

Lessons Learned from MPSI's work supporting the peace process in Myanmar

March 2012 to March 2014

The Myanmar Peace Support Initiative
Yangon, Myanmar
March 2014

“... This should be a true ceasefire, and if so we will be pleased. If the ceasefire breaks down, the situation could be worse than before, and meaningless for me to continue to live.” **villager from Poe Thaw Su, Kyauk Kyi Village Tract, Eastern Bago. October 2013.**

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AHRN	Asian Harm Reduction Network
ALP	Arakan Liberation Party
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBO	Community-based organisation
CIDKP	Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People
CNF	Chin National Front
CPCS	Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent/Buddhist Army
EAG	Ethnic Armed Group
EBO	Euro-Burma Office
EPRP	Ethnic Peace Resources Project
FSPs	Fragile State Principles
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
JPNA	Joint Peacebuilding Needs Assessment
KCBNG	Karen Community Based Network Group
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KKO	Klo-Htoo Baw Organization
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
KORD	Karen Organisation for Relief and Development
MNEC	Mon National Education Committee
MNLA	Mon National Liberation Army
MPC	Myanmar Peace Centre
MPSI	Myanmar Peace Support Initiative
MWO	Mon Women's Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIS	Nordic International Support Foundation
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PDSG	Peace Donor Support Group
PNLO	Pa-oh National Liberation Organisation
RCSS	Restoration Council Shan State
SSA-S	Shan State Army South
SSPP	Shan State Progressive Party
UN	United Nations
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
WGEC	Working Group for Ethnic Coordination

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – THE MYANMAR PEACE SUPPORT INITIATIVE

The Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI)

- The MPSI was launched in March 2012, following a request from the Government of Myanmar to the Government of Norway to lead international support to the peace process. MPSI was never intended to be a mediation initiative, but rather designed to come in just behind the political momentum of the peace process, helping to support ceasefire agreements reached by the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups. Enabling this role to be played by an international actor was a first for Myanmar, reflecting the new opportunity for peace between national actors. It was also quite a unique arrangement in comparison to other peace-making processes internationally.
- This report brings together research conducted in the last year, including an MPSI ‘Reflections’ report produced in early 2013, an independent review of MPSI undertaken in 2014, and is informed by field trips, discussions with peace process stakeholders, the insights of MPSI staff, meetings and workshops with Government and Ethnic Armed Groups, community meetings and project reporting. The report seeks to reflect on those two years of support, and suggest ways to frame and improve international support to the peace process and aid into conflict-affected areas.
- In the last two years MPSI has facilitated projects that built trust and confidence in - and tested - the ceasefires, disseminated lessons learned from these experiences, and sought to strengthen the local and international coordination of assistance to the peace process. In doing so MPSI engaged with the Government, Myanmar Army, Ethnic Armed Groups, political parties, civil society actors and communities, as well as international partners, to provide concrete support to the ceasefires and emerging peace process.
- MPSI associated projects have been undertaken across five ethnic States (Chin, Shan, Mon, Karen and Kayah) and two Regions (Bago and Tanintharyi). Projects have been delivered in partnership with seven Ethnic Armed Groups, thirteen local partners (four of which are consortia), and nine international partners. Flexible and responsive funding was received from Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the European Union and Australia.
- From the outset, the intention had been for the MPSI to provide temporary support to the emergence and consolidation of peace, in the absence of appropriate, longer-term structures and while more sustainable international peace support responses were mobilised. In line with its stated purpose of being a temporary structure, MPSI aspired for its work to be continued by local actors, national and international Non-governmental organisations and other entities including sector donor funding instruments, such as the Peace Donor Support Group (PDSG).
- There have been many contextual, political and structural challenges for MPSI in carrying out its role. These have included tensions in the peace process itself, especially delays in starting necessary political dialogue; managing the expectations of key stakeholders; developing MPSI’s own working processes (without creating an ‘*institutionalised*’ structure); limitations in capacity and knowledge (especially regarding best practice to enable community agency and empowerment); and maintaining a flexible, adaptive, responsive strategy (i.e. working without a ‘blue print’) while implementation was already underway.
- The following paper seeks to set out lessons, reflections and insights on the work of MPSI. It is composed of a background section, a section on lessons learned during two years of MPSI’s work, and a section examining application of the New Deal Framework¹ to the Myanmar context. It has four

¹ The New Deal entailed a change to the way the international community works in fragile states. It ‘proposes key peace-building and state-building goals, focuses on new ways of engaging with a focus on country-led processes and

annexes: i) overview of MPSI-supported projects; ii) list of considerations for organisations when planning and implementing projects in conflict-affected areas; iii) interview responses resulting from MPSI's listening project conducted over the last quarter of 2013; and iv) independent review of the MPSI: Executive Summary.

The Peace Process

The peace process, which emerged in Myanmar in late 2011, represents the best opportunity in many decades to address issues that have structured armed conflict in the country since independence. The agreement of ceasefires is a historically important achievement of peace-making. The peace process emerged as a Government-led initiative, under the leadership of President U Thein Sein, and his chief peace envoy, Minister U Aung Min supported by the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC). Although questions remain regarding the Government's ability to deliver on the ceasefire agreements negotiated with Ethnic Armed Groups, most stakeholders acknowledge the vision, leadership and commitment of the President and his team.

Two years of MPSI's work and experience have informed an analysis that includes the following:

- Over the past year, Ethnic Armed Groups have been increasingly pro-active and creative in their relationships with the Government during negotiations to achieve a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Although tensions and difficulties still exist, Ethnic Armed Groups have demonstrated commitment to the peace process, and an eagerness to begin a necessary political dialogue process that will attempt to negotiate solutions to underlying causes of Myanmar's post-independence civil war.
- The leaders of the Ethnic Armed Groups, and other ethnic stakeholders in Myanmar, acknowledge and expect that the political dialogue process will take some time in order to reach acceptable outcomes. As such the 2015 elections are seen as creating a temporary interruption in a process that will go on until perhaps 2020.
- The ceasefires and emerging peace process are helping to transform the lives of civilians affected by decades of armed conflict. Displaced people are beginning to return to previous settlements and attempting to rebuild their lives. In many communities, livelihoods have improved as a result of villagers' better access to their fields and a reduction in predatory taxation. Through a series of 'listening project' exercises conducted by MPSI, it has become evident that villagers greatly appreciate these changes, although they worry whether the ceasefires can be maintained and the peace process sustained.
- It has been repeatedly observed mainly by civil society organisations that women are under-represented in the peace process, or rather in the ceasefire process so far. MPSI has seen its task as only to encourage the groups directly involved in the ceasefire process to consult widely and to take steps to ensure that women's issues are heard and that those designing the future political dialogue, ensure that women are effectively represented in the process. Through the Ethnic Peace Resources project, MPSI has attempted to identify and address obstacles to the stronger representation of women from ethnic communities and organisations in the peace process.
- The peace process in Myanmar is unique in many ways, and not least because of the limited role of the international community. Negotiations are undertaken directly between the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups, with no significant external mediation and with only limited international facilitation.
- The current state of economic and political development of the country could be dramatically altered with the rise of communal violence of religious dimensions. Communal violence in Rakhine State and elsewhere during the post-2011 transition period in Myanmar has distinct causes from Myanmar's long-running ethno-political conflicts and is not a subject to (or of) the peace process, though they share some features and linkages.

identifies commitments to build mutual trust and achieve better results in fragile states.' Ref - <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org> and <http://www.newdeal4peace.org>

Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations are not a novel prescription in the history of efforts to make aid policy and practice more conflict-sensitive – much has been written on how to effect greater conflict sensitivity in the delivery of aid. What is hoped is useful – and novel for the Myanmar context – is that these recommendations are grounded in two years of intensive pilot project and the consultative work of MPSI and result from sincere reflection on what can be improved upon and what needs better resourcing and effort.

These recommendations are offered in the spirit of a contribution to on-going efforts to improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of support to the peace process in Myanmar.

1. **Understand, and act in accordance with, context.** When seeking to provide support in conflict-affected areas, interventions need to be better designed and delivered in accordance with the context. State-society relationships will be politically negotiated in the course of the peace process, including the shape of local administration and where competence and responsibility for service delivery lie; requiring less emphasis on ‘technical fixes’ and more emphasis on flexible approaches to aid that fit with the peace process.
 - International donors and diplomats need to better reflect their understanding of the historical and present complexities in Myanmar in their strategies for support to Myanmar and the peace process.
 - Those working in conflict-affected areas need to understand, and better respond to local political cultures and local perceptions, and the dynamics of peace and conflict at the sites of their work.
 - Specifically, consideration needs to be given to how best to provide support to the social service providers in the areas under control of Ethnic Armed Groups to allow them to continue to deliver services in the interim period of political dialogue.
2. **Consultations need to be meaningful and need to be properly resourced.** International assistance can create opportunities to support trust-building, creating ‘space’ for dialogue as well as meeting the physical, social and economic needs of communities. On-going consultation with Government, Ethnic Armed Groups (and, importantly, their sectoral departments) and all key local stakeholders needs to be properly invested in – and account taken of the time and resources programmes need – if they are to realise the opportunities for trust-building. Most importantly however, meaningful consultation prior to the design and delivery of any interventions needs to take place, and explicit consent to operate should be sought in those consultations. Consultation needs to include where, how, if and what kind of interventions are assessed and agreed as needing to take place.
3. **Remain flexible.** Being operationally flexible means adapting to changing circumstances in the peace process, adapting to the outcome of stakeholder consultations, *and* committing long enough to see success in programmes of support. Building-in flexible approaches means programmes will be able to respond quickly at key political moments, to fill spaces while other structures are negotiated, and to evolve and remain important for the period of the peace process.
4. **Recognise local capacity and build the capacity of local actors to articulate their needs and concerns.** The contexts of conflict-affected communities are unique, with different local histories, experiences and aspirations – and different needs. A contribution to peace will be more sustainable if locally driven and owned. Programmes of support should be based on a sound appreciation and recognition of local experiences of conflict and existing local capacities. The programmes should include measures to

increase local capacity, to maximise their resilience, their coping strategies and ways out of crisis, and at the same time have safeguards to mitigate the risks of by-passing or over-whelming local actors.

5. **Broaden engagement and inclusiveness in the peace process.** The voices of conflict-affected communities – and women - have been largely absent from what might be described as more of an *elite-led, top-down discourse* around the peace process.
 - Among the voices of conflict-affected communities there is widespread anxiety that the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups may fail to reach a political settlement and the peace process may yet break down. At the stage where agreeing ceasefires transforms into the initiation of political dialogue, it will be essential to include far broader stakeholders, including wider civil society and political actors, and indeed all citizens of Myanmar. This will be a considerable logistical and political task that will require significant financial and political support, including funding support from donors.
 - There remains further work to be done in bolstering efforts on women being better represented and engaged in the peace process. In increasing inclusion, there remains a need to find innovative and compelling ways to support and strengthen the role of women in the peace process and win recognition and salience of key issues of importance to women. Support needs to be designed with this need in mind.
6. **Agree on simple and practical co-ordination and flexible funding mechanisms.**
 - Partners should agree on simple, practical and light-footed co-ordination mechanisms – these mechanisms will allow political and conflict analyses to be shared, to assist a common understanding of issues and concerns and to help achieve greater coherence and sharing of strategic goals.
 - Donors should establish responsive, and where feasible and appropriate, common funding mechanisms - funding mechanisms should have the flexibility to adjust to the capacity constraints and risks involved in working as directly as possible with Ethnic Armed Groups' structures and community organisations. Using the platforms for sharing information, it is imperative these mechanisms are demand driven.
7. **Encourage an inclusive process for a national peacebuilding plan.** A national peacebuilding plan is needed, critically one that is developed with and owned jointly by Government, Ethnic Armed Groups, political stakeholders, civil society and communities. The process for the development of a national plan is as important as its outcome. Donors need to recognise the key differences between sector plans and approaches and 'a peacebuilding plan'.

SUMMARY TABLES: CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS; PROJECTS; LESSONS LEARNED AND REFLECTIONS

Summary of Challenges and Achievements

MPSI has contributed to fostering trust and confidence in the peace process, while testing realities, in particular ceasefires, on the ground. However, there have also been many contextual, political and structural challenges for MPSI in carrying out its role. With a summary of both challenges and achievements outlined in the table below, more detail is found in section 2.

	Challenges and Achievements
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic stakeholders' limited confidence in the political process • Expectations on MPSI to deliver large-scale interventions in the ceasefire areas, quickly • Local organisations and Ethnic Armed Groups' limited capacities to articulate their needs • Established, funding models often insufficiently timely and responsive to emergent confidence-building project needs • Communicating MPSI strategy: the need to balance the importance of acting quickly, responding to needs and requests as they developed, and the need for widespread and inclusive consultation and communication on activities and strategy • MPSI staffing: The MPSI team has significant experience in relation to peace and conflict issues in Myanmar and beyond, but is small and mostly works on a part-time basis. • Criticism from civil society: MPSI being perceived as supporting a Government '<i>economic development first</i>' agenda; as well as insufficient consultations.
Achievements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding quickly to a political imperative, and being a tangible demonstration of the international community's political support • Engaging with seven Ethnic Armed Groups, and supporting and testing some of the key elements agreed in the ceasefires • Testing commitment and improving channels of communication, importantly at the local level. • Deepening participation in the peace process, to include communities, civil society and political parties • Building confidence among communities • Brokering access to isolated communities and increasing humanitarian space • Supporting communities to recover from conflict • Generating better understanding and donor support. MPSI supported projects have helped to demonstrate what is - and is not - possible and appropriate in the context of a complex and dynamic peace process • Disseminating learning from MPSI activities, back into to the peace process, and communicating findings with key stakeholders

Summary of MPSI-supported projects

MPSI supported projects have aimed to build trust and confidence in – and test – the peace process. A list of MPSI supported projects is below, and more detailed descriptions and evaluations of those projects are found in Annex 1.

Approach 1: ... Providing assistance to communities, alongside the creation of opportunities for dialogue and the opening up of humanitarian space	(i) Eastern Bago - Kyauk Kyi pilot; (ii) Tanintharyi - Dawei and Palaw Pilot; (iii) Mon - Kroeng Batoi Pilot; (iv) Kayah/Karen - Shadaw Pilot; (v) Karen – Democratic Karen Benevolent/Buddhist Army (DKBA) pilot; (vi) ID Card Programme
Approach 2: ... Supporting consultations and dialogue between Ethnic Armed Groups, political parties, CSOs and communities	(vii) New Mon State Party (NMSP) Consultation Process; (viii) Mon National Conference; (ix) Chin Consultation Process and IT for Chin schools; (x) Chin National Conference; (xi) Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) Consultation Process; (xii) 'Trust Building for Peace' Conferences; (xiii) Karen District Information-sharing and Planning for Community Development; (xiv) Ethnic Armed Groups Community Consultations Workshop
Approach 3: ... Contributing to the foundations of peace and development	(xv) Chin Development Agency; Mon Education Project; (xvi) Ethnic Peace Resource Project; (xvii) setting up of 16 Ceasefire Liaison Offices with seven Ethnic Armed Groups, Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Chin National Front (CNF), Karen National Union (KNU), KNPP, NMSP, Restoration Council Shan State (RCSS) and Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP); (xiii) Shan Media Training; (xix) KNU Districts Political and Strategic Thinking Workshops; (xx) KNU Economic Policy workshops; (xxi) Non-technical Survey of Landmines (pilot)

Summary of Lessons Learned and Reflections

Insights derived from two years of MPSI experience in relation to the peace process are detailed in sections two and three of this report. These reflections are structured according to the distinct stakeholder groups that the MPSI engaged with, including learning from the MPSI-affiliated Ethnic Peace Resources Project (EPRP), as well as specific guidance for donor partners based on the New Deal Framework and broader fragile states principles.

	Lessons and reflections – <i>see sections 2 and 3 for more detail</i>
Lessons from engagement with communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The differences in local dynamics in different regions of Myanmar matter • Communities' needs and aspirations are not well understood by non-locals • Peace and security is desired more than humanitarian or development assistance • Increased freedom of movement has been a tangible benefit of the ceasefires • Land tenure security is an critical issue of growing magnitude • Business can be a spoiler, but can be engaged to play a more positive peace support role • There is widespread concern about major infrastructure projects in ethnic areas • Communities desire better governance and service delivery, while the question of Government versus non-state legitimacy remains contested in ethnic areas
Lessons from engagement with civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locally-owned Community-based organisation (CBO) consortium approaches work well in fragile areas • The accountability requirements of donors/INGOs and other international organisations must be responsive to capacity constraints of CBOs • Assistance should strengthen and not undermine CBO – community relationships • Good consultation supports the agency of the consulted, accommodates those with less capacity to engage with internationals, and sees partners not beneficiaries
Lessons from engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint involvement of Ethnic Armed Groups with Government and Myanmar Army in pilot projects has been beneficial for trust and relationship-building

<p>with Government and Myanmar Army</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite weak capacity, ceasefire liaison offices have played a key role in diffusing tensions • Access to conflict-affected areas has become easier, though it still remains difficult • The Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC) has emerged as a key player in the peace process, but collaboration has been challenging at times
<p>Lessons from engagement with Ethnic Armed Groups (and political parties)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread Ethnic Armed Groups concern that national and international assistance in conflict-affected areas will be in collusion with the Government's political or economic agendas • Ethnic Armed Groups have highly varied levels of trust and confidence in the peace process due to different histories, contexts, and aspirations • Ethnic Armed Groups have not automatically created space for civil society since the ceasefires, who've mostly had to claim it for themselves • Communities generally perceive Ethnic Armed Groups as more legitimate than the state, though this is sometimes contested • Ethnic Armed Groups consultations with communities have supported improved Ethnic Armed Group governance • Determining the future relationship between non-state and state structures while preserving local agency will be a key concern for the peace process • The differences in agendas and voices within and between Ethnic Armed Groups matter • Ethnic Armed Groups lack the capacity to articulate their needs and concerns, which disadvantages them in interactions with internationals offering or providing assistance • Women are currently marginalised from the peace process • Political parties feel marginalised (and de-legitimised) by the peace process
<p>Lessons from EPRP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace process information is not easily accessible to non-elite communities • Thematic technical assistance needs on a variety of issues evolve rapidly and remain largely unmet • The critical contribution of ceasefire liaison offices to the peace process is not well-recognised (or supported) by international peace supporters • Insensitivity and lack of responsiveness to gender concepts and concerns is widespread in the male-dominated peace process • It is problematic that, among ethnic communities, federalism is thought of as a goal in itself rather than a means to achieve ethnic aspirations • Ethnic communities have limited consciousness of the potential for democratic, non-violent action in support of their aspirations • There is confusion in ethnic communities concerning the Government's role
<p>Lessons for international partners based on the New Deal Framework</p>	<p><i>Legitimate Politics – foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urgent need to support progress from ceasefires to a political dialogue process • Community consultation must be carefully tailored to support legitimate politics and initiate more inclusive processes • Need for greater transparency and information-sharing in international peace assistance • Better aligning assistance with local perceptions and priorities, and better sequencing with the political process, are critical for conflict sensitivity <p><i>Security – establish and strengthen people's security</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving security is of primary concern to conflict-affected communities • Assistance should not create 'pull factors' for return to areas that are not yet secure

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistance that is built on impartial consultation and respect for [humanitarian?] access can support trust-building and improved security; failure to do so can cause harm • Myanmar Army engagement and endorsement of assistance projects builds community trust and confidence, and strengthens local processes <p><i>Justice – address injustices and increase people’s access to justice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establishing rule of law is desired to address injustice and support reconciliation • Reconciliation should favour local solutions <p><i>Economic Foundations – generate employment and improve livelihoods</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land tenure security is an urgent issue requiring policy review • Capacity building and promotion of fair approaches to local wealth sharing is needed <p><i>Revenues and Services – manage revenue and build service delivery capacity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities must be relieved from the burden of multiple taxation systems • Legitimacy and primacy of non-state service providers in ethnic areas should be recognised
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INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to provide lessons, reflections and insights on the work of the Norwegian-sponsored Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI), and recommendations to those working in support of the Myanmar peace process in their continuing support.² It is composed of a background section, a section on lessons learned during two years of MPSI's work, and a section examining application of the New Deal Framework to the Myanmar Context. It also includes four annexes: i) overview of MPSI-supported projects; ii) list of considerations for organisations when planning and implementing projects in conflict-affected areas; iii) interview responses resulting from MPSI's listening project conducted over the last quarter of 2013; and iv) independent review of the MPSI: Executive Summary. In early 2013 the MPSI team produced a report exploring '*Reflections*' on MPSI's work³, to promote further analysis and dialogue with key stakeholders on what had worked, what hadn't and why. The present report is built on the earlier reflections exercise, and is informed by field trips, discussions with peace process stakeholders, the insights of MPSI staff, meetings and workshops with Government and Ethnic Armed Groups, community meetings and project reporting.

The MPSI was launched in March 2012, following a request from the Government of Myanmar to the Government of Norway to lead international support to the peace process. The MPSI has facilitated projects that build trust and confidence in - and test - the ceasefires, disseminated lessons learned from these experiences, and sought to strengthen local and international coordination of assistance to the peace process. The MPSI is neither a donor nor implementing agency. Most, but not all, donors to MPSI projects are members of the Peace Donor Support Group (PDSG), which is chaired by Norway.

MPSI has aimed to ensure local participation in all stages of needs assessment, project design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. To ensure that the projects are locally owned, the activities supported have been defined by and requested by local actors. MPSI has engaged with the Government, Myanmar Army, Ethnic Armed Groups, political parties, civil society actors and communities, as well as international partners, to provide concrete support to the ceasefires and emerging peace process. From the outset, the intention has been for the MPSI to provide temporary support to the emergence and consolidation of peace, in the absence of appropriate, longer-term structures and while more sustainable international peace support responses are mobilised. In line with its stated purpose of being a temporary structure, MPSI aspired for its work to be continued by local actors, national and international NGOs and other organisations including sector donor funding instruments, such as the PDSG (see below).

² The Peace Donor Support Group web-site contains a variety of MPSI-related documents: www.peacedonorsupportgroup.com.

³ <http://www.peacedonorsupportgroup.com/reflections---one-year-on.html>

1 BACKGROUND

1.1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW – PEACE AND ARMED CONFLICT IN MYANMAR

The work of MPSI is based on an assessment that the peace process, which emerged in late 2011 represents the best opportunity in decades to address political, social, economic and cultural issues which have driven conflict between the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups. The May 2013 agreement to halt fighting between Government forces and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) means that for the first time in the country's history all major Ethnic Armed Groups have agreed to end hostilities. This is a significant and historic peace-making achievement. In order for the country to move onto a sustainable process of peace-building, it will be necessary to address a number of serious and outstanding issues, which have structured state-society conflicts since independence.

Non-Burman communities make up at least 30% of Myanmar's population. By the time of independence in 1948, ethnicity had become a defining category of political orientation, and the late 1940s saw widespread outbreaks of violence. By the time the Karen National Union (KNU) went underground in January 1949, the country had embarked on a civil war, which lasted more than six decades. The ensuing armed conflict was marked by serious and widespread human rights abuses. For many conflict-affected communities the Myanmar Army continues to be experienced and perceived as a predatory and violent intruder.

For more than half-a-century, ethnic nationality-populated, rural areas of Myanmar have been affected by conflicts between ethnic insurgents and a militarised state, widely perceived to have been captured by elements of the ethnic Burman majority. Since the 1970s, armed opposition groups have lost control of their once extensive 'liberated zones', precipitating further humanitarian and political crises in the borderlands. For generations, communities have been disrupted, traumatised, and displaced. In 2012 there were an estimated 500,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the southeast alone, plus some 150,000 predominantly Karen refugees living in a series of camps along the Thailand-Burma border, and several million private 'economic migrants' in neighbouring countries. In the nearly two years since the start of ceasefire negotiations in late 2011, the number of displaced people in southeast Myanmar has reduced, while numbers have increased dramatically in Kachin and Rakhine States as a result of war and communal violence.

A previous round of ceasefires in the 1990s brought considerable respite to conflict-affected civilian populations. These truces provided the space for civil society networks to (re-)emerge within and between ethnic nationality communities. However, the then-military Government proved unwilling to accept ethnic nationality representatives' political demands for substantial political discussions resulting in significant autonomy agreements. Therefore, despite some positive developments, the ceasefires of the 1990s did little to dispel distrust between ethnic nationalists and the Government. Trust was further eroded in April 2009, when the Government proposed that the ceasefire groups transform themselves into Border Guard Forces, under the direct control of Myanmar Army commanders. Several of the less militarily powerful ceasefire groups accepted transformation into Border Guard Force formations. However, most of the larger groups resisted.

The election of a semi-civilian government in November 2010 represented a break with the past, despite the continued role of the military in government and politics. Although opposition groups (including most armed groups) continue to object strongly to elements of the 2008 constitution, the political transition has nevertheless seen the introduction of limited decentralisation to seven predominantly ethnic nationality-populated States. In late 2011 and through 2012, the new Government under President U Thein Sein

agreed, or re-confirmed, preliminary ceasefires with 10 of the 11 most significant Ethnic Armed Groups. Despite such positive developments, in June 2011 the Myanmar Army launched a major offensive against the KIO, the main Kachin Ethnic Armed Group in northern Myanmar, breaking a 17-year ceasefire. As a result of this resumption of armed conflict, at least 80,000 people were displaced along the border with China, with tens of thousands of more IDPs in the conflict zones and Government-controlled areas.

In May 2013 a preliminary truce was agreed between the Myanmar Government and Army and the KIO. Since then, leaders of key Ethnic Armed Groups have engaged with the Government, the quasi-government Myanmar Peace Centre and the Myanmar Army leadership, to discuss the consolidation of existing ceasefires, and to negotiate a framework for political negotiations, which should include participation on the part of Myanmar's diverse civil society and political actors (including women and youth). The success of these talks will be crucial to the outcome of the peace process.

Note - These comments do not address the pressing issue of anti-Muslim violence in Myanmar. Unlike conflict between Ethnic Armed Groups and the Government, which in principle can be resolved through political negotiations, intra-communal violence is more intractable and difficult to solve. Nevertheless, this is one of the most urgent issues facing the country in this challenging period of transition.

Box 1: Key stakeholders in the Myanmar peace process

- Myanmar Army (and local militias)
- Ethnic Armed Groups (highly diverse: including Border Guard Forces and militia); ethnic opposition alliances (chiefly United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) & the Working Group on Ethnic Coordination (WGEC))
- Conflict-affected communities
- Civil society - CBOs and national NGOs (including exile/border-based organisations)
- Ethnic and other political parties
- Governments and donors
- United Nations (UN) and international organisations, including international NGOs
- Regional actors
- Business interests
- Refugees, diaspora communities and exiles

1.2 THE MYANMAR PEACE SUPPORT INITIATIVE

Following the Myanmar Government's request to the Norwegian Foreign Minister in January 2012, MPSI was established based on a recognition of the political imperative to help facilitate and coordinate international support to the emerging peace process, initially to attempt to achieve sustainable ceasefires. It was accepted that *beyond ceasefires* it was essential to open-up opportunities for political dialogue concerning underlying issues if the peace process was to be consolidated and sustained. It was also seen as important to provide some quick support to conflict-affected communities, in order to explore the reality of national-level reforms and to test the new dynamics brought about by ceasefire under-takings at the local level. For the Norwegian Government and members of MPSI, there was an awareness of the failure of the international community to support past ceasefires (in the 1990s) and the subsequent failure to move from ceasefires to substantial peace-building, ultimately leading to the collapse of some of the key ceasefires.

While some early consideration was given to the creation of a formalised funding mechanism or 'peace fund', this option was considered too slow to mobilise. Furthermore, the timing was arguably not right,

with ceasefires still fragile and ongoing fighting in Kachin and parts of Shan State. In this context, the MPSI was designed as a short-term mechanism to provide quick-turnaround interventions of support in areas where the new ceasefires had been agreed. MPSI was also seen as a mechanism to help international actors constructively navigate an extremely complex, and fast-changing, political context. The number of Ethnic Armed Groups, each with their different histories, aspirations and concerns, meant that there was a need to get a better understanding of how best to engage, and in which areas. Areas under Ethnic Armed Group authority had long been isolated, with local communities highly vulnerable following decades of armed conflict, and associated human rights abuses.

Until the beginning of the peace process, humanitarian and development actors from inside Myanmar were heavily restricted by Government, and most support targeting these areas was delivered cross-border from Thailand or was otherwise carried out 'under the radar'. With some exceptions, the international community had limited knowledge and information about the situation and local dynamics and generally was not clear about how best to respond to the emerging new situation. One aim of MPSI was to support international engagement with armed opposition and affiliated organisations (many of them based in border areas or neighbouring countries) in ways, which recognised their capacities and - sometimes contested - legitimacy. MPSI sought to explore the provision of support from within the country to conflict-affected areas newly accessible under the auspices of the ceasefires, and to support the move 'inside' Myanmar of the Ethnic Armed Groups and affiliated organisations. At the same time, MPSI wanted to support conflict-affected communities and civil society actors on the ground, working both to help communities recover from decades of conflict and to build confidence in the ceasefires.

A key issue which emerged early in the process, and helped to define MPSI's role, was the trust deficit on the part of ethnic communities, in relation to the credibility of the ceasefires, the Government-led peace agenda, and the broader political reforms. After more than sixty years of conflict, fifty years of military dictatorship and twenty years of ceasefires that led to no political solutions (and some ceasefires collapsing), key stakeholders - including Ethnic Armed Groups, civil society actors and affected communities - had very limited confidence in the prospects for a viable peace. MPSI was challenged to position itself carefully - to be just behind the momentum of the peace process, supporting the positive engagement of key actors and local communities, without getting ahead of the political momentum, or the realities faced by conflict-affected communities. In particular, it was necessary to continue emphasizing that substantial political negotiations, that included all key stakeholders, were necessary to achieve lasting peace.

