

Paung Ku: “Leading from behind”

Phase 2 Evaluation report

January 2013

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Authors' details

The End of Phase 2 Paung Ku evaluation report was prepared by Ms Susan Garner, Ms Lucia Nass, U Khin Maung Lwin and Daw Moe Moe.

List of acronyms and terms

Acronym	Term
ALG	Advisory and Learning Group
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBO	Community based organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DFiD	Department for International Development
FDT	Foreign Direct Investment
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
LNGO	Local Non-Government Organisation
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
PK	Paung Ku
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SEM	Socially Engaged Monastic schools and / Spirit in Education Movement
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference

Executive summary

Background and context

Paung Ku is a civil society strengthening initiative, which became operational in 2007. It is run by a consortium of international and local development organisations, but is currently transitioning to independence. At the commencement of Phase 2, Myanmar witnessed major political change – a new government, a new era which was accepting of the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in building the nation, reform and poverty reduction ie and with the policy commitment of the Myanmar Government. By the end 2012, civil society in Myanmar still had many challenges to deal with and barriers to effective social change, including on-going conflict and ethnic unrest, concerns related to (ir)responsible investment, arrest of activists, lack of essential services, lack of livelihoods and poverty. It was within this context and understanding that the evaluation of Phase 2 of Paung Ku was undertaken.

Evaluation activity objectives, components and key results

The focus of this evaluation was the end of phase 2, covering the 3 year period from January 2010 to December 2012. The objective of the evaluation was to:

- assess Paung Ku’s achievements against four Phase 2 objectives:
 1. **Build Capacity** of civil society organisations (to be, do and relate)
 2. **Improve Practice** in consortium members and the international development community
 3. **Facilitate Networking** for learning, sharing and influencing wider change
 4. **Enhance Advocacy** of civil society with policy actors
- assess achievements against AusAID evaluation criteria
- evaluate the impact of Paung Ku civil society strengthening activities
- gather the lessons learned from Phase 2.

Using an overall developmental evaluation approach, the evaluation components and activities included:

- qualitative methods of evaluation case study and appreciative inquiry for in-country consultations between 23 November – 3 December 2012 with Paung Ku community based partner organisations based in Yangon, Mandalay, Shan, Karen and Delta regions
- a review of relevant Paung Ku documents, reports and program information, and
- interviews of Paung Ku board members, members of the (former) Advisory and Learning Group; and Paung Ku senior management staff.

Results of consultations are documented in a stand-alone Case Study report at Appendix B.

Brief outline of evaluation findings

Phase 2 of Paung Ku was a period of rapid political and social change in Myanmar. Paung Ku was also transitioning to an independent organisation, especially during 2012 in which Paung Ku placed a greater strategic focus on its networking and advocacy objectives than in previous years. This move in terms of strategic focus was in response to concomitant changes occurring in civil society over the

period. Overall the evaluation found significant achievements in terms of the capacity building, networking and advocacy objectives of Phase 2. For a range of reasons Objective 2 was not realised, but nor was this objective well-resourced or supported during this period of transition in Paung Ku.

Brief outline of lessons and recommendations

The key lesson learned from the evaluation of Phase 2 is that Paung Ku has evolved to be a dynamic and respected player in civil society strengthening in Myanmar, and in many ways beyond the expectations of a small project. Adopting an innovative and responsive approach to Myanmar civil society strengthening activities was the core of its inspirational success.

A further lesson from Phase 2 is that civil society groups play a far greater role than just service delivery for example by building social capital, influencing policy and supporting just and inclusive participatory processes. At the beginning of Phase 2, Paung Ku set out to understand and support these other roles of civil society groups. This lesson is also relevant to shaping the direction of Paung Ku into Phase 3 while building upon its achievements in strengthening civil society in Myanmar through its core activities. It was also evident in Phase 2 that Paung Ku aimed to support the consortium members and other agencies in strengthening their ability to work with local organisations. While Objective 2 was not fully realised in Phase 2 there were key lessons from this experience that can inform how Paung Ku will work with the international development community, its partners and donors in Phase 3. Key stakeholders consulted for the evaluation were strongly supportive of Paung Ku overall. However, a number of key areas were mentioned as requiring attention or needing improvement which related to both strategic and operational aspects of Paung Ku across objectives 1 and 2 in particular.

Recommendations for Paung Ku in Phase 3 relate to: consolidating and articulating Paung Ku strategic focus; making Paung Ku values more explicit: facilitating external learning activities about CSO strengthening; supporting CSO access to small grant funds, including through other funding sources; strengthening the Paung Ku mentoring resource; advising the international development community on civil society strengthening approaches, and adoption of a developmental and systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation.

Evaluation Criteria Ratings	Rating (1-6)
Relevance	6
Effectiveness	5
Sustainability	4
Efficiency	5
Innovation and adaptation	5
Gender Equality	4
Coverage	5
Analysis & Learning	5
Monitoring & Evaluation	4

Recommendations

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: There are a lot of important issues that civil society organisations want to work on in Myanmar. Paung Ku has begun to ‘cluster’ issues so that capacity building, networking and advocacy support can be strategically organised. Paung Ku should actively pursue this path of gaining strategic focus, so that the widest and deepest possible change can be facilitated.

Recommendation 2: Paung Ku has developed high quality learning papers regarding its capacity building practice. Less obvious are the underlying values systems for issues based civil society strengthening, such as not taking sides in conflict, environmental protection and organics, rights based analysis, and gender equality. It is recommended that Paung Ku makes such values explicit.

Recommendation 3: Practice learning has been organised in a fairly centralised and internal manner (with the exception of the mentor network some time ago). As Paung Ku transitions to an NGO with strong local partners such as Metta, Ecodev and Shalom, Paung Ku might consider initiating decentralised learning on CSO strengthening, by involving other Myanmar NGOs in its reflective team meetings, e.g. as is currently done quarterly with the external mentors in the Delta.

Recommendation 4: Paung Ku remains largely invisible to many in the international development community in Myanmar, as well as to the general public. Paung Ku may consider publishing CSO achievements for the general public as well as for the Myanmar development community to increase the ‘inspirational impact’ of emerging CSO action for nation building. A more active Facebook page in both English and Myanmar could help to publish CSO achievements more widely.

Recommendation 5: Paung Ku deeply understands the importance of building capacity from the grassroots up, including through small grants with which communities can begin to achieve and to organise. There was some concern that Paung Ku is moving away from this important work. It is recommended that Paung Ku keeps responding to requests for support for small community initiatives, directly as well as indirectly via stronger CSOs that wish to play such a capacity building role. This requires Paung Ku to maintain or even expand the small community capacity building grant program.

Recommendation 6: There are various initiatives by international development agencies to design CSO funds (e.g. Social Fund, and Women’s Advancement Fund) and Paung Ku has been involved with the design of these funds. It is recommended that Paung Ku strategically facilitate access for emerging community based organisations to these and other small grants funds.

Recommendation 7: The mentor resource will remain valuable for community groups and civil society networks even as they mature. External mentors are interested to further develop their capacities, especially in the area of issue based networking and advocacy. Paung Ku might consider facilitating a process in which mentors can be enabled to network, enhance their capacity, and make their (fee based) services directly available to community and civil society organisations.

Recommendation 8: Paung Ku has not been very effective in influencing the practice of the international development community. It adopts a “leading from behind” approach, i.e. enabling CSOs to influence the design of development programs. While this is certainly important from a civil society strengthening perspective, it does not provide the international community with insights into

how to engage with Myanmar civil society. Considering Paung Ku expertise in Myanmar civil society strengthening, it is recommended that Paung Ku directly advise (for a fee) the international development community on how to effectively and strategically engage civil society in Myanmar. To do this effectively, Paung Ku needs to dedicate staff time, and appoint and develop a “lead advisor” to serve as the contact person for the international community. The international advisor might play a useful role in building this advisory capacity in a selected group of Paung Ku senior staff.

Recommendation 9: The adoption of a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation of Paung Ku in Phase 3 is recommended to provide the type of data and information that can guide future program implementation, evaluation, priority setting and decision making. The development of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework against Phase 3 objectives and outcomes will lay the foundations for future monitoring and evaluation activities that can build upon the M&E work undertaken by Paung Ku to date.

Introduction and background

Origins of Paung Ku

Paung Ku started as an idea in 2005 that became operational in 2007; by 2008 Paung Ku was playing a major role in the response to Cyclone Nargis.

The last year of Phase 1 (2007-2009) was dedicated to consolidation of the initiative with over three hundred and fifty projects funded, over two hundred thousand beneficiaries, almost one hundred groups being mentored along with the beginning of a number of consortium learning and donor advocacy initiatives.

Meanwhile the regular Paung Ku program continued to respond to proposals across the rest of the country supporting over thirty community development projects.

Paung Ku emerged in Myanmar in 2005 as a type of 'experiment' with INGOs who were keen to support civil society development that could truly build 'grass roots capacity' in response to local community need.

Background and context for the implementation of Paung Ku Phase 2

The background leading up to the time Paung Ku became operational is important to acknowledge; as well as the key issues emerging in Myanmar over the period and by the end of Phase 2. Around 1995, International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs) were first allowed into the country, but at that time they could only operate a humanitarian agenda. Some community led development was gradually supported by early innovators such as Swissaid which had strong connections with Spirit in Education Movement (SEM) (now an international Paung Ku partner), and young local NGOs such as Metta (now a Paung Ku consortium member). Metta was among the very first local NGOs to be officially recognised in Myanmar. In 2005 there was a shift in thinking among the INGOs which up to that time had worked for change from outside the country: the sanctions were not working, a silent humanitarian crisis was deepening inside Myanmar, and this called for support from within the country. Organisations like OXFAM and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) Paung Ku consortium members which have a strong profile in civil society strengthening established operations in Myanmar.

In 2008 Cyclone Nargis sparked the emergence of a multitude of CSOs and Myanmar NGOs and opened the door for more INGOs and capacity development funding. The Myanmar Government increasingly accepted the role of NGOs and developed registration law.

INGOs felt the lack of local development expertise and capacity, and invested heavily in staff capacity development. The Capacity Building Initiative, also an INGO consortium initiative, grew fast. Local NGOs also faced a growth spurt e.g. Metta growing from 100 to over 500 staff in a relatively short period of time.

At the commencement of Phase 2 in 2010 Myanmar witnessed major political change – a new government, a new era which was accepting of the role of CSOs in building the nation, reform and poverty reduction (ie and with policy commitment of the Myanmar Government). The response to Cyclone Giri showed more coordination and/or cooperation by the Myanmar Government in the

relief and rehabilitation effort compared with the Nargis response. And Paung Ku contributed significantly to this.

A week after the first elections in 20 years, at the end of 2010 Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest. In March 2011, civilian President Thein Sein was sworn in. In his first year in office there was a gradual release of many political prisoners and passage of a law that allowed peaceful demonstration. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed to the Myanmar chair in 2014, and the international community began to consider lifting some of the sanctions.

During by-elections in April 2012 “Daw Suu” secured a seat in Parliament. Although parts of the country, most notably Kachin State remain in conflict, many sanctions have been lifted and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) interests in the country are growing. The media covered serious debates, e.g. about the political prisoner release and the government salary increase, and there was more transparency, e.g. about the debt to China. In August 2012 media censorship was abolished although strict laws remain in place. By this time NGOs began to explore advocacy roles for civil society most notably around land rights.

Throughout Phase 2, and as Paung Ku moves into Phase 3, it is important to acknowledge that while many positive changes have occurred politically and socially, that civil society in Myanmar still has many challenges to deal with, and barriers to effective social change, including on-going conflict and ethnic unrest, concerns related to (ir)responsible investment, arrest of activists, lack of essential services, lack of livelihoods and poverty. It is within this context and understanding that the evaluation of Phase 2 of Paung Ku has been undertaken.

Paung Ku Phase 2 Evaluation team

The evaluation team comprises Susan Garner, Lucia Nass, Khin Maung Lwin and Moe Moe:

- Ms Susan Garner is a monitoring and evaluation specialist in the social, health and human services areas, including for programs focussing on social and economic disadvantage, access to essential services, and poverty. Susan has over 25 years’ experience in the field covering design, implementation and evaluation of complex social policies and programs.
- Ms Lucia Nass has over 25 years’ experience with strengthening civil society organisations and change facilitators, 3 years of which was from a home base in Myanmar. She has designed, implemented and evaluated various large scale capacity development programs, including nationwide decentralisation processes.
- U Khin Maung Lwin is an experienced facilitator/evaluator with different INGOs and LNGOs in Myanmar. He is also a trainer and facilitator for capacity building on programming (i.e. Project Cycle Management, Monitoring & Evaluation, Social Mobilization, PRA, etc.) and emergency response in cross-cultural settings including quality and accountability. He has over 12 years of M&E and program/project management experience across multiple sectors.
- Daw Moe Moe has worked for 7 years with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) including as facilitator in the field. She has experience in baseline assessment, final evaluation of CBO projects, and midterm evaluation of livelihood and capacity building projects.

Evaluation approach and methods used to evaluate Paung Ku Phase 2

To evaluate Paung Ku certainly was not a straightforward task. Given the complex nature of Paung Ku, overall a developmental evaluation approach was adopted for Phase 2 which encompassed:

- qualitative methods of case study evaluation and appreciative inquiry for in-country consultations between 23 November – 3 December 2012 with Paung Ku community based partner organisations based in Yangon, Mandalay, Shan, Karen and Delta regions
- a review of relevant Paung Ku documents, reports and program information, and
- interviews of Paung Ku board members, members of the (former) Advisory and Learning Group; and Paung Ku senior management staff.

Developmental evaluation

According to Michael Quinn Patton,

‘Developmental evaluation supports innovation development to guide adaption to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments’ (Patton, M Q, 2010).

Using a developmental approach to the evaluation of Paung Ku enabled the flexibility to deal with the range of complex aspects of the program. A number of methods of inquiry are recommended for when a developmental evaluation approach is adopted including: appreciative inquiry; success case method; most significant change; systems thinking / approaches; outcome mapping; and action research.

Following meetings of the evaluation team, briefing sessions with Paung Ku and consultations with Board and Reference Group members on 23 November 2012, the evaluation team agreed that **case study evaluation** and **appreciative inquiry** were the most suitable and feasible for this evaluation and within the time frames allowed.

Theory of change

Theory of change (ToC) is a way to describe how a program, initiative, strategy or reform process achieves change. For a complex and evolving program like Paung Yu the theory of change was not easy to formulate. The capacity building, networking, advocacy and partner practice elements of Paung Ku, in terms of their importance, relationships and interdependence to each other means that Paung Ku combines a number of different program ‘archetypes’ that are described in the evaluation literature (Funnell and Rogers, 2011). The approach and methods employed for the evaluation were based on the ToC developed for the evaluation plan (see Appendix A); providing a sound theoretical basis to underpin the evaluation.

Case study evaluation

Case study evaluation is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a ‘real life’ context. It is research based inclusive of different methods and is evidenced based” (Simons H 2009:21). A case study evaluation approach was preferred given the need to understand complex social change mechanisms and the factors leading to change in Myanmar.

Appreciative inquiry interview techniques

Much has been written in the research literature about appreciative inquiry as a method for organisational change, community development and evaluation¹. Appreciative inquiry as an interview technique was preferred to a more typical problem solving approach used in many evaluation studies. Appreciative inquiry enabled the evaluation team to explore possibilities including what has worked and not worked and why. It was also a more culturally appropriate way to consult with Myanmar communities and enable simple translation processes to be adopted.

Analysis and synthesis of data and information

Existing data and information collected by Paung Ku as part of its work provided other valuable material on which to report on the outcomes of Phase 2. These along with the data and information collected during the consultations undertaken during the in-country field work were reviewed to assess Paung Ku against the Terms of Reference² for the evaluation. In this way, both qualitative and quantitative data and information informed the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Key evaluation questions

Evaluation questions were developed for all evaluation criteria. The final list developed for the evaluation plan is provided in Appendix A p 43-46.

