

Paung Ku

Project Proposal 2011-2012

Summary

Project Title:	The Paung Ku Project - A Consortium initiative for strengthening Myanmar civil society through innovation.
Based:	Yangon, Myanmar
Lead by:	A Consortium of INGO/LNGOs working in Myanmar, with Save the Children as the lead agency
Project Period:	1 January 2011 to 31 December 2012
Budget:	Requested from AusAID 1,323,325 over 2 years (2011-12)
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1. Context

Despite facing many challenges, in the last decade Myanmar civil society organisations have begun to find more space and opportunity to operate. This has resulted in a proliferation in the number of groups and there is now a wide variety of active organisations, from local & national level NGOs to community based organisations and social groups. Further, in response to Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 many new local groups mobilised to support relief and recovery activities.

However, while the number of local organisations is growing, Myanmar civil society is still faced with a range of challenges. First, while most local groups have demonstrated self reliance and initiative, in many cases their capacity to implement programmes and to absorb and shape international support (both financial and other) is limited. This is particularly the case in relation to capacity in programme design and management, financial management and organizational development and accountability.

Second, this limitation in organisational capacity also applies to international agencies in Myanmar. There are low levels of experience of partnership in the Myanmar context and therefore few *proven* approaches developed toward effectively engaging and supporting civil society organisations. In particular, there are very few funding and support mechanisms that can cater for small, volunteer based community level organizations that do not need large grants and are not seeking to grow into a “professionalised” NGO.

Third, civil society in some cases mirrors the broader governance issues in Myanmar. Many organisations face challenges related to member participation, with decision making often being centralised around one leader or a small group of leaders. Further, while often not visible, there is significant conflict and fracturing of relationships both within and between Myanmar civil society groupings.

Finally, while there is some operational space for service provision related activities; the opportunities for influencing policy makers are extremely limited. This means that there is a lack of alternative voice and engagement with government (particularly to represent grassroots and disadvantaged groups).

2. Rationale

The Paung Ku consortium was established in 2007 in recognition of this growth in the activity and numbers of local organisations in Myanmar. While there was growing local organisation activity, international support in funding and technical and managerial capacity building (especially for smaller and regionally based organisations) remained limited.

Over the three years since Paung Ku’s inception, the initiative has worked with over five hundred local groups (both in Cyclone Nargis affected and other areas), disbursed over USD 2 million worth of grants and reached over five hundred thousand beneficiaries. Paung Ku has also supported the capacity building and mentoring of over one hundred of these local organisations

During this time, recognition of the importance of civil society in Myanmar has grown. The role of civil society in service delivery remains important especially in an environment of extremely limited basic services. In addition, civil society is increasingly understood as a key actor in building trust and social capital, building models of participatory governance and influencing wider policy change. In the Myanmar context, it is important to recognize the role of support (both funding and other support) as driving a “wedge” into the

humanitarian space and potentially opening it up for these more diverse roles. Therefore, through continuing to work with a wide variety of local groups (many of whom will be active in local level service delivery) the Paung Ku initiative aims to strengthen Myanmar civil society in fulfilling this range of roles (Please see *Annex 1* for a more detailed description of Paung Ku's 'Model of Change').

The second phase of the initiative will be implemented by a consortium of international and local NGOs and will build on these key insights about Myanmar civil society gained from the first phase. The initiative will continue to build capacity of local groups, support networking within civil society and enhance advocacy of civil society to other actors. Through learning through experience, the initiative will also seek to change the practice of international NGOs (and other agencies) toward more and better engagement with Myanmar civil society.

The second phase¹ of the Paung Ku initiative is for **two years** (from January 2010 to December 2012). This phase will focus on developing and testing innovative practice for strengthening Myanmar civil society.

3. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the initiative is:

To strengthen civil society in Myanmar through innovation.

In the Myanmar context, with significant humanitarian needs and a long standing crisis in governance, a strong civil society is important in:

- being a civil voice in relation to government, private sector and international actors
- building models of participatory governance
- promoting trust and building social capital
- providing development and social supports to communities who have very low access to services

Paung Ku is designed to develop and promote innovative approaches to strengthening civil society, which can be replicated and scaled up in Consortium and other agencies.

3.1 Project approach

In order to strengthen civil society, the Paung Ku initiative will have four main objectives

- **To build capacity** of civil society organizations
- **To improve practice** within Consortium member programs and the wider development community
- **To facilitate networking** within civil society for learning, sharing and influencing wider change.
- **To enhance advocacy** between civil society and policy actors.