A second defining issue for MPSI was the fluidity of context. When MPSI was being established the 'peace architecture' was only beginning to emerge. This included, a PDSG (Embassies and international donors); an International Peace Support Group (a forum for international and national NGOs active on peace issues); the Myanmar Peace Centre (established as a secretariat to the Government's chief peace envoy, Minister U Aung Min); and coordination mechanisms for Ethnic Armed Groups that mostly functioned outside the country. MPSI aimed to learn from its engagement with these and other stakeholders (including conflict-affected communities, and civil society and political actors) in different contexts, feeding lessons learned back into the peace process. Meanwhile, most Ethnic Armed Groups were still engaged in preliminary discussions with the Government, and were often internally divided over whether and how to engage in the peace process, in a context where necessary political dialogue had not yet materialised.

1.2.1 The MPSI approach

It was within this highly sensitive and fragile context that a team was mobilised to support the Norwegian Government to fulfil the broad objectives of supporting the ceasefires and providing assistance to conflict-affected communities. The team was led by Charles Petrie, former UN Representative to Myanmar, and consisted of international and local consultants with experience of working with relevant Ethnic Armed Groups and conflict-affected communities.

MPSI sought to move quickly in response to political imperatives in a fast-changing context. The approach has evolved over the past 24 months, to respond to the changing environment and the demands and concerns raised by Ethnic Armed Groups, civil society and communities on the ground. MPSI has not taken the form of a large fund disperser because it was quickly understood that ethnic stakeholders had serious concerns about the Government's pursuit of a development agenda in the absence of political dialogue. Instead, MPSI prioritised supporting processes related to building trust and confidence among key stakeholders, testing the ceasefires and the emerging political process, and seeking to contribute to peace support coordination and advocating for conflict sensitivity in humanitarian and development assistance.

As noted, a consistent operating principle has been to ensure that projects were locally-owned and based on communities' priorities and participation. MPSI-supported projects were requested by local actors (Ethnic Armed Groups, civil society actors and conflict-affected communities), not prescribed by MPSI. In the spirit of 'do no harm', MPSI committed to working in a manner that did not expose vulnerable populations or partners to risk (for example, due to any breakdown in the peace process). The principal modality for support consisted of developing pilot projects which have been small in scale but politically significant. The pilots were designed from the beginning to test sincerity, build confidence and increasingly after the launching of initial projects, to garner learning on key issues. They were designed to become platforms to be expanded or replicated as appropriate.

MPSI sought to advance women's participation in public life and decision-making in the project areas and beyond, by working with women-led CBOs and key women in communities in project areas. Through the Ethnic Peace Resources Project (EPRP: see below), MPSI aimed to explore how to achieve greater representation of women in the peace process and ensure greater acknowledgement of issues of importance to women. In the wider context of MPSI, other projects related to this issue have been supported. Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) provided support to the *Women Forum* organized by Women's League of Burma (WLB) and Women Organization's Network (WON) in Yangon in September 2013, focusing on the role of women in the peace process.

Within the pilot projects, the main roles MPSI has taken on include: (i) consulting with, and facilitating discussions among, relevant stakeholders (Ethnic Armed Groups, civil society organisations, local communities and, to a varying degree, with local Government and military authorities); (ii) supporting the establishment of CBO consortia and platforms for the planning and implementation of pilot projects; (iii) supporting communities and CBOs to articulate their needs and concerns; (iv) brokering access to conflict-affected areas; (v) linking donors and implementing partners (mostly international NGOs) to locally-initiated projects; (vi) supporting local partners proposing pilot projects to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders; (vii) providing advice and information to stakeholders about 'best practice' across the different kinds of projects proposed; (viii) responding quickly to needs articulated by key stakeholders; (ix) learning from interventions, and where appropriate feeding back into the peace process.

1.2.2 MPSI-supported activities

MPSI has supported projects developed and implemented by local actors, reflecting local contexts and the different levels of confidence among Ethnic Armed Groups and associated communities and civil society and political actors. Three main types of project have been supported:⁴

- (1) Building confidence in and testing the peace process, through providing assistance to communities, alongside the creation of forums for dialogue and the opening-up of humanitarian space.

⁴ Details and analysis of MPSI-supported projects can be found in Annex 2: Overview of MPSI-supported Projects.

- o Pilot projects implemented by Ethnic Armed Groups and CBOs, to help communities recover from armed conflict (Karen: Kyauk Kyi and Tanintharyi; Mon: Krong Batoi; Karenni: Shadaw); the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) project to provide ID cards, allowing conflict-affected people to travel more freely and access Government services.
- (2) Supporting consultations and dialogue between Ethnic Armed Groups, political parties, civil society and communities.
 - o Consultations undertaken by New Mon State Party (NMSP), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and Chin National Front (CNF), to explain the peace process to conflict-affected communities and civil society groups, and listen to peoples' concerns and aspirations, and an MPSI-facilitated workshop for NMSP, KNPP and CNF to share their experiences with other Ethnic Armed Groups (including the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC)); support for Chin, Shan and Mon peace conferences; Karen National Union (KNU) information-sharing, planning and community needs and priorities workshops.
- (3) Contributing to the foundations of peace and development, including through advocacy for protection of ethnic rights, and supporting the functioning of ceasefire Liaison Offices as specified in ceasefire agreements.
 - o Preliminary work on the proposed Chin Development Agency; support to NMSP (Mon National Education Committee) Mon National Schools; support to ceasefire Liaison Offices established by Ethnic Armed Groups as part of ceasefire agreements (including start-up funding and training activities); Shan media training; scoping discussions for a Non-Technical Survey of landmines (by Norwegian Peoples Aid, conducted in selected areas of Mon State, January 2014); development of an Ethnic Peace Resources Project (providing Ethnic Armed Groups and political party leaders, civil society groups and communities with resources to participate in the peace process, through workshops and a web-based platform); two KNU district political and strategic thinking workshops (including topics such as 'thinking about power' and 'introduction to strategic thinking and strategic planning'); two KNU economic policy workshops (to give KNU leaders an overview of Myanmar's economy and current business environment and present them with different options for their future economic decision-making).

Box 2: MPSI associated projects key facts

- MPSI has engaged with the **KNU, NMSP, ALP, CNF, KNPP, SSA-S/RCSS and DKBA** and helped to initiate and support projects seeking to test commitment to, and build confidence in, the ceasefires.
- MPSI pilot projects have **opened up humanitarian space and delivered assistance to conflict-affected people living in very isolated areas**, including food, medicines, tools and school supplies. **More than 100,000 people have received national identity cards**, which allow citizens to invoke basic rights and enable freedom of movement.
- Wide reach through broad partnerships: MPSI-supported projects have been implemented by local partners across **five ethnic States** (Chin, Shan, Mon, Karen, Kayah) and **two Regions** (Bago, Tanintharyi). They are delivered in partnership with **thirteen** local partners (four of which are consortia), and **nine** international partners.
- **Flexible and responsive funding** from Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the European Union and Australia

Details of the various projects supported by MPSI are outlined in Annex 1

2 LESSONS AND REFLECTIONS

2.1 THE RANGE OF CHALLENGES FACED

There have been many contextual, political and structural challenges for MPSI in carrying out its role. These have included tensions in the peace process itself, especially delays in starting necessary political dialogue; managing the expectations of key stakeholders; developing MPSI's own working processes (without creating an 'institutionalised' structure); limitations in capacity and knowledge (especially regarding best practice to enable community agency and empowerment); and maintaining a flexible, adaptive, responsive strategy (i.e. working without a 'blue print') while implementation was already underway.

2.1.1 Ethnic stakeholders' limited confidence in the political process

As noted, MPSI aimed to help build trust in - and test - the ceasefires and the emerging peace process. However, for the Ethnic Armed Groups and other stakeholders, confidence in the peace process has been undermined by delays in launching substantial political talks, by the continuation of fighting in Kachin and Shan States, and by the failure to consolidate ceasefires in areas where truces have held. As a result, some ethnic stakeholders have viewed MPSI-supported projects as attempts to 'buy peace' in collusion with the Government's political, social and economic agenda. It was therefore imperative to phase and sequence support at a pace with which Ethnic Armed Groups were comfortable (and to advocate this approach to other stakeholders, as an important component of conflict-sensitivity in the Myanmar context). The fragility of the ceasefires has also meant there was a need to ensure that pilot projects were not creating 'pull factors' for displaced people to return to areas which were not yet stable, or had not yet been made safe from landmines.

A number of ethnic civil society organisations had (and continue to have) legitimate concerns and reservations about the peace process. For some of these organisations, MPSI was seen as an early and relatively high-profile intervention that risked legitimising a peace process in which they had no confidence. These concerns were compounded by confusion regarding MPSI's role in the peace process, which could have been clarified better and earlier. MPSI was never intended to be a mediation initiative, but rather designed to come in just behind the political momentum of the peace process, helping to support agreements reached by the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups.

2.1.2 Expectations to deliver large-scale assistance, quickly

Despite Ethnic Armed Groups and other ethnic stakeholders' lack of confidence in the political process, there were expectations expressed from the Myanmar Government to develop larger-scale interventions in the ceasefire areas. The Government was keen to create quick 'peace dividends' for communities in order to demonstrate the credibility and reach of the peace process, and to capture international resources. This was matched by an initial predisposition on the part of some donors to see assistance and development in ethnic areas as the key to resolving conflicts. This in turn led to unrealistic expectations from both the Government and donors regarding how quickly MPSI could facilitate or open the door for the introduction of large-scale assistance programmes. MPSI was therefore challenged to ensure that the principle was accepted that the pace of support was not 'too quick' (or indeed 'too slow'); ***that aid not get ahead of the peace process.***

2.1.3 Local organisations and Ethnic Armed Groups' limited capacities to articulate their needs

Before the emergence of the peace process in Myanmar, Ethnic Armed Groups had been largely unable to engage with international donors. Over the past 24 months however, MPSI has been able to facilitate a

series of symbolically and practically important encounters between Ethnic Armed Groups (and other ethnic stakeholders) and the international community.

Nevertheless, a key challenge in developing projects under MPSI has been the limited capacity of both Ethnic Armed Groups and conflict-affected communities to articulate their vision regarding next steps and practical proposals that other stakeholders could respond to. Assistance was welcome but on terms that required it to be in-tune with progress in the peace process – terms that necessarily varied according to need and experience of the conflict and an accompanying cautiousness of *how* it was to be framed and delivered. For many of the Ethnic Armed Groups, this was the first time they had submitted proposals for international support. There was limited understanding of how the international aid infrastructure works, how to explain their needs in terms that donors could respond to, and how to adhere to accountability requirements. Ethnic Armed Groups and other ethnic stakeholders often had unrealistic expectations of what could be supported and how quickly funding could be accessed. Critically, local CBOs were key implementing partners in the MPSI pilot projects, but often had limited project development and management skills. A key role for MPSI was therefore to help to close this gap by matching local actors and projects with national and international NGOs and donors. It was a considerable challenge to produce timely, fundable proposals with strong local ownership, and then to secure a timely and flexible response from donors.

2.1.4 Funding models often not responsive

It has also been a challenge to ensure that sufficient, small scale, flexible funding was available at short notice. Established funding mechanisms tend to rely on large budgets, in support of fully developed ‘sectoral interventions’ and bundled projects, to minimise the administrative burden on the funders. This was not easy to match with often limited formal capacities, but invaluable local ‘know how’.

MPSI’s approach focused on matching locally defined needs, concerns and projects with relevant international organisations and donors. This required responding in a strategic and timely manner to small, but politically and symbolically important, requests for support. What was often needed were small amounts of seed funding (between \$5,000-\$30,000) for workshops, small-scale initiatives, initial training and systematic and participatory needs assessments in the preliminary phase of establishing pilot projects. In some cases, much of MPSI’s staff time was spent in seeking out appropriate partner International non-governmental organisations (INGOs), supporting the development of concepts notes and subsequent project proposals, finding donors and facilitating the process of negotiation required to match local and donor needs. In this context, the (Oslo-based) Nordic International Support Foundation (NIS) played a key role with regard to fast-track response for small funding in support of these processes. Subsequently, MPSI became quite dependent on its partnership with Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA), which had pre-positioned funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an established in-country presence and local capacity, and the mandate and interest to work with local CBOs and Ethnic Armed Groups in the peace process. Norwegian support through NIS and NPA was key to the success of MPSI during the first 24 months.

At the diplomatic level, the Norwegian Government demonstrated strategic imagination in responding quickly to the task of supporting the peace process, at the request of the Government, and in consultation with key Ethnic Armed Groups. However, there was a discernible perception through 2012 and part of 2013 that the international community lacked a coherent strategy with a result that assistance was seen by critics as largely following the Government’s priorities.

An MPSI failure to find donors in moving from relatively small-scale (in funding terms) early pilot-type projects to follow-on peace support projects, some more substantive in scope, can be viewed to be both

missing confidence-building opportunities that have presented themselves and denting the confidence of ethnic stakeholders in the international community in being able to respond to what ethnic actors consider is needed in their communities to support the peace process.

2.1.5 Communicating MPSI strategy

Some stakeholders were concerned that MPSI strategy was not made clear enough, early enough. Particularly in the first year, in focusing on engaging key ethnic stakeholders (especially Ethnic Armed Groups and local conflict-affected communities), and ensuring their participation in project design and implementation, MPSI lacked the human resources for sharing information and consulting widely with other stakeholders (including the diverse universe of Myanmar civil society and political actors).

The weakness in communications was illustrated by confusion arising from initial messaging linking MPSI to donor pledges of USD \$60 million + for the peace process. This was in contrast to the emerging reality of MPSI's focus on process-oriented approaches, mainly supporting small-scale interventions. However, efforts were made to make programme documents accessible so that the broad outline of the role and strategy of MPSI were increasingly available, initially through the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, later under the PDSG website.

There was also confusion regarding the relationship between MPSI and the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC), launched in mid/late 2012. Over the past year, the MPC's role has been clarified as a Secretariat to the Government side in the peace process, as a think tank, and (to a certain extent) a facilitator for international agencies accessing conflict-affected areas. MPSI engages regularly with the MPC, as well as with Ethnic Armed Groups and their coordinating structures, with conflict-affected communities, with civil society and political parties. For some stakeholders however, MPSI continued to be perceived as being too close to the Government and MPC, and therefore was seen in some critical circles as attempting to promote a Government agenda.

As a short-term, early intervention initiative, MPSI was intended to be phased out as '*mainstream assistance*' responded to the peace process. MPSI's planning/funding was agreed on a three-to-six month rolling basis. The lack of clarity on these longer-term 'normalised' structures to support the peace, and on reasoning behind the planned phase-out of MPSI, became a de-stabilising factor for some stakeholders and perceived by some as a sign of a wavering commitment.

2.1.6 MPSI Staffing

The MPSI team has significant experience in relation to peace and conflict issues in Myanmar and beyond, but is small and mostly works on a part-time basis. There was never a 'blue print' for this short-term initiative and some stakeholders have noted that the roles and responsibilities assumed by MPSI far outweighed its size. These issues were compounded by the strategy not to 'institutionalise' MPSI - to ensure it remained a light and flexible *learning and action* initiative. This re-enforced the perception among some critics that neither Norway nor MPSI were fully committed to the peace process. However, during 2013 MPSI was able to expand its initial limited staffing capacity, allowing it to continue to engage in consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, to facilitate the implementation of projects successfully initiated and more proactively work with media and other stakeholders. This has included convening a wide range of workshops and meetings, including coordination forums.

2.1.7 Criticisms from civil society

Another key challenge was the need to balance the importance of acting quickly to launch pilot projects, responding to needs and requests as they developed, and the need for widespread and inclusive consultations.

MPSI has been subjected to criticism from a number of Thailand-based activist groups. As noted, MPSI was seen as supporting the Government's perceived '*economic development first*' agenda, and even accused of forcing displaced communities to resettle in Government-controlled areas. Some critics, have sort to use Norway's role in the Sri Lankan peace process to argue that similar outcomes may result in Myanmar. MPSI was also accused of involvement in the factional struggle within the KNU leadership, around the issue of KNU ceasefire strategy and the larger peace process.

As noted above, criticism of MPSI has sometimes been a proxy for stakeholders' concerns regarding the broader peace process. Some of MPSI's critics had, during the past two decades of armed conflict in Myanmar, assumed the roles of channels for providing donor funding to vulnerable people in conflict-affected areas - and have mostly done outstanding work in a difficult and dangerous context. However, with the opening of the ceasefire/peace process, in the context of the opening up of Myanmar through the political reform process, a strong trend developed to *shift* the funding for conflict-affected/ceasefire areas from cross-border support, to assisting communities from 'inside' the country. This challenged Thailand-based groups to re-invent themselves. Many have done so, setting up operations inside Myanmar – whilst at the same time some border-based groups have experienced significant reductions in funding. In addition, it can be seen that the Government-led reform and peace processes were perceived as threatening by groups and individuals which have been used to *controlling the narrative* regarding ethnic politics in Myanmar, only to see new political discourses and realities emerging outside their fields of influence.

Complaints from Thailand and border-based organisations that they were not consulted sufficiently during the development of MPSI pilot projects - particularly in the first year - illustrate an inherent tension between the need to consult broadly and deeply with stakeholders, and the urgency of responding quickly to a fast-changing peace process. Nevertheless, with hindsight, MPSI could have done a better job of explaining its position and activities, and responded earlier and more explicitly to criticisms.

It is important to highlight that criticism of MPSI decreased after mid/late-2012, as the credibility of MPSI's approach – and importantly, the value placed in it by principal stakeholders - was demonstrated in pilot projects.

2.2 ACHIEVEMENTS

MPSI has contributed to fostering trust and confidence in the peace process, while testing realities on the ground. This has been achieved by: -

2.2.1 Responding quickly to a political imperative

Since its inception, MPSI has been the most high-profile international effort to support the peace process. Norway's role as the first country to take this 'risk' gave credibility to the peace process. For key stakeholders in the ceasefire (especially the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups), MPSI has been a tangible demonstration of the international community's political support.

2.2.2 Engaging with seven Ethnic Armed Groups

The projects have supported and tested some of the key elements agreed in the ceasefires, such as setting up ceasefire Liaison Offices, strengthening peace-support coordination, supporting consultations with communities and other stakeholders, supporting local groups providing assistance to and rehabilitation of conflict-affected communities, facilitating the activities of CBOs, and helping Ethnic Armed Groups to engage in the peace process. MPSI engaged with the Karen National Union (KNU), New Mon State Party (NMSP), Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Chin National Front (CNF), Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), Shan State Army-South/ Restoration Council of Shan State (SSA-S/RCSS) and Democratic Karen Benevolent/Buddhist Army (DKBA). For some of these groups, MPSI facilitated the first direct contacts with international donors and diplomats - an important symbolic development, demonstrating that the peace process could be a vehicle for the Ethnic Armed Groups to re-invent themselves as 'above-ground' political and development actors. Consulting and engaging directly with these groups also helped to build a better understanding of Ethnic Armed Groups' needs, aspirations, and capacities.

2.2.3 Testing commitment and improving channels of communication

For the KNU, NMSP and KNPP, the Government's willingness to allow unhindered access for the delivery of aid in Ethnic Armed Group-controlled areas was seen as an important symbol - and test - of the ceasefires. In the case of the Kyauk Kyi pilot, aid was delivered through the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP), the relief wing of the KNU. Previously, CIDKP operated as a technically illegal cross-border organisation. MPSI supported CIDKP to open an office and bank account in Government-controlled Myanmar, in doing so building the KNU's confidence in the peace process. At a local level, the pilot projects have facilitated and also encouraged more regular interaction between Ethnic Armed Groups and Government and Myanmar Army authorities – a significant confidence-building measure. For example, discussions between CNF and Government regarding a joint assessment and Chin Development Agency, the provision of IT facilities in remote schools in Chin State, have encouraged more regular dialogue and helped to build confidence in the prospects of *working together*. The Ethnic Peace Resources Project, which has been developed out of MPSI's work, also helped start a process helping Ethnic Armed Group ceasefire Liaison Offices identify and discuss issues of concern.

2.2.4 Deepening participation in the peace process, to include communities, civil society and political parties

MPSI's approach has contributed to improved relations between Ethnic Armed Groups and/or Government and ethnic civil society networks. For example, the collaboration of Mon civil society organisations and NMSP line-departments in the Kroeng Batoi pilot has helped to build trust between stakeholders that have sometimes experienced difficult historical relationships. MPSI-supported community consultations, and community-level needs assessment and project planning meetings, have helped local people to gain a better understanding of the national-level political process, and created opportunities to articulate aspirations, needs and concerns. The Shan, Chin and Mon State peace conferences have likewise provided platforms for increased dialogue between Ethnic Armed Groups and political parties, and civil society actors. MPSI also initiated monthly interactive sessions with civil society organisations based in Yangon with the purpose of creating a platform for these organisations to exchange information and experiences regarding the peace process with some of the partner organisations, which have implemented MPSI supported projects. MPSI has also played a convening role that has fostered confidence of ethnic communities in expressing concerns and aspirations, such as during the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Ministers visit where between ethnic civil society, Ethnic Armed Groups and Government met for the first time to discuss concerns such as landgrabbing and mother tongue education.

2.2.5 Building confidence among communities

MPSI monitoring visits indicate that pilot projects have been important in helping conflict-affected communities feel safer and more secure. It is important to recognise that the pilot projects have represented an important break from the past, often constituting the first *international presence* in heavily conflict-affected areas. For some people, this presence has been an implicit signal that there is greater security in the context of the ceasefires and emerging peace process. Seeing the Government, Myanmar Army and Ethnic Armed Groups collaborate in allowing projects to proceed has also been a significant symbol of ceasefires having real substance. In the case of the Kyauk Kyi pilot, IDP beneficiaries stated that they are now less worried that the Myanmar Army would again seize or destroy their property - although for many in this community, concerns nevertheless remain regarding their security and long-term prospects of the peace process. Also in the Kyauk Kyi pilot, *for the first time* Karen IDPs were able to express their concerns and hopes for the future, in the presence of senior Myanmar Government and Army representatives, as well as the KNU and international community representatives. In Kyauk Kyi and Palaw (in Tanintharyi Region), some displaced families have begun spontaneously to return to their original villages, demonstrating a degree of confidence in the peace process. The ID card project implemented by Norwegian Refugee Council in conjunction with the Ministry of Immigration and Population has also had a significant impact on individuals' lives, allowing people to travel more freely, and in some cases begin to access Government services.

2.2.6 Confirming pilot project findings on levels of trust and confidence

Findings from the MPSI '*listening project*' in Karen, Karenni, Shan and Mon areas conducted in the last half of 2013 confirm these trends in perceptions of increased personal safety and security since the ceasefires. The aim of this documenting work has been to listen to the voices of communities, and learn about peoples' (particularly women's) experiences of life before and after ceasefires. As well as its value as a monitoring exercise, the rationale for this work is that the voices of communities with the most direct experiences of peace and conflict in Myanmar, who have in many cases been living in fear and hiding for decades, can be better introduced into discourse regarding the peace process.

A recurrent theme coming out of MPSI *seeking to listen* has been villagers telling MPSI that their lives have been transformed for the better as a result of the ceasefires. While many communities remain deeply concerned that fighting may break out again, and worry about the prevalence of land-grabbing and other problems, they also report many benefits of the ceasefires. These include increased ability to travel; reductions in violence, fear and human rights abuses (including arbitrary taxation by the Myanmar Army, and to a degree by Ethnic Armed Groups); and increased livelihoods options. As a result, many communities feel safer, and to a degree more prosperous as a result of reduced taxation by conflict actors and greater access to traditional farmland and livelihood opportunities (See annex 3: MPSI's listening project).

Box 3: CASE STUDY - Observations on direct communications and reconciliation

At an MPSI-facilitated meeting in Kyauk Kyi, on 5 September 2012, the villagers told a visiting Government Minister that they felt intimidated by the Myanmar Army's questioning when they had to travel through Government-controlled territory. While the Minister was initially defensive, after listening to the Karen villagers, he issued direct orders to a Myanmar Army Colonel at the meeting for his troops to minimize such questioning in the future. On a previous occasion, on 11 July 2012, a Karen IDP leader had asked a Regional Minister, "Can you guarantee that you will not burn our villages down in the future?" The Minister replied that the Myanmar Army would not burn the Karen villages down again, but that he also understood that

this was difficult for them to believe. He went on to say that his presence at the meeting was a symbol of the new Government's willingness to make peace, and that with time they would all build trust in each other.

This collaboration continued beyond the context of the MPSI project, as exemplified by the joint celebration of Karen New Year in Kyauk Kyi on 12 January 2013. The event was attended by high-level representatives from the Government, the KNU, and community representatives. Such a joint celebration is unprecedented and would have been unthinkable just one year previously. Many IDPs travelled down from Keh Der (the pilot project site) to the town of Kyauk Kyi for the first time since 1975, and there were emotional scenes as families re-united. Participants explained that, although they were still frightened of the Myanmar Army, the interactions they had with soldiers in the context of the pilot project gave them the confidence necessary to attend this event in a Government-controlled area. These consultative encounters between IDPs, Myanmar Government and Army and the KNU have continued in the second (expanded) phase of the Kyauk Kyi pilot project

2.2.7 Brokering access and increasing humanitarian space

MPSI-supported pilot projects (for details, see annex 1 - *Overview of MPSI-supported Projects*) are mostly located in previously difficult-to-access areas controlled by, or under the authority of, Ethnic Armed Groups. MPSI facilitated access to these highly conflict-affected areas, for both international and national aid agencies, diplomatic personnel, and journalists - opening up humanitarian space and providing models for assistance to conflict-affected communities in the context of the peace process. Although MPSI has had few problems receiving permission to visit remote and conflict-affected areas, access is still granted through exceptional channels. Increasingly, MPC now plays an important role in supporting and administering travel authorisation, but official approval is still requested from the President's Office. Travel authorisation is also required from the relevant Ethnic Armed Groups, although there is no official process for this. During and after visits to project sites, MPSI staff de-brief relevant Government, Myanmar Army and Ethnic Armed Group officials.

2.2.8 Supporting communities to recover from conflict

Over 5,500 conflict-affected people have received direct assistance from MPSI-connected projects over the past 18 months, mostly in extremely isolated areas, previously inaccessible for country-based aid agencies. Some of these communities have occasionally received some assistance from the Thai side of the border. (The initial Karen and Mon pilot projects are being expanded in 2014, to include further conflict-affected communities.) For example, in Kyauk Kyi and Palaw, food, medicines, tools, and school-children's supplies were provided to IDP communities living in hiding in the jungle. From June 2012 to September 2013, through the NRC's ID Card Project, over 104,839 conflict-affected people in Karen, Kayah (Karenni) and southern Shan States have received national identity cards, allowing citizens to exercise basic rights to vote and freedom of movement, and to access markets and social services. In addition to these rights, holders of national identity cards can also exercise the right to education (one must hold a national identity card in order to graduate from high school as well as to study law, medicine, engineering as well as 11 other disciplines); the right to hold a Myanmar passport; and the right to stand for political office. National identity cards also give access to numerous services: the inheritance, purchasing and registering of land, opening a bank account, registering a business, applying for status as an official overseas foreign worker, health services in case of an accident or crime (Myanmar law obligates citizens to file a police report *before*

receiving health care in such circumstances), and even more mundane aspect of daily life like applying for a SIM card.

2.2.9 Generating better understanding and donor support

Many activities supported by MPSI have been ground-breaking in the context of Myanmar. These precedents have helped to demonstrate what is - and is not - possible and appropriate in the context of a complex and dynamic peace process. MPSI has highlighted issues that were previously too sensitive to raise, and has attempted to build a better understanding of the context and dynamics in the conflict-affected areas, particularly on the part of international donors, diplomats and aid agencies. One of the failures of MPSI has been its limited success in influencing donors and implementers to approach interventions in a conflict sensitive manner, and adhere to international undertakings on conflict sensitivity, such as the Busan New Deal. That said, the MPSI approach has been documented as having helped to build up trust with the Ethnic Armed Groups, and helped to gain a better understanding of the capacity and confidence of key stakeholders. As a result, projects initiated through MPSI have secured funding and support from donors including Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the European Union, and Australia.

2.2.10 Disseminating learning from MPSI activities, back into to the peace process, and communicating findings with key stakeholders

MPSI has attempted to learn from its experience over the past 18 months. For example, the Kyauk Kyi pilot was implemented with just one (border-based) main local partner (CIDKP), whereas in subsequent pilot projects (in Tanintharyi and Mon areas, and later in Karenni), MPSI has worked with a broad range of local partners, including both border-based CBOs and those established 'inside' Myanmar.

MPSI has attempted to feed learning from its activities, back into to the peace process, communicating findings with key stakeholders. In meeting with donors and Government officials (including MPC), MPSI has emphasised some of the concerns and aspirations of conflict-affected communities and Ethnic Armed Groups, so that actors in the peace process have a better understanding of others' concerns and realities. Another example of MPSI learning is the development of the EPRP. This project developed out of regular discussions with Ethnic Armed Groups, ethnic civil society and political actors, leading to an understanding that ethnic stakeholders needed resources and capacity-building, in order to participate effectively in the emerging peace process.

2.3 KEY AREAS OF LEARNING

Key areas of learning include specific lessons relevant for international engagement, as discussed in section 3 on *Relevance to Myanmar of the Fragile States Principles and Busan New Deal*.

A key understanding coming out of MPSI's 24 month's experience, in supporting and testing the ceasefires and the emerging peace process in Myanmar, is that external assistance (especially foreign aid) has limited roles in the establishment of peace. Fundamentally the peace process is indigenous to Myanmar, locally owned and led, with limited roles for international intervention. As the listening project and other monitoring and evaluation exercises demonstrate, the primary impacts on conflict-affected communities and other stakeholders are political-economic, deriving from the complex context of a dynamic peace process. The many extraordinary and positive changes - and very serious challenges - coming out of the peace process are far more significant in affecting the lives of individuals and communities than aid or humanitarian activities implemented or funded by the international community.