Strengths and limitations of the evaluation approach and methods used

The developmental evaluation approach and methods adopted to evaluate Paung Ku Phase 2 were chosen to provide the greatest validity possible given the complexity of the program and the timeframes and budget to conduct the evaluation. However, these methods are not without their limitations. For example, evaluation case study and appreciative inquiry were used for the consultations with organisations and people for the in-country field trips. The strength was it allowed in-depth conversations about Paung Ku across each of Phase 2 objectives. On the other hand the limitation of qualitative approaches such as these is that they cannot claim to be a comprehensive analysis of all of Paung Ku activities or necessarily generalizable across all CSOs and regions in Myanmar. Nor could a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of different types of capacity building approaches funded by Paung Ku be undertaken using this approach. Nevertheless the in-depth approach to the consultations enabled an overall assessment of the effectiveness of Paung Ku activities against the objectives.

The consultations with diverse stakeholder groups using these methods generated very useful information about the range of activities and issues that Paung Ku has supported, and certainly common themes were evident from an analysis of this information. In-depth analysis of a small but representative sample of different capacity building projects could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the small grants program, but this would have been both time consuming and resource intensive to do as part of this evaluation. Other evaluation methods, such a network analysis, outcome mapping and others using quantitative data associated with the small grants program, may have complemented and strengthened the methods used for this evaluation. While not possible to do within the timeframes and budget, such methods have potential for future monitoring and evaluation activities supported through Paung Ku (see page 25, 26).

¹ <http://www.atlc.org/members/resources/ai1.html>; <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm>

² For further information about the evaluation terms of reference and methods see Appendix A

Key findings of the evaluation of Paung Ku Phase 2

Findings against Phase 2 Objectives

Paung Ku is now at the end of Phase 2 (2010-2012). Paung Ku's four key objectives in Phase 2 were to:

1. **Build Capacity** of civil society organisations (to be, do and relate)
2. **Improve Practice** in the consortium members and the international development community
3. **Facilitate Networking** for learning, sharing and influencing wider change
4. **Enhance Advocacy** of civil society with policy actors

These objectives and the activities undertaken by Paung Ku during Phase 2 are the focus of this evaluation. The evaluation involved field trips to the Mandalay and Delta regions, as well as consultations in Yangon with representatives from various organisations with experience of Paung Ku during Phase 2³. The number of community based partner organisations consulted during the in-country visit for the purpose of the evaluation was 42; and the total number of individuals consulted was 121, excluding Paung Ku and AusAID (see Appendix A Table 6, p 53).

To assess what Paung Ku had achieved during Phase 2, the evaluation team was guided by key evaluation questions developed against AusAID required evaluation criteria (see Appendix A p 43-46).

The report illustrates through use of practical examples and case studies the significant achievements of Paung Ku in a relatively short space of time since it became operational in 2007.

These case studies are the stories of Myanmar community leaders and their fellow citizens who have been involved in various community development and advocacy activities with Paung Ku. These stories demonstrated that Myanmar civil society is in many ways at the cross roads of significant changes in terms of social and political change and nation building. The stories have informed and helped the evaluation team to understand how important it is that civil society strengthening continues in Myanmar. Appendix B provides an account of the stories that have informed the evaluation of Phase 2.

What has Paung Ku achieved during Phase 2?

This section of the report is a synthesis of the key findings about Paung Ku's achievements against its core objectives, based on various case studies documented during the in-country visit to Myanmar to conduct the evaluation. This largely qualitative approach was adopted to provide the necessary depth in which to assess Paung Ku achievements against its core objectives.

³ Note CSO / CBO representatives from Shan and Karen states travelled to Yangon and Mandalay be part of the evaluation consultations

In terms of Paung Ku's achievements against its core objectives the evaluation found:

Objective 1: *Build Capacity of civil society organisations (to be, do and relate)*

- The small project grant capacity building activities of Paung Ku were well supported and highly appreciated by civil society organisations in Myanmar.
- The evaluation confirmed that the combination of small grants and mentoring were the core elements of Paung Ku capacity building efforts during Phase 2.
- Accessing small project grants was significant to many community groups. Those involved in community activities committed a lot of their time and energy to building their own capacity, and this was felt as a burden worth carrying.
- The shift during Phase 2 from development grants to issues based capacity building projects was understood by community based organisations, but in some cases Paung Ku had not necessarily communicated this change well or in a timely way to communities wishing to access small project grant funds.
- The key benefit of Paung Ku was not the small grant per se, but how this facilitated learning about cooperation and collaboration in the community, and about gaining access to training and other resources to achieve community goals and to deal with any issues they were confronting.
- During Phase 2 Paung Ku's training and networking events continued to be considered important for strengthening community organisations. Paung Ku focussed on downward accountability of civil society groups to their communities and constituency. Reflection on this experience has driven Paung Ku to become more accountable and transparent to the organisations it works with.
- In terms of the capacity building activities Paung Ku has achieved significant spread and coverage across different regions in Myanmar (see Appendix C); however, community groups consulted for the evaluation from remote regions believed that special attention was required to enable capacity building activities to be effectively delivered by Paung Ku for isolated communities.
- There was a strong message from civil society for Paung Ku to maintain strong grass roots involvement with communities on the specific and local issues facing them.
- An empirical measurement of capacity building through the small grants program was not possible for this evaluation, but ongoing monitoring and small project grant evaluations would be useful to measure capacity building effectiveness for future evaluation activities.

Objective 2: *Improve Practice* in consortium members and the broader international development community

- Phase 2 Objective 2 was a broad, ambitious, possibly unrealistic and under resourced objective of Phase 2.
- The interest of consortium members in Paung Ku as a place to learn about grassroots capacity building dwindled over time. Turnover of board members, i.e. directors of INGOs in the consortium was reported as one of the contributing factors.
- The Paung Ku board members consulted for the evaluation suggested that the Board did not function as a governance board or have time to deal with Paung Ku intensively. This necessarily meant that the Board could not provide an effective mechanism for Paung Ku to improve practice in the international development community.
- While the role and size of the Paung Ku board changed or evolved into its present form during Phase 2, staff of consortium members were intended to play a key role in mentoring as part of the Paung Ku small grants program for community development and capacity building. For a number of reasons, this approach to mentoring through the Paung Ku consortium members did not work. In light of this Paung Ku staff needed to work with communities itself to unpack the challenges they were facing.
- The Advisory Learning Group (ALG) which was composed of senior staff of Paung Ku consortium members had the dual purpose to learn from Paung Ku and to advise on the development of its capacity building practice i.e. mentoring. ALG members consulted for the evaluation said they recalled learning much from the early mentoring experience with Paung Ku, before mentoring became impossible to combine with their own INGO project duties.
- ALG members also reported to have played an active role in linking community groups with Paung Ku mentors and the small grants. There was also evidence of international NGOs linking community organisation with Paung Ku for grants and mentoring.
- Phase 2 was characterised by significant changes in the country but with many challenges remaining across the various regions in Myanmar that Paung Ku works with (see background and context on page 8-9). Paung Ku positioned itself in Phase 2 to respond as flexibly as possible to civil society development needs by focussing much needed attention on its other 3 core objectives.
- Paung Ku's evolving focus during Phase 2, especially in terms of a stronger networking and advocacy orientation, during a period where consortium members were less interested or involved, is also likely to have influenced Paung Ku's ability to achieve against Objective 2 in the way originally intended.
- The international development community was also changing during Phase 2, with the prospect of new international players being involved in broader development

activities, including funding of public services and larger grant programs.

- Half of the consortium members and the wider international community interviewed for the evaluation made assumptions about the current work of Paung Ku as too bold and immature. But the views presented by 42 civil society organisations consulted for the evaluation confirm that Paung Ku was careful and thoughtful in its approach to working with civil society. The evaluation found the perception of the international community that Paung Ku was associated with overtly political action may have further blocked learning from Paung Ku.
- During Phase 2 Paung Ku conducted and developed a number of key learning papers as part of improving practice with consortium members and the international development community. Key examples including mentoring, strengthening civil society and reflections on the response to Cyclone Giri.

Objective 3: *Facilitate Networking* for learning, sharing and influencing wider change

- Based upon the range of CSOs consulted for the evaluation, Paung Ku's engagement with civil society by the end of Phase 2 spanned well established CSOs and nascent community based organisations across a broad range of issues facing Myanmar society including networking for local and regional issues.
- Paung Ku's role as a facilitator and influencer of change was recognised and valued by those whom we consulted for the evaluation. This facilitating role enabled civil society to lead and direct their activities with support from Paung Ku.
- The Paung Ku's focus on learning, sharing and influencing wider change through networking was seen by those we consulted as making a significant contribution to strengthening civil society in Myanmar.
- Engaging in learning from their activities, doing research and gaining access to technical expertise and information about certain issues were mentioned by all groups consulted for the evaluation as particularly important contributions of Paung Ku. Through networking many CBOs had joined first with just a few and then ten or more other CBOs in a very short space of time.
- During Phase 2 the objective for networking developed from a common articulation of *linking/sharing information* and *resources/learning/joint action* to include *creating a voice / platform* for advocacy.
- Many of the advocacy results would not be possible without informal networking e.g. farmers, CSOs, NGO Food Security Working Group, and media networked on providing inputs to the land law.
- The land rights issue was raised on numerous occasions, including during consultations in Yangon, Mandalay and the Delta regions. Paung Ku provided information and resources, access to legal advice and council, and through

networking and advocacy, substantial support to various CSOs and CBOs on this particular issue. The full resolution of this issue will take time, but CSOs consulted for the evaluation reported that some land had been returned to them and further action was being taken through the Parliament and the courts to regain land or for obtaining proper compensation.

Objective 4: *Enhance Advocacy of civil society with policy actors*

- The advocacy enhancing role of Paung Ku, as with networking, is well supported and appreciated by the civil society organisations consulted for this evaluation
- Like networking, advocacy is integral to Paung Ku's other objectives to build community capacity. Before the commencement of Phase 2 in 2010, advocacy was mainly about community groups engaging with local authorities to obtain permission for their activities.
- During Phase 2, Paung Ku's focus gradually shifted to community groups engaging with a broader set of issues. Paung Ku also recognised a multitude of civil society actors beyond community groups, such as media, artists and public opinion leaders.
- By the end of Phase 2, the advocacy objective of Paung Ku was a major area of innovation that sought to achieve practice, policy and attitudinal change by enabling 'movements' around a wide variety of social e.g. peace and development in Rakhine and Kachin States, and land rights, economic e.g. Dawei deep seaport and economic zone environmental issues e.g. pollution from gold mining and by facilitating the involvement of multiple stakeholders.
- The range of activities reported as undertaken by Paung Ku with civil society in terms of involvement of the media, facilitating communication with policy actors, and supporting high profile advocacy events, demonstrated that the advocacy and networking objectives of Paung Ku are strongly inter-related in practice.
- A number of high profile issues have been raised through the media by CSO's that received facilitation services and capacity grants from Paung Ku during Phase 2. This was part of Paung Ku's support to CSO's advocating with policy actors such as government authorities, parliamentarians, and public opinion leaders to instigate change. While the examples varied communities took the lead, Paung Ku support consisted of process facilitation.
- The advocacy role of Paung Ku is the least understood objective of Phase 2 and perceived to involve the most risk. This risk relates to achieving a balance between Paung Ku enhancing the advocacy activities of civil society and being perceived as driving its own advocacy agenda. The evaluation found that overall this balance was achieved in favour of the former; but the perceived risk of the latter needs to be well managed into the future.

Evaluating Paung Ku achievements in Phase 2 against AusAID evaluation criteria

The definitions and scope of AusAID evaluation criteria that were applied are provided in Appendix A page 43.

Relevance

The core objectives of capacity building (Objective #1), networking (Objective #3) and advocacy (Objective #4) and associated activities undertaken, remained relevant and appropriate over the period, allowing Paung Ku to respond to grass root issues within Myanmar communities in a volatile period in Myanmar's social and political history.

Myanmar community members and leaders consulted for the evaluation stressed the importance of Paung Ku to their community capacity building efforts and the real value of Paung Ku, "like a spider in the web", maintaining a strong grass roots connection on the issues civil society is currently grappling with in Myanmar.

Development of civil society is at a significant point in time in Myanmar. While Paung Ku objectives have changed since it began in 2007 this reflects in part the rapid pace of change in Myanmar civil society,

"We define Paung Ku as the mandated organisation for civil society strengthening. No other understands civil society like they do." (Ex-ALG member, senior INGO staff, November 2012)

Paung's response to meeting the needs of civil society, the number of major events, including natural disasters, and various civil society movements across Myanmar society over the period.

Objective (#2) and associated activities concerning 'partner practice' changed in response to the decreased level of involvement and interest of consortium partners in Paung Ku, and the role and functioning of the Board during Phase 2: the push towards independence. The nature of partner engagement is expected to change radically in Phase 3, although the relevance of this type of objective for Paung Ku is debated.

The continuing relevance of these objectives and associated activities to the international development community, including government development partners, like AusAID, and International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs), was a key finding of this evaluation. Board members who were consulted for the evaluation noted the difficulties associated with Objective 2 in terms of maintaining active involvement and engagement of consortium partners throughout Phase 2. This reflects less on the relevance of this objective to Paung Ku, than the reality of time pressures e.g. inflexible scope and deliverables of projects consortium members are under in their varied roles in Myanmar.

As the major donor to Paung Ku since 2007, AusAID has provided both continuity of (in effect) core funding over the period, and the flexible foundation from which Paung Ku has been able to facilitate and strengthen civil society development in a unique and highly responsive way. While AusAID has

other programs and funding in mind in Myanmar, the relevance of maintaining a focus on civil society strengthening is apparent in the draft 2012 Myanmar AusAID Country Strategy.

Australia will continue to support civil society strengthening in Myanmar. This will help to ensure that engagement with the Government is balanced by strengthening the capacity of the Myanmar people to hold the Government to account, and will be of increasing importance as Myanmar moves towards a more representative democracy.

AusAID Myanmar Country Strategy (draft 2012)

The type of civil society strengthening activities that Paung Ku is undertaking should be seen as complementary to other existing or proposed activities funded by international donors including AusAID and / or other consortium or donor organisations. As presented in other parts of this report, Myanmar civil society has many challenges in nation building, including gaining access to much needed essential services, such as health and education. Many other challenges remain despite recent political changes nationally, and include ongoing conflict, (ir)responsible development and arrest of activists.

However, independent civil society action is critical, and Paung Ku supports this. Donors including AusAID can benefit from well informed and well prepared civil society organisations that are representative of their membership. CSO engagement with the national agenda is as important and valuable as their participation in INGO donor programs. While Paung Ku should certainly support the latter, the longer term difference will be made by the former.

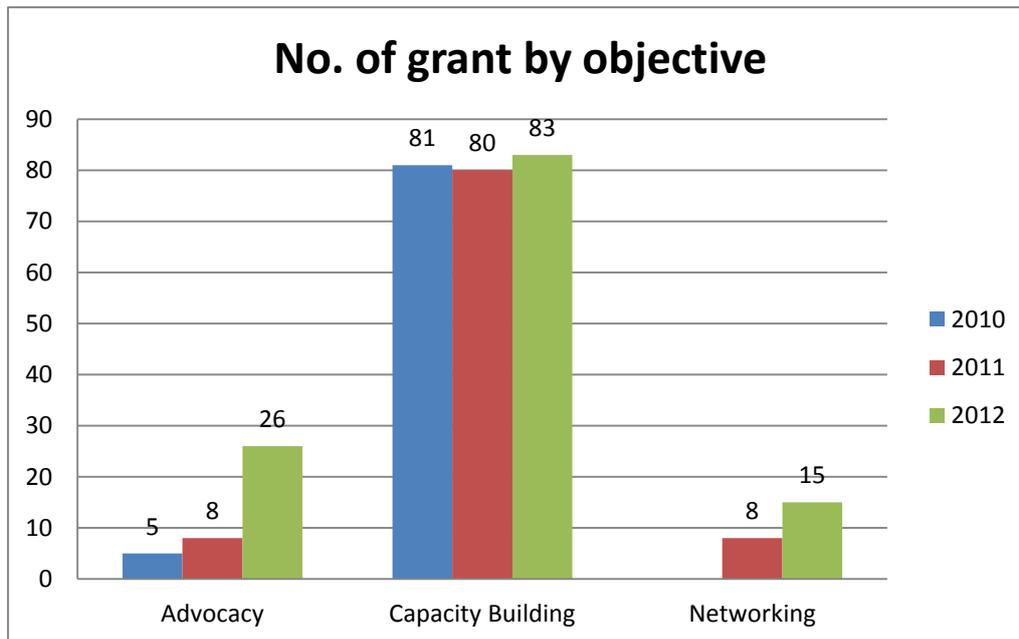
Paung Ku therefore could work in a complementary way with other programs and donor organisations to continue to build community, network and advocacy capacity using small grants funded specifically for this purpose.