Build Capacity

With a history of limited resources and support for local organizations in Myanmar, there is a need to begin by building groups' self reliance and then identifying ways to further their contribution to a strong civil society. While many beneficiaries will be reached (in a

¹ Further information regarding Paung Ku's first phase (Evaluation and Reporting) is available from Paung Ku.

variety of sectors) through the activities of organizations that Paung Ku will support, the primary focus will be on capacity building for the organizations themselves. One advantage of the consortium approach is the pooling of expertise both in sectoral areas and in organizational capacity building. The initiative will draw on this variety of experience and skills in building the capacity of local groups.

One of the Paung Ku's key approaches to capacity building is through *action–reflection learning*. As organisations implement micro project activities, a Paung Ku mentor (who is separate from project monitoring processes) facilitates reflection on what the group has learnt and how that learning might contribute to strengthening their capacity and sustainability in the future. In phase one, Paung Ku provided mentoring services to over one hundred local organisations.

Improve Practice

A central reason for the Consortium is its ability to strengthen a critical mass of INGOs and large LNGOs to support emerging civil society. Through learning and sharing between organisations, it is intended that practice will change towards more productive and impactful engagement with local groups.

One example of Paung Ku facilitating consortium practice change in phase one was through the adoption of small grants mechanisms and mentoring approaches within other Consortium agencies. By experimenting with new approaches, reflecting critically and sharing learning widely it is hoped that Consortium and other agencies will improve their practice in working with Myanmar civil society.

Facilitate Networking

Paung Ku recognizes that one key element of a strong civil society is the extent of links and networks within it. Therefore, Paung Ku will identify, facilitate and support civil society networks with the aim of promoting learning and sharing and influencing wider change. The Consortium approach allows for increased opportunities for linkages between civil society actors as it pools the contacts and networks of the various agencies.

One key lesson from phase one is that effective networks and links usually form around particular geographical areas or issues of concern. Therefore, Paung Ku will seek to identify particular areas or issues which are seen to mobilise groups and depending on the situation may either support existing networks or facilitate new ones.

Enhance Advocacy

Policy-influencing, especially with government authorities, is a nascent and challenging civil society role in the Myanmar context. Despite many constraints, civil society groups continue to find space to influence government, private sector and international actors toward better policies and action. The Paung Ku initiative will build on this existing experience, knowledge and capacity.

One key insight from phase one of the initiative was the important role of village based organisations in engaging with local authorities (for example, in gaining permission for new activities or pushing for government contribution to supporting the vulnerable). Paung Ku will continue to focus on opportunities for advocacy at the village level and through documentation of group experiences, seek to understand the dynamics of successful engagement.

Which organisations will Paung Ku support?

Given the large and growing number of civil society organisations in Myanmar, it is necessary to be strategic about working with groups and networks who will contribute most towards strengthening Myanmar civil society. In particular Paung Ku will seek to engage with groups who are able to (or have potential to)

- Build empowering internal and external relationships through a culture of participation.
- Sustain themselves
- Deliver quality and accountable results and services
- Engage with the state at appropriate levels

In the first phase, Paung Ku worked with over five hundred civil society organisations (mostly from community based organisation level). This included a wide range of different types of organizations and micro projects. For example

- A community based organisation in a Cyclone Nargis affected area completed a project rebuilding a fence around their water supply. They went on to do a second project rebuilding a small bridge in their community.
- A community based organisation in central Myanmar completed a project to build a new school after their village had been flooded.
- A Yangon based Myanmar NGO was given funding to for five staff to attend training on project cycle management.

While Paung Ku is seeking to support diverse roles for civil society, in some situations, an initial service delivery focus is necessary for local groups in order to find the legitimacy for their operations. As opportunities develop, Paung Ku can build group capacity for more diverse roles in advocacy and networking.

In the first phase, civil society groups were identified through applications for micro project funding. This mechanism will continue and in the second phase Paung Ku may also take a role in actively identifying and approaching local groups who are seen to have potential.

3.2 Sectors

Central to the Paung Ku process is the belief that local groups themselves should design, lead and evaluate their own initiatives. Therefore, Paung Ku will not specifically support particular sectors but rather consider proposals on the basis of their contribution to strengthening communities and civil society.

In the first phase, Paung Ku has supported micro projects in sustainable agriculture; natural resource management; early childhood education; non-formal education; primary health care; HIV&AIDS prevention, care and support; water and sanitation and income generation. In addition to this, Paung Ku may also support groups to do cross cutting activities related to organisational development, advocacy, peace building and project management.