2.3.1 Engagement with Communities

MPSI projects have demonstrated the importance of understanding context when seeking to offer or facilitate support. Part of this is the need to recognise that communities' histories, aspirations and needs are unique, and specific to their environment and experiences. This has validated MPSI taking a flexible approach and not imposing standard project designs.

MPSI pilot projects were targeted in remote, conflict-affected areas, under the authority of Ethnic Armed Groups. Needs assessments and surveys carried out in these areas have drawn out **unique local dynamics**. In Karen areas, communities expressed needs for peace, physical security and food security - in that order of priority. In Mon areas, local people focused more on community development and longer-term livelihoods and rehabilitation - although here too security remained a key concern. For displaced Karen communities in Kyauk Kyi and Palaw, their original land was relatively close to the current location or place of hiding, and the desire to return was strong. However in other cases the terminology of 'IDPs' was of questionable relevance, as communities regarded themselves as being relatively settled, having found somewhat durable solutions to displacement. The populations are also distinguished by their varying ages, religious demographics and social structures. For example, Karen villagers in Keh Der (Kyauk Kyi) were nearly all animists, very few of whom spoke Burmese, whereas the community at Krong Batoi were mostly Buddhists, speaking both Mon and Burmese.

Box 4: MPSI listening project

The ceasefires and emerging peace process are helping to transform the lives of civilians affected by decades of armed conflict. However, the voices of conflict-affected communities have been largely absent from elite-led discourses around the peace process.

In the second half of 2013, MPSI initiated a light listening project (see annex 3) that sought to capture some voices of communities and groups with a stake in the outcome of Myanmar's peace process. This paper presents the initial findings from the first phase of the listening project. The aim is to listen to Karen, Mon, Shan and Karenni (Kayah) communities and groups - particularly women - to better understand their experiences before and after the ceasefires, and to introduce these narratives into discourse around the peace process.

Initial findings indicate that many people have benefited greatly from preliminary ceasefires between the Government and the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). For example, before the KNU ceasefire, villagers often had to flee from fighting, and to avoid forced conscription and portering. Today people report greatly decreased levels of fear. Many of those who spoke with the MPSI said that for the first time in decades they did not have to worry about fleeing into the jungle, to avoid being subjected to serious human rights abuses.

In some cases, displaced people are beginning to return to previous settlements and attempting to rebuild their lives. Many villagers mentioned that before the ceasefire they were unable to travel or visit their farms – or could only do so by paying bribes. Even then, villagers were severely restricted in terms of the amount of food or other supplies they could carry while travelling, as they risked being accused of supporting insurgent organisations. After the ceasefires however, villagers have been able to travel much more freely and to tend their rice fields. Levels of taxation, paid to the Myanmar Army or Ethnic Armed Groups, have decreased significantly over the past two years. In many communities, livelihoods have improved as a result of villagers' better access to their farms and a reduction in predatory taxation. Villagers greatly appreciate these changes, although they worry whether the ceasefire and emerging peace

process can be maintained.

“Since the ceasefire, I can go to my rice fields and weed regularly, so I get more rice for my family,” one male Karen villager said. “Now I can also travel freely and, unlike before, sleep out in the rice fields in a hut without having to fear for my life. Now the Tatmadaw [Myanmar Army] still move around but we don’t have to fear meeting them.” A Karen woman told the MPSI that “our villagers are like ducklings that have been in a cage for so long, and now they are released. They are so pleased to leave their cage! Our villagers are free to travel day and night, and are more busy and productive than before.” Communities in Karenni (Kayah) State reported similar changes in their daily lives. “The change is that there is no more threat from military and no more forced portering”, one male Karenni villager said.

The ceasefire agreements has also made it possible for ethnic groups to organise community consultations and conferences such as the ‘Trust Building for Peace’ conferences in Shan State and the Mon National Conference in Mawlamyine. These activities have provided platforms for increased dialogue between Ethnic Armed Groups and political parties, and civil society actors. The people MPSI spoke with said that it would not have been possible to do this in the past.

Despite such positive views, there is widespread anxiety that the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups may fail to reach a political settlement and the peace process may yet break down. One man said, “If the ceasefire breaks down, it’s not worth living for me.” There is a widespread understanding that only substantial political dialogue, and the re-negotiation of state-society relations in Myanmar, can bring about a sustainable and just peace. Villagers expressed a strong commitment to the peace process, and urged their leaders to continue the negotiations. As one (male) Karenni villager said, “People want peace. We all have to come together to support and maintain peace. Only if we try, we can achieve it. If we are afraid, we will get nothing this time.”.

Some of the interviewees were familiar with projects supported by MPSI – community consultations carried out by NMSP, the Mon National Conference, the pilot projects in Karen and Mon IDP areas, the ‘Trust Building for Peace’ conferences in Shan State, and the Mon national school system – but most of the interviewees had never heard of MPSI itself. MPSI regards this as an indicator of success, demonstrating that ‘ownership’ of the projects does not rest with MPSI but with the local partner organisations.

The communities recommended international organisations to support development needs – including basic infrastructure, food security, health care, education support and vocational training – and called for more activities focussing on gender awareness and women’s empowerment. They also encouraged international organisations to put pressure on the Myanmar Government to achieve genuine democracy in order for the ceasefires to last.

In all project areas, assessments have demonstrated that community needs are much wider than what CBOs, with support from MPSI, could respond to immediately. Workshops were conducted to identify the most prominent needs which quick-impact projects could address. This approach has been important in **demonstrating to communities that long-term support is potentially available, while also using short-term projects to get a better understanding of local dynamics and needs.**

Also essential is getting a better understanding, and where appropriate supporting the development of, intra-community relationships. In the case of Kyauk Kyi pilot, additional assistance was provided to nearby

Karen civilians in Mu The (a Government-controlled village near the project site), so as not to exacerbate any tensions with beneficiaries in the main project area.

The importance of sensitivity to communities' perceptions of peace and security. In all MPSI-supported project sites, communities have expressed strong desires for peace, and for increased security. The need for assistance is consistently expressed as being secondary to the need for peace and security. An extremely positive, and underreported, element of the peace processes is the finding, from MPSI monitoring visits and the listening project, that communities in pilot and other ceasefire areas have experienced greater human security and ability to travel over the past 24 months, and in some cases increasing prosperity. Nevertheless, many people are not yet fully confident that ceasefires will hold, or that the peace process will be consolidated. At the project level, it has been important to be in-tune with these perceptions, in order to ensure that the pilots provide appropriate support and facilitation for trust-building processes.

Box 5: Communities' trust in the peace process

In the pilot in Kyauk Kyi, interesting changes in perceptions and trust have been observed. At the start of the project, IDP leaders communicated their concerns and fear in relation to visiting Government-controlled areas for meetings, and even in visiting their farms (which are often in remote areas, distant from the village). In the past, such activities have exposed communities to danger, including serious human rights abuses and death. During the course of the project, these perceptions have begun to change. Some families have already moved back to their original land (although MPSI has not encouraged this due to the prevalence of landmines), and many others have articulated their desire to do so. Communities travel more regularly and many have, often for the first time in decades, re-united with families living in Government-controlled areas. Community leaders have conveyed their desire for refugees to return to the area. (NB: MPSI has not encouraged the return of IDPs or refugees.) During the project evaluation, villagers also stated that, since the ceasefire, they had become gradually less worried that the Myanmar Army would seize or burn their property. Importantly though, they also said they remained concerned and that patterns of human rights abuse and other problems from the past were unlikely to change quickly, and expressed their serious concerns about increased Myanmar Army presence near some villages.

Regular MPSI-facilitated consultation meetings at Kyauk Kyi, between representatives of Government, KNU/ Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) and the community, have contributed to trust-building. These encounters have provided an unprecedented opportunity for the IDP community to raise their concerns directly to the Government and Myanmar Army.

In the Dawei and Palaw pilot extensive discussions with beneficiary communities indicate that the ceasefire between the KNU and the Myanmar Government/Army has brought many benefits to the communities, after decades of isolation. These include greatly improved freedom of movement and access to information, and also a significant reduction in fear - which has allowed many of the scattered community in the jungle around Tha Mae Plaw to begin (tentatively) to return to their old village, from which they fled in 1997 (although Myanmar army incursions during the 2013 rainy season significantly undermined the community's confidence in the peace process). The pilot project has made it possible for communities to receive information and to ask authority figures questions regarding the peace process, and also to receive support for basic needs that will assist them to get beyond a hand-to-mouth existence. As a result, people feel more confident in the prospects of a peaceful and secure life, and more engaged with the outside world. However, the ceasefire has also brought with it new problems for these communities.

While conflict-affected communities in Tanintharyi welcome the benefits of peace, they also fear that the ceasefire will bring with it increased land-grabbing by well-connected companies (in collusion with both the KNU, and local Government and Myanmar Army authorities). Furthermore, there is a fear on the part of both communities and Ethnic Armed Groups that the Government is using the peace process to expand and extend its authority into previously inaccessible areas. As most communities still regard the Government as not representing them, and have for decades experienced the Myanmar Army as a violent and predatory force, these concerns threaten to undermine trust and confidence in the peace process. MPSI has worked with the TKPSI to explore these issues, and help communities to access better information about Government plans in their areas, and to draw national and international attention to the way application of 2012 land laws may jeopardise the benefits of the peace process to local communities, and perhaps even undermine the peace process itself.

In the Krong Batoi Mon pilot discussions with the local NMSP leadership, village leaders and community representatives have revealed that confidence in the ceasefire agreement is quite strong, although political dialogue is viewed as the only sustainable way to bringing lasting peace. The project evaluation revealed that villagers regarded the presence of foreign aid workers as a signal that there is greater security for all to live and travel in the area, and that the distribution of Myanmar ID cards by local Government authorities has enhanced confidence in the peace process.

Since the ceasefires, **freedom of movement has been a key positive and tangible change**. Prior to the ceasefires, highly vulnerable communities in armed conflict-affected areas were unable to cross the ‘front-lines’ into Government-controlled areas, without fear of arrest and serious abuses. The ceasefires and MPSI-supported initiatives such as the NRC ID Card distribution project have allowed communities to move more freely without interference and fear, to access markets and their land, and to meet with family members and friends in Government controlled areas.

Box 6: NRC ID card programme

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has supported the Ministry of Immigration and Population in issuing Citizen Scrutiny Cards (full Myanmar ID cards) to communities in remote and conflict-affected areas, establishing a ‘one-stop shop’ model that covers, free of charge, all the steps involved in issuing the Citizen Scrutiny Cards on the same day. MPSI has provided support in mobilising funding for this work, and helped NRC to gain access to conflict-affected (including pilot project) areas.

From June 2012 to September 2013, 79,399 national identity cards were issued to citizens in conflict-affected areas of Karen State, 14,402 ID cards were issued in Kayah State from November 2012 to September 2013, and for southern Shan State 11,038 ID cards were issued from April 2013 to September 2013. ID card activities commenced in Mon (Thaton office) in October 2013 and in Tanintharyi (Dawei office) in December 2013.

In many armed conflict-affected areas of Myanmar (which in some cases have not been under state control since before independence), local people have often either lost their official ID documentation or have not had access to public services due to their displacement as a result of the conflict. This makes it difficult and dangerous to travel to Government-controlled areas, and impossible for people to access Government or other services, or to begin the task of holding State authorities to account. The provision of ID cards therefore allows displaced people access to basic rights, such as voting and enrolling children in school.

Prior to implementation of the ID card project, if villagers wanted to acquire official documentation, they had to suspend their livelihood activities and travel at their own expense and personal risk, to apply and to receive the card at a later date, plus pay costs associated with obtaining a card. Villagers in many areas where MPSI works have consistently expressed relief and gratitude, and stated the importance of receiving ID cards, and how this contributes significantly towards building their trust and confidence in the peace process. Nevertheless, there are some potential risks associated with NRC assisting the Government in providing ID cards to people living in areas under the authority of the Ethnic Armed Groups. In practice, the international community is partnering the Government in the extension of state-led activities into previously (quasi-) autonomous areas, under the authority of Ethnic Armed Groups. This penetration of the state into previously inaccessible areas can be perceived as threatening by vulnerable local communities, as well as Ethnic Armed Groups and civil society actors. In this context, MPSI has sought to facilitate contacts between NRC, local communities and Ethnic Armed Groups (e.g. the KNU), in order to ensure the implementation of this project is not viewed with hostility, and to engage Ethnic Armed Groups as key stakeholders in the peace process, in their role as de facto local authorities in remote, conflict-affected areas.

Land tenure security has been raised frequently as a crucial issue as communities are beginning to return to and resettle on their original land. Problems of land-grabbing are compounded by the negative impacts of the 2012 Farmland Act, and 2012 Vacant, Fallow and Wasteland Act. This legislation does not recognise customary, upland land tenure practices - but rather acts to facilitate the transfer of land from communities to powerful business interests. The recognition of and protection of land rights has been raised by communities in areas where there are threats and experiences of land grabbing from the private sector, such as Palaw and Kyaik Pee Laung.

Business interests can either be spoilers in the peace process, or could be engaged to play a more positive role. Most new business activities in conflict-affected areas are extractive (logging, mining etc) and often connected to local or national power-holders. Business activities in newly accessible conflict-affected areas are often associated with land-grabbing (e.g. for plantation agriculture). As well as the negative social and environmental impacts, such activities can undermine communities and other stakeholders' trust and confidence in the peace process. Unless the Government, Ethnic Armed Groups and their international partners address these issues, there is a risk that local communities may be alienated from the peace process - as was the case with the previous round of ceasefires in the 1990s.

Ethnic communities are concerned about major infrastructure projects. Myanmar undoubtedly needs economic and infrastructure development, especially in remote and conflict-affected areas. However, ethnic communities are deeply concerned that the peace process will see the construction of major infrastructure projects (e.g. hydroelectric dams) –depriving them of ancestral lands, and undermining human security and livelihoods. Large-scale projects should only be implemented after free, prior and informed consultation with all stakeholders and following proper impact assessments.

There has been a demand from communities for acceptable and responsive governance, and service delivery. In the Mon context, this has included the need to strengthen the Mon ethnic language education system, and in particular provide financial support to teachers. Mon communities have also raised their concerns directly to NMSP, about their frustrations regarding multiple taxation (by Government and Ethnic Armed Groups, and local 'bandits'), and regarding the increasing problem of drugs in the community. In Tanintharyi Region, at Kyaik Pee Laung, communities have been concerned to register their school with the Government authorities. MPSI interaction at the community level has also raised the **issue of contested**

legitimacy, in terms of what governance structures communities see as legitimate and who speaks on their behalf and represents them.

Box 7: Mon education projects

The preservation and reproduction of minority languages is of great concern to ethnic nationality communities in Myanmar, as the military and Government are perceived as implementing a policy of assimilation by imposing majority languages and cultures on minority communities. In this context, a number of Ethnic Armed Groups have developed independent education systems. Among these structures, the Mon National School system provides a model for providing quality education to ethnic minority-populated, conflict-affected areas in Myanmar. Rather than being products of a separatist education system, Mon National School graduates matriculate with Government recognised qualifications, and a full grasp of the Burmese language. This is due to systematic linkages between the locally-implemented Mon education system, and Government schools. The Mon education system therefore represents a model which might be adopted by other communities in the context of the peace process - an education system which is locally owned and inspired, but open to integration with Union structures of service delivery, as the political and peace processes move forward. As such, it offers a model for 'federal' education in Myanmar. The Mon National Schools teach in Mon language at the primary level, allowing easy access to formal education for non-Burmese speaking children. The curriculum shifts towards Burmese at the middle-school level, and is taught entirely in Burmese at high school. All three Mon National High Schools have a semi-formal relationship with a partner Government high school, allowing students to sit Government examinations.

The first phase of the MPSI-supported project, January 2013 to June 2013, focused on the development of a Mon education policy and revised curriculum, through a consultative process with communities, NMSP and Myanmar Government. The second and larger (in terms of funding) phase of MPSI support for Mon education consists of a three-year, almost \$4 million project proposal, aimed at supporting the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) and Mon National School system, during a period of uncertainty and transition. This proposal contains several elements, the core of which is support to Mon teachers' stipends and capacity-building. Unfortunately, until now MPSI has been unable to secure funding for the MNEC project. The failure to find a donor for the MNEC project illustrates the difficulty of moving from the relatively small-scale (in funding terms) pilot-type projects described in this document, towards 'scaling up' to bigger peace-support initiatives. Also, the experience has led some Mon educators to perceive the international community as trying to impose its own and/or the Myanmar Government's political and aid agendas without regard to the effects that this may have the struggle on the part of ethnic communities for a sustainable peace.

When **'safe spaces' are provided or facilitated, communities claim these and challenge the relevant authorities**. In the Mon pilot, project activities included community empowerment and women's leadership trainings. Feedback indicates that this approach has been welcomed, and has helped women to play a greater role in community decision-making. The International Labour Organisation community-based early recovery model being employed in the Mon pilot project ensures that 40% of the elected village committees are women. Peace training and community empowerment has also been a part of the Tanintharyi pilot projects.

Longer-term sustainable peace must include processes that allow populations to come to terms with the abuses of the past. Experience in the Kyauk Kyi pilot demonstrated **communities' desire for reconciliation and justice**.

2.3.2 Engagement with Civil Society

The pilot projects have allowed MPSI to explore and better appreciate the sometimes significant advantages of engaging more closely with community-based organisations, as opposed to national-level (including border-based) NGOs. While CBOs come from and work in the community, national NGOs can sometimes be elite-level organisations, acting as gatekeepers vis-à-vis beneficiary communities.⁵

Before the peace process started, it was difficult for CBOs groups to operate in many areas and sectors, due to Government suppression. Therefore, national-level (including cross-border) groups played important roles in accessing vulnerable communities. However, with the advent of the peace process, local organisations have been able to (re-)emerge at the village level, albeit without formal registration. Working with and strengthening such CBOs can help to close the power gap between communities and Government, Ethnic Armed Groups, national-level NGOs, INGOs and international actors. CBOs are well placed to carry out needs assessment, monitor ceasefires, support community consultation processes, and share information with communities on the ceasefires and political processes. Engaging directly with these groups has also helped MPSI to develop a greater understanding of the needs, challenges and dynamics at a community level.

A **locally-owned CBO consortium approach works well**, building trust between conflict-affected communities and Ethnic Armed Groups, and international organisations and donors. There is significant value in including organisations with a gender-focus in the local consortium, as this can help others to better understand gender-related issues and importance of women's roles and participation in decision-making.

There is a **need to find flexible ways to achieve accountability when working with CBOs, that don't necessarily have the capacity to produce proposals or reports of the kind demanded by international donors**. National NGOs and INGOs can play important roles in bridging this capacity gap with project management and technical support. However, in some instances it has also been important to recognise the tensions inherent in relationships between local (CBO) and national (NGO/INGO) actors – tensions which are not unique to the Myanmar context.

An **essential consideration when supporting CBOs should be to protect the social fabric, which connects these organisations to communities**. This includes protecting their space from an influx of external actors, avoiding over-formalising their structures or networks, and not overburdening them with too much money or too much formal administrative process too quickly.

When it comes to peace, **all civil society and political actors (at least among ethnic nationality communities) regard themselves as primary stakeholders**. While it is important to bear this in mind, when initiating projects there is a need to develop 'inclusive enough' consultations in order to support a fast-changing peace process. When engaging with civil society actors, there is a need to be clear regarding the distinction between 'consultation' (which implies that interlocutors have some kind of veto) and 'information-sharing' activities. Consultation processes and other meetings need to be managed to ensure that the dialogue is not dominated by 'professional' organisations and individuals with English language skills and experience of interacting with international actors.

⁵According to this distinction, CBOs are based in and run by community members, whereas NGOs - although they may be working for the good of the community - are primarily staffed by outsiders.

2.3.3 Engagement with the Myanmar Government and Myanmar Army

Given the history of conflicts and low levels of trust and confidence in the Government, there is a need for the state and Myanmar Army to enter into a new relationship with ethnic communities. To achieve this in a way that continues to build trust and confidence with Ethnic Armed Groups and communities, the Government needs to demonstrate a cultural shift from the top-down, authoritarian approach of the past, and demonstrate a willingness to listen to and address concerns and grievances through concrete action.

Involving Government and Myanmar Army in the Kyauk Kyi pilot was important, as the more they were seen to be facilitating the establishment of the project in partnership with the KNU, the greater the confidence the IDPs had that the ceasefire was credible. In addition, direct local Government and military involvement also provided officials with an understanding of the issues of concern to communities, and what was being attempted through the pilot project.

MPSI has been exposed to a number of significant moments, which indicate the **possibilities for trust-building and strengthening relationships between the Government (including the Myanmar Peace Centre) and Myanmar Army, and Ethnic Armed Groups and conflict-affected communities**. This has included working jointly towards action on landmine issues and access to justice (for example in Kyauk Kyi). State-level peace conferences have been supported in Mon, Chin and Shan States, which have been important occasions for starting the long task of national reconciliation. For the first time, such events were authorised and attended by senior Government and Ethnic Armed Group officials as well as leading figures from civil and political society.

Ceasefire Liaison Offices and improved communications between ex-combatants, have played a central role in decreasing tensions. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to support the roles and build capacities of Liaison Office staff, so they can function effectively and to allow the community to interact with them freely.

Access to conflict-affected areas has become significantly easier - although the system still works on the basis of the 'exception being the rule'. Although the MPC now plays an important role in supporting and administering the process, travel authorisation is still officially approved by the President's Office. Travel permission is also needed from the relevant Ethnic Armed Group, although there is no official process for this.

Box 8: Building trust through local negotiations of security and access to justice

A Myanmar Army Colonel in Kyauk Kyi explained that following the detonation of a landmine by a Myanmar military truck, rather than going to the nearest village and responding with accusations and violence, he contacted the local KNLA/KNDO Battalion Commander. This resulted in them together going to the area of the detonation, and unearthing five additional landmines.

In both Kyauk Kyi and Mon areas, ceasefire Liaison Offices have emerged as a mechanism for accessing justice. In August 2012 in Kyauk Kyi, at villagers' request, the KNU arrested a village headman (husband of a Government Township clerk), who was allegedly involved in extortion from villagers (approximately 8 Mil Kyat since 1996) and the torture-killing of four civilians. He was taken to the KNU base, attempted to escape and was killed. This could have escalated into a very serious incident. However, the ceasefire Liaison Office played a key role in bringing KNU and Myanmar Government/Army local leadership together to resolve tensions. On another occasion, the local KNU arrested a gang of thieves, and rather than dealing with them in a summary fashion, handed the accused over to local Myanmar authorities.

In NMSP-controlled areas, drug dealers have been arrested, and on occasion handed over to Government authorities. The NMSP is engaging with the Government at the Township-level, to address one of the key concerns of local communities: the escalation of methamphetamine-type drug abuse. MPSI has played a role in introducing the NMSP and Mon CBOs to international drug abuse-oriented NGOs. The NMSP decided to work together with the Asian Harm Reduction Network (AHRN), with NPA support, to implement a four-day drug awareness training for NMSP and Mon community leaders.

2.3.4 Engagement with Ethnic Armed Groups

MPSI's engagement has reinforced understandings on the part of the international community that ethnic grievances are the key driver of armed conflict in Myanmar. On occasion, MPSI has been able to share these insights with the Government and MPC.

There is a **widespread concern that assistance in conflict-affected areas could promote the government's perceived economic and political agendas - supporting the penetration of militarised, state-led 'Burmanisation' into previously autonomous ethnic areas.** It is extremely important that these concerns continue to be heard and understood by the Government and international donors, and that the sequencing and type of support reflects these concerns - otherwise, well-meaning actors risk undermining the peace process.

There are **different levels of confidence and trust in the peace process, on the part of Ethnic Armed Groups and conflict-affected communities, and civil and political society actors,** due to stakeholders' varying histories, experiences, contexts and aspirations. The different levels of trust can be seen in the types of projects Ethnic Armed Groups and other MPSI partners have requested.

In KNU, NMSP and KNPP areas, the pilot projects were seen as opportunities to test the Government's sincerity in the peace process. However, these Ethnic Armed Groups were not comfortable with starting large-scale projects. In contrast, the CNF has requested support for an ambitious joint needs assessment and development planning initiative, together with the (State) government and other (civil society and political party) stakeholders. The KNPP has prioritised support for relationship-building with civil society and community ceasefire monitoring.

Some of the contextual complexities of trust can also be seen in how different Ethnic Armed Groups relate to the Government in areas under their authority. In the Kyauk Kyi pilot, Government authorities and military commanders have accompanied missions to the area with MPSI, and have met with communities. In the Mon pilot, although NMSP has regular dialogue with the Government on the pilot, they are not comfortable with state or Myanmar Army personnel accessing their areas. It has been important for MPSI to be sensitive to these perceptions and realities, and not to push Ethnic Armed Groups into accepting increased Government or international access.

Equally complex are the **different relationships that Ethnic Armed Groups have with civil society.** In most cases, ceasefires have not automatically expanded the space for local civil society. Rather, civil society actors have had to forge and claim this space themselves. An exception to this is CNF, which is taking on some of the roles and characteristics of civil society, and which in consequence has been viewed by some Chin organisations as encroaching on their space.

Relationships with communities are mixed, and in some cases contested. For many displaced and other communities in conflict-affected areas, Ethnic Armed Groups and related civil society structures and personnel are perceived as more legitimate and effective than those of the state. A key challenge in the peace process, and for international donors supporting governance reform and service delivery, will be to understand **how non-state structures relate to government structures, and how they can best be supported to ensure local agency is respected, and communities empowered.** However, in other areas **the legitimacy of Ethnic Armed Groups is contested.** For example, the CNF experienced resistance from some local communities, in the context of opening a ceasefire Liaison Office in Tidim, northern Chin State.

International engagement with Ethnic Armed Groups is important to them in demonstrating recognition for their cause and struggle, and support for their entry into the peace process. However, international support to Ethnic Armed Groups **risks over-emphasizing their legitimacy. In most contexts, Ethnic Armed Groups constitute only one set among several ethnic nationality stakeholders,** which also include above-program political parties and civil society-orientated activist groups. In the case of the ALP, MPSI's engagement allowed them to share their history and understanding of Rakhine self-determination with the international community. However, this engagement also brought with it the risk of over-emphasising the legitimacy of a relatively small and marginal group.

It is important to recognise the different agendas and voices within and between Ethnic Armed Groups. For example, internal political tensions within the KNU created a challenging environment for MPSI, where the pilot project was being mobilised by some actors to further exacerbate divisions in the organisation. MPSI considered it important to engage with all voices within the KNU, but to step back during heightened moments of tension and not push for any new activities in pilot project areas. Understandably, there are always likely to be different views of the political process within political and armed organisations, both at the leadership level and between the leadership and the local levels, as well as between political and military wings and actors.

Ethnic Armed Groups often **lack capacities to articulate their needs and concerns,** and are sometimes unprepared for understanding international aid structures and approaches to humanitarian relief, peace-building and development. It is therefore important that concrete technical assistance for project development is provided to the Ethnic Armed Groups. Flexible donor mechanisms, which are able to provide such support, are needed. It is also essential that international assistance is properly coordinated, and that time is made available for the extensive consultations with Ethnic Armed Groups and other stakeholders.

The peace process is currently operating in a male-dominated environment, with women generally being marginalised. However, there are some exceptional women playing leading roles in the peace process, including leaders of CBOs and NGOs. In the Mon context, the Mon Women's Organisation plays an important role in ensuring women's participation in the pilot projects and community consultations.

The Ethnic Peace Resources Project is reviewing obstacles to women's involvement in EPRP activities (and the peace process more generally), and devising strategies and practical measures to overcome this. An early conclusion regarding community consultations with Ethnic Armed Groups was the need for capacity-building activities for women potentially able to play active roles in the peace process, but who lacked confidence and skills for public meetings and networking.

The request from Ethnic Armed Groups for support to community **consultation processes represents an important change in their governance style.** MPSI-supported community consultations have provided opportunities for civil society and conflict affected-communities to voice their grievances, concerns and aspirations, in conversation with Ethnic Armed Groups. Furthermore, these activities have given Ethnic

Armed Groups opportunities to show that engaging with communities is important to them and to follow up on requests and concerns expressed by the communities.

2.3.5 Engagement with Political Parties

Ethnic nationality political parties in Myanmar include those which contested the 1990 elections, most of which were subsequently banned, although many have since re-registered during the period of democratic opening in Myanmar. Other above-ground ethnic parties were formed to contest the 2010 elections, often doing quite well in what was very far from being a free and fair poll.⁶

Many political parties have expressed **resentment at being excluded from the ceasefire process**. They feel uneasy at the manner in which the government - and by extension, international supporters of the peace process - have welcomed Ethnic Armed Groups as political players via the peace arena. Political parties feel they have significant legitimacy derived from the electoral support of communities, which is not reflected in their marginal roles in the peace process. MPSI-supported peace congresses in Shan, Mon and Chin States included leading roles for the political parties, opening the way for a greater role for these actors in the peace process. The EPRP also aims to engage with ethnic political parties, in order to support their engagement in the peace process.

2.4 LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ETHNIC PEACE RESOURCES PROJECT

The idea for the Ethnic Peace Resources Project (EPRP) emerged towards the end of 2012 out of the work of the MPSI. The EPRP seeks to empower ethnic people to participate in the emerging political dialogue of Myanmar's peace process. The need for EPRP is in itself a learning of MPSI activities, insofar as MPSI's experience has revealed the urgent need to support ethnic communities to participate in the very process that seeks the fulfilment of their aspirations, and an to sixty years of civil war waged predominantly in their areas.