Rating: 6/6

Effectiveness

The way Paung Ku's Phase 2 core objectives (#1, 3, & 4) were achieved over the period, are outlined in the findings above and substantiated by the evaluation case study report in Appendix B. The range of activities undertaken under each objective contributed to these achievements and has positioned Paung Ku to move beyond the project phase to developing the case for becoming an independent registered NGO.

In terms of the number of small grants funded over Phase 2, the majority were for capacity building activities. The following graph (Source: Paung Ku, November, 2013) demonstrates that in 2012 in particular that more funds were provided for advocacy and networking compared to previous years in Phase 2.



This evaluation has used primarily qualitative methods; providing an in-depth approach to assess overall effectiveness of Paung Ku against its 4 key objectives. However qualitative methods have limitations in terms of providing empirical measures of effectiveness and comparative effectiveness.

Paung Ku's activities could potentially be measured to assess effectiveness, including comparative analysis of different approaches to capacity building, for example for the small grants program, and other civil society development and strengthening activities. However, these activities are not straightforward to measure quantitatively without more sophisticated and expensive data collection and analysis methods than was possible for this evaluation.

Also, as noted earlier, Objective #2 particularly in relation to INGO⁴ learning from mentoring, was not fully realised during Phase 2 for a number of reasons, including:

- changing interests and level of involvement of INGO consortium members
- under-resourcing of this objective over the period
- changes in the structure and role of the Board
- level of staffing in Paung Ku and external pressures to deliver activities to beneficiaries against all Phase 2 Objectives.

For Phase 3, Objective #2 has since been subsumed into the other objectives of Paung Ku. The organisational arrangements for Paung Ku during Phase 3 will necessitate the establishment of different governance arrangements and relationships to new partner and donor organisations. At the same time, it will be useful to continue the reflective learning activities adopted by Paung Ku in Phase 2 to engage new partners and donor organisations in these processes during Phase 3 (see page 25 below on criterion Analysis and Learning).

⁴ Local NGOs were not interviewed as part of the evaluation

It will also be important to establish sound governance arrangements and processes for Paung Ku as an independent NGO. This will increase the effectiveness of the management of Paung Ku through sound reporting and accountability arrangements to a new Board.

Rating: 5/6

Sustainability

Paung Ku has provided significant benefits to civil society and arguably beyond what was originally envisaged at the commencement of Paung Ku Phase 2 in 2010.

There is momentum in Myanmar civil society for change and nation building. Paung Ku has contributed to these developments and importantly is seen and trusted by community and civil society organisations as a major facilitator and catalyst for change into the future. Community support for Paung Ku is therefore a key factor in its sustainability and transition to an independent NGO.

However, the sustainability of the Paung Ku model and transition to an independent NGO in Phase 3 now hinges more upon having sustained funding in the coming years. Civil society in Myanmar cannot yet bear the burden of funding an organisation like Paung Ku, so external, international funding sources will remain important in the years to come.

AusAID has been the main funder of Paung Ku since 2007, and certainly has provided not only the greatest financial support for the small grants program, but also the flexibility needed for Paung Ku to operate effectively. This type of core funding is increasingly difficult to obtain. As an independent organisation, Paung Ku would need to secure alternative sources of core funding through its partnering arrangements and potential new country partners on a new Board. Therefore new and existing consortium members and donors will need to support Paung Ku financially for it to be sustained in the event Australian Government funding was to cease or bridging funds provided.

AusAID core funding has been critical to Paung Ku and its achievements in strengthening civil society in Myanmar. For the outcomes and impacts of Paung Ku to be sustained requires a flexible funding model. Without this type of flexible funding Paung Ku's ability to respond effectively and responsively to civil society will be seriously hampered and will undermine Paung Ku's progress and sustainability into the future.

Rating: 4/6

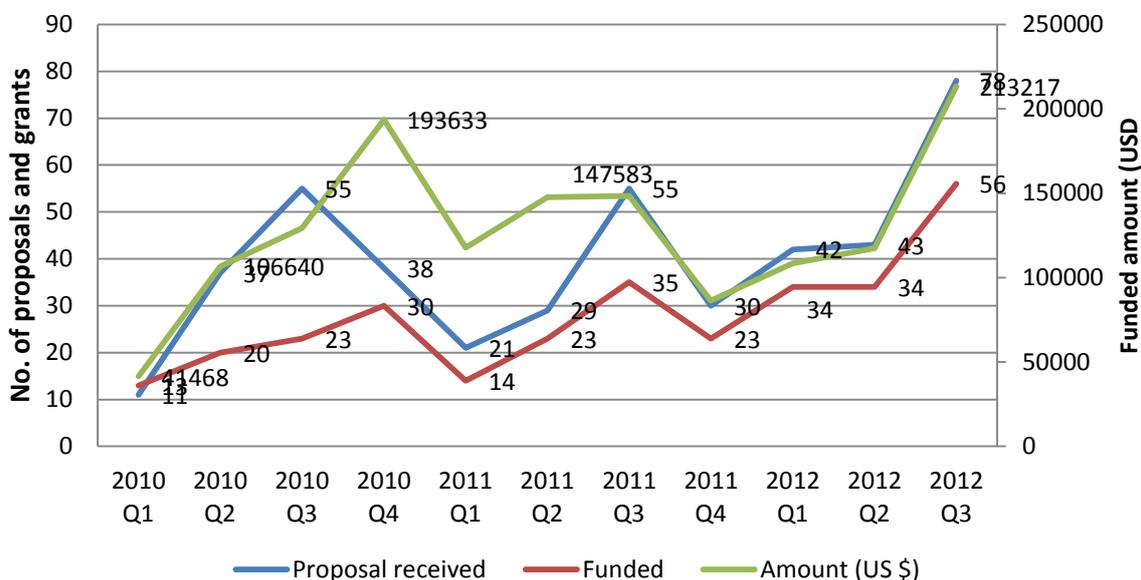
Efficiency

Paung Ku has achieved a lot with limited resources considering its big agenda in terms of civil society development in Myanmar.

Resources are used for the small grant program and its administration and to pay staff involved across all Paung Ku's various activities. Core funding for PK teams, mentoring and micro project grants is provided by AusAID through Save the Children, and other funds are provided by 12 other donor partners, for designated learning, networking and advocacy activities.

The number and value of the grants funded over Phase 2 is provided in the graph below (Source: Paung Ku, November 2012)

The number of proposal received Vs funded grants and amount spent in US\$ from 2010 - Sept 2012



During Phase 2, three hundred and five (305) small grants were awarded, increasing from 86 to 96 and 123 over the period 2010 to 2012. In 2012, the project grants were 54% of total direct costs at US\$500,000.

Paung Ku staffing costs were 18% of total direct costs, suggesting much of the Paung Ku budget is provided to fund activities that directly benefit Myanmar communities. Each year of the Paung Ku budget over Phase 2 was approximately 600,000US\$ / year. In year 2012 further funds were provided to Paung Ku by AusAID to cover additional networking and advocacy initiatives.

The M&E and audit function at 8% suggests funds are allocated to monitor and manage the program and the associated financial management risks⁵.

⁵ Note: the evaluation team did not undertake a performance audit of Paung Ku finances as part of the ToR.

The breakdown of costs for the 2012 Paung Ku budget is provided below.

Direct costs	2012 budget	% of total of direct costs
Micro project grants	500,000	54
Learning, networking, advocacy	103,465	12
Mentoring	73,000	8
PK teams	128,710	14
International advisor	36,000	4
M&E and audits	76,400	8
Total direct costs	917,575	100

Rating: 5/6

Innovation and adaptation

The evolution of Paung Ku during Phase 2 is characterised by innovative and adaptive practice. Paung Ku activities for capacity building, networking and advocacy are strongly inter-related and managed in such a way to be able to respond to civil society in terms of addressing their particular needs and objectives.

As Myanmar civil society has evolved in response to and as part of social and political change in the country, Paung Ku has moved from a small project to a stage where it is becoming an independent NGO. Without innovation and adaptation this would not have been possible to achieve and within the short timeframe of the project.

The advocacy feature of Paung Ku is a major area of innovation that seeks to achieve practice, policy and attitudinal change by enabling ‘movements’ around a wide variety of social e.g. peace and development in Rakhine and Kachin States, and land rights, economic e.g. Dawei deep seaport and economic zone and various environmental issues by facilitating the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

The way Paung Ku works with communities and civil society actors, as a facilitator and catalyst for change, also engenders innovation and adaption in communities. A number of the case studies of Myanmar communities that have informed in this report demonstrate how innovative and adaptive Myanmar society has been despite the huge challenges they face in their communities (see case studies in Appendix B). The inspirational impact of the innovations supported by Paung Ku was deeply felt by the Myanmar members of the evaluation team, who also began to see new possibilities for the future of their country.

Rating: 5/6

“Women can say anything to anybody if they have to”

Paung Ku supported 2 generators for Luhtu Metta, a CBO in the Delta. The generators aimed to provide household electricity for lights, and the group aimed to use the profits for the village revolving fund. The management was organized by men and initially the generators ran regularly. The men set the fee at 50 Kyat per light bulb, and connected 80 of the 200 households.

Then the fee collectors, men, were faced with payment delays and default. As there was no income to run the generators, the CBO decided to stop running them.

After one year, with the help of a Paung Ku mentor, a women’s group was organized with 11 members. They wanted to restart the village generators, and got help from the village authorities. They negotiated to increase the grid to all 200 households, and formulated a fee collection system. If required, irresponsible users now pay a fine. The women group took over the responsibilities from the men, and manages the generator more efficiently and effectively. Not only did women organise electricity for the whole village, they also collected fees and are investing in the village revolving fund.

Gender equality

Community groups involved in Paung Ku generally comprise men and women, but in some cases also boys and girls. While in terms of participation there was not necessarily equal numbers of each sex, there was strong evidence of active participation of women and girls in various community and capacity building activities funded by Paung Ku. In some cases, Women’s Groups were established, but females also played leadership roles within CBOs and CSOs involved in the key issues facing the communities concerned, e.g. land rights, environmental concerns.

During the consultations for the evaluation we noted that women and girls actively participated in the discussions, and there was no sense that female involvement was tokenistic.

While the benefits of community capacity building activities through Paung Ku were generally directed to the whole community, there were some examples of projects directed only at female livelihoods, e.g. sewing classes for girls in Kyarinsakegyi, Kayin State.

“Young women build capacity in Meiktila”

Third Eye Education Foundation (TEEF) was established in March, 2012 by female university students actively interested in social work. TEEF holds monthly youth leadership development training. TEEF also conducted extra curriculum trainings during holidays to improve knowledge on social, health, communication and better behaviour for school children from villages near Meiktila.

Overall, Paung Ku policies and staff management practice demonstrate that involvement of women in Paung Ku activities is strongly supported. A strong focus on gender equality in terms of eligibility for the small grants projects in Phase 3 and monitoring of the level of involvement of women and girls in the successful delivery of the small capacity building grants in the future could build a clearer picture of the achievement of this criterion than was possible for this evaluation.

Rating: 4/6

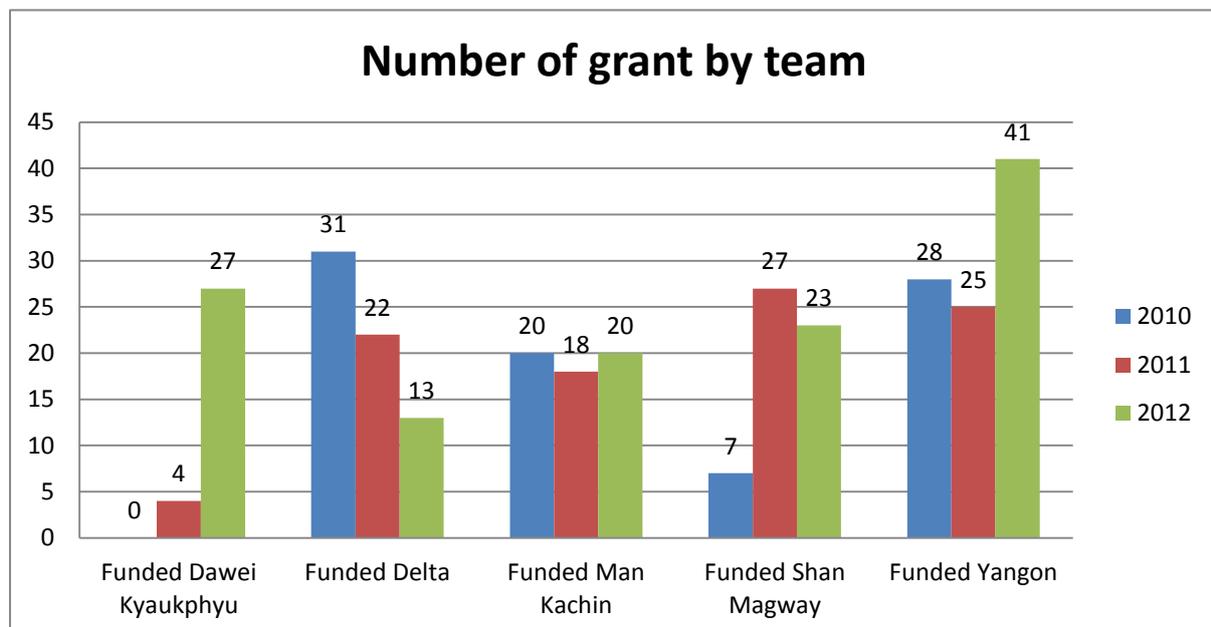
Coverage

The map of Paung Ku partners (2010-2012) at Appendix C demonstrates significant coverage across a diverse range of Myanmar regions with different types of issues and capacity building needs. The types of community based partners included:

- Village level committee/ organizations
- Network of geographically based development committees/ organizations
- Issue based networks
- Individual activists
- Group of activist networks
- Opinion leaders
- Lawyer groups
- Regional actors and players
- Media

By the end of September 2012 Paung Ku had worked with 238 community based partners across most regions of Myanmar (Paung Ku, January 2013). To obtain a sense of the coverage of Paung Ku, the evaluation team consulted with people representing 42 different community based groups and a total of 121 individuals from the Yangon, Mandalay, Shan, Karen and Delta regions about the role of Paung Ku and the types of issues they were facing. As noted previously in terms of Paung Ku's capacity building, networking and advocacy activities and achievements in the previous section of the report, Paung Ku covers not only a broad range of communities and civil society actors, but a broad range of grass roots issues across much of country.

