THE ART OF NETWORKING: A STUDY OF CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS IN MYANMAR

FINAL DRAFT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CRC	Convention for the Rights of the Child
CSFoP	Civil Society Forum for Peace
CSNeP	Civil Society Network for Peace
DFID	Department for International Development
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
GEN	Gender Equality Network
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KNU	Karen National Union
MATA	Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability
MLAW	Myanmar Legal Aid Network
MSG	Multi-Stakeholder Group
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	National Ceasefire Coordination Team
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
NLD	National League for Democracy
NNER	National Network for Education Reform
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
USDP	Union Solidarity Development Party
WON	Women's Organizations Network

CONTENTS

With the opening of civic and political space for civil society in Myanmar following the reforms initiated by the government after 2011, the number and engagement of civil society organizations grew in a wide range of sectors, including in human rights and democratization. Key in these reforms was the loosening of restrictions on the freedom of expression and freedom of association. As more civil society groups and organizations became active, many also began to develop linkages and form networks to work together on common agendas. The number of networks grew and many organizations are now members of multiple networks.

Networks are complex organisational structures. This study focuses on four in-depth case studies to illustrate how civil society organizations have come together in networks to be able to advocate for changes within a challenging environment. The study aims to:
- provide an understanding of how civil society networks have formed and how they are functioning;
- assess the achievements and challenges of working as a network;
- identify good practice areas on how networks organize and manage relationships.

The study conducted a literature review, a mapping of existing networks, key informant interviews with organizations that work with civil society networks and in-depth analysis of case studies of four civil society networks -- the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA), Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW), Civil Society Forum for Peace (CSFoP) and National Network for Education Reform (NNER).

The study focuses on *civil society* networks made up primarily of civil society actors which includes actors from the private sector, academia, religious groups, the media and political parties, but does not include actors from the government (public) sector. The study focuses on policy advocacy networks working at a national level, and those that are formed and led by local civil society actors.

Development of civil society networks
Although there may have been other informal and traditional forms of civil society networks, the mapping exercise found that formal civil society networks first emerged in the country in the mid-2000s, the term "civil society" having been introduced by the international development community in Myanmar in the 1990s. Among the earlier networks were networks that were established to address the political, social and economic injustices that people felt from the unitary and military directed state that responded ruthlessly to internal dissent leading these early networks to seek exile or if remaining within the country to go underground, remain informal and diffuse.

With the inflow of international assistance in the HIV sector in early 2000s, numerous formal networks were established to fight against discrimination and represent the needs of key populations affected by HIV including people living with HIV, sex workers, drug users and men who have sex with men. These networks had strong support from the international aid community, in part to legitimize their own work which was facing must scrutiny from the outside world. Following the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and the accompanying increase in civil society activity, a number of networks were also formed that focused on coordination of and resource mobilization for humanitarian and medium term development efforts in the Delta, including numerous township level networks.

With the opening of space for civil society to engage in a wider range of issues, including in engagement with the government, numerous policy advocacy networks were formed after 2011 to influence the policy and practice of power holders. Despite the increased openness, many organizations found that, individually, they still had little influence on power holders at the national policy level as well as on private businesses. Building on linkages with other organizations, they came together to identify innovative ways to overcome these challenges.

The national policy networks studied were often formed by one or more "leaders or leading organizations" that already had the trust of civil society organizations based on their own informal networks. These "leaders" and existing informal relationships were instrumental in bringing together people and creating the inspiration, the energy and common vision for different organizations to work together.

The formation of a network creates a "virtual space" through which civil society organizations can raise their voices. Even when the networks do not have official recognition and a physical space at the discussion table, they are able to adapt and use other means to raise their issues. Numerous networks have used international initiatives and conventions such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Convention for Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to legitimize their formation and their activities. Some rally around new laws, policies and processes that are being created to find the space to engage.

Often the impetus for forming a network is a forum, conference or series of workshops which brings together civil society organizations around a specific issue or topic about which the participants have a concern. These events, where participants from different parts of the country come together, are a strong catalyst for creating the enthusiasm and commitment to join hands to continue to work together. These members from different parts of the country are an important element of the national networks. Through its members, the networks stay embedded within the communities and are able to gather updated information and stay in touch with the situation on the ground. They are also able to share information on national policy and monitor policy implementation on the ground.

While some networks remain informal, the transformation into more formal "civil society networks" often leads to the institutionalization of the relationships and the development of governance and management bodies and processes to manage them.

Reasons for forming networks
The majority of civil society networks in Myanmar are policy advocacy networks which have been formed to carry out advocacy on specific issues. Other functions of networks include: sharing information; capacity building and mutual learning; coordination of activities; joint action (e.g. on election observation to cover different regions) and joint strategy. There are however few networks or partnerships in Myanmar that have focused on developing encapsulating agendas or joint standards and strategies due to the political realities in the country.

The main reasons for civil society actors to work together in policy advocacy networks are the ability to have a voice through strength in numbers and the pooled risks for individual members in confronting power holders. Many regional members join national networks to be able to influence national policy and to learn through interactions with others. Networks are also a means to bring together different types of actors to draw on their different strengths and expertise and to expand coverage of an initiative.

Characteristics of networks
Membership in networks varies widely from small networks of less than ten organizations to national networks with more than 500 members. Members share a common characteristic or commitment towards a common issue, or a link to a member that does. Although they are brought together around a particular issue, national networks may have very diverse membership. One of the key strengths of these networks has been their ability to bring together civil society from different regions and that represent different religious, ethnic and professional groups with different approaches and ideologies.

As networks are often built on informal social networks and are made up of actors who already have some previous linkages, there is often a strong level of trust among the initial members. The initial members often include a tight core group which is highly motivated. The formation of a more formal network and the

acceptance of external donor funding often leads to establishment of structures and processes which may change how members relate to each other.

Internal relationships are usually centered around a central decision-making body and a coordination unit. Most networks establish a central decision-making structure, such as a Board or Executive Committee, to make decisions on behalf of the network. While the networks seek to be participatory and representative in the structures and processes of the Boards or committees, the conveners of the networks are often the informal leaders of the network and have a strong influence on the decision-making bodies. .

Among the four networks studied, three have established coordination offices/secretariats to coordinate and manage the activities of the network and one is in the process of establishing a coordination unit. While a coordination office is often needed because members do not have time to manage the activities of the network, the formation of a coordination office can complicate relationships within the network. Where there is a coordination office, communications among members often go through the coordination office. Members may interact more closely within thematic groups or regional networks but relationships between these groups tend to flow through the coordination office. Regional networks tend to be relatively autonomous of the national network although the capacity of different regional networks may vary.

Networks themselves network externally, building on the relationships that their members already have with other stakeholders. The ability of networks to draw on the large set of their member's existing linkages is a key strength of networks.

Relationships with government are particularly important for policy advocacy networks. The four networks studied have found ways to establish formal and informal links with the relevant target government entities for their advocacy work building on existing relationships of the members. Most networks have also established strategic partnerships with other organisations such as other civil society entities, international NGOs, UN agencies and regional and international networks for joint activities, such as for research, capacity building, technical assistance and solidarity for a shared vision. As networks which bring together small community groups with limited technical expertise, the networks have sought to establish linkages with external organizations that can strengthen their influence and credibility and enhance their technical capacity.

At present, most networks still depend on external donors for funding. Donors can have a strong influence and impact on the functioning on networks. The networks studied are conscious of the implications of donor funding on their internal dynamics and advocacy positions.

Achievements and good practice areas
This study sought to assess the achievements of the policy advocacy networks studied using three evaluative questions:
- how well are the networks representing civil society and community voices;
- how much space do the networks have to influence power holders; and
- what difference have the networks been able to make on the issues they seek to address.

As relatively new entities working in a complex and difficult political environment, the networks studied have strived hard and done well to represent civil society and community voices on issues which are still highly sensitive. MATA, CSFoP and NNER use their regional networks to gather input from states/regions to feed into national discussions. Despite difficulties at times in reaching common positions, these mechanisms ensure that positions taken are shaped by inputs from the members and the communities they work with. Some networks have conducted research and documentation to collect evidence from the community to strengthen their advocacy efforts but this is still limited and there is a need to expand such initiatives.

One of the important achievements of the networks studied has been their ability to adapt and find innovative ways to gain recognition and influence power holders to contribute to national level processes despite the

challenging political environment they faced. Network members have seen that by working together they become more visible and their voices are more likely to be heard. Even when they are not officially given a space in national level processes, they cannot be ignored. Except for MATA, the recognition however, is not institutionalized and can thus be easily reversed.

Even though there was more space for civil society to engage with power holders following reforms introduced by the Thein Sein government, the engagement did not necessarily lead to desired changes. Although the government held many consultations with civil society to revise and develop new laws and policies, the inputs were not always incorporated in the final outputs or actions. All of the networks studied feel, however, that they have had an impact, formally or informally, on their key advocacy targets – on the drafting of the Legal Aid Law and the National Education Law; on the drafting of the National Ceasefire Agreement; and on the drafting of the first Extractive Industry Transparency Index (EITI) report submitted by the Myanmar government. These laws and documents are however, only the first step in a long process to effect changes on the ground. The networks will need to continue to monitor the situation to ensure that these processes continue. Policy advocacy is a long term process and the benefits of success are not likely to be seen in a short period of time.

While there are many benefits to forming and being part of a network, networks are complicated organizations and many have faced challenges in establishing appropriate structures and undertaking actions to maintain the interest and solidarity of members. A network's structure and form will depend on its own circumstances. The study, however, identified a number of common organizational challenges that networks face as well as some ways that the networks have used to overcome these challenges. Based on this, the study has identified a number of good practice areas for how networks can organize and manage relationships. The following are a summary of these good practice recommendations:

1. **Be clear about the purpose and principles of the network**
   o Members must understand the specific reasons they are working together as a network; there must be added value for the members to work together as a network
   o All members must agree and adhere to the basic principles of the network
2. **Be clear about the time and commitment required**
   o Networks require a lot of time and effort from members. Members must commit to contributing the time and effort of their staff/members
3. **Build trust and maintain the involvement of members**
   o Develop shared values, a clear Code of Conduct and mechanisms for addressing conflict
   o Involve members in activities of the network rather than rely solely on the coordination office
   o Acknowledge contributions of members for the successes of the network
   o Develop a strong internal communications strategy to foster interactions among members
   o Establish clear roles and responsibilities for the coordination office; coordination office staff should be good communicators that can bring people together
4. **Establish democratic and participatory decision-making structures and spaces**
   o Develop structures which allow members to influence decision-making
   o Promote the network and its decision-making bodies as a shared space rather than a structure
   o Establish other sub-groups and domains of decision-making which involve members such as regional networks, thematic groups and committees
5. **Complement rather than compete**
   o Do not take on functions and activities that the members are already undertaking
6. **Develop innovative accountable mechanisms of operations**
   o Consider different options for establishing how the network operates; for example, a network can work through informal processes or be initially hosted by one of the members to avoid having to develop new management policies and procedures

- o Develop a Conflict of Interest policy and guidelines for decision-makers (who are usually also members and may also benefit from the decisions made)
- o Develop strong monitoring and evaluation systems

7. Manage donor relationships and funding
- o Be aware of the implications of receiving donor funds and the challenges this may create in managing donor requirements which often requires the establishment of structures and policies that draw away from members' commitment.
- o Be aware of pressures that donors may inadvertently place on networks of the functions they take on

Despite the challenges they face, the case studies show that the networks have been successful in achieving results in the three areas assessed. In order to further strengthen their activities, the networks should consider the following.

1. National networks should **place more emphasis on supporting their regional networks** to strengthen their representativeness and ability to carry out activities at the state/regional level. The networks should develop strategies for building the capacity and mobilizing more resources for the regional networks.
2. Policy advocacy networks should **strengthen their research and documentation initiatives** to ensure that advocacy messages are well-grounded and based on evidence, for example by developing partnerships with academic institutions or other research entities which can provide technical support and resources.
3. Networks should **advocate for equal status and stronger formal recognition of civil society participation in state processes** at township, state/regional and national levels, for example to be granted space for formal representation by civil society organizations in official bodies, forums and citizen engagement mechanisms.
4. Networks should **establish stronger monitoring and evaluation systems** to assess their contribution towards their objectives and goals. It will be important for networks to show that they can have an impact in order to continue to show their relevance to their members and stakeholders.

This study focused on functional aspects of networking within an organizational framework. To complement and build on this, it would be useful to conduct further study on the socio-psychological aspects of networking to better understand how individuals act and interact in networks and how networking can empower individuals to create social movements for change.

With a new government installed in 2016, Myanmar will continue to undergo a rapid pace of change. As the country looks forward to this new optimistic period, networks can play an important role in helping to shape a development agenda that is owned by the people. To do this, networks will need to be able to adapt to the changing situation, to harness their members to find innovative strategies and responses -- to continue to develop the *art of networking.*

*"Sometimes we wonder why we are still working together…
but we keep going because we all accept that we have to
work together to attain peace in our country."*

Jaw Gum, Working Committee Member
Civil Society Forum for Peace

I.   INTRODUCTION

With the opening of civic and political space for civil society in Myanmar following the reforms initiated by the government after 2011, the number and engagement of civil society grew throughout the country. As more groups and organizations became active, many also began to develop linkages and to form networks to work together on common agendas. The number of networks grew and many organizations are now members of multiple networks.

This study seeks to develop a better understanding of the recent growth and development of civil society networks in Myanmar. Networks are complex organisational structures with characteristics that make them different from single organisational entities. This study focuses on four in-depth case studies to illustrate how civil society organizations have come together in networks to be able to advocate for changes within a challenging environment. The study assesses the achievements of the networks as well as the challenges networks have had of working together to provide ideas for reflection by those in civil society who are part of networks or who seek to form new networks on how networks can organize to influence development issues in Myanmar. It also seeks to inform other organizations and donors which work with and support networks.

II.   STUDY OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORK

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to:
- provide an understanding of how civil society networks have formed and how they are functioning in Myanmar;
- assess the achievements and challenges of working as a network;
- identify good practice areas on how networks organize and manage relationships.

The objectives of the study were refined during the course of the study as it become clearer what could be achieved and who could gain from the observations derived from the study.

DEFINITION OF A CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK

There are many types of networks – computer networks, biological networks, organisational networks and social networks – and the study of networks encompasses a wide field of disciplines. For example, the field of network science is an academic field drawing from various disciplines including mathematics, sociology and computer science to understand complex networks such as social networks, telecommunication networks and even epidemics and political movements[1]. This study focuses on networks made up of people and organizations.

The literature on networks notes that the term is used so much in many ways that it is difficult to understand what is meant[2]. This study defines a network broadly as a collection of *actors* that are connected to each other through some kind of *relationship*. It is the actors and relationships between them that make up the network rather than the structures and services that they provide.

The study focuses on *civil society* networks which are made up primarily of civil society actors. Civil society actors include individuals, groups and organizations in the private sphere which are distinct from the government. Within this study, civil society actors include those from the private sector, academia, religious groups, the media and political parties, and do not include actors from the public sector.

STUDY APPROACH

A literature review conducted for the study identified a number of approaches for studying and evaluating networks. The study initially considered using a Network Functions Approach developed by researchers at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI)[3] which looks at four elements of a network – purpose, role, functions and form. However, the approach was later adapted and the study developed a set of research questions which examine different aspects of networks within the Myanmar context around four topics – network formation and purpose; internal relationships and structures; external relationships; strengths and challenges. The research questions were developed with input from the study committee and form the basis for data

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[1] See (Network Science -- Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2016) for an introduction to network science.

[2] (Hearn & Mendizabal, 2011)

[3] The NFA was inspired by Stephen Yeo's typology of functions (Yeo, 2004) and was first developed for studying research policy networks (Mendizabal, Understanding networks: The functions of research policy networks, 2006). It was subsequently refined in 2011 by Hearn and Mendizabal (Hearn & Mendizabal, 2011).

collection. As there have been few prior studies on civil society networks in Myanmar and little existing written literature, the questions are explorative in nature. The research questions are listed in Box 1.

Box 1: List of research questions

> **Network formation and purpose**
> - How have networks developed in Myanmar? How is this situated within the overall development of civil society in Myanmar?
> - What are the reasons that networks have been formed?
>
> **Internal relationships and structures**
> - What are the relationships and dynamics among members? How do members build trust among each other? How are these shaped by existing social networks in Myanmar?
> - What constitutes leadership within the network? Who are the leaders? What is their role?
> - How are networks monitoring their work? How do they seek to learn from their experiences?
>
> **External relationships**
> - How have civil society networks gained legitimacy/recognition within the Myanmar context? Within the current social and political transition in Myanmar, networks are seen as a means for amplifying voice and influencing policy. How are networks negotiating the political space? How are networks engaging with the state/political society including political parties?
> - How are networks funded? What effects have external funding had on networks? What are the challenges of managing donor funding?
> - How have networks sought to build partnerships? With whom, for what? How does this impact on their effectiveness?
>
> **Strengths and challenges**
> - One of the assumptions is that "the capacity of a network is greater than the sum". What do members see as the main advantages from working in a network?
> - What are some of the common challenges? How have networks tried to address them?
> - How do networks view their future? What do they seek to become?

Based on an analysis of the answers to the research questions, the study first presents a broad picture of civil society networks in Myanmar – how they have developed, the types of networks, the members of networks, the reasons networks are formed and how they are initiated. The study then assesses the achievements of the networks in three areas – how well they represent community and civil society voices, what influence they have on power holders and what impact they have had on their advocacy agenda. In analyzing the data collected, the study identified common challenges faced by networks and some ways in which they have sought to deal with these challenges. Based on this, the study presents a number of good practice considerations to guide civil society organizations working in or seeking to form networks.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

There is wide range of civil society networks in Myanmar including coalitions of communities such as networks of HIV positive people; producer networks made of up farmer groups such as the Myanmar Coffee Association; geographically-based civil society coordination networks such as state/regional civil society networks; consortiums formed to implement joint activities; as well as networks of civil society organizations formed around different sectoral issues such as gender, land, micro-credit, education, humanitarian support and peace. There are networks at the township, district, state/regional and national levels.

Taking into account the context in Myanmar and Paung Ku's own work with civil society networks, the study committee decided to focus on **policy advocacy networks** working at a **national** level. Some of these national networks also have regional networks at the state/regional level.

The study focuses on networks that are formed and led by local civil society actors, and thus includes networks which have only local organizations as members and does not include those which have members that are international organizations.

The key findings of the study are based on an analysis of information gathered from four in-depth case studies. Due to the small number, the findings of the study may not be generalizable but the study hopes that the insights gained are also applicable to other networks, particularly other national policy advocacy networks.

III.   METHODOLOGY

The study used the following methods:
(1) a literature review;
(2) mapping of existing networks;
(3) key informant interviews with organizations that work with civil society networks; and
(4) in-depth analysis of case studies of four civil society networks.