At the level of key leaders of ethnic organisations, there is recognition of the importance of a national level peace dialogue to follow ceasefires that seeks to address long-standing ethnic grievances. EPRP makes resources available to support capacity building and participation of these organisations, both in terms of online resources (www.eprpinformation.org) and a flexible program of training and technical assistance on key peace process topics to ethnic organisations, ceasefire Liaison Offices, ethnic CSOs and the communities that they serve. Support for internet connections enhances internet communication of Ethnic Armed Group ceasefire Liaison Offices, while a cross-cutting gender implements strategies to overcome obstacles to women's involvement in the peace process (for more information on the EPRP see annex 1). The identified **lessons learned** informed stage 2 (unfunded as of February 2014), and are listed below:

(1) **Website: Peace process information is not readily available that is accessible to non-elite communities.** EPRP has responded by developing non-academic content, providing direct training, and providing materials in multimedia formats (audio, video etc) for wider distribution. Information on international best practice and norms related to peace are being consistently translated into Myanmar language to make it more accessible to intended end users. **New technology is changing the way Myanmar communities access information.** The issuing of telecom licenses will make internet and mobile communications more accessible nationwide. EPRP responded by developing a version of the website for smart-phone access.

⁶ 34 ethnic political party MPs were elected to the Upper House, 54 to the Lower House, and 110 to State/Regional assemblies. In four of the seven ethnic State legislatures (Chin, Karen, Rakhine and Shan), ethnic parties gained more than 25% of the seats.

(2) Workshop program: Three series of workshops were proposed for stage 1, targeting leadership and staff of Ethnic Armed Groups, ethnic community organisations, and ethnic political parties. **Thematic technical assistance needs are evolving rapidly in the peace process and remain largely unfulfilled.** Several times EPRP has had to adapt rapidly to unforeseen technical assistance needs. EPRP has responded, for example in requests for information on the census and census observation, by having a flexible workshop programme that allows resource people to be bought in and training material developed quickly in response to needs.

(3) Focus on ceasefire Liaison Offices: **EPRP's interaction with liaison offices has revealed the need for greater visibility for ceasefire Liaison Offices' role in the peace process and increased coordination on support functions.** EPRP is actively involved in efforts to coordinate various training opportunities with other national and international partners, and has been requested to advocate on behalf of ceasefire Liaison Offices' funding needs to donors and other stakeholders.

(4) Community information materials: **Ceasefire Liaison Offices provide much-needed hubs for two-way communication with communities in relation to the peace process.** The peace process has been quite top down. Efforts to encourage community participation will be vital for a peace process that truly reflects the concerns and aspirations of all stakeholders. In addition to supporting information dissemination, ceasefire Liaison Offices are well-placed (but not capacitated) to collect feedback from the community on an on-going basis. EPRP offers ceasefire Liaison Offices training and support for public communication and community listening activities.

(5) Cross-cutting gender component: EPRP has pioneered methods of equalising gender participation in peace support activities and revealed **common misunderstanding of gender-based perspectives.** The meaning of 'gender' is difficult to translate in Myanmar and is usually translated as 'women's rights'. The idea of mobilising women's strengths, skills and support in the ethnic struggle was recognised as a readily available strategy that could strengthen the struggle of ethnic groups against a majority, which has resonated with male leaders. It has also proven necessary to constructively re-interpret tradition and custom where it was experienced as unfair on women, and created obstacles to recognition and mobilisation of women's unique strengths. It was found that community 'listening events' provided opportunities for women to give powerful voice to the unique suffering of women in conflict and their frustration at being excluded from community decision-making.

(6) Broader observations: Regarding the peace process, there is clearly a **syndrome of people 'thinking about federalism as a goal'** rather than thinking about federalism as a means of achieving ethnic goals/solving ethnic problems. This creates a kind of political orthodoxy against which it is difficult to argue without being seen as 'on the other side'.

Ethnic communities inside the country (i.e. not the border communities closely connected to Ethnic Armed Groups) have long-lived in an environment designed to politically immobilise them. The reform process has opened space, but political parties do not yet 'represent' the community's aspirations nor lead community action. **Communities have limited consciousness of forms of democratic, non-violent action in support of their aspirations and values** represented by Ethnic Armed Groups, who can therefore be represented as 'extremists' not representative of the community.

There is confusion in the community regarding the role of 'State level Governments', which function assertively as arms of the central government (e.g. strong state special branch police at community workshops) and occupy the political space of the ethnic community's projection of autonomous 'state' or local governments. People are confused as to whether or not to welcome 'decentralisation' since they know it only through central government-controlled state governments.

2.5 REFLECTIONS ON THE MPSI APPROACH

MPSI has been a unique and innovative response to the complex context of peace, and ongoing conflict, in Myanmar during a period of government-led, nationwide political transition. From MPSI's experience to date, some reflections and lessons can be drawn regarding the value and challenges of this model of peace support and, more broadly, in relation to principles for international intervention. These are further explored in the section on the *Relevance to Myanmar of the Fragile States Principles and Busan New Deal*.

- The ability to be organised and resourced to respond quickly at key political moments, and fill a space of support while other structures evolve, is critical.
- Trust-building needs to be the core element for the theory of change in early peace support; this is related to the notion of 'testing' the peace process.
- In a conflict context where there is a willingness of key parties to cease hostilities and a locally-driven demand for peace, 'light-footed' international responses that don't impose external structures or support, can help support the peace process.
- Timely expert analysis though a 'learning through doing' approach was beneficial. This in turn helped to build a context-specific understanding of conflict-sensitivity. MPSI could have better communicated its phasing and modalities of support to government and international actors, and also to Ethnic Armed Groups and civil society actors.
- The substance and value of being process-focused, rather than from the delivery of services or assistance per se.
- There is value in having a structure which is linked to both the grass-roots and high-level political decision making; a structure that is less risk averse than donors and NGOs (or the UN). This can be valuable when an engagement strategy involves working directly with Ethnic Armed Groups, CBOs and conflict-affected communities. It can support the development of 'best-fit approaches', in which locally owned processes are likely to be superior to ungrounded, 'state of the art' external interventions. Such a structure can support information sharing and donor coordination, and initiate processes for developing a shared analysis among donors and other key actors. However, it is important to have clear communication channels to feedback analysis from projects to key stakeholders.
- The need to access flexible and timely funding which can be used in support of catalytic activities will be critical. It is necessary that such a system can cope with providing funding to actors that have very limited project and financial planning and management experience; and can provide comprehensive support to partners in their project and financial planning, management and reporting.
- Sufficient staffing with multifaceted skills, including political negotiation, local expertise and knowledge, and peace-building programmatic skills are a valuable mix. Having staff with the trust of both the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups is also important.
- There is value in having a flexible approach and strategy, to respond dynamically in a complex context. However, this needs to be carefully communicated and linked clearly to a broader overarching strategy and stakeholder analysis.
- It is important to manage expectations and communicate ambitions with modesty; a communications and outreach/consultation strategy is needed from the start. This strategy needs to take into consideration the challenges of communicating an evolving process and structure (an opportunistic-but-principled approach), to a sceptical audience which fears exclusion.
- It is important to act fast, but also to ensure that phase-out is defined by some key objectives being met, and that 'hand-over' of responsibilities clearly articulated.
- To manage expectations and ensure clarity, there is a need for longer-term coordinated aid instruments to be developed in tandem with this early phase.

3 APPLYING THE NEW DEAL FRAMEWORK TO THE MYANMAR CONTEXT

This section seeks to relate learning from the MPSI to relevant parts of the Busan New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (New Deal Framework) and the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations or *Fragile States Principles* (FSPs). The section is divided into two parts, (i) key MPSI lessons and recommendations that relate to an approach that could be framed under *the New Deal*, and (ii) a set of suggestions derived from the Fragile States principles. This section does not set out to be prescriptive on what adherence to the New Deal and the FSPs should look like in the Myanmar context, it merely seeks to set out MPSI insights that can illuminate the relevance of both in the context of aid to Myanmar and the peace process.

3.1 WHY IS THE NEW DEAL FRAMEWORK RELEVANT TO MYANMAR?

The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (*the New Deal Framework*) and the Fragile States Principles (FSPs) are attempts by the international community to ensure that international interventions of support in fragile states are more relevant and effective. All MPSI donors are participating countries and organisations committed to supporting the core principles of the New Deal.

Box 9: Fragile States Principles⁷

“The Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations – or Fragile States Principles – provide a set of guidelines for actors involved in development co-operation, peacebuilding, statebuilding and security in fragile and conflict-affected states. Widely accepted as a point of reference, the FSPs were first adopted by OECD ministers in 2007. These principles were established because fragile states require different responses than those applied in better performing countries. These states face severe development challenges such as a lack of security, weak governance, limited administrative capacity, chronic humanitarian crises, persistent social tensions, violence or the legacy of civil war.”

While the FSPs concentrate on good donor practice, the New Deal Framework goes a step further by also focusing on the need to address the causes of conflict.

With its origins in the Paris and Accra aid effectiveness processes, the New Deal entailed a change to the way the international community works in fragile states. It ‘proposes key peace-building and state-building goals, focuses on new ways of engaging with a focus on country-led processes and identifies commitments to build mutual trust and achieve better results in fragile states.’⁸ The objective is a partnership between the international community and the fragile state to rebuild security and establish justice institutions. These are seen as the fundamental building blocks that will regain the trust of the people, and strengthen the social and economic foundations of any country.

Myanmar is currently confronting multiple challenges. This includes (i) finding a sustainable end to more than half a century of armed conflict, (ii) re-building the ‘social contract’ between the state and diverse social groups; (iii) allowing a democratic process to emerge that will lead to credible and legitimate elections in 2015, and (iv) re-building an economy after decades of isolation and decay. There is a risk that the complexities of establishing a sustainable peace in Myanmar may lead many to ignore some of the underlying causes of the conflict. In MPSI’s experience of the last two years the key challenges to achieving

⁷ Ref - <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/aboutthefragilestatesprinciples.htm>

⁸ Ref - <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org> and <http://www.newdeal4peace.org>

this peace are (i) governance that is weak in terms of delivery, but historically strong in terms of structures of control (ii) insecurity and the absence of predictable justice, and (iii) widespread rural poverty.

These components of social and state fragility are of such complexity that the risk is that the need to neutralize and respond to the more active, immediate local drivers of conflict (for example, local conflict economies, proliferation of multiple local armed groups with or without political aspirations) overshadows attention to resolving the underlying ethnic grievances that sparked and continue to fuel the conflict.

As international attention towards Myanmar remains high and with interventions of support continuing to increase in scale and number, consideration of the relevant New Deal under-takings, as well as a demonstrable commitment to Fragile States Principles will remain instructive and critically important.

3.2 MPSI LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO THE NEW DEAL

MPSI offers an important and relevant perspective as its work has been focused on supporting communities, civil society organizations and non-state actors in Myanmar. The insights obtained through MPSI's work provide a useful complement to thinking through the application of the New Deal Framework in Myanmar. Furthermore, these insights will hopefully encourage development partners in Myanmar to focus on harmonizing their interventions with the local context and in the process build the coping capacities of local structures.⁹

The following lessons and recommendations identified are categorized under the New Deal's Five Peace-building and State-building Goals:

3.2.1 Legitimate Politics – foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution

- **Move quickly from ceasefire to political dialogue:** Having committed to finding a peaceful resolution to decades of conflict, the key issue for Ethnic Armed Groups and ethnic communities is moving from transient and unstable ceasefires towards definitive political resolution. This they hope to achieve by addressing ethnic grievances through an agreed political process referred to as a framework for political dialogue. Lessons and insights from MPSI's work repeatedly speak to the need to this being done quickly. Delays in the launch of the political process have been cited in discussions in a number of MPSI pilot projects and workshops as contributing to weakening both those ethnic leaders who took risks by entering into ceasefires as well as the credibility of the agreements themselves.
- **Consult communities, design projects appropriately:** Consultation processes between Ethnic Armed Groups, communities, civil society, and political parties have been re-confirmed in MPSI's work as an important means to get a sense of what legitimate politics is focussed on and to start inclusive processes. But while international engagement with Ethnic Armed Groups is important, it also brings with it the risk of over-emphasising legitimacy of armed groups vis-a-vis political parties, civil society organisations and local communities. Promoting the outreach role of Ethnic Armed Groups through consultation processes and ceasefire Liaison Offices – as some MPSI work has sought to do - offers significant potential for more inclusive dialogue with communities. MPSI's work has learnt of a significant variance in levels of confidence in the peace process; the diversity of the projects that were requested and supported through MPSI demonstrate and reflect these varying levels of confidence among the Ethnic Armed Groups and communities in the peace

⁹Those interested in this agenda, should also read *Working Differently in Fragile & Conflict Affected Situations: The Asian Development Bank Experience* (2012) and *The Asia Foundation's Contested Corners of Asia; sub-national conflict and international development assistance* (2013).

process, and, necessarily, the varying context-specific priorities and needs. This variance across areas is dependent in large part on a community's experience of conflict and since the ceasefires.

- **Promote transparent and clear information sharing:** (As noted previously) a lesson learned in the context of early stages of the Myanmar peace process was that rumours and misinformation with regards to international assistance can be a destabilising factor, adding to the fragility of the situation. This prompts the need for transparent, clear and routine information-sharing – throughout peace process.
- **Sequence assistance with the political process:** Assistance needs to be in-tune with local perceptions and priorities, as well as sequenced and communicated carefully with the political process. Without such conflict –sensitivity, assistance can undermine the political process by moving too fast, being seen as trying to 'buy peace' or being used to extend government control in ceasefire areas, and as a means to distract from the importance of the political agendas (these are recurring insights from MPSI's work). Any focus on 'state-building' must take into account the legitimacy of non-state actors and be sensitive to the lack of trust in Government structures at a community level.

3.2.2 Security – establish and strengthen people's security

- **Ensure security remains the top priority:** Needs assessments and direct discussion with affected IDP communities under the auspices of MPSI's work reveal that security (physical safety, protection) is *the* primary concern of communities. Removal of restrictions on movement since the signing of the ceasefires has been cited by a number of communities as evidence of positive change in their lives. The ability of populations to move freely has allowed internally displaced people to access their farmlands and to benefit from previously inaccessible services.
- **Balance assistance with security:** There is a critical need to ensure that early assistance projects don't create 'pull factors' for communities to return to areas that are not yet secure.
- **Deliver "conflict sensitive" assistance to conflict-affected areas:** Quick delivery of assistance in conflict-affected areas can play an important role in building trust. However, this is more valuable when carried out with unhindered access, opening up spaces for consultation about proposed assistance between key stakeholders. This will in turn foster trust and confidence between Ethnic Armed Groups civil society, communities, the central government, and international partners. 'Unhindered' access for service providers and aid agencies does not mean access without consent or consultation, it means that where access is consulted upon and consented to, it should be respected. Access to conflict-affected areas by internationals delivering conflict-sensitive assistance can be a critical contribution to boosting communities' sense of security (and reducing human rights abuses, *protection by presence*). Conflict sensitive international support can play an important role in creating 'safe spaces' that bring communities together with Ethnic Armed Groups and/or Myanmar Army – conflict insensitive international support will be likely to have the opposite effect.
- **Facilitate engagement between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the Myanmar Army:** An important lesson has been in cultivating Myanmar Army awareness about process-led, consultation-dependent projects and what MPSI has observed is that the more the Army is seen to agree to the process, the greater the confidence from the IDPs that the ceasefire is credible. When 'safe spaces' are provided or facilitated, communities do claim them and challenge government authorities. These exchanges have also demonstrated the value of focussing on empowerment and supporting local processes in tandem with, or as an integral part of, the provision of assistance.

3.2.3 Justice – address injustices and increase people’s access to justice

- **Re-establish the rule of law:** Longer-term sustainable peace must include some process that (re-)establishes the rule of law, and allows populations to come to terms with the abuses of the past. There is a strong desire at the community level for recognition of past suffering, and, specifically, for the (re-)establishment of justice and the rule of law as a step towards reconciliation.
- **Favour local solutions:** The ceasefires on the ground offer some important and interesting examples of locally arrived-at justice engaging state and non-state actors. Local level events/celebrations (for example, the unhindered celebration by various ethnic nationalities’ of their national days) can play an important role in fostering early reconciliation. Ceasefire Liaison Offices could offer potential to introduce predictable recourse mechanisms at community level.

Box 10: The ten Fragile State Principles¹⁰

The Fragile States Principles (FSPs) provide a set of guidelines for actors involved in development co-operation, peace-building, state-building and security in fragile and conflict-affected states:

1. Take context as the starting point
2. Ensure all activities do no harm
3. Focus on state building as the central objective
4. Prioritise prevention
5. Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives
6. Promote non-discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies
7. Align with local priorities in different ways and in different contexts
8. Agree on practical coordination mechanisms between international actors
9. Act fast...but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance
10. Avoid pockets of exclusion (“aid orphans”)

3.2.4 Economic Foundations – generate employment and improve livelihoods

- **Review and reflect on current policy and law relating land tenure and ownership:** As displaced people are beginning to return and resettle and the ceasefires are opening up previously conflict-affected areas to ‘investors’, land tenure security is becoming a key element for long term peace and stability. New nationally applied land laws, introduced since ceasefires, have failed to acknowledge and respect customary land usage and laws, and are seen to be ‘legalising’ significant de facto loss of land. Widespread land grabbing, and the incursion of economic activities, particularly in relation to environmentally and socially destructive natural resource extraction are major, recurring concerns that have come up in a number of areas of MPSI’s work.
- **Promote fair approaches to resource sharing:** Finding agreement on the sharing of local wealth in resource rich ethnic States and Regions is a key issue for future sustainable peace. The need for capacity-building in the knowledge and skills-base in natural resource management has been identified in MPSI’s engagement in conflict-affected areas.

¹⁰ Ref - <http://www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/aboutthefragilestatesprinciples.htm>

3.2.5 Revenues and Services – manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery

- **Recognise the burden of multiple taxation systems on communities:** Communities have expressed frustration with the multiple taxation systems to which they are subjected (i.e. the tax demands from both State and non-state actors). Equitable and predictable taxation regimes should be the goal.
- **Promote an understanding of key role for local services:** Services, principally education and health, are in many cases being provided through non-state structures. These structures are very often seen to have more legitimacy than those of the Government. They also play an important community *coherence and identity role*, reflecting the desire of ethnic communities for recognition of ethnic languages, culture and history. MPSI has learnt that acceptable governance must be seen in terms of the linkage, and negotiated integration, of state services with locally owned and implemented systems, rather than the displacement of non-state systems with state systems. A hard won lesson that bears repetition is the importance of State and international interventions not getting ahead of the pace of political peace processes, by unduly forcing integration of non-state and State systems.

3.3 MPSI LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE FRAGILE STATES PRINCIPLES

MPSI's insights and lessons indicate a clear need to do things differently when framing and implementing interventions in Myanmar during this critical phase. The New Deal Approach and consideration of some of the more pertinent Fragile States Principles can be useful in framing a way forward.

MPSI projects have demonstrated the very high levels of knowledge held by local people regarding the realities of the local forces they must contend with, and that communities' histories, aspirations, needs and concerns are unique and specific to their environments and experiences. In turn, the international community needs to acknowledge and accept its own often limited understanding of the complexity of the processes they are engaging with.

There are a range of ways international actors supporting Myanmar could *do things differently*. Within a New Deal Framework, and derived from the Fragile States Principles, recommendations include:

3.3.1 Acknowledge ethnic grievances and support bottom-up processes

- Ethnic grievances are the key element of the conflicts and need to be acknowledged and understood from the start of the peace process - including in needs assessment activities.
- Recognition is required at all levels of the Government and donor community of the need for a cultural shift; to move away from 'top-down' approaches to consultation, learning and an understanding of how the Government is perceived, what the issues are, and a willingness to listen to, and ultimately address, grievances through consultative processes not through preconceived, unilaterally determined 'solutions'.
- The peace process currently operates in a male-dominated environment in which women are generally marginalised from decision-making. There is a need to find innovative and compelling ways to support and strengthen the role of women in the peace process and win recognition and salience of key issues of importance to women.
- It is necessary to bring ethnic political parties into the peace process, in recognition of their electoral legitimacy and their constituencies.

3.3.2 Align with local priorities and bottom-up processes

- Whilst it should go without saying that peace processes are more sustainable if locally driven and owned, to date MPSI's experiences show that attaining meaningful local ownership remains a constant challenge.
- As noted above, the contexts of conflict-affected communities in Myanmar are unique, with different local histories, experiences, and aspirations. Support should recognise this and be directed towards reinforcing local resilience, local coping mechanisms and ways out of crisis.
- As part of this, a key focus of international assistance should be recognising local capacity and building the capacity of local actors to articulate their needs and concerns (e.g. Ethnic Armed Groups, communities and ethnic civil society). This is more time-consuming than is often anticipated. International responses need to be tailored to the complexities of the local dynamics, to support local coping strategies and expect to invest time in (and resource) consultation and process-heavy approaches. They should avoid assistance that seeks the 'most efficient' and 'technically correct' approach, often adopted by international actors.
- Mainstream international community assistance instruments – for example, Multi-donor Trust Funds - need to focus on empowerment and process over standard service delivery indicators and measurements.
- International partners should acknowledge the importance of protecting the role of local structures/CBOs from the influx of new actors, and avoid over-formalising demands on these structures and networks, so as not to overburden them.
- "Blue-print style" tools and project design are not effective in this conflict/ceasefire context.
- International assistance needs to be carefully tailored to local dynamics and focus primarily on supporting local capacities. In many cases 'best-fit' local approaches when locally owned are likely to be superior to ungrounded, externally driven, 'state of the art' interventions.
- Mechanisms are needed to inform donors of bottom-up transitional and peace-building processes that require acknowledgement and support.
- In supporting local structures it is important to recognise the value of supporting different levels of civil society. Small, local and less accessible community based organisations involved in small-scale interventions are generally better placed than national NGOs to reflect the community's perceptions of the peace process.

3.3.3 Act fast, remain flexible and commit to seeing success launch

- There is value in having a light and flexible structure able to respond quickly at key political moments and fill spaces while other structures evolve. However, it is important that short and longer-term structures are developed in tandem so that lessons learned through early interventions in the short-term can be integrated into the practice of longer-term 'normal' structures.
- Important that messaging on short and longer-term intervention structures is carefully communicated and expectations managed.
- While pilot projects are a useful starting point to better understand needs, local dynamics, and as listening points to learn from, pilot projects should be scaled-up *as conditions allow* to become more broad-reaching and longer-term, but conflict-sensitive interventions. However, moves to design and implement large-scale assistance in conflict-affected areas, before the commencement of credible dialogue about the issues underlying conflict, are likely to backfire and to undermine the peace process.

3.3.4 Agree on simple, practical and light-footed coordination mechanisms

- Agree on practical, simple and “light-footprint” co-ordination mechanisms between international actors. In international efforts to interact with other stakeholders, there is a need for coordination structures to distinguish between consultation and information-sharing.
- Practical coordination processes should introduce shared conflict sensitivity and political analysis into the international community’s interactions with non-state actors (civil society organisations/community-based organisations and Ethnic Armed Groups) and State systems of governance and service delivery.
- In order to achieve greater coherence, international partners should agree on an effective information and strategy-sharing mechanism and re-commit to international principles (the New Deal and Fragile States Principles) and a set of context-specific Principles/ Priorities. They should ensure that staff on-the-ground know how to interpret what the principles mean in practice. A “joint response mechanism” to share information on difficulties that arise in implementing programmes should be developed.
- It is essential for the international community to manage expectations arising from its involvement. The mantra should be to under-promise while attempting to over-achieve.

3.3.5 Agree on simple and practical co-ordination and flexible funding mechanisms

- Funding mechanisms should be more responsive to the dynamic environment. They will need greater collective coherence to be effective.
- Partners should agree on simple, practical and light-footed co-ordination mechanisms – these mechanisms will allow political and conflict analyses to be shared, to assist a common understanding of issues and concerns and to help achieve greater coherence and sharing of strategic goals.
- Donors should establish responsive, and where feasible and appropriate, common funding mechanisms - funding mechanisms should have the flexibility to adjust to the capacity constraints and risks involved in working as directly as possible with Ethnic Armed Groups’ structures and community organisations. Using the platforms for sharing information, it is imperative these mechanisms are demand driven.

3.3.6 Encourage an inclusive process for a national peacebuilding plan

- A national peacebuilding plan process should be launched. However, it needs to be developed in close consultation with non-state actors, in particular Ethnic Armed Groups, civil society, and communities. The process for developing such a plan is equally as important as the outcome. The process can provide an opportunity for building trust and confidence and without an inclusive process it risks becoming another oppressive structure imposed by the State on local communities, exacerbating conflict.
- Principles for consultation should be developed to prevent perceptions of exclusion, which could increase the number of potential ‘spoilers’.
- International donors need to recognise the key differences between a technical/sector-focused plan, which reflects primarily Government-driven agendas and a ‘peace-building plan’. While the role of the government is of key importance in both, the latter requires early, robust consultation for input and direction from Non-state actors. The Government should not be viewed as a neutral actor or the controlling actor in the planning process.

As noted, the recommendations above are derived from nearly two years of work of the MPSI and are offered in the spirit of wishing to contribute to on-going efforts to improve the appropriateness and effectiveness of support to the peace process in Myanmar.

ANNEX 1: OVERVIEW OF MPSI-SUPPORTED PROJECTS

MPSI ASSOCIATED PROJECTS KEY FACTS

- MPSI has engaged with the **KNU, NMSP, ALP, CNF, KNPP, SSA-S/RCSS** and **DKBA** and helped to initiate and support projects seeking to test commitment to, and build confidence in, the ceasefires.
- MPSI pilot projects have **opened up humanitarian space and delivered assistance to conflict-affected people living in very isolated areas**, including food, medicines, tools and school supplies. **More than 100,000 people have received national identity cards**, which allow citizens to invoke basic rights and enable freedom of movement.
- Wide reach through broad partnerships: MPSI-supported projects are implemented by local partners across **five ethnic States** (Chin, Shan, Mon, Karen, Kayah) and **two Regions** (Bago, Tanintharyi). They are delivered in partnership with **thirteen** local partners (four of which are consortia), and **nine** international partners.
- **Flexible and responsive funding** from Norway, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the European Union and Australia.

Approach 1: Building trust and confidence, and testing the peace process – Providing assistance to communities, alongside the creation of opportunities for dialogue and the opening up of humanitarian space

Eastern Bago - Kyauk Kyi pilot

Project area: Ker Der Village Tract, eastern Bago Region; with expansion to cover three additional sites in phase 2: Kwi La (another IDP Village Tract adjacent to Ker Der) and two 'relocation sites' in Government-controlled areas

Time-frame: June to December 2012 (phase 1) and September 2013 to December 2014 (phase 2)

Project partners: CIDKP and KORD, with NPA support

Project fund support: \$160,000 (phase 1) and \$ 292,000 (phase 2)

Donor: AusAid and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (both phases commenced with Norwegian funding)

MPSI input: - **HIGH** - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultation, Brokering access to conflict-affected areas, Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Provides assistance to internally displaced communities in an area previously inaccessible from inside Myanmar due to conflict. Project design, including geographical location, jointly agreed upon by Government, communities and KNU.

Political context

In January and April 2012, the Myanmar Government agreed a ceasefire with the KNU, with provisions mainly pertaining to military and security-related matters. Two of the clauses in these agreements stated a joint commitment to guarantee civilian populations' life, security and freedom from fear, and to help communities recover from conflict.

The Kyauk Kyi pilot project, including the geographical location, was requested by the KNU, and agreed by the Myanmar Government (including Minister U Aung Min). The objective of the project was to support the immediate recovery efforts of the IDPs in the pilot project area, encourage a normalization process between the IDP community and state and KNU civilian and military authorities, and eventually create an environment conducive for the return of those IDPs who wish to resettle in their villages of origin. On the

political level, the aim of the project was to support the over-arching peace process between the Government and the KNU, by creating traction on the ground – thus increasing confidence in the political process, both among the general population and military actors in the area.

It was jointly agreed that the CIDKP (the KNU's relief wing) and the Karen Organisation for Relief and Development (KORD), would be the implementing agents on the ground. As the humanitarian arm of the KNU, with a trusted area presence, the CIDKP proved the most appropriate implementer for the project, from both political and practical perspectives.

Project activities

Based on the evidence provided by a participatory needs assessment conducted by CIDKP, and with support from the MPSI and NPA, CIDKP designed the project with two expected results: i) the successful delivery of immediate support packages to the IDP communities will signify proof of support for the peace process on the part of the Myanmar Government and Army, opening the way for wider relief efforts including demining and resettlement, and ii) the successful delivery of immediate support packages will strengthen resilience of the assisted communities to prepare for a stage-by-stage recovery, which may include the ability to survive safely in their current villages until landmines are removed (rather than a dangerous return to the original sites before the landmines are removed).

The Kyauk Kyi pilot was the first project initiated under the MPSI. It was implemented in Mu The/Ker Der Village Tract, a remote jungle area, in the hills twenty miles east of Kyauk Kyi, on the road to the Thai border in eastern Bago Region - Karen National Union (KNU)/Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) 3rd Brigade area. Due to the protracted armed conflict, Kyauk Kyi Township has for decades been an area largely inaccessible to external actors (including international humanitarian agencies). The first phase, which included the distribution of rice and non-food items (clothing and stationery for school-children, medical kits, agricultural tools) to the 1585 IDPs, began in June 2012 and was completed in December 2012. NPA provided capacity-building support and financial management.