In relation to coverage of the small capacity building grants in particular, the number of grants funded by Paung Ku grant team over the period is presented in the following graph (Paung Ku, November 2012):



Rating: 5/6

Analysis and learning

Analysis, reflection and learning within Paung Ku and in terms of how it works internally and relates to civil society organisations is a strong and central platform of how Paung Ku works and operates in practice. Paung Ku supports debate on locally appropriate understandings and approaches of civil society as the first step to strengthening its role in Myanmar. Numerous cases studies and reflective reports of high quality were produced by Paung Ku during Phase 2 with support from the Paung Ku international advisor. Key examples include:

- Reflections on Cyclone Giri (2010)
- Strengthening civil Society in Myanmar 2010
- Crossing the Hills The Dawei Development project 2011
- Civil society's understanding of capacity building (Learning paper, 2012)

All Phase 2 Paung Ku objectives involve analysis and learning in some way, although in Objectives 1 and 3 **learning** is specifically mentioned. This report has provided a number of key examples (see the Evaluation Case Study report at Appendix B) of how analysis and learning is put into practice in Paung Ku in terms of its key objectives and within the community organisations involved with Paung Ku. For example, Paung Ku funds community groups to do what they want to do, and **facilitates learning** from it. Project grants are thus not sector related and are disbursed with the possibility of repeat grants. Mentoring is geared to **learning by doing** to help organisations see beyond an immediate need, then to **learning from others** (ie cross-visits), and gradually to pursue deeper and/or wider change.

In other words analysis and learning it is not simply aspirational but a core aspect of how Paung Ku delivers on its objectives in the 'real world'. It is also a continuous process of analysis and **learning before doing, during doing and after doing**. In addition, this evaluation has been conducted with the same philosophy in mind - to learn and reflect on the stories and experiences of Myanmar civil society in terms of their capacity building efforts and to analyse how Paung Ku has supported them in their endeavours. The evaluation also offers an opportunity to analyse and learn from the achievements of Phase 2, areas for improvement, and to inform future directions in Phase 3.

Rating 5/6

Monitoring and evaluation

M&E for a project such as Paung Ku is inherently challenging and difficult. The type of monitoring and evaluation effort required for Paung Ku needs to reflect the complexities and the realities in which Paung Ku operates. In other words M&E should be fit-for-purpose and generate meaningful data and information to provide the type of evidence needed to demonstrate objectives have been met. Mixed methods using various qualitative and quantitative data sources for both monitoring and evaluation activities are recommended to enable interpretation against AusAID evaluation criteria.

Monitoring and evaluation activities in Phase 1 informed the development of the performance framework developed for Phase 2. The mid-term review of Paung Ku in January 2012 also informed the development of the performance framework for Phase 3. For Phase 3 Paung Ku has suggested a meaningful framework combining output and outcomes measures that could inform future monitoring and evaluation effort and the type of reporting on program implementation that is required into the future. Additional detailed information would strengthen the overall approach to M&E suggested in Phase 3 across operational and strategic outcomes of Paung Ku including suggested methods of evaluation at critical points across Phase 3. Paung Ku has an M&E Team to

support this aspect. The potential to supplement this with external M&E expertise at critical points is recommended for Phase 3.

By way of example, a comparative and more empirical analysis of different capacity building approaches in terms of the benefits to communities and civil society strengthening could be undertaken in future M&E activities. Monitoring and evaluating of the effectiveness of the mentoring component of capacity building into Phase 3 for example could be undertaken; and collection and analysis of data about the networking and advocacy activities could be considered.

As part of this evaluation project the evaluation team has developed a Theory of Change model that could underpin future M&E activities in Phase 3 (see pages 27, 28 below). These theoretical frameworks could be used to assist Paung Ku to further strengthen their M&E effort while keeping it focused, practical and feasible to conduct into the future.

Rating 4/6

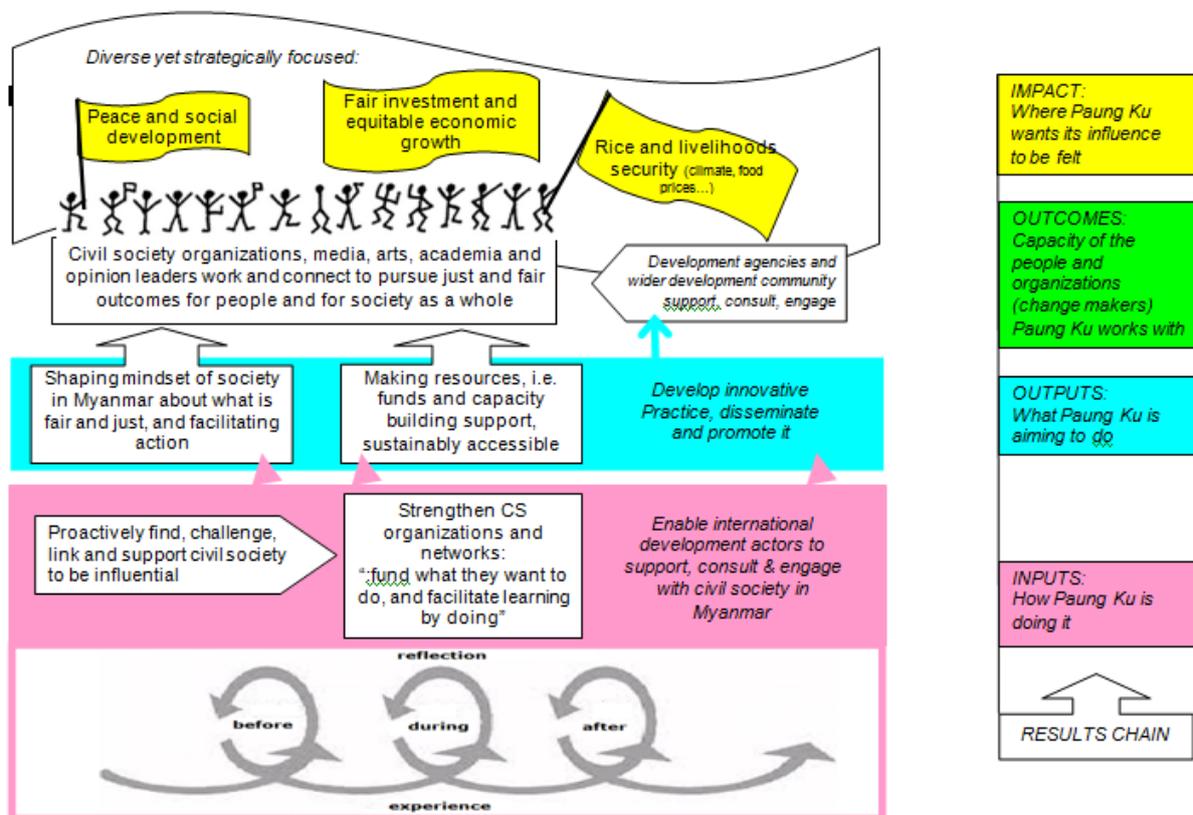
AusAID Evaluation Criteria Ratings

Evaluation Criteria Ratings	Rating (1-6)
Relevance	6
Effectiveness	5
Sustainability	4
Efficiency	5
Innovation and adaptation	5
Gender Equality	4
Coverage	5
Analysis & Learning	5
Monitoring & Evaluation	4

Impact of Paung Ku on civil society development

Impact evaluation is a challenging and complex area in the field of evaluation. From a technical point of view, it was not possible to undertake an analytical / empirical approach to measuring the impact of Paung Ku as part of this evaluation study, and within the timeframes required.

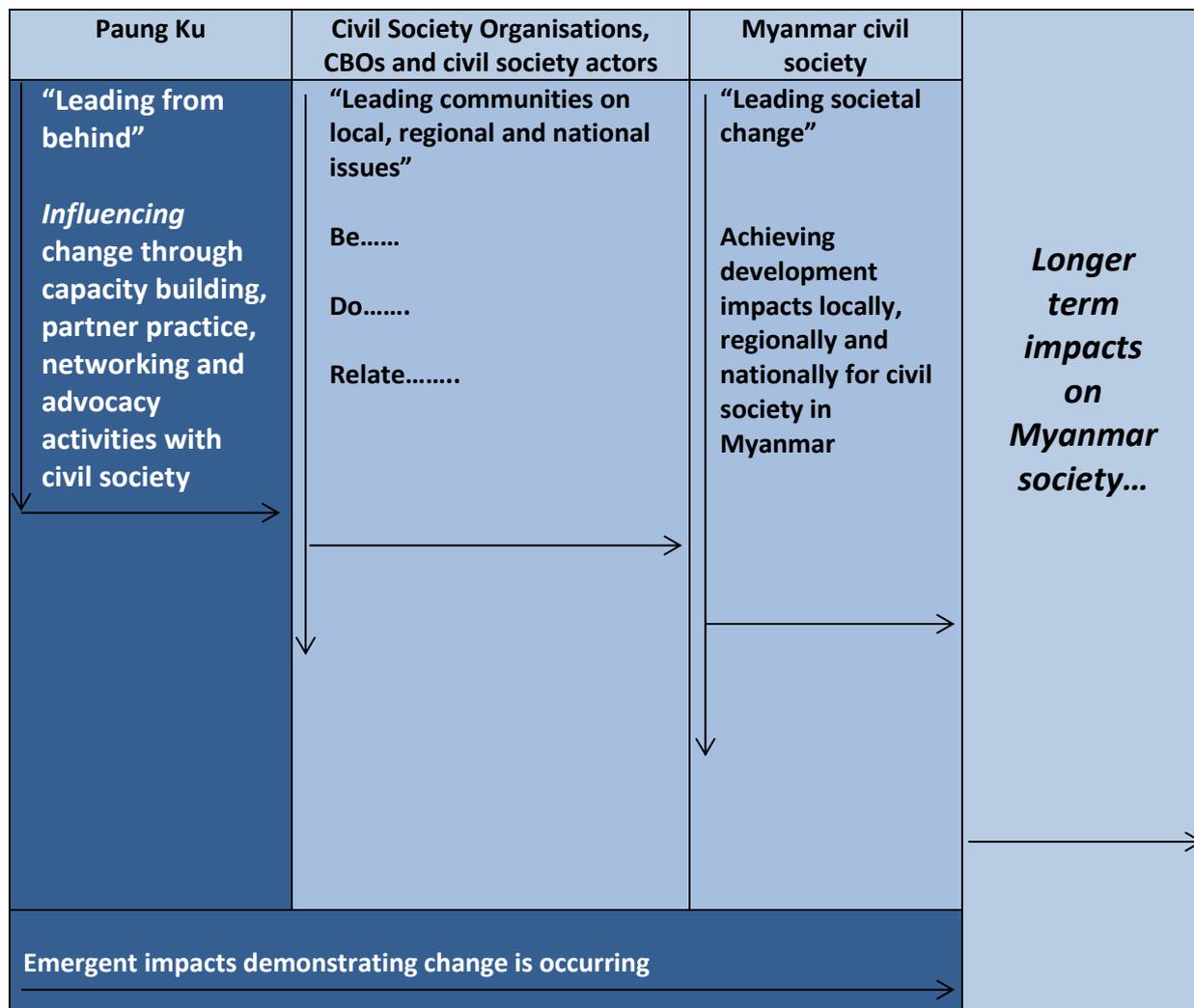
However, in designing the evaluation, the evaluation team distilled the Theory of Change (ToC) to demonstrate the mechanisms by which Paung Ku aims to influence civil society development in Myanmar. A simple, input, outputs and outcomes framework for Paung Ku was neither possible nor desirable. Oversimplification would misrepresent and distort the reality in which Paung Ku works with civil society and hence the theories of change visual presented below is to demonstrate Paung Ku's role and the impacts it aims to influence.



The approach adopted for this evaluation about impact was to understand how Paung Ku has, and is making a difference through strengthening Myanmar civil society – this approach provided strong insights about the type of impacts that Paung Ku is generating through its work with civil society on a practical level.

The evaluation found that Paung Ku **influences** change rather than **directs** the changes that are happening in Myanmar society. The following diagram depicts how Paung Ku activities are leading to a range of developmental impacts in Myanmar society.

“Leading from behind” – impact on civil society development



‘Impacts’ of Paung Ku

The evaluation team made the following observations about the factors that are important and have contributed to the impact of Paung Ku on civil society development in Myanmar:

1. The influencing / enabling power of the small grants program for community development and capacity building funded under Paung Ku
2. Active, highly committed community minded organisations building strong capacity and driving change at a grass roots level
3. Strong, likeminded CBO’s coming together in Civil Society Organisations
4. Evidence of evolving formal and informal networks across Myanmar society at a local, and regional levels

5. Evidence of societal 'movements' on high priority issues affecting Myanmar society, livelihoods, economic development, environment, peace and seeking access to essential services
6. Evidence that 'real change' was happening on some issues, e.g. law reform, court decisions for land grabbing
7. Evidence that there are still many challenges facing Myanmar civil society including the need for essential services such as education and health
8. Significant support, appreciation and trust in Paung Ku and how it strengthens civil society to influence and enable change, ie "leading from behind"
9. Resilient community organisations that understand and balance rights and duties / responsibilities
10. The emergence of young nascent civil society actors driving change in their communities that would benefit from further support and funding from Paung Ku
11. A momentum in Myanmar civil society that seems 'unstoppable'; and that deserves to be published so that it can serve as an inspiration to other civil society actors in Myanmar, and that needs to be nurtured through further facilitation and mentoring to reinforce the gains that have been made.

What were the lessons learned during Phase 2?

What did key stakeholders learn about Paung Ku's civil society strengthening activities, including what is working, what is not, and why?

This evaluation has found Paung Ku has made significant achievements, beyond its expectations, during Phase 2 which was a period of rapid social and political change. Adopting an innovative and responsive approach to Myanmar civil society strengthening activities was the core of its inspirational success.

From the evaluation of Paung Ku in Phase 2 ten key principles appear to have underpinned the way Paung Ku's civil society strengthening activities have worked to enable Paung Ku to deliver against its core objectives:

1. Network extensively and intensively with opinion leaders
2. Support genuine local initiatives, agendas and issues: trust your gut feelings!
3. Facilitate productive interactions and deep reflection towards thoughtful action that balances rights and duties
4. Bring organizations with similar issues together
5. Bring organizations in touch with resource persons who can inform, educate, train, research...
6. Bring organizations and networks in touch with the media, artists and members of parliament to influence public opinion and political process
7. Provide remote groups with the means to communicate (i.e. mobile phones)
8. Provide grants, so that organizations can pay for capacity development activities 4-6 above, and monitor downward accountability to the members – don't overdo it: organizations can mobilize local resources!
9. Offer facilitation/mentoring separately from grant making, so that 'learning by doing' is not "polluted" by grant management concerns
10. Stay out of the way and let the civil society leaders, organizations and networks get on with their work: "lead from behind".

During the consultations, community members and other interviewees were asked what was most important in terms of their engagement with Paung Ku but also specific aspects of Paung Ku's role and activities that were not working so well. While those consulted were strongly supportive of Paung Ku overall, there were a number of key areas that were mentioned by different stakeholders as not working as well and hence requiring attention or needing improvement, including:

- Paung Ku has a big agenda to fulfil and appears to be under resourced to be able to deal with all the big issues in Myanmar civil society; people expressed concerned that staff burn out could be a problem
- Consortium members did not appear to have learnt from the Paung Ku experience of civil society strengthening in Myanmar (except when they were investing in mentoring for Paung Ku)
- Community mentors were not adequately resourced especially given the important role they play in terms of capacity building through Paung Ku

- Civil society organisations indicated strongly that Paung Ku’s contribution to capacity building should remain at the ‘grass roots’ level. In relation to the small grants program in particular, some of the specific lessons from stakeholders in Phase 2 included:
 - A shift in terms of eligibility for small grants in Phase 2 was not always communicated clearly to communities seeking funds through Paung Ku. Better communication is needed to overcome situations where community expectations about funding were raised and the resultant ‘loss of face’ from changes in eligibility.
 - Facilitating access to small grant funding especially for “start-up” community organisations
 - Addressing misunderstandings between western concepts of accountability in grant / financial administration and Myanmar concepts of trust and accountability

These issues cover both strategic and operational aspects of Paung Ku especially in relation to Phase 2 Objectives 1 and 2.

What lessons can inform and shape the future direction of Paung Ku? What lessons can help Paung Ku to improve their performance in Phase 3, and assist civil society capacity building efforts by other actors?