A **literature review** of studies on civil society networks from local and international sources was undertaken at the beginning of the study. The literature review found very few studies on civil society networks in Myanmar. The literature review helped identify lessons that have already been learnt about the operations of networks in other countries and contributed to the design of the study framework. A list of the documents reviewed is listed in the bibliography.

Fieldwork for the study was conducted in April to July 2016. The fieldwork began with a **mapping** exercise to identify existing civil society networks in Myanmar. The mapping was limited to networks whose members are local civil society actors only and excluded those which also have members which are international organizations. Networks at the state/regional, district or township levels were also excluded due to the limited resources available. The study identified a total of 36 national networks, of which 20 responded to a basic questionnaire on the characteristics of their network (type and number of members, purpose, role and functions). Additional information about the networks was collated from secondary sources such as directories and websites. Despite attempts to identify as many networks as possible, it is likely that the study was not able to identify and collect information on all existing national civil society networks in Myanmar and thus is not able to provide an exhaustive list. A list and brief description of the networks identified is provided in Annex I.

Key informant interviews were conducted with staff from five organizations/individuals that work with civil society and civil society networks. The key informants were from UNDP, Paung Ku, Pyoe Pin and Norwegian People's Aid; one was an independent consultant. The list of key informants interviewed is provided in Annex II. Key informant interviews provided background information on existing networks as well as interviewees' assessment of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of the networks they have worked with. The information provides a broader view than that provided by the four case studies.

The four in-depth **case studies** constitute the major focus of the study. The networks for the case studies were selected by the study committee based on the intended focus of the study (see scope of study). Accordingly, all networks selected work at a national level and have policy advocacy as their primary purpose. The case studies were also selected to cover a range of issues that are significant in the current development context in Myanmar. The four networks selected for the case studies are the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA), Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW), Civil Society Forum for Peace (CSFoP) and National Network for Education Reform (NNER). The study team met with the members of the governance bodies, network members and staff of the coordinating bodies of these four networks. Interviews were held in Yangon as well as with regional networks and members of each of the networks based in Myitkyina in Kachin

state. Kachin state was selected because the regional networks there are strong and have an active membership. The list of people interviewed from each network is in Annex II.

IV.   ORGANIZATION OF STUDY

This study was commissioned by Paung Ku and Christian Aid through a project funded by the European Union.

Paung Ku is a civil society strengthening initiative in Myanmar established in 2007. Paung Ku has supported many community groups and civil society organizations through a learning-by-doing and action-reflection approach to strengthen their organizational foundations as well as their ability to influence power holders. In recent years, with the opening of civic and political space, Paung Ku has also provided significant support to civil society networks which aim to influence the reform process through advocating for respect for social, political and economic rights and development of more inclusive and equitable policies and practices.

Christian Aid has worked in Myanmar since the 1980s to empower poor and marginalized communities, enabling them to take control of their own development. Christian Aid works in partnership with local organizations in Myanmar as well as those on the Thai and China border.

In 2015, Paung Ku and Christian Aid formed a partnership on a joint project to provide support to civil society organizations. This study is one of the activities of this partnership.

Paung Ku and Christian Aid formed a study committee at the beginning to guide the study team during the course of the study. The study committee was composed of six staff from Paung Ku and Christian Aid.

The study team was formed by DantDaLun Management and Consulting Services and was made up of three consultants who have extensive experience working with civil society organizations including civil society networks in Myanmar. One consultant was responsible for the literature review and study design while two consultants conducted the data collection, analysis and report writing.

V.   OVERALL CONTEXT

The study of civil society networks in Myanmar must be understood within the overall social, political and economic context in the country and in the development of the civil society sector in Myanmar.

SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Myanmar is a country undergoing intense political, economic and social change. The year 2016 marks a landmark moment in the country's history as a new government elected by the people takes over power following decades of authoritarian rule controlled by the military.

Although a "civilian" government led by President Thein Sein was installed in 2011, the elections that brought the Thein Sein government into power was considered to have been rigged with the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), boycotting the election and the military controlled Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP) winning 80% of the votes. Despite questions over the legitimacy of the government that took over, many Western countries lifted economic sanctions opening the way for increased foreign investment and development assistance. Nevertheless, many problems related to continued armed conflict in the ethnic areas, widespread corruption, weak governance and policies which favor big business have limited the impact of these developments for most of the population leading rather to growing inequalities and increasing environmental damage.

The problems faced in Myanmar today are very complex and stem from historical developments and issues which have been unresolved for many decades. Following independence from the British in 1948, Myanmar

experienced a period of democratic rule before the military took over in a coup led by U Ne Win in 1962. The Ne Win government adopted what it termed the *Burmese way to Socialism*, introducing free health care and education and nationalizing businesses and land ownership. The military controlled the country with a heavy hand and sealed off the country from the rest of the world. Severe restrictions were placed on freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association. Any dissent, including numerous student protests which took place throughout the years, was silenced with brutal crackdowns and arrests. The policies had a disastrous impact on the economy; as the country teetered on bankruptcy, the majority of the people lived in poverty and social services deteriorated from lack of funding and investment.

These policies continued until the late 1980s when the government began a process to introduce free market economic policies, removing restrictions and opening the way for foreign investment in a number of sectors. In 1988, student demonstrations broke out, sparked in part by the government's decision to demonetize its currency. These were again brutally repressed but led to Ne Win stepping down and installation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). Elections were held in 1990 but the military refused to hand over power to the NLD which won by an overwhelming majority, and instead arrested many of the NLD and opposition members.

The liberalization of the economy in the 1990s however paved the way for the military to develop their business interests and saw the establishment of new businesses controlled by the military and individuals closely related to the generals. Despite this, sanctions imposed by many countries limited the opportunities for the business sector except in the oil and gas field. The majority of the people saw few changes in their lives.

Throughout the decades many who have dared to oppose the government have suffered under the repressive methods used by the government. Many have died, disappeared, been imprisoned and tortured. The military operated an intricate intelligence network which instilled a blanket of fear over the population. Many dissidents also left the country and sought refuge in neighboring countries, some eventually in third countries, where they continued their struggle against the military dictatorship in Myanmar. Since the easing of restrictions by the Thein Sein government, some have returned to Myanmar and sought to reengage in the new developments in the country.

Adding to the political, social and economic problems faced is the myriad of armed conflicts which broke out in the ethnic regions of Myanmar soon after independence from the British to fight for greater autonomy and a federal system of governance. There are more than 20 ethnic armed organizations, most of which control their own territory and armed militias. Although the military led government began signing ceasefires with some of the ethnic armed groups in the mid to late-1980s, there was never an attempt for political dialogue and the ceasefires have led to increased exploitation of the natural resources in the ethnic regions by both the military and ethnic armed groups with few benefits for the people themselves. In 2011, fighting again broke out in some regions, notably in Kachin State where a ceasefire had been in place with the Kachin Independence Army since 1994. More recently, the Thein Sein government attempted to reach a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with all the ethnic armed groups but this has caused a split among the ethnic groups with only eight groups signing the agreement. Renewed efforts are now being made by the new NLD government to bring all the groups together to broker a lasting peace in the country. While there is strong hope that the new government will bring about change, the government's ability to manoeuver is constrained by the need for the NLD to tread carefully in its relations with the military which still controls 25% of the parliament and three key ministries – the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Border Areas and Ministry of Defense.

Further complicating the picture is the tension caused by a rising ultra-nationalist Buddhist movement that has used hate speech to incite discrimination, hatred, violence and religious intolerance across the country. While much of the rhetoric of the nationalist monks have been against the Muslim minority, the promotion of a need

to "protect the Buddhist race and religion" also adds to tensions in the peace talks with the ethnic groups, some of which are Christian.

As civil society organizations seek to address the social, political and economic problems that face the country today, they themselves are shaped by the dynamics and relationships that define this social, political and economic landscape. In studying civil society networks, these relationships and the different layers of identities (ethnicity, religion, class, political affiliation, family ties) also shape the dynamics and relationships within the networks.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Under the Ne Win period, civil society organizing was strongly suppressed. While there are disagreements whether "*civil society died*" during this period, it is clear that civil society activity was strictly controlled at the time and attempts to cross boundaries and voice views that were in opposition to the government were severely dealt with. The term "civil society" was introduced by the international development community in Myanmar in the 1990s but traditional forms of organizing outside of the government sphere had continued during the Ne Win period. Due to the pressure on social and political organisations, the period saw an increase in religious organizations both among Buddhist and Christian communities, some of which also carried out some social activities.

In the early 1990s after the end of the Ne Win era, the government opened the way for international NGOs to work in Myanmar. With international sanctions in place, including sanctions on development assistance, only a small number of humanitarian organizations established a presence in the country, focusing primarily on the health sector. To appease the international community which sought to work with local partners, the government promoted a number of "Government Organized NGOs" known as GONGOs such as the Myanmar Maternal Child and Welfare Association, Myanmar Red Cross and the Myanmar Nurses Association[4]. GONGOs are often hierarchical in nature with leaders who have close links with the government.

In some of the ethnic regions, the signing of ceasefire agreements in the early 1990s brought hopes of a "peace dividend" and increased development. Although this failed for the most part to materialize, the cessation of conflict paved the way for a number of local NGOs such as Metta Development Foundation and Shalom (Nyein) Foundation to form and establish projects in these regions. Civil society groups were also organized within refugee and exile communities based abroad. The majority of international aid assistance to Myanmar at that time was focused on populations along the Thai-Myanmar border where fighting had continued with the Karen National Union (KNU).

By the 2000s, increasing numbers of community groups within the country had found ways to operate with or without the explicit endorsement of the authorities. Most groups sought to organize self-help support and fill gaps in basic services where the public sector had failed. Some international NGOs also sought to promote the formation of community-based groups within their projects to increase participation and promote sustainability. However, civil society activities were still closely controlled and many issues were still considered off-limits.

In 2008, following the destruction caused by Cyclone Nargis in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta, many civil society groups responded with an outpouring of support. Although much of the flurry of activity died down after the initial phase, the programmes that started post-Nargis formed the basis for many civil society groups to increase their activities in the delta as well as to later expand to other areas.

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[4] Now called the Myanmar Nurses and Midwives Association.

In 2011, in an effort to gain legitimacy and recognition for the lifting of sanctions, the Thein Sein government brought in a series of reforms which, among others, led to the opening of space for civil society to work on wide range of issues, including human rights and democratization. Key in these reforms for civil society is the loosening of restrictions on the freedom of expression and freedom of assembly and association.

Since then, there has been a rapid growth in civil society involvement in different sectors. Civil society actors range from small community groups at the village level to youth and women's organizations at township and regional levels to national level non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in a wide range of sectors, including on policy reform. In 2011, an online directory of local NGOs in Myanmar listed 119 organizations, of which 105 had head offices in Yangon[5]. In 2016, the Local Resource Center which provides services to local NGOs showed a listing of 480 organizations with 420 based in Yangon[6]. Although the data is from different sources and not all organizations are listed in either case, the numbers show a five-fold increase indicative of the rapid growth in the last five years.

Civil society has been involved in a variety of roles – providing social services; building civic awareness and understanding of social justice; voicing opinions and demanding for the rights of those being dispossessed or exploited; and advocating for better protection of the country's natural resources and environment. Many of the civil society groups in the country are relatively new and do not yet have strong organizational structures, often relying on a single leader. While Yangon-based NGOs have mobilized funding and are increasingly dependent on professional staff, the majority of community-based groups are formed by volunteers and their strengths lie in their commitment and knowledge of the situation in their own communities.

Civil society actors, even non-political ones, are considered vital for democracy because they build social capital, trust and social values, which are transferred into the political sphere and help to hold society together, facilitating an understanding of the interconnectedness of society and interests within it[7]. Civil society in Myanmar is very diverse, as it is in many other countries. As noted previously, the social, political and economic landscape has shaped the development of different civil society organizations which have emerged in different periods of Myanmar's history in different parts of the country in response to different pressures or ambitions. These differences are accentuated by the lack of trust following decades of conflict and repressive rule which has propagated isolation and fear providing little space for dialogue and inclusiveness. Until recently, there have been few opportunities for civil society to work together across the country. Regional groups have tended to identify along ethnic lines with a high sense of autonomy from central Yangon-based structures to negate the strong Burmanization forces within the government and society. Border-based and exile groups, some of which have since returned to Myanmar, have been strongly opposed to the government and are wary of groups that have been willing to collaborate with government structures under the previous military regime. Some groups, particularly student groups and ex-political prisoners, have taken on an activist approach to push for reforms while those who have found ways to work during the years of repression favor more cooperative ways of finding opportunities through negotiations and personal ties. While not insurmountable, these differences further complicate efforts to develop networks that aim to bring together a wide range of civil society actors.

> *"Civil society is fragmented and divided. But this is natural and not a negative point. It is important that each makes clear its objective and role to see how we can work to best support each other. This is the reality."* (Key informant)

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[5] (Transnational Institute, Burma Center Netherlands, 2011)
[6] From database shared by the Local Resource Center
[7] (Putnam, 1994)

Under the Thein Sein government, civil society was tolerated, primarily as a means to legitimize the government. Despite the apparent opening of space for civil society to operate, there were still restrictions and the space was often quickly closed down when civil society was too vocal or openly defiant. Some issues were still highly sensitive and journalists and social media users have been arrested for raising issues linked to the military. The Association Registration Law passed in 2014 was developed with extensive consultation with civil society and makes registration voluntary; however by-laws issued in 2015 requires organizations applying for registration to obtain a recommendation letter from a government ministry. And despite amendments in 2014 to the Right to Peaceful Assembly Act and Peaceful Procession Law, the law has continued to be used to arrest those who protest peacefully. Civil society and networks with a strong policy advocacy agenda thus still work under challenging political circumstances and must find innovative ways to address their issues at heart.

With the installation of the new NLD government in 2016, the outlook for civil society is still unclear. The NLD had not yet made clear its position in relations to civil society. While there is still a strong role to play for civil society as new policies are developed, the new government has taken a cautious approach and has not yet fully embraced the participation of civil society in the new political context.

VI. DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORKS IN MYANMAR

Although there may have been other informal and traditional forms of civil society networks, the mapping exercise found that formal civil society networks first emerged in the country in the mid-2000s. Among the earlier networks were networks that were established to address the political, social and economic injustices that people felt from the unitary and military directed state that responded ruthlessly to internal dissent leading these early networks to seek exile or if remaining within the country to go underground, remain informal and diffuse.

A list and brief description of the networks identified through the mapping exercise is provided in Annex I. The mapping exercise identified the Child Focused Network, a network which promotes children's rights, as the first formally organized civil society network formed in Myanmar. The network was formed in 2003, facilitated by UNICEF and a number of other international NGOs, to promote the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) and to build the capacity of its members, the majority of which are children's institutions, in child protection.

HIV related networks In the late 2000s, a number of HIV advocacy networks representing populations most affected by the HIV epidemic were established to fight against discrimination and represent the needs of their community. The Myanmar Positive Group was established in 2005 to represent the community of people living with HIV. One of its key policy issues at the time was to advocate for access to anti-retroviral treatment for people living with HIV, a life-saving treatment that was still limited to a few in Myanmar despite increasing access throughout the world. Following in the steps of the Myanmar Positive Group, a number of other HIV related networks were also established – a sex workers network, a network of drug users, a network of men who have sex with men and a positive women's network – building on the same concept of finding space to be represented in decision-making and fighting discrimination. The Myanmar Interfaith Network on AIDS (MINA) and National Network of NGOs (3N), networks of civil society organizations working on HIV, were also formed focusing on capacity building of members and solidarity for a shared cause. The networks were supported by the inflow of international aid assistance at that time in the HIV and health sector from Western donors who lobbied for their recognition and representation in the official government coordination body for HIV, in part to legitimize their own work which was facing must scrutiny from the outside world.

Post-Nargis networks In the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, the increased activity of civil society groups also led to the growth of a number of networks focused on coordination and information sharing. In addition to national networks such as the Myanmar NGO Network, Thadar Consortium, Myanmar Environmental Resource Network, numerous township level networks were also formed. Some of the networks, such as the

"Zonal Committees" supported by Paung Ku in the delta later moved from a focus on information sharing and mutual learning to also working on joint advocacy such as in submitting recommendations to government and Members of Parliament on new land laws being developed at the time.

Policy advocacy networks Most of the networks formed after 2011 following the liberalization of the space for civil society organizing are policy advocacy networks such as the Enabling Legal Environment Group, WinPeace, Land in our Hands, Myanmar China Pipeline Watch Committee and IFI Watch, as well as the four networks in the case studies – Myanmar Alliance for Accountability and Transparency (MATA), Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW), National Network for Education Reform (NNER) and Civil Society Forum for Peace (CSFoP). These networks seek to create a platform for civil society to influence policy and practice of power holders such as local and national government, Members of Parliament, financial institutions, private sector companies and non-state armed groups on issues of rights and social justice. A number of networks were also

established during the 2010 and 2015 elections to coordinate civil society efforts for voter observation and to influence the election process.

Gender and women's networks Over the years, there have been numerous gender and women's networks that have been established in Myanmar in support of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Women's Organizations Network of Myanmar (WON) was set up after Cyclone Nargis by a group of local women's organizations. Women's organizations based outside Myanmar however had already established a network of women's organizations in 1999, the Women's League of Burma (WLB) based in Chiangmai, in order to bring together women's organizations of different ethnic nationalities. The Gender Equality Network (GEN), a broader network that includes all organizations with an interest in gender issues, grew out of the Technical Working Group on Protection of Women which was established during the response to Nargis. The network includes both international and Myanmar NGOs which have an interest in gender issues.   In addition to these networks, there are a number of women's networks that work in specific sectors such as WinPeace which focuses on women's role in peace and conflict resolution and May Doe Kabae, a network of women's micro-credit groups.

Civil society umbrella networks Apart from specific sectoral or issue-based networks, there are a number of networks that bring together civil society organizations at a geographical level such as township and state/regional civil society networks. UNDP has supported the establishment of state/regional civil society networks in 7 states/regions to act as an umbrella to represent civil society in engagement with local government. These networks provide spaces for information sharing, coordination, giving voice and act as point of contact for identifying civil society representatives for consultations with stakeholders such as government and donors. There is however not a national umbrella of all civil society organizations bringing together different state/regional networks. An attempt was made to form the national Civil Society Organization Forum (CSO Forum) to bring together civil society groups from all over the country to raise civil society voices during the visit of President Barrack Obama in 2014 but the forum remains a loose network with limited activities.

Consortiums and partnerships Consortiums and partnerships are specific types of networks, often with limited members. They are usually geared towards joint implementation of projects through bringing together organizations with different expertise or different coverage areas. The Thadar Consortium and Joint Strategy Team are consortiums that were formed in the context of a humanitarian response, the first in the Delta and

the latter in Kachin state. Few other consortiums and partnerships of local CSOs have been formed in Myanmar.

