from this philosophy have been chosen because they may reflect the past relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State, where the military played a central role in controlling civil society. Contrary to Hegel, Ferguson’s theory of functioning together may be considered ‘new’ as it fits better into today’s political development of collaboration and integration, both nationally and internationally. As a result of the political changes, it would be expected that the Burmese society develops in the direction of Fergusons theories, also due to the influence from INGOs. By applying Hegel and Ferguson, it is possible to study the political transition in relation to the time periods before and after the reforms. Analytical tools from Hegel and Ferguson will firstly be applied to discuss previous research on the Myanmar State, and its relationship to civil society, and secondly to analyse my informant’s narratives about the (past) civil society-state relationship, and thus how the Burmese people react to the reforms (second part of the analysis).
The nature of civil society, and the relationship between civil society and the state, is dependent on the local context\textsuperscript{82}, and it is therefore necessary for an INGO to apply context-sensitive development approaches when strengthening civil society\textsuperscript{83}. This will in particular apply for a country like Myanmar, which is experiencing a critical and unforeseeable period of political change. This issue will be analysed in the last part of the analysis.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Along the banks of the river fishing men and women were fishing. I all seemed very peaceful. All the way we were passing little villages consisting of primitive huts made of hay and palm leaves.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{82} (Ottaway M., 2011: 184)
\textsuperscript{83} (Ware, 2012: 53)
3. Myanmar, a country in change – in a sensitive context

Myanmar is experiencing a rapid transition from a repressive dictatorship towards democracy and political reforms, and this context may form a unique opportunity for the Burmese civil society to develop. In order to study the development of civil society, it is necessary to understand the Burmese context before and after the political changes, both in terms of the administrative structure and political landscape and in terms of human aspects. The daily life conditions under military rule have been extreme, and it is important to present and discuss this context, as it is assumed to have an impact on the country and its people even after the political changes. Similarly it is important to discuss the political reforms in relation to the key actor AAM/TC to be able to discuss the possibilities, but also the challenges that still remain, in strengthening the civil society. In the following I will briefly discuss some of the most important country facts including recent history (since 1962) and political changes. The study area, the Ayeyarwady Delta and the people living there will be presented together with the AAM and TC that are operating in the area.

3.1 Myanmar, the Ayeyarwady Delta and its people

Myanmar is geographically located in Southeast Asia (cf. map on page ii), and it is rich in natural resources, including oil and natural gas, different sorts of gems (jade in particular), teak wood and rice. Myanmar used to be the largest exporter of rice, and during a long period of time the Ayeyarwady Delta was termed “the rice bowl of Asia”, but after years of military rule the country is today among the poorest countries in SE-Asia and categorized as a LDC country. The administrative setup in the country is presented in Annex 1.

84 (Fink, 2009: 1)
85 (Taylor, 2009: 458)
The Burmese people are characteristic of their traditional longyis (a piece of cloth tied at the waist), lips and teeth coloured red by chewing betel nut, and faces white from thanaka – a paste from a certain kind of wood that they apply to their face to protect against the sun, moisturize, or just to look good. All of these characteristics apply for both men and women\textsuperscript{86}.

Myanmar has approximately 140 ethnic groups in the country, officially forming eight major groups: Katchin, Kayah (Karennis), Kayin (Karens), Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rakhine and Shan\textsuperscript{87}. The largest ethnic group is the Bamar (Burmans). The majority of the villagers in the Delta belong to the Bamar, and while some are Christian, most of them are Buddhists\textsuperscript{88}. The multi-ethnicity has often led to ethnic conflicts. However, the Delta has not been involved in any ethnic conflicts, and this thesis is therefore not focusing on civil society in the context of ethnicity.

\textsuperscript{86} (Fink, 2009: 1)
\textsuperscript{87} (Fink, 2009: 9)
\textsuperscript{88} According to project officer from Ratana Metha
In 2008 the Ayeyarwady Delta was devastated by the Cyclone Nargis, and around 130,000 people died. The government did not allow INGOs or foreign donors to enter the area until weeks after the cyclone hit, a delay in relief aid that led to heavy criticism of the government. The disaster in the Delta was in some aspects a turning point for the government to open up for foreign aid and thus paving the way for involvement of INGOs in the development of the Delta areas\textsuperscript{89}.

### 3.1.1 The Myanmar State (and Military "Tatmadaw") – since 1962

The objective of this chapter is to study the nature of the Myanmar state, particularly in regard to the responsibility of the state and the expectations of the Burmese people.

The military coup in 1962, led by General Ne Win and the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP), changed Myanmar from being a wealthy country to gradually being a country of repression, isolation and increasing poverty\textsuperscript{90}. The military, the Tatmadaw, was the de facto rulers from 1962 to 2010, and during this period of time the country experienced a number of uprisings against the regime. One of the most well-known was in 1988 where large groups of students took to the street. However, the uprising was violently suppressed, a large number of students died\textsuperscript{91}, and the military seized power again and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), and later the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Later, in 2007, another large and nationwide demonstration named the Saffron Revolution, led by monks in saffron-coloured robes, was similarly suppressed, an action that attracted the attention of the outside world. During this time period, 1962-2010, the Myanmar State was weak in supporting its people\textsuperscript{92}, and Lorch elaborates on this by arguing that the state could be considered “...particularly weak with regard to the core function of providing for the welfare of the population”\textsuperscript{93}.

\textsuperscript{89}(Kramer, 2011: 3)
\textsuperscript{90}(Fink, 2009: 30)
\textsuperscript{91}(Fink, 2009: 50-52)
\textsuperscript{92}(Taylor, 2009: 449)
\textsuperscript{93}(Lorch, 2006: 128)
In the constitution from 1948, after the independence, the Burmese people were ensured fundamental civil rights of freedom of expression, assembly and forming of associations\(^94\). In the following years, however, and in particular after the military coup in 1962, a number of laws and regulations limiting the people’s freedom and rights were gradually being implemented. The people were controlled and restricted, following a Hegelian civil society-state structure. The laws were broadly worded and had during the years of military rule “...been used against people who have done as little as sung pro-democracy songs or written letters to friends abroad which included critical remarks against the government”\(^95\). Soon after the military coup in 1962 restrictions were imposed on the press. The Printers and Publishers Law was implemented, which established the Press Scrutiny Board censoring all books, film, magazines and songs before publication\(^96\). In 1957 a law on ‘unlawful associations’ was implemented, where the President of the Union had the power to declare certain associations unlawful. After the uprisings in 1988, free association was further limited through a law stating that “Gathering, walking, marching in processions, chanting slogans, delivering speeches, agitating, and creating disturbances on the streets by a group of five or more people is banned regardless of whether the act is with the intention of creating disturbances or of committing a crime or not. In 1990 a law on movement was implemented stating that “any person not normally resident in a house, who stays for one night or more must be registered at the local township office”. These restrictions provided the government with the ‘tools’ to control the people, and punishments were severe if the rules were not obeyed.

Soon after the military coup in 1962, a number of Government organised Non-government Organisations (GONGOs) were established with the aim of organising the population in groups, and after the uprisings in 1988 additional welfare organisations and associations were formed, officially with the purpose of providing social services and organising community organisations, as well as to encourage people to participate

\(^94\) (Union of Burma, 1948: Chapter 17) 
\(^95\) (Liddell, 1999: 58) 
\(^96\) (Taylor, 2009: 316)
in pro-regime rallies and demonstrations\textsuperscript{97}. This could be seen as an attempt to develop or strengthen civil society, but in fact, these organisations were not operating independently but controlled by the state, and the objective of establishing these organisations was to support the government, and to indirectly control the citizens\textsuperscript{98}. Viewing from the outside this close relationship between civil society and the State could be related to Ferguson’s theory about civil society and the state being somehow intertwined\textsuperscript{99}, but in fact the strict control of the GONGOs indicate elements of Hegel’s philosophies of the civil society – state relationship.

\textbf{3.1.2 Fear as an integral part of the Burmese people}

Under military rule the people had to apply for permission to travel domestically, and to visit and stay overnight at a friend or family’s house. Unexpected house inspections, surveillance and monitoring became part of everyday life\textsuperscript{100}. Violating any of these military rules would very often result in severe punishment or long terms of imprisonment\textsuperscript{101}. According to Aung San Suu Kyi, living under these conditions has resulted in fear becoming an integral part of the Burmese people. Even President Thein Sein recognizes the existence of fear as he in March 2013 declared that the government has now reduced this ‘culture of fear’\textsuperscript{102}. In 1996, Skidmore conducted research on fear, vulnerability and terror-making in Myanmar, primarily based on empirical data from Yangon and Mandalay. Skidmore believes that the Myanmar state under military rule deliberately generated fear within the Burmese people: “The State is conscious of its ability to manipulate emotions. In fact, the Department of Psychological Warfare within the Ministry of Defence is devoted to the State construction of affect…”\textsuperscript{103}.

One way of creating fear is to develop an atmosphere of anxiety by making people spy on each other. This will deter people from expressing their opinions, even within the walls of their own house, because you never know who will be eavesdropping. The fear

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{97} (Taylor, 2009: 446)
\item \textsuperscript{98} (South, 2008: 17)
\item \textsuperscript{99} (Ferguson, 2004: 397)
\item \textsuperscript{100} (Fink, 2009:137)
\item \textsuperscript{101} (Fink, 2009: 171)
\item \textsuperscript{102} (N.Y.Times - Nick Cumming-Bruce, 2013)
\item \textsuperscript{103} (Skidmore, 2004: 40)
\end{itemize}
furthermore resulted in feelings of mistrust. In fact, Skidmore defines Myanmar as a “...nation of individuals unable and unwilling to trust each other”\textsuperscript{104}. A situation like this is devastating for the development or maintenance of a healthy society\textsuperscript{105}, and this is one of the reasons why I am particularly interested in analysing whether the fear and mistrust has tentacles to today’s Myanmar. When communicating with Burmese people the fear and mistrust is often shown in gaps, silences and omissions, as well as in silly laughs\textsuperscript{106}. This particular aspect will be taken into consideration when I analyse the transcriptions and the diary from the fieldwork.

Skidmore’s findings, published in 2004, could be outdated and hence not applicable in today’s Myanmar, however, my observations and impressions from the fieldwork indicate that certain aspects of this fear may still be affecting people’s way of thinking, speaking and acting. In this way fear may remain an obstacle to a fast implementation of the political reforms, and concurrently to the strengthening of civil society.

3.1.3 Civil society in the Burmese culture

Some theoreticians claim that civil society in Myanmar has been non-existing since the 1962 military coup, and that it has only now been born. According to David I. Steinberg, a well-known Myanmar-specialist “Civil society died under the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP); perhaps, more accurately, it was murdered”\textsuperscript{107}. Others argue that civil society has always existed to a certain degree, and that it is now free to develop and grow stronger\textsuperscript{108}. These contradictory opinions may be a result of different understandings of ‘civil society’. In the following I am going to discuss this issue by drawing on Tom Kramer’s report on civil society in Myanmar, for which purpose I will apply Ottaway and Carothers theories about ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ civil society\textsuperscript{109}.

\textsuperscript{104} (Skidmore, 2004: 51)
\textsuperscript{105} (Skidmore, 2004: 52)
\textsuperscript{106} (Skidmore, 2004: 43 and 55)
\textsuperscript{107} (Steinberg D., 1999: 8)
\textsuperscript{108} (Kramer, 2011)
\textsuperscript{109} (Ottaway & Carothers, 2000)
According to Kramer “*There is no equivalent of the Western term ‘civil society’ in Burmese language, and the concept itself is also rather new...*”\(^{110}\). This was evident during my fieldwork and it is one of the reasons why I find it particularly interesting to study how ‘civil society’ is understood by the different actors. However, despite the fact that ‘civil society’ does not have an equivalent in Burmese language, this does not mean that social formations, resembling what we would perceive as ‘civil society’ has not existed\(^{111}\). These social formations, defined traditional civil society groups, were very often based on religion, directly linked to the local monastery or church\(^{112}\), and in many cases the function was to fill the gaps where the state was not supportive\(^{113}\). Kramer (and AAM) believes that the Burmese people have gradually developed a culture of self-reliance, which may explain why traditional civil society groups and organisations have continued operating since the 1962 military coup. According to AAM the state’s lack of support has meant that “...*communities have needed to remain self-motivated and have had to do things themselves in order to achieve community development*”\(^{114}\). Without doubt, during military rule, civil society organisations were suffering, as they were “...*banned or placed under strict government control...*”\(^{115}\). However some of the groups were still tolerated, while others went underground, and many of the contemporary local NGOs have emerged from these\(^{116}\).

But how can Steinberg claim that civil society was murdered under the BSPP rule? As a former member of the Senior Foreign Service, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Steinberg may be operating with a ‘modern’ understanding of civil society. The contradictory views of Steinberg and Kramer may thus be a result of different understandings of the concept ‘civil society’.

\(^{110}\) (Kramer, 2011: 6)
\(^{111}\) (Kramer, 2011: 6)
\(^{112}\) (Kramer, 2011: 6)
\(^{113}\) (Lorch, 2006: 29)
\(^{114}\) (AAM Fellowship Programme, 2012: 22)
\(^{115}\) (Kramer, 2011: 8)
\(^{116}\) (Kramer, 2011: 9)
3.1.4 Political change and reforms

As the focus of the thesis is on the political reforms’ influence on the development and strengthening of civil society, I am in the following going to highlight and discuss political events, laws and reforms that I find particularly relevant for the thesis.

Already during the time of military rule several attempts were made, although unsuccessful, to have political changes. At an early stage Aung San Suu Kyi made her entrance into the political arena to fight for a free and democratic Myanmar. She established the political party NLD, which has played an important role in the political struggle in the country. But in 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest.

From 2010 onwards the country started changing. In fall 2010 Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest – by that time she had been in house arrest for 15 years in total. In spring 2011 a new government, supported by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), was officially formed, with the leadership of the pro-democratic president Thein Sein, and this gave birth to a number of democratic reforms. In a by-election in April 2012 the NLD won a landslide victory, which meant that the party was now represented, although with a minority part of Parliament.
In the following some of the most important and relevant reforms and political events are listed. These reforms relate to human rights like freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, elements of crucial importance for the development of civil societies.