In April 2012 CIDKP carried out a survey/needs assessment with the IDP communities (assisted by FAFO, a Norwegian research foundation). The findings showed that three in four households wanted to move back to their original villages in the future (a few had already moved, or been back to assess the situation), 23% wanted to go somewhere new and only 4% wanted to stay in their place of displacement. However, for those who wished to return, the presence of landmines in the original areas constituted a significant obstacle – not least with regard to securing sustainable livelihoods. The needs assessment also indicated a significant level of food insecurity, and widespread fear that the ceasefire arrangement might break down and the Myanmar Army would once again attack their communities. Needs were also identified with regard to education and water/sanitation. Based on the needs assessment, a project proposal was developed by CIDKP, with support from NPA and MPSI, and strong community involvement. MPSI conducted a series of meetings with stakeholders, including various Karen CBOs both 'inside' Myanmar and Thailand based. Ongoing efforts at consultation had to be balanced with the need to move quickly, in order to support a fast-changing peace process, and also to ensure assistance was provided to highly vulnerable communities before the onset of the rainy season. As it was, there were delays and much of the assistance was delivered with difficulty during the rainy season, and the project was successfully implemented in large part thanks to the superb efforts of CIDKP staff on the ground.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

The project provided a platform for an unprecedented degree of engagement and communication between the Myanmar Government/Army, the KNU/KNLA, and the affected community. In regular consultation

meetings, members of the IDP population were able to raise their concerns directly with the authorities, including the Bago Region Border and Security Affairs Minister, and local military commanders. This element of the project remains extremely important, as this may be the first time that displaced Karen civilians directly affected by the armed conflict have been able to express their concerns directly to senior Myanmar Army and Government officials. For many of those present, these encounters were quite moving, not least for the dignified manner in which the IDP leaders spoke of their concerns and aspirations.

On 16 May 2012 a consultation was held in Kyauk Kyi, between the Myanmar Government (Immigration & Population Minister Khin Yee, and Regional/Township officials), the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister and Ambassador, KNU/KNLA leaders (KNU Military Affairs Committee Secretary, Htoo Htoo Lei; KNLA 3rd Brigade Commander; KNU District Chairman), and representatives of the IDP community (many of whom had never visited Kyauk Kyi before). This meeting established precedents, including authorisation for CIDKP to establish a project office in Kyauk Kyi. However, it was perceived as somewhat intimidating by the IDPs. Therefore, a follow-up meeting was held at Mu The, much closer to the pilot project area, on 11 July. This consultation involved substantive discussions between Myanmar Government (Bago Region Security and Border Affairs Minister) and Army (battalion commander), KNU/KNLA (3rd Brigade Commander, KNU District and Township Chairmen), and about 30 representatives of the IDP community. As well as briefing the beneficiaries regarding progress on the project, this forum provided opportunities for all sides to express their interests and concerns. The significance of this encounter is represented by a question from one IDP leader to the Myanmar Army Colonel/Bago Region Minister: "can you guarantee that you will not burn down our villages in the future?" The Minister replied that the Myanmar Army would not, but that he understood it was difficult for the community to believe this. He said that his presence at this meeting was symbolic of a new government willingness to make peace, and that he believed that trust would be built over time, through the projects we were there to discuss.

During an MPSI monitoring visit in September 2012, a joint meeting was held with the Bago Region Border Affairs and Security Minister, a Colonel from the Myanmar Army, a Lt-Colonel from KNDO (a military arm of the KNU), two Township Officers from the KNU, CIDKP officials and approximately 30 IDPs from Keh Der. This meeting – and others like it – permitted communities living in KNU-controlled areas to speak directly to representatives of the Myanmar Government, to express their concerns and directly ask for assurances for their safety. The villagers told the visiting Government Minister that they felt intimidated by the Myanmar Army's questioning when they had to travel through Government-controlled territory. While the Minister was initially defensive, after listening to the Karen villagers, he issued direct orders to the Colonel for his troops to minimize such questioning in the future. Since then, IDPs report that they have been able to collect the assistance items – which were distributed close to a Government military camp, due to difficulties sending supplies through to the project site during the rainy season – without any hindrances.

In November 2012 a final monitoring trip was undertaken with the aim of assessing project impact and future prospects. Interviews were conducted with the Myanmar Army, KNU leaders from Mu The and officers from KNLA 3rd Brigade, which revealed that military authorities on both sides were positive and optimistic about "the strength of the peace [at the project sites]". In their report on the monitoring trip, CIDKP relayed the view of local KNU commanders (like the KNDO Lt-Colonel, who considered the pilot project to have brought many benefits to the area, and strengthened the trust-building between the different parties during the first phase of the peace process. According to the Lt-Col, "IDPs can now live in a stable situation, the ceasefire has reduced people's fear, and IDPs can test the situation and return to their own villages. Moreover, the pilot project provides more cooperation between the military, the Government and the KNU." Although IDPs interviewed during the monitoring mission clearly expressed an increased feeling of security, some also voiced concerns related to the peace process. Many were worried that the ceasefire would eventually collapse, generating new rounds of military action. Similar views were expressed during the January 2013 evaluation of the pilot project.

In September 2013, a second phase began implementation, in Keh Der and three additional locations: Kwi La (another IDP Village Tract adjacent to Ker Der) and two 'relocation sites' in Government-controlled areas. The second phase focused more on livelihoods support, with CIDKP, KORD and other CBOs working to help conflict-affected communities test the possibility of returning to their original villages and re-establishing their traditional livelihood. A key peace-building element here is to work with communities, to explore and use the space available in the peace process, to help local people take greater control over their own lives, and community development activities. However, in Keh Der and Kwi La, progress towards full rehabilitation of their original village area has been limited by the continued presence of landmines.

Tanintharyi - Dawei and Palaw Pilot

Project area: Kyaik Pee Laung and Tha Mae Plaw, two small sites south of Myitta and east of Palaw Township, Tanintharyi Region; with expansion to cover two additional sites in phase 2, further to the south and east in KNU-controlled areas, where population has been 'in-hiding' since the late-1990s

Time-frame: November 2012 to October 2013 (phase 1) and 2014 (phase 2 tbc)

Project partners: Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiative (TKPSI, consortium of key stakeholders in Tanintharyi including CIDKP, Karen Development Network (KDN), the Catholic and Baptist churches, and the KNU ceasefire Liaison Office in Dawei), with NPA support.

Project fund support: \$266,260 (phase 1); funding still required for phase 2

Donors: Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - **HIGH** - Establishing consortiums and platforms, Brokering access to conflict-affected areas, Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Helps 1135 conflict-affected individuals rebuild and rehabilitate their lives, facilitates dialogue among key stakeholders, and supports trust-building among local CBOs. Based on requests from KNU and CBOs, and consultations with affected communities, and discussed with and agreed by the Tanintharyi Region Chief Minister.

Political context

At the request of the KNU, a second Karen pilot project was implemented in KNLA 4th Brigade areas in eastern Palaw (Tha Mae Plaw) and south of Myitta (Kyaik Pee Laung), in Tanintharyi Region. Following a series of inception workshops facilitated by MPSI, a needs assessment was carried out, and the project began in November 2012. The project was implemented by a consortium of CBOs, some with experience of working from inside Myanmar (e.g. Karen Development Network (KDN) and the Catholic Baptist churches) and some cross-border. The Tanintharyi Karen Peace Support Initiative (TKPSI) consortium includes the KNU, CIDKP, the Yangon-based Karen Development Network, and the local (Dawei and Myeik-Palaw) Catholic and Karen Baptist churches.

Project activities

With support from NPA, the TKPSI has sought to address some of the most pressing needs articulated by the 1353 conflict-affected people in these two locations. The first phase of the project included the provision of short-term food security and livelihood assistance, basic household items, improved access to water and sanitation, education support, psycho-social support initiatives (through a series of trauma healing workshops), and mobilising and capacity building of communities (through community consultations). A follow-up evaluation and needs assessment was conducted in September 2013, leading to the development of a second phase TKPSI proposal, deepening support to conflict-affected communities in the original two locations, and beginning work in two more locations, further to the South in KNU-controlled areas, where vulnerable IDP populations have been living in hiding for more than a decade.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

One key difference between the Kyauk Kyi and TKPSI pilot project is that the latter is implemented by a broader range of local partners, including organisations based both 'inside' Myanmar, and the CIDKP, which before the KNU ceasefire operated cross-border. Both of the Karen pilot projects have allowed the CIDKP to open local offices in government-controlled areas, and begin a process of normalising its presence inside the country. In a development, which has done much to build trust and confidence in the peace process, CIDKP personnel can now travel and operate freely inside Myanmar, whereas previously they would have faced arrest (due to their close association with the KNU).

Monitoring and evaluation visits, including extensive discussions with beneficiary communities, indicate that the ceasefire between the KNU and the Myanmar Government/Army has brought many benefits to the communities at Kyauk Pee Laung and Tha Mae Plaw, after decades of isolation. These include greatly improved freedom of movement and access to information, and also a significant reduction in fear - which has allowed many of the scattered community in the jungle around Tha Mae Plaw to begin (tentatively) to return to their old village (from which they fled in 1997). Evaluations indicate that as a result of the pilot project, people feel more confident in the prospects of a peaceful and secure life, and more engaged with the outside world. However, the ceasefire has also brought with it new problems for these communities.

In early February 2013 Government officials from the Myitta Township Forestry Department visited Kyauk Pee Laung, to inform villagers of plans to demarcate protected forestry areas around the village. The implications of this reclassification may mean that villagers will be excluded from their land and prevented from farming, while concessions are granted to agricultural plantation companies. In recent months, their fears regarding land-grabbing were realised, when local farmland was occupied by a rubber plantation company. One family told TKPSI that, "We can now live without fear because of ceasefire process ... We are happy and we think now we can work on our farms freely. Unfortunately, we lost our land again because of the intrusion of the Rubber Company. We can do nothing. They said they have got permission from Government to work on this land. They also said these lands do not belong to us because we do not have any legal ownership document."

Both of the project areas are in conflict-affected ethnic areas, regarded by ethnic communities and the KNU as subject to customary land ownership practices. People in Tha Mae Plaw community are also worried about incoming investment from mining and forestry companies. Repeated visits by authorities (including local Government and Special Branch police) are perceived as intrusive, and have created great concern. Furthermore, in September and October 2013 Myanmar Army columns passed close by or through Tha Mae Plaw, causing great anxiety to the community. At a community meeting with the TKPSI, one villager said, "we had to flee our villages and livelihood areas and wandering and hiding in the jungle for many years and now we think there will be no fighting between Government and KNU so we think might be able to rebuild our original villages. While we are trying, a lot of groups from Government side and also business enterprises that we have never seen before come to our place and take our pictures, test our lands, and we know nothing what they are doing to us. If they treat us like that, we think, things will be difficult for us and there will be no freedom for us to settle back here in our original place. So the best way is to go back to the jungle. There seems to be more peace in the jungle."

Thus, while conflict-affected communities in Tanintharyi welcome the benefits of peace, they also fear that the ceasefire will bring with it increased land-grabbing by well-connected companies (in collusion with both the KNU, and local Government and Myanmar Army authorities). Furthermore, there is a fear on the part of both communities and Ethnic Armed Groups that the Government is using the peace process to expand and extend its authority into previously inaccessible areas. As most communities still regard the Government as not representing them, and have for decades experienced the Myanmar Army as a violent and predatory force, these concerns threaten to seriously undermine trust and confidence in the peace process. MPSI has worked with NPA and TKPSI to explore these issues, and help communities to access better information

about Government plans in their areas, and to draw national and international attention to the way the application of new land laws may jeopardise the benefits of the peace process to local communities and perhaps the peace process itself.

It is intended that these issues will be further explored in phase 2 of the TKPSI pilot projects. In 2014, the TKPSI plans to extend its activities to work with IDPs 'in-hiding' in the jungles of southern Tanintharyi, working with highly vulnerable communities to assist in their rehabilitation, thus testing commitment to, and building confidence in, the peace process.

Mon - Kroeng Batoi Pilot

Project area: Four villages in Kroeng Batoi area, Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region, with expansion to cover five additional sites in phase 2

Time-frame: July 2012 (needs assessment); January to August 2013 (phase 1); 2014 (phase 2, time-frame tbc)

Project partners: Kroeng Batoi Pilot Project Working Group (consortium of Mon CBOs and NMSP departments), with NPA and International Labour Organisation (ILO) support

Project fund support: \$85,675 (phase 1); funding required for phase 2

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - **HIGH** - Establishing consortiums and platforms, Brokering access to conflict-affected areas, Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, Linking donors and implementing partners

- Provides assistance to conflict-affected communities in four villages under the control of NMSP: awareness raising and community mobilization, women's empowerment, improving livelihoods of communities and improving access to WASH, health and education services. Planned and implemented in partnership with consortium of Mon CBOs and NMSP

Political context

The New Mon State Party (NMSP) renewed its ceasefire with the Myanmar Government in February 2012 and further talks were held in April 2012. While Mon communities continue to have doubts about the ceasefire and new government, local civil society organizations nevertheless see the renewed ceasefire as an opportunity to provide much-needed assistance to conflict-affected communities in areas under the control of the NMSP.

Project activities

MPSI has supported the formation of a consortium of 9 organisations - the Kroeng Batoi Pilot Project Working Group - including local civil society groups (both cross-border and based 'inside' Myanmar), the NMSP and key NMSP line-departments (health, education). This is the first time that many of these organisations have worked together. Some have close links with NMSP, while others are more independent. The Kroeng Batoi pilot provides an important opportunity to strengthen communications and the relationship between the NMSP, its departments, and with local civil society organisations. A key administrative role in the project is played by the Rehmonya Peace Foundation, a new NMSP led-body.

In July 2012 the newly-established consortium collaborated on a needs assessment of conflict-affected communities living in Kroeng Batoi, an area selected by NMSP. In contrast to the Kyauk Kyi pilot, the assessment revealed that 96% of villagers, many of whom are IDPs, wished to stay in their current villages. The needs assessment, and a follow-up field visit in October 2012, revealed that each of the four villages in the target area lacked a proper water supply, and villagers were also in need of general education related to health and hygiene. Furthermore, villagers did not have a clear understanding or vision for the long-term development of their community, and did not value women's participation in development work or village affairs. As a part of the visit, discussions were held with the local NMSP leadership, village leaders and

community representatives which revealed that the confidence in the ceasefire agreement was fairly strong, although political dialogue was viewed as the only sustainable way to bringing lasting peace.

In January 2013 the pilot project was started in four villages in the Kroeng Batoi area, in Yebyu Township in NMSP-controlled areas in northern Tanintharyi Region, with a target population of 1355 people (357 households). The first phase focussed on access to water, community empowerment, awareness-raising, and women's leadership training. The ILO and NPA provided capacity-building and technical support to the local organisations, with the ILO lending its experience regarding rights-based local infrastructure development.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

In the first monitoring visit, undertaken in February 2013 (one month after the project started), focus group discussions with villagers revealed that the presence of foreign aid workers was regarded as signalling that there was greater security to live and travel in the area. Village Development Committees had been formed, with 60% of the elected committee members being women (an important step for enhancing women's future participation in decision-making). Food security appeared to be the most pressing need of the villagers.

An evaluation and follow-up needs assessment were conducted over the 2013 rainy season. Initial findings indicate that community empowerment and awareness raising elements have been highly successful, giving local people (and particularly women) a greater say in development activities and aspects of governance in this highly conflict-affected area. The supply of water to these remote villages has been another important outcome, to which villagers responded very positively. Furthermore, local perceptions of the safety/security situation in their area have increased. This is also due to the distribution of Myanmar identity cards in Krong Batoi area by the Tanintharyi Region authorities.

The proposal for the second stage of the project is being developed, as of mid-March 2014. The project area will be expanded to cover five additional villages, with a greater focus on locally appropriate infrastructure development, community mobilising trainings and livelihood support.

Kayah/Karenni - Shadaw Pilot

Project area: Ten villages in Shadaw Township, Kayah State, Myanmar

Time-frame: September 2013 to June 2014

Project partner: Kainayah Rural Social Development Organisation

Project fund support: \$79,000

Donor: Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - MEDIUM - Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Supports returning IDPs in a remote and difficult-to-access area to recover traditional land and livelihoods, emphasising the empowerment of the local people; approved at the local and State level and by the KNPP.

Political context

The ceasefire between Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Myanmar Government emerged through a series of meetings starting in late 2011 and continuing through 2012. In the Union level agreement, both sides agreed to discuss the systematic resettlement of IDPs. Further meetings were held in 2013, including the most recent round of talks in October.

MPSI became aware of the emerging trend of spontaneous return of IDPs in the Shadaw area, with villagers attempting to return to their old home area after a very long period of displacement. The IDPs' old village

areas were overgrown by the jungle, but not affected by landmines. A local CBO, the Kainayah Rural Social Development Organisation, with experience of participatory development approaches and working in Kayah villages, had been approached by the local people for emergency assistance. Recognising the 'self-reliant' outlook of a very traditional community, and the daunting task facing them in attempting to recover their lost livelihoods and villagers, MPSI was approached by the CBO for support. The main consideration of MPSI in recommending that this project be supported was to encourage the emergence of international funding that would empower people making their own decisions about post-displacement solutions (with assistance from an appropriate CBO) that would help to consolidate the group's cohesion and self-reliance.

Project activities

This project seeks to provide recovery assistance to 251 IDP households, with a total population of 1431, seeking to re-establish their lives in 10 villages in Shadaw Township. The target area is a series of scattered villages in quite remote and inaccessible areas. Where the only other agency beginning to work is UNHCR, which has started providing water and sanitation facilities in selected villages.

The project supports the returning IDPs to recover traditional land and livelihoods, emphasising the empowerment of local people. The project re-introduces the traditional collective rice-bank, which in the past was used for supporting traditional celebrations, and which is proposed to be reintroduced and re-oriented around collective food security. Other activities include provision of seeds and the introduction of a 'seed-bank' in order to promote the community's own self-sufficiency; community rebuilding of primary schools; community health worker training to one local woman, in 5 of the 10 project villages; and a collective process for planning improvement and protection of local water sources with greater awareness of the danger of water-borne diseases.

Karen – DKBA pilot

Project area: DKBA ceasefire areas: Hlaingbwe, Kawkaik, Myawaddy & Ye Townships

Time-frame: March 2014-December 2014

Project partner: Karen Community Based Network Group (KCBNG), DKBA and Kio-Htoo Baw Organization (KKO)

Project fund support: \$100,000-120,000 (indicative sum required)

Donor: Project in planning phase. Funding still required.

MPSI input: - **HIGH** - Establishing consortia and platforms; Brokering access to conflict-affected areas; Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders; Linking donors and implementing partners.

- The project seeks to provide quality and ethnically sensitive education, which will contribute to the ongoing peace process and increase the capacity of civil society in DKBA related areas.

Political context

The DKBA signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government on 3 November 2011, after a one-year period of fierce fighting on the ground. The agreement included a commitment to work together on development projects. The DKBA and civil society actors in its related areas have for the most part been isolated from humanitarian and international actors in the past. A pilot project proposal has been developed through various consultation meetings of civil society and DKBA leaders at the end of 2013, with the assistance of MPSI. Participants of the meetings came from 4 different DKBA related areas, including Ye, Kawkaik, Mae Tha Wa and Sonseemyaing. They reported that the overall living situation after the ceasefire has improved. Challenges however remain in relation to Myanmar Army presence in DKBA areas and the usage of forced labour. The overall socio-economic situation in DKBA controlled areas has mostly not changed and investments in social services (education & health) remain low. Participants mentioned that it is difficult to plan for the future, as they do not know if peace will prevail.

Project activities

The project seeks to provide quality and ethnically sensitive education, which will contribute to the ongoing peace process and increase the capacity of civil society in DKBA related areas. In September and October 2013 MPSI implemented two workshops with DKBA, Klu-Htoo Baw Organization (KKO) and civil society members of the region, to explore the possibility of establishing a pilot project in their areas of authority. Through a participatory approach participants identified education as being the primary need in DKBA related areas. Hence, a needs assessment was conducted to identify educational needs in the four target regions. Project implementations will be led by KCBNG and will focus on 2 school constructions, establishment of parent-teacher associations, school garden trainings, health & hygiene trainings for students and school material support. In addition, various capacity building workshops will be held in order to upgrade the capacity and knowledge of civil society actors in DKBA related areas. Direct beneficiaries of the project include approximately 3,600 school children and 180 teachers. The community ownership of the project is strong and DKBA is providing an open space for the community participation in the project.

The project is at funding stage (as of mid-March 2014).

ID Card Programme

Project area: Conflict-affected, ceasefire and Ethnic Armed Groups-controlled areas in Karen, Kayah (Karenni), Mon and southern Shan States

Time-frame: July 2012 - ongoing

Project partners: Norwegian Refugee Council in conjunction with the Ministry of Immigration and Population

Project fund support: \$1,992,000 (as of 30 August 2013)

Donors: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AusAid, Swiss Development Corporation and EuropeAid

MPSI input: - **LOW** - Brokering access to conflict-affected areas, and Linking donors and implementing partners
- Issues Citizenship Scrutiny Cards to remote and conflict-affected communities, who currently lack ID cards, in areas determined by agreement between the Myanmar Government, Ethnic Armed Groups and communities. ID cards issued by the Ministry of Immigration and Population.

Political context

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has supported the Ministry of Immigration and Population in issuing Citizen Scrutiny Cards (full Myanmar ID cards), to communities in remote and conflict-affected areas. To do so, NRC and the government have established a 'one-stop shop' model that covers, free of charge, all the steps involved in issuing the Citizen Scrutiny Cards on the same day. MPSI has provided support in mobilising funding for this work, and helped NRC to gain access to conflict-affected (including pilot project) areas.

Project activities

From June 2012 to September 2013, 79,399 national identity cards were issued to citizens in conflict-affected areas of Karen State, 14,402 ID cards were issued in Kayah State from November 2012 to September 2013, and for southern Shan State 11,038 ID cards were issued from April 2013 to September 2013. Plans are commencing for south-eastern Shan State and Tanintharyi Region.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

In many armed conflict-affected areas of Myanmar (which in some cases have not been under state control since before independence), local people often have either lost their official ID documentation or have not had access to public services due to their displacement as a result of the conflict. Lack of ID documentation makes it difficult and dangerous to travel to Government-controlled areas, and impossible for people to access Government or other services, or to begin the task of holding State authorities to account. The provision of ID cards therefore allows displaced people to begin accessing basic rights, such as voting and enrolling children in school. Prior to implementation of the ID card project, if villagers wanted to acquire ID

cards, they had to suspend their livelihood activities, and travel to government offices at their own expense and personal risk, both to apply and to receive the card at a later date, plus pay the associated costs. Villagers in many areas where MPSI works have stated the importance of receiving ID cards, and how this contributes significantly towards building their trust and confidence in the peace process. Nevertheless, there are some potential risks associated with NRC assisting the Government in providing ID cards to people living in areas under the authority of the Ethnic Armed Groups. In practice, the international community is partnering the Government in the extension of state-led activities into previously (quasi-) autonomous areas, under the authority of Ethnic Armed Groups. As noted above, this penetration of the state into previously inaccessible areas can be perceived as threatening by vulnerable local communities, as well as Ethnic Armed Groups and civil society actors. In this context, MPSI has sought to facilitate contacts between NRC, local communities and Ethnic Armed Groups (e.g. the KNU), in order to ensure the implementation of this project is not viewed with hostility, and to engage Ethnic Armed Groups as key stakeholders in the peace process, in their role as de facto local authorities in remote, conflict-affected areas.

Approach 2: Building trust and confidence, and testing the peace process - Supporting consultations and dialogue between Ethnic Armed Groups, political parties, CSOs and communities

NMSP Consultation Process

Project area: Mon-populated areas in Mon State and adjacent parts of Karen State and Tanintharyi Region

Time-frame: June 2012 to July 2013

Project partners: NMSP, with NPA support

Project fund support: \$190,925

Donors: Ministry for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - **MEDIUM** - Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Promoted greater mutual understanding and cooperation regarding the peace process amongst NMSP, Mon communities, civil society organisations and political parties.

Political context

The NMSP re-confirmed its ceasefire with the Myanmar Government in February 2012, and further talks were held in April 2012. As a part of the renewal of the ceasefire agreement, the NMSP and representatives from the Government agreed to open 10 NMSP ceasefire Liaison Offices.

Project activities

MPSI has supported the NMSP's plan to carry out a substantial consultation process, involving over 400 meetings with communities, CBOs, Mon political parties and local authorities, held between June 2012 and July 2013. The objectives of the community consultations were to strengthen networks between NMSP and different Mon communities; for NMSP to cooperate with various Mon community leaders, CBOs and religious leaders to explore and support reconciliation and conflict resolution; to disseminate information regarding the peace process and political development; and for the NMSP to be better informed about Mon communities' hopes and concerns regarding the peace process. The meetings were organised by the staff of 10 NMSP ceasefire Liaison Offices, and led by senior NMSP officials. In implementing this project, NMSP is working with the Mon Women's Organisation (MWO) to provide support for financial accounting and reporting, and ensure that the voices and concerns of women and other marginal groups are included. NPA is also providing technical advice, and a channel for funding.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

In their interim narrative report in February 2013, the NMSP outlined a number of concerns and hopes raised by communities during consultations. In response, the Mon National Liberation Army had organised a seminar to review its procedures and the NMSP has launched a rural development programme, as requested by communities. Communities expressed their concern at the growing prevalence of drugs (methamphetamines) in their areas. MPSI has responded by introducing NMSP to appropriate harm-reduction NGOs, and funding a workshop on drug issues, (supported by NPA). The consultations revealed that Mon communities see a political settlement to Myanmar's ethnic conflicts as essential, and also want to see reconciliation between the NMSP and armed factions which have split from the party in the past - issues which have been prioritised by the NMSP leadership.

The NMSP and Mon CBOs reported that some villagers feared to participate in, or even attend, the consultation meetings, because they were afraid of punishment and fines by State authorities, due to the Unlawful Association Act. The mitigation strategy was to extend the invitation for the consultation meetings through local CBOs, so that the villagers did not need to have direct contact with NMSP. In June 2013 NMSP reported that villagers had participated more actively in the latest round of meetings, and that the consultations had improved communication channels between NMSP and communities.

Prior to project starting, the NMSP Central Executive Committee had developed guidelines for its interactions with communities. These included presentations on NMSP policy, but no feedback sessions from the communities. During the project, the approach changed, with NMSP leaders encouraging villagers to ask questions, and provide feedback and suggestions. The project also improved the cooperation and coordination among the NMSP consultation team members. Before the project, the leaders did not have any experience in consultation sessions and they did not know how to facilitate such meetings. After each consultation round, the leaders shared their experiences and discussed the issues raised, which contributed to strengthening the internal cooperation and coordination in NMSP. As a result of the consultations, the NMSP's understanding of the needs of Mon people has improved, and the NMSP is now working closely together with various Mon organisations and Mon communities on a series of projects (e.g. the Mon National Conference, see below).

It was observed by NMSP leaders and the MWO that information-sharing during the consultations improved the villagers' understanding and awareness of the peace process, and political situation. Villagers were encouraged to question the leadership, and participate more in political discussions and decision-making in their areas. The NMSP has become better informed regarding the hopes and concerns of Mon ethnic communities, allowing it to represent these views in forthcoming political dialogue with the Government and other stakeholders in Myanmar.

The consultation meetings have resulted in a number of subsequent projects and activities initiated by NMSP, as requested by communities:

- During all consultation meetings the villagers complained about widespread drugs problems. The NMSP has sought to address this issue by: 1) Initiating drug awareness trainings and workshop for NMSP members, CBO representatives and village leaders (supported by NPA); and 2) Amendment of NMSP drugs laws to enhance prosecution of drug dealers.
- The villagers also raised two distinct kinds of concerns regarding land issues: land disputes among villagers themselves, and land-grabbing by the Government and Myanmar Army, and private companies. The NMSP has raised the later issue in all meetings with the Government, and is planning to launch a GPS programme to document villagers' land ownership.
- In some areas, villagers complained about landmines. A Mine Risk Education project, supported by NPA and DCA, has been launched. NMSP has also submitted a request for a Non-Technical Survey to the MPC, and the Government has accepted this (see details below).

- Villagers expressed their desire that the two Mon political parties (the Mon Democracy Party and All Mon Regional Democracy Party) form a single party. The NMSP has facilitated meetings between the two parties, but this is a sensitive issue and discussions are still in process. In response to the request for Mon unity, the NMSP organised a Mon National Conference jointly with Mon political parties and Mon CBOs. The MPSI-supported conference was held in Mawlamyine in 28-30 September 2013 (see below).
- The NMSP consultation team collected documentation of human rights abuses, and reported these to ceasefire Liaison Offices. In some cases, the disputes were resolved at the Township level and in other cases the complaints were submitted to the Union level.
- During consultation meetings, Mon CBOs requested capacity-building training. The NMSP initiated a 6-week capacity-building training for youth from CBOs, with support from NPA. The trainings included an internship for 20 youth at NMSP's Sangkhlaburi ceasefire Liaison Offices and headquarters.

Future community consultations are likely to be issues-based (e.g. on federalism and constitutional change). The NMSP is also looking to build three community halls, to be located near ceasefire Liaison Offices in Mawlamyine, Ye and Thanphyuzayat, to create a space for civil society to meet and organise activities.

Mon National Conference

Project area: Mawlamyine, Mon State

Time-frame: 28-30 September 2013

Project partner: Mon National Conference Working Committee

Project fund support: \$47,825

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via NPA

MPSI input: - **MEDIUM** - Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Brought together a broad range of Mon stakeholders (including NMSP, Mon political parties, Mon CBOs and religious leader) to share opinions, discuss problems and issues facing the communities, and build mutual trust and understanding among each other.

Political context

During the NMSP community consultations (see above) it was decided to hold a Mon National Conference, to continue the engagement between different stakeholders in the Mon peace process. Such a gathering of Mon stakeholders had not previously been possible due to the political situation and armed conflict in the country.