Media networks UNDP has supported the development of state/regional media networks in the 7 states/regions where it works. The media networks conduct joint initiatives and provide protection for their activities; for example the networks help to validate translations of government documents to ensure that journalists do not misquote information.

Producer networks Although agricultural producers such as coffee growers and melon growers are part of the private sector, during the mapping exercise conducted by the study, several networks formed by these producer groups identified themselves as civil society networks. These networks, such as the Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producer and Exporter Association, Myanmar Coffee Association and Myanmar Tea Cluster are organized at the village, township, state/regional and national levels to represent producers, buyers and traders in the specific industries. These networks seek not only to promote their products but also to advocate and influence laws and policies which affect their industries such the Seed and Pesticide Laws and border market systems.

HOW NETWORKS ARE INITIATED

Networks coalesce and form around a common issue or characteristic. Although they share a common agenda, different members are often brought together by a "convener" or "facilitator" to initiate the process of working together. Many of the early networks were motivated by international development organizations working in Myanmar such as UN agencies and international NGOs. Pyoe Pin[8] and UNDP are key facilitators and donors for civil society networks in Myanmar. Other international NGOs working in specific sectors have also played a role in bringing together civil society actors to form networks in their sectors.

As the space for civil society activities expanded, many networks have developed organically under the initiative of local civil society organizations themselves. Despite the increased openness, many organizations found that, individually, they still had little influence on power holders at the national policy level as well as on private businesses, many of which had strong links with government authorities or the military. Building on informal networks and linkages with other organizations, they came together to identify innovative ways to overcome these challenges. For example, the Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW) brought together a group of lawyers, civil society organizations and community networks and linked up with a Southeast Asian regional network to work on issues of rule of law at a time when the government was still highly sensitive to any civil society activities on legal or political matters.

Numerous networks have used international initiatives and conventions to legitimize their formation and their activities. The formation of a network creates a "virtual space" through which civil society organizations can raise their voices. Even when the networks do not have official recognition and a physical space at the discussion table, they are able to adapt and use other means to raise their issues. Networks that are given official recognition can also push the boundaries to further expand the space they have. For example, the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA) was formed in response to the government's announcement to participate in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and its members have an official physical space within the Multi-Stakeholder Group that has been formed; furthermore, the civil society members are able to use the virtual space created by the network to advocate to local authorities and

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[8] Pyoe Pin is a Department for International Development (DFID) funded project whose purpose is to support locally-led coalitions of civil society, private sector and government to address issues in different sectors, including in policy reform.

the Ministry of Mines on other land, labour and environmental related issues caused by exploitation of natural resource by private businesses.

Many networks develop out of existing informal networks and partnerships that already existed among some of its members. The national policy networks studied were often formed by one or more "leaders or leading organizations" that already had the trust of other civil society organizations. These "leaders" and existing informal relationships are instrumental in bringing together people and creating the inspiration, the energy and common vision for different organizations to work together.

At times, the impetus for forming a network is a forum, conference or series of workshops which brings together civil society organizations around a specific issue or topic about which there is a common concern. These events, where participants come together, are a strong catalyst for creating the enthusiasm and commitment to join hands to continue to work together. The NNER held a series of 28 seminars attended by more than 100 participants each in different parts of the country to build their constituency for their network. The seminars were entirely self-funded and led to the development of the NNER National Education Policy which forms the basis of NNER's advocacy efforts.

The regional constituencies are an important element of national networks. As noted previously, it is the actors and relationships between them that make up a network, not the services that it provides. Through its regional networks and members, the network stays embedded within the community and is able to gather updated information and stay in touch with the situation on the ground. It is also able to share information on national policy and monitor policy implementation on the ground. A strong committed membership that is able to communicate regularly is thus important for the functioning of a network.

As networks become more formalized, structures and relationships often become more formalized. The transformation of informal social networks into more formal "civil society networks" leads to the institutionalization of the relationships and the development of governance and management bodies and processes to manage them. The challenges of managing these changes are explored and analyzed in later sections.

WHY NETWORKS ARE FORMED

Networks have been formed for different reasons and there are different reasons organizations or individuals choose to work together in a network.

REASONS FOR FORMING A NETWORK

The majority of civil society networks in Myanmar are policy advocacy networks which have been formed in response to the challenging political context. The networks advocate to influence reforms taking place through providing input into formulation of new legislation in their sector; play a watchdog role to ensure that policies are being implemented at the local level; advocate against illegal, unfair or environmentally destructive policies of businesses and big investment projects; and voice community concerns, for example, in the peace talks between the government and ethnic armed organizations. The networks seek to represent the interests of specific groups, to voice their concerns and advocate for their needs to be addressed. The civil society networks seek to advocate on issues of social justice and environmental protection and to represent those that are disadvantaged and marginalized.

Box 2: Why networks are formed

> **Reasons for forming a network (network functions):**
> - advocacy on specific issues;
> - sharing information;
> - capacity building and mutual learning;
> - coordination of activities;
> - joint action (e.g. on election observation to cover different regions) and joint strategy
>
> **Reasons for working together as a network:**
> - there is strength in numbers;
> - to spread the risks involved;
> - to form a national body that can represent interests of different regions;
> - because of a sense of solidarity on a shared purpose;
> - to bring together organizations with different expertise and strengths;
> - to learn from each other;
> - to expand individual areas of coverage;
> - to carry out activities together;
> - to show a coordinated response

A key function of many networks in Myanmar is also to build the capacity of their members on the issues that they aim to address. Often, capacity building is linked to other activities of the network such as advocacy or research in order to improve the members' capacities e.g. to conduct effective advocacy or to conduct a research study. The need for capacity building is also often an important strategy for networks because of the recognition that most the CSO members are relatively new and thus lack adequate technical capacities even though they know well the situations in their communities. For example, CSFoP is interested in building its members understanding of federalism and transitional justice so that they can better participate in dialogue on these issues. Efforts for capacity building draw from a wide range of resources including national and international expertise as well as cross-learning among civil society organizations themselves. Having wide access to technical resources through networks is an important reason for civil society groups to join networks.

Another common function of networks is to share updated information with or among members on the issue of concern. For example, networks may share information about events taking place, new initiatives, funding opportunities and new publications. They also share information about their members' activities, often with the notion of promoting coordination or sharing experiences.

There are however few networks or partnerships in Myanmar that have focused on developing encapsulating agendas, joint standards and strategies. The Joint Strategy Team was the only network identified which has brought together members to develop a joint strategy for working together on a specific issue. This in part reflects the early stages of civil society collaboration in Myanmar where there are yet few partnerships among civil society actors to work together on implementing joint activities.

Interestingly, there were no networks identified through the study that have been formed to support members to mobilize funding from donors (although some networks have become channels for funding for their members in an effort to raise funds from donors who are more interested in concrete outcomes on the issues addressed rather than the more nuanced outcomes of networks). In other countries, donors have looked to networks as a means of distributing funds to smaller organizations and such functions have led to tensions and undesired shifts in the relationship between the network and their members[9]. Networks in Myanmar need to be aware of these potential pitfalls of becoming channels of funding for members. While the potential for networks to become funding mechanisms should not be dismissed, networks that decide to

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[9] (Barry & Mendizabal, 2009)

take on this function will need to be careful to avoid members joining to access funds rather than to contribute to their core functions and common values[10].

REASONS FOR WORKING TOGETHER AS A NETWORK

For policy advocacy networks, the main reasons for members to work together with others rather than just as individual organizations are -- the amplification of voice through strength in numbers and the shared risks for individual members in confronting power holders. Given the history and continuing repression against freedom of expression in the country and the limited scope of most organizations, many in civil society are aware that they cannot undertake advocacy interventions on their own.

Civil society organizations in national networks also point to the ability of networks to bring together and represent different regions in the country as an important reason to form a network rather than work as separate organizations. Regional networks participate in national networks to be able to address national policy. Most networks are issue-based and share a common purpose; working together with others gives a sense of solidarity and is a motivational factor for continuing to pursue their agenda.

Another reason often cited for working together is the opportunity to learn through interactions with others. This is more important for smaller CSOs in more remote regions of the country where there are few opportunities to access information or learning opportunities.

Some networks bring together different types of actors in order to be able to draw on their different strengths and expertise. For example, MLAW includes members which are law firms as well as civil society organizations which work with communities that may require legal assistance. Working together with other organizations in different regions also helps to expand coverage of an initiative.

Although few in numbers, some networks also bring together organizations to jointly implement actions and show a coordinated response.

[10] (Mendizabal, Supporting networks: Ten principles, 2009)

This section provides a description of each of the four networks in the case studies – Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability, Myanmar Legal Aid Network, Civil Society Forum for Peace and National Network for Education Reform – which form the basis for the key findings of the study.

MYANMAR ALLIANCE FOR TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

FORMATION AND PURPOSE OF NETWORK

Figure 1: Overview of MATA and external stakeholders
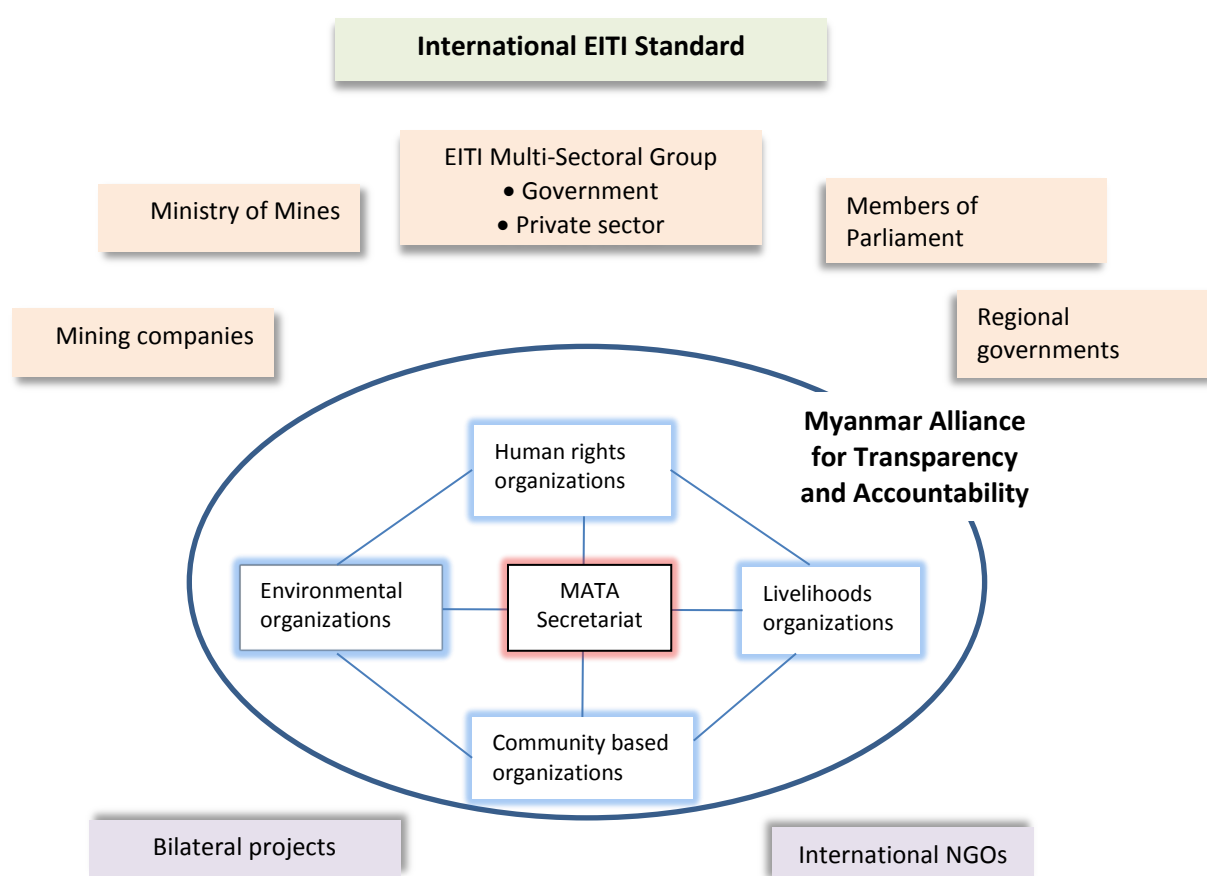
The Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA) was formed in response to the government's decision in 2012 to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), a global standard to promote open and accountable management of natural resources in the oil, gas and mining sectors. The EITI standard requires that a Multi-Stakeholder Group (MSG) consisting of government, private sector and civil society representatives be established to oversee and implement the EITI process in each country. The government initially handpicked a number of civil society organizations which were not related to the extractive industries to be members of the MSG. A group of civil society support and environmental organizations (Paung Ku, Pyoe Pin, Spectrum, Ecodev and Green Network) who were concerned about the process then organized a civil society forum attended by more than 100 civil society actors from all 14 states and regions in 2013 to discuss whether civil society should participate in the EITI as it would be seen to be legitimizing the government's efforts to propagate itself as a responsible accountable government. The participation of local community groups outside Yangon was deemed important as many of the oil, gas and mining issues are taking place in different regions of the country. During the forum, the participants agreed

that there would be benefits to joining the EITI and that they would work together as a network to represent civil society interests. A group of 45 representatives were selected as a temporary group to initiate the process. Following this, workshops were held in each of the 14 states and regions resulting in formation of Regional Working Groups. Five Regional Representatives were elected from each Regional Working Group to form the National Working Group which then elected the civil society representatives on the MSG.

Originally called Myanmar Coalition for Transparency (MC4T), MATA is a civil society alliance that supports civil society actors to collaboratively advocate for transparency and accountability in all sectors across Myanmar, with a focus on natural resource governance.

MEMBERS AND STRUCTURE

MATA has 518 members which include community groups and organizations that work on justice, land, rights, livelihoods, environment and natural resource management. Most of the members are partners of the organizations that convened the initial forum that brought the network together. Membership is open to all individuals and organizations which have an interest in the issue but not to organizations with links to political parties. Although MATA has a large membership, some of the members do not participate actively in the activities of the network.
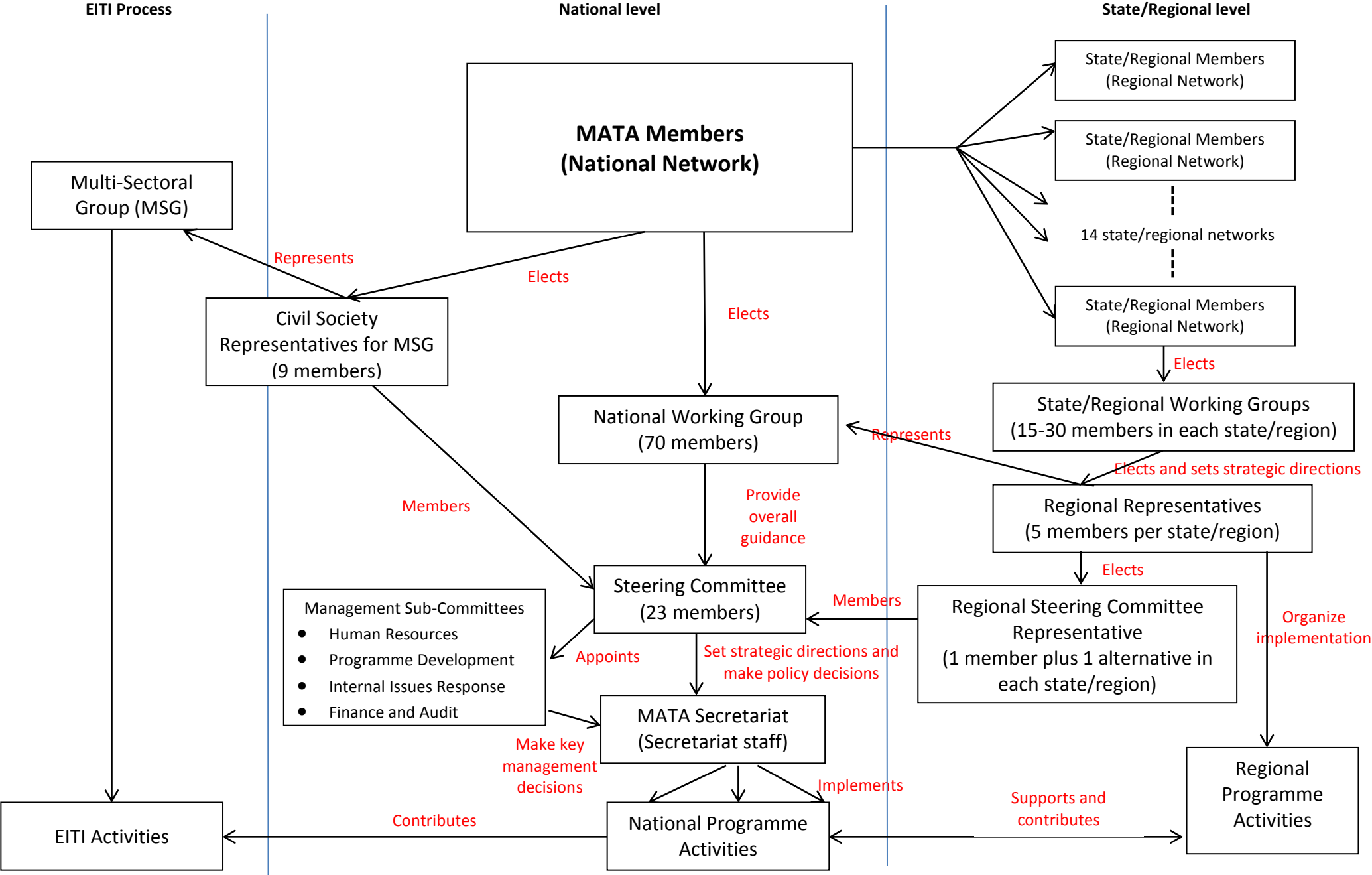
MATA has a complex internal network structure (Figure 2). The members are formed into regional networks in each state/region and the network is decentralized to the state/regional level. Each regional network is able to develop its own workplan and raise its own funds. However, regional networks have different levels of capability and need different levels of support. In some states/regions, such as in Kachin state, the regional network is very strong. The network in Kachin, called the Transparency and Accountability Network Kachin State (TANKS), has a coordination office and has mobilized its own funding. While it is a member of MATA, it also sees itself as its own organisation and is the process of developing its own Constitution.

Each regional network forms a Regional Working Group of 15-30 members to oversee the activities in the state/region. Some regional networks have also formed their own Steering Committee although this does not seem to be consistent for all states and regions. Each Regional Working Group elects 5 Regional Representatives to represent the state/region in the National Working Group. The National Working Group meets annually and acts as the national assembly for the network. In addition, each state/region elects one member from among the 5 Regional Representatives to sit on a national Steering Committee which is the main governance body of the network. The Steering Committee is made up of the 14 state/regional representatives as well as the 9 members elected to sit on the Multi-Stakeholder Group of the EITI. Sub-Committees of the Steering Committee have been formed to oversee the management of the Secretariat. In addition, MATA has an Advisory Group made up of technical professionals to provide advice on specific issues related to the EITI.