- **May 2011**: Thousands of prisoners are granted amnesty, but few political prisoners are among them
- **October 2011**: More than 200 political prisoners are freed as part of a general amnesty
- **December 2011**: President Thein Sein signs a law allowing peaceful demonstrations for the first time
- **January 2012**: Hundreds of prisoners are released
- **September 2012**: Censorship prior to publication has been gradually abolished. From September it was allowed to publish on all topics without prior censorship
- **January 2013**: The ban on public gatherings of more than five people are abolished
- **April 2013**: Private newspapers having license can freely publish

The reforms should however be viewed with caution. The underlying legislation has generally not been changed and the risk of breaking the rules of law, which are often broadly worded and therefore subject for interpretation, is therefore still present. Such uncertainty also applies for the abolishment of censorship of publications; instead of censorship prior to publishing the control of press is now left to the judgement of the authorities after publishing and with a possibility of punishment if the publications are not found in line with the underlying laws. This situation leaves the authors and

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117 (BBC News - Myanmar Timeline, 2013)
118 (N.Y.Times - Thomas Fuller, 2012)
120 (Politiken, 2013)
121 (N.Y.Times - Reuters, 2013)
journalists in a situation of uncertainty, which consequently will lead to a higher degree of self-censorship and fear of punishment\textsuperscript{122}.

3.2 INGOs in Myanmar

While some local (and national) traditional civil society groups and organisations appear to have existed throughout the military rule, the INGOs and international donors have been restricted in engaging with Myanmar – for several reasons. Firstly, because of the Myanmar government’s fear of political interference from outside\textsuperscript{123}. Secondly, engaging with Myanmar was by many countries considered ethically reprehensible\textsuperscript{124} due to the Myanmar government’s violation of human rights, and several countries including USA and EU had imposed embargos on relations to Myanmar. Despite these obstacles and concerns a few foreign NGOs cautiously took steps towards involvement in Myanmar\textsuperscript{125}. After the political changes in 2011 the embargos have gradually been removed and Myanmar has opened up to the outside world. As a consequence the country has been receiving pledges of support from the international community resulting in an influx of NGOs and foreign supported projects.

3.2.1 ActionAid Myanmar (AAM)

AAM, that until recently was one of the relatively few INGOs operating in Myanmar\textsuperscript{126}, is part of ActionAid International (AAI), which is an international NGO with the overall aim to end poverty and injustice\textsuperscript{127}. AAM applies a participatory bottom-up approach, in which the strategy is to establish partnership with, and at the same time build the capacity of, local NGOs\textsuperscript{128}, who will in turn be able to develop and strengthen CBOs in the local communities. Hence, contrary to many INGOs and foreign donors\textsuperscript{129}, AAM establishes partnerships with traditional civil society groups and organisations, which are often informal and unregistered. A CBO is a grass-root membership organisation.

\textsuperscript{122} (N.Y.Times - Thomas Fuller, 2012)
\textsuperscript{123} (Ware, 2012: 12)
\textsuperscript{124} (Ware, 2012: 6)
\textsuperscript{125} (South, 2008: 35)
\textsuperscript{126} (AAM Fellowship Programme, 2012: 4)
\textsuperscript{127} (AAM Country Strategy 2012-2017, 2012)
\textsuperscript{128} (AAM/TC Semi-annual Report, 2012: 3)
\textsuperscript{129} (Ottaway M., 2011: 186)
based in the community that is locally managed and whose members are the main beneficiaries\textsuperscript{130}. The theory is that “...the decision-making role of the community yields a greater sense of ownership and identity with the process of development...”\textsuperscript{131} (Parnwell, 2008: 113). The question is whether this is possible to achieve in the Burmese context? Operating under the AAI strategy and slogan “People’s Action to End Poverty”, AAM has a strong belief that civil society can function as an important tool to improve the situation, economically as well as politically, in Myanmar\textsuperscript{132}. This is in line with Ferguson’s theories emphasizing the potential of civil society\textsuperscript{133}. By working together with local partners AAM can benefit from the “...local knowledge and wisdom of local organizations...” and thus become aware of the most important needs of their beneficiaries, an approach which, according to Ware, is considered sensitive to the local context\textsuperscript{134}. This aspect will be discussed in the last part of the analysis. Within the bottom-up approach, one of AAM’s important tools in the Burmese context is the \textit{fellowship programme}. The fellowship programme develops and supports youth leadership\textsuperscript{135}. A ‘fellow’ is a young Burmese person who is trained to motivate and educate local communities to develop civil society as a means to fight poverty\textsuperscript{136}.

\textbf{3.2.2 The Thadar Consortium and the Delta Project}

The AAM supported project in the Ayeyarwady Delta is managed by the Thadar Consortium (TC). The Thadar Consortium, established in October 2008, is a consortium of international and local NGOs. The objective of the Consortium is to develop and strengthen CBOs in structures that support bottom-up development efforts\textsuperscript{137}. This includes transforming existing village-based groups into modern CBOs, through capacity-building in administration, accountability, transparency and leadership\textsuperscript{138}. According to Ottaway, a CBO is “...usually concerned about local level development and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{130} (South, 2008: 13)
\item \textsuperscript{131} (Parnwell, 2008: 113)
\item \textsuperscript{132} (AAM Country Strategy 2012-2017, 2012)
\item \textsuperscript{133} (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 397)
\item \textsuperscript{134} (Ware, 2012: 38)
\item \textsuperscript{135} (AAM Country Strategy 2012-2017, 2012: 4)
\item \textsuperscript{136} (AAM, Silvio Ferretti, 2010: 4)
\item \textsuperscript{137} (AAM/TC Technical Proposal, 2011: 3)
\item \textsuperscript{138} (AAM/TC Semi-annual Report, 2012: 12)
\end{itemize}
welfare issues...” and it “…rarely becomes openly political”\textsuperscript{139}. AAM is the lead-agency of TC, and AAM is furthermore functioning as the link to the international donor Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT), of which Denmark is one of the 10 countries involved.

The Consortium has three levels of management and implementation: 1) Consortium Members\textsuperscript{140}, 2) Project Management Team (PMT) and 3) Local NGOs/‘Implementing Partners’ (IPs), which are the direct implementers of the projects. The Consortium is managing the ‘Delta project’ named \textit{Building Local Capacities for Livelihood Systems Approach in the Ayeyarwady Delta}, which was chosen as the empirical basis for the thesis. The project (phase II) started on 16 September 2011 and it is expected to end on 31 August 2014. While phase I (2008-2011) focused mainly on relief and disaster management (in the wake of Cyclone Nargis), phase II is focusing on the development and strengthening of CBOs\textsuperscript{141}. The Delta project is being implemented in 24 villages located in 6 village tracts of Bogale and Mawlamyinegyun townships. Fellows have been selected for each village, 16 female and 8 male fellows.

The empirical data for this thesis were collected in six villages in the Mawlamyinegyun township (pronounced ‘Mojorn’) (see map on page ii). Three local partners (IPs) are operating in the villages: the MBCU\textsuperscript{142}, the RMO\textsuperscript{143} and the TGH\textsuperscript{144}.

AAM is particularly concerned about building positive working relations with the local authorities: “\textit{The local authorities are sensitized through the advocacy workshops to ensure that the transformation is two way and not only from the community}”\textsuperscript{145}. This creates the space for everyone including the authority representatives to voice their opinion, but it may also be a challenge to implement in practice. These issues will be analysed in the third part of the analysis.

\textsuperscript{139} (Ottaway M., 2011: 185)
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{ActionAid Myanmar} (lead agency), \textit{Capacity Building Initiative} (CBI), Pyoe Pin (British Council), Myanmar NGO Network and Paung Ku.
\textsuperscript{141} (AAM/TC Technical Proposal, 2011)
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Myanmar Baptist Convention} (MBCU) (local NGO/church-based organisation)
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ratanna Metta Organisation} (RMO) (local NGO focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment)
\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Thingaha} (TGH) (local NGO focusing on gender equality)
\textsuperscript{145} (AAM/TC Semi-annual Report, 2012: 16)
3.3 Conclusion

Half a century of military rule has had a dramatic impact on Myanmar, both in terms of economic development and human rights. Laws restricting freedom of expression and assembly were being strictly enforced, and punishments were severe. This situation naturally had a negative impact on the possibilities of freely developing the civil society groups. The government did, however, establish a number of ‘civil society’ organisations that were working closely with the state. These organisations were, however, controlled by the state (GONGOs), and the objective was very often to indirectly support the state or to control the citizens. Hence, this state-controlled nature of the GONGOs could be related to Hegel’s philosophy about civil society groups being under state control. Another consequence of the repressions was the creation of an environment of fear and mistrust. Based on my observations and impressions from the fieldwork, I believe that certain aspects of fear and mistrust may still be present and subconsciously be affecting the people’s reactions to changes. While civil society organisations, apart from the GONGOs, were banned, some groups were tolerated and continued to operate, basically religious or faith-based organisations focusing on religious activities and welfare. The difference in opinion about the existence of civil society groups during the era of military rule may relate to different understandings of civil society. In a ‘traditional’ understanding several civil society groups existed throughout the years of military rule, while there in a ‘modern’ understanding were no civil society organisations. Furthermore, as the concept ‘civil society’ has no equivalent in the Burmese language, it is difficult to discuss the meaning of the concept among the villagers. It is therefore important as a first step in the analysis to study how ‘civil society’ is perceived by the different actors in the Burmese context.

The instalment of the new government in 2011 made a change in policy, and political reforms are gradually overturning some of the older restrictive rules and regulations. The change of policy, apart from the reforms, is also seen in the behaviour and exercise of power in the government; increased transparency and release of political prisoners
are examples. The analysis of these changes and their influence on civil society are forming the central part of the thesis (second part of the analysis).

The international NGOs and donors have been restricted in engaging with Myanmar. Today, after the reform process, it has become easier for INGOs to operate in the country, and in the third part of the analysis I am going to analyse the challenges INGOs are experiencing during this rapidly changing political reform process. The sensitive nature of the past relationship to the state, having a traditional top-down approach, may create a challenge for an INGO performing a bottom-up approach in implementing civil society projects. It may also be a challenge to implement modern civil society organisations in rural areas that are used to the traditional groups. These issues will be analysed in the third part of the analysis, where I am going to study how AAM/TC are influenced by the political reforms in their development and strengthening of CBOs, and furthermore analyse the possibilities and challenges in regard to their context-sensitive bottom-up development strategies and methods.
4. Methodology and Fieldwork

The objective of this chapter is to present how my methodological standpoint, the methods applied during the fieldwork and the theoretical basis for the analysis together constitute the framework for analysing, discussing and providing answers to the thesis statement.

4.1 Research methodology – civil society and the state as social constructions

Based on an understanding of civil society and the state as socially constructed spheres, this thesis is methodologically approached from a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism is based on the understanding that: “... the physical and social reality is constructed by the terms that we use to describe it, or by the categories in which we think about it” (my translation)\(^{146}\). It is obvious that civil society and the state physically exist, but the meaning of these two spheres is socially constructed, through language, by the members of society as well as by society as a whole. In that regard ‘civil society’ is influenced by contextual factors like culture, history and religion\(^{147}\). In other words, our understanding of concepts such as ‘civil society’, ‘state’ and ‘civil-society-state relationship’ depends on the way that we, and the society that we live in, construct them. During the fieldwork I was particularly aware that my own theoretical concepts of civil society and the state were most likely perceived differently by the Burmese people.

4.2 Construction of empirical data

The methods behind the collection and construction of empirical data will be presented in the following. This includes interview methods, a presentation of the informants, considerations concerning restrictions, limitations and challenges when doing fieldwork in Myanmar, ethical dilemmas and the role of the researcher. Throughout the chapter the social constructionist approach presented above will be integrated as an underlying basis for the methodological skeleton.

\(^{146}\) (Collin, 2003: 13)
\(^{147}\) (Collin, 2003: 14)
4.2.1 Sensitivity issues

Before getting into the technical aspects of the research methodology it is important to describe the restrictions and limitations related to the so-called ‘sensitivity issues’. Myanmar is a challenging country in regard to conducting research, particularly due to the uncertainty that occurs about openness and freedom of speech. According to the media Myanmar is now an open country allowing the Burmese citizens to freely voice their opinion in public, and based on this impression the interview questions were prepared rather open and explorative prior to the fieldwork. This openness appeared evident during the first couple of days in Yangon. However, the reality of this openness seemed to change when outside Yangon.

During preparatory meetings prior to the fieldtrip to the Delta, the TC PMT emphasized the necessity in being cautious in the research methods, particularly in regard to sensitive issues like politics and democracy. A word like ‘political reforms’ should not be used during the interviews, or even outside the interviews. This obviously appeared an obstacle to the fieldwork, as the thesis is basically based on this term. Fortunately, as an alternative to ‘reforms’ the word ‘change’ was acceptable, which made it possible – although in a more indirect way - to ask explorative questions. This, on the other hand, required that the informants would connect ‘change’ with ‘political change’, which was not always the case. Furthermore the word ‘research’ appeared to be sensitive, and I was therefore instructed to travel ‘undercover’ as a TC employee during the fieldtrip. This may have affected the interviews in bringing the informants in a delicate position where they did not feel free to express their true opinions, for fear of jeopardizing their relationship to the organisations supporting them. This was of course unfortunate, but without going ‘undercover’ it would not have been possible to enter the villages.

4.2.2 Qualitative, explorative approach

The fieldwork was conducted through a qualitative approach, which “…allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants, to determine how meanings are...

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148 Field Diary p. 5
formed through and in culture, and to discover rather than test variables”\textsuperscript{149}. This approach is useful to get an understanding of the actors’ construction of underlying opinions of civil society, and their reaction to the political reforms. It was of particular interest to study why and how political reforms influence civil society - and how AAM can operate in regard to this. Qualitative research is applicable in this case, as it “...provides insights into the ‘black box’ of social and economic processes and relations which are poorly understood, ambiguous or sensitive in nature”\textsuperscript{150}. Another reason why the qualitative methodological approach is appropriate is that the interviews would be touching sensitive issues\textsuperscript{151}, and according to Steinar Kvale “...qualitative research is sensitive to the human situation” (my translation)\textsuperscript{152}. In qualitative interviews the interview persons are given more freedom to shape their answers in a direction that is comfortable to them.