Project activities

The conference was held from 28-30 September 2013 in Mawlamyine, the capital of Mon State. The conference was been planned and organised by a Mon National Conference Working Committee which is comprised of the following organisations: NMSP, All Mon Democratic Party and Mon Democratic Party, and 9 representatives from various community-based organisations. The aim of the Mon National Conference was to enable Mon leaders, including Mon political parties, the NMSP, civil society organisations and religious leaders to come together, share opinions, discuss problems and issues facing the community, and build mutual trust and understanding.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

A total of 343 participants attended the conference, with an additional 84 observers and academics from various organisations. Participants discussed how political parties, armed groups and civil society can contribute to the peace process, in order to bring lasting and genuine peace in Mon populated areas and

then to the whole country. Several strategic papers/documents had been prepared by participating organisations on the topics of sustainable peace, political issues, problems facing the community, ethnic identity, unity, education, women participation in decision-making and the peace process and the results of the community consultations. These papers were used as background and starting point for the discussions at the conference. The conference was used to plan for a Mon National Convention, expected to be held in January 2014.

Chin Consultation Process and IT for Chin schools

Project area: Chin State and Chin communities in other areas

Time-frame: April 2013 to March 2014

Project partner: Chin National Front

Project fund support: \$862,000

Donors: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via NIS (Norwegian funding covering additional costs)

MPSI input: - MEDIUM - Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Implements two specific clauses in the ceasefire agreement between CNF and Government:

1. Facilitates a series of consultations between the CNF and Chin communities;
2. Provides Internet connection and computer centres to 30 Chin High Schools, in collaboration with the Chin State Government.

(NB: \$35,000 from this project is allocated to the Chin National Conference - see below)

Political context

Chin State is the poorest and least developed in the Union. The CNF was the first armed group to formally sign a ceasefire agreement with the Thein Sein Government, on 6 January 2012. Another two agreements focusing on implementation were signed in May and December 2012. Two of the specific clauses in the ceasefire agreement are that CNF can hold consultations with the diverse Chin public, and that initial development projects should be undertaken, to strengthen community infrastructure and help overcome isolation.

Project activities

This project aims: 1) to facilitate a series of consultations with communities, to be conducted by the CNF in partnership with Chin political parties and civil society groups, in order to better understand local concerns and aspirations in relation to anticipated political negotiations; and 2) with the agreement and cooperation of the State Government, to provide 30 high schools in Chin State with Internet access and computer centres as a means of overcoming the isolation of remote communities.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

The project was started in April 2013, and in October 2013 the first progress report was finalised. During this period, a number of activities have been implemented. Eight staff members have been recruited for the project and 30 target schools have been selected (with a total of 12,463 students in 8th standard and above).

In April 2013 a training workshop was held in Aizawl (India) for the facilitating team for the public consultations. During the workshop, the participants developed questionnaires to be used during the public consultations, in order to better understand Chin people's hopes and concerns regarding the peace process. From May 2013 to October 2013, 57 public consultations were held in 9 Townships of Chin State. Almost 15,000 people participated in the consultations, and about 10,000 answered and returned the questionnaires. As a part of raising Chin the community's political awareness, 3000 copies of *Democracy, Self-determination and Federalism* (by Dr Lian Sakhong) were reprinted and distributed.

Following an open bidding round, the CNF signed a contract with a very experienced company, Thit Sa Oo, to provide computers, generators and satellite Internet connections to the Chin High Schools. On 28 August 2013 the CNF and Thit Sa Oo company met with the Chin Chief Minister and his cabinet, to discuss the implementation of the first phase of the computer and satellite Internet component. It was jointly agreed to provide computers and satellite Internet to high schools to nine Chin High Schools under the first phase, and to organise trainings on computer skills for teachers at these schools. It was also agreed to form a joint management committee, comprising members from the Chin State Government, CNF and representatives of teachers and parents. The State Government offered to contribute 9,000,000 MMK to cover costs for computer desks and chairs, which was not covered by the budget for the project. A total of 445 computers and desks/chairs have been distributed to the schools, and all schools have been provided with printers, satellite Internet and generators.

So far, public consultations have been convened in Chin State only, and CNF is preparing for similar consultations with Chin communities living outside Chin State. Public consultations have been scheduled for Yangon and Mandalay and the regional Governments have issued permission to CNF to hold the consultations.

Chin National Conference

Project area: Hakha, Chin State

Time-frame: 12-15 November 2013

Project partner: Chin Affairs Partnership (network of 9 CBOs)

Project fund support: \$63,488 (+ \$35,000 allocated from the 'Chin Consultations and IT for Chin Schools' project)

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via NIS

MPSI input: - **LOW** - Linking donors and implementing partners

- Enabled Chin stakeholders to develop common position and internal consultative mechanisms for the political dialogue process, and strengthened mutual understanding and trust in Chin communities.

Political context

The Chin National Conference aimed to deepen the peace process, by including the voices of Chin political parties and civil society actors. The Chin National Front, Chin political parties and Chin CBOs jointly organised the conference, with the CNF's financial contribution allocated from the project on 'Chin Consultation Process and IT for Chin schools'. MPSI was approached by the Chin Affairs Partnership – an independent network of Chin CBOs – to help secure additional funding.

Project activities

The Chin National Conference was held 12-15 November 2013, bringing together more than 570 participants from CNF, Chin political parties, Chin State Government and Chin civil society, including women's and youth groups, and religious organisations. The conference ended with delegates voting to support amending the 2008 constitution, to bring about a genuine federal system. This was unprecedented historically, among a community previously noted for its political fragmentation.

KNPP Consultation Process

Project area: Kayah (Karenni) State

Time-frame: September 2012 (stage 1); January 2013 to June 2013 (stage 2); and November 2013 to April 2014 (stage 3)

Project partners: KNPP, with NPA support

Project fund support: \$17,340 (stage 1); \$37,847 (stage 2) and \$22,380 + 66,390,000 MMK (stage 3)

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, funds channelled via NIS (stage 1) and NPA (stages 2 and 3)

MPSI input: - LOW-MEDIUM - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultation, Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners
- Opens a dialogue between the KNPP and public about the current political situation and initial ceasefire agreement, and helps to establish an implementation system for community-based ceasefire and local human rights monitoring.

Political context

On March 7 2012 State-level talks were held in Loikaw and a preliminary ceasefire agreement was signed between the Government and KNPP. Three months later, on June 9 2012, the first Union-level talk was held in Loikaw, and both parties signed a 14-point preliminary agreement (based on 20-points originally proposed by the KNPP). On 19-20 June 2013 the KNPP met again with the government for a second round of Union-level talk. The two parties agreed to an eight-point agreement for implementation of a sustainable ceasefire and a development process in Karenni State. Further talks were held in October 2013. After the first Union-level talk, the KNPP established three ceasefire Liaison Offices in Karenni State; a fourth office was later opened in Bawlekhe.

The Government agreed that the KNPP could conduct consultations and awareness training in Karenni State, on the topics of democracy, human rights and constitutional issues. The KNPP realises the need for transparency and participation on the part of civilian communities, in order to make progress in the peace process.

Project activities

This project facilitated workshops for the KNPP and Karenni CBOs, planning for community-based monitoring of the ceasefire, and community consultations. The first stage included a two-day workshop with the KNPP in Mae Hong Son (Thailand) in September 2012, to explore the needs and options for community-based mechanisms to monitor the KNPP-government ceasefire. MPSI facilitated the workshop in partnership with a network of 7 Karenni/Kayah CBOs (both 'inside' and 'outside' groups). This was a rare opportunity for KNPP and affiliated border-based CBOs to meet together with CBOs from 'inside' the country. The workshop contributed towards strengthening networks within and between the diverse Karenni community.

The second stage of the project began in January 2013, and included a series of public consultations in Karenni State, eliciting widespread public participation, as well as meetings with CBOs and political parties. The aims of the consultations were for KNPP to inform the public about the ceasefire agreement; to inform people about the KNPP's political position and development plans; to encourage the public to get involved in forming of both Local Monitoring and Human Rights Committees; and to listen to suggestions, needs and concerns in relation to the peace process. The second stage also involved an information-sharing workshop on the Local Monitoring Committee, which was formed as a follow-up activity to the first stage of the project.

In November 2013 the third stage started, under which the KNPP will conduct additional public consultations in three major towns and 20 villages. The KNPP expects at least 20,000 people to participate in the consultations. The third stage will also provide a Training-of-Trainers session, graduates of which will organise an implement awareness-raising workshop, for Karenni communities to enhance their participation in the peace process, and work to protect their rights.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

In April 2013 staff from NPA observed Karenni community consultation meetings, and reported that communities were encouraged to give feedback and comments - but that some people were afraid to share their views in a public forum, because they did not yet fully trust the ceasefire agreement. At the time of the visit, a local monitoring team had been formed with community members from Shadaw, Balake,

Demawso Townships. In order that the local monitoring team remain independent, the KNPP was not directly involved in its formation.

In June 2013 the KNPP submitted a final narrative report, reporting that the consultations had increased the communities' participation - and trust - in the peace process; enabled KNPP to take actions on request from community members; had brought some of these requests into the peace talks at State and Union level; and that the consultations had improved interactions between KNPP, communities and the State Government. The KNPP reported that communities could now travel and work without fear. Two representatives from the Local Monitoring Committee had participated in each of the consultations, and KNPP reported that this has helped to ease villagers' concerns regarding the durability of the ceasefire.

Following a request from communities, the KNPP's Central Committee agreed to reduce its taxes on communities by 50%. Villagers had demanded that a major dam and hydro-power plant and cement factory project, planned for Ywarthit village, should not continue. The villagers feared that the project would result in land-grabbing and environmental problems. The KNPP brought this up with the State Government, and it was decided to suspend the dam project and cement factory project.

'Trust Building for Peace' Conferences

Project area: Lashio and Taunggyi, Shan State

Time-frame: March 2013 and September 2013

Project partners: Working Committee for Trust Building for Peace, with NPA support

Project fund support: \$71,000

Donors: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and British Embassy

MPSI input: - **LOW** – Linking donors and implementing partners

- Enabled leaders and members of ethnic nationalities political parties and Ethnic Armed Groups in Shan State and Kayah State to come together, share opinions and build mutual trust and understanding.

Political context

The Shan and Karenni Trust Building conferences aimed to build mutual understanding among a broad network of ethnic stakeholders, and explore options for political actors to contribute to the peace process, and the creation of a federal union. MPSI played a nimble role in the project, helping to secure funding quickly upon request from the organising committee.

Project activities

In March 2013 a conference was held in Lashio, Shan State, organised by a working committee of ethnic political parties, including the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD, 1990 political party) and KNPP. The conference brought together 235 delegates from 12 political parties, 11 Ethnic Armed Groups and 23 other organisations from Shan and Kayah (Karenni) States, plus some participants from elsewhere (e.g. Mon State). The conference built on a previous Shan stakeholder workshop held in November 2012 (with funding organised by MPSI). Conference participants began the task of working out a common agenda and vision - particularly around the big issues of federalism and the 2008 constitution. The conference also created a platform for Ethnic Armed Groups to interact in a positive manner with political parties and civil society actors, providing a model that could be replicated in other states. Norwegian support granted by NPA included a process of community follow-up after the conference.

In September 2013, a second conference was held in Taunggyi, Shan State. The aim of this conference was to explore how political stakeholders in Shan and Kayah States can collaborate to build a genuine federal union and to build trust in peace and development in their areas. The conference brought together more

than 300 representatives from more than 50 different political parties, society organisations and Ethnic Armed Groups.

Karen District Information-sharing and Planning for Community Development

Project area: Workshops held in Bago, Hpa-an and Lay Wah

Project time-frame: February 2013 to June 2013

Project partners: CIDKP, with FLD and NPA support

Project fund support: \$13,329

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - **HIGH** - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultations, Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Facilitated consultations among KNU, CIDKP and representatives from KNU Districts on community development needs and opportunities under the ceasefire.

Political context

Following the initial KNU ceasefire in January 2012, CIDKP and KORD initiated two pilot projects (Kyauk Kyi and Dawei-Palaw - see above) designed to provide assistance to communities affected by conflict, and to test the peace process. In late 2012 the continuation of the ceasefire process, and the potential to expand and duplicate the pilot projects, was called into question because of KNU internal political tensions. The commitment of the KNU to the peace process was resolved through the KNU Congress of December 2012, and the organisation has resolved to continue, broaden and expand the pilot projects, to reach other conflict-affected Karen communities.

Assistance to conflict-affected Karen communities has thus far been mostly limited to occasional emergency support and small-scale local efforts, which have provided important learnings. Despite aspirations to do more however, CIDKP and KORD have had little opportunity to expand their activities - because of limited capacities, as well as political constraints. In a context of many years of conflict and displacement, there have been very limited efforts by the KNU to begin planning for post-ceasefire development activities. The KNU, CIDKP and KORD now envisage that a new stage of planning can begin, building on the experience of the initial pilot projects. It is recognised that Karen communities in conflict-affected areas need opportunities to come together to share information, identify priority needs and possible project locations, and to consider how communities can best use assistance to help reconstruct their communities.

Project activities

From February 2013 to June 2013 three workshops were held to provide a platform for the KNU and CIDKP (the KNU's relief wing) to consult representatives from the seven KNU Districts about the changes occurring since the ceasefire, and to provide opportunities to begin planning for the process of recovery from conflict, and longer-term community development. The project was facilitated by CIDKP, with support from the Foundation for Local Development and NPA.

The first workshop was held in Bago in February 2013, with 34 participants from KNU Districts 1, 2 and 3. The workshop was attended representatives of the Bago Regional Government and Bago area CBOs. Participants expressed that they and their communities want peace - but they do not yet have confidence that the peace process will be successful. It was reported that the key concern of communities was security - not assistance - and that the communities are asking 'can we trust the ceasefire?' Participants liked the MPSI approach of initiating small projects to test the sincerity of Government and Myanmar Army, KNU and KNLA, and to build confidence between Government and Army and the community. The Kyauk Kyi pilot project was seen as successful because it brought these stakeholders together to solve problems; it built

confidence. The participants revealed that there are now less travel restrictions, which is good for the community, but many outsiders are now entering Karen areas and grabbing land.

In May 2013 a second workshop in Pa'an was attended by 28 people from KNU Districts 4, 6 and 7. The Karen State Government had been invited to the opening ceremony of this workshop. However, it emerged after the opening that the large delegation of State Government officials intended to stay throughout the workshop. This meant that information-sharing among KNU, CIDKP and community representatives was not able to be completed. The mitigating strategy was to adjust the program in order to avoid undermining the relationship with government. As a contingency measure, it was planned to conduct the third planned information-sharing workshop involving all 7 districts in Lay Wah in the border area.

The third workshop was held at the KNU Lay Wah headquarters, in June 2013, attended by 33 people. All seven KNU Districts were invited, but the Taungoo district (Brigade 2) decided not to join the workshop, after its team leader was injured in a motorbike accident. All Districts present at the workshop reported problems with land-grabbing in their areas; participants agreed that these problems could be resolved through application of customary law, with political backing from the KNU. In some Districts, the KNU provides land documents recognizing customary law, but the situation varies from District to District, regarding whether such land documentation is accepted by the government. All Districts reported that they are waiting to learn whether the Code of Conduct negotiated between the Myanmar government and KNU will be implemented, as this is seen as important for dealing with land problems, stability and trust-building. The Districts agreed to develop guide-lines and principles for IDPs return/resettlement program, and are planning to submit a concept paper on humanitarian assistance to CIDKP/KORD.

Ethnic Armed Groups Community Consultations Workshop

Project area: Workshop held in Chiangmai, Thailand

Time-frame: 11-12 September 2013

Project partners: Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) and Ethnic Peace Resources Project

Project fund support: \$9,320

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, funds channelled via NIS.

MPSI input: - **MEDIUM** - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultations, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Facilitated a workshop for CNF, KNPP and NMSP to share experiences from their MPSI-supported community consultations with leaders of other Ethnic Armed Groups and the UNFC, and worked through practical and political issues, identifying community concerns and highlighting important next steps.

Project activities

In September 2013 MPSI convened a workshop in Chiangmai, attended by representatives from a number of Ethnic Armed Groups, including the UNFC, NMSP, CNF, KNPP, KNU, KIO, Pa-oh National Liberation Organisation (PNLO), Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), Lahu Democratic Front, Arakan Army and Arakan National Congress - in total 38 participants. MPSI has supported three Ethnic Armed Groups to undertake community consultations: NMSP, CNF and KNPP. The purpose of the workshop was to bring these groups together with other Ethnic Armed Groups, to share their experiences from the consultations, and work through practical and political issues, identify community concerns and highlight important next steps. The workshop was also an opportunity to share global learning's of community consultations with the Ethnic Armed Groups.

The CNF, KNPP and NMSP presented their observations on the MPSI-supported community consultations, with further substantial contributions made by other groups (including KNU and PNLO). The workshop also included a presentation on comparative case studies from other peace processes and a case study of the

extensive consultation process developed in Mindanao. These presentations were provided by the CPCS in Cambodia.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

The workshop allowed senior and more junior Ethnic Armed Group officers to compare their experiences, to think through issues arising from different community consultations, and to work towards developing best practice in this field. The leaders of the Ethnic Armed Groups identified a number of lessons learned from the community consultations including a need for more consultations and smaller (Village Tract-level) meetings so that more of the people's voices can be heard; better inclusion of CBOs; and a need for local stakeholders - including youth - to be more involved in the peace process. They also identified a need for ceasefire monitoring and discussed the roles, which communities can play in this.

Approach 3: Building trust and confidence, and testing the peace process – Contributing to the foundations of peace and development

Chin Development Agency

Project area: Hakha, Chin State

Time-frame: February 2013

Project partner: FAFO Research Foundation

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - MEDIUM - Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Supported scoping and discussions on peace and development policy and planning needs, in cooperation between the CNF and Chin State Government. Preliminary field trip conducted by FAFO Research Foundation.

Political context

During the early stages of ceasefire negotiations between the Myanmar Government and the CNF, it was agreed in principle that an independent Chin Development Agency would be established. This would involve members of Government, State authorities, Chin civil society and political actors, and the CNF. The proposal was approved by the Chin State Chief Minister.

While the direct impacts of armed conflict are relatively limited in Chin State, this is the poorest state in Myanmar, and it is therefore important for this area to be prioritised for development assistance. In the context of the peace process, the CNF highlighted the need for development and aid to be planned and implemented jointly by key stakeholders, to avoid misunderstandings and prevent conflict, and to provide a model of joint community and environment-friendly development of ethnic areas.

Project activities

The overall goal of the project is to support scoping and discussions relating to the establishment of a Chin Development Agency, and to support a planning process that involves cooperation between the CNF and the Chin State Government, designed to lead to a community-orientated and environmentally friendly development plan. With support from MPSI, two researchers from FAFO Institute carried out a preliminary field-trip to Myanmar and the Chin State capital Hakha in February 2013, and consulted with the CNF, the Chin State Government, community organizations and local research and development experts.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

FAFO proposed a follow-up extensive survey program to determine the needs, limitations and opportunities presented by the difficult physical conditions of Chin State. This was agreed in principle by the Chin State authorities, but implementation was called into question due to the planned launching of

the Joint Peace-building Needs Assessment (JPNA), as donors perceived the potential for overlap between the two approaches. The project is currently 'on-hold' until the JPNA can be launched, which however may be delayed because it is subject to progress with the on-going national ceasefire process.

Mon Education Project

Project area: Thaton, Mawlamyine and Dawei Districts, Mon State and Tanintharyi Region

Time-frame: January 2013 to June 2013

Project partners: Mon National Education Committee, with NPA support and advice from Shalom

Project fund support: \$136,496

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - MEDIUM-HIGH - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultations, Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, Linking donors and implementing partners

- Protected and promoted Mon language and culture through raising public awareness, and facilitating community input into reform of Mon education policy.

Political context

The NMSP has consistently highlighted the importance of education, in its interactions with Government and international actors. During April 2012 talks in Mawlamyine, the NMSP delegation emphasised its commitment to Mon language education – and Minister Aung Min responded warmly and positively. Similar interactions occurred in April 2013, during the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister's visit to Mon and Karen States, when the Mon State Chief Minister (and also the Railways Minister, responsible at Union-level for the Mon peace process) expressed their support for Mon education, in the presence of NMSP and Mon CBOs and political parties, and Norwegian diplomats.

The preservation and reproduction of minority languages is of great concern to ethnic nationality communities in Myanmar, as the military and Government are perceived as implementing a policy of assimilation by imposing majority languages and cultures on minority communities. In this context, a number of Ethnic Armed Groups have developed independent education systems. Among these structures, the Mon National School system provides a model for providing quality education to ethnic minority-populated, conflict-affected areas in Myanmar. Rather than being products of a separatist education system, Mon National School graduates matriculate with Government recognised qualifications, and a full grasp of the Burmese language. This is due to systematic linkages between the locally-implemented Mon education system, and Government schools. The Mon education system therefore represents a model which might be adopted by other communities in the context of the peace process - an education system which is locally owned and inspired, but open to integration with Union structures of service delivery, as the political and peace processes move forward. As such, it offers a model for 'federal' education in Myanmar. The Mon National Schools teach in Mon language at the primary level, allowing easy access to formal education for non-Burmese speaking children. The curriculum shifts towards Burmese at the middle-school level, and is taught entirely in Burmese at high school. All three Mon National High Schools have a semi-formal relationship with a partner Government high school, allowing students to sit Government examinations.

The NMSP and its education Department (the MNEC) have been supporting education in their areas of authority since before the 1995 and 2012 ceasefires. In the past, funding has been sporadic, making it difficult for Mon education authorities to plan for the future. In the context of the peace process, it is very important to support this model of best practice in ethnic education, during a period of rapid but uncertain transition in Myanmar. The Mon education system and related MPSI-supported projects are particularly important from a gender perspective, being among the few initiatives in the peace process led and run by

women (the MNEC Director is the only woman on the NMSP Central Committee, with Mon women in many other key education positions).

Project activities

The first phase of the MPSI-supported project, from January 2013 to June 2013, focused on the development of a Mon education policy and revised curriculum, through a consultative process with communities, NMSP and Myanmar Government. The MNEC conducted eight public consultation workshops to discuss the Mon education system. The consultations had a total of 441 participants (288 males and 153 females) from youth groups, women groups, media, parents, the Mon teachers association, NMSP and monasteries. In March 2013 the MNEC held a Mon Education Seminar which brought together a broad range of stakeholders to discuss the results from the public consultations and to develop a Mon education policy. The stakeholders reached a number of agreements including for NMSP to negotiate with the Mon State Government and the Union Government for recognition of Mon Education and Mon National School, and to build an ethnic leaders' network and conduct an education seminar with all ethnic groups. In October 2013 an MNEC team undertook a nine-day visit to India, where they were exposed to different aspects of mother-tongue and multi-lingual education policy and practice. This visit has inspired Mon educators to further enhance and reform the Mon National School system.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

MNEC reported that communities participated enthusiastically in the discussions and engaged in planning for future education programmes for their communities. By implementing public consultations and the Mon Education Seminar, the MNEC collected varied input on future formal and non-formal education. According to MNEC, the project also helped them to evaluate and further develop their education program.

The second and larger (in terms of funding) phase of MPSI support for Mon education consists of a three-year, almost \$5 million project proposal, aimed at supporting the MNEC and Mon National School system, during a period of uncertainty and transition. This proposal contains several elements, the core of which is support to 800 Mon teachers' salaries and capacity-building. Unfortunately, until now MPSI has been unable to secure funding for the MNEC project - despite one donor having initially shown much interest, only to later disappoint MNEC. The failure to find a donor for the MNEC project illustrates the difficulty of moving from the relatively small-scale (in terms of funding) pilot-type projects described in this document, towards 'scaling up' to bigger peace-support initiatives. Also, the unfortunate experiences with donors has led some Mon educators to perceive the international community as trying to impose its own and/or the Myanmar Government's political and aid agendas without regard to the harm that this may do to the struggle on the part of ethnic communities for a sustainable peace.

Ethnic Peace Resources Project

Project area: All ethnic communities

Time-frame: April 2013 to January 2014 (phase 1)

Project partner: FLD in partnership with DCA

Project fund support: \$236,000

Donors: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs (additional fund support (Gender Component): \$45,500)

MPSI input: MPSI contributions to EPRP differs from other MPSI initiated or supported projects because EPRP's funding, governance and implementation is separate from MPSI. So while MPSI consultants make a significant contribution to EPRP's activities, these contributions come under the governance and funding of EPRP.

- Develops a web-based information resource platform and a series of workshops and seminars for ethnic leaders and in communities around 11 ceasefire Liaison Offices in Karen, Mon, Kayah, Chin, Rakhine, Shan and Kachin (with expansion planned to cover others in second phase).

Political context and MPSI's involvement

This project has been developed out of MPSI's experience of working with ethnic leaders, organisations and communities engaged in the peace process. The EPRP aims to support the needs of leaders and staff of Ethnic Armed Groups, ethnic political parties and civil society organisations, to be well informed and confident to discuss and act on key issues for the peace-process.

Project activities

The project focuses on leadership and ceasefire Liaison Offices of Ethnic Armed Groups and includes four distinct components: the development of a web-based resource platform (www.eprpinformation.org) and three series of workshops and seminars designed for different target groups; providing internet connection and training for internet beginners targeted at ceasefire Liaison Offices, providing resources for use by ceasefire Liaison Offices to help inform the community about the peace process; and a gender-focussed component which explores how to achieve greater representation of women in the peace process and ensure greater acknowledgement of issues of importance to women.

Monitoring, learning and evaluation

As a result of an introductory training workshop with ceasefire Liaison Offices in April, it was agreed with the Working Group for Ethnic Coordination (WGEC) that the proposed workshop series, initially dedicated to NSAG leaders, be re-directed to ceasefire Liaison Office leadership and staff. EPRP's support to ceasefire Liaison Offices has contributed to greater visibility for ceasefire Liaison Offices and increased coordination on support functions. EPRP is working to coordinate implementation of training for ceasefire Liaison Officers with national and international partners, and has been requested to advocate on behalf of ceasefire Liaison Offices' funding needs to donors and other stakeholders.

The first community workshop was conducted from 18-23 July 2013 in Myitkyina (Kachin State), facilitated by the Humanity Institute. The overall objectives were for Kachin civil society groups to understand theories of federalism and decentralizations and be able to identify their goals in this respect, in the context of the May 2013 initial agreement between the KIO and government. Workshop discussions included principles and of politics of ethnicity, regional autonomy and federalism (symmetrical and asymmetrical systems), women's participation in the peace process, and ethnic issues in relation to education. The workshop had a total of 47 participants (male 27, female 20) from 8 Kachin civil society organisations.

In order to disseminate community information material through the ceasefire Liaison Offices, a contract has been signed with The CPCS (in Siem Riep) and planned materials have been identified for utilisation by ceasefire Liaison Offices in their communities. A first training for information dissemination was conducted in Taunggyi (18 participants), to help ceasefire Liaison Offices realise that they are the key point to disseminate information to community, and the need to be creative about how best to provide information to different target groups.

A three-day workshop was conducted on the topic of thinking about political strategy with 24 participants from 8 ethnic political parties on 1-3 August 2013. The overall objective is to equip the parties to be able to think and plan strategically in a political context where they feel side-lined because Ethnic Armed Groups have in some ways 'been given the initiative' through the ceasefire process.

In early October 2013 a four-day workshop was conducted in Mawlamyine on the topic of 'monitoring' with 15 participants from Ethnic Armed Groups and ethnic civil society organisations. The overall objectives were for the participants to understand lessons learned about monitoring from other contexts and to discuss how to provide useful information about monitoring to communities. Nonviolent Peace Force facilitated a two-day discussion on monitoring (what to monitor and different models - who monitors?).

Ceasefire Liaison Offices are often situated in remote locations and most lack Internet connectivity and skills to take advantage of the research and communication potential of ICT. EPRP planned in stage 1 to provide Internet connections to nine identified ceasefire Liaison Offices, to train local ICT trainers. Larger numbers of high-cost Internet connections required at more ceasefire Liaison Offices than predicted caused delays due to the need to allocate available funds equitably. This in turn delayed Internet ToT training, which has nevertheless since commenced.

The EPRP gender advisor started work in June 2013, focusing on reviewing obstacles to women's involvement in EPRP activities (and the peace process more generally), devising strategies to overcome this and developing gender-related materials with a strong presence on the website. Maximising women's participation in community workshops has been a priority. The strategy applied to the Myitkyina workshop was to consult in the planning stage with the host organisation (Humanity Institute), strongly encouraging identification of suitable women participants. The result was that women constituted over 40% of workshop participants. A strategy was devised in advance of the ethnic political parties workshop, suggesting that participating parties could send 2 representatives as long as one was female; without a female participant, only one participant would be accepted. The response was mixed, 7 females participating, out of a total of 24 (29%).

An early conclusion after community consultations in ethnic communities was the need for a series of capacity-building activities for women potentially able to play active roles in the peace process, but who lacked confidence and skills for public meetings and networking. The EPRP gender advisor has observed common cases of misunderstanding of gender perspectives. Often the meaning of 'gender' is difficult to translate or explain in Burmese or local languages, and is often translated as 'women's rights'. A lesson learned has been the need to approach the issue in terms of gender 'roles' and 'fairness' instead.

A second stage of the EPRP project is planned for a further 18 months, and is intended to maintain the focus on ethnic leadership, and relationships between ethnic organisations and community, connecting ceasefire Liaison Offices to internet, and supporting the roles of ceasefire Liaison Offices, with a distinct gender-focussed component. Future EPRP work will include training for ceasefire Liaison Offices on 'sensitive listening', so as to support 'listening' to the community, in order to help give voice to community feelings and feedback about the peace process.

Ceasefire Liaison Offices

Project area: Chin, Karen, Kayah, Shan, and Mon States, and Sagaing, Tanintharyi and Bago Regions

Time-frame: July 2012 to December 2012 (phase 1) and January to December 2013 (phase 2)

Project partner: Euro-Burma Office

Project fund support: \$487,500 (phase 1) and \$1,283,000 (phase 2, indicative sum required)

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MPSI input: - **LOW-MEDIUM** – Linking donors and implementing partners

- Supports Ethnic Armed Groups to establish ceasefire Liaison Offices, and including training of Liaison Officers in responsibilities and approaches, facilitating the implementation of ceasefires.