A national Secretariat based in Yangon coordinates the activities of the network and provides support to members. The Secretariat has 10 staff members including a National Coordinator, Programme Manager, 2 Regional Coordinators, a Communications Officer and finance and administrative support staff.

MATA has sought to develop a democratic, decentralized form of governance with activities focused at the regional level and active participation of the members. However, the level of participation has been uneven – in some states/regions such as in Kachin state which is rich in natural resources and faces many related issues, the regional network is very active and strong. However, in some states/regions where there are few extractive industries or where civil society is less organized, the members have little interest or are not coordinated except in response to invitations by the Secretariat.

Figure 2: Internal network structure of MATA

EITI Process	National level	State/Regional level

- **MATA Members (National Network)**
- State/Regional Members (Regional Network)
- State/Regional Members (Regional Network)
- 14 state/regional networks
- State/Regional Members (Regional Network)
- Multi-Sectoral Group (MSG)
- Civil Society Representatives for MSG (9 members) — *Represents* / *Elects*
- *Elects*
- National Working Group (70 members)
- State/Regional Working Groups (15-30 members in each state/region) — *Elects* / *Represents*
- *Provide overall guidance*
- *Elects and sets strategic directions*
- Regional Representatives (5 members per state/region)
- *Members*
- Steering Committee (23 members)
- *Members*
- *Elects*
- Regional Steering Committee Representative (1 member plus 1 alternative in each state/region)
- Management Sub-Committees
  - Human Resources
  - Programme Development
  - Internal Issues Response
  - Finance and Audit
- *Appoints*
- *Set strategic directions and make policy decisions*
- *Make key management decisions*
- MATA Secretariat (Secretariat staff)
- *Implements*
- *Organize implementation*
- EITI Activities
- *Contributes*
- National Programme Activities
- *Supports and contributes*
- Regional Programme Activities

FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

The issue of "accountability and transparency" is very broad and while MATA was born of the EITI process and has a focus on natural resource governance, its mandate is very broad. It has recently also decided to participate in the Open Government Partnership initiative, which is also an international initiative to promote more open, accountable and responsive governments.

The activities of the MATA Secretariat fall under five broad areas:
- advocacy
- capacity building
- networking and coordination
- communications
- monitoring, learning and research

At the regional level, some Regional Working Groups also conduct awareness raising sessions in the communities on individuals' rights (e.g. land rights) and the social and environmental impact of natural resource extraction projects.

The Secretariat plays a supportive role to manage and coordinate activities which are implemented by or with participation of the network members. All activities are approved by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee members are also the core members involved in activities at the regional, national and international levels. For example, advocacy activities with government Ministries are organized by the Secretariat but led by the Steering Committee members. Although all Steering Committee members are considered equal and there are no designated officers (e.g. Chair, Secretary or Treasurer), some committee members are more active in leading the network than others. These informal leaders have a strong influence over the directions and activities of the network.

Advocacy is a key strategy of the network. Through the EITI process, the network has participated in processes to establish greater transparency and accountability in the oil, gas and mining sectors with the publication of the first EITI report. Through this, civil society has gained better insight into the government's financial and budgetary processes which has highlighted areas for reform for more transparent and equitable use of the earnings raised from the exploitation of the country's natural resources. The network has also established a relationship with the Ministry of Mines and has set-up a Complaints Handling Mechanism to address issues of compliance by mining companies to the Mining Law.

Advocacy at the regional levels are conducted by the regional networks and include advocacy to companies involved in natural resource extraction in addition to regional governments. To accomplish this, the network has also identified capacity building as a key strategy of the network, to build the capacity of its members at the regional level, both in management (e.g. by Regional Working Groups) or in technical issues related to natural resource governance. Capacity building activities are managed by the Secretariat as well as by regional networks with participation of the members.

Advocacy activities are supported by communications activities, such as issuing statements and convening press conferences. For example, MATA issued a statement in a press conference on the problems in the mining industry in Hpakant township.

Networking and coordination are internal functions of the network to strengthen the operations of the network and the interactions among the members. These functions are crucial for the effective functioning of the network. One of the key benefits identified by the members of being in a large national network is the ability to mobilize national participation on issues of concern. For example, recognizing the sensitivity and complexity of the problems in Hpakant, one of the biggest jade mining regions in Kachin state, TANKS through

MATA organized a national workshop held in Hpakant which was attended by members from all states and regions to highlight the myriad of problems faced in the local mining sector including the abuse of workers' rights, non-compliance to mining laws and regulations and environmental damage which have caused massive landslides killing hundreds of workers and family members. The workshop drew national attention and prompted the local authorities to participate in a dialogue to try to resolve some of these issues.

The network places primary emphasis on participation of members in the network activities; for example press conferences are led by Steering Committee members rather than the Secretariat. However, there is a tension between ensuring active participation by members and ability of the network to respond for a number of reasons – time required of members, communications problems, different interests and capacities of members, and at times interpersonal politics among members. As a new organisation that promotes ownership by its members, the active participation of the members, particularly the Steering Committee members is crucial; however micro-management by the Steering Committee has at times hampered the operations of the Secretariat, creating frustrations rather than fostering the performance of Secretariat staff. The network has tried to clarify roles and responsibilities but faces challenges with the complex internal structures and a challenging and uncertain external environment.

RECOGNITION AND FUNDING

MATA has been very successful in negotiating the space to gain official recognition from the government. Recognition of MATA stems from its participation in the EITI. Some of the MSG members are key leaders of national civil society organizations and have successfully lobbied for recognition of MATA within the EITI. The nine civil society representatives on the MSG of the EITI are elected by MATA members among the MATA membership.

As part of the EITI process, the government of Myanmar issued an authorization letter which states that the private sector, civil society and government should cooperate to implement the EITI standards and that MSG members are authorized to examine businesses to assess whether they are implementing the EITI standard. The letter states also that authorities are required to provide assistance and raise awareness in accordance with the law. While the letter relates to the EITI standards, it has also been used by MATA members to gain access in other areas of natural resource management issues.

In particular, MATA has developed strong linkages with the Ministry of Mines which is a member of the MSG. At the local level, most government authorities are not aware of the EITI and civil society has played the role of providing training to them on the EITI and natural resource governance issues. This has also helped it gain recognition from local authorities.

MATA has developed partnerships with a number of international and national organizations that provide funding both at the national level and to the regional level. However, funding is primarily available at the national level and raising resources for the regional levels remains a challenge. The national Secretariat is responsible for managing donor funds at the national level; however, managing funds at the regional level has been a challenge where strong structures have not been established.

MYANMAR LEGAL AID NETWORK

FORMATION AND PURPOSE OF NETWORK

The Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW) evolved out of a regional process of engagement by a number of law firms and civil society organizations with other participants from Southeast Asia to promote the rule of law in 2010. At that time, legal issues were still highly sensitive in Myanmar and the country was still under military

rule. Following two workshops in Indonesia and Thailand, the regional participants formed the Southeast Asian Legal Aid Network (SEALAW) and decided to hold its third regional workshop in Myanmar in 2012. Despite a long process to finally obtain permission from the government to hold the regional workshop in Myanmar, the permit was withdrawn at the last minute. Nevertheless, the organizers managed to go ahead with a "meeting" which brought together local NGOs, law firms, international organizations and government representatives from Myanmar with the regional delegates from other Southeast Asian countries. A number of academics however sought not to participate because of the withdrawal of the permit for the official workshop. The meeting was the first time that a gathering on the rule of law was held in Myanmar. During the workshop, the Myanmar participants agreed that a legal aid system was needed in Myanmar and agreed to establish the Myanmar Legal Aid Network.

Figure 3: Overview of MLAW and external stakeholders
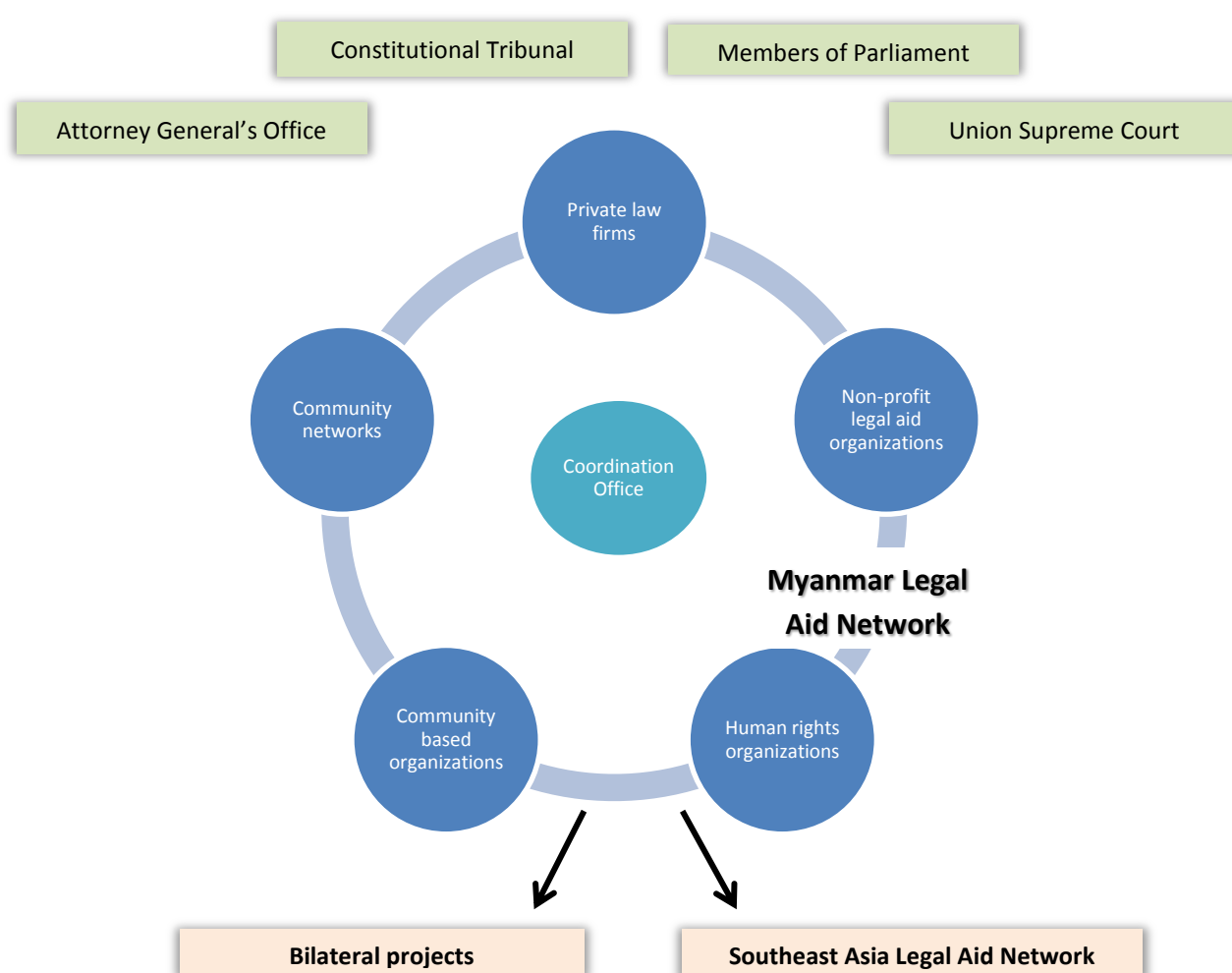
The purpose of MLAW is to strengthen the rule of law through improving access to legal aid services. This requires not just the provision of services but also a reform of the judicial system, training of legal aid providers and raising awareness among the public about their legal rights.

MEMBERS AND STRUCTURE

MLAW has 7 founding members and currently has a total of 19 members which include civil society organizations working on rule of law, justice and legal aid service provision as well as private sector law firms.

Many of the MLAW members are legal aid service providers. Other members include human rights organizations and community organizations raising awareness on the rule of law. About half the members are based in Yangon and the remaining in other states and regions. The network is in the process of restructuring the management and governance bodies following an incidence of misappropriation of funds and temporary suspension of all activities. Previously, through an amendment to the Constitution, the Secretary of the Secretariat Office, who was a paid staff member, was also a member of the Board. This gave discretionary powers to the Secretary which ultimately led to the lack of checks and balances which permitted the misappropriation to take place. The network has now revised its Constitution and restarted its activities.

The Secretariat office has been changed into a Coordination Office staffed by a Network Coordinator, Programme Officer and support staff. The Coordination Office is tasked with coordinating and managing the activities of the network rather than leading in implementation. Oversight over the Coordination Office is provided by a Management Committee selected from among the Board members. The Board has 11 members elected by the network members during an Annual General Meeting of all the members.

Figure 4: MLAW internal structure
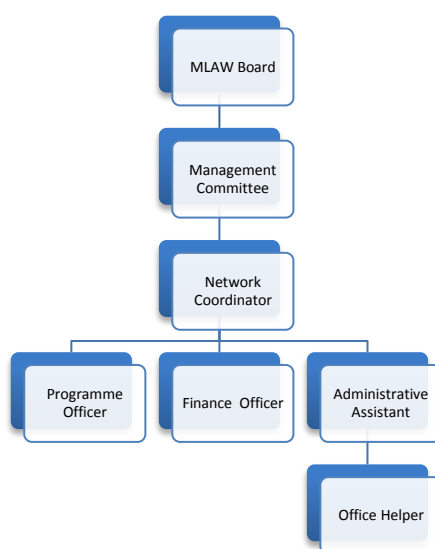
FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

MLAW focuses on supporting access to legal aid to promote the rule of law. However, it also engages in other areas related to promoting the rule of law such as legal reform and strengthening of the legal system.

With the restructuring of the network, a new Coordination Office has just been established and work is still on-going to develop the strategy and activities of the network. Currently it is envisaged that the main areas of work are:
- advocacy on the legal reform process;
- capacity building of legal aid service providers including lawyers and paralegals;
- supporting members to provide legal aid services through management of a central legal aid fund.

MLAW was actively involved in the development of the Legal Aid Law which was passed by Parliament in January 2016. It has also organized workshops and seminars on different issues related to legal reform for its members, government structures and parliamentarians. The network has also supported two of its members to establish Justice Centers providing legal aid services for the poor in Yangon and Mandalay. Some members consider the ability of the network to refer clients in different parts of the country to other legal aid service providers as one of the key benefits of working as a network.

It will be important that the network considers carefully its future strategy and the benefits of working together as a network in restarting the activities of the network. In the past, the Secretariat was responsible for planning and making decisions for the network, often with little consultation with the members or the Board. The Secretariat began to take on a direct implementation role and sought funding for activities similar to those of its members. In particular, the attempts of the Secretariat office to open legal aid centers in a number of states where members were already providing legal aid services rather than support those members to expand their services led to discontentment among the members. The Board has now made it clear that the new Coordination Office will be responsible for supporting members in implementation of activities rather than in leading the implementation of activities itself.

Rebuilding trust will also be an important consideration. Following the crisis, some members are apprehensive about being part of the network again, indicating in interviews that they feel that they have benefitted little from being a member of the network even though the network has organized many workshops and seminars attended by its members. Internal communications and information sharing have been highlighted as areas for improvement.

The Management Committee, which was formed during the crisis to take over the management of the network, is taking a key role in the restructuring of the network and restarting activities. While the Board has no designated officers, the Management Committee has a designated Chair and Vice-Chair. A Treasurer position has also been proposed in the revised Constitution. The officers have specific responsibilities and decision-making authority. Although all Board members are considered equal, a number of the founding members appear to be more influential.

RECOGNITION AND FUNDING

MLAW is well recognized by the government and has been formally involved in the development of the new Legal Aid Law which was passed in early 2016.

One of the first activities of MLAW after its establishment was to organize a study visit to South Africa to learn about the legal aid system in the country. The participants of the study visit included representatives from the Attorney General's office, Union Supreme Court and the Constitutional Tribunal. This visit was a key factor in raising the profile of MLAW and gaining recognition from the government authorities. Consequently it has held many workshops and seminars which have included different government authorities and the Bar Associations from different states and regions. Many of the members of the network have close linkages with national and state/regional legal bodies and have been able to use these to obtain support for MLAW activities.

MLAW has had strong support from one institutional donor, Pyoe Pin, which was instrumental in the establishment of the network and which has continued to support the network through a difficult period. Other donors have included the Land Core Group and USAID. Some members perceive that the previous Secretariat was resource driven and strongly influenced by funding and its donors; this was one of the reasons the Secretariat started up activities which were not mandated or supported by the members.

CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM FOR PEACE

FORMATION AND PURPOSE OF NETWORK

The process for establishing the Civil Society Forum for Peace (CSFoP) began in response to the Thein Sein's government's call for peace (1/11) issued in 2011. Shalom, a Myanmar organisation that has been working on peace and conflict resolution since the year 2000, organized a forum in 2012 to bring together civil society

organizations to discuss how to respond to the call. During the forum, the participants agreed that there was a need to create a national entity to bring together voices from different regions to contribute to national level talks as there are networks and organizations working at a regional or community level but not at a national level. The participants agreed to continue to meet at regular (quarterly) forums. This led to the establishment of CSFoP and a Working Committee to organize the activities of the forums was formed, consisting of members who had volunteered to be on it.