The fieldwork was designed as an explorative case study, which means that it was approached with an open-minded and explorative approach, allowing for the interview questions to be open-ended in order to follow up on unexpected information. Thus, the case study is primarily inductive\textsuperscript{153}, as the empirical data constructed in the field was subsequently analysed in regard to broader and more general theories. The reason for this design was primarily the uncertainty about openness after years of isolation and repression. This open-minded and explorative research goes hand in hand with the qualitative approach, which “...implies an openness towards new and unexpected phenomena, instead of the interviewer operating with pre-formulated questions and finalized analytical categories” (my translations)\textsuperscript{154}.

The advantage of a case study is that “...it can close in on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practise”\textsuperscript{155}. The conclusions derived from the case study may not apply for Myanmar as a whole, one reason being the ethnic

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{149} (Corbin & Strauss, 2008: 12)
\item \textsuperscript{150} (Holland & Campbell, 2005: 5)
\item \textsuperscript{151} (Harris, 2002: 489)
\item \textsuperscript{152} (Kvale, 1997: 78)
\item \textsuperscript{153} (Bryman, 2008: 11)
\item \textsuperscript{154} (Kvale, 1997: 44)
\item \textsuperscript{155} (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 235)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
diversity of the country, but the findings may never the less contribute to a general, basic understanding about civil society in a Burmese context, and how it is influenced by the political reforms\textsuperscript{156}.

Apart from interviewing, the fieldwork also included observations. Both the interviews and the observations will be described in detail below.

\textbf{4.2.3 Semi-structured interviews}

In line with the qualitative and explorative nature of the fieldwork the interviews were conducted as semi-structured single-person interviews, in which “…questions are open-ended. Unexpected, relevant issues are followed up with further questions or probing”\textsuperscript{157}. By applying this method the informant is given the freedom to influence the interview and construct comprehensive explanations, allowing the research field to unfold for the interviewer to elaborate on topics that are particularly relevant for the research. The interviews are structured, following an interview guide, but in practise they resemble normal, everyday-conversations, allowing the informants to shape the interviews in a direction relevant to them and their life stories.

During the fieldwork 36 interviews were conducted, all of which were recorded. I was aware that the use of a recorder may appear an obstacle in obtaining a relaxed atmosphere during the interviews; however I considered it an important tool to preserve details that may not appear of relevance until later in the process. Fortunately they all accepted to be recorded, and they did not seem particularly affected by it. The majority of the interviews were conducted in confidentiality in order to protect the identity of the informants. This precaution was particularly important in the villages, as the township authorities appeared concerned about our presence\textsuperscript{158}. To retain this confidentiality the informers will be given anonymous names in the thesis report (cf. annex 2). The two representatives from AAM will, however, remain identifiable in the thesis report. Conducting 36 interviews was more than initially planned, and it appeared

\textsuperscript{156} (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 228) \textsuperscript{157} (Mikkelsen, 2006: 89) \textsuperscript{158} Field Diary p. 13
a sufficient number as the informants by the end of the fieldwork were not providing any new or unexpected information.

Based on the perception that the informants in the villages would feel more comfortable discussing sensitive issues in private, it was decided to conduct single-person interviews. However, on two occasions the intended single-person interviews ended up as multiple-person interviews, as the informants themselves suggested to be interviewed as a group. Ten interviews were conducted in Yangon, and 26 in Mojorn township and six different villages in the Delta. Observations before, during and after the interviews were systematically recorded in a field diary. All interviews in the Delta and one in Yangon were conducted with the help of a local interpreter from Yangon. Her name is Torah\textsuperscript{159}. Torah has a broad English vocabulary and a pronunciation that is easily understandable. Furthermore, she is not connected to the TC or the Delta project, which minimized the risk of biased interpretations. During the interviews Torah didn’t interpret the information simultaneously, but she allowed the interview person to finish his/her response before she did the interpretation. This prevented the informants from being interrupted, which is an important aspect when approaching and analyzing the empirical data within the frames of a narrative theory (to be presented in detail later). After returning from the Delta Torah spent a couple of days going through all the interview recordings to check if the interviews were translated correctly.

\textbf{4.2.3.1 The interview guides and informants}

The informants consist of four different groups of people: AAM and TC management staff, implementing partners (IPs), fellows and local villagers. The informants are listed in annex 2. As these four groups of people have four different educational and experiential backgrounds it was decided to develop four different interview guides. In line with Steinar Kvale’s guidelines, the interview guides were developed to cover the same overall research topics, but by asking questions in different ways\textsuperscript{160}.

\textsuperscript{159} Torah is 23 years old and she was born in the Shan State bordering Thailand. Torah has studied one semester in the United States (as one of the few Burmese students) and she is a present working as a freelance interpreter,

\textsuperscript{160} (Kvale, 1997: 133)
The main topics to be covered in the interview guides were: 1) the understanding of civil society, 2) relationship to AAM/TC, 3) relationship to authorities, 4) the (political) changes and 5) future prospects of civil society. The interview guides are shown in annex 3.

In the villages the fellow was the first villager to be interviewed, as he/she usually has a good understanding of the technical aspects of the CBOs. The group of villagers, including the fellows, plays the most important role in this research because they are the beneficiaries of the AAM/TC project. In order to obtain different perspectives of civil society and its development process villagers representing different social groups were selected. Furthermore, it was attempted to have an equal balance in gender, age and employment. It was particularly important to include a number of unemployed or jobless people, as these are the target beneficiaries in the TC project.

4.2.4 Observation

The main objective of the qualitative interview is to understand the meaning of the information given by the informants, by interpreting what is being communicated as well as how it is being communicated\(^\text{161}\). Thus, it is important to be observatory before, during and after the interviews. The observation conducted during the fieldwork was completely passive and not participatory in any way. There are a number of reasons for this. First of all I do not speak Burmese and in two of the six villages the villagers had never before met a foreigner, so my presence was obviously far from natural. This makes it challenging to integrate naturally as a participant in the local environment (to be further elaborated in ‘the role of the researcher’ below).

Observation was conducted in a number of different situations. Before the fieldtrip I attended a workshop in Yangon for Delta project managers, project officers and fellows, in order to get an understanding of the project implementation, work processes and most important issues in the Delta. In the villages, after the 2\(^{nd}\) or 3\(^{rd}\) interview I went for a walk around the village, primarily to get a feeling of the village life in general, but

\(^{161}\) (Kvale, 1997: 42)
also to verify the information obtained during the first couple of interviews. Observing the village life often created new questions to be asked in the following interviews. For example, during one interview a lady informed that all the children in the village went to school. When I subsequently went for a walk I noticed children walking around in the village, and when I confronted a random villager I was told that not all children went to school. This shows the importance of observation – not everything can be uncovered through interviewing\footnote{Mikkelsen, 2006: 88}.

Apart from my observations in connection with interviewing and spending time in the villages, general observations during my stay in the country will also be taken into consideration in the following analysis. As an example, obtaining permission to travel to the project areas was extremely challenging and time-consuming\footnote{Field Diary p.6}, and I consider this observation particularly important in regard to the analyses concerning the political reforms and AAM's role in strengthening civil society. The observations are in some cases noted in the transcriptions of the interviews and in other cases in the diary.

4.2.5 The role of the researcher

Conducting research based on a qualitative approach requires the researcher to be aware of how he/she is affecting and constructing the research situation\footnote{Kvale, 1997: 123}. As described above, two of the six villages had never before met foreigners, and hence it is difficult to become an integral part of the natural environment and every-day life of the villagers. This feeling would probably diminish if I spent a longer period of time in the villages, but unfortunately this was not an option of the following reasons. Firstly, a tourist visa restricts the visit to Myanmar to one month (28 days). Secondly, visits to the villages require special permits, and you are not allowed to stay over-night in the villages. When obtaining the permission, from the township authorities, the villagers were informed and prepared for my arrival, and hence the atmosphere in the villages was not natural.

\footnotetext[162]{Mikkelsen, 2006: 88} \footnotetext[163]{Field Diary p.6} \footnotetext[164]{Kvale, 1997: 123}
Apart from acknowledging the effects of my physical appearance\textsuperscript{165}, it is similarly important to be aware of how I myself participate in the collection and construction of the empirical data: “\textit{Fieldworkers enter the field as more than researchers. Our identities and life experiences shape the political and ideological stances we take in our research}”\textsuperscript{166}. Different constructions of e.g. civil society become particularly evident during the interview situations when the informants and the interviewer are constructing ‘civil society’ in different ways. Undoubtedly, in some situations the villagers have attempted to give the ‘right answers’ instead of expressing their own opinion. This is a classic issue that has to be taken into consideration when analysing the data collected. This is particularly evident in my case, because of the ‘undercover’ position as a staff from the TC.

\textbf{4.2.5.1 Ethical considerations}

It was difficult to determine what exactly was acceptable to be expressed in public and what was not. The research required information on, amongst other things, politically sensitive issues. However, this could only be obtained by presenting the interview questions in a way that avoided the use of terms like ‘political reforms’, but on the other hand did not conceal the wish to discuss political aspects. Informants, who did not feel comfortable discussing political topics, would somehow end up touching upon these topics anyway, as a result of my probing. Undoubtedly, when conducting research it is of utmost importance to respect the integrity of the informants. However, situations may occur when it seems inevitable to probe, and this is a common dilemma for researchers\textsuperscript{167}. Having thus obtained information in an ethically questionable way, made it even more important to maintain the confidentiality of the informants, and efforts were made to prevent the recordings from being leaked or even confiscated by the police or township authorities\textsuperscript{168}.

\textsuperscript{165} (Holland \& Campbell, 2005: 6)
\textsuperscript{166} (Kleinmann \& Copp: 10)
\textsuperscript{167} (Brinkmand \& Kvale, 2005: 169)
\textsuperscript{168} Field Diary p. 16
Another dilemma arose in the subsequent reporting of the information. As mentioned earlier AAM is an apolitical organisation, and it is therefore extremely important that management staff from AAM or the TC is not quoted on any political issues. This aspect will of course be respected in the thesis report.

4.3 Processing of empirical data

In the following I am going to present how the empirical data was processed subsequently to the fieldwork, and which methods will be applied to analyse the data.

4.3.1 Transcription of interviews

All 36 interviews have been transcribed in detail by the author. The main reason for this is to obtain a comprehensive overview of the information given by the informants, and to create a strong basis for a narrative analysis, in which transcription is essential\(^\text{169}\). To ensure a high degree of reliability the transcriptions have been done as literal as possible, which means that the language may not be grammatically correct, however all the details are included. When transferred from the transcriptions to the report, the grammar has in some cases been adjusted and transcriptions from interpreted interviews have been transformed from he/she to the I/we form. Apart from a few passages, that were considered irrelevant, everything has been transcribed. However, non-lexical words, like ‘uh’ or ‘mm’, have been left out, and as an alternative three dots (...) are applied whenever there are non-lexical words or short silences. Furthermore, having used a recorder, which gives the transcriber the opportunity to listen to the interviews repeatedly, and by applying the above-mentioned transcription methods, the subjectivity of the transcription may be minimized.

4.3.2 Construction through narratives

The empirical data will be analysed applying methods and analytical tools from the theories behind narrative analysis\(^\text{170}\). The reason for this choice of analysis is that, in line with the social constructionist approach, I believe that the (subconscious) construction

\(^\text{169}\) (Riessman, 1993: 56)
\(^\text{170}\) (Riessman C. K., 2008: 11)
of our understanding of civil society and the relationship between civil society and the state can be explored through our narratives. Or more precisely, through the way we narrate our experiences, histories, lives etc. Narrative analysis is a rather complex analytical approach, as it is not one method but a mixture of different methods\textsuperscript{171}. I have chosen to focus on Catherine Kohler Riessman. According to her, the advantage of narrativization is that it “...tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning”\textsuperscript{172}. Thus, by considering the informants as narrators, and their explanations as narratives, it is possible to analyse meanings, opinions and feelings behind their explanations. The narrative approach is particularly relevant in this study because many of the informants narrate stories during the interviews, which may have deeper meanings. If the informants do not feel comfortable discussing certain topics directly, there is a chance that they may do this indirectly through narratives about every-day life.

The primary objective of narrative analysis is to understand. In other words, the intention is to “...access and analyse the contexts of meaning within which human beings understand themselves and each other; the contexts of meaning they live in and through” (my translation)\textsuperscript{173}. In this analytical approach the informants are considered ‘narrators’ and their answers to the interview questions are considered ‘narratives’. The theory behind narrative analysis goes hand in hand with social constructionism, as “...speakers construct events through narrative rather than simply refer to events”\textsuperscript{174}.

By analysing narrated life stories and experiences it becomes possible to study the underlying feelings, emotions and opinions behind the development of civil society and the influence of the political reforms – information that, based on my personal experience, is difficult to obtain in a direct manner in Myanmar. Analysis in narrative studies “...opens up the forms of telling about experiences, not simply the content to which language refers. We ask why was the story told that way?”\textsuperscript{175}. In other words, why was

\textsuperscript{171} (Chase, 2005: 651)  
\textsuperscript{172} (Riessman, 1993: 19)  
\textsuperscript{173} (Søndergaard, 1996: 54)  
\textsuperscript{174} (Chase, 2005: 656)  
\textsuperscript{175} (Riessman, 1993: 2)
the story/narrative constructed in that particular way, and why was it narrated from the perspective of that particular time period?

4.3.3 **Analytical tools for narrative analysis**

Technically, the role of the analyst is to identify “...narrative segments, reduce stories to a core, examine how word choice, structure and clauses echo one another, and examine how the sequence of action in one story builds on a prior one”\(^{176}\). Hence, the intention is to identify relevant segments of narratives, extract the most important phrases and words, from which the meaning and opinions of the informants is expressed, and relate these to the narration of the interview as a whole\(^{177}\). The transcriptions to be analysed show that only certain sequences of the interviews are actual narratives. Some of the informants, villagers in particular, seemed hesitant or reluctant in their responses, and therefore only provided short replies. Hence, in certain cases the analysis will only focus on certain phrases or words, which are indirectly part of the narrated interview as a whole\(^{178}\). It is important, however, to treat these phrases or words as pieces that have to be analysed in relation to the narrative as a whole. According to Riessman, “...narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators, who must respect respondent’s ways of constructing meaning...”\(^{179}\). The intention is to treat all important phrases and words, that have been extracted from shorter or longer narratives, as part of the narrated interview as a whole.