The key lesson learned from the evaluation of Phase 2 is that Paung Ku has evolved to be a dynamic and respected player in civil society strengthening in Myanmar, and in many ways beyond the expectations of a small project. Paung Ku does not shy away from supporting the big picture issues facing Myanmar civil society, the root causes of poverty, inequality and injustice, while continuing to engage with immediate grass roots livelihoods concerns. The work is carried out in such a way that Paung Ku as well as the CSOs it works with stay connected to the communities they represent.

This reflects Paung Ku’s strategic, flexible and responsive approach to working with civil society across its key objectives of capacity building, networking and advocacy. In Phase 3 Paung Ku has integrated these objectives in recognition of their strong inter-relationship and interdependence.

Another key lesson from Phase 2 is that civil society groups play a far greater role than just service delivery for example by building social capital, influencing policy and supporting just and inclusive participatory processes. At the beginning of Phase 2, Paung Ku set out to understand and support these other roles of civil society groups. This lesson is also relevant to shaping the direction of Paung Ku into Phase 3 while building upon its achievements in strengthening civil society in Myanmar through its core activities.

It was also evident from the evaluation of Phase 2 that Paung Ku aimed to support the consortium members and other agencies in strengthening their ability to work with local organisations. While Objective 2 was not fully realised in Phase 2 there were key lessons from this experience that can inform how Paung Ku will work with the international development community, its partners and donors in Phase 3. For example advocacy is understood by Paung Ku as engaging with and guiding donor support to civil society. The intention for Paung Ku in Phase 3 is to become more strategic in this endeavour. Building a clearer picture of the way Paung Ku works in terms of advocacy in particular, and the relationship between the networking and capacity building objectives could help to overcome perceptions of politicisation and risk associated with Paung Ku’s civil society strengthening activities.

Influencing the international development community in their practice of strengthening civil society has had less focus than the other key objectives. Interestingly, the INGO members of the consortium have not been able to learn from Paung Ku, nor has Paung Ku been recognised for its achievements to date. Paung Ku does not seek the spotlight. However, there is an opportunity for Paung Ku to be acknowledged for what it has achieved to date as a key player in building civil society in Myanmar at the present time.

Finally, there was clear lesson in undertaking this evaluation about the value of sound monitoring and evaluation practice for Paung Ku to take forward into Phase 3. Developing a feasible and practical approach to future M&E activities is a key way to enable Paung Ku to improve their performance in relation to various aspects of program implementation; in responding to and addressing issues and problems as they arise; as well as documenting their achievements in terms of their civil society strengthening activities into the future.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1: During Phase 2 Paung Ku consolidated a number of its core activities especially in relation to the objectives for capacity building, networking and advocacy.

Conclusion 2: Paung Ku is seen by stakeholders as very effective as an identifier, facilitator and catalyst for change, pro-active, responsive and flexible in dealing with CSOs.

Conclusions 3: Paung Ku's small grants have gone a long way in communities and are well supported as a mechanism for capacity building.

Conclusion 4: Mentoring was also seen as an important aspect to build community organisational capacity and networking/advocacy capacity of civil society. The community based mentors are working effectively with CBOs and moving to help CSO's develop peer to peer mentoring capacity for their own CBO members.

Conclusion 5: Phase 2 was characterised by process facilitation for movements of change on wider issues, by enhancing advocacy support to CSOs, strengthening formal and informal networks and a shift in focus of the small grant program from community development to address underlying causes of poverty, inequality and injustice.

Conclusion 6: Involvement of the international development community in Paung Ku became fragmented over Phase 2, with changes in the level and type of involvement of consortium and on-consortium members and concomitant changes to the Board.

Conclusion 7: The potential of influencing the wider development community practice of civil society strengthening was not realised during Phase 2, but reinforced the importance of strengthening and adequately funding and resourcing Paung Ku in Phase 3.

Conclusion 8: Paung Ku has exceeded expectations in terms of impact on civil society development in Myanmar. Within a very short timeframe, and building on capacity strengthening achievements of Phase 1, Paung Ku enabled civil society in Myanmar to start occupying space created by the new political situation, and work towards social change in issues of importance to them.

Conclusion 9: Paung Ku is well positioned to continue its civil society development work but a certain level of flexible core funding must be sustained to underpin the transition and enable operations in the first years as an independent NGO.

Conclusion 10: Further funding for Paung Ku is required to realise the returns on investment and position Paung Ku to continue to build community capacity through the Paung Ku combination of small grants and process facilitation which focusses on grass roots issues. Some CSOs touched upon "uncomfortable" political aspects, but independent CSO action is critical at this stage in Myanmar's history, and donors have learned the value of supporting this independence.⁶

⁶ DAC peer review on Partnering with Civil Society: 12 lessons, 18 November 2012.
<http://prezi.com/fe1yh8smlhfw/partnering-with-civil-society/> (Note: includes AudAID)

Conclusion 11: Paung Ku should be seen by the international development community as an exemplary, unique and effective civil society strengthening program from which much can be learned, and from which advice can be sought on how to engage civil society in the design, implementation and evaluation of Aid Effective development partner and INGO programs intended to benefit Myanmar people.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation of Phase 2 Paung Ku, the following recommendations are proposed to position Paung Ku for Phase 3.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: There are a lot of important issues that civil society organisations want to work on in Myanmar. Paung Ku has begun to ‘cluster’ issues so that capacity building, networking and advocacy support can be strategically organised. Paung Ku should actively pursue this path of gaining strategic focus, so that the widest and deepest possible change can be facilitated.

Recommendation 2: Paung Ku has developed high quality learning papers regarding its capacity building practice. Less obvious are the underlying values systems for issues based civil society strengthening, such as not taking sides in conflict, environmental protection and organics, rights based analysis, and gender equality. It is recommended that Paung Ku makes such values explicit.

Recommendation 3: Practice learning has been organised in a fairly centralised and internal manner (with the exception of the mentor network some time ago). As Paung Ku transitions to an NGO with strong local partners such as Metta, Ecodev and Shalom, Paung Ku might consider initiating decentralised learning on CSO strengthening, by involving other Myanmar NGOs in its reflective team meetings, e.g. as is currently done quarterly with the external mentors in the Delta.

Recommendation 4: Paung Ku remains largely invisible to many in the international development community in Myanmar, as well as to the general public. Paung Ku may consider publishing CSO achievements for the general public as well as for the Myanmar development community to increase the ‘inspirational impact’ of emerging CSO action for nation building. A more active Facebook page in both English and Myanmar could help to publish CSO achievements more widely.

Recommendation 5: Paung Ku deeply understands the importance of building capacity from the grassroots up, through small grants with which communities can begin to achieve and to organise. There is some concern that Paung Ku is moving away from this important work. It is recommended that Paung Ku keeps responding to requests for support for small community based initiatives, directly as well as indirectly via stronger CSOs that wish to play such a capacity building role. This requires Paung Ku to maintain or even expand the small community capacity building grant program.

Recommendation 6: There are various initiatives by international development agencies to design CSO funds (e.g. Social Fund, and Women’s Advancement Fund), and Paung Ku has been involved with the design of these funds. It is recommended that Paung Ku strategically facilitate access for emerging community based organisations to these and other small grants funds.

Recommendation 7: The mentor resource will remain valuable for community groups and civil society networks even as they mature. External mentors are interested to further develop their capacities, especially in the area of issue based networking and advocacy. Paung Ku might consider facilitating a process in which mentors can be enabled to network, enhance their capacity, and make their (fee based) services directly available to community and civil society organisations.

Recommendation 8: Paung Ku has not been very effective in influencing the practice of the international development community. It adopts a “leading from behind” approach, i.e. enabling CSOs to influence the design of development programs. While this is certainly important from a civil society strengthening perspective, it does not provide the international community with insights into

how to engage with Myanmar civil society. Considering Paung Ku expertise in Myanmar civil society strengthening, it is recommended that Paung Ku directly advise (for a fee) the international development community on how to effectively and strategically engage civil society in Myanmar. To do this effectively, Paung Ku needs to dedicate staff time, and appoint and develop a “lead advisor” to serve as the contact person for the international community. The international advisor might play a useful role in building this advisory capacity in a selected group of Paung Ku senior staff.

Recommendation 9: The adoption of a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation of Paung Ku in Phase 3 is recommended to provide the type of data and information that can guide future program implementation, evaluation, priority setting and decision making. The development of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework against Phase 3 objectives and outcomes will lay the foundations for future monitoring and evaluation activities that can build upon the M&E work undertaken by Paung Ku to date.

References and resources

Paung Ku program documents reviewed:

1. Paung Ku Phase 2 Performance Framework (January 2012)
2. Paung Ku Phase 3 Performance Framework (November 2012)
3. Paung Ku Partner List 2010-2012
4. Paung Ku Presentation Phase 2 Evaluation (November 2012)
5. Paung Ku Annual Reports for Phase 2, and selected team reports
6. Paung Ku Mid-term Review (January 2012)
7. Paung Ku Report: Crossing the Hills: Dawei Development Project (2011)
8. Paung Ku Reflective Learning Paper: Civil Society's Understanding of Capacity Building (2012)

Academic references:

9. Anne T. Coghlan, Hallie Preskill, Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas published in *NEW DIRECTIONS FOR EVALUATION*, no. 100, Winter 2003 © Wiley Periodicals, Inc
10. Funnell S C and Rogers P J (2012) *Purposeful Program Theory: Effective use of theories of change and logic models* Jossey and Bass, US
11. Patton M Q (2011) *Developmental Evaluation: Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use*. The Guilford Press, NY, US
12. Preskill H, Tzavaras Catsambas T (2006) *Reframing Evaluation Through Appreciative Inquiry* SAGE Publications, US
13. Simons H (2009) *Evaluation Case Study Research in Practice*, SAGE Publications, London, UK

Appendix A– Phase 2 Paung Ku Evaluation Plan November - December 2012

Introduction

Purpose of the document

This document has been prepared to inform AusAID and Paung Ku about the evaluation process that will be adopted to evaluate Paung Ku end of project Phase 2.

It provides guidance on the theoretical approach from which the various methods to be applied will be based. It also provides information about the methods used by the evaluation team to answer key evaluation questions.

Terms of reference for the evaluation

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) is sponsoring the evaluation of Paung Ku. The evaluation team has been asked to evaluate:

1. **Achievements** of Paung Ku against:
 - the *objectives* and *outcomes* defined in the Phase 2 project framework
 - *AusAID Evaluation criteria* - Relevance; Effectiveness; Efficiency; Sustainability; Gender Equality; Monitoring & Evaluation; Analysis & Learning; and Innovation & Adaptation
2. Assess the **impact** of Paung Ku on civil society development
3. Gather the **lessons learned**:
 - by key stakeholders about Paung Ku's civil society strengthening activities, including what is working, what is not, and why
 - to inform and shape the future direction of Paung Ku, and
 - improve performance in Phase 3, and assist civil society capacity building efforts by other actors

A number of evaluation questions were proposed in the ToR:

- To what extent has the Paung Ku project been successful in achieving its objectives?
- How sustainable are the outcomes?
- What is the quantity and quality of the outputs delivered?
- Have there been any unintended consequences of the project?
- What is the coverage geographically, socio-economically, in terms of gender equality, and across marginalised groups?
- What lessons have been disseminated about what works when addressing this development issue?
- What capacity building approaches have been most *effective*?

Note: The full set of evaluation questions developed for the evaluation plan is provided below.

Structure of the document

The document is structured as follows:

Part A – Descriptive overview of the policy and implementation environment of Paung Ku (PK) – provides the context for evaluating PK, history of program implementation, policy directions and proposals for future program delivery

Part B – Theory of Change – provides the underpinning theory to support the evaluation activities undertaken, including schemas and diagrams to present in a clear way the key elements of the Paung Ku model and how change can be achieved. This section outline the key areas of Paung Ku to evaluate, evaluation criteria and key evaluation questions

Part C – Evaluation approach, methods and tools – provides information about how Paung Ku will be evaluated with a supporting rationale for the methods and tools used

Part D – Organisations and people consulted for the evaluation of Paung Ku

Part A – Descriptive overview of Paung Ku – program, policy and implementation environment

Description of Paung Ku

Paung Ku is a civil society strengthening initiative, which became operational in 2007. It is run by a consortium of international and local development organisations, but is currently transitioning to independence.

Objective 1: To **build capacity** of civil society organisations (CSOs) to:

BE (have clear vision/mission and responsibilities, apply learning and sharing and have supportive organisational systems)

DO (undertake activities well to meet their vision and mission)

RELATE (to internal and external stakeholders)

Objective 2: To **improve practice** within consortium members and the wider development community

Objective 3: To **facilitate networking** within civil society for learning, sharing and influencing change

Objective 4: To **enhance advocacy** between civil society and policy actors

The end of phase 1 evaluation was presented to the Board in February 2011, covering the period from October 2007 to September 2010. The focus of this evaluation is the end of phase 2, covering a 3 year period from January 2010 to December 2012.

History of the Paung Ku program

Paung Ku started with an idea in 2005 that became operational in 2007, and was adapted to play a major role in the response to Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The last year of phase 1 was dedicated to consolidation of these initiatives with over three hundred and fifty projects funded, over two hundred thousand beneficiaries, almost one hundred groups being mentored along with the beginning of a number of consortium learning and donor advocacy initiatives. Meanwhile the Regular Paung Ku program continued to respond to proposals in the rest of the country supporting over thirty projects.

The annual report 2009 states that “the immediate aim of Paung Ku funding for projects is to support the delivery of community development or capacity building.” Small grants are seen as a vehicle for ‘learning by doing’, and Paung Ku mentoring services are designed to stimulate reflection on the project process. Paung Ku is growing rapidly and feels the need to increase the number of active mentors, and to more deeply understand and define the practice and purpose of mentoring. Training and networking are also considered in strengthening organisations. For instance, Paung Ku focusses on downward accountability of civil society groups to their communities and constituency. Reflection on this experience drives Paung Ku’s desire to become more accountable and transparent to the organisations it works with.

One key learning is that civil society groups play a far greater role than just service delivery (for example, building social capital, influencing policy and supporting participatory processes). In 2010 Paung Ku sets out to understand and support these other roles of civil society groups.

Paung Ku aims to support the consortium members and other agencies in strengthening their ability to work with local organisations. At the start of phase 2 however Paung Ku is yet to more clearly define the nature and focus of this learning in terms of knowledge and skills. Advocacy is understood as engaging with and guiding donor support to civil society and the intention is to become more strategic in this endeavour.

Questions are asked about Paung Ku identity. Should it “begin to identify more strongly as a Consortium initiative, start a process toward becoming a local NGO or simply become a program within Save the Children?” However, the greatest puzzle is “how to find ways to continue to question, to learn and to innovate so that Paung Ku can continue to be an experiment that is worthwhile”.

Key features of the Paung Ku program

1. Build Capacity of civil society organisations (to be, do and relate)

Capacity building is not ‘delivered’ or ‘outsourced’. It is process driven by an organisation’s desire to achieve change. Many agree that capacity of organisations speeds up with active facilitation of learning and reflection by an external actor. However, while there is more donor funding for capacity building in Myanmar there are few capable facilitators of capacity building processes. The way the international community disburses funds has been seen to undermine the vision and accountability of local groups. For instance by only making funds available for certain sectors, organisations are driven to adjust their vision. Or by requiring formal ‘western’ accountability processes, organisations are driven to ‘fabricate’ receipts to account for otherwise honest expenditures. Paung Ku believes the best is to simply **fund groups to do what they want to do, and**

facilitate learning from it.

Project grants are thus not sector related and are disbursed with the possibility of repeat grants. Mentoring is geared to 'learning by doing', to helping organisations see beyond an immediate need, then to learning from others (cross-visits), and to gradually pursue deeper and/or wider change.