3.3 Geographic Scope

The coverage of the Project is limited to the areas in which the INGO partner-members have permission from the authorities to work. However, this pooling of MoU coverage is a key advantage of the Consortium approach and gives significant and growing opportunities for access.

The areas currently covered by consortium MoU's are: Chin State, Kachin State, Kayin State, Sagaing Division, Tanintharyi Division, Bago Division, Magway Division, Mandalay Division, Mon State, Yangon Division, Shan State, and Ayeyarwady Division.

3.4 Sustainability

The Paung Ku initiative's central goal is strengthening the long term role of civil society as a sector in Myanmar. Contributing to the capacity and sustainability of civil society organisations and networks in Myanmar is a critical component of this, with group *ownership* and *access to resources* as two key areas.

Vision and ownership of activities by local organisations is essential in supporting a sustainable role for civil society. If external agencies are seen to overly define and shape program goals, this can undermine local organisation commitment to ongoing action. One key advantage of the Paung Ku initiative is that activities are essentially led by locally defined goals, in that civil society organisations can apply to Paung Ku to support projects which are designed by groups and communities themselves. This process is seen to maximize local ownership of activities.

Another potential limitation to the sustainability of the activities and influence of civil society organisations is their ongoing access to resources, particularly funding. While Paung Ku provides some project funding, one key portion of the capacity building objective is to widen the networks and opportunities for local organisations to access funding and other support through alternative local or international sources. For example, In the first phase of the initiative, Paung Ku was able to act as a link between grassroots or township level groups and potential long term donors.

3.5 Cross Cutting Issues

Gender

The Paung Ku initiative sees gender equality as a critical cross cutting factor in strengthening civil society.

- CSO applications to Paung Ku are specifically assessed for gender equality in engagement in and support from project activities.
- Mentoring and capacity building process specifically addresses gender equality within group processes.
- Paung Ku learning framework disaggregates beneficiary and group data by gender in order to monitor progress in gender equality in CSO activities.
- Gender equality in group leadership is a component of a capacity building objective indicator.

Disability

- Several self help groups of people living with a disability have been supported by Paung Ku in the first phase. It is likely that these relationships will continue in the new phase.

- Networking around disability as an issue may also form part of Paung Ku's advocacy activities.

Environment

- Networking around environmental issues along with specific funding for community forestry related activities may form a key part of Paung Ku's objective toward enhancing advocacy.

Child Protection

- The Paung Ku initiative is integrated into Save the Children's (as lead agency) Child Protection Policy and standards.
- All project monitoring staff have received training in assessing the potential impact of micro projects on child protection issues.

4. Structure

Consortium

The Paung Ku Consortium is composed of

- Save the Children (as lead agency)
- Swissaid
- Norwegian People's Aid
- World Concern Myanmar
- International HIV&AIDS Alliance
- Burnet Institute
- Metta Foundation
- Knowledge and Dedication for Nation-building (KDN)
- Oxfam GB
- CARE Myanmar
- GRET

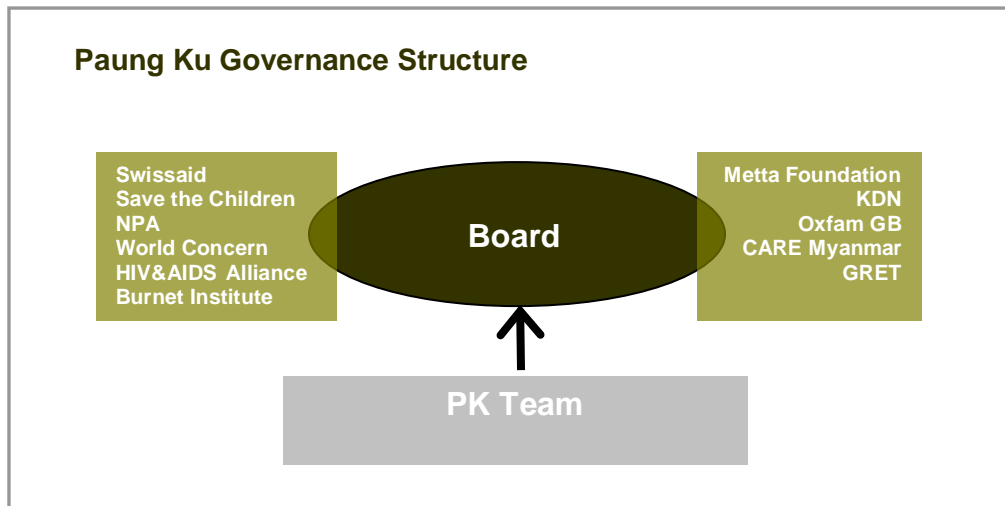
All organisations are international agencies, except for Metta Foundation and Knowledge and Dedication for Nation-building which are locally based. As lead agency, Save the Children will be responsible for providing financial and human resource system support. The Consortium may admit new member-organisations based on their potential to contribute to the initiative.