I have chosen to focus particularly on how my informants construct their narratives from past, present and future perspectives. The reason for this focus is that I am interested in discovering the different actor’s understandings of the historical development of civil society, their past and present experiences with the relationship between civil society and the state, and their expectations to the future. According to Riessman, informants “...narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where

\(^{176}\) (Riessman, 1993: 40)
\(^{177}\) (Riessman C.K., 2008: 8)
\(^{178}\) (Riessman C.K., 2008: 23)
\(^{179}\) (Riessman, 1993: 4)
there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society”\textsuperscript{180}. It is these “breaches” that are relevant to identify in the transcriptions and analyse in detail, particularly in regard to studying the influence of the changes in the country and political reforms. The question is, when do these breaches occur and how are they narrated in relation to the past, present and the future?

In line with the social constructionist approach, and as already touched upon in ‘the role of the researcher’, it is important to emphasize that a narrative “... is a joint production of narrator and listener...”\textsuperscript{181}. In other words, my presence as a researcher has contributed to the construction of my empirical data.

\textit{The typical way of transport in the Delta area}

\textsuperscript{180} (Riessman, 1993: 3)
\textsuperscript{181} (Chase, 2005: 657)
5. Strengthening of civil societies in a country of change - a contemporary analysis of the situation in the Delta

Having presented and discussed the theoretical framework, the sensitive context of Myanmar and the methodology behind the development of this thesis, I have provided the basis to approach the analysis. The objective is to study the narratives of my informants, by drawing on Riessman’s theories about narrative analysis in order to analyse how they construct their understandings of ‘civil society’ as well as of civil society-state relationship, the influence of the political reforms and the role of AAM. For this purpose I am going to apply analytical tools from the theoretical and methodological frameworks presented earlier, while simultaneously drawing on theoretical discussions of previous research by Taylor, Kramer and Skidmore.

In correspondence with the thematic structure of the thesis, the analysis is subdivided into three interlinked analytical sections. The first section, which is focusing on the conceptualisation, function and role of civil society, is meant to create a basis for the following two analyses. By critically studying how civil society is constructed by actors at different levels, from the international development society to the grass-root level in the villages, I am hoping to unfold the concept and possibly uncover the reasons behind the ambiguity of the concept. In this section I will apply analytical tools from Ottaway & Carothers. Having determined the nature of ‘civil society’ in a Burmese context, the following section, which is in fact the central analysis of this thesis, is focusing on the past and present relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State, and which influence the political reforms have on the Burmese civil society. Here I will draw on Hegel and Ferguson. Based on findings from the first and second subsections of the analysis, I am in the last section going to analyse which influence the political reforms have on AAM’s approach to strengthen the Burmese civil society in the Delta. For this purpose Ware and Oakley’s theories about context-sensitive development will be applied.

The focal point in the three analyses is the political changes and the reforms. As previously explained, the most important reforms in regard to this thesis are the
reforms on laws limiting freedom of expression, assembly and press, as these reforms are essential for the strengthening of civil society (cf. chapter 3.1.4).

5.1 The understanding of civil society

From a social constructionist perspective, the understanding of civil society is a social construction influenced by historically and culturally dependent discourses. Hence, at the levels of politicians, development organisations (NGOs like AAM or AAI) and the people living in the rural areas there may be different understandings of the concept. In the following I am going to analyse how the main actors from my case study, AAM, TC and the villagers, each construct the conceptualisation, role and function of civil society (the view from the perspective of the state is not included in the case study).

As previously explained, there is no equivalent to the concept ‘civil society’ in the Burmese language, and due to restrictions the English term could not be applied until after 2008 (U Ye Kyi, project officer). Thus, to identify groupings and structures that may resemble my understanding of civil society in the villages, Torah, the interpreter, referred to ‘community-based groups’ during the interviews with the villagers. Managers and officers from AAM and the TC were familiar with the English concept, although it appeared to be understood in different ways. My exploration and interpretation of the different actor’s construction of civil society is partly based on the general understanding of civil society, as described in the introduction of this thesis, and partly on my own perception and construction of civil society.

5.1.1 Civil society from the perspective of AAM and TC

Shameem, who has many years of experience working with civil society projects and consortiums in India, expressed that “…civil society is comparatively new… no, I cannot say ‘new’. In some terms it is new, and in some terms it is…” ‘old’. Because there have been these church-based organisations and other NGOs for ages … for more than 20-25 years… you can (today) see a very definite change in the rush of so many civil society organisations”. I believe that Shameem’s description of ‘old’ could be interpreted as ‘traditional’ civil society, and ‘new’ as ‘modern’ civil society (Ottaway), and that she is
referring to a transition from traditional to modern civil society in which the ‘breach’ may be either Cyclone Nargis or the political changes (2010). The question is what exactly is understood by ‘new’ (modern) civil society? According to Aung Min Naing, from AAM, traditional civil society groups, formed by youth or villagers, “...are not considered local NGOs by the point of view of government, INGOs and donors. They are not formal ... but a sort of civil society... not registered formally. But they are doing this sort of humanitarian work and social work”. Hence, in his opinion to be recognised by government, INGOs and donors a civil society organisation has to meet certain criteria, such as being formally registered. Such civil society organisations (CSOs) in Myanmar would probably be recognised as ‘modern’ civil society182. When defining AAM’s role in civil society, Aung Min Naing explains: "ActionAid is actually...civil society, but not fully. ActionAid is the INGO, and... it is a sort of organisation... but I would not put it in the definition of the civil society organisation of Myanmar”. While he concludes that AAM is an international (modern) civil society organisation, he is obviously debating with himself before reaching this conclusion, thus indicating the ambiguous and complex nature of the concept.

In the international development discourse, shared by many INGOs, ‘civil society’ appears to have become ‘naturalised’ and considered an essential tool to fight poverty and promote democracy183. I believe that AAM, being part of the international development society (through AAI), is similarly influenced by this naturalisation of civil society, and I base this statement on the fact that the term is not defined in AAM’s project reports, website etc. The concept is spoken about in a knowingly manner, indicating that is has become a natural part of the discourse. When asked to define the concept, Shameem explains that “…we are so used to calling it civil society... groups of normal people... who are committed and interested in the cause of development... and they unite. So the definition could be anything...”. The expression that “they are so used to calling it civil society” supports the assumption that the concept has become an integral part of the discourse. The question is, how do the local partners react to AAM’s

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182 (Ottaway M., 2011: 187)
183 (Pratt, 2003: 37)
understanding of the concept and does it correspond with their own understanding of civil society?

U Mya from the TC PMT, obviously had difficulties defining ‘civil society’ when directly confronted with the question. However later in the interview he indirectly explained his understanding of civil society in a narrative based on the past: “...one of my grandfathers, he said that when he was young he stayed near the Thailand border, and at that time he... collected donations from the UN to support vulnerable people. So they have groups helping vulnerable people”. I interpret this narrative as a description of the role and function of traditional civil society. Thus, in order to define the concept U Mya refers to past experiences (narratives) about the role of traditional civil society. The same uncertainty about definition was evident when U Ye Kyi, from an IP, was asked to define the concept. His initial reply was rather difficult to understand, but later, when referring to the past, it became clearer: “Actually citizens in our country have already had the sense of civil society for a long time. We want to help, we like to form community groups, and work for the development of our nation”. By applying ‘we’, U Ye Kyi shows that he and his NGO has the desire to strengthen (traditional) community-based groups, but ‘we’ also indicates that the NGO is considering itself as something different. By looking at the narratives by U Mya and U Ye Kyi, it appears that members of TC and the IPs have difficulties in defining the concept civil society, however they manage to describe their understandings of the concept when referring to the past.

In spite of the difficulties in defining the concept, it appears to be understood as something that it positive and should be practiced. An IP staff, U Than Win, who evaded my question regarding the definition of civil society, expressed: “…from my experience and learning from other...organisations or the media... it (civil society) is very important”. Thus, regardless the difficulty of definition, the naturalisation of the concept is constructed as positive and important. This aspect also appears to be evident in the villages. The English term has been transferred directly into the Burmese language, but it still hasn’t been linked to the Burmese people’s traditional understanding of civil society. During the interview with U Tin, Daw Tin Mar and Daw Khin May Kyi from an
IP, taking place in Yangon, I was told that “...some of the communities they cannot understand what is the civil society organisation (CSO), but they are talking about ‘CSO, CSO’... but we still need to educate them. What is the real meaning of democracy, what is the real meaning of CSO?”. Thus, while the villagers, in the opinion of the IP staff, may not know the meaning of CSO and democracy, they have learned that it is something good. This narrative the IP staff indirectly construct themselves as belonging to the ‘modern' civil society, and that this concept now has to be taught to the villagers. Hence, despite the fact that the villagers have a clear understanding of traditional civil society, the narratives of U Tin, Daw Tin Mar and Daw Khin May Kyi may indicate that their ‘modern' understanding of the concept is far from the ‘traditional' understanding, and it may therefore be difficult to transfer the information to the villagers.

Hence, while all of my informants perceive ‘civil society' as something positive and important, it is only the representatives from AAM who appear to understand the details of the concept, including the difference between traditional and modern civil society,

5.1.2 Civil society from the perspective of the villagers in the Delta

Before travelling to Myanmar, as well as during the first period of time in the country, I had the impression, in line with Steinberg’s conception, that civil society was ‘murdered’ during military rule. However, during the fieldwork this initial impression of civil society was challenged, as it appeared that traditional civil society groups had existed for a long time. The fellow, U Nu, who had mainly become a fellow because he had experience from participating in a village-based youth group, explained that “… the committee of the religion has been here since the village started. Since we got the monastery...”. In his narrative, this appeared to constitute a very natural part of his life. As described earlier, traditional civil society organisations were normally linked to the local monastery or local church, which often functioned as the welfare-provider when the government was unable (or unwilling) to manage this task\footnote{Kramer, 2011: 6}. Another fellow, Daw Win Win Hmaw, a middle-aged woman who had spent considerable time doing
voluntary, social work, and whom the project officers referred to as ‘mother’, explained that, apart from the CBO established by the AAM/TC, we “... have another group for the peace and betterness of the village, and... there are two groups. Male and female. Female groups have to cook for the monks and also do the hospitality, and male groups... if they have to cook big amounts of food, they will cook it. And also... they... cut the wood so that they can use it as fire”. This group has existed since she was born, which indicates around 50 years. The fact that religious and social community-based groups and organisations have always existed and constituted an important part of village life appeared to be evident in all the villages visited (U Khin Kyaing, Daw San San New, U Nu). Hence, despite the restrictions on civil society organisations during the military regime, these kinds of traditional (welfare) groups, which were tolerated by the government, have been maintained in the villages. This confirms Kramer’s previous research about the existence of traditional civil society groups during military rule.\(^\text{185}\)

The main functions of these local groups are to meet basic needs of the villagers, take care of the elders, coordinate festivals and ensure peace in the village. The objective could also be fundraising, as explained by the fellow U Khin Kyang: “...there was a little nursery school, but we didn’t have teachers so we had to call the teachers from other cities. So the teachers come and we had to pay the teacher. So we made a little committee to collect the money”.

In most villages the groups and organisations were rather informal and unstructured, while in the village of fellow Daw Win Win Hmaw there seemed to be an exception in having a more formally organised group. Apparently the group for ‘peace and betterness’, as she referred to above “…was very similar (to the CBO established by the implementing partner). It was for the development of the village too. And that committee is still in the village, so we have two committees. Just the name is a little different, but what they are doing is the same”. In other words, Daw Win Win Hmaw’s village had established a more-or-less formal CBO more than half a century ago, and its function is similar to the one that was just established by the IP.

\(^{185}\) (Kramer, 2011: 6)
The existence of traditional civil society groups and organisations may be a result of the ‘self-reliance’ aspect, caused by the lack of support and social services from the state authorities, as referred to by Kramer and AAM\textsuperscript{186}\textsuperscript{187}. During the fieldwork I got the impression that the villagers relied heavily on their own skills and power, primarily in regard to developing and structuring the local community\textsuperscript{188}. The self-reliance aspect was e.g. present in the villager’s narratives about not expecting anything - neither from the state nor the TC. U Ba Kyi, the headmaster of the local primary school in his village, expressed the importance in avoiding disappointment: “...it is not that I am not expecting anything... but if we do and then don’t get anything it is not good for us, and when I talk with the other villagers I try to persuade them not to expect anything. If it is not coming it is not good for us. So I mostly tell them to... believe in themselves and try themselves. Not to expect anything”. According to Skidmore, this is a natural defence mechanism when living in an environment of repression and uncertainty\textsuperscript{189}.

While most of the villages visited had only been partly affected by the Cyclone Nargis, one village had been severely devastated, and a large number of villagers had lost their lives. The villagers did not receive any emergency relief (at least not in the first couple of months after the cyclone hit) and as a reaction traditional civil society organisations grew stronger. According to Aung Min Naing from AAM, this cyclone “…created the opportunity to encourage these... groups of traditional people to form into local NGOs”, and in his report Kramer expresses that: “A wide range of local initiatives, including ethnic faith-based organisations, played a key role in the emergency response...”\textsuperscript{190}. Kramer’s previous research supports Aung Min Naing’s narrative, however I believe that they are both referring to the level of civil society groups and organisations above village level (NGOs like the TC IPs, operating between the villages and the INGOs), because during the interviews with the villagers it was difficult to determine whether, or if at all, the traditional village-based groups and organisations functioned in that

\textsuperscript{186} (Kramer, 2011: 44) 
\textsuperscript{187} (AAM Fellowship Programme, 2012: 22) 
\textsuperscript{188} Field Diary p. 20 
\textsuperscript{189} (Skidmore, 2004:56) 
\textsuperscript{190} (Kramer, 2011: 3)
critical time period. In fact I got the impression that the traditional village-based groups had not been particularly active in the aftermath of Nargis.