Political context

The establishment of Liaison Offices is specified in ceasefire agreements between Ethnic Armed Groups and the Myanmar Government. Most Ethnic Armed Groups have sought to establish ceasefire Liaison Offices, currently numbering 31 across Mon, Chin, Karen, Kayah, Shan and Rakhine States, and Sagaing, Tanintharyi and Bago Regions. They are recognised as a critical component of the architecture to support implementation of ceasefires and progress of the peace process. Through ceasefire Liaison Offices, Ethnic

Armed Groups are able to work on the implementation of ceasefire undertakings with Government and Myanmar Army counterparts, *and* to seek to broaden engagement of communities in the peace process. MPSI was involved in the establishment of ceasefire Liaison Offices by mobilising political support and funding, and driving establishment by Ethnic Armed Groups.

Project activities

Since July 2012, funding to establish ceasefire Liaison Offices has been provided by Norway via the Euro-Burma Office (EBO). This has covered the establishment of 16 ceasefire Liaison Offices by seven Ethnic Armed Groups: ALP, CNF, KNU, KNPP, NMSP, RCSS and SSPP. The funding has supported the ceasefire Liaison Offices with rent, staff, equipment and travel and utilities costs. It has also provided basic training on financial management across all ceasefire Liaison Offices, as well as regular information-sharing forums between ceasefire Liaison Offices. The EBO has covered core costs of additional ceasefire Liaison Offices out of its own funding. Some Ethnic Armed Groups continue to fund their own offices.

Monitoring, learning and coordination

Some ceasefire Liaison Offices have started documenting land confiscation cases and other HR violation complaints from local people, and in some cases have initiated political or legal action, in order to address these concerns. The main work of ceasefire Liaison Offices has been to engage with Myanmar Army, in order to avoid confrontations, particularly in relation to troop movements etc. Ceasefire Liaison Offices has also been involved in community consultations (for examples, see above), and meetings with civil society actors, political parties and international interlocutors.

Since establishment of the ceasefire Liaison Offices, MPSI has been involved in several capacities. Liaison Offices are a primary target group of EPRP capacity building activities, including the provision of Internet access to some offices (see above). Ceasefire Liaison Offices have also provided a forum for MPSI-facilitated meetings between Ethnic Armed Groups, Government, civil society, and foreign dignitaries, as in the case of a Norwegian delegation's visit to Mon and Karen States in May 2013. More broadly, ceasefire Liaison Offices provide communication channels that support MPSI projects and guard against threats to the peace. In Kyauk Kyi for instance, ceasefire Liaison Offices have communicated potential security threats to project beneficiaries, enabling MPSI responses via relevant authorities to prevent escalations of hostilities close to the project site.

Working optimally, ceasefire Liaison Offices provide a safeguard, operating as sites where local tensions and miscommunications can be addressed before they escalate into outright confrontation. For example, after a Myanmar Army truck ran over a landmine killing four in East Bago, the KNU ceasefire Liaison Officers stepped in quickly to defuse the situation and undertook a rapid de-mining exercise jointly with the Myanmar Army. Ceasefire Liaison Offices also support improved rule of law and security. In another mid-2012 example, the KNU arrested some thieves near Kyauk Kyi, and through the Liaison Office transferred them to Myanmar Government authorities instead of dispensing their own justice.

Ceasefire Liaison Offices also provide a space to allow dialog between civil society, Government, Ethnic Armed Groups and the international community. In May 2013 for example, a Norwegian Delegation met with the Union Government, the Mon State Government, the NMSP and representatives of Mon civil society in the Mawlamyine ceasefire Liaison Office. Topics such as ethnic education, land-grabbing, and de-mining were discussed openly and frankly between these parties, for the first time outside the context of formal ceasefire negotiations.

As communicated by NRC in several UNHCR Southeast Consultation meetings in 2013, the establishment of the ceasefire Liaison Offices were beneficial to NRC's ID Card programme, facilitating increased access into "black" areas (territory solely administered by ethnic armed groups) as well as guarantees of security for

NRC staff members travelling to these areas with the Ministry of Immigration & Population Officers to implement the ID Card programme. The NRC office in Hpa-An received on numerous occasions faxed requests from the KNU, NMSP and DKBA for this service to be delivered to specific areas. These faxes were then provided to the Ministry of Immigration & Population staff who then took them to the ceasefire Liaison Offices, where guarantees of access were negotiated and agreed. This process has been described as working 'flawlessly' during the course of the ID card project in Karen State.

The PDSG Secretariat provided a co-ordination service to those supporting ceasefire Liaison Offices by way of monthly meetings. The main implementing partners as of October 2013 are EBO, EPRP, the ILO, the MPC, and the CPCS.

External support for core funding of ceasefire Liaison Offices cannot be provided indefinitely. However, there is a strong case to be made for sustained external support to ceasefire Liaison Offices over the course of the peace process. Without external funding a number of risks could materialize. Ethnic Armed Groups seeking to resource their own ceasefire Liaison Offices will likely result in sub-optimal functioning of many of the ceasefire Liaison Offices, and risk their important role being undermined by the pursuit of commercial revenues to maintain and meet running costs.

As of November 2013, funding for 2014 for ceasefire Liaison Offices had not been identified. \$2.5 million would support more than 50 ceasefire Liaison Offices, including new offices expected to be required in Kachin State and elsewhere. If properly supported, ceasefire Liaison Offices may become more active as a conduit to engage local civil society and communities, acting as a focal point to disseminate information about political progress while also collecting community perspectives to inform discussions. Ceasefire Liaison Offices are also likely to play a role in ceasefire monitoring, a function needed to strengthen ceasefire agreements currently facing a deficit of trust and confidence.

Shan Media Training

Project area: Trainings held in Taunggyi, Shan State

Time-frame: June 2013 to May 2014

Project partner: RCSS Peace Committee

Project fund support: \$37,339

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, funds channelled via NIS

MPSI input: - MEDIUM - Supporting local partners to formulate actions and budgets in terms required by funders, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Facilitates a series of basic trainings on media reporting standards for people of the various townships in Shan State.

Political context

After an informal meeting with Government representatives, RCSS and the Myanmar Government signed a ceasefire agreement on 2 December 2011. However, armed clashes have since occurred frequently. RCSS have been concerned about how to provide reliable and timely information to communities, especially as most news received in Shan State comes from outside Shan State (with the exception of one journal (close to Government) published in Taunggyi).

MPSI has been instrumental in securing funding to support a series of basic trainings on media reporting standards, for a network of representatives from all townships in Shan State, coordinated by the RCSS Peace Committee, with support from various media organisations. The aim is to mobilise observers in the community who have received basic media training and enable them to collect and disseminate reliable information among Shan communities. This is a good example of how ceasefire Liaison Offices can engage

with other stakeholders (including civil society and political actors), in order to deepen community support for the peace process.

Project activities

The project will conduct a series of basic media trainings for people from different Townships in Shan State (three 20-day training sessions, at three-monthly intervals). The basic media training sessions will be followed by one 20-day advanced media training for selected trainees. The project will also equip the Taunggyi RCSS training centre with computers, printers, scanners, an LCD projector, cameras and video-cameras.

The first training session was held from 11-30 July 2013 (25 participants, 11 female and 14 male).. Two staff members from the RCSS Taunggyi ceasefire Liaison Office participated as observers. Participants learned basic computer and Internet skills, use of video equipment, and media literacy and citizen journalism. One of the trainers had a Bachelor's degree in Communication and International Journalism (Hong Kong Baptist University) and the other trainers were from Youth Power Media, which based in Chiangmai (Thailand).

The second session was held 2-21 September with 30 participants (12 female and 18 male). The training was expanded during this session to include video production (news shooting and editing) provided by experienced reporters from Tai Freedom media group based in Chiangmai. A third session is planned for December 2013.

KNU Districts Political and Strategic Thinking Workshops

Project area: Two three-day workshops held in Bago Region

Time-frame: September 2013 and October 2013

Project partner: Karen Strategic Studies Group

Project fund support: \$11,100

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, funds channelled via NIS.

MPSI input: - HIGH - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultations, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Conducted two workshops for District/Brigade-level leaders from the KNU/KNLA 3rd and 6th Brigade, on topics such as 'thinking about power' and 'introduction to strategic thinking and strategic planning'. The project grew out of the 'Karen District Information-sharing and Planning for Community Development' meetings.

The workshop was extremely productive, with frank discussion from participants (including many from local Karen civil society groups) regarding how little informed they were about the ceasefire and peace processes. The program focussed on introducing political and strategic thinking in the form of 'trend analysis'. This was followed by a presentation by Saw Htoo Htoo Lay, a key adviser to the KNU's peace process. The conclusion drawn was that there was a pressing need for meeting/workshop activities through which the community (both within the KNU and broader civil society) could be kept better informed about the peace process. The second workshop was planned for October, but postponed because of heightened activity involving the KNU leadership in 'nationwide ceasefire' negotiations.

KNU Economic Policy workshops

Project area: Workshops held in Mae Sot

Time-frame: 30 October 2013 – 1 November 2013; 9-10 December 2013

Project fund support: \$13,000

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs via NIS, with assistance from FLD

MPSI input: - HIGH - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultations, and Linking donors and implementing partners

- Gives KNU leaders an overview of Myanmar's economy and current business environment, and presents them with different options for future economic decision-making, in the context of the newly-formulated KNU Economic Policy.

The two two-day KNU Economic Policy Workshops were facilitated by MPSI, to provide the KNU leadership with economic background information, and give participants opportunities to discuss economic aspects of the peace process, in relation to the newly-formulated KNU economic policy.

Non-technical Survey of Landmines (pilot)

Project area: Eight villages in Ye Township, Mon State

Time-frame: December 2013 to February 2014

Project partner: NPA Mine Action

Project fund support: \$25,000 (indicative sum required)

Donor: Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union

MPSI input: - **LOW-MEDIUM** - Direct facilitation of discussions/consultations

- NPA Implemented a pilot Non-technical Survey (phase I) in the area of Ye Township in Mon State. The survey was conducted in close cooperation with the NMSP in order to determine the extent of the landmine problem in the project area. As a pilot, the project was also carried out in order to test the drafted National Standards for Mine Action in Myanmar, which is currently awaiting approval from the government of Myanmar.

Political context

Myanmar is one of the most landmine-affected countries in the world, but little is known of the extent of the problem. Contamination is estimated to affect more than 5 million people, posing a potential threat to people's lives and livelihoods, the future resettlement of displaced populations (when conditions allow) and the rehabilitation and development of key infrastructure routes. Mine clearance is an issue raised and agreed upon in principles in a number of ceasefire agreements.

Following peace talks with the government, the NMSP expressed an interest in conducting Mine Risk Education activities, and Non-Technical landmine Surveys (NTS) in their areas of control. On 14 May 2013, during the Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Larsen's visit to Mawlamyine, a request for a Non-Technical Survey was communicated. Prior to this, NPA – with the support of MPSI – had already secured the first MoU with the Government for mine action.

Project activities

There is currently little proper overview of the locations of mined areas in Mon State, and no systematic assessment of the landmine situation had taken place at all prior to the pilot NTS (phase I). This implies that for the time being a lot of areas will not be used for farming and other activities, due to the fear of landmines. The project seeks to address this problem by mapping areas contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnances, through a Non-Technical Survey in Mon State, allowing for safe use of land in those areas identified as free of landmines/unexploded ordnances.

NPA has established a team that collect, analyse and present an overview of landmine (and unexploded ordnance) contamination and its socio-economic impact in the project area. The team consists of an international survey coordinator, a Mon national survey team leader and three Mon national survey staff. Training of team members was done in December 2013 and the Non-technical Survey (phase I) was conducted in the period 13 – 27 January in Ye Township, Mon State. This was the first NTS ever to be conducted in Myanmar. A phase II has already been agreed with NMSP, but is pending Government approval. According to schedule, it will commence in March 2014, and will last for three to six weeks, depending on the findings.

Throughout the implementation of the project, time is dedicated to consultations with the Mon State Government, Myanmar Army and NMSP/ Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA). The entire Non-Technical

Survey will be conducted in close coordination with both sides, and it is envisioned that the project will improve stabilization and confidence in the peace process between the Government and the NMSP/MNLA. The population in the concerned villages will directly benefit from the Non-Technical Survey activities through having a better understanding of areas that are safe to use and which areas to avoid. The entire township of Ye has benefited from the project, as the survey activity assisted to open up access to the area. The survey may also be a precondition for future activities as well as other development actions in the project area. However, there are risks that land declared landmine-free may increase in value, thus making it of interest to speculators, and perhaps unscrupulous local power-holders.

ANNEX 2: CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED AREAS

International assistance should look to opportunities to support trust-building, to create 'space' for dialogue between stakeholders, to help empower and build the confidence of local communities as well as meeting the physical, social and economic needs of communities.

It is incumbent on aid agencies and donors working in conflict-affected areas to invest in understanding the context they are operating in, including local political cultures, perceptions (of the context *and* of external aid), and the dynamics of peace and conflict – both in the areas/sites they are seeking to work in and at the level of nation-wide peace process efforts. This understanding needs to be maintained and brought to bear throughout the lifecycle of programmes of support – in timing and in adjusting support to ensure it remains in accordance with the needs of peace and peace processes.

Agencies need to ensure that the investment in understanding the context they are operating in is also put into practice on an operational level, and importantly, is adequately resourced. This includes not only guidance to staff on "conflict sensitivity" and "Do No Harm", but also recruiting project staff who will be able to gain the trust and confidence of local populations. Efforts should be made to ensure staff include people from the target communities. External partners should not be guided by their assistance entailing the 'most efficient' and 'technically correct' approach, but instead the most responsive and appropriate to the context.

Box 11: Overview of Conflict sensitivity / Do No Harm

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the local context (through engaging with local stakeholders, analysing potential sources of conflict as well <i>local capacities for peace</i>;2. Understand the relationship between the proposed interventions and the context (by analysing the suggested intervention and how that impacts the sources of conflict and sources of connections);3. Design strategic programs based on step 1 & 2, that have the ability to adapt and be flexible given changing circumstances on the ground and as such minimizes the chances to do harm and maximizes the chances to <i>do good</i>. |
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This list of 'considerations' for aid partners working in conflict-affected areas – derived from two years of pilot project work by the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative - set out below should help in designing-in trust building interventions that take the local context into account. The list is not exhaustive, but it is hoped it will be useful for those seeking to provide support in conflict-affected areas.

(1) **Does the project have agreement (at least in principle) from Government, Ethnic Armed Groups and communities?**

- o *Has the project been proposed or requested by ethnic group representatives?*
- o *Does it strengthen their ability to support the ceasefire and continuing peace process?*

A key way for stakeholders such as Ethnic Armed Groups to be engaged is through Stakeholder Engagement/Consultations. International principles such as Do No Harm and the New Deal highlight the need for interventions to be shaped by the local context, and to engage with local stakeholders, which is more comprehensive than simply 'informing' stakeholders of the planned intervention.

(2) Does the project build trust and confidence in the ceasefire and peace process through meeting the priority needs and concerns of the conflict-affected communities?

The contexts of conflict-affected communities are unique, with different local histories, experiences, and aspirations. Support should be directed towards reinforcing local resilience, coping strategies and their ways out of crisis.

Ethnic grievances are at the heart of the conflicts - 'top down' approaches are unlikely to be cognizant of or responsive to these grievances, and maybe perceived negatively in communities who have experienced conflict. Grievances can start to be addressed through consultative processes from the bottom-up not through pre-conceived, unilaterally determined 'solutions'. Peace processes will be more sustainable if **locally** driven and owned and supported by affected communities.

(3) Does the project help build the capacity of local actors to articulate and address their needs and concerns?

A key focus of international assistance should be *recognising* local capacity and providing opportunities for local actors to articulate their needs and concerns. This takes time and is resource intensive – both of which need to be accommodated realistically in programmes of support. Included in this is the need for prior and (routine) on-going consultations between the key stakeholders – consultations that provide an opportunity to voice needs and concerns and ensure a full range of views are heard, understood and responded to. To the extent possible, projects should be owned locally and recognise existing local capacity. While local actors may acknowledge the need for capacity building of their organisations, they must be seen as equal partners in fully participatory project processes by national NGOs, INGOs and UN organisations.

There is a need to find flexible ways to achieve accountability when working with CBOs that don't necessarily have the capacity to produce proposals, budgets or narrative and financial reports of the kind demanded by international donors. National NGOs and INGOs can play important roles in bridging this capacity gap with supportive, not dominating, project management and technical support.

(4) Does the project provide practical support to specific, agreed elements of ceasefire/peace agreement implementation?

Where projects support some of the key elements agreed in the ceasefires (many of the ceasefire agreements refer to provision of services, assistance) – they also test the commitment to these elements of the ceasefires and, where commitment can be demonstrated, it can be an important confidence-building measure and indicator of confidence in the peace process. The extent to which support to elements of a ceasefire agreement is '*monitorable*' or '*verifiable*' may also be considered.

(5) Does the project protect the social fabric that connects CBOs to communities? Does the project incorporate safeguards against disempowering, over-whelming or by-passing local stakeholders?

An essential consideration when supporting CBOs should be to protect the *social fabric* which connects these organisations to their communities. This includes 'protecting' their space from an influx of external actors, avoiding over-formalising their structures or networks, and not overburdening them, (which includes offering or providing too much assistance, which may reduce self-reliance or demanding too many formal administrative measures, which may undermine self-confidence. The harmful effects of international actors disempowering, over-whelming or by-passing local stakeholders can be amplified in

conflict-affected areas. Investing time in meaningful consultation for project planning and meaningful partnership in implementation can go some way in reducing these risks.

(6) Have you considered if the project could be planned and implemented through a locally owned CBO consortium approach? – Would this be appropriate?

A locally-owned CBO consortium approach can work well, building trust between conflict-affected communities and Ethnic Armed Groups, and international organisations and donors. There can be significant value in including women's organisations and organisations with a gender-focus in the local consortium, aiding other consortium members to better understand gender-related issues and importance of women's roles and participation in decision-making.

Box 12: Practical tools to help secure accountability in conflict-affected areas

Conflict Sensitive Consortium (2012), How to guide to conflict sensitivity,
(<http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/content/how-guide>)

Helvetas / Swisspeace (2013), Manual: 3 Steps for Working in Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations (WFCS), (https://assets.helvetas.ch/downloads/2013_hsi_manual_3_steps_wfcs.pdf)

CDA – DNH in Land Tenure and Property Rights Programming Tool
([http://www.cdacollaborative.org/publications/search/?as=2&bs=&publisher=&pubTypes=1732&programs=1149-1336-1337-1338-1642-2804&country=0&tags=1151&author=&pubYear=&sort=date -.Uvsw0KSzLB](http://www.cdacollaborative.org/publications/search/?as=2&bs=&publisher=&pubTypes=1732&programs=1149-1336-1337-1338-1642-2804&country=0&tags=1151&author=&pubYear=&sort=date-.Uvsw0KSzLB))

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW RESPONSES FROM MPSI'S LISTENING PROJECT

Summary of findings

The ceasefires and emerging peace process are helping to transform the lives of civilians affected by decades of armed conflict. However, the voices of conflict-affected communities have been largely absent from elite-led discourses around the peace process.

In the second half of 2013, MPSI initiated a light listening project (see annex 3) that sought to capture some voices of communities and groups with a stake in the outcome of Myanmar's peace process. This paper presents the initial findings from the first phase of the listening project. The aim is to listen to Karen, Mon, Shan and Karenni (Kayah) communities and groups - particularly women - to better understand their experiences before and after the ceasefires, and to introduce these narratives into discourse around the peace process.

Initial findings indicate that many people have benefited greatly from preliminary ceasefires between the Government and the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). For example, before the KNU ceasefire, villagers often had to flee from fighting, and to avoid forced conscription and portering. Today people report greatly decreased levels of fear. Many of those who spoke with the MPSI said that for the first time in decades they did not have to worry about fleeing into the jungle, to avoid being subjected to serious human rights abuses.

In some cases, displaced people are beginning to return to previous settlements and attempting to rebuild their lives. Many villagers mentioned that before the ceasefire they were unable to travel or visit their farms – or could only do so by paying bribes. Even then, villagers were severely restricted in terms of the amount of food or other supplies they could carry while travelling, as they risked being accused of supporting insurgent organisations. After the ceasefires however, villagers have been able to travel much more freely and to tend their rice fields. Levels of taxation, paid to the Myanmar Army or Ethnic Armed Groups, have decreased significantly over the past two years. In many communities, livelihoods have improved as a result of villagers' better access to their farms and a reduction in predatory taxation. Villagers greatly appreciate these changes, although they worry whether the ceasefire and emerging peace process can be maintained.

"Since the ceasefire, I can go to my rice fields and weed regularly, so I get more rice for my family," one male Karen villager said. "Now I can also travel freely and, unlike before, sleep out in the rice fields in a hut without having to fear for my life. Now the Myanmar Army still move around but we don't have to fear meeting them." A Karen woman told the MPSI that "our villagers are like ducklings that have been in a cage for so long, and now they are released. They are so pleased to leave their cage! Our villagers are free to travel day and night, and are more busy and productive than before." Communities in Karenni (Kayah) State reported similar changes in their daily lives. "The change is that there is no more threat from military and no more forced portering", one male Karenni villager said.

The ceasefire agreements has also made it possible for ethnic groups to organise community consultations and conferences such as the 'Trust Building for Peace' conferences in Shan State and the Mon National Conference in Mawlamyine. These activities have provided platforms for increased dialogue between Ethnic Armed Groups and political parties, and civil society actors. The people MPSI spoke with said that it would not have been possible to do this in the past.

Despite such positive views, there is widespread anxiety that the Government and Ethnic Armed Groups may fail to reach a political settlement and the peace process may yet break down. One man said, “If the ceasefire breaks down, it’s not worth living for me.” There is a widespread understanding that only substantial political dialogue, and the re-negotiation of state-society relations in Myanmar, can bring about a sustainable and just peace. Villagers expressed a strong commitment to the peace process, and urged their leaders to continue the negotiations. As one (male) Karenni villager said, “People want peace. We all have to come together to support and maintain peace. Only if we try, we can achieve it. If we are afraid, we will get nothing this time.”.

Some of the interviewees were familiar with projects supported by MPSI – community consultations carried out by NMSP, the Mon National Conference, the pilot projects in Karen and Mon IDP areas, the ‘Trust Building for Peace’ conferences in Shan State, and the Mon national school system – but most of the interviewees had never heard of MPSI itself. MPSI regards this as an indicator of success, demonstrating that ‘ownership’ of the projects does not rest with MPSI but with the local partner organisations.

The communities recommended international organisations to support development needs – including basic infrastructure, food security, health care, education support and vocational training – and called for more activities focussing on gender awareness and women’s empowerment. They also encouraged international organisations to put pressure on the Myanmar Government to achieve genuine democracy in order for the ceasefires to last. The focus of the interviews centred around **changes taken place in the last two years** (for communities, this included asking after changes in their daily lives and their present concerns); **confidence, trust and any sensitivities** regarding the ceasefire; (any) **impact of MPSI projects**, and **recommendations** to MPSI and international organisations working to support the peace process in Myanmar.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with members of NMSP, Shan National League for Democracy, MNEC, MWO, Mon National Conference Working Group, Shan Trust Building for Peace Conference Working Group and conflict-affected communities in a) Kyauk Kyi Township, Eastern Bago, b) Kroeng Batoi area in Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region, and c) 12 villages in Karenni (Kayah) State.

The interviews sometimes took place where opportunity arose in the context of other meetings or conferences. Whilst these were accompanied by several trips solely for the purposes of documenting, the breadth of interviews did not seek to be systematic or statistically robust but instead simply to provide insights and further understanding on views held on the peace process and its consequences for daily life where the opportunity arose.

The interviews were conducted in the second half of 2013, and much of the documenting took place at a time where discussions on a nationwide ceasefire agreement were ongoing. MPSI hopes that this material will be of interest to those working in support of peace, and make a modest contribution to better understanding the peace process as understood by local stakeholders, during the latter half of 2013.

A selection of some of the interview responses (not the whole interviews) are set out below. A number of sentiments are shared by different interviewees, where this is the case it is noted. The overview of responses is presented area-by-area.

Interview responses

Changes in the last two years - Changes in daily life and present concerns

MON STATE. September to October 2013.

In Mon areas, interviewees reported that the ceasefire has increased security and freedom of movement for communities, and that severe human rights violation such as torture and extrajudicial killings have ended. After the signing of the new 2012 government-NMSP ceasefire agreement, a Mon National Conference has been held, and the NMSP has conducted community consultations. Stakeholders in Mon-populated areas reported that these activities have helped build trust between NMSP, political parties and communities and improved communities' knowledge of the political changes. One interviewee said that women's social-political status has improved, but did not necessarily see this as a result of the ceasefire. Many interviewees highlighted the importance of the use of Mon ethnic language in Mon schools.

- *"There is an increased feeling of security and freedom of movement [in Mon populated areas in the South-East]"* **Representatives from NMSP, MWO and MNEC**
- *"Trust and confidence has been improved through freedom of movement and right to vote provided by ID cards. Through the consultation work [community consultations conducted by the NMSP], villagers are now content to voice their opinions with the party members. There remains a need to build up political knowledge in communities for their better understanding and participation in the peace process. There have been changes since the 1995 ceasefire agreement. Back then NMSP was not allowed to establish this Dawei District office. At this 2012 ceasefire agreement, NMSP established an office in Dawei that works for the welfare for communities, including long-term plantations which was not possible in the past due to insecurity."* **Dawei District Chairman of NMSP**
- *"Changes in the past two years? Improved relationship with the community due to their better understanding of health issues. Better job opportunities for the community and women's socio-political status and treatment has been improving gradually, but has little, if nothing, to do with the ceasefire"* **Member of MWO**
- *"Early marriage of girls, 15-16 years old still seen in some villages with a huge discouragement on girl's aspirations for higher education or looking for more responsible jobs"* **Members of MNEC and MWO**
- *"Teaching in Mon Language is important because it is the mother language that the child was familiar since while he was in his mother's womb. With this language, it is better to raise him, teach him until he gets to a certain grade so that he can do better at school without language barrier."* **Member of MNEC**
- *"The Mon National Conference itself can be seen as a big change after ceasefire. This kind of conference was impossible before but now we can witness it happening. To include Peace building under team building at school curriculum is under discussion. The idea is to make children familiar with peaceful conflict resolution without violence."* **Member of MNEC**
- *"We enjoy more freedom of movement and increased security. Severe human rights violations such as torture and extrajudicial killings have ended. We want our school upgraded and we want health facilities."* **Villagers from the Kroeng Batoi area, Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region**

KYAUK KYI VILLAGE TRACT, Eastern Bago. October 2013.

Before the KNU ceasefire, villagers often had to flee from fighting, and to avoid forced conscription and portering. Today Karen communities in Kyauk Kyi report greatly decreased levels of fear. Many villagers mentioned that before the ceasefire they were unable to travel or visit their farms – or could only do so by paying bribes. Even then, villagers were severely restricted in terms of the amount of food or other supplies

they could carry while travelling, as they risked being accused of supporting insurgent organisations. After the KNU ceasefire however, villagers have been able to travel much more freely and to tend their rice fields. Levels of taxation, paid to the Myanmar Army or Ethnic Armed Groups, have decreased significantly over the past two years. In many communities, livelihoods have improved as a result of villagers' better access to their farms and a reduction in predatory taxation. Villagers greatly appreciate these changes, although they worry whether the ceasefire and emerging peace process can be maintained.