Capacity changes are described in terms of the group *being* (e.g. group unity, visioning, decision making and leadership, involvement of women and youth, community participation, sharing information internally and with the community, improved financial and other systems), *doing* (e.g. improving quality of activities and hence results, raising funds by themselves, improved planning and expanding the type of project undertaken) and *relating* (particularly with negotiating with authorities, other donors and networks). (MTR 2012)

2. Improve Practice in the international development community

Improving civil society strengthening practice of consortium members has been a fundamental feature of Paung Ku. There has gradually been less emphasis on the consortium members and more on promoting change for particular stakeholders such as embassies and institutional donors. Mechanisms for promoting this practice are the Advisory and Learning Group (now discontinued in the transition process), and the online discussion Forum.

3. Facilitate Networking for learning, sharing and influencing wider change

Networking is either geographic (6 supported) or issues-based (4 supported). Sometimes issues-based networking is sub-divided into local and international. Initially emphasis was on 'formal' networks, but there has been a growing recognition of all the informal networking that goes on. The objective for networking has developed from a common articulation of *linking/sharing information and resources/learning/joint action* to include *creating a voice / platform* for advocacy. Many of the advocacy results would not be possible without networking e.g. farmers and land law.

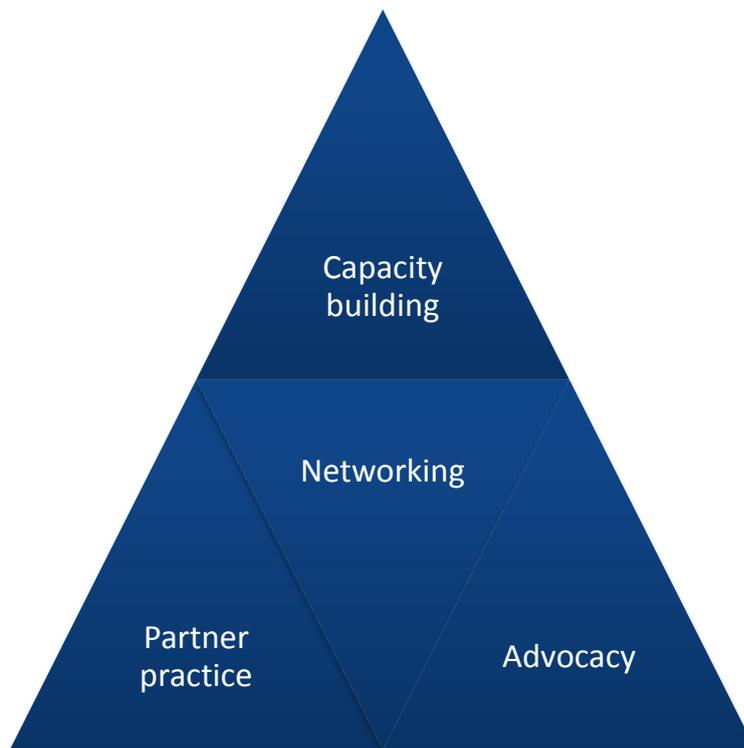
4. Enhance Advocacy of civil society with policy actors

Before 2010, advocacy was mainly about community groups engaging with local authorities to obtain permission for their activities. Sparked by the changing environment in the country, the focus gradually shifted to community groups engaging with a broader set of issues. Significantly a multitude of other civil society actors have now been recognised beyond community groups, such as media, artists and public opinion leaders. Now the advocacy feature of Paung Ku is a major area of innovation that seeks to achieve practice, policy and attitudinal change by sparking 'movements' around a wide variety of social e.g. peace and development in Rakhine and Kachin States, and land rights, economic e.g. Dawei deep seaport and economic zone and various environmental issues.

Part B – Theory of change for the Paung Ku Program model

Key elements of the Paung Ku Program model

The Paung Ku model combines a number of inter-related elements covering:

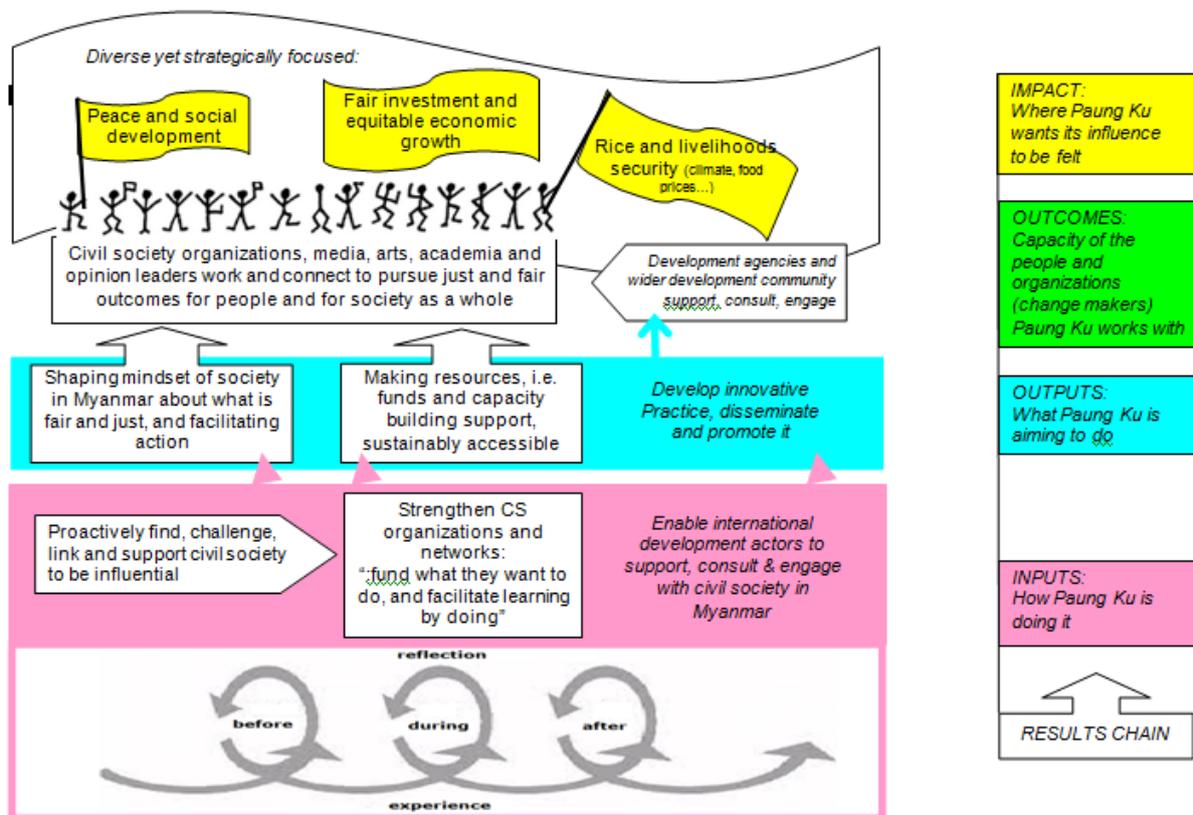


Theory of change

Theory of change (ToC) is a way to describe how a program, initiative, strategy or reform process achieves change. For a complex and evolving program like Paung Yu the theory of change is not easy to formulate, especially from a review of the program documentation. Ideally the ToC is best developed as a collaborative process with the key stakeholders so the strategic elements of the program can be understood and appropriately depicted to underpin the practical evaluation activities that are undertaken.

The capacity building, networking, advocacy and partner practice elements of Paung Ku, in terms of their importance, relationships and interdependence to one another means that Paung Ku combines a number of different program ‘archetypes’ that are described in the evaluation literature (Funnell and Rogers, 2011).

For the purpose of this evaluation plan, we have represented the theory of change diagrammatically below. The validity of theory of change represented overleaf will be ‘tested’ over the course of the evaluation and refined and changed as appropriate.



Evaluation criteria used to evaluate Paung Ku

Evaluation criteria provide the foundation for developing key evaluation questions and provide clarity concerning meaning and scope that is invaluable for collecting, analysing and reporting on data and information about Paung Ku.

The majority of criteria are proposed for guiding different aspects of this evaluation. These criteria and definitions were derived from documents provided by AusAID (AusAID, 2012).

Table 1 Evaluation criteria and definitions

Criterion	Definition
Relevance	Paung Ku is the most appropriate way to meet high priority goals that Australia shares with its development partners within the given context
Efficiency	The resources allocated by Australia and its partners are appropriate to the objectives and context, and are achieving the intended outputs
Effectiveness	Paung Ku is meeting or will meet its objectives, and is continually managing risk
Impact	An assessment of the positive and/or negative changes (directly or indirectly, intended or unintended) realised by the organisations and people that Paung Ku has worked with. The degree to which impact can be assessed will vary according to the nature and duration of the work with Paung Ku
Sustainability	Significant benefits will endure after Australia's contribution has ceased, with due account given to partner systems, stakeholder ownership and

	plans for phase out.
Gender equality	Paung Ku incorporates appropriate and effective strategies to advance gender equality and promote women and girls empowerment
Coverage	Paung Ku is implemented in such a way to influence the targeted range of CSOs operating in Myanmar
Innovation & Adaptation	Paung Ku supports innovative approaches that adapt to the local environment and conditions
Analysis & Learning	Paung Ku is based on sound technical analysis and continuous learning
Monitoring & Evaluation	An appropriate system provides sufficient information and is being used to assess progress towards meeting objectives.

Key evaluation questions against evaluation criteria

Based on the criteria above, a number of key evaluation questions have been developed to focus the evaluation to meet the terms of reference.

The questions were developed from an initial list provided by AusAID and following briefings and consultations with Paung Ku program managers and advisors, members of the Paung Ku Board and the Reference group for the evaluation the questions were refined and made more specific to the context in which the program is being delivered. Not all questions are relevant to all stakeholders the evaluation team will be consulting.

Table 2. Key evaluation questions against evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria	Key evaluation questions
Relevance	<p>Is Paung Ku the most appropriate way for Australia to support civil society development activities with its development partners in Myanmar?</p> <p>Do CSOs consider Paung Ku to be relevant to addressing their capacity building, networking and advocacy needs?</p> <p>Is Paung Yu relevant to the issues facing Myanmar civil society at the present time?</p> <p>Is the Paung Ku model the most appropriate way to build capacity of civil society organisations during this 'time' of rapid political and social change in Myanmar?</p> <p>How relevant is the Paung Ku model to other development partners? And potentially to other developing countries?</p>
Efficiency	<p>Is the resourcing by AusAID and other partners to Paung Ku appropriate to delivering the expected outputs?</p> <p>Is Paung Ku adequately resourced?</p> <p>Have Paung Ku funds been administered efficiently? Is there a robust financial management system in place to manage funds?</p> <p>Are the grants to community projects and civil society initiatives managed</p>

	<p>efficiently?</p> <p>Is the quantity and quality of the outputs delivered during Phase 2 commensurate with the level of funding?</p>
Effectiveness	<p>Is the Paung Ku model seen as an effective model by partners and civil society to address capacity development needs?</p> <p>How have the other elements in the Paung Ku model contributed to overall effectiveness? Which ones? Why?</p> <p>What capacity building approaches have been most effective?</p> <p>Which other approaches in the Paung Ku the model, e.g. networking, advocacy have been the most effective?</p> <p>What are the strengths and weaknesses of the model? How are the weaknesses managed to increase effectiveness?</p> <p>To what extent has Paung Ku been successful in achieving its objectives?</p> <p>Have some objectives had greater focus than others? Why? What objectives have changed leading into Phase 3?</p>
Impact	<p>What has been the impact of Paung Ku on civil society development, the Paung Ku consortium members and policy actors?</p> <p>What do emerging trends suggest Paung Ku's impacts have been and may be into the future?</p> <p>Are impacts (positive or negative) more observable in some areas than others at this stage?</p> <p>Have there been any unintended consequences of the model in terms of how it has evolved and been implemented?</p> <p>What are the internal and external threats to the Paung Ku model in achieving change in civil society?</p>
Sustainability	<p>Is the Paung Ku model sustainable? Should it be? If so, is it financially sustainable?</p> <p>Is Paung Ku well placed to successfully deliver against its objectives into the future?</p> <p>Are some elements e.g. grant making, mentoring capacity, advocacy function of the model more sustainable than others?</p> <p>What factors (internal and external) could be influencing the sustainability of the model?</p>
Gender equality	<p>Does Paung Ku advance gender equality and promote active participation of women and girls?</p> <p>Is there a policy in Paung Ku about gender equality? How is the policy put</p>

	<p>into practice?</p> <p>To what extent are woman and girls involved in Paung Ku activities, including with CSOs, consortium members and policy actors?</p>
Coverage	<p>What is the coverage of Paung Ku activities geographically, socio-economically, ethnically?</p> <p>Are marginalised groups appropriately covered under the activities undertaken?</p> <p>Have activities been largely in response to need and demand?</p>
Innovation and adaptation	<p>How does the Paung Ku model support innovation and adaptation?</p> <p>Has Paung Ku adapted and provided innovative solutions to deliver on its objectives?</p> <p>Are there unintended consequences?</p> <p>Does Paung Ku support adaptive and innovative approaches by CSOs through its activities? How?</p>
Analysis and Learning	<p>How does Paung Ku support analysis and learning with its own organisation, consortium members, CSOs and other civil society actors?</p> <p>What lessons have been disseminated about what works when addressing civil society development issues?</p> <p>Have the findings and recommendations of previous reviews been adopted?</p>
Monitoring and evaluation	<p>What systems are in place to support on-going monitoring and evaluation of Paung Ku against its objectives?</p>

Part C – Evaluation approaches and methods

Paung Ku is characterized by complexity. This includes the different ways of working, the complexities of the issues Paung Ku is work with communities to address; and the complexities of the environment in which the program is being implemented. An analysis of complexity concepts of relevance to Paung Ku are provided below. Particular attention was paid to the formulation of the evaluation questions and their relevance to the stakeholders who will be consulted over the duration of the in-country visit by the evaluation team. A stakeholder analysis of the relevance of the key evaluation questions was developed to inform the consultation processes adopted.

Given the nature of Paung Ku, overall a developmental evaluation approach is proposed for this evaluation. According to Michael Quinn Patton,

‘Developmental evaluation supports innovation development to guide adaption to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments’ (Patton, M Q, 2010)

Patton identified five primary purposes of developmental evaluation:

1. Ongoing development – *the program is being implemented in a complex and dynamic environment*
2. Adapting effective principles of a new context – *the program is innovative, based on adaption of effective principles and knowledge*
3. Exploring real-time solutions and generating innovative responses in the face of sudden and turbulent major change – *existing initiatives and responses no longer effective as conditions suddenly change*
4. Pre-formative development of potentially scalable innovation – *changing and dynamic situations require innovative solutions to worsening conditions or the model needs to be developed or does not exist*
5. Major systems change and cross scale development evaluation – *the program disrupts the existing system and the innovation needs to be scaled up which adds to complexities and uncertainties*

Table 3. Complexity concepts and relevance to Paung Ku

Concept	Overview of concept	Application to evaluation	Relevance to Paung Ku
Adaption	Interacting elements respond and adapt to each other so that what emerges is a function of the relationship between different agents over time	DE is an evaluation process that adapts to the needs of the programs and organizations, and to the relationships among program stakeholder and the evaluators themselves. Learning by doing	
Emergence	Patterns emerge that are beyond, outside of and oblivious to any notion of shared intentionality - the whole is greater than the separate parts	Watching for things to percolate up from interactions, capturing those ideas and new relationships, and placing them in front of the people as options for further development	
Non-linearity	Sensitivity to initial conditions: small actions can stimulate large reactions – a small increase in one variable produces a large increase in another	Being alert for tipping points or critical incidents is a key part of the DE evaluators role, noting forks in the road can lead to significant changes in programs or organizations – and this often happens in unpredictable ways	
Uncertainty	Unpredictable conditions, sometimes unknowable in advance – a ‘maybe’ condition	In DE, the evaluation process cannot be fixed. It needs to have flexibility built in, such as preparedness for program processes and outcomes to change. Measurement also needs to be flexible	
Interdependence	Relationships between different elements are highly interdependent	Paying attention to the inter-relationships and inter connections that create feedback loops is a key part of DE. This is important because very often in dynamic situations, we can sometimes not predict what might happen, we only really know once it’s happened	

Developmental evaluation approach and methods used for Paung Ku

Using a developmental approach to the evaluation of Paung Ku will enable flexibility to deal with the range of complex aspects of the program. A number of methods of inquiry are recommended for when a developmental evaluation approach is adopted including: appreciative inquiry; success case method; most significant change; systems thinking / approaches; outcome mapping; and action research. Following meetings of the evaluation team, briefing sessions with Paung Ku and consultations with Board and Reference Group members on 23 November 2012, the evaluation team agreed that **evaluation case study** and **appreciative inquiry** were the most suitable and feasible for this evaluation and within the time frames allowed.