Overall, it appears that the villagers understand civil society as groups of people supporting and helping each other in different aspects of everyday-life, and according to their narratives these groups constitute a natural part of the Burmese history and culture. Thus, in theory, the development or strengthening of CBOs should in principle not be a challenge for the villagers, as they are already familiar with the organising of traditional civil society groups. However, U Ye Chan, a fellow, expressed that at the beginning it was very difficult for him: “...I didn't really know what I was doing... and also the villagers didn't really understand about it”, and “there was one training concerning accounting, in the village, but... all of the villagers couldn't understand it because it was high level and beyond their education...”. It is rather interesting that even U Ye Chan, who used to be the village authority, had difficulties understanding the concept of the CBO. This issue will be analysed in the last part of the analysis.

5.1.3 In conclusion: civil society perceived differently by different actors

This analysis confirms that civil society is a broad and ambiguous concept, and that the different actors have different understandings of it. While some view civil society from a modern perspective, others base their narratives on a traditional understanding of the concept. Furthermore, the difference between these two understandings appears to be somewhat blurry, and some narratives suggest an ambiguity in regard to whether the informants consider themselves as part of modern or traditional civil society.

The representatives of AAM appear to have a broad understanding of civil society, in which they acknowledge and benefit from the existence of traditional civil society groups and organisations. However, Shameem expresses that ‘civil society’ has become a natural part of their discourse, and this may be one of the reasons why the TC staffs have difficulties understanding and defining the concept. Aspects of modern civil society (accounting, transparency etc.), which are supposed to be implemented through the Delta project, are different from those of traditional civil society, which is the type of civil society that the TC staffs refer to when seeking to define the concept. Hence, if
aspects of modern civil society are spoken of in a knowingly manner and not defined, it may be difficult for TC staffs to understand, and thus difficult to disseminate to the villagers. As a consequence of this complexity, it appears that ‘civil society’ has come out of proportions, thus creating an unnatural gap between traditional and modern civil society. However, despite the fact that members of TC refer to traditional civil society when defining it, they consider themselves to be part of modern civil society.

While the villagers may not be familiar with the terminology of civil society, traditional civil society groups and organisations have for decades been part of their culture, and the villagers have a clear understanding of the functions of these groups. The villagers are aware of the basic principles of civil society, and it is therefore interesting how the IP’s talk about it as something the villagers ‘have to learn’. Overall, my impression is that ‘civil society’ has been lifted to a level where it is difficult to understand, also for the IPs, and thus difficult to integrate in the Burmese context. This finding is supported by Ashley South, who believes that "...the notion of civil society is rooted in European and U.S. political thought, making its application to non-Western contexts such as Burma potentially problematic"\(^{191}\).

If the reader’s eyebrows are now curved in the shape of a question mark, this is quite understandable. While it appears to be difficult for the different actors to understand and define ‘civil society’, it is equally challenging for the author of this thesis to critically discuss this issue. And no matter how frustrating this may seem, Ottaway states that we cannot do better than accept this\(^{192}\). However, I hope this analysis has created a framework for the following two parts of the analysis.

5.2 Civil society-state relationship and the influence of the political reforms

Drawing on the above findings about the understanding and construction of civil society, I am now going to study the different actor’s narratives about the relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State, and analyse which influence

\(^{191}\) (South, 2008: 12)
\(^{192}\) (Ottaway M., 2011: 198)
the political reforms have on the strengthening of civil society in the Delta project. Here the focus is on how individuals, as participants in civil society, are influenced by the reforms, while influence on AAM, as an INGO will be analysed in the last part of the analysis.

Initially, I am going to study whether, or to what extent, the reforms have reached the different actors in my case study. During my fieldwork in Yangon I got the impression that the citizens were perfectly aware of the changes\textsuperscript{193}, but what is the situation like in the Delta? Subsequently, the intention is to analyse how the different actors construct their conceptions of the past and present civil society-state relationship through their narratives. The objective is to challenge my impression that the contemporary relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State may have significant tentacles to the past. For this purpose the analytical tools from Hegel and Ferguson are essential, in order to analyse the function and role of civil society in relation to the state. Here I am also going to draw on Taylor and his previous research on the Myanmar State, and Skidmore’s previous research on fear, as I believe that the aspect of fear and mistrust, if still existing, may have an influence on how the changes and reforms are received. Together with the previous analysis, this analysis will create a framework for the third analysis, in which I will analyse AAMs possibilities and challenges when implementing bottom-up projects in a country like Myanmar.

The empirical data for this part of the analysis are rather sensitive, and observations played an important role in obtaining additional information. The narratives to be analysed here are very often supplemented by my observations of the body language of the narrators. As described earlier, politics is a sensitive topic, and if the interview persons feel discomfort it will most likely show physically.

5.2.1 The penetration of the political reforms

"On the dashboard I notice a picture of Aung San Suu Kyi, and as soon as the taxi is moving the driver starts telling me about the political changes, expressing that the former

\textsuperscript{193} Field Diary p. 3
government was not good for the country’

This sense of openness frequently marked my experiences from the former capital, Yangon. Based on literature research prior to my fieldwork, I was able to conclude that having a picture of Aung San Suu Kyi in your car and publicly expressing your opinion about politics, and even criticizing the former military regime, was definitely not acceptable a few years ago. Having these first observations in mind, it came as a surprise when I was later instructed by the TC not to apply terms related to politics during my fieldtrip to the Delta. This gave me the impression that the democratic changes may not have reached the Delta.

The confusion about openness was confirmed during a multi-person interview, with two female managers, Daw Tin Mar and Daw Khin May Kyi, and a male coordinator, U Tin, from one of the IPs, taking place in Yangon. In the beginning of the interview Daw Tin Mar, a well-spoken, sympathetic woman, very formally dressed, enthusiastically explained that “...now the door is open. That is very different that civil society. We have our own voice. People, everybody, have their own voice. So that is changed. Now they can talk, they can open their mouth. Not just open their ears. Open their mouth and they can listen, they can speak out. So that means it is very open for us”. This enthusiastic attitude confirming my first impressions of an atmosphere of change and openness, however, changed during the interview. Daw Tin Mar later explained that “We got the president and everything is changing. But still some left. A lot of things left. Not changing yet. So that means... it is not actually... not totally changed... our government, our country... not totally changed. The name will be changed. But some of the activities... not totally changed”. The reason for this slow process may be that some reforms are yet to be implemented, or that some laws are only partially changed. Another reason may be that the reforms and changes have not yet penetrated the mindsets of the people, including top-level people, as suggested by the second female manager, Daw Khin May Kyi. I will come back to this issue later.

It furthermore appears that there are differences in the levels of penetration. This issue was evident from interviews with members of the PMT and IP managers, taking place in

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194 Field Diary p. 3
195 Field Diary p. 10
Yangon. According to U Mya from the PMT you see a lot of changes in Yangon, but in the villages it is different. This may explain the instructions not to discuss sensitive political issues during the fieldwork, and not to present myself as a researcher\textsuperscript{196}. The IP president, U Win Phay, who was very open-minded, shared this opinion, and expressed that the top level now accepts civil society, but: “...at the middle level and grass root level there are still no changes. In most of the areas”. Thus, at present the changes are apparently only happening in the central areas like in Yangon and other big cities in Myanmar\textsuperscript{197}. U Win Phay is frequently visiting the project areas, and by travelling between Yangon and the villages he has a strong basis for comparing the levels of change.

During the time spent in the Delta it was difficult to determine whether, or to what extent, the reforms had actually reached the villages. One reason was that I could not ask this question directly – an issue that in itself could be interpreted as a sign that the reforms have not, or only to a limited extent, reached the villages. The word ‘change’ could be used, but unfortunately many of the villagers related it to changes taking place in the aftermath of the Cyclone Nargis. Furthermore, in regard to the level of openness, there appeared to be a difference between the villages. Three very talkative, and open-minded, ladies, Daw Hla Hla, Daw Phyu Phyu Win and Daw Yu Yu San, with whom I conducted a multi-person interview, made it clear that they were aware of the reforms: “...before, like two years ago, when you listened to the radio you wouldn’t hear anything about it. But now that the political situation is changing everything is open and... you can say whatever you want or whatever you need, and... when you listen to the radio you will hear that Aung San Suu Kyi is going there, working there and doing this and that, and we envy it. She is going to lots of countries and doing her best, why can’t we do this?” These three ladies were obviously encouraged by the political changes, and not afraid of expressing it. This openness appeared to be a rather exceptional case, but it nevertheless suggests that the reform on freedom of expression had at least reached this village. In other villages this atmosphere of openness did not seem to exist in the

\textsuperscript{196} Field Diary p. 10
\textsuperscript{197} Field Diary p. 10
same way – I will come back to this issue later. However, the reform on freedom of assembly, allowing people to organise in (non-political) groups, appeared to have reached the majority of the villages. According to Daw Khin Khin Nyunt, a 28-year old female villager, who I believe belonged to the more wealthy part of the villagers as she had donated one of her houses to the CBO, expressed that: “...it has become easier to participate in a group, and it is because two years ago it wasn't like that. I didn't know what a community was or anything, but now it is very... easy to participate and also... the villagers are more united, and it makes me want to participate more”. I believe that part of Daw Khin Khin Nyunt motivation results from the presence of the IP, as she expresses how she previously ‘didn’t know what a community was’. The necessity in being ‘taught’ about civil society is an aspect of the Delta project discovered in the previous analysis.

5.2.2 Changing the mindset - relationship between civil society and the state

As described above, Daw Khin May Kyi suggested that the reason for the limited changes may be that the Burmese people (at all levels) have not yet changed their mindset and adapted their behaviour to the new situation in the country. One reason for this could be that they have been living in a top-down structured, military ruled system for almost half a century\(^{198}\) and the new era of democracy is unfamiliar to them. According to the IP president U Than Win, the villagers “...are still stuck in that age”. In order to approach this issue, I am going to analyse how my informants narrate the past and present relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State, and discuss how the past relationship may be influencing the contemporary relationship.

According to Daw Yi Hla from the PMT the government used to be very ‘far away’ from the community and not involving civil society in state affairs. Now “...the government, civil society and non-state actors are trying to understand each other”. In Daw Yi Hla’s narrative, the civil society-state relationship has developed from a structure related to the Hegelian philosophy, with a distinct gap between civil society and the state, to a structure in line with Fergusons theories, where the two spheres are intertwined and

\(^{198}\) (Fink, 2009: 30)
dependent on each other. Obtaining this intertwined structure also appears to be the objective of AAM, as confirmed by Aung Min Naing, who argues that AAM believes it needs to be overlapped sometimes, to make the project implementation easier. The ‘breach’ of Daw Yi Hla’s narrative, marking the change in relationship and structure, is most likely the political changes (2010/11), however it could also be Cyclone Nargis (2008), which made cooperation between different spheres necessary.

Despite this intended change in relationship, however, there appears to be a barrier when it comes to being able to influence the authorities. When asked whether this is possible, Daw Yi Hla replies that: “…the Thadar Consortium does not like to influence them (township authorities). The relationship between our partners (IPs) and the village authority is okay, because the village authorities understand and they already know… so they understand and they are ready to help our IPs. But the township authority mindset is not changed… even though the high level has changed already. Now our government has changed their policies, but in the ground level their mindsets do not change”. In other words, while the government and the village authorities are now open for change, the township authorities operating in between, are still living by the old, Hegelian relationships and structures. The IP president U Hla Phyu, confirms this by arguing that some authorities still practice their old mindsets, and they are still being patriarchal. This may also explain Daw Tin Tin Mya’s (PMT) reply to my asking whether the political changes have reached the villages: “…not really, I think. Because there is an information gap, still, between the township level and the village level”. Hence, it appears that the township level is still ‘stuck in that age’ and considered to constitute an obstacle to the penetration of the political reforms, an aspect that AAM is particularly focused on changing. As previously explained, the township authorities could not be included in the empirical basis, but a staff from the Delta project provides a possible explanation to this situation, explaining that: “…before they (township authorities) are like dictator in the area, they are the kings. But now they cannot do that anymore. Now they are gradually losing their power”, but “…if civil society organisations, as long as they do not consider the authorities from a human perspective, the authorities will still say no. Because they need
to have their good face”. Hence, it is important for the authorities to keep their authoritative reputation.

The fact that the TC does not have the intention to influence the government, or other authorities, seemed to be the general understanding throughout my interviews with TC staff. When I confronted Daw Tin Tin Mya (PMT) with the question of influence, she actually looked rather surprised, emphasizing the self-evident nature of the issue when she replied: “We cannot influence actually. We cannot influence the township authority. We can just... negotiate. Because... you cannot say (laughing)... you cannot influence the township authorities. Impossible”. There is a possibility that Daw Tin Tin Mya is usually applying the word ‘advocacy’ instead of ‘influence’ (advocacy is often used in project reports etc.), and thus does not understand the meaning of ‘influence’ in this context. Either way, I find her reaction interesting, particularly because it is stated in the AAM/TC Technical Proposal\(^\text{199}\) that “The mobilisation and organisation of groups, communities and networks is key to people centred analysis, planning and action, and their capacity to discuss, negotiate and influence the institutions that affected their livelihoods”, as well as in the AA Fellowship Report\(^\text{200}\). In other words, the influencing of institutions affecting their livelihoods, which include township authorities, is part of the AAM and TC strategy. Why do members of the PMT have a barrier towards this issue? Daw Yi Hla may provide a possible explanation to this. She expresses that “...normally civil society organises themselves and work for their lives. They work for their needs. But... normally they never relate with the government. But it is like... a special society... (laughing)... this is the community, and civil society is working themselves alone”. By applying ‘they’, I believe Daw Yi Hla refers to the level of traditional village-based civil society groups, and thus not her own ‘modern’ level (analysis part 1). Her narrative suggests that although the official strategy of the project is to change the civil society-state relationship from a Hegelian to a Ferguson structure, this may be difficult to achieve in reality, due to the fact that the ‘beneficiaries’ of the project are still following former authority-structures, in which civilians are not supposed to influence the

\(^{199}\) (AAM/TC Technical Proposal, 2011)
\(^{200}\) (AAM, Silvio Ferretti, 2010: 4)
While it is important for AAM not to become politically involved, I do not interpret the barrier towards influencing the authorities as being related to the policy of non-interference as ‘influence’ is directly referred to in the TC technical proposal. Instead, I believe that it may be related to Daw Khin May Kyi’s (IP manager) claim that the Burmese people still have not changed their mindsets and behaviour.