- *"Now, after the ceasefire, we can live a little better and normal life, and can breathe properly. We hope that it will last."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"Since the ceasefire, I have had a better chance to go to my rice fields and weed regularly, so I got more rice for my family. Now I can also travel freely, and unlike before sleep out in the rice fields in a little hut, without having to fear for my life. Now the Burma Army still move around, but we don't have to fear meeting them. ... Unlike before, now we can visit Kyauk Kyi to buy food and household items, and visit our relatives without permission or harassment. We can stay as long as we want and even go to others villages. It is easy to travel."* **Male villager, 30 years, living in a KNU controlled area of Ker Deh village tract**
- *"Since the recent ceasefire, by the grace of God, we travel freely, and don't have to pay so much money to the Army. We dare to go to work or travel. It's like a blessing door open for us. Therefore, our life is easing from difficulties. It feels better. There is no more forced labour to face again."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"Since we moved back to our village, our village needs to improve education for young generation. We rebuilt our school in 2001-2002 at the entrance of the village and we taught the students. We did it because we love our children. Now our school is recognised by the Government. Our pastor's wife and a knowledgeable villager take care of health problems, but there are so many poison snakes in our area, which is a big problem. We need more educated people and need to develop our village."* **Female villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"Sometimes we had to hide KNU people in the village - but now the Burma Army don't even notice KNU people being around."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"The river was nearby the village, but even so villagers needed to get a written permission letter from Burma Army, before they could go there. Now however, we can travel more freely."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"In the past, villagers had to pay for a permission letter. In order to go to our lands, we needed permission. When they rotated their troops we had to re-pay for a new permission letter again. We always had to pay. We don't have to do that anymore, after the ceasefire."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"Late last year, one man was bitten by a poisonous snake and he was bleeding. There was no one in the village to cure him, so we sent him to in Kyauk Kyi hospital, and they helped him and referred him to a hospital in Naypyidaw. Before the ceasefire, we would not have been able to save him like that."* **Female villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"After ceasefire, our villagers are like ducklings that have been in a cage for so long, and now they are released. They are so pleased to leave their cage! Our villagers are free to travel day and night, and are more busy and productive than before, especially the village headman. In a way, it is difficult to have better relationship between villagers now, because there is less understanding and solidarity with each other. We only think about individual not as a whole village development. Therefore, our Karen leaders, church leaders and villagers need to work together and understand each other more and try hard to get to our goal."* **Female villager from Poe Thaw Su.**
- *"The nearby village moved 3 times, but our village moved 6 times. The more we moved or fled, the less we had left, not even a lid for a pot. Also, we can talk openly like this, because of the ceasefire. We dared not talk like this in the past. We dared not to open our mouth regarding this issue. Now we are scared of nothing."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su.**

- *“In the past our life was like a thief’s, we had to be aware and cautious of meeting our relatives and chatting with them. Now, our life is much better. We travel and work as we like – freely. We feel peace in our hearts. Before the ceasefire, we always had to listen for any dog barking when we went out or around the village. We just waited for any order from Burma Army or bad news. Sometime it was my turn to be a village headman, and while I was working in the field, a messenger would come to get me with lots of demands from the local Burma Army. I just had to follow their orders. So this experience was hard. After the ceasefire, being a village headman, I have less worry and don’t even care anymore when I hear a dog barking. No one will come and demand and order me and harass me. We no longer need to pay any tax. We only give offerings to monks, and church members give to church quota. In the past, we just saved money to give to Burma Army and nothing to spend for our families. The more chickens we bred the better, because it saved trouble for our villagers - because we could give chickens to Burma Army. Now we can eat them ourselves, or sell them.”*

Male villager from Myit Yeh Village

- *“In the two years since the ceasefire, there has been no more portering, forced labour or taxation from either side, and no one asks us any more for our chickens. Therefore, civilians have a better daily life. We are free to travel to our lands and sleep over as long as we want. No one harasses us any more, saying we need written permission to visit our own farms, and letters to show how much food we carry. We civilians are happy and pleased with this ceasefire process.”*

Male villager from Myit Yeh Village

- *“We have had to flee so many times, so now villagers and church members are spread around everywhere near Kyauk Kyi area. Some villagers/church members moved to Done Done, Kyauk Kyi, Hor Ko Gaw, Ya Myo Aung (40 households), refugee camps and abroad. Currently, only a third of our villagers/church member have moved back to our original village (Myet Yeh). For our church and our community activities, it is difficult for us to contact to villagers and church members to participate, because they live all over places. We had to send messages secretly. However, after the ceasefire we can send messages freely. Before the ceasefire, it was very difficult to pay for our annual church membership fee. But the church leaders understand our situation. Now it is easier.”*

Female villager from Myit Yeh

- *“Recently I was talking to a Shan migrant worker in a local betel nut orchard. He called me older brother, and said that in the past no one dared to come to this area, apart from bandits. Now we can come here and work, without needing any permission letter of the Burma Army. I wished that life will get better for us. If it didn’t get better in our area, there is no meaning to live any longer. Better to die.”*

Male villager from Poe Thaw Su.

- *“Before the ceasefire, villagers had to watch the village for Burma Army and porter regularly. We didn’t have many villagers attending the church service, because they were too busy serving the Army. It distracted the service and church activities. It was so difficult to get together and work together. Also food was our concern for every family, because when we had religious guests we villagers put them up at their houses. It was very difficult to share food with guests, because we had to give all our spare food to the Army. No special curries for visiting pastors, it was even hard to offer visitors fishpaste! Now, if we compare before and after the ceasefire, villagers are still poor, but as the situation gets better our villagers can offer more to guests. In the past we had faced many problems, but villagers had courage to get through it together. As the situation gets better, villagers are working hard for their daily life. They have less time to gathering. Everyone is busy with their daily lives and it is difficult to meet up, and it seems that even less people are attending church service. During the fighting time, I’ve seen more people attend church service than nowadays.”*

Female villager from Myit Yeh Village

SHAN STATE. September 2013.

The Shan State 'Trust Building for Peace' conferences were held in Lashio in March 2013 and in Taunggyi in September 2013. In September, MPSI spoke to the General Secretary of Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, who is also the secretary of the working group that organised the conferences. The conferences brought together Ethnic Armed Groups, civil society actors and political parties from Shan, Kayah, Mon, Kachin, Rakhine, Karen and Chin States. The General Secretary said that such conferences would have been impossible to convene in the past, and saw them as a landmark in the peace process by the organising committee.

- *"SNLD's initial plan was to expand the ethnic groups as the number of conferences grows. However, considering the rapid timing of Myanmar's political climate, we felt they did not have much time to wait. Therefore, in the last September conference, although it says Shan, Kayah, Mon States, we invited other ethnic NSAGs and CSO groups from Kachin, Rakhine, Karen, Chin, and those from political parties as well. It was impossible to organize this kind of conferences in the past. However, it is possible now although there are still challenges with local government's full support and collaboration. These conferences serve as a platform, an open space for different groups to be vocal and to discuss their views on trust building for peace."* **U Sai Nyunt Lwin, General Secretary of SNLD and Secretary of the working group for the 'Trust Building for Peace' conferences**

KARENNI (KAYAH) STATE. November 2013.

Before the KNPP ceasefire, villagers were often subjected to forced portering and conscription - by both the Myanmar Army and the KNPP - and often had to pay 'fines' to troops in form of chickens and rice. Before the ceasefire, some of the villagers were forced to safeguard electricity towers during the nights. They no longer have to do this, but are still required to build fences around the towers once a year. Today villagers in Karenni State report that the portering has stopped, and that they no longer feel threatened by the armies. Freedom of movement has improved significantly.

NB The villagers in Karenni (Kayah) State wished to be anonymous. In this document they are referred to as (A), (B) etc.

- *"The change is that there is no more threat from military and no more forced portering. For KNPP, there is no burden from them and no need to provide rice. I can go to Loikaw anytime now. I can go today and come back today even at night. No need to fear. I am allowed to pass freely through the military compound now. No soldier inquires me anything."* **Male villager in Karenni State, 54 years (H)**
- *"The villagers could not go and express freely about what they suffered from fightings between government military and Karenni armed group. People had to obey orders like 'do this, don't do that'. There was no safety in our life and we couldn't work freely for a living. In times of porter, all including students and teachers were arrested to porter. In case of health problem, people could not go to hospital and had to return on the half way due to the fightings. People misunderstood each other and sold untrue stories of others like 'he is a Karenni's hard core' and 'he is from military intelligence', etc. When there was a column of troops in the village, villagers sometimes had to serve as gate-keepers for them. For troops' safety, we had to serve as nightwatchmen. The worst thing people felt was the fear - no matter which groups come, either from military or Karenni side. People do not think that they are human beings like them. They see them as frightening. This has been changed a little bit now."* **Male villager in Karenni State (A)**
- *"Although we were born and live in Kayah State which produces electricity, we don't get electricity until now because there is no peace in our region. But we had to safeguard lamp posts. It has only been 3 years that we don't need to safeguard them. However, we still have to fence electric towers. ... Before, we had to guard the towers at night in a small hut, rain or shine. Now we are not asked to work that much. Just building fences for the towers once a year. Before, if we didn't watch for the towers, the village chiefs would be fined. They [Myanmar Army] asked for chicken. They don't ask anymore now, but we still have to watch for the towers*

and build fences.” Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State (G)

- *“Villagers have a sense of fear automatically when they see soldiers. Being asked to take responsibility for guarding bridge and road and to pay tax poses a burden for widowers who have difficulties. We have been asked for bamboos, and faced with forced labour and forced recruitment by military.” Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State (A)*

Confidence, trust and any sensitivities regarding the ceasefires

MON STATE. September to October 2013.

Villagers in Mon State expressed hope that the ceasefire agreement would last, but also reported that levels of trust and confidence in the peace process - and in the Myanmar Government and Ethnic Armed Groups - are still low, due to the traumatising experiences which villagers have often have been through. Mon stakeholders regarded the ceasefire as a positive step, but not sufficient in itself. Political dialogue and self-determination, and respect for human and political rights, including community participation in decision-making, were seen as crucial in achieving long-lasting peace.

- *“Levels of trust and confidence in the peace process are still low due to what we have come through before. There are many villagers who are severely traumatized and cannot trust either the Myanmar Government and ethnic party.” Villager from the Kroeng Batoi area, Yebyu Township, Tanintharyi Region*
- *“We have witnessed change and are now more hopeful about the ceasefire. However, ceasefire alone is not peace. For true peace, there is a need to proceed for political dialogue, self-determination rights, and consultations with communities and participation.” Dawei District Chairman of NMSP*
- *“Government offered to build three primary schools and sending teachers in the project target areas, but no negotiations with MNEC yet – it is seen as an attempt to impose the government system on ethnic communities.” Yebu District Chairman of NMSP*
- *“To promote Mon Culture and language is very important. Myanmar has so many cultures and ethnic people. If the government restrict these various cultures and languages, it is impossible to build peace in this country. To have equal rights among ethnic groups is crucial. It takes time and there is a need to analyse and work towards achieving those rights progressively in a patient manner.” Member of MNEC*

KYAUK KYI VILLAGE TRACT, EASTERN BAGO. October 2013.

Most villagers in Kyauk Kyi expressed concerns regarding the durability of the ceasefire agreement and feared that it might break down. Most of the villagers MPSI spoke with do not yet dare to trust the ceasefire - or other ceasefires in the country - and some of them were still scared of the Myanmar Army. One of the villagers said that “some villagers are still worried about the future and frightened of what will happen to them, so they don’t see the value in working for development of their village. It is a trauma for them, like a long-term disease.”

- *“We are still scared of them [the Myanmar Army] because they base quite near us and if we meet them along the road we are still nervous, as we cannot speak their language [Burmese]. ... We hope that the ceasefire will last longer and that we will have an opportunity to rebuild our original Keh Der village. We villagers are so happy that we can go back and work on our paddy fields, which have become overgrown, and we want a school and clinic in our village. ... Currently, when we pass the Burma Army check point, we need to tell them our names, where we come from and where we are going. We worry that the ceasefire will break, because Burma Army has sent more troops up to KNU 5th Brigade area (in the hills to the East). We are concerned about security and don’t want to face any more difficulties. We only want to have a better life.” Male*

villager, 30 years, living in a KNU controlled area of Ker Deh village tract

- *"Our village fled 3 times - in 1965, 1992 and 2005. We have our own village history, which we would like to preserve both in Burmese and Karen language."* **Female villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"We are not sure how long this ceasefire will last. We worry that it will break down. If the ceasefire breaks down, I can't bear to go as porter of the Burma Army again. I was a porter one hot season, it was so exhausting that I nearly died. So I had no more energy to do it again."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"The two governments [Myanmar Government and KNU] need to have good understanding. This should be a true ceasefire, and if so we will be pleased. If the ceasefire breaks down, the situation could be worse than before, and meaningless for me to continue to live."* **Male villager from Poe Thaw Su**
- *"We didn't have a permanent village headman, because no one wanted to take the blame and violence from Burma Army which goes along with that job. Villagers had to take it in turn to be villager headman monthly. We just wished our duty would be over quickly. Until now, even after the ceasefire, our village does not have permanent village headman. We rotate it monthly."* **Male villager from Myet Yeh village**
- *"Some villagers are still worried about the future and frightened of what will happen to them, so they don't see the value in working for development of their village. It is a trauma for them, like a long-term disease."* **Male villager from Myet Yeh Village**
- *"I still worry about the situation because I hear about the news in Kachin land. I told my children to be aware and not to go out at night with a torchlight [in order not to be seen]. Burmans are tricky. This peace may not last. We have to be careful."* **Female villager from Myet Yeh village**

KARENNI (KAYAH) STATE. November 2013.

The Karenni communities MPSI spoke with expressed a strong commitment to the peace process in Karenni (Kayah) State. They urged the conflicting parties to continue peace negotiations in a transparent and accountable manner, and also highlighted the need for community participation in the process. A woman explained that the electricity had been shut off in her village and that the villagers didn't know why this happened, or how to ask to get it back. "We don't have any rights", she said. A village headman talked about the need for reconciliation: "One side is fighters and another is farmers. From my point of view as a village administrator, it is necessary to reconcile and re-integrate these people from different backgrounds. We have to give training to the fighters and then let them live together. Otherwise, some of them would not be able to get rid of their past behaviour of jungle."

- *"If we accept military when they come, Karenni threaten us. If we accept Karenni, military beat us. We faced this because there's no peace in our village. If there's peace, it wouldn't happen. People want peace. We all have to come together to support and maintain peace. Only if we try, we can achieve it. If we are afraid, we will get nothing this time. We need to present and urge on the table. Don't be afraid of both military and Karenni. What happened in the past is needed to be forgotten. Only thinking forward and doing better is necessary."* **Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State (B)**
- *"When KNPP came to shoot my father, both my mother, Daw Than Yin, and me got injured and my mother was on her back. Therefore, I don't like any war. Peace is the only good result for all. That's why I pray that peace, that all people want, can be attained soon."* **Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State (C)**
- *"There was one time that our village got electricity. I don't know what reason and for whom, but it was shut off. We don't have any rights. We don't know how to analyse the situation. Though we would like to get it back now, we don't know if we have the right to ask. We don't know where and how to ask for it. We feel that our villagers should be informed about the reason for shutting off the electricity."* **Female villager in**

Karenni (Kayah) State (D)

- *“From this time forward, peaceful Karenni State could be established through transparent, peaceful negotiated solution.” Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State (D)*
- *“Now they are in peace negotiation, whatever it’s good. Either from Karenni side or Government side, both sides should be clear with each other. What I want to say is that we were in the middle of two sides before, so we want them not to fight each other. We, the villagers, suffer from being in-between the two sides. We have to try hard for Karenni State. Now we can live peacefully when peace talk is holding.” Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State (F)*
- *“The soldiers object many things. If there is peace, hopefully, there will be a lot of benefits for Karenni people and ethnic nationalities.” Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State, 54 years (H)*
- *“I want to talk about it for a long time. I have to deal with both military soldiers and Karenni soldiers because I am a village administrator. When they come to the village, they first come to see the village administrator like me. KNPP even tried to kill me. There was a time that I couldn’t even come close to my house. I couldn’t stay without dealing with the military. On the other side, the military beat me up when dealing with KNPP. The situation is that I am able to come back to the village only when there is peace. ... In the past, it was very terrible when KNPLF [Karenni National People’s Liberation Front] came back. When KNPLF reached peace agreement, we thought we could rely on them. But they couldn’t remove communist ideology out of their mind and they are worse. In the past, when there were fighting near the villages, we, village administrators, were beaten without any reason. We were beaten and asked who came to shoot and if we knew where Karenni soldiers were. If we didn’t know, they beat us. So terrible. This KNPLF group couldn’t abandon their behaviour of the jungle. ... If KNPP come back with peace agreement, what I would like is to have a time interval because there are Karenni soldiers who have been fighting for over 60 years and there are the people who have been suffering from civil war. One side is fighters and another is farmers. From my point of view as a village administrator, it is necessary to reconcile and re-integrate these people from different backgrounds. We have to give training to the fighters and then, let them live together. Otherwise, some of them would not be able to get rid of their past behaviour of jungle. This is important. ... As for me, I can forgive both government and KNPP for what they have done during the time there was no peace. If they forgive us and we forgive them, I think there will be mutual understanding and the development of our state, nationality and region will be done further.” Village chairman, male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State, 60 years.*

Impact (if any) of MPSI projects

MON STATE. September to October 2013.

Interviewees in Mon State reported that the pilot project in Kroeng Batoi, and especially the establishment of water systems, had been received with much gratitude from villagers. The interviewees recognised the link between the project and the ceasefire agreement – that the villages had been chosen because they have been affected by conflict. The community consultations had helped raise communities’ understanding of the peace process and improve the capacity of the NMSP according to interviewees.

- *“The established water system has received much gratitude from the villagers, however we are not aware of the donor agency [Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs] or MPSI. [In Kroeng Batoi Area], we recognise that the pilot project is clearly linked to the ceasefire process and that we have been chosen because they have been affected by conflict in the past. Frequent visits of foreigners and staffs of international organisations [MPSI, NPA, and ILO] to the area, has, we believe, also contributed to trust and confidence building in the ceasefire process.” Villagers from Kroend Batoi*
- *“The Mon National Conference is the result of the series of consultations we had over the past year from consultation projects. From these consultations, we observed the huge threat of drug issues in Mon State.*

Before, we focused on tracking, capturing and punishing people who committed in the act of drug related issues. But now as a follow up activity, we are now focusing on the preventive measure such as training and awareness raising about drug abuse together with trainers from AHRN.” NMSP

- *“Through the consultation work [community consultations conducted by the New Mon State Party], villagers are now content to voice their opinions with the party members. There remains a need to build up political knowledge in communities for their better understanding and participation in the peace process.” Dawei District Chairman of NMSP*
- *“Peace process requires participation from everyone including ordinary people from communities. To raise their understanding and knowledge about what’s going on, the peace process, political climate, and instruments, etc. so that they can participate with valid and meaningful judgement. The capacity of NMSP staff had increased from the experience of MPSI support projects. This project allowed our capacity development as we experienced the project.” International Relations and Project coordinator of NMSP*

KYAUK KYI VILLAGE TRACT, EASTERN BAGO. October 2013.

Very few of the villagers had heard about MPSI – which MPSI regards as an indicator of success, demonstrating that ‘ownership’ does not rest with MPSI but with the local partner organisations. One interviewee had heard about the project and said that the consultation meetings between the KNU, the Myanmar Army and the villagers had helped strengthen the ceasefire.

- *“I have heard about the MPSI pilot project. It is very useful. Villagers received food and tools and household support. We fled so many times in the past and could not carry all of our belongings. We are happy to receive support and hope that in the future we can stand on our feet. The MPSI pilot project is good and support the ceasefire by making it easier to travel, and to visit our rice fields. I helped organized the distribution, and prepared villagers to help with carrying loads. We appreciate how this project supports the ceasefire by organizing meeting between villagers, KNU and Burma Army. They discuss and share things between them.” Male villager, 30 years, living in a KNU controlled area of Ker Deh village tract*

SHAN STATE. September 2013.

The Secretary of the working group of the ‘Trust Building for Peace Conferences’ said that the conferences had helped to bring together different stakeholders and enabled them to reach agreements and build relationships.

- *“This conference, with support from Norwegian People’s Aid [MPSI associated funds], has conveyed positive impacts. Different political parties, non state armed groups will get good contacts and have informal discussions during their breakfast, lunch and dinner times since they all are staying at the same hotel during the conference. Some might perhaps also get some agreements and plans just in between to proceed without having to announce others. This is also one of the intentions to provide a space for different parties to express, share, discuss, and dialogue between or among the parties themselves both formally and informally.” U Sai Nyunt Lwin, General Secretary of SNLD and Secretary of the working group for the ‘Trust Building for Peace’ conferences*

Recommendations to MPSI and other international organisations working to support peace in Myanmar

MON STATE. September to October 2013.

Stakeholders in Mon State called for faster and more efficient aid delivery, and more activities focussing on gender awareness and women’s empowerment.

- *“Faster and more efficient aid delivery and more comprehensive coverage of the target community. More programmes to encourage and support unity for Mon people. For example, the current project [Kroeng Batoi pilot project] covers only 30% of the needed area. The other 70% with more needs are not covered. It would be great if project assistance should get to ground on a timely manner and at the more needed place.” Dawei District Chairman of NMSP.* NB: The proposal for the second stage of the Kroeng Batoi pilot project is being developed. The project area will be expanded to cover five additional villages, with a greater focus on locally appropriate infrastructure development, community mobilising trainings and livelihood support.
- *“Less talking, more action. Gender awareness training on women and girl children. More support for small local CSOs.” Member of MNEC*
- *“Plan for women empowerment to address the male-dominated society” Member of MWO*

KYAUK KYI VILLAGE TRACT, EASTERN BAGO. October 2013.

Villagers in Kyauk Kyi expressed a need for international organisations to support basic infrastructure, food security, health care, education support and vocational training. They also encouraged international organisations to put pressure on the Myanmar Government to achieve genuine democracy in order for the ceasefire to last.

- *“Currently, we don’t have hospital, we can only sometimes buy medicine, and sometimes we get it from the KNU and backpackers [cross-border aid organisation] We need a school too, as we don’t want our children to travel too far for education. We want to build better houses and live in harmony. There are so many needs in our village, such as water for houses and rice fields, to be able to grow more vegetables for our family etc. We have no toilet, and no electricity either.” Male villager, 30 years, living in a KNU controlled area of Ker Deh village tract*
- *“We wish and hope that we will have peace. Perhaps the two Governments [Myanmar Government and KNU] may not be able to solve the problem, but international organisations can give pressure and help the Government to have real democracy - so that we civilians can live and enjoy a better life. Otherwise, the ceasefire might last only for short time. If the fighting break out again, then it will be worse than before. The civilians faced difficulty so long and too much already. We can’t survive any longer.” Male villager from Myet Yeh village*

KARENNI (KAYAH) STATE. November 2013.

Karenni communities encouraged the international community to support development needs in Karenni State including educational needs.

- *“I would like to ask from international community to mainly support educational needs of our poor children whose parents couldn’t support their school fees. We have a lot of clever children, but they have to quit their school because their parents couldn’t support them. There are also many children who are left behind and couldn’t continue their education after high school due to financial and other difficulties. Every village in Kayah State has this problem.” Male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State, 46 years*
- *“What I would like to tell international community is that our country is very poor. Kayah State, which is situated in the far-flung corner, is poorer. Therefore, I would like to say that we need a lot of international assistance to develop our community.” Village chairman, male villager in Karenni (Kayah) State, 60 years.*

ANNEX 4: INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF MPSI – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In his inaugural speech in March 2011 President Thein Sein declared a political and economic reform agenda based on fundamental rights of citizens. Apart from beginning reconciliation with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the release of hundreds of political prisoners, he made the **peace process with armed ethnic groups** (EAGs) a top priority during his first year. Minister U Aung Min was appointed Chief Negotiator and began a series of negotiations with the EAGs. By April 2012, ceasefires had been signed with all the major groups except the Kachin.

At the beginning of 2012, President Thein Sein requested the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs to help mobilise international support for the peace process. In positively responding to this request the Norwegian government took a considerable political risk that no other international actor was able or willing to take at this time. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided that Norway would launch a light and flexible initiative that would test the sincerity of all parties to the agreements being made. To this end, Norway engaged Charles Petrie, the former UN Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Representative in Myanmar from 2003 until December 2007, when he was declared persona non grata by the Myanmar government. His being allowed back by the government sent a signal of political change and willingness to re-engage with the international community.

The **Myanmar Peace Support Initiative** (MPSI) resulted from these decisions and was always envisaged as a short-term mechanism to provide support to the ceasefires and the broader peace process until other structures could take over. It was neither a donor nor an implementer but a means to create links between parties that previously either were in direct conflict or simply had little access to each other.

An underlying principle of MPSI was to be responsive to the situation on the ground and its consultants did not propose projects themselves but rather assisted EAGs in their formulation and development. Though often small in size, the projects were all in politically strategic locations, designed to test the commitment of all parties to the ceasefires and to the safe opening of access to previously unreachable communities. The first pilot project was in **Kyauk Kyi**, one of the so-called “black areas” where the state had not had control for a long time, if ever, and where external actors had hardly any access. The location was suggested by the KNU and agreed upon by the Myanmar government and army. The project provided a platform for an unprecedented degree of engagement and communication between different stakeholders and was considered a breakthrough by all sides.

As the peace process slowly moved forward, MPSI recognised the need to become involved in **longer-term support**, including state level consultations, building the capacity of ethnic actors to engage with the peace process, and finding ways to make voices from the ground heard by those in power – be they government or donors. Some of its consultants also came to fulfil a substantial role as the secretariat for the **Peace Donor Support Group** (PDSG), which had been requested by President Thein Sein in mid-2012. Last but not least, it fulfilled an important role of analysis of key issues for the peace process.

The **key strength of MPSI** has been in the deep knowledge of Myanmar held by core members of the team, and the trust and relationships built over the many years they have worked in the country, combined with the status and access that was brought by Charles Petrie. This basic strength of personnel was combined with a flexible mode of operation that encouraged creativity and allowed MPSI to take political and operational risks. In this it had some important successes, using its influence to create links and make breakthroughs on the ground. It also had two vital partnerships: that of the Nordic International Support Foundation (which administered the MPSI), and that of Norwegian People’s Aid (to which Norway had given a budget specifically to implement MPSI related projects). Without these it could not have functioned.

MPSI also had several **weaknesses**. Its strategy for growth was sometimes unclear and it lacked operational management, especially as it began to grow. This was most evident in the failure to appoint a permanent coordinator in Yangon until 2013. It also failed to develop a clear communications and outreach strategy, and did not adequately share either its purpose or its analysis. Lastly, it proved a challenge to get other donors more consistently involved, which resulted in difficulties in securing funding for projects. Inevitably, working at a time of change and with a government that few people were yet prepared to trust, MPSI attracted **criticism**, especially from organisations based along the border with Thailand. Some of this could have been avoided with a better communications strategy, but some was an unavoidable part of operating in a highly contested situation.

These problems notwithstanding, **the conclusion of the review is that MPSI was clearly the right initiative at the right time**. Its extreme flexibility and the knowledge and access its core team brought enabled it to open access to closed areas and to build trust between previously warring parties. The task of support, however, is not over. While MPSI, as a temporary and very loosely structured initiative, needs to phase out it is important that the functions it has performed are not lost. The peace process remains fragile and is by no means irreversible. Although the situation with the military has improved and many groups report a feeling of greater confidence, trust in the Myanmar Army still remains a problem, and some areas are still seeing active conflict. Any failure to initiate ceasefire monitoring or to begin substantial political talks would raise serious questions about the future of the peace process. New **risks** are also arising. Inter-communal violence has the potential to destabilise the country. The census in March/April 2014 will inevitably be a cause of tension given the relationship between political rights and issues of ethnic and religious identity. Pre-electoral dynamics will be a further source of tension, shifting the discourse from one of consensus seeking to one of competition, and the results of the elections (due in late 2015) may well make the cause of peace in ethnic areas harder to advance. Not surprisingly, ethnic leaders feel their best chance of peace is now.

The government of Myanmar aims to sign the National Ceasefire Accord by April, although the final text is not yet agreed, and then begin an inclusive **political dialogue**. While this is unlikely to be completed in the time remaining before election campaigns start, it is vital that it reaches a point where the movement towards peace will be hard to reverse. The dialogue will trigger the need for international support for all parties and this support will have to be given in a situation where the UN is still not a trusted actor, and thus the usual coordination mechanisms will be missing. The current fragmented nature of the approach to conflict in Myanmar is also a problem, and donors need an over-arching framework that brings these into a comprehensive strategy based on the fundamental rights of all the country's citizens. In this, a successor of MPSI could play a valuable part.

Recommendations

Looking back: learning from MPSI and recommendations for any future efforts to support the early stages of a peace process

- The lesson from MPSI is that bringing together in-depth country expertise, relationships of trust with key actors, and individuals who have political access - both to donors and government - is vital. Without this it will not be possible to gain traction.
- A good delivery mechanism is critical - in this respect the partnership with NPA and NIS was a crucial element of the MPSI and a similar arrangement should be part of any future initiative.
- While an initial short timeframe makes sense in the early months, when the team is testing whether anything is even possible, working on three to six month commitments is counter-productive. A two-year timeframe would be more realistic.

- The overall idea of an initiative that is light and flexible is fundamentally right but some structure is required. It is important to quickly get a full time focal point in-country, and for that person to have responsibility for the operational management of the programme.
- If projects are to be part of the overall strategy, the team needs sufficient expertise to take this forward and funding mechanisms need to be put in place for both immediate needs and longer term programme development. A multi donor mechanism is unlikely to be useful at the beginning as it takes too long to set up but would probably be needed longer-term.
- In any contested situation a clear communications strategy, and the means to implement it, is vital.
- It is important to develop partnerships on as many levels as possible. This is time consuming, but without it resistance is likely to be generated.

Looking forward: recommendations for support to the Myanmar peace process

There is a need to develop a clear strategy for the transition of MPSI into other mechanisms and to have a communications plan around this. Plans should be made for the next two years, after which a new political situation will require another review of support mechanisms.

PDSG Secretariat

- Establish a clear sense of ownership of the secretariat by the PDSG itself and a shared vision of its purpose and roles before funding a large secretariat. Care should be taken to ensure that the secretariat does not usurp what should be the role of the government and Myanmar Peace Center.
- Roles of the future secretariat potentially include:
 - Support to the PDSG in its political, financial and technical coordination of donor support.
 - Consideration of analysis, lessons learned and insights from existing projects and programmes and how these should inform future donor funding.
 - Exploring a model for setting up a joint fund to create more certainty that projects identified get financial support.
 - Specific working groups to look at particular issues, as with the current coordination of support to liaison offices. An up-coming issue could be technical and financial support to the political dialogue.

Preserving independent analysis capacity:

- Some form of ‘think tank’ would be the best way to maintain the independent analysis provided by the MPSI. The exact model for this should be explored through a feasibility study, enabling a range of opinions to be canvassed, the most appropriate structure and mandate to be decided, and the beginnings of partnerships explored.
- Such a body should be a local institution – in the sense that it would be based in Yangon and accountable to Myanmar-based actors.
- It could start off small with just a few full time staff, a small number of core advisers and a small budget to commission research and related activities.
- It is important, given the contested nature of the environment, that it develops a strong communications strategy and has an outreach and partnerships policy.

Responsibility for continued support to projects

- The immediate priority is to ensure funding for existing project commitments. If necessary, Norway should be prepared to be funder of the last resort.
- A plan needs to be developed for support to the liaison offices and the Ethnic Peace Resources Project.
- There is the need to develop and resource a plan for the 'roll out' of projects to support the peace process. In this, some form of multi donor mechanism should be considered.
- Finally, support will be needed for some time for ethnic communities that are part of pilot areas to enable them to continue to engage with international actors.