Case study evaluation

Case study evaluation is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a 'real life' context. It is research based inclusive of different methods and is evidenced based" (Helen Simon 2009:21). Evaluation case study approach was preferred given the need to understand complex social change mechanisms and the factors leading to change in Myanmar.

Appreciative inquiry

Much has been written in the research literature about appreciative inquiry as a method for organisational change, community development and evaluation⁷.

An Overview of Appreciative Inquiry in Evaluation (2003) Anne T. Coghlan, Hallie Preskill, Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas published in NEW DIRECTIONS FOR EVALUATION, no. 100, Winter 2003 © Wiley Periodicals, Inc. was considered particularly useful for informing the approach to adopt for the evaluation of Paung Ku. Appreciative inquiry is preferred method for the evaluation of Paung Ku, rather than a more typical problem solving approach. The difference in these approaches is illustrated in the figure below from Peggy Holman and Tom Devane (1999) Collaborating for Change: Appreciative Inquiry (page 15)

Figure 1. Problem Solving and Appreciative Inquiry



⁷ <http://www.atlc.org/members/resources/ai1.html>;
<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm>

While the above illustration has been for organisational change purposes, the same philosophy has been applied in community development and evaluation of development programs.

The key evaluation questions that need to be answered for the evaluation of Paung Ku will be used as a general guide using an appreciative inquiry approach that will be adopted for this project. In other words, the evaluation questions themselves (see above) were not the actual questions that will be used out in the field in a literal sense.

Overall evaluation approach and methods to be used for the evaluation of Paung Ku

The overall developmental approach for the evaluation is summarised as:

- Case study evaluation approach⁸ and Use of Appreciative Inquiry techniques for Yangon and regional consultations
- Review of documentation and analysis of existing and newly collected data and information relevant to all evaluation questions

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology covers design and planning, document review, consultations, analysis and reporting aspects, as outlined below.

Table 4: The methodology steps and actions

Steps in the evaluation	Actions to be undertaken
Step 1: Plan and design the evaluation	Review program documentation (Phase 2 project documentation) Determine purpose of the evaluation Develop initial theory of change to underpin the evaluation Identify key evaluation questions Undertake stakeholder analysis for consultations and evaluation focus Identify types and sources of information required Identify evaluation methods and prepare tools Prepare draft evaluation plan
Step 2: Review existing data	Access and review existing data about Paung Ku relevant to answer key evaluation questions Identify gaps in data, and where new data collection is required Request access to data and information sources as required Collate existing data in preparation for analysis, triangulation and reporting
Step 3: Undertake initial consultations in Yangon with identified key stakeholders	Evaluation team briefed by Paung Ku program managers and advisors Conduct select consultations with key stakeholders in Yangon prior to field trips to Mandalay and the Delta regions

⁸ Refer to Helen Simons work on case study evaluation methods

	<p>Review information and key issues to take on board in the evaluation</p> <p>Confirm consultation schedule for in-country visit</p> <p>Refine draft evaluation plan</p> <p>Confirm approach and methods to be adopted</p> <p>Refine theory of change</p> <p>Confirm evaluation plan</p>
Step 4: Undertake field trip consultations in Mandalay and Delta regions	<p>Refine evaluation tools for each region – Team 1 & 2</p> <p>Identify contextual information for each region prior to field visits</p> <p>Agree evaluation team consultation and communication protocols</p> <p>Collect and collate consultation data from field trips</p> <p>Team 1 & 2 communicate as required during field trips</p> <p>Prepare Mandalay and Delta field trip reports</p>
Step 5: Undertake final consultations in Yangon	<p>Meet with Paung Ku staff and consult with key stakeholder as arranged</p> <p>Confirm if additional information or consultations required, and any follow-up needed</p> <p>Collate and analyse information collected through consultations</p> <p>Refine and confirm theory of change</p>
Step 6: Analyse and synthesise data and information collected to answer key evaluation questions	<p>Triangulate information and data from document review, Yangon and field trip consultations</p> <p>Analyse and synthesise data and information against key evaluation questions and terms of reference</p> <p>Identify key themes / findings from the evaluation</p> <p>De-brief to validate initial findings</p>
Step 7: Draft evaluation report and present on findings	<p>Commence draft evaluation report</p> <p>Prepare draft Aid Memoir and present to AusAID and Paung Ku stakeholders</p> <p>Discuss implications of the evaluation findings</p> <p>Prepare conclusions and recommendations</p> <p>Refine draft evaluation report</p>
Step 8: Finalise evaluation report	<p>Submit draft report for feedback</p> <p>Refine and amend the evaluation report as required</p> <p>Refine and complete report based on feedback</p>

Table 5. Evaluation consultation checklist

Interview Process step	Protocol to adopt	Reference other documents
Introductions	<p>KML to introduce himself and SJG</p> <p>MM to introduce herself and LN</p> <p>Allow interviewees to introduce themselves</p> <p>Circulate attendance list document and ask attendees to complete; unless one-on-one interview</p>	<p>Evaluation Team précis in Evaluation Plan</p> <p>Attendance template list</p>
Interview pre-amble	<p>SJG and LN provide:</p> <p>background about the project purpose of the interview style and duration of interview</p> <p>KML and MM to translate</p>	Evaluation plan
Interview questions	<p>Team members to select and decide which questions they will ask</p> <p>KML and MM to translate</p>	Evaluation plan - – Stakeholder / evaluation question analysis
Recording of interview	Team members to take notes during interview	Collect and collate notes taken by team members for Yangon, Mandalay and Delta consultations
Completion of interview	<p>KML and MM to keep note of time</p> <p>Team members thank stakeholder for their time and participation</p> <p>KML and MM to translate</p>	
Write up interview notes	<p>Team members discuss key observations</p> <p>Draw observations together as soon as possible after interview is complete, or at the end of each day of interviewing</p>	<p>Source notes for each region to summarise key issues:</p> <p>Yangon based Mandalay Delta region</p>
Collate information gathered from consultations	<p>Delta team</p> <p>Mandalay team</p> <p>Yangon – both teams / based on whom interviewed</p>	Case study summaries prepared to inform the evaluation report

Part D Consultation program for the evaluation

Table 6: Number of Organisations and individuals consulted for the evaluation (27 Nov–4 Dec 2012)

Note: CSOs from Shan and Karen states were also consulted

Yangon consultations	No people	Mandalay based consultations	No people	Delta based consultations	No people
Save the Children	1	Sein Yaung So Activity	4	RDO	2
Swiss AID	1	Green Network	1	Women's Group	2
Oxfam	2	Green Future	1	Ah Linn Tan	4
Eco dev	1	OAFADG	3	Yaung Ni Oo	3
Shwe Hmaw Wun	5	DEMO	2	Women's Group	3
Hser Mu Htaw	6	Justice Movement for Community	1	Pan Tian Shin	4
SEM	1	JMC	2	Women's Group	1
Jue Foundation	2	Farmer Network	2	Township Fisherman Committee	3
Ore Wai Media Network	1	Ga-Yu-Hands	11	Bogalay-North	4
Modern News Journals	1	Peace and justice	3	Maw Gyun	5
7 Day News	1	Activist	1	Bogalay-South	3
The Voice	1	Myit-Tar-Par-Ra Mi Hospital	1	Kyeik Latt	3
Note: AusAID and Paung Ku staff not included in this table.		Paung-See-Myit-Ta	2	RDO	1
		Third Eye International Foundation	1	Farmer Group	2
		Win-Zit-Myit-Tar Group	2	Farmer Group Maw Gyun Zone	4
		Myat-Par-Ra Mi	1	Farmers	12
		Yong-Kyi-Oo	1		
		Yan Aung Myin	3		
Total 12	Total 23	Total 18	42	Total 16	56

“Empowering nascent community groups”

A young man of Hta Naung Kan Village, Meiktila was concerned about lack of essential services such as health services and civic education in his village.

Through Paung Ku he had an opportunity to attend a training related to grass-root leadership and development. He’s started training youth on awareness on local community development. Currently 58 members actively participate in the youth group.

The youth group instigated a village clinic program with the help of a volunteer medical doctor. The clinic opens three days a week and refers people to the town hospital, if necessary

The group also established a community library with the help of a monk from their village. The group has special weekly talks and discussion among members - each member reads one topic and they share with each other.

They have also conducted training at neighbouring villages and get involved in local events (e.g. plastic campaign). Based on learning from the group, the community from nearby industrial zone has also established a community library. The Youth Group in Hta Naung Kan Village has started to network with other CBOs locally and also nationally.

Appendix B – Phase 2: Paung Ku Evaluation case study report

This report illustrates through use of practical examples and case studies the key achievements of Paung Ku over Phase 2 (2010-2012), by answering the following questions:

How has Paung Ku built the capacity of Civil Society Organisations in Myanmar?

How has Paung Ku facilitated networking for learning, sharing and influencing wider change?

How has Paung Ku enhanced the advocacy of civil society with policy actors?

How did Paung Ku improve community capacity building practice in the wider development community?

These case studies are the stories of Myanmar community leaders and their fellow citizens whom the evaluation team consulted during an in-country visit to Myanmar in November – December 2012. Those consulted had been involved in various community development and civil society strengthening activities with Paung Ku and at different stages in the history of Paung Ku. These stories demonstrated that Myanmar civil society is in many ways at the cross roads of significant changes in terms of social and political change and nation building. Not all of the stories we were privileged to hear during the in-country visit are included in this report.

How has Paung Ku built the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) in Myanmar?

During the field visits for the evaluation, the evaluation team interviewed different types of community groups in Myanmar. Some were very well established grassroots representative organisations, and others were very new to their community action endeavours. There was significant diversity amongst the groups in terms of the communities they represented, the issues they are facing, how long they had been operating, and why they had come to Paung Ku.

“Importance of grass roots involvement”

When asked what was most important to them in working with Paung Ku ‘capacity building to act for their communities’ was most

"What community capacity has Paung Ku built?"

Capacity to Be: Communities drive their change process and are clear about what they want to achieve. Initially they achieve practical results, later they learn to act more strategically.

Communities learn to be well organised, and to select trusted, motivated, representative leadership.

Capacity to Do: Community groups have completed relevant activities, and have learned to mobilise their own resources. They have achieved results in terms of development as well as rights.

Capacity to Relate: Internally, community groups organise downward accountability, as well as sharing and learning among the members of the group. Externally, community groups learn to connect with other groups, and to stay connected. They learn to approach relevant stakeholders who can help to advance their development activity or their cause, including NGOs in their locality, local authorities, and their elected representatives in regional and national parliaments.

commonly mentioned. Paung Ku maintaining 'grass-roots' involvement was also frequently mentioned.

Paung Ku has worked with community groups to build capacity at various stages in their organisational development and maturity demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to diverse community capacity building

needs. Paung Ku engaged in helping communities to come together for joint reflection and action, e.g. Youth groups in Mandalay area; supported well-established and

"Paung Ku small grants have met a huge need in the community. The small grants enabled community development from the 'ground up'- this empowered communities, promoted a citizens' voice" (Paung Ku Board Member, November 2012)

active community groups to achieve increasingly more benefits for their members; and facilitated association of community based organisations in representative bodies, which are now seeking registration as a Civil Society Organisation (CSO). By way of example one of four of the zone committees in the Delta region represents 44 CBOs and has active sub-groups on fishing, farming, women, and youth.

Accessing small project grants was significant to many community groups, but it was clear that those involved in community activities committed a lot of their time and energy to building their own capacity.

The key benefit of Paung Ku was not the small grant per se, but how this facilitated learning about cooperation and collaboration in the community, and about gaining access to training and other resources to achieve community goals and to deal with any issues they were confronting.

Different issues were raised by community groups consulted during the field visits, including foreign investment, pollution from gold mining, environmental degradation and land rights, to name a few.

Paung Ku provided a wealth of information and resources to assist community organisations to understand the issues they were confronting, to network with other groups dealing with the same issues, and to reflect on how communities could deal with them.

It was clear from the consultations that during Phase 2 there was a shift from using the small grants for community development projects, e.g. such as electricity for all households, to using the small grants more strategically for community capacity building, that is to buy training, technical or legal advice.

Small grants trigger “learning-by-doing”

Paung Ku initiated training and networking events which continued to be considered important for strengthening community organisations. During Phase 2, Paung Ku focussed on downward accountability of civil society groups to their communities and constituency. Reflection on this experience has driven Paung Ku to become more accountable and transparent to the organisations it works with.

The mentoring role, facilitated and supported through Paung Ku, was another avenue to build the capacity of civil society organisations during Phase 2. Groups and networks were able to freely access Paung Ku mentoring services. Paung Ku generally agrees on a timeframe for such services, for instance an average of 9 visits for a starting community group.

Mentoring was not linked to CSOs application to access the small grants, but mentoring does aim to strengthen organisational capacity in terms of governance, administration and strategic direction.

The annual report 2009 stated “the immediate aim of Paung Ku funding for projects is to support the delivery of community development or capacity building.” Small grants are still seen as a vehicle for ‘learning by doing’, and Paung Ku mentoring services are designed to stimulate reflection on the project process (Annual Report, 2009).

Mentoring in a mentor’s words

“We only need to facilitate if there is a difficult issue, otherwise let people find their own way. We do not monitor closely because it will create dependency. We also teach and use coaching to build skills like note taking and documentation, speaking skills, and financial management.

There was some variation in the practice of mentoring in Mandalay and the Delta based on the consultations undertaken for the evaluation. Nevertheless, the evaluation found that the combination of mentoring and capacity grants is at the heart of Paung Ku’s capacity building effort.

Paung Ku grew rapidly during Phase 2 and now feels the need to increase the number of active mentors, and to more deeply understand and define the practice and purpose of mentoring in Phase 3.

If we don't do it, who will? If not now, then when will it start?

One CSO leader explains the plight of fishers in the Delta.

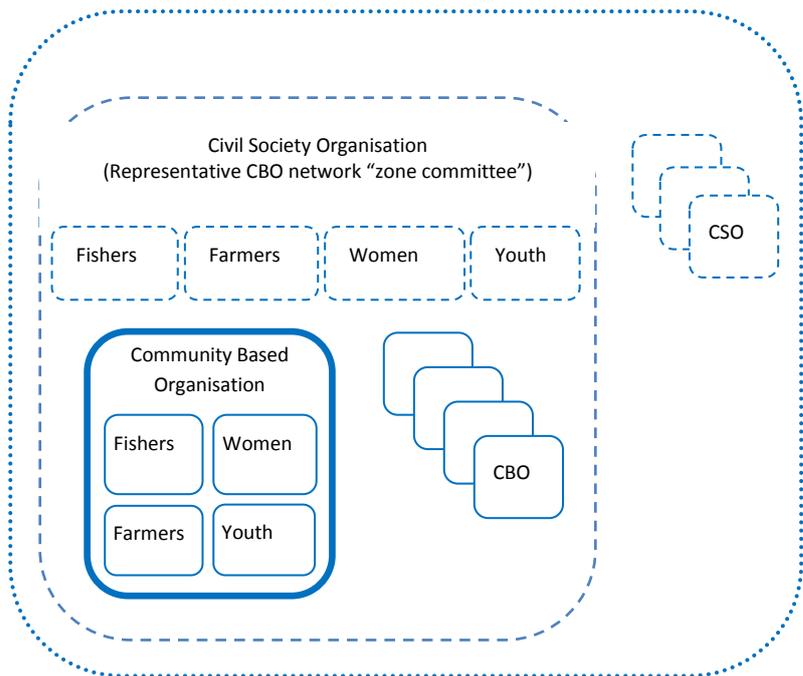
“Businessmen buy a license to fish from the government and distribute concessions to fishers. Our research shows that just 5 businessmen have all the fishing licenses in our area, and they only pay 53 lakhs Kyat tax to the government. They pay 252 lakhs Kyat for the permit, but they collect 1500 Kyat from the fishers for the right to fish. This is illegal, but they announce it as “collective sharing” and there is nothing we can do about it.”