During my interviews I realised that the term influence in itself was actually rather sensitive. When asking the fellow Daw Win Win Hmaw how they (the village) were going to influence the township authorities, Torah (the interpreter) suggests that I should perhaps choose a different term, as ‘influence’ is a little bit sensitive. I found this issue interesting, and asked Torah to translate it anyway. As Torah had expected, Daw Win Win Hmaw replied that “…you can only cooperate with them, you cannot influence them”. Finding the same barrier in the villages, as among the TC staff, confirmed my assumption that this barrier is probably not related to the AAM policy of not being engaged in local or national politics, but more likely related to the old structures characterising the civil society-state relationship prior to the democratic transition.

An aspect, which was similarly confirmed by the villagers, was that, contrary to the distant relationship between the villagers and township authorities, the villagers are closely connected to the local village authorities. The fellow U Nu expressed that: “…it has been like this for three or four years, because… the current local authority is very humble and kind. So… the villagers like him. Mostly… the local authority only lasts one or two years, but this guy has been… the local authority for like three or four years. By the choice of the villagers”. Furthermore, the village authority is the leader of the CBO (U Nu). This close relationship appeared to be evident in all the villages, and apparently the village authority had been elected, by the villagers, to be the CBO leader. Thus, while the past civil society-state relationship may have been based on a Hegelian structure, it appears that at village level there has been an overlap between the villagers and the village authority (Ferguson). This is an interesting difference in relationship between the village and township level.

(201) (Pelczynski, 1984: 1)
5.2.3 Uncertainty and fear could be a braking force

According to Aung San Suu Kyi and Skidmore, fear and mistrust marked the past relationship between the Burmese civil society and the Myanmar State. If the contemporary civil society-state relationship has tentacles to the past, which appears to be the case, Skidmore’s findings may still be traceable in the contemporary Burmese society, a situation that most likely would hamper people’s desire to participate in the development of civil society. From my preliminary observations in Yangon this would be difficult to imagine, but already during an interview with IP president U Hla Phyu I realised that this may still be the case. According to U Hla Phyu, the Burmese people “...are...very fearful. Our Myanmar society is very fearful, because of government...military... approaches. Using a lot of... violence (laughing). So people are very silent... suffering... still suffering”. He later went on to describe the conditions in the rural parts of Myanmar: “...in the local level... they also suffer inequality, injustice. Because of the system. And because of the practises of oppression (laughing), discrimination, corruption in the community level. So people are suffering”. I asked him if he was talking about the contemporary situation, and he nodded. U Hla Phyu was narrating rather openly, however, I noticed that he would make a little laugh whenever he expressed what the government/military has done (or is doing) to the Burmese people (violence, oppression). Of course, little laughs occur in many different contexts, but I found it unnatural in this particular conversation, and perceived it as possibly related to Skidmore’s findings about certain body reactions reflecting (subconscious) fear[202]. U Win Phay, another IP president, who was similarly speaking openly, although in a less nervous manner, supports U Hla Phyu by expressing that “...we are dealing with orphans, vulnerable people, but we are also vulnerable (laughing). Because any time we can get in jail”. He explains that the Burmese people still have to apply for permission to sleep at a friend or family’s house, and if you have a guest you have to report it to the ward. Otherwise you can get in jail (U Hla Phyu). These narratives suggest that, in spite of the political changes at the national level, there may still be an atmosphere of uncertainty in regard to the implementation of the reforms.

[202] (Skidmore, 2004: 55)
In the villages it was sometimes difficult to determine whether responds like “I don’t know anything about politics” or long silences were signs of fear or simply lack of knowledge. For example, when asking the local villager U Kyaw That whether the changes in Myanmar was the reason why the IP was in his village, there was a long silence followed by sentences that Torah was unable to translate, because he was speaking ‘ungrammatically’. Thus, while some villagers, like the three women, Daw Hla Hla, Daw Phyu Phyu Win and Daw Yu Yu San, spoke openly about the political changes, without expressing any signs of fear, other villagers were rather closed, which may indicate that the reform regarding freedom of speech had not yet reached the villages. By the end of an interview with a local villager named U Kyaw Swa, during which I had not received any information out of the ordinary, he suddenly opened up to me. U Kyaw Swa is a rice farmer, and he explained how a certain military-controlled rice-farming company is exploiting the entire rice-farming business, making life challenging for the rice-farmers. He wrapped up this criticism about the government by explaining that he can still not talk about such things outside, with other people. Furthermore, he expressed that “…I share you this information because I want it to change. And if you know it I am happy. I want you all to know that we are suffering right now”. Apart from people living and working in Yangon, U Kyaw Swa was the only villager directly criticising the government. I was rather surprised by his last comment, that he wants everyone to know that they are suffering, especially because I had just listened to a narrative with an opposite message, coming from the project officer U Ye Kyi. In general, the project officer appeared overly positive when talking about the political changes, and U Ye Kyi ended our interview by expressing that he is “…really happy to answer those kinds of questions, because most people outside in the world still thinks the country is in… those closed doors with lots of crisis with the government, but it is not anymore. It is open and I want everyone to know that. It is not the same anymore, it has changed”. It is interesting how the narratives of U Kyaw Swa and U Ye Kyi can be so remarkably different. U Ye Kyi does not live permanently in the Delta (township), but he is directly responsible of implementing the project, and thus spends a large amount of time in the villages. One possible interpretation of this overly positive attitude may be
that U Ye Kyi, and the other project officers, are fearful of showing a negative attitude towards the political changes.

Overall, it was difficult to determine whether fear and mistrust is still part of the Burmese society, as this aspect is closely linked to the issues of political sensitivity. In Yangon, I got the impression that people feel free to openly express their opinions. Apart from benefitting from this new freedom of expression, however, my informants (IP staff etc.) explained that many fundamental rules still apply, and certain informants seemed uncomfortable when expressing this. In the Delta area, a small number of villagers spoke openly about the changes, while the majority appeared to feel uncomfortable when talking about topics related to politics. A possible explanation for this could also be ignorance, due to the isolation of the villages. Hence, my impression is that today fear and mistrust is less prevalent than it appeared to be in the previous observations of Skidmore. However, I believe that certain elements of the aspect still remain, thus rejecting president Thein Sein’s claim that ‘the culture of fear’ has been eliminated.

5.2.4 In conclusion: reforms hampered by old structures and mindsets

On the surface, or at national level, the political changes are visible. People feel liberated, and they initially express a positive attitude towards the reforms. However, there appears to be a geographical difference in the changes. While people living in the cities are experiencing the reforms, the impression from the Delta area was that, apart from a few cases, the villagers were either unaware of the reforms or not particularly comfortable discussing them. Furthermore, during the construction of narratives, the informants expressed that real changes have not yet materialised. One reason may be that the Burmese people still have not adapted their mindsets and behaviour to the new situation. Another reason may be that the reforms are still to be implemented properly.

The past structure of the country, and the relationship between the civil society and the state, may have an influence on the limited reach and effect of the political reforms. It

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203 (N.Y.Times - Nick Cumming-Bruce, 2013)
appears that some actors within the civil society-state relationship are still “stuck in that age”, hence making it difficult to achieve a more intertwined and cooperative relationship. This issue is particularly evident in regard to the township authorities, which are apparently still practising by their old mindsets. These findings are, for example, based on the informants’ narratives in which they expressed reluctance towards ‘influencing’ the authorities. With such a ‘barrier’, especially by PMT staff and IP managers, it may not be possible to achieve the full impact of the political reforms. This issue will be taken up in the last part of the analysis.

Although it was difficult to determine, primarily due to the sensitivity of the interview questions, I got the impression that fear and mistrust is still prevalent in the Burmese society, although less than in the previous research of Skidmore. In the narratives of the informants I discovered certain elements that could be linked to the uncertainty of the scope of the reforms. During the time spent in the villages and township, the impression was that it is more-or-less acceptable to talk about the democratic changes, NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi, while it appears to be unacceptable (in the villages) to criticize the former government etc.

In conclusion, it appears that the reforms have given the Burmese people hope. However, there are still old structures that may hamper their participation in the strengthening of civil society.

5.3 The role of AAM (and the TC)

Having analysed and discussed the understanding and construction of civil society, and the general influence of the political reforms in Myanmar, there is a basis for analysing the role of AAM and TC in strengthening civil society in the Delta. It is assumed that INGOs, like AAM, may play an important role in speeding up the process of the political changes, however, based on the previous analyses, the strengthening of civil society in the context of Myanmar may prove challenging. The objective of AAM’s strategy is, in collaboration with local partners, to strengthen or establish formal CBOs at village-
level, and in the following I am going to analyse and discuss the challenges of AAM/TC when operating in the Delta context.

It is a positive starting point that some social structures of traditional civil society have existed for decades as part of the local culture. Thus, despite the difficulties in understanding and defining the concept, the villagers are already aware of the basic principles of civil society. The question is whether this experience can be useful in the establishment or strengthening of formal CBOs. It appears that the political reforms regarding freedom of speech and assembly have, to a certain extent, reached the villages, but to what extent does this make the villagers more willing to participate in the formal CBO?

It has not been in the nature of the traditional civil society groups to operate externally in advocacy of rights and democracy, and the villagers are therefore not familiar with ‘influencing’ e.g. the state authorities. Furthermore, it appears that the contemporary relationship between the state and civil society is still affected by top-down structures dominating prior to the democratic transition. These conditions seem to have a negative effect on the villagers’ and TC staff’s willingness to ‘influence’ the authorities and government.

The AAM/TC approach in establishing and strengthening CBOs will be analysed in the perspective of Wares context-sensitive development theories and Oakley’s theories about obstacles to the context-sensitive development approach. The intention is not to evaluate the outcome of the Delta project, but to analyse the approach applied and challenges experienced by AAM/TC in these years of political transition. Furthermore, the organisational setup and relationship between the actors within the AAM and the TC will not be analysed.

5.3.1 Local engagement in the establishment and strengthening of CBOs.

AAM’s objective to strengthen the Burmese civil society is based on a bottom-up approach. By building partnerships with local NGOs, and benefitting from their local knowledge and expertise, AAM and the TC are able to apply a context-sensitive
approach when implementing projects in the villages (Ware). These local NGOs in the Delta project have been operating in the Delta since the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis (2008), some even before, and they are therefore familiar with the historical and cultural development of the Delta society.

As expressed in the first part of the analysis, some villagers had difficulties understanding the purpose and function of the CBOs. However, both the traditional village-based groups and the new CBOs belong to ‘civil society’, whether traditional or modern, and it should therefore be possible for the project staff (the IPs) to teach the villagers about the principles of a formal CBO. The barrier to achieving this may be that the ‘civil society’ has been taken to a (modern) level where it is difficult to understand from a traditional civil society perspective\textsuperscript{204}. During a training session for Delta project officers, conducted by an expert from AAI, I discovered that the Burmese interpreter applied the English term ‘civil society’. There is a possibility that the project officers do the same when they themselves conduct training sessions in the villages, without explaining the English terms, and this may also explain why the villagers have difficulties understanding the trainings. I base this perception on the fact that the villagers know the English term, and they are aware that it indicates something positive, yet they do not know the meaning of the terms. This gap between traditional and modern civil society may constitute an obstacle to the implementation and functioning of the Delta project. Apart from issues related to the conceptualisation of the concept, the reason may be that the villagers are unfamiliar with the formal, administrative structures to be established\textsuperscript{205}. Here Oakley’s theory about ‘social obstacles’ may also apply, as it is likely that the repression by the Myanmar State has left the villagers “...inexperienced in leadership and organisational practises required to participate in implementing and maintaining projects”\textsuperscript{206}.

Despite these communicative challenges in the inception phase, however, the fellow U Ye Chan, a 49-year old man who used to be part of the village authorities, explained that

\textsuperscript{204} (South, 2008: 12)
\textsuperscript{205} (Oakley, 1991: 11)
\textsuperscript{206} (Oakley, 1991: 13)
the establishment of a formal CBO, and in particular the revolving fund (money banking system), has a positive influence on the villages: “... now that we have this money banking system everybody is getting better, we don’t really have to go and lend money from the other village with big profit anymore. We can do it here. And that makes me really happy...”. A 40-year old job-less woman named Daw Kyi Kyi, who lives in the same village as U Ye Chan, also emphasises how she has benefitted from it: “I have a little plantation right now, because I borrowed the money from the money banking system...and I have already given back the money that was invested in the plantation”. Hence, despite the fact that the CBO has only just been established, it appears to have the potential to create a basis for improved livelihood. The narratives of these two villagers are similar to those from other villages, and I interpret this as a sign that the establishment of a formal CBO is received positively as it meets some of the material needs of the villagers. However, in one particular case the revolving fund of the CBO did not appear to have the intended effect. U Min Min, a young, jobless man, who supported his family by catching fish and frogs, and who appeared to be one of the poorest villagers interviewed, expressed how he avoids the support of the CBO/revolving fund: “...I haven’t borrowed any money from it yet. Because I am scared that I won’t be able to give it back... I don’t have work every day, so I’m scared that I cannot afford to give it back”, and “... I never borrow money from anybody. I believe that I can feed my own family every day, because I am a man”. While the majority of beneficiaries of the CBO are, or will be, benefitting economically, the poorest villagers, who should be the main beneficiaries of the Delta project, may not always be reachable for the CBO.

According to the majority of the villagers, they are very interested and engaged in the work of the CBO. The three female villagers, Daw Hla Hla, Daw Phyu Phyu Win and Daw Yu Yu San, who participated in the multi-person interview, explained that there are monthly CBO meetings, where everyone is invited to participate, but there are also “...meetings only for the committee members, where we cannot come, but if we cannot come we just come in here to the office anyway. Even if we have work. We just come”. It is understandable why the villagers are interested in the meetings, first of all because the CBO may help them economically and secondly because these meetings are considered
exciting events in the villages, and the villagers believe that they can gain knowledge by participating in them. However, while the narratives of the three female villagers seemed reliable, based on my observations of their well-structured village book (presenting the basic needs of the villagers), well-established office and a board on which villagers can apply for hospital funding etc., the reliability of similar narratives was sometimes difficult to determine. In another village, in which the interviews were also carried out in the ‘office’, the villagers were similarly expressing their strong engagement in the CBO. However, during the interviews the posters (concerning the CBO) hanging on the walls of the hut would gradually fall down. While the fellow, U Nu, assured us that the glue must have become dry after hanging there for so long, it may also have been an indication that the posters were put up on the wall that particular morning, in connection with my arrival. It could be an indication that the village's attachment or engagement to the CBO is not particularly strong. This perception was supported when the two villagers, U Kyaw That and Daw Aye Aye Thwe, living in the same village subsequently explained how U Nu had a hard time persuading people to participate in the CBO, when he first started working as a fellow. Another fellow, Daw San San Nwe, in a different village explained how she similarly had a hard time encouraging the villagers to participate in the CBO: “...I had to persuade lots of people, and some were stubborn, so it was really hard to persuade them...to participate in the community”.