Governance

The Paung Ku initiative is governed by a Board representing the Consortium members.

The Board will meet quarterly and is responsible for

- Strategic level decision making
- Monitoring of the broader operational environment
- Accountability to all stakeholders, including donors
- Recruitment and management support to the Paung Ku Director



Advisory and Learning Group

The Advisory and Learning Group (ALG) provides the practice channel between the Project and the member-agency programmes. It is composed of senior Myanmar practitioners from the Consortium member-agencies. The ALG is responsible for:

- practice advice and support to the project innovations
- technical support (where required) to the Board and project team
- monitoring and documenting the wider practice context
- providing linkages between PK-supported CBO's, local government, the project team and the member-agencies
- the transfer of learning into the member-agency programmes

Paung Ku Project Team

The Project Team will consist of a

- Paung Ku Team Director
- International Advisor
- Program Team (Program Manager, four regional Program Facilitators, one Trainer, five Mentor Facilitators and ten Field Monitors)
- Finance Team (Finance Manager, two Support Officers and one Database Assistant)

Paung Ku head office will be located in Yangon with sub team offices (one Program Facilitator, two Field Monitors and one Mentor coordinator) based in regional areas. The current regional offices are based in Ayeyawaddy Division, Magway Division and Mandalay Division, though these locations may change according to workload and demand.

The Paung Ku team is directly accountable to the Board (through the Project Manager).

5. Implementation

Objective 1	To build capacity of civil society organisations	Indicators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More developed and longer term plans for funded and mentored groups. 2. Increased access to funding and technical resources through other international or local sources (ie sources other than Paung Ku). 3. Changes in group structure and responsibilities to more shared leadership (including women's leadership) 4. Funded and mentored groups have an increased habit of reflection on experiences and changing practice (ie experiential learning) 5. Increased member and community participation in planning, group decision making and implementation.
Output 1.1	132 CSO micro-projects funded, completed and evaluated by 100 civil society organizations each year.	
Output 1.2	Mentoring programme completed with 80 grant-funded civil society organizations each year.	
Output 1.3	Training delivered and cross visits facilitated for 80 grant funded civil society organizations each year.	
Objective 2	To improve practice within Consortium member programs and the wider development community	Indicators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of pilot projects (replicating Paung Ku models) in consortium members which are completed and then embedded in consortium member programs. 2. Number of consortium members seeking PK input for new partners initiatives 3. Growing profile of partnership progress in Consortium Member annual reports 4. New program of Consortium Members always starts with Civil Society analysis 5. All Consortium Members have their own civil society learning space activities (internal seminar, forum, website)
Output 2.1	Annual CBO-INGO (Consortium) exchanges are convened and facilitated in three regions (Yangon, Mandalay and Pyapon).	
Output 2.2	Annual workshop for consortium staff is convened on how to apply/put into action one of the Paung Ku practice-models (eg Mentoring, Small Grants).	
Output 2.3	A learning space is provided for consortium members to learn from regional and international civil society initiatives. ('Models of Change' forums, web discussion group)	
Output 2.4	A best-practice review is conducted of a specific INGO-CSO relationship for each consortium	