Figure 5: Overview of CSFoP and external stakeholders
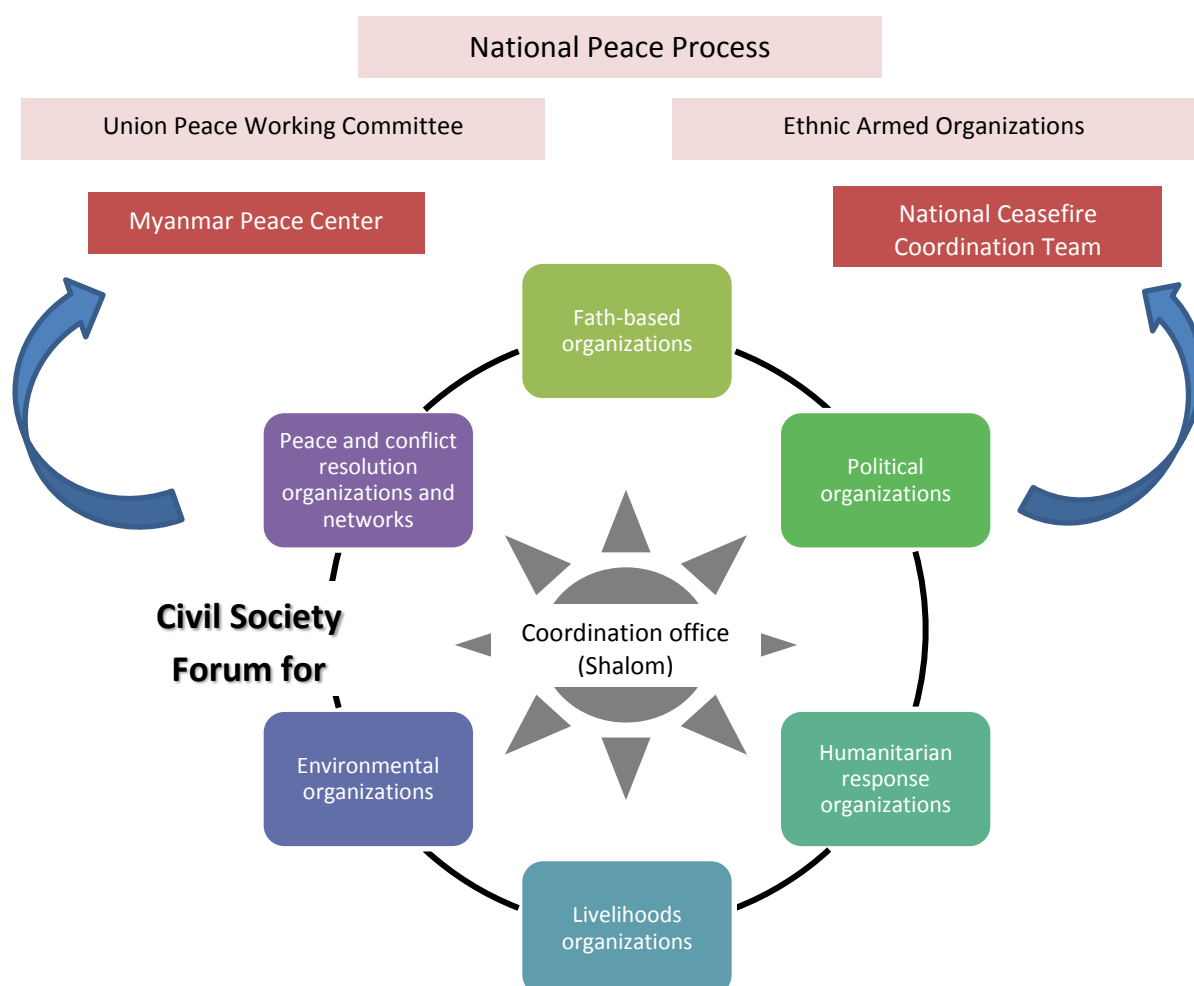
Note: The study looked at relationships of CSFoP under the peace process of the previous government.   National bodies thus relate to the process at that time.

The purpose of CSFoP is to promote the attainment of a just peace in Myanmar. CSFoP only focuses on the issue of ethnic peace (it does not address inter-communal conflict issues) and on the formal peace negotiations process.

MEMBERS AND STRUCTURE

CSFoP has about 200 members who are individuals and organizations working on peace from different parts of the country. The members include organizations and regional networks focused on peace and conflict resolution, faith-based organizations, organizations working on humanitarian responses in conflict areas, political organizations as well as organizations working on livelihood and environment whose work is affected by the conflict. Although CSFoP functions as a network, it does not have a formal membership structure. The

network is built around the forums and members are invited to attend the forums. Each of the forums has included between 80 to 180 participants.

CSFoP also has networks at the state/regional level, which are organized as Civil Society Networks for Peace (CSNePs). CSNePs hold forums at the state/regional levels in preparation for the national forums. Some CSNePs are more active and have their own Working Committee and Coordination Office such as in Kachin State. Civil society organizations began to form a network in Kachin in 2011 when the war erupted again in Kachin state but the network became inactive until it reorganized following its participation in CSFoP. It thus predated the establishment of the national CSFoP network.

The Working Committees at the state/regional and national levels are formed by volunteers who express interest to be part of the committee. There is thus no elected governance body for the network. The national Working Committee is the main decision-making body for the network. The committee meets very often on an "as needs" basis to discuss responses to the developments in the government peace negotiations and the organization of the peace forums, such as in deciding the topics, participants, resource persons etc. The national Working Committee consists of 27 members and includes some members from different states and regions, although the majority are based in Yangon. Some members who initially joined as representatives of their organizations have committed to stay on as individuals in the committee even after they had resigned from their organizations and are now working for other organizations which are not members of CSFoP. This has helped to strengthen the commitment and continuity of the Working Committee. There are no designated officers within the Working Committee and all members are equal; although it is recognized that some members have more influence than others, all are seen to be contributing their efforts equally.

The Working Committee is supported by a national Coordination Office which is hosted by Shalom. The Coordination Office, with 3 staff recruited by Shalom, provides logistical support (organizing the venue, transportation etc. for the forum) and manages the finances for the network, including mobilizing funds for the network and reporting to donors. This implicitly gives Shalom a key role in shaping the network even though it seeks to be participatory in nature.

After the second forum, a number of Thematic Working Groups were established to focus on specific issues. Currently there are Thematic Working Groups on Business Investment and Peace, Environment, Justice, Federalism, Gender, Security and Ceasefire Monitoring. Each Thematic Working Group is led by a focal person/focal organization. The activities of the Thematic Working Groups are decided by the groups themselves and may include holding/attending meetings and workshops or organizing awareness raising sessions in the community on the theme of their working group. Activities by Thematic Working Groups are implemented by the focal person/organisation with funding provided by the national Coordination Office.

FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

CSFoP aims to influence both sides of the conflict – the government and the non-state ethnic armed groups -- to achieve a just peace. The main activity of CSFoP is the forums which are held quarterly or as needed depending on the National Ceasefire Agreement process to share information and develop common positions for input into the NCA. CSFoP invites both government and ethnic representatives to specific sessions in the forums to promote dialogue on specific topics – for civil society to share their perspectives and for the government and ethnic representatives to share theirs. CSFoP also tries to influence the peace process by issuing statements to represent community voices. As the NCA has been a key priority for the previous government, CSFoP has been very active to keep up with the official process.

In addition to the forums, CSFoP also supports efforts to build the understanding of members on different issues through workshops and the Thematic Working Groups. Some Thematic Working Groups are more active than others depending on the focal person/organization.

The Working Committee is the decision-making body for the network. The committee members note that as the members are very diverse and the priorities in different regions are often different (e.g. positions in Karen state may differ from those in Mon state), there are sometimes strong disagreements but a final consensus is always reached. While some may still not agree with the final decision, they agree to abide by the decision of the network. Members attribute this ability to overcome differences to the strong commitment that members have for achieving the cause of the network.

> *"Sometimes we wonder why we are still working together… but we keep going because we all accept that we have to work together to attain peace in our country."*

The Working Committee members, including those in the Working Committees at the regional level, are also the movers and shakers of the network; all contribute their time and effort actively to implement the activities of the network. The Coordination Office has only three staff who provide logistical and financial management support for the network. As the Coordination Office is hosted by Shalom, the office follows the organisational policies and procedures of Shalom (e.g. in finance, human resources management) and has not had to develop its own policies and procedures. Shalom also acts as the fund manager and takes responsibility and accountability for the funding to the network.

RECOGNITION AND FUNDING

CSFoP is recognized by both sides of the conflict, the government and the ethnic armed organizations. On the government side, CSFoP engaged with the Myanmar Peace Center which had been established by the previous government to manage the peace negotiations; and on the side of the ethnic armed organizations, CSFoP engaged with the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) which was the coordination body established by the ethnic armed organizations to represent them in the NCA negotiations. With the dissolution of the Myanmar Peace Center, CSFoP was still waiting to see who it can engage with in the government at the time of the study. CSFoP notes that one of its strengths is that it is the only body that can engage with and is trusted by both sides. CSFoP has lobbied for recognition from both sides through individual and organisational linkages of its members, which include both Burmese members who have links to the government and ethnic members with close links to different ethnic armed groups. CSFoP also recognizes that the government and ethnic armed groups are willing to engage with CSFoP because they want their positions to be heard or they want to be seen to be inclusive.

All funding for CSFoP is provided by one major donor, the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), with finances managed by Shalom.

NATIONAL NETWORK FOR EDUCATION REFORM

FORMATION AND PURPOSE OF NETWORK

The National Network for Education Reform (NNER) has its roots in an informal network of educationalists who were working on the Thai-Myanmar border but the idea of establishing a network in Myanmar was first discussed during an education seminar organized by a number of the educationalists in Yangon in late 2012 after their return to the country following the success of the NLD in the 2012 by-elections. The seminar brought together a wide group of participants from different backgrounds. The participants included representatives from the ethnic education departments of the non-state ethnic armed organizations, the teachers' union and student unions, youth networks, language and culture groups, monastic and other faith-based schools, education organizations, as well as political groups such as the 88 Generation Peace and Open Society and the NLD Education Network to discuss the need for a change in the education system of the country in line with the political changes to a more democratic system. The seminar participants felt that not

enough was being done to promote education reform by the government and agreed to establish a network to advocate for this.

The purpose of the network is to promote education reform for a more democratic and inclusive education system.

MEMBERS AND STRUCTURE

The network started with a core of 13 members. Following the 2012 seminar, it expanded to 68 members and now has more than 150 members nationwide. Most members were mobilized during the countrywide forums held at the beginning of the formation of the network to gather input for the drafting of a National Education Policy.

NNER has three types of members:
- individuals such as academics and education specialists;
- organizations; and
- parts of organizations (such as the ethnic education departments of the ethnic armed organizations).

The network however has remained an informal network and there is a fluidity in membership as members participate when they are available.

A Thematic Working Group currently acts as the coordinating and decision-making body for the network. The Thematic Working Group members are voluntary and represent different sections of the network (e.g. monastic schools, students, teachers, inclusive education etc.). There are two to three representatives from each section on the Thematic Working Group; although there is a notion that each section forms a separate Thematic Working Group (e.g. a Monastic Schools Thematic Working Group and an Inclusive Education Thematic Working Group etc.), currently it is the representatives from each section that together make up one central "Thematic Working Group." The representatives act as the focal points for sharing information among their constituent members. A Communications Team has also been established but is not functioning very well and most communications is channeled by the Thematic Working Group members. There are no designated officers in the Thematic Working Group and Working Group members have equal status although some of the founding members continue to be more influential. The Working Group meets monthly and communicates frequently through a closed Facebook group.

Regional Working Groups have also been established in each state/region. The network was initially seen as a Yangon based network with little ownership at the regional level but this has been somewhat addressed through the establishment of Regional Working Groups. The level of participation however still varies across regions. Regional Working Groups may develop their own activities and raise their own funds but only few have done so thus far. While Regional Working Groups are representatives of NNER at the state/regional level, some Regional Working Groups, such as the Kachin State Education Network (KSEN) in Kachin state, also have their own organisational identity. KSEN, as an independent Kachin network, works on education issues in Kachin state but represents Kachin state in national level NNER activities.

Currently the Thematic Working Group and Regional Working Groups meet together every six months to review and plan their activities as a network. NNER held its first National Assembly/Conference in 2013 which was attended by more than 1300 participants. It plans to hold national conferences every two years. The network also has an Advisory Group that provides technical input on education issues.

NNER is in the process of becoming more institutionalized and plans to set up a 27 member Representative Body consisting of representatives from the Regional Working Groups and Thematic Working Groups to

become the decision-making body for the network. It is also in the process of drafting a Constitution and is seeking funding to establish an office managed by one administrator and one finance staff.

Figure 6: Overview of NNER and other stakeholders
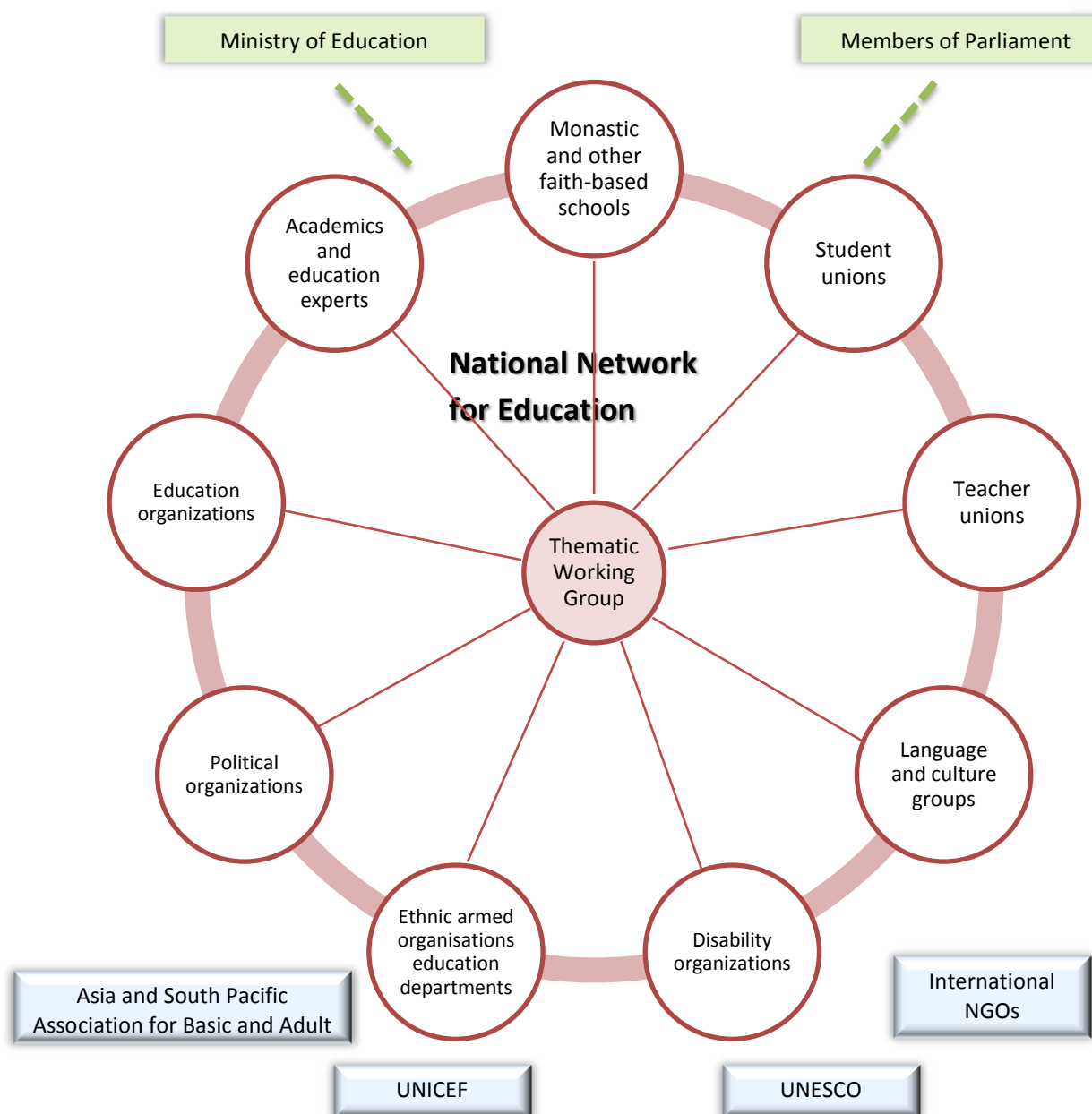
FUNCTIONS AND ROLES

NNER's key activities thus far have been to advocate for changes to the National Education Law that was approved in 2014 despite student protests throughout the country against the law. NNER supported the student protestors who are also part of the NNER network in their negotiations with the government.   It has also held a number of seminars on specific topics for its members.

Moving forward, NNER has identified two key areas of work:
- advocacy for education reform; and
- research.

It also plans to provide training on advocacy and research to its members to be able to carry out the above functions.

The Thematic Working Group is the main decision making body but the network plans to establish a Representative Committee to be the decision making body in the future. Currently, activities are planned and organized by the Thematic Working Group working closely with the Regional Working Groups for implementation of centrally organized activities such as research. With the establishment of an office, the administrator will be responsible for organizing activities and managing funds based on decisions made by the Thematic Working Group.

NNER has functioned thus far as an informal network. The structures that have been formed are very loose. The network is very dynamic and is run by its core members who are very committed and volunteer their time and effort without being compensated for any costs. Many discussions are conducted and decisions made through social media and email. Although this has worked thus far, there have been several challenges. As all members are considered equal and there is not yet an office or administrator, it has been difficult for external stakeholders to communicate with the network as there is no designated focal person. Members participate when they can and so may not take full responsibility at all times. The network has also faced difficulties with some new members speaking for and misrepresenting the network. The network covers a wide range of issues, membership is diverse and the network's values are very broad; conflicts have thus arisen at times among members. The network thus plans to develop clearer institutional structures and establish an office to manage the network's activities.

RECOGNITION AND FUNDING

NNER has had a hot/cold experience in its encounters with the government and was not able to gain official recognition in the process to draft the new Education Law. NNER attributes this to the political sensitivities in the education sector due to historical reasons and strong political interests to maintain control over the education system. Throughout the military period, students have been at the forefront of many demonstrations and universities and schools have been shut down following political unrest. Education has been used as a tool to control the population. In the ethnic areas, ethnic armed groups have formed their own education departments providing education in ethnic languages.

Soon after the formation of the NNER, the government announced its intention to draft a new Education Law. NNER felt that it would be important to first develop an education policy based on public opinion to shape the drafting of the law. It thus held a series of 28 forums in 2013 in different states and regions throughout the country with participation by teachers, university students, monks from monastic schools, local parliamentarians and staff from civil society organizations to gather input on the issues faced in the education sector and areas for reform. There was a flurry of activity and many students were very active in the organization of the forums. NNER did not seek any external funding and resources for all the forums were provided by the community and the NNER members themselves.

After the forums, an NNER Working Group analyzed the information collected and held its first National Education Conference with more than 1,300 participants including education experts in order to develop a National Education Policy. The policy covered 13 areas from early childhood development to tertiary education and key recommendations were made on mother tongue education, inclusive education, support for teacher training and welfare, revision of the student assessment system, compulsory education for 9 years and an increase in the education budget to 20% of the national budget within five years. The policy was based on a philosophy of promoting critical thinking within a democratic system and society.

NNER distributed and presented the policy at a number of occasions to the government, parliament, international organizations and political parties, including the NLD. NNER was subsequently invited by

President Thein Sein for a meeting with the Minister of Education to discuss the policy. President Thein Sein expressed appreciation for the points in the policy and recommended that NNER submit the policy to parliament for consideration. NNER thus approached the NLD to submit the policy to parliament but NLD declined to do so because it felt that the chances of acceptance was low as NLD was a minority in the parliament and there was resistance among some in government to changing the education system due to political sensitivities despite President Thein Sein's position. NNER accepted NLD's decision.

Following this, NNER received an invitation from the Ministry of Education to attend a conference in 2014 on the drafting of the Education Law but the invitation to NNER was withdrawn one day before the conference without any explanation. There were evidently elements in the government which did not support the NNER. Meanwhile the process for drafting the Education Law proceeded and the law was passed by both houses of parliament despite opposition to the law by the university student unions as well as NNER.