It is difficult to determine the reason for the village's initial hesitation to participate in the CBO, and at the same time it is rather surprising considering the fact that most of the villagers are apparently familiar with less formal CBOs. According to U Mya, from the TC, a possible reason may be that “...the CBO is formed by the NGO, so they got a structure with accounting and managing... but it is made by the NGO, so it is not really based on the community”. U Mya’s narrative suggests that, in spite of AAM’s and TC’s intention to implement context-sensitive projects, it may be difficult to establish CBOs that are actually based on the local community and where the local people are prepared to take ownership. During the fieldtrip to the Delta, U Mya’s narrative was further elaborated by the fellow Daw Win Win Hmaw, who explained (in the first part of the
analysis) that her village has had a well-structured CBO as long as the villagers can remember, and it functioned/functions the same way as the new CBO established by the project. Thus, the newly established CBO is not based on the community’s existing CBO, despite the fact that it seemingly had all the qualities required.

Although it may have been challenging for the fellows to mobilise the villagers, and for the villagers to become familiar with the establishment of a new, formal CBO, it appears that the CBO may have a positive impact on the social life in the village. Daw Nu Nu Phyu, a member of the CBO representing the 60 poorest households of her village, expresses how “... all of the villagers are really united now. We used to just stay in our houses, because of the road and everything... and we would just do what we had to do in our households, and we didn't really communicate that much. But now we are united”. One of the objectives of the CBO is to improve the condition of the village, for example by repairing and improving the roads and the bridges leading up from the river, and these tasks should be carried out by the villagers in unity. Thus, the CBO may physically and socially create a basis to strengthen the society in the villages. It is important to note here that the villager’s perception of me as a representative from the TC may have affected their answers. Overall, however, it is interesting how these narratives appear rather contradictory to the hesitation toward participating in the CBO, as expressed by U Kyaw That, Daw Aye Aye Thwe and Daw San San New.

5.3.2 Influencing external actors, advocacy

While the primary objective of the CBO is to improve the livelihood of the villagers, its secondary objective is to function as a basis from which the villagers can gain the strength to influence the authorities, primarily the township authorities. Daw Tin Tin Mya from the TC explains that when the CBO has built up capacity, in all areas, it will be “...confident enough to deal with the township authorities. They will know how to approach them, and then there will be... better communication channels in the future. Then they can go up to the township level”. During informal meetings, after working hours, in the TC offices, I learned that this objective had actually to some extent been achieved, not by the individual CBOs but by united efforts from CBOs in different
villages. In my opinion, however, it is difficult to imagine how this at present would be possible in the project area visited. This perception is based on findings from the second part of the analysis. First of all, it appears that influencing or advocacy has not been a natural part of the traditional civil society groups. Secondly, despite my informant's desire for a Ferguson-inspired society with intertwined and interdependent spheres, it appears that the Burmese society is still stuck in the old Hegelian, top-down structure. This issue was particularly evident in the narratives of the TC staff, in which they expressed a disbelief and reluctance to influence the township authorities. Some of the villagers appeared to share these feelings, and according to U Kyaw Swa, the villager who previously expressed that the Burmese people are still suffering, there is no way the CBOs can benefit the villagers in influencing the government (township authorities).

According to Oakley, such circumstances, caused by structural and social obstacles, may constitute a barrier to the bottom-up approach that AAM is applying. Ware supports this argument, and he furthermore states that residues of “...ancient political values reverberate within contemporary Burmese politics”\(^{207}\). Hence, both Oakley and Ware support the findings from analysis part 2, arguing that the contemporary Burmese society is strongly influenced by the past civil society-state relationship. While the structural obstacles have prevented the inclusion of civil society in decision-making processes (Taylor), the social obstacles have resulted in people not gaining experience with leadership or formal project implementation (Taylor). However, while villagers and CBOs may feel socially and structurally prevented from influencing township authorities and the government, U Ba Kyi, the headmaster of the local school, expressed that by having the local village authority as member of the CBO, it is easier to cooperate with the township authorities. Hence, by strengthening the existing intertwined relationship between the villagers and the village authority, the villagers may be able to benefit from the power of the village authority when approaching the township authorities.

\(^{207}\) (Ware, 2012: 85)
5.3.3  In conclusion: the establishment of CBOs is challenging

This analysis shows that in spite of the villager’s familiarity with traditional civil society, the fellows had experienced difficulties persuading the villagers to participate in the development or strengthening of the formal CBOs established by the AAM/TC project. The villager’s hesitations in engaging in the CBOs may possibly be explained by Oakley’s theories about structural and social obstacles, where the villagers have limited experience in the structural setup of the CBOs. Another reason may be that the trainings conducted by the project staff (the IPs) in the villages is influenced by the international development discourse, in which ‘civil society’ has been taken to a ‘modern’ level that makes it difficult to understand for the villagers. In other words, while AAM in principle is applying a context-sensitive bottom-up approach by implementing their projects through local IPs, certain structural, social and discursive obstacles challenge their work. These obstacles may explain why Daw Yi Hla, from the TC, expresses that “…even though we tried a lot, some communities are still…left behind… because of their (lack of) readiness to the systems that we have introduced”.

In spite of these obstacles connected to the initial establishment of the CBOs, however, it appears that the CBOs may have a positive influence on the strengthening of civil society, motivated through the facilitation of material goods and potential economic benefits. In particular, the money-lending system (revolving fund), integrated in the CBO, was repeatedly mentioned as a key function of the CBOs. This function appeared to be a focal point of the villager’s engagement and participation in the CBO, and some villagers expressed that this common interest had resulted in the villagers becoming more united. U Mya from the TC on the other hand expresses that “…if the Consortium stops, the CBO will become… maybe in some villages there will be no CBO”.

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6. Discussion on research findings - and methods and theories applied to obtain them

Overall, I have discovered that Myanmar is not as ‘open’ as I initially expected it to be, and in the following I am going to discuss certain aspects related to my overall findings, including surprises experienced during the study process, and reflect upon the methods and theories applied.

During the fieldwork my underlying pre-understandings of project implementation in a country like Myanmar were constantly challenged. First of all I was surprised to discover how difficult it is to operate with something as seemingly simple as ‘civil society’. I had not expected to put much emphasis on this aspect until I realised the issues the definition and operationalisation of the concept constitutes. Ottaway and Carother’s theories about traditional and modern civil society proved very useful, firstly to study my informant’s understanding and construction of the different forms of civil society, and secondly to analyse how the complexity of the concept can be an obstacle for the implementation of a civil society project. I soon realised that even writing about this complexity was extremely challenging. I now agree with Ottaway that by attempting to define ‘civil society’ it becomes even more vague and blurry, and that it may not be useful to try to make a simple definition of the term. What the first part of the analysis indicates is how intangible something as seemingly simple as ‘civil society’ can become in a working relationship between local, national and international partners.

During the fieldwork in the villages, I was particularly surprised to learn that the relationship between the villagers and the local village authorities is, and has apparently always been, positive. Thus, while the general civil society-state relationship appears to have been based on top-down and Hegelian values, which may still be the case, these local communities have had structures related to Fergusons’s theories about an intertwined relationship between the two spheres. I found this rather interesting, and I believe that Hegel and Ferguson were useful to analyse the understanding and construction of this relationship. Generally speaking, by representing two different time
epochs, Hegel and Ferguson were useful to analyse the transition between the past and contemporary civil society-state relationship. However, I found Hegel a challenging philosopher to apply, partly because it is difficult to get access to primary sources, and secondly because those available are difficult to interpret. I was sceptical when using secondary literature sources, for which reason I have primarily focused on and applied aspects from his philosophy that appear to reflect his basic understandings of civil society and the state, and leaving out details and nuances that may be specific interpretations by the authors of the secondary literature sources.

As an alternative to Hegel and Ferguson, I did consider applying methodological aspects and analytical tools from the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, particularly in regard to his philosophies about *discourses* and *power*. Foucault believes that every time period/epoch is based on certain discourses or ‘truths’, which subconsciously limit how members of society think, talk and act, and that these ‘truths’ are determined by underlying power structures[208]. Foucault’s philosophy reflects my own impression that the Burmese people’s way of reacting to the political reforms may be influenced by discourses and structures originating from a time period prior to the democratic transition, and analytical tools drawn from this philosophy would therefore have been useful in studying this aspect. However, due to the fact that the responses of my informants have been translated, I believe the discourses may have become blurry and thus not possible to analyse.

I was surprised to discover how difficult it was to conduct research, particularly since the media has given the impression that the country has now opened up. Due to the sensitive environment, including the suspiciousness toward my research, it was challenging to obtain the data needed to create a comprehensive picture of the situation, particularly in the Delta. I believe it was the right choice to apply a qualitative instead of a quantitative methodology, especially because the concept ‘civil society’ required extensive elaboration. The sensitive atmosphere also made it necessary to guarantee the informers full confidentiality. Using a questionnaire as an alternative

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[208] (Heede, 2010: 75)
might have appeared more confidential, but I believe that my informants would have had difficulties responding to the questions without further elaboration. The narrative methodology was useful, as it gave me the opportunity to allow the informants to narrate about their everyday-lives, in which I could subsequently trace underlying constructions of the topics in question. In order to maintain confidentiality, it was however not possible to give a detailed description of the informants through the report.

It would perhaps have been interesting to complement my empirical data with narratives from the perspective of the state authorities or the NLD, but unfortunately this was not an option. Overall I have the impression that I was extremely lucky even to get permission to visit the villages in the Delta. Due to the various obstacles, difficulties and limitations during the fieldwork the working conditions have not been optimal, but I believe that even under these conditions, the methods applied have resulted in a satisfactory result.
7. Conclusion: The reforms have a positive influence – but change takes time

The political reforms have a positive influence on the Burmese people, who have obtained a renewed freedom of speech and assembly. Especially those living in Yangon and other big cities now feel free to express their opinions in public. This freedom of speech and assembly is an underlying condition for their active participation in civil society.

The concept of civil society is ambiguous and in order to strengthen civil society and to assess the influence of the political reforms, it is necessary that the different actors have a shared understanding of the concept. This is however not the case today. Different actors have different understandings, and in some cases they even have difficulties in defining the concept. Despite the general restrictions, traditional local groups have been tolerated through the years of military rule. These groups are informal and have a loose structure and their function has primarily been welfare in the local community. There is no equivalent of ‘civil society’ in the Burmese language, but the local villagers perceive such traditional groups as part of civil society. AAM and its partners acknowledge these local organisations, categorised as traditional civil society, while they consider themselves as modern civil society organisations. The ‘civil society’ concept is difficult to understand and define by some members of the AAM partners. One reason could be that these partners often grew out of traditional groups and later went through a transition towards a more formal ‘modern’ civil society organisations. Another reason could be that the term ‘civil society’ has become ‘naturalised’ in the international development discourse as ‘modern’.

There appears to be a gap between this international perception and the perception of local communities having lived with traditional civil society group for generations. The CBOs that AAM/TC are developing in the villages are of a modern nature with a well-structured organisation, and it may be a challenge for the implementing partners having an ambiguous understanding of civil society, to implement projects in villages where people have a traditional understanding. The overall conclusion is that the
complexity of civil society, leading to different perceptions of the concept, may be a challenge and potentially an obstacle to the implementation of CBOs in the villages.

Despite the challenges in understanding and defining ‘civil society’ the informants seemed hopeful and open to the strengthening of civil society. A number of reforms have been issued that gradually are easing the restrictions imposed by the former government. These reforms are leaving more space for civil society to develop. However, while the political reforms appear to have penetrated the more developed parts of the country, they may not have reached the rural areas to the extent that they have had a major influence on the civil society in the villages. Apart from a slow penetration the implementation of the reforms seem to be hampered by the many years of command driven top-down procedures, and it is difficult to change the mindsets of the villagers as well as of the authorities. Although there is a desire to strengthen civil society and change the old structures, many of the informants express reluctance towards influencing the authorities or government officials, arguing that this is not possible. This reluctance may be related to the fact that it has never been in the nature of traditional civil society groups to engage directly with the authorities outside the community. The township authorities, in particular, appear to still be ‘stuck in the old structure’, which is a challenge and a potential ‘braking force’ for the strengthening of civil societies.

Another reason for a slow implementation in the villages could be that, in spite of reforms, the basic laws have not been changed. This creates uncertainty and a potential fear of breaking the underlying rules and regulations. Fear has previously been a factor in daily life of the people, but from their hesitation to discuss matters related to the ‘changes’ it was difficult to determine whether the villagers in the Delta are still affected by these feelings. Apart from one villager expressing fear in relation to authorities, it is the impression that this aspect has changed character toward a higher degree of uncertainty about the ‘real’ change of the basic laws. It is in the villages now acceptable to talk about Aung San Suu Kyi, while it is still unacceptable to criticise the old government. Hence, there are apparently still some ‘unwritten rules’, at least in the
villages visited, limiting the freedom of expression. This uncertainty concerning the reforms, together with an apparently continued surveillance by the authorities, may constitute an obstacle or a delaying factor to the strengthening of civil society in general, and this may also hamper AAM’s desire for their partners and beneficiaries to engage with authorities like the township authorities. Despite these constraints it is the overall conclusion that the reforms have a positive influence on the possibilities of civil society to develop, and it has at the same time become easier for an INGO like AAM/TC to participate in the development. It is, however, important that AAM/TC is aware of the consequences of different understandings of civil society, when implementing projects in the Delta.