The fishers have to sell their fish to the licence holder, because selling fish to others would be an illegal act. Moreover, when the buyer weighs the fish the fishers are cheated on the weight, and then again they are paid below the market price. Fed up with the situation, which has existed for many years, one bold fisher sold fish to others. The licence owner called the police and the fisher was jailed. The village had to come up with 1,000 lakh to get him out of jail. One of the Delta CBO umbrella organisations documented the case and shared it with 3 other umbrella CSOs for discussion. The CSOs in the Delta now work together to gain collective fishing rights.

How has Paung Ku facilitated networking for learning, sharing and influencing wider change?

Networking is either geographic or issues-based. Initially emphasis was on ‘formal’ networks (e.g. the Delta zone committees), but there has been a growing recognition of the importance of informal networking across organisations faced with similar issues.

Networking in the Delta



The objective for networking has developed from a common articulation of *linking/sharing information* and *resources/learning/joint action* to include *creating a voice / platform* for advocacy.

The majority of community groups and CSOs we met with during the field visits were well networked, within and across regions, and commented that Paung Ku had facilitated this.

The minority, primarily those who were only recently established were aware of the potential to be networked and were planning various activities with Paung Ku to establish their own and/or join existing networks.

Many of the advocacy results would not be possible without informal networking e.g. farmers, CSOs, NGO Food Security

Working Group, and media networked on providing inputs to the land law.

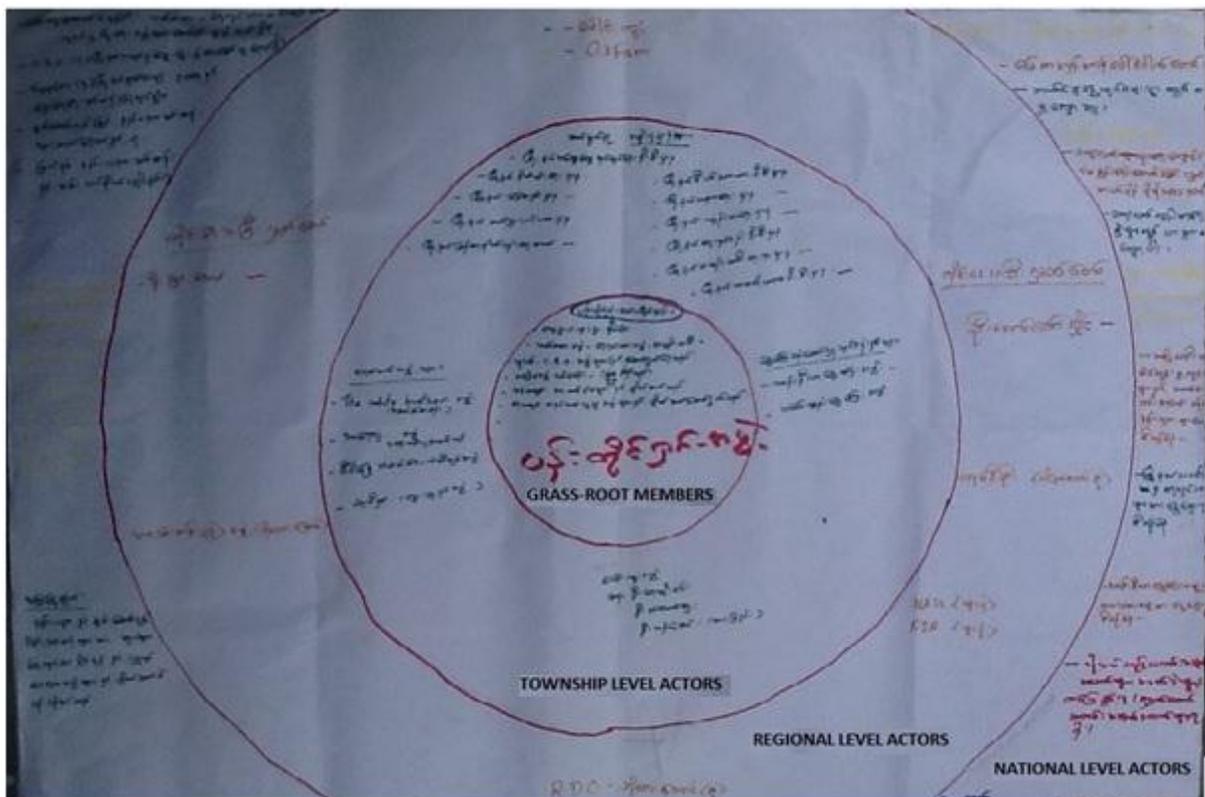
The land rights issue was raised on numerous occasions, including during consultations in Yangon, Mandalay and the Delta regions. Paung Ku provided information and resources, access to legal advice and council, and through networking and advocacy, substantial support to various CSOs and CBOs on this particular issue.

Engaging in learning from their activities, doing research and gaining access to technical expertise and information about certain issues were mentioned by all groups as particularly important contributions of Paung Ku. Through networking many CBOs had joined first with just a few and then ten or more others in a very short space of time.

While a network analysis was not possible within the short time frames for this evaluation, based on the consultations conducted during the in-country field visits, the evaluation team documented many key examples of the type and extent of networking that had been made possible through Paung Ku.

For example, Paung Ku has facilitated both regional e.g. Delta Zone Committees and issue based networks e.g. land rights to bring together people to share and learn from one another on diverse, complex, technically challenging and politically sensitive issues.

Picture: Informal network of one of 4 PK supported CSO's in the Delta



“Kyon Ma Ku – land issue leads to larger problem”

Our community asked a Paung Ku consortium member to support a bridge, and they put us in touch with Paung Ku. Villages across the river, heard about it and visited us early 2012. They had a land issue: authorities took their land for a paper factory near the river. Paung Ku listened and advised to invite the media. The media suspected river pollution and took a sample. Paung Ku paid for a test in the national lab, and the results showed that the water was polluted from upstream gold mining. The wells in two villages are also very seriously contaminated, and it is now prohibited to drink this water.

The four villages concerned met twice and agreed to jointly raise the water pollution problem with the health department. We also started action against gold mining, but the miners did not care. The next step was to inform the two regional prime ministers, and to inform the media at the same time. These gold mines are in the deep forest, so we also contact the KNU. One of our female representatives attended a KNU congress meeting, and requested them to help. Most of the illegal mines are closed now. There is just one site left.

We submitted a grant request for a deep well to Paung Ku, but their grants are too small, so we are digging a well even though it will not solve the all the

How has Paung Ku enhanced the advocacy of civil society with policy actors?

Like networking, advocacy is integral to Paung Ku’s other objectives to build community capacity. Before 2010, advocacy was mainly about community groups engaging with local authorities to obtain permission for their activities.

Sparked by the changing environment in the country, the focus gradually shifted to community groups engaging with a broader set of issues. Significantly, Paung Ku started to recognise a multitude of civil society actors beyond community groups, such as media, artists and public opinion leaders.

Now the advocacy feature of Paung Ku is a major area of innovation that seeks to achieve practice, policy and attitudinal change by enabling ‘movements’ around a wide variety of social e.g. peace and development in Rakhine and Kachin States, and land rights, economic e.g. Dawei deep seaport and economic zone and environmental issues and by facilitating the involvement of multiple stakeholders.

“Blue spots”

The PK movement aims for peace, harmony, and conflict avoidance. Paung Ku seeks to calm down and to sort out the issue peacefully. PK helps the media to show both sides of an issue, both sides of a conflict because things are never black and white. There are blue spots, where people from one side are helping their fellow citizens from the other side (Paung Ku staff member, November 2012)

Enhancing advocacy is arguably the most misunderstood objective of Paung Ku and the one that may appear to present the most risks. The evaluation team met with a number of people from the media, and also asked community groups how the advocacy activities worked in practice. With only relatively recent freeing up of the media in Myanmar, and the potential fear in communities in tackling difficult issues it is understandable that advocacy of civil society with policy actors through Paung Ku may be seen to be challenging and un-predictable. But this also needs to be seen within the context of broader social and political changes in Myanmar including changes in the media and censorship.

A number of high profile issues have been raised through the media, by CSO's that received facilitation services and capacity grants from Paung Ku during Phase 2. This was part of Paung Ku's support to CSO's advocating with policy actors such as government authorities, parliamentarians, and public opinion leaders to instigate change. While the examples varied communities took the lead, while Paung Ku support consisted of process facilitation.

The representatives of CBOs, CSOs and opinion leaders whom we spoke to were clear: Paung Ku responds to their requests for advocacy support; not the other way around. The organisations and people that come to Paung Ku are so clearly driving their own change processes that we had to probe deeply to understand that Paung Ku's involvement had "only" been catalytic.

Yet it was very clear that without Paung Ku, the organisations would not have been where they were today. While an advocacy support role is not without risk, Paung Ku manages this risk by only working on real issues that organisations themselves feel strongly about, and want to act upon. At the end, Paung Ku is invisible by "leading from behind".

The importance of advocacy has appeared to have increased over Phase 2, but this coincides with a number of major political events (as described in the context), and increasing community capacity and commitment to taking on the hard issues in their communities. A number of high profile cases, including where community leaders were imprisoned or apprehended, have since been resolved in the courts in favour of Myanmar communities.

By taking a strong and persistent stand on issues such as land rights, illegal mining, fishing rights, international peace events, and assisting with resolving or helping people who have been affected by conflict, Myanmar civil society is breaking through decades of social and political isolation.

Paung Ku has played a civil society strengthening role that others may have shied away from in this period of rapid social and political change. In so doing, Paung Ku has engendered courage and strength in civil society as a driver of positive change in the country. Paung Ku is certainly not instigating or fuelling political discontent or upheaval in Myanmar, it is rather supporting civil society

"Leading from behind"

I like the way we work. CSO start with development, and build trust in the community. They achieve development results, and then they are faced with wider issues. They approach us for advocacy (Paung Ku staff member, November 2012).

actors to find well researched, peaceful, balanced and new ways of resolving long standing complex issues through self-reliance, participation in political process, and, where appropriate, legal redress.

How did Paung Ku improve community capacity building practice in the wider development community?

The Paung Ku consortium members, includes International NGOs and local Myanmar NGOs and bilateral aid agencies (AusAID and DFiD) who have been involved in Paung Ku as donors. Since 2005, Save the Children has hosted Paung Ku on behalf of the consortium.

Improving practice in the wider development community, i.e. the consortium members and beyond, was a broad, ambitious, possibly unrealistic and under resourced objective of Paung Ku in Phase 2. There were many reasons why the interest in Paung Ku as a place to learn about grassroots capacity building dwindled over time. Turnover of board members, i.e. directors of INGOs in the consortium, was one of the contributing factors.

The Paung Ku board members that were interviewed agreed that the Board did not function as a governance board. The Board did not have time to deal with Paung Ku intensively. In a way, Paung Ku was moving faster than the Board could keep up with.

“Paung Ku is very open to feedback and information, and this is very good. Relationships with Paung Ku are based on trust and shared values. Paung Ku sees a big picture and is using the activities on the ground to get there.” Ex-ALG member, November 2012

In the beginning of Phase 2 the Advisory Learning Group (ALG) was still active. It was composed of senior staff of consortium members, with the dual purpose to learn from Paung Ku and to advise on the development of its capacity building practice (i.e. mentoring). Two ALG members were interviewed and they recalled learning much from the early mentoring experience with Paung Ku, before mentoring became impossible to combine with their own INGO project duties. The ALG members also played an active role in linking community groups with Paung Ku mentors and grants.

With the political changes in the country, the ALG was seen as a safe space where NGO senior staff could meet to share views and discuss about the future. Paung Ku helped the ALG members to understand new concepts like social accountability and the role of the media. Paung Ku also invited experts, for instance to talk about the Constitution.

According to interviewees, the INGOs had difficulties to engage with the “political updates” that Paung Ku organised. Both in the ALG and inside INGOs some of Paung Ku’s relationships, for instance with 88 generation who were released from prison, was cause for tension and disagreement. With the decision to transition from a project to an NGO, a “confused” ALG was dissolved about 6 months ago, although the ex-members retain strong relationships. A small board is now leading the transition, but the INGO board members did not express clear ideas about their future relationship with Paung Ku.

Paung Ku's grass roots involvement in community development and capacity building; its orientation to building capacity including through small grants across a broad range of CSOs and community groups was seen by Board members as a particular strength of Paung Ku.

In many ways Paung Ku's model is uniquely focussed on community capacity building compared to the usual larger grant programs as in other countries

directed at providing essential services for education, health and infrastructure, such as roads and transport.

While the role and size of the Paung Ku board changed or evolved into its present form during Phase 2, staff of consortium members were intended to play a key role in mentoring as part of the Paung Ku small grants program for community development and capacity building. For a number of reasons, this approach to mentoring through the Paung Ku consortium members did not work. In light of this Paung Ku staff needed to work with communities itself to unpack the challenges they were facing.

"Improving practice through mentoring"

The original intention for mentoring was that mentors would come from the consortium members of Paung Ku. It was hoped this would create cross capacity building of the members. It did not work. (Paung Ku Board member 2012)

The evaluation considered the importance of mentoring within the context of Paung Ku's other objectives and sought to understand how mentoring was provided by the end of Phase 2. While the mentoring by INGO staff in the Paung Ku program did not affect wider mentoring practice of consortium members as intended, Paung Ku adapted and innovated to enable mentoring to grow as a practice for strengthening community led initiative, as was originally envisaged.

A small Board is managing the transition of Paung Ku to an independent NGO in Phase 3. Board members consulted for the evaluation reflected on the contributions of Paung Ku to civil society as well as some of the challenges in terms of maintaining a focus on grass roots capacity building, networking and advocacy and the need for ongoing funding for Paung Ku to continue its work.

The transition, including with the current Board will be challenging for Paung Ku while continuing to try to fulfil its key capacity building objective as defined in the Phase 3 Project Framework Documentation (2012) during a time of funding uncertainty (Paung Ku Board Member, 2012).

"Risk calculation"

"Paung Ku is a great risk calculator. Every issue is so touchy, but Paung Ku always finds the right people and the right way forward. Trust building on these sensitive issues is too risky for INGOs, so we must let Paung Ku do it." Ex ALG member, November 2012

Recent developments have seen new players like the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank entering the Myanmar International development community with loan and grants portfolios. Paung Ku is supporting civil society organisations to engage with these new actors. While in the Paung Ku analysis, the impact of ODA is “peanuts” compared to, for instance, the impact Foreign Direct Investment will have on the people of Myanmar, Paung Ku does stay abreast with the Aid programs that are being designed, and facilitates exposure of CSOs to these programs e.g. World Bank programme for village banking.

Paung Ku Social Media Discussion Forum

Paung Ku also uses a Discussion Forum and a Facebook page to discuss wider development issues in the country, each with about 300 participants. Responses from 16 Forum participants, half Yangon based, and from mixed organisational profiles (i.e. only 6 INGOs), indicate that the Forum is “somewhat” to “very” important to them. All except 4 share the Forum emails or discuss topics with others, and 13 call for both English and Burmese language on the Forum. Some other suggestions were: make it more easily accessible to a wider audience; allow anonymous contributions; integrate with academic work; more “neutral”, less “opinionated”.

Appendix C-Paung Ku and CSO engagement in Myanmar