After the law was passed, the students took to the streets to demonstrate against the law. Although NNER was not formally involved in the student protests, the network, which included the student unions, voiced support for the demonstrations and assisted the students in their negotiations with the government and parliamentarians. Following several failed attempts at negotiations, the police cracked down on the demonstrations and more than 100 students were arrested.

Despite the lack of official recognition from the government, NNER feels that some of its recommendations have been taken into account in the Education Law, although not to their full extent. For example, the law refers to an increase of the education budget to 20% of the national budget as recommended by NNER but leaves out the timeframe for which this is to be reached.

To date, NNER is not officially recognized by the government and does not have official space for dialogue with government due to the political dynamics surrounding the issue. However, NNER has recognition from the ethnic armed organizations' education departments which run their own education systems and ethnic schools. It continues to advocate on the issues that have been identified in the National Education Policy through other channels such as meetings with parliamentarians, conducting workshops with state/regional and national government, and providing evidence for the proposed changes.

NNER has primarily been self-funded by its members and does not currently have any long-term donors. The 28 forums organized throughout the country in 2013 were all supported through personal and community funds. Members have primarily used their own funds for activities although support has been received from donors such as Paung Ku and Partners Asia for one-off activities such as its national conferences and meetings. NNER is currently seeking long-term funding for a project for its advocacy and research activities and to establish an office. It will be interesting to see how external donor project funding impacts on the NNER after it has managed to maintain a self-funding policy for its first four years.

While it currently does not have any long-term partnerships with donors, NNER has developed strong partnerships with technical agencies such as UNICEF, UNESCO and international NGOs, and is recognized at the regional and international level. It participated in the World Education Forum in 2015 and is also a member of a regional coalition, the Asia and South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education through the Thinking Classroom Foundation[11].

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[11] ASPBAE requires members to be registered so NNER cannot officially be a member.

VIII. KEY NETWORK CHARACTERISTICS

As described previously, networks are made up of actors that are connected to each other through some kind of relationship and it is the actors and relationships between them that make up the network rather than the structures and services that they provide. This section provides an analysis of the actors in the networks as well as the internal and external relationships of the networks studied.

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS

Membership in networks varies widely from small networks of less than ten to twenty organizations, for example MLAW, to large national networks such as MATA with more than 500 members. The civil society members include community-based organisations, farmers groups, youth groups and women's groups; non-governmental organizations; as well as groups from the private sector, academia, religious institutions, the media, non-state armed groups and political parties; but they do not include actors from the government (public) sector. Some networks include individuals as members as well as organizations.

Members share a common characteristic or commitment towards a common issue, or a link to a member that does. Although they are brought together around a particular issue, national networks may have very diverse membership reflecting the wide range of civil society actors cutting across different social, economic and political backgrounds. One of the key strengths of these networks has been their ability to bring together civil society from different regions and that represent different religious, ethnic and professional groups with different approaches and ideologies.

> *"Our members are very different. Some are activists, some are more academic."*
>
> (MATA Steering Committee member)

Networks are often formed based on existing relationships and existing ties. At the start, the initial members of a network are often those identified by the conveners or core members of the network. As a result, the initial members are often closely knit and strongly committed to the cause. As the networks become better known, the membership may expand with other organizations outside the initial core being brought in. Although the networks generally seek to have open memberships with membership criteria that focus on shared values, a Code of Conduct and active participation rather than type of organization, by their nature, networks usually bring together like-minded people and members often join based on personal links with other existing members. However, the expanding membership leads to different dynamics and relationships, especially if the network becomes more formalized.

INTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

As noted before, it is the relationships between network members that make up a network. Relationships within networks differ based on the size and scope of the network, pre-existing links, types of activities as well as the external environment and it is difficult to draw generalizations on how internal relationships function within networks. Relationships also change over time as networks grow and become more institutionalized. The four case studies illustrate some key points.

As networks are often based on informal social networks and are made up of actors who already have some previous linkages, there is often a strong level of trust among the initial members. The initial members often include a tight core group which is highly motivated. The formation of a more formal network and the acceptance of external donor funding often leads to establishment of structures and processes which may change how members relate to each other.
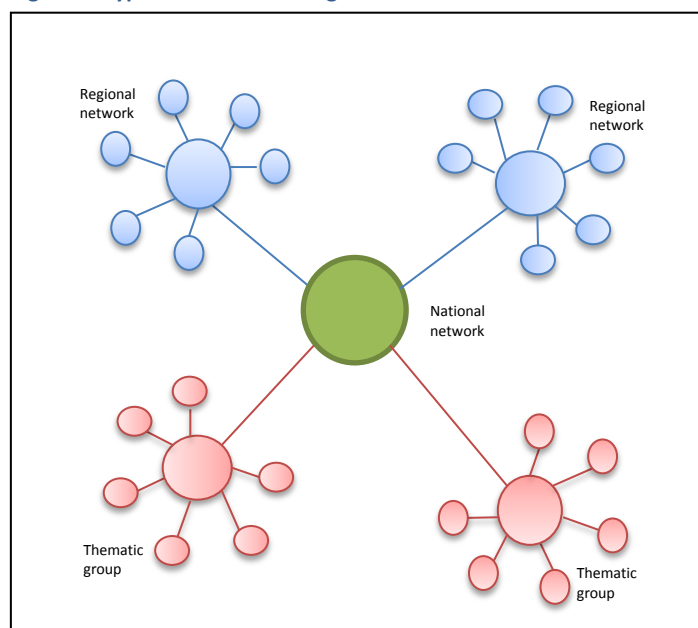
In large networks, members are often clustered to form sub-groups. The sub-groups can be clustered geographically to form regional networks, by themes to form thematic groups, by characteristics or by pre-existing linkages. These sub-networks shape the dynamics within networks and offer different ways of collaboration among members. For example, in NNER, members relate within their state/regional sub-network as well as within thematic areas (e.g. monastic education, inclusive education).

Internal relationships tend to revolve around a central decision-making body and a coordinating office. Most networks establish a central decision-making structure, such as a Board or Executive Committee, to make decisions on behalf of the network. MATA and MLAW have governance bodies which are elected by the members of the network. MATA has elaborate policies and processes for election of regional representatives and Steering Committee members, with clear limits in the terms of the members.

As informal networks, CSFoP and NNER have also established decision-making bodies but these are made of up volunteers rather than elected members. In all four networks, there are no officers within the decision-making bodies and all members are considered equal. However, at present, the conveners of the networks still have a strong influence on the decision-making bodies in the four networks studied and are thus seen as the informal leaders of the networks.

Among the four networks studied, three have established coordination offices/secretariats to coordinate and manage the activities of the network and one is in the process of establishing a coordination unit. While a coordination office is often needed because members do not have time and full-time staff are often required to manage the activities of the network, the formation of a coordination office can complicate relationships within the network.

Most civil society organizations in Myanmar still rely on community volunteers rather than paid staff; having paid professional staff at the coordination office creates imbalances and power dynamics which can lead to conflict between the staff and members. The coordination office overshadows the members and is impatient to move forward on its own whereas the members feel that they are the "owners" of the network and want to manage the coordination office.

As national networks are spread across the country, members do not meet or interact often as a whole network. Where there is a coordination office, communications among members often go through the coordination office. Communications are often facilitated through social media or email groups. Members interact more closely within thematic groups or regional networks but relationships between these groups tend to flow through the coordination office. Regional networks and thematic groups may meet more regularly depending on availability of funding and how spread out their members are. Most networks try to have an annual general meeting of all members but this can be quite costly. Some networks thus limit the representation at annual assemblies. For example, in MATA, only five elected representatives from each regional network attend the annual general assembly referred to as the National Working Group.

The view from the periphery however, may differ from that from the center. While the central network may view regional members as extension of their network, regional members may see themselves as autonomous entities that participate in a national network for specific interests. In the networks studied, the regional networks can make decisions on fundraising and activities in their own regions. In Kachin state, the regional networks of MATA and NNER are strongly independent and see themselves as separate entities which participate as a member in the national network for national level activities. The discourse is centered around the concept of "federalism" with regional networks emphasizing their ability to make decisions for their own regions.

> "TANKS (Transparency and Accountability Network Kachin) has its own activities, its own organization and constitution. There is MATA because of TANKS. TANKS is here not because of MATA. Kachin members form TANKS and TANKS participates in MATA."

> "KSEN (Kachin State Education Network) works on education policy for Kachin and cooperates with NNER for national issues. The issue (education) may be the same but the areas of work are different… KSEN wants to cooperate with NNER but not be a branch of NNER."

The challenge for national networks is the different capacities and interests among different regional networks and managing these differences.

EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Networks themselves network externally, building on the relationships that their members already have with other stakeholders. The ability of networks to draw on the large set of their member's existing linkages is a key strength of networks.

Relationships with government are particularly important for policy advocacy networks. The four networks studied have found ways to establish formal and informal links with the relevant target government entities for their advocacy work. Although NNER does not have official recognition from government and CSFoP is not an official participant in the talks for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement they have found other means to engage with government. Relationships are usually built upon personal links that members already have with individuals in government. Except for MATA which participates in the Multi-stakeholder Group of the EITI, these links are not institutionalized. The relationships with government are further discussed in detail in the section on *Recognition and Space to Influence Power-Holders.*

Most networks have established strategic partnerships with other organisations such as other civil society entities, international NGOs, UN agencies and regional and international networks for joint activities, such as for research, capacity building, technical assistance and solidarity for a shared vision. As networks which bring together small community groups with limited technical expertise, the networks have sought to establish linkages with external organizations that can strengthen their influence and credibility and enhance their technical capacity. For example, NNER has strong links with UNICEF and the Asia and South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education; MLAW has links with the Bar Associations in different states and regions and is a member of the Southeast Asia Legal Aid Network and MATA has links with the international EITI Secretariat and the National Resources Governance Institute.

At present, most networks still depend on external donors for funding. Donors can have a strong influence and impact on the functioning on networks. A number of networks in Myanmar have been established from processes initiated by "donor" organizations such as international NGOs and bilateral aid projects which have an interest in promoting civil society collaboration in their areas of interest and provide funding for the establishment of the network. The networks studied are conscious of the implications of donor funding on their internal dynamics and advocacy positions. MATA is in the process of developing a partnership policy to

clarify the types of partnerships and process for making decisions on partnerships it forms. NNER has managed to remain self-funded relying on the contributions of its own members and sought external funding only for specific one-off activities. It has consciously done this thus far to remain independent of institutional donors.

> *"We did not want to take any money from donors. We wanted to be independent."*
>
> (NNER Thematic Group Member)

Other implications of donor funding are discussed in the section on *Manage donor relationships and funding*.

Some networks have relationships with the private sector as well. As noted above, some of the agricultural producer networks of farmers and traders also consider themselves civil society networks. However, due to the nature of the private sector in Myanmar which is dominated by large companies with close ties to the government and which are not strongly regulated, most networks consider the private sector as targets of advocacy (e.g. to change the practices of mining companies) rather than as partners.

At present, most networks in Myanmar do not have strong relationships with other civil society networks and tend to work within their own sectors only even though the networks can learn from each other and draw on each other's efforts and resources. For example, CSFoP can gain from links with NNER and MATA as the issues addressed by the networks are linked. MATA noted that it would like to strengthen its links with gender and women's networks but has not yet had time to do this well.

IX.   ACHIEVEMENTS AND GOOD PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

NETWORK ACHIEVEMENTS

With the growth of networks in Myanmar, it is relevant to ask the question *"what are they actually achieving?"* The activities of networks are well perceived and they have created much attention within the media. They have managed to bring together a wide range of civil society groups to address important national and local issues.

> *"Networks are a physical visibility of solidarity."* (Key informant)
>
> *"MATA is a national movement.… MATA itself is an achievement. There were many problems which threatened the network but we survived."* (MATA member)

However, in more careful analysis, it is difficult to assess the success of networks as most networks do not yet have good monitoring and evaluation systems. None of the four networks in this study have strong monitoring systems and none have carried out evaluations of their work. The study was thus not able to carry out a rigorous assessment of the achievements of the networks based on available data. The study sought to understand what the networks have been able to achieve through the networks' own perceptions.

The evaluation of policy advocacy networks is a complicated by the difficulties of evaluating advocacy interventions and the complexity of networks themselves. Advocacy interventions are difficult to monitor and evaluate as they take place within complex dynamic environments and thus require flexible collaborative approaches rather than conventional management and assessment methods[12]. Additionally, networks are complex organizational forms often with diffuse power structures which give rise to challenges in establishing

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[12] (Tsui, Hearn, & Young, 2014)

accountabilities for what happens, what is achieved and by whom[13]. This study can thus only provide a cursory assessment of the achievements of the networks.

This study sought to assess the achievements of the policy advocacy networks studied using three evaluative questions[14]:
- how well are the networks representing civil society and community voices;
- how much space do the networks have to influence power holders; and
- what difference have the networks been able to make on the issues they seek to address.

REPRESENTATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND COMMUNITY VOICES

How well are the networks representing civil society and community voices?

All the four networks studied are national networks with diverse memberships encompassing different types of civil society organizations from different states and regions in the country. MATA, CSFoP and NNER are large networks with hundreds of members that include rural community groups, faith-based organisations, national NGOs as well as professionals and academics which represent a wide section of Myanmar society. However, while the number and type of members a network is indicative of the support and scope it has, the quality of representativeness of a network is better measured by the processes and products it generates[15].

As relatively new entities working in a complex and difficult political environment, the networks studied have strived hard and done well to represent civil society and community voices on issues which are still highly sensitive. Although the networks tend to be more strongly influenced by a number of informal leaders, they have actively sought to be representative and to gather input from other members to shape the messages and positions taken on the issues that they are advocating on.

MATA, CSFoP and NNER have organized regional networks which are relatively autonomous structures in each state/region. The regional networks act as a means to gather input from the different states/regions to feed into national discussions. For example, the regional networks of CSFoP, the CSNePs, hold regional forums prior to the national CSFoP forums to gather input for the network's advocacy positions within the NCA process. The national forums which are held regularly in parallel to the NCA process provide a space for the views of members to be discussed in order to come to a common position. The points that CSFoP has raised in its advocacy to the government and non-state actors are contributions originating from different members. For example, issues related to a humanitarian strategy have been developed by its members, Metta Development Foundation and the Joint Strategy Team who are key humanitarian players in the conflict response in Kachin and Shan states. CSFoP also has Thematic Working Groups on different themes to foster discussions and interactions among members on specific areas. These additional forums provide more space and time to bring in more members to discuss specific topics within the broad issue of peace.

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[13] This point has been made about international social change networks (Wilson-Gruz & Nunez, 2006) but can also be applied to national networks.
[14] These questions have been adapted from a study conducted by Intrac on civil society networks in Malawi (James, 2006).
[15] (Ranaboldo & Pinzas, 2003)

NNER initially held a series of 28 community level forums throughout the country to collect input for formulation of its National Education Policy. The input from the community forums led to the incorporation of a number of new issues in the NNER Education Policy. This included issues of education for internally displaced populations and a shift in a discourse on "Special Education" for the disabled to "Inclusive Education" in the NNER Education Policy. The policy on inclusive education promotes a rights-based approach to education for people with disabilities in integrated schools rather than the current "ability oriented" approach of the government which supports separate special needs schools[16]. The community links and inputs from these forums have been an important base for NNER and continue to shape NNER's activities.

> *"NNER has survived because it built a strong constituency on the ground."* (Key informant)

Following the initial community consultations however, there was less involvement of regional members and much of the work of the network was led by the core team. In 2015, however, NNER held a national conference with participation from all its members and has started to hold six monthly Thematic Working Group meetings which bring together the different regional working group and thematic working group members to review and plan their activities. This has allowed more space for members to shape the direction and activities of the network.

MATA seeks to gather input from members through its Steering Committee members which is made up of representatives from the different state/regional networks and elected CSO representatives on the Multi-stakeholder Group of the Myanmar EITI. The Steering Committee meets monthly and members can raise issues and provide updates on problems related to extractive industries in their states/regions. In practice, the representativeness of the Steering Committee members of their regional networks varies from state/region to state/region. Some Steering Committee members are active and have regular communications with members within their states/regions while in some states/regions, Steering Committee members do not have regular contact with other regional network members and are thus not able to represent their areas well.

Despite difficulties at times in reaching common positions, these mechanisms ensure that positions taken and statements made by the networks are shaped by inputs from the members and the communities they work with. Key challenges for the networks to strengthen the participation and inputs from regional networks are the difficulty in raising funds for regional activities and limited capacity in some states/regions. Regional networks can raise their own funds but this is often limited. One of the important priorities for networks will be to strengthen the regional networks in order to remain grounded and representative of the communities they support.

> *"Networks need to stabilize their legitimacy… to empower regional groups to do it on their own."*
> (Key informant)

Some networks have conducted research and documentation in order to collect evidence from the community level to strengthen their advocacy efforts. For example, NNER is conducting research on the Myanmar education curriculum and has made research a cornerstone of its future strategy. MATA has established a database and mechanism for collating data from the community on natural resource governance. Although limited thus far, such research and documentation ensures that the positions of the networks are informed by the situation on the ground. With a new government that is elected by the people, it will be even more important for networks to substantiate their advocacy efforts to Members of Parliament with evidence from

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[16] The NNER members representing organizations working with disabled persons argue that *"although some education officials dismiss the NNER policy as being a dream and unrealistic due to lack of financial resources, the attainment of these rights should be a process and not a destination and thus policies should be made in order to begin this process."*

the ground. Networks should thus strengthen their research and documentation activities through the members in partnership with external organizations.

MLAW is a smaller network and has a stronger representation from legal professionals. Its members also include a number of human rights organizations and organizations which have links to community groups such as Paung Ku and the key population networks[17]. The network however does not have clear mechanisms for seeking input from its members and during the interviews for the study, some members expressed dissatisfaction with the way the Secretariat had functioned previously and the lack of active participation from members in the network's activities and decisions. As the network restructures and reorganizes itself to restart activities, it will need to consider how it can strengthen its advocacy and communications strategy to better incorporate contributions from its members.

RECOGNITION AND SPACE TO INFLUENCE POWER HOLDERS
How much space do the networks have to influence power holders?

One of the important achievements of the networks studied has been their ability to adapt and find innovative ways to gain recognition and influence power holders to contribute to national level processes despite the challenging political environment they faced. The reforms introduced by the Thein Sein government led to some opportunities for civil society to provide input into the development and revision of national laws and policies. Most civil society organisations in Myanmar are community based groups which are relatively small and new so few have the recognition from government and other power holders to be able to individually engage in advocacy work. Network members have seen that by working together they become more visible and their voices are more likely to be heard. Even when they are not officially given a space in the national level processes, such as in the cases of CSFoP and NNER, they cannot be ignored. Except for MATA, the recognition however, is not institutionalized and can thus be easily reversed.

The civil society networks studied have used a number of strategies to gain recognition and space to influence power holders. In all cases, informal links between individuals from the member organizations are an important starting point to opening the doors.