	member. (2-3 reviews per year)	
Output 2.5	An annual best-practice review is conducted of a specific PK project team-CSO relationship	
Output 2.6	One learning package is designed and delivered each year on “Working with CSO’s” for consortium staff and other forums (topics such as Do No Harm, Partnership, Advocacy, Sustainability)	
Output 2.7	Seconded mentors have shared a PK model to a group from their own organization.	
Objective 3	To facilitate networking within civil society for learning, sharing and influencing change.	Indicators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each area based network takes on and documents two advocacy projects 2. Township network approach has been duplicated by other organization in ten other townships. 3. First CBO representative on the organizing group of a national network 4. National Mentor Network attracts Non PK funding for 2013 5. Conference held about networking in civil society
Output 3.1	6 township-networks are established as pilots for CSO networking and information-sharing.	
Output 3.2	2 area-based advocacy focussed networks of CBO’s & LNGO’s are established and resourced each year..	
Output 3.3	Five PK-supported organizations become members of existing NGO networks.	
Output 3.4	One existing CBO/LDO network is provided with mentoring and grant support each year.	
Output 3.5	Four pilot regional forums of PK-supported groups and organizations are convened in 2010. (for example Dry Zone region or Ayeyawaddy Region)	
Output 3.6	The national Mentor Network (NMN) is established and resourced.	
Objective 4	To enhance advocacy between civil society and policy actors	Indicators <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocacy becomes a widely accepted rationale for civil society activity 2. Consortium members develop advocacy strategies which are know and committee to by their staff and partners. 3. CBO are able to articulate an advocacy role (beyond service provision) 4. Consortium has directory of known policy-level contacts in 4 core areas of civil society advocacy
Output 4.1	A volume of case-studies of successful CSO/INGO advocacy with government agencies is produced and disseminated.	
Output 4.2	An advocacy module is designed and lead within PK’s mentoring/training programme.	
Output 4.3	An engagement model for Myanmar CBO advocacy practice is developed and promoted,	

	building on local organizations' existing capacity to negotiate permissions with state actors.
Output 4.4	Two seminars are convened and resourced each year for selected consortium staff on aspects of the socio-political context.
Output 4.5	Five workshops with local and international NGOs on nature and role of civil society in Myanmar

6. Project Monitoring, Learning and Dissemination

In many ways Paung Ku is fundamentally a monitoring, learning and dissemination project in its own right. The project is conceived and designed around a cycle of innovation, demonstration, promotion and replication. Practice approaches to supporting the growth of civil society are designed and reviewed by the project team. The learning is incorporated into the approaches as they are promoted within the wider development community, who in turn monitor, evaluate and improve their own programme applications.

At the individual micro project level, monitoring and evaluation occurs through Paung Ku systems which have been in place through the first phase and are implemented by field monitors from the programme team. Progress toward indicators will be verified through field team reports, group and network self assessments, team meeting records and Consortium agency documents. Within this micro project level monitoring system is a process for groups to identify their own indicators. Through this process Paung Ku aims to strengthen ownership and capacity for monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring of the broader contextual level is a key function of the Paung Ku Advisory and Learning Group which will meet monthly and the Board which meets Quarterly.

The lessons from the monitoring processes are then synthesised and documented through PK project team meetings, Advisory and Learning Group meetings, mentor sharing and learning workshops and Mid Term and Final evaluations. CBO/INGO “exchanges”, and three annual peer reviews of selected INGO/CBO and PK/CBO relationships will also be a source of learning for the Consortium.

Ultimately, the initiative aims to influence practice within Myanmar and therefore promotion of learning is vital. Dissemination occurs through a range of pathways. First, project reporting (3 monthly reports, annual reports and final report) presents key lessons to all stakeholders and seeks their feedback and responses. Second, key lessons related to different areas of practice will be presented through workshops and papers (in phase one Paung Ku produced papers and conducted relevant workshop sessions on The Case for Civil Society Led Emergency Response and Harm to Civil Society). Because of the Consortium nature of the initiative there are also a variety of additional formal and informal channels of exchange and promotion.

7. Risk analysis

The Project has identified four main risks relating to internal and external environment.

1. That an international initiative is increasingly perceived as lacking constituency and legitimacy to “strengthen civil society”. Likelihood: Medium (this phase), Impact: High

Mitigation: Building majority local organisation representation on Board and ALG through the second phase, exploration of localising the initiative.

2. That the Consortium will be unable to provide sufficient, skilled, on-site mentors to PK-supported groups and projects. Likelihood: High, Impact: High

Mitigation: Formal mentoring agreements with individual Consortium agencies, resourcing a third party (eg a local NGO) to supply mentors (as a contingency plan).

3. That Consortium network and advocacy activities are significantly constrained by the State. Likelihood: medium, Impact: high.

Mitigation: The PK board and ALG have extensive experience in managing government relations and monitoring varying levels of risk. The Consortium approach also allows use of pooled MoU and government contacts to minimise impact.

4. That due to perception of risk to their own programs, Consortium agencies will not want to supply MoU coverage for PK grant support. Likelihood: medium, Impact: medium

Mitigation: Monitoring of context and Paung Ku Board to develop contingency plan.