Representatives from AAM and TC expect the civil society to develop and the gap to the state authorities to decrease, and the overall objective (shared by AAM) is to move towards making civil society and state overlap and cooperate. The INGOs, like AAM, are playing an important role in this process of strengthening the civil society, especially now that it has become easier for them to obtain permission to enter the (rural) areas. The people in the villages express a desire to participate in civil society organisations, even though they may have difficulties understanding the meaning of (modern) civil society. The positive interest may also come from the CBO’s function as a service provider (e.g. the money lending system), which almost all informants mentioned as a successful activity. All in all the political reforms have a positive influence on AAM/TC’s possibilities of contributing to the development of CBOs.

Generally, the contemporary Burmese society appears to be affected by the past civil society-state relationship, and this may constitute an obstacle to the strengthening of civil society. AAM is aware of these obstacles, and one of the objectives of the Delta project is to make the villagers strong enough to change these structures by engaging with the township authorities. This may however, based on the findings in the villages, be difficult to achieve in the short term, as part of the authorities are still ‘stuck in that age’. The development should move towards a balance in collaboration between the
civil society and the authorities, but the state authorities will – and should – also in the future play an important role in society.

Women with traditional ‘thanaka’ in their faces
8. Democrazy? – the future perspective of civil society in Myanmar

As this thesis is based on empirical data from one particular rural part of Myanmar, it is not possible to generalise the conclusions from this case. Nevertheless, it provides a basic understanding of possibilities and challenges in development of civil society in rural areas of a country that is in the process of changing from military rule to democratic structures.

‘Civil society’ has become a naturalised buzz-word within the international development community and for many INGOs the strengthening of civil society is seen as a key tool in the promotion of democracy and human rights in non-democratic countries. This thesis shows that the ambiguity of ‘civil society’ and in particular the differing perceptions between the local people and the international development communities may constitute an obstacle for INGOs in implementing future projects. For the INGOs to operate under the local conditions it is important to carefully consider the approach and adapt to the local context in applying a context-sensitive approach. Although these findings are from a limited geographical area and developed in a specific cultural, historical and religious context, I believe that a case-study conducted in another part of the country would show similar, although nuanced, findings. Furthermore, I believe that these findings are useful for INGOs intending to implement civil society projects in countries, where the inhabitants have just recently been introduced to the international concept of ‘civil society’. A possible solution to the issue may be to increase the focus on a transparent communication, where seemingly evident aspects of ‘civil society’ are defined and explained to everyone involved in the project. However, it would require more research to solve this issue, especially now that civil society projects are becoming gradually more popular.

While the political reforms and the strengthening of the Burmese civil society are important means in achieving a successful democratic transition, it may also have a downside that could possibly counteract a partnership between national and international actors. I got the impression that the increased freedom of expression is creating some challenges in the cooperation between the INGOs and their local
partners. While this issue mainly concerns relations between INGOs and local NGOs, other cases of this downside to the political reforms are seen throughout the country. Some parts of Myanmar are currently experiencing an increasing extent of ethnic and religious conflicts and according to the Irrawaddy Newspaper, the “...spread of this new radicalism has been helped by the very reforms it threatens to derail. A quasi-civilian government came to power in 2011 after five decades of brutal military rule. New freedoms of speech and assembly soon followed, which have made it easier to disseminate radical views”. Such use, or rather misuse, of the reforms may contribute to jeopardizing the political transition process.

Apart from the conflicts described above, the many years of frustrated expectations may lead to an overwhelming demand for speeding up the process of change. This reaction may also be fuelled by INGOs in their promotion of civil society. Kramer warns that “...‘civil society’ has become the new buzz-word in Burma, and there is a danger of placing too much hope and expectations on what it is and what it can do”209. The country seems to be in a situation, where the reforms have created hopes that may be difficult to meet in the short term. I believe that my findings support this argument, as my informants appear to have very high, and possibly unrealistic, expectations to the potential of ‘civil society’. The political situation in Myanmar is still sensitive, and the development and strengthening of civil society is an extremely delicate topic. As expressed by a project manager “...our country looks like... children who are very restricted and controlled by their parents for a long time. Some of the children, like your western country, they have their own mindsets. Their own decisions and own choice. But for our country... long time we looked like children who are very restricted by principles and rules and regulations... now the parents release out. We didn’t even know yet which one is the right one and which one is the wrong one. That is why we want to try everything... so now it is just released out (laughing), so they cannot choose which one is the right and which one is the wrong”. She, and a civil society expert that I later had a meeting with, termed this issue ‘democracy’ – describing democracy that gets out of control, another pitfall that may jeopardize the transition.

209 (Kramer, 2011: 43)
Another concern in the transition process is what the press name the ‘emerging Burma burnout’. The reforms are being developed at a pace that the Myanmar administration has difficulties in handling. The Burmese administration that for years has operated in a top-down command driven system is unable to follow up in implementing the new reforms. The thesis points at the difficulties in implementing new bottom-up structures in a country that is still basically top-down, where members at different levels in society may still be ‘stuck in the old age’. Changing the mindsets of both authorities and people does not happen overnight. It requires a long time to change the ways of thinking, and to let go of underlying emotions like fear and mistrust. While AAM is seeking to include the government and state authorities in civil society decision makings, I believe that this particular aspect requires increased attention and it is important to recognize the fact that the Myanmar State has always played an important, authoritative role in the Burmese society, and this will most likely continue.

210 (Politiken - Gwen Robinson, 2012)
9. Bibliography


Annex 1. Myanmar Administrative Structure

For Information Management Purposes the MIMU promotes 3 levels for data collection and reporting:

- Admin 1-First sub-national level
- Admin 2-Second sub-national level
- Admin 3-Third sub-national level

Source: General Administration Department, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2009

*There are only 14 States and Regions however, Shan States is subdivided into 3 Sub-States;
Bago Region is subdivided into 2 sub-regions.

** Of the 330 Townships, 33 are urban, 3 are rural and, 294 are mixed.

***This number differs from the MIMU Pcode list release IV, which also includes settlements as reported by UN and INGO field offices.
### Annex 2. Informants - fictitious names

Apart from the two representatives from AAM, all my informants have been given fictitious names, in order to ensure anonymity. Names starting with ‘Daw’, which literally translated means ‘Aunt’, are used for women, while names starting with ‘U’, which translates ‘uncle’, are used for men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ActionAid Myanmar:</th>
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<tr>
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<td>- Aung Min Naing</td>
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<td>- U Mya</td>
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Annex 3, Interview guides

AAM and TC (PMT)

1) Introduction (first I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself)
   - Would you please give me a brief presentation of yourself and your function in AAM/Thadar Consortium?
   - How long have you been working in AAM/Thadar Consortium?

2) Civil Society (now I would like to know a bit about your understanding of civil society)
   - How would you define civil society?
   - How would you describe civil society in Myanmar?
   - Are CBOs and VDCs part of civil society?
   - How is AAM/Thadar Consortium part of civil society?
   - How is the relationship between state, market and civil society?
   - What are the possibilities of developing a stronger VDCs/CBOs in Myanmar?
   - Do you believe it is possible?
   - Has your opinion on the possibilities of developing stronger VDCs/CBOs changed during the past couple of years? (Has other factors influenced your opinion?)

3) AAM’s/Thadar Consortiums selection of implementing partners (my next questions will be about your cooperation with the implementing partners)
   - How did the Thadar Consortium choose your implementing partners?
   - Did these organisations exist beforehand, or did you contribute to the development of them?
   - Which qualifications were you looking for?
   - How can you benefit from their local knowledge and expertise?
   - How did you train your partners?
   - Do your partners believe it is possible to strengthen civil society in Myanmar?

4) Relationship to village and township authorities (let’s talk about your relationship to the village and township authorities)
   - How is the Thadar Consortium cooperating with the village and township authorities? (please give examples)
   - Has this relationship changed during the past couple of years? How?
   - How can you influence the village and township authorities?

5) Changes (now I would like to hear about the changes in Myanmar)
   - In regards to social development work, how has the situation in Myanmar changed?
   - What are the most important changes in regards to AAM’s/Thadar Consortiums work?
   - Has civil society in Myanmar changed during the past couple of years?
   - If yes, why do you think so?
   - Can you feel the changes? (If yes, how?)
   - If ”yes” – has project implementation become easier?

6) Future expectations (my last few questions will be about the future)
   - What do you think civil society in Myanmar looks like in 5 years? (which groups/organizations etc.)
   - What do you think the role of the VDCs/CBOs will be in 5 years?
   - How do you expect AAM/Thadar Consortium to be part of it?
   - In your opinion, do you believe that the VDCs/CBOs are long-term sustainable?
   - How can the Thadar Consortium contribute to this?
   - In the future, how do you see the relationship between VDCs/CBOs and village and township authorities?

7) Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to tell me? About your community, IPs, AAM/Thadar Consortium or the changes in Myanmar.
local partners (IPs)

1) Introduction (first I would like to ask you a few questions about your organisation)
   - Would you please give a brief presentation of your organisation and your function in it?
   - How old is your organization?
   - What areas is your organisation focusing on?

2) Civil Society (now I would like to know some more about your understanding of civil society)
   - How would you define civil society?
   - How would you describe civil society in Myanmar?
   - Is a community based organisation (CBO) part of civil society?
   - What are the possibilities of developing stronger CBOs in Myanmar?
   - In your opinion, do you think it is realistic?
   - Has your opinion on the possibilities of developing stronger CBOs changed during the past couple of years? (Has other factors influenced your opinion?)

3) Relationship to Thadar Consortium and AAM (my next questions will be about your relationship to AAM and Thadar)
   - Why do you think you were selected as partner?
   - Were you trained to be part of the project? (how?)
   - What is the purpose of the training?
   - How are you contributing to the Thadar project?
   - How can you make a change in the local communities?
   - What are your past experiences with civil society – before the Thadar project? (please give examples)
   - What do you think the local people expect from you?

4) Relationship to local authorities (let’s talk about your relationship to the local authorities)
   - How is your organisation cooperating with the local authorities? (please give examples)
   - Has this relationship changed during the past couple of years? How? (have other factors influenced this?)
   - How can you influence the local authorities?

5) Changes (now I would like to hear about the changes in Myanmar)
   - In regards to development aid, how has the situation in Myanmar changed?
   - What are the most important changes in regards to your organisation’s work? (any other factors?)
   - Has working with CBOs changed during the past couple of years?
   - If yes, why do you think so? (have other factors influenced this?)

6) Future expectations (my last few questions will be about the future)
   - What do you think civil society in Myanmar looks like in 5 years? (which groups/organizations etc.)
   - What do you think the role of the CBOs will be in 5 years?
   - What will your role be?
   - In your opinion, do you believe that the CBOs are long-term sustainable?
   - How can the Thadar Consortium contribute to this?
   - In the future, how do you see the relationship between CBOs and local authorities?

7) Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to tell me? About your community, AAM or the changes in Myanmar.
Fellows

1) Introduction (first I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself)

- Will you please present yourself and your function?
- Where in Myanmar do you come from?
- What is your educational background?
- How long have you worked as a fellow?

2) Civil Society/CBOs (now I would like to know some more about your community and how you yourself participate in it)

- As I understand it each village has a formally organised VDC and a number of community groups.
- Can you please explain: what is the function of a VDC?
- And what is the function of the community groups?
- How many groups are there in your village?
- How many are connected to the VDC, and how many are not?
- What are the possibilities of developing strong community groups in this community?
- How can this community benefit from strong community groups?

3) Relationship to IPs and Thadar Consortium (my next questions will be about your relationship to the IPs and Thadar project)

- Why do you think you were selected as a fellow?
- How were you trained to be a fellow?
- Who in the local community are you training?
- What is the purpose of the training?
- How can you make a change in the local community?
- What do you think this community expects from you and the IPs?

4) Relationship to village and township authorities (let's talk about your relationship to the village and township authorities)

- How are you cooperating with the village and township authorities? (please give examples)
- How can the VDCs convince village or township authorities to support your community?
- If you need support, would you contact the village authorities?
- What are the village and township authorities doing for you and your community?

5) Changes (now I would like to hear about changes in your country)

- Is working with community groups different today than it was two years ago?
- How?
- Why do you think this is?

6) Future expectations (my last few questions will be about the future)

- What do you think will happen with the VDC and the community groups when the support from the IPs and Thadar stops?
- What do you think the community groups in this community will be like in 5 years?
- Will the VDC and community groups still be there?
- What do you expect your role to be?
- In the future, how do you see the relationship between your community and village and township authorities?

7) Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to tell me? About your community, the IPs or the changes in Myanmar.
Villagers

1) Introduction (first I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself)
   - Brief presentation of yourself.
   - What do you do for a living?
   - What is your religious/ethnic background?
   - How big is your family?

2) Civil Society/CBO (now I would like to know some more about your community and how you participate in it)
   - Are you part of any community groups?
   - Are they connected to the VDC? (how?)
   - Why did you want/not want to participate in this/these group?
   - When did you start to participate in this/these group?
   - How do you contribute to this group?
   - What is the purpose of the group's activities?
   - How can the group help or support you?
   - How can a stronger community group help you in your daily life?

3) The relationship to IPs and Thadar Consortium (my next questions will be about your relationship to this project)
   - If connected to VDC:
     - How are you benefitting from this?
     - How do the IPs and fellow support you and your family?
     - Do they give you any training?
     - Is anybody else supporting you?
     - What do you expect from the IP and the fellow?
     - How has your local community benefitted from the presence of the IP and fellow?
     - Have the IP and fellow made it easier to participate in community groups? (how?)
   - If not connected to VDC:
     - Is anybody supporting you and your family?
     - If you or your family need help who do you contact?

4) Relationship to village and township authorities (let's talk about your relationship to the village and township authorities)
   - If you and your family need help, would you contact the village authorities?
   - How and why would you do it?
   - Are you receiving any support from the village authorities? (in what way?)

5) Changes (now I would like to hear about the changes in Myanmar)
   - Compared to two years ago: has it become easier or more difficult to develop community groups in your village?
   - If easier/more difficult: in what way?
   - If easier/more difficult: what do you think is the reason for this?
   - Is your willingness to participate different today than it was two years ago? (How?)

6) Future expectations (my last few questions will be about the future)
   - What do you think will happen with the community groups when the IP and fellow stops?
   - What do you think your community groups will be like in the future?
   - Will the existing community groups be there 5 years from now?
   - How do you expect to participate in it?
   - In the future, how do you see the relationship between your community and village and township authorities?

7) Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to tell me? About your community, IPs or the changes in Myanmar.
Travelling back from the village after a long day’s work