MATA used an international movement, the EITI, which has gained traction with governments and civil society around the world to gain official space to address issues of natural resource governance. Although the Myanmar government made the first step to participate in this international initiative, civil society organized themselves in order to ensure that the space for civil society created by the participation in the initiative would allow for genuine participation of civil society and of communities that are affected by natural resource governance issues. MATA was able to lobby, through informal links of its members, for official recognition even though the government had initially handpicked other organizations to represent civil society in the process. Civil society has also used the space created to broaden the scope of the EITI to address issues on the ground caused by natural resource extraction such as land conflicts, environmental degradation and workers' safety. This expansion of space is a common strategy in Myanmar where boundaries can often be pushed once some official recognition is initially given. Authorities become more relaxed when they see official pieces of paper and are more willing to allow civil society to proceed with their own activities.

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[17] The key population networks refer to four HIV related community networks representing key populations affected by HIV – sex workers, injecting drug users, men who have sex with other men and people living with HIV. As noted before, these were some of the early networks formed in Myanmar. Unfortunately however, these key population networks have not been very active in the MLAW network although they are founding members.

Despite an initial setback of withdrawal of official permission for a regional workshop, MLAW was able to organize an international study visit early on in its formation together with officials from the Union Supreme Court, Attorney General's office and the Constitutional Tribunal to learn about the legal aid system in South Africa. This was an important first step in establishing formal links with these entities. Key to obtaining the inroads for dialogue though was the links that individuals from the members already had with state/regional and national governments. As legal professionals, these members have good linkages with government bodies which opened the doorway for establishing formal links for MLAW. Consequently, MLAW was invited to workshops and consultations on the development of the Legal Aid Law that was passed in 2016.

Civil society was not given an official role in the negotiations towards the NCA because talks were limited to reaching a ceasefire between the army and non-state armed groups as the government had stipulated that political dialogue could only begin after a ceasefire had been signed. CSFoP thus did not have a seat in the official NCA negotiations and carried out its advocacy in parallel with the official process by inviting the advocacy targets to its own forums, issuing statements and conducting individual meetings with the parties involved. For example, following the second CSFoP forum the members issued a statement that there should not be any big investment projects in conflict areas during the peace-building process. The statement was disseminated widely and accepted by the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) which presented the statement to the ethnic armed groups conference which then raised the issue in the NCA. Although it was not party to the NCA negotiations, CSFoP was able to obtain the recognition of both the government and the ethnic-armed groups and to engage with them outside the official talks. CSFoP was invited to meetings organized by the Myanmar Peace Center and both the government and ethnic armed organizations accepted invitations to the forums organized by CSFoP.

NNER too was not involved in any official consultations organized by the government on the National Education Law. Although NNER initially met officially with the President and Minister of Education and was then invited to a government workshop on the National Education Law, the invitation was retracted at the last minute and subsequently the NNER did not have any more official engagement with the government. The reason for the lack of recognition has been attributed to the political sensitivities of the education sector which encompasses an active student movement which has historically been at odds with the military and involvement of ethnic education departments of non-state ethnic armed groups. Despite the lack of official recognition, NNER continued to advocate for their positions by issuing statements and advocating with individual parliamentarians. The network members are strongly determined. The network's insistence and perseverance makes it a constant presence that cannot be ignored.

> *"The government thinks of education as politics, a means of control. As an opposition party, NLD was not willing to push on the education issues as there were other priorities. NNER sees education as education… We will not give up."* (NNER Thematic Group member)

Although all the four networks have sought to advocate with Members of Parliament, NNER is the only network that has engaged with the NLD as a political party through one of its founding members. However, these ties were severed when NNER voiced its support for the students in demonstrations against the Education Law.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE
What difference have networks been able to make on the issues they seek to address?

Even though there was more space for civil society to engage with power holders following the reforms introduced during the Thein Sein government's rule, the engagement did not necessarily lead to the desired changes. Although the government held many consultations with civil society in the process of revising and developing new laws and policies, and officials usually listened and took note of the inputs provided, the

inputs were not always incorporated in the final outputs or actions.

As noted previously, evaluating advocacy interventions is very challenging because of the complex dynamic situation that they take place in and the difficulty in directly attributing who and what led to any changes. None of the networks studied have strong monitoring and evaluation systems. The study thus does not have substantial data to assess if the actions of the networks during the past few years did contribute to making a difference and is only able to draw on the information provided by the networks themselves during the interviews.

All of the networks studied feel that they have been successful in having an impact, formally or informally, on their key advocacy targets – on the drafting of new laws (the Legal Aid Law and the National Education Law); on the drafting of the National Ceasefire Agreement; and on the drafting of the first EITI report submitted by the Myanmar government. In the interviews for the study, each of the network members pointed to examples of how their inputs were incorporated into the respective documents that were formally adopted. While the changes may not be solely attributed to the activities of these networks, the networks are convinced that their inputs did make a difference.

CSFoP points out that they were instrumental in contributing to Articles 9 and 10 in the NCA on protection of civilians and provision of humanitarian assistance. They stated that their inputs were also incorporated in the section on ceasefire monitoring.

MLAW notes that its advocacy for non-government appointed lawyers to be able to provide legal aid to the poor led to the inclusion in Article 52 in the Legal Aid law that was passed in January 2016.

MATA points out that civil society advocacy on the jade and gemstones industry led to the inclusion of this industry in the scope for the first EITI report; although there were limits to what data was available and included in the report, this is the first time that official data on this industry has been forthcoming.

NNER noted that even though it was not officially involved in consultations on the National Education Law, the law which was passed incorporates many of the points made in their National Education Policy, such as -- mother tongue education, establishment of teacher and student unions, increase in the education budget -- although it may not fully incorporate all aspects of the points made by NNER. For example, the law specifies an increase of the budget for education to 20% of the budget but does not specify the timeframe by which this is to be reached. As NNER was not officially involved, the contribution of NNER has never been officially recognized.

These laws and documents are however, only the first step in a long process to affect changes on the ground. By-laws and programmes to implement the Legal Aid Law and National Education Law have yet to be developed, political dialogue for a long-term peace settlement is yet to take place and information from the EITI report is yet to be digested and turned into actions that ensure that resources earned from the country's extractive industries do lead to benefits for the people. The networks will need to continue to monitor the situation to ensure that these processes continue.

At the state/regional levels, advocacy towards regional governments can only lead to limited changes as the political system is still very centralized and regional governments in Myanmar do not yet have much real authority. However, advocacy towards local authorities and power holders has potential to be more grounded and focused on changes that can have an impact for communities. TANKS, the Kachin MATA regional network, noted that their presence in some remote regions where members have carried out human rights awareness raising sessions has led to improved compensation packages for farmers whose land have been taken over by dam and mining projects. For example, in Chipwe, their presence in a negotiation meeting with a Chinese company involved in illegal gold mining and a hydropower project led to cessation of the gold mining and agreement by the company to compensate local farmers.

Policy advocacy is a long term process and the benefits of success are not likely to be seen in a short period of time. The networks are determined to continue to pursue their agendas and while their successes may not be full victories, they see this as a step in the direction being pursued.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

As noted previously networks are complex organisational structures. There is no "one size fits all" and a network's structure and form will depend on its own specific circumstances. The study, however, identified a number of common organizational challenges that networks face as well as some ways that the networks have used to overcome these challenges. Based on an analysis of the challenges and measures taken, the study has identified a number of good practice areas on how networks can organize and manage relationships.

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE PURPOSE AND PRINCIPLES OF THE NETWORK

The study found that networks are sometimes formed with vague notions of how the members will work together. Although there is a common vision of what the network wants to achieve (e.g. to promote legal aid for the poor) and a commitment to work together, there is a less clear idea of *how* the members will work together as a network.

One of the first questions that members of a network need to answer are "*Why should we form a network? What is the added value of working together? Is a network the best form of organization to achieve what we want to do?*" At times, organizations and individuals come together because they are enthusiastic about a common goal and thus want to work together to achieve it. However, they are less clear about what they will do together.

The study found that network members sometimes join without being clear about why they are involved. Some members do not clearly see how they can contribute to the network and how their own work links to the work of the network. Some organizations may get involved in an area of work because of opportunities rather than need. Some individuals may volunteer their time in a network because of personal interests such to be seen to be active in the community or because of the "power" it gives in as being elected as a Steering Committee member of the network. These may cause distortions in the functioning of the network as it detracts from the main purpose of the network.

As the members of a network may be very diverse and have different reasons for being involved, it is important that the network establishes clear principles that all members should agree with and adhere to on the issues that they seek to address. The principles should guide the network in the activities and advocacy interventions. NNER says that three basic agreed principles – social justice, human dignity and academic quality – form the basis for the education reforms that it advocates for. All members commit to these basic principles.

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE TIME AND COMMITMENT REQUIRED

While there are often clear benefits to working together as a network, there are also costs involved. As mentioned already, networks are complex organizational structures and maintaining a network takes considerable effort. Participation in networks is often time consuming. Members must commit to contributing to the network for the network to function well.

As members of networks are themselves organizations with their own programmes and activities, the participants in a network are often individuals who already have full-time jobs or commitments within their own organizations. Most civil society organizations do not include participation in networks in the job

descriptions of their staff but expect them to do so while also fulfilling their own job responsibilities. Members must commit to contributing the time of their staff/members and formally recognize the work of their staff/members in the network.

In Myanmar, often the same individuals are involved in different networks. Most civil society organizations in Myanmar still have weak second line leaders and participation in policy advocacy networks often falls on the leaders. The individuals thus find themselves pulled in different directions. The time spent for the network takes away from their own organisation, at the same time the network has a hard time chasing up on the individual to get decisions made. MATA and MLAW staff noted that the busy schedules of the Board/Steering Committee members is a constant challenge for obtaining timely decisions. CSFoP and NNER are flexible and allow members to participate when they have time but this creates other problems of accountability and continuity.

Due to the time demands on its members, networks often establish Secretariats or Coordination Units to manage the activities of the network. However, although this may free up members from having to organize the implementation of activities, the management of the unit still requires the involvement of the network members. Unlike stand-alone organizations where governance bodies are often limited to setting strategic and policy directions and do not get involved in management of the organisation, management of a network's coordination unit usually requires involvement from members as members need to retain oversight over the work of the coordination unit to maintain the ownership by members. While international experience shows that networks with strong secretariats that are empowered by its members to make decisions and undertake activities on their behalf can function well, civil society in Myanmar does not appear to be ready to embrace such network models as many of the issues are still new and there are significant risks involved, particularly for policy advocacy networks. Civil society members want to retain oversight but find it difficult to commit the time and effort required.

Both MLAW and MATA have found that management of the coordination body requires significant effort and time from the members. MATA has formed sub-Committees under its Steering Committee (Human Resources Sub-Committee, Programme Development Sub-Committee, Financial Management Sub-Committee) to address these management issues but continues to struggle as management by committees is time consuming and requires a lot of coordination. MLAW has established a Management Committee under its Board to manage the coordination unit and is in the process of establishing policies and procedures for its management.

BUILD TRUST AND MAINTAIN THE INVOLVEMENT OF MEMBERS

The elements that are most important in a network are the *members* and the *relationship* between them. Maintaining an active membership and building trust among the members are thus the most important organizational requirements to have a strong network.

Maintaining a high level of trust and commitment among members is important for a network to function well. The networks studied have diverse membership which cut across sectoral and social networks. As described previously, most civil society organizations in Myanmar have had few opportunities for working together. The

risks members take in being part of policy advocacy networks can be significant as the activities of the network may also have implications for the members. Without addressing these issues, bringing people together in networks can end up creating more divisions than building unity. The large networks such as CSFoP, MATA and NNER have sought to build trust among its diverse membership by emphasizing shared values, establishing a Code of Conduct for staff and members and developing conflict resolution mechanisms. One CSFoP member attributes its success to the active participation of its members.

> "CSFoP is able to function only through its network. All members have their networks on the ground... We do not have projects. We all contribute to CSFoP."

Often networks start with a lot of enthusiasm and energy as members find others who share a similar interest. Over time, this enthusiasm may wane and new members may join which do not have the same commitment. National networks have members who are spread throughout the country and conducting regular meetings is not an option. In reality, most networks depend on a core set of members to implement the activities of the network. The establishment of Secretariats often leads to such bodies taking over implementation of activities from the members. Maintaining some level of involvement from all members however is important to retain the cohesiveness of the network. Although there is strength in numbers, particularly for advocacy networks, and the number of signatures on a statement is an indication of the support it has, the legitimacy of the network can be questioned if it has many members that do not have much interest in the network's activities.

One way to maintain involvement of members is by actively sharing information through regular meetings and electronic channels. A strong internal communication strategy is thus important to ensure that members are informed of the activities of the network and can share information among each other. NNER members are active social media users and use these channels to maintain communications among its members. Providing other opportunities for members to be involved such as including them in press conferences, extending invitations for participation in workshops and capacity building opportunities are other ways of involving members. To maintain involvement, it is also important that the network attributes its successes to the contributions of its members rather than take credit solely as a network.

Establishing clear responsibilities for the coordinating body of the network is also important to ensure that the unit maintains the involvement of members in implementation of activities. The recruitment of paid experienced staff members at the Yangon level may lead the coordination body to overshadow the members and be impatient to move forward on its own. It is important that this does not happen and that members stay involved in the decisions made and activities implemented by the Secretariat. On the other hand, it is important that the coordination body is given enough leeway to carry out its functions without micro-management from the members. In recruiting staff of the coordination body, it is important that networks find good communicators who are able to bring people together in addition to having management and technical skills.

ESTABLISH DEMOCRATIC AND PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES AND SPACES

In order to maintain ownership of the network by the members, networks must develop mechanisms that allow members to feel that they have a part in making key decisions in the network. All the four networks studied have sought to establish democratic and participatory decision-making structures. The members of the MLAW and MATA governance bodies (Board and Steering Committee) that are responsible for making strategic decisions for the network are **elected** by the members of the network. MATA has an elaborate election system and structure for selection and participation of regional networks and representatives. These structures and policies provide clarity but require much effort in formulation and application.

The development of democratic structures however does not guarantee a more participatory process as the representatives that are elected may use those structures to centralize power for themselves rather than represent their constituents. One key informant referred to this as *"democratic centralization."* Furthermore, establishing complex policies and procedures for election and representation may lead to exclusion rather than inclusion. To counter such power dynamics, networks should promote themselves and the decision-making bodies not as structures but as a shared space for working together.

As informal networks, CSFoP and NNER do not have formal elected governance bodies but have established decision-making bodies made up of volunteers. Membership in these decision-making bodies is open to those who wish to give their time and effort; while there is no formal election, any member can volunteer and participate in decision-making if they wish. CSFoP has allowed members who resign from their organisations to stay on as individual members; this provides continuity as well as a sense of inclusiveness in the network.

All the decision-making bodies in these four networks do not have designated officers; all members are considered equal. This makes coordination of the decision-making body more difficult but is a conscious effort to avoid the dominance of some members. It is recognized however in all the networks that there are more influential members, often the original founding members of the network. These informal leaders are often the inspiration and "glue" that holds the network together. They influence the network because they are knowledgeable or have strong experience in the issues addressed by the network, and are thus well respected within the network. This does not mean that there are not sometimes disagreements or resistance to the influence of these leaders by some members.

> *"Some people are very influential… so the challenge is to balance power in the network."*

In addition to the main governance/decision-making body, the networks have also established other sub-structures such as regional networks, thematic groups or sub-committees at different levels to involve other members in decision-making. These sub-structures allow for more diffuse decision-making in different areas.

COMPLEMENT RATHER THAN COMPETE

A fundamental principle of a network should be that it should not compete with its own members and implement the same activities as its members. Members must clearly identify what it is the network will do that is different from their own work. Activities must be complementary rather than duplicating. For example, a network to promote women as leaders will have members who are already providing training to women leaders; the network should support members by providing training of trainers for its members rather than implement a programme for training women leaders. The study found that without clearly understanding the nature of networks or in efforts to fundraise from donors who want to see results, networks sometimes begin to take on the same functions as that of its members. When MLAW took on a project to establish legal aid centers under the name of the network, some members became disenfranchised as they felt that the network was taking over their role rather than supporting them.

DEVELOP INNOVATIVE ACCOUNTABLE MECHANISMS OF OPERATIONS

As mentioned previously, there is no "one size fits all" for the way that networks are organized. Networks need to find appropriate mechanisms for their own circumstances, drawing on their main resource, their members. While there is a tendency for networks to become more formal and to form organizational structures and procedures to manage financial and operational issues, such processes may lead to increased bureaucratization which can suppress the initiative and commitment of members. In particular, policy advocacy networks need to be able to adapt and respond quickly to the external environment. Networks should thus seek to find innovative mechanisms which allow them to be more agile while ensuring that they

remain accountable both to their members and donors[18]. For example, networks can be hosted by one of the network members to avoid having to establish new management policies and procedures; this allows the network to have stability and work on building the strength and trust within the network rather than internal management controls. The hosting of the network could also be rotated to avoid having one member which has stronger influence. In CSFoP, Shalom acts as the funding channel and manager of funds. Networks can also identify mechanisms that can draw on the expertise within their members, e.g. through temporary assignments, rather than recruit external staff for the coordination units.

However, due to the nature of networks where governance and decision-making bodies are made up of members themselves, members often get involved in making decisions that they themselves are involved in or decisions that can also impact on their own organizations as members of the network. There is thus a need for a conflict of interest policy to address such issues, particularly when monies are involved. Some of the members in decision-making bodies in the networks studied noted that other members are sometimes resentful of them because they feel that the members in the decision-making bodies get more opportunities, for example to attend international conferences.

In addition to financial accountability, networks must also monitor and evaluate their work. Most networks in Myanmar are not yet doing this systematically. Policy advocacy, in particular, is difficult to monitor and evaluate. However, networks must consider how they can establish such systems if they are to stay responsive to their members and constituents.

MANAGE DONOR RELATIONSHIPS AND FUNDING

Networks need to be aware that donor funding does not push them into functions that they are not prepared for and that the funding does not create the wrong incentives for members to be involved. The acceptance of donor funding often leads to the establishment of structures such as a coordination body and introduction of policies and procedures to manage these funds. As described previously, coordination bodies may have a tendency to take over implementation of activities and even compete to implement the same activities in their enthusiasm to move things along. Donors supporting networks need to be aware of these challenges and ensure that the structures and systems put in place to manage their funds do not lead to diminishing the commitment and involvement of the members and that processes of bringing people together do not actually lead to greater conflict if the diversity and differences within civil society are not recognized. A study on networks in Malawi found that *"funds from outside donors … has compromised member ownership of the network and created a 'donor project' orientation[19]."* Drawing from the lessons in other countries, networks also need to avoid being the one-stop shop for donors or simply a mechanism to channel funds to members[20]. While this is not yet strongly evident in Myanmar, as international assistance continues to grow in size and complexity, it will be important for donors to recognize these issues.

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[18] A study of NGO networks in Latin America found that there has been a tendency towards a "lightening of structures" focusing on the processes and products of networks rather than the "network as an apparatus". The study found that by drawing on members rather than building up the coordination unit, a network can change quickly according to demand; improve the quality rather than number of human resources; strengthen both the members and network as a group at the same time; focus resources on services and products rather than additional staff; and draw on and acknowledge the contribution of members rather than "outsiders". (Ranaboldo & Pinzas, 2003)

[19] (James, 2006)

[20] The study on networks in Malawi also found that "Many donors are now more attracted to CSO networks because of them being 'vehicles' for reaching their members – as a wholesaler of grants or capacity building services to a wider target group." (James, 2006)

X. LOOKING FORWARD

The networks in the study have made notable in-roads into the policy advocacy agendas that they have set themselves by taking hold of opportunities in the reform process set by the previous government. However, at the time of the study, the networks are facing an uncertain future. As the new NLD government takes over, the networks are taking a cautious wait-and-see approach as the priorities of the new government are still uncertain. In particular, the NLD had not yet made clear its position in relations to civil society. Furthermore, some of the government bodies and processes that the networks were interacting with such as the Myanmar Peace Center and the Myanmar EITI had been dissolved or were pending decisions by the new government. Some of the relationships and recognition that had been established by the networks have thus been called into question. Nevertheless, the networks were optimistic that the new government would continue to pursue the agendas that had been set and were gearing themselves to be able to respond to new developments.

With the military still controlling 25% of parliament, three ministries which hold the key to peace and security issues and a large portion of the business sector through their circle of influence, there is awareness that the new government may still be constrained in its ability to make changes and that civil society needs to continue to put pressure to address social injustices and inequities and to represent communities in voicing their views. Civil society actors are aware that they do not want to create conditions which may be used by the military as a pretext to take over power again; however civil society must continue to be able to raise issues when they do arise. The networks that had a more activist approach noted that they may need to shift towards more constructive engagement with the government. For example, NNER said it would take a "friendly" approach and focus efforts to conduct more research and documentation to enable it to do better evidence-based advocacy. MATA too indicated it would need a more "professional" approach to negotiations. Establishing external partnerships which can improve access of members to technical resources would be useful in this regard.

While addressing these advocacy challenges, networks must also address the organisational pitfalls that may contribute to the breakdown of the network. As *network* organisations, networks will need to strengthen the two elements that make up the network – its *members* and the *relationships* between them. Networks will need to strengthen the quality of their membership while maintaining the strength in numbers. This will mean having a strong set of shared values and ensuring that members stay involved in the work of the network. For nationally representative networks, more focus must also be placed on strengthening the regional networks to build an effective decentralized system.

This study focused on functional aspects of networking within an organizational framework. To complement and build on this, it would be useful to further study the socio-psychological aspects of networking to better understand how individuals act and interact in networks and how networking can empower individuals to create social movements for change.

XI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The number of civil society networks in Myanmar has expanded rapidly since 2011. Networks have been formed for different reasons but the majority seek to bring together different organizations and individuals to advocate on issues related to the legal, social, economic and political reform taking place in the country.

While there are many benefits to forming and being part of a network, networks are complicated organizations and many have faced challenges in establishing appropriate structures and undertaking actions to maintain the interest and solidarity of members. Although network members are linked by a common issue

or geographical region, civil society is very diverse and most civil society actors in Myanmar have had limited opportunities to work together in the past.

Despite the challenges they face, the case studies show that the networks have been able to achieve results in three areas assessed.

1. The networks studied have established structures and processes to ensure that they are representative of their members and the communities they work with. Although the networks tend to be more influenced by a few influential leaders and core members, they have strived hard to ensure wider consultation and input to inform their strategies and advocacy messages.
2. The networks studied have found innovative ways to gain recognition and space to influence power holders on sensitive issues despite the challenging political situation. However, some networks are not formally recognized and the space is not institutionalized; the networks thus have found other means to raise their concerns and get their messages across.
3. The networks claim that their advocacy has made a difference and that their points have been incorporated into official positions such as in new laws, agreements and processes of the government, although not always to the full extent of their demands or proposals. While these changes may not be solely attributed to the networks as there are other players involved, the networks have successfully made positive steps forward in their advocacy goals.

In order to further strengthen their activities, networks should consider the following.

1. National networks should **place more emphasis on supporting their regional networks** to strengthen their representativeness and ability to carry out activities at the state/regional level. The networks should develop strategies for building the capacity and mobilizing more resources for the regional networks. Regional networks need more support to enable them to develop strategies and plans for their own states/regions; to conduct advocacy at state/regional and local levels; to support documentation and research activities; and to manage funds for implementation of activities.
2. Policy advocacy networks should **strengthen their research and documentation initiatives** to ensure that advocacy messages are well-grounded and based on evidence, for example by developing partnerships with academic institutions or other research entities which can provide technical support and resources.
3. Networks should **advocate for equal status and stronger formal recognition of civil society participation in state processes** at township, state/regional and national levels, for example to be granted space for formal representation by civil society organizations in official bodies, forums and citizen engagement mechanisms.
4. Networks should **establish stronger monitoring and evaluation systems** to assess their contribution towards their objectives and goals. It will be important for networks to show that they can have an impact in order to continue to show their relevance to their members and stakeholders.

There is no optimal structure for a network and the networks studied have developed different organizational forms to fit their own circumstances. However, the study found that the networks face a number of common challenges and networks should take into account a number of good practice considerations in establishing their structures and ways that they work. These good practice considerations are described in Box 3 below.

With a new government installed in 2016, Myanmar will continue to undergo a rapid pace of change. As the country looks forward to this new optimistic period, networks can play an important role in helping to shape a development agenda that is owned by the people. To do this, networks will need to be able to adapt to the changing situation, to harness their members to find innovative strategies and responses -- to continue to develop the *art of networking.*

Box 3: Good practice considerations for working as a network

1. **Be clear about the purpose and principles of the network**
   o Members must understand the specific reasons they are working together as a network; there must be added value for the members to work together as a network rather than as separate organizations
   o All members must agree and adhere to the basic principles of the network
2. **Be clear about the time and commitment required**
   o Networks require a lot of time and effort from members. Members must commit to contributing the time and effort of their staff/members and formally recognize the work of their staff/members in the network.
3. **Build trust and maintain the involvement of members**
   o Develop shared values, a clear Code of Conduct and mechanisms for addressing conflict within the network
   o Involve members in activities of the network rather than rely solely on the coordination office (e.g. involve members in press conferences, external events, capacity building opportunities)
   o Acknowledge contributions of members for the successes of the network
   o Develop a strong internal communications strategy to foster interactions with and among members (e.g. through social media, email groups, newsletters)
   o Establish clear roles and responsibilities for the coordination office; coordination office staff should be good communicators that can bring people together
4. **Establish democratic and participatory decision-making structures and spaces**
   o Develop structures which allow members to influence decision-making; for example, boards and committees elected from among members with clear roles and responsibilities
   o Promote the network and its decision-making bodies as a shared space rather than a structure
   o Establish other sub-groups and domains of decision-making which involve members such as regional networks, thematic groups and committees
5. **Complement rather than compete**
   o Do not take on functions and activities that the members are already undertaking
6. **Develop innovative accountable mechanisms of operations**
   o Consider different options for establishing how the network operates; for example, a network can work through informal processes or initially be hosted by one of the members to avoid having to develop new management policies and procedures
   o Develop a Conflict of Interest policy and guidelines for decision-makers (who are usually also members and may also benefit from the decisions made)
   o Develop strong monitoring and evaluation systems
7. **Manage donor relationships and funding**
   o Be aware of the implications of receiving donor funds and the challenges this may create in managing donor requirements which often requires the establishment of structures (e.g. a coordination office) and policies that draw away from members' commitment.
   o Be aware of pressures that donors may inadvertently place on networks of the functions they take on (e.g. grant making)

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Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
Child Focused Network	2003		Child-care centers, CSOs	To promote children's rights and social protection		Supported by UNICEF and international NGOs to work with children in institutions and community in Yangon and Mandalay	Information sharing, organizing forums/meetings, capacity building, IEC materials
Myanmar Positive Group	2005		Self-help groups of people living with HIV	Promoting the greater and meaningful involvement of people living with HIV (PLHIV) in the HIV response in Myanmar.		Supported by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance to promote the principal of Greater Involvement of People living with HIV (GIPA) following a mapping of PLHIV self-help groups	Build the skills of PLHIV for more involvement; Reduce stigma and discrimination towards PLHIV; Promote networking among PLHIV individuals and groups; Advocate for PLHIV rights of access to treatment and services
Myanmar Fruit, Flower and Vegetable Producer and Exporter Association	2006	40,000 members with 29 clusters and 7 branches	Individuals, companies, crop representatives, township and state/regional representatives of growers, sellers, exporters and importers		Private sector network which views itself as part of civil society. Operating under the aegis of Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry.		Capacity building, marketing support, advocacy on relevant laws
Consumer Education Network	2007		Individuals + CSOs	Increase consumer education in Myanmar	-		Training, advocacy, exhibition, meetings with other stakeholders
Myanmar NGO Network (MNN)	2008	60 (approx.)	CSOs	To establish a common place for CSOs/INGOs		Emerged from regular coordination meetings among Myanmar NGOs following a similar forum for international NGOs	Biweekly meeting, information sharing and cross agencies communication
National NGOs Network (3N)	2008	105	CSOs	To form systematic network for communication for ensuring capacity improvement of CBOs and LNGOs working for HIV and AIDS in each region of the whole country		Emerged from a number of meetings of CSOs working on HIV facilitated by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance	Governance and structure, capacity building, advocacy, information sharing and communication, networking, network fund raising

Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
Thadar Consortium	2008	14	CSOs	Enhance local NGOs role and protect against oppression on local NGOs by government through collective mechanism	Works with local implementing partners who in turn provide communities with humanitarian relief and recovery as an entry point to community led empowerment processes	Formed post-Nargis to meet immediate post-cyclone livelihood recovery efforts.	Coordination-project design and implementations, communication through secretariat
Myanmar Positive Women's Network	2008		Individual women	To improve the ability of HIV positive women in Myanmar to be involved in vital decision making and to better lead meaningful lives		Initial facilitation for formation supported by UNAIDS	Capacity building, advocacy
Women's Organizations Network	2008	30	Women's organizations	To support women's community groups in Myanmar to improve lives of women and men		To engage and advocate for peace, justice and equality for women and men through working with key stakeholders at all levels towards positive social change in Myanmar	Awareness raising, trainings and advocacy on women's rights, violence against women, and peace in conflict regions
Myanmar Interfaith Network on AIDS (MINA)	2009	64	Faith-based organizations	Share resources on tackling HIV and AIDS, help people living with HIV, prevent discrimination on PLHIV, coordinate advocacy	Four chairpersons from different religions, routine leadership positions, host cross religions, focused on mutual understanding and acceptance of different faiths aiming towards harmonious society	Founded organically as a result of a CSO Forum, to promote mutual understanding and cooperation among different religion institutions	Psycho/social support to PLH, raise religious leaders and authorities awareness on PLH, monetary, nutrition and spiritual support to PLH, trainings, workshop and forum
Myanmar MSM Network	2009		Self-help groups of men who have sex with other men	To fight against stigma and discrimination of men who have sex with men		Formed by MSM self-help groups who sought to establish a national network to represent the MSM community	

Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
National Drug User Network in Myanmar	2009	1877	Drug user groups	People who use drugs in Myanmar at all levels and venues face no stigma and discrimination and enjoy equal access to health and social services		Formation of network facilitated by Burnet Institute	Networking and community participation, advocacy for media, awareness raising, capacity building and resources management, representative and ownership, fund raising, working group member individual skills up, coaching for each drug user implement organizations
Myanmar Environment and Resources Network	2009	17	CSOs	For sustainable development of mangrove systems		Formed following post-Nargis activities	To share learnings; promote accountability, voice; increase investment in conservation; create enabling environment
Myanmar Network Organization for Free and Fair Election (MYNFEL)	2010	14	CSOs + Individual	Foster democratization through free and fair election		Became organization from network, conducted voter education in 45 townships in 2010	Voter education trainings, election observation ;Coordination among election observers, and trainers of civic education
Women Can Do It (WCDI)	2011	60	Alumni of WCDI trainings	Promote women's role in leadership and decision making		Composed of alumni and membership of politically active women from different part of the country and coordinated attempt to promote women's leadership	Capacity building trainings, alumni resource sharing, periodical journal and documentation, advocacy, 30% quota
Sex Workers in Myanmar Network	2011	37	Sex worker self-help groups and individuals	Promote the rights of sex workers			Training and advocacy on Sex Workers' rights, and on HIV/AIDS prevention
Myanmar People's Forum	2011		CSOs	To promote role of civil society in ASEAN and to make ASEAN a people-centered institution		To participate in the ASEAN People's Forum	Organize forums and participation of Myanmar civil society in ASEAN People's Forum

Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW)	2012	19	CSOs and private law firms	To strengthen the Rule of law through improving legal aid services on issues relating to the people of Myanmar		From participation in the regional Southeast Asian Legal Aid Network	Legal aid or pro-bono Services, Legal Empowerment Program such as workshops, learning exchange programs publication training, advocacy, information sharing, meetings with members and other stakeholders.
Civil Society Forum for Peace	2012	150	CSOs and individuals	To advocate for a just peace	Focused primarily on forums as a parallel process to the national peace talks	In response to the President's Call for Peace	Regional and national forums to bring together civil society and advocate to government and ethnic armed organizations
IFI Watch	2012		Individuals and representatives of civil society organizations	To ensure the democratic governance of IFI operations in Myanmar to realize inclusive development, economic justice and ecological sustainability.		To act as watchdog for activities of international financial institutions such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank and International Monetary Fund	Facilitate dialogue among the government, IFIs and local communities.
Myanmar China Pipeline Watch Committee	2012		Individual and CSOs along the Myanmar-China pipeline	To watch the damage created by the constructions and protect the livelihood of the residences along the Myanmar-China pipeline and nature resources.			
Myanmar Lawyers Network	2012	300		To uphold the rule of law, revitalize an independent judiciary, develop a democratic constitution and safeguard human rights			
National Network for Education Reform	2013	150	CSOs and individuals	To advocate for reform in the education sector and promote a system of education in line with a democratic system and society	An informal network of students, teachers, civil society organizations, monastic schools, ethnic education departments	Following a series of state/regional consultations to develop a National Education Policy for input in the formulation of the Education Law	Advocacy for education reform and research; capacity building for members on advocacy and research

Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
Enabling Legal Environment Group	2013		CSOs	To advocate amendment of laws harmful to CSOs and public		Formed by leaders of CSOs based on successful advocacy of amendment of association registration law and the right to information law	Legislative reviews, advocacy and awareness raising on laws harmful to CSOs and public
WinPeace	2013	30	CSOs + Individuals	Promote women's participation and leadership through coordinated work on peace issues		Originated in WON but separated to focus more on politics/women's issue and to establish a coordination among different women's organizations and professionals	Focus on women's peace and security-- demonstrations, women's right movement, dialogues and setting agenda of women-related issues for parliamentary discussion
Joint Strategy Team (JST)	2013	9	CSOs	Ensure an efficient, impactful and quality humanitarian response by Local-National NGOs, to address the most urgent needs of people affected by the conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan States.	The strategy aims to minimize donor-driven policy and maximize the use of international cooperation opportunities using locally owned common strategy	To develop a joint strategy in an attempt to have a common understanding of how the response should be designed, strategized, targeted, and managed.	
Myanmar Youth Stars	2013			To empower, advocate and create opportunities for key populations of young people to have access to HIV prevention, care and treatment in an environment where they receive equal rights			
Myanmar Tea Cluster	2013	10,000	Tea farmers, processers and traders	To improve the Myanmar tea industries of black tea, green tea and pickled tea	Private sector network which views itself as part of civil society. Member of the MFFVPEA		Capacity building and enhancing coordination and networking among the value chain actors

Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability	2014	518	CSOs + Individuals	Support civil society actors to collaboratively advocate for transparency and accountability in all sectors across Myanmar with a focus on natural resource management		Initiated as participation in the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative	Coordination & Networking, Communication, Advocacy, Capacity Building, Monitoring, learning and research
Myanmar Election Observation Network (MEON)	2015	17	CSOs	Strengthen election observation group; increase public awareness on election process	Generate a communication mechanism across state/regions that instrument effort beyond individuals' capacity	To reconnect those who had work under EU election project	Training, advocacy and information sharing
Civil Society Organization Forum	2015	50+	Individuals + CSOs	Share resources on tacking HIV/AIDS, help people living with HIV/AIDS, prevent discrimination on PLH, coordinate advocacy			hotspot meeting for emergency issues, annual forum
May Doe Kaba	2015	31	Women Self-Reliant Groups formed under UNDP Human Development Initiative	To empower women in rural area		Formed from a national meeting of women self-reliant groups formed under the UNDP Human Development Initiative	training, bi-monthly meeting
Women's Political Action	2015	7	Individuals	To promote women's participation in politics	Network still being developed	Meeting of a number of women leaders to increase number of women MPs elected in the 2015 elections	Research, capacity building, networking and alliance building
Myanmar Coffee Association				To improve the prosperity of all sectors of the coffee industry	Private sector network which views itself as part of civil society		
Women's League of Burma	1999	13	Women's organizations from different ethnic groups	To increase the participation of women in the struggle for democracy and human rights, promote women's participation in the national peace and reconciliation process, and enhance the role of the women of Burma at the national and international level.	Based outside Myanmar	Emerged from a forum held in Chiangmai to bring together existing Burma women's organizations of different ethnic groups.	Raising awareness, capacity building, grassroots campaigns, providing direct assistance, documentation, advocacy and mobilization for: peace-building and reconciliation, political empowerment and violence against women

Name	Year Founded	Number of Members	Type of Members	Goal/Purpose	Important Characteristics	Dynamics that led to Network Formation	Key Activities
Land in Our Hands							
Myanmar Muslim Youth Network							
Public Legal Aid Network							

Organisation	Position
Paung Ku	Director
UNDP	Programme Specialist – Civil Society and Media
Pyoe Pin	Programme Officer
Norwegian People's Aid	Programme Manager Programme Officer
Independent	Consultant
Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability	National Coordinator Assistant National Coordinator Yangon Regional Coordinator Steering Committee member Steering Committee member, Kachin/Transparency and Accountability Initiative Kachin State Training Team Leader, Transparency and Accountability Initiative Kachin State
Myanmar Legal Aid Network	Management Committee member (2) MLAW member (2) Network Coordinator Programme Officer
Civil Society Forum for Peace	Working Committee member (9) Coordinator, Civil Society Network for Peace, Kachin Working Committee member, Civil Society Network for Peace, Kachin Coordinator Programme Officer
National Network for Education Reform	Thematic Working Group member (6) Kachin Working Group member/Kachin State Education Network