Collaboration Complexity

Insights and lessons from the Skills for Negotiation project in two Self-Administered Zones in Burma / Myanmar

Table of contents

Acknowledgements

1. Why a case study?[1]

Those working in the development sector are seeing an ever increasing number of multi-stakeholder projects that span organisations, cultures, locations and sectors and that operate in a wide range of contexts and impact many different kinds of communities. Multi-stakeholder collaboration, commonly described as 'partnership', is a relatively new delivery mechanism. Increasingly, it is being used to establish more effective and iterative working relationships between in-country and international stakeholders. By drawing together diverse skills and contributions, it is hoped that projects will be better able to deliver innovation, fit for purpose solutions, sustainability and more.

Whilst this approach may be one that many in the development sector welcome and adopt, there are others who do not embrace it – preferring more traditional approaches. In fact, many find the collaboration imperative and the realities of making complex and layered relationships work stressful and confounding and, at times, inappropriate for the task at hand. The challenge of building complex working relationships and establishing sound collaborative practices whilst managing the multiple pressures of project delivery can be perceived as an unnecessary burden.

These considerations lead to a number of questions that underpin this inquiry:

- Do the risks, challenges and transaction costs associated with multi-stakeholder collaboration actually outweigh the hoped-for benefits?
- What is the appropriate amount of time spent on process and partnership-building that should be allocated to partnering to deliver a programme of work without squandering precious resources?
- How easy is it to apply key partnering principles (equity, transparency and mutual benefit, to name but three) in what is still essentially a top-down, donor-driven reality?
- Does it have to be so difficult to partner effectively?
- Most importantly of all: what is the real added value of a collaborative approach and does it truly lead to greater innovation, more participation and a stronger sense of engagement in sustainable development?

The partnership featured here has provided a valuable and unique opportunity to explore these questions.

The partnership and project

The partnership at the heart of this case study is from a project funded by the Government of Canada, managed by Agriteam (a Canada-based consultancy). The structure that supported the project was a four-way partnership, enshrined in a co-created collaboration agreement designed to underpin the collaborative basis for the work. This agreement ran alongside separate contracts drawn up by Agriteam with each of the other three partner organisations that covered specific project commitments, deliverables and financial arrangements. The 3

additional organisations had representatives based in Canada, UK, India and Burma / Myanmar.

The project was designed to build skills in negotiation to enable stronger participation in law making and development planning amongst stakeholders in two locations in Burma / Myanmar as a contribution to the country's transition from conflict and authoritarianism to democracy. A key feature of the approach was to enable those involved to build knowledge, skills and actual experiences of collaboration.

The theme of collaboration therefore ran right through all aspects of the partnership and of the project.

The case study

This case study was embedded as an integral part of the programme of work – why? Partners shared the view that it would be interesting and important to record the process of collaboration in terms of both the programme's partnership structure and its collaborative delivery model in a country where voluntary collaboration has, until recently, been strictly confined to Buddhist charity. So the case study[2] was designed to examine collaboration in action at strategic, operational and community levels. We set out to examine collaboration between partners in some detail and to consider the opportunities and challenges that this partnership presented, including how best to model collaboration whilst delivering the project.

Our research approach and its limitations

We wanted to gather insights from a variety of perspectives and to do our best to accurately represent the diversity of experiences. To this end, we tracked a range of unfolding stories in real time and collected information in a number of ways including:

- Reviews of relevant literature and project documentation;
- Conversations with local stakeholders about collaboration within the Burma / Myanmar context;
- Conversations with representatives from each of the partner agencies;
- Access to *Learning Logs*[3] kept at the operational level during the project;
- Reflection sessions with the project team at key points in the project;
- Focus groups feedback from community stakeholders / training participants.

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1. The introduction is largely written by the case study team (PBA) – it is intended to give a framework for the case study by grounding it in some partnering theory and experience.

2. During early discussions, one of the prospective partners (CIIAN) suggested the value of documenting the project and partnership. The opportunity to build a case study was later raised by PBA, who moved to include this as one of the project outputs, a proposal that was approved by the partners and donor.
3. A learning log is a form of journal kept by members of the project team during the project. It is a personal record of their experiences, ideas, questions and insights. The term 'log' is taken from the nautical use of a 'log line' that is an instrument for charting the course of a ship's journey.

Whilst every effort was made to collect data as comprehensively as possible and to explore the issues raised in adequate depth, the process was limited by:

- The need to balance the allocation of effort between the case study and the higher priority effort needed to develop and deliver the project;
- Truncated timeframes set by a fixed deadline in which this case study was compiled concurrently with the project, not afterwards;
- The relative importance that key individuals and / or their organisations gave to the case study, and their willingness to prioritise and invest time recording and contributing their experiences;
- A level of concern regarding the fact that voicing critique could be detrimental to the project and / or to longer term relationships between the partner agencies;
- The need for the case study to reflect the perspectives of multiple partners and diverse stakeholders;
- The need to produce the case study as a relatively succinct and accessible document when the breadth and wealth of data would merit a much more detailed study.

Any such case study process is invariably impacted by these kinds of constraints – they are the realities that we all face in working collaboratively. It means that choices have to be made about where to focus our attention. We believe there is considerable potential for exploration of additional issues identified that are not able to be covered here.

Because partnerships are made up of individual experiences, it is not uncommon to find that one perspective and its opposite can be equally valid and accurate expressions of the situation[4]. It is worth bearing this in mind as you read this case study.

The case study as a tool for change

"Ultimately our aim as case study researchers and writers is to generate genuine interest and assist learning so that issues about partnering are better understood. Case studies – if they are researched and recounted well – can provide lessons that enable deeper understanding and the motivation to improve, change and build ever stronger partnerships"[5]

This case study is not a definitive presentation of the experience on this project, and it is doubtful if such a thing is realistic given the constraints outlined above. It has, however, enabled the team to unearth some of the complexities, discontents and excitements that this form of multi-stakeholder engagement brings. Our enthusiasm for partnering does not blind us to the fact that it can be difficult and, above all, this experience has taught all of us that we have no reason to be complacent about partnering as a delivery mechanism.

Whilst the content for this case study has been provided by many of those involved in the project[6], we (the case study team) have had the responsibility of driving, shaping and producing the final product. We take full responsibility for any conclusions we have deduced from the data contributed. We acknowledge that as active participants in the project, we have our own points of view and that our interpretation of findings can and should be open to question and to challenge.

This case study is intended to stimulate conversation, critical analysis and a lot more exploration of multi-stakeholder collaboration as a delivery mechanism for sustainable development whether at the international, national or community level. If such collaboration is critical to the future of our world, which many believe to be the case, it is vitally important to invest in understanding it better.

2. A new chapter in Burma / Myanmar history

"Burma is on a journey from dictatorship to democracy. It is a slow process and it needs to be if it is to make that journey without leaving too many people behind and without creating too much instability and vulnerability in both people and institutions. The Army is still considered the only fully functional institution in the country."[7]

The history of ethnic conflict in Burma / Myanmar[8] is long and brutal, with several of the country's ethnic groups having spent the last 50 years in armed conflict with the government army. Decades of conflict have compounded and created a number of additional issues including: international isolation, economic decline, human rights abuses and displacement.

Both the government and civilian armed rebels have operated through highly centralised decision-making and top-down control mechanisms and to date there has been little coherence within the state apparatus. A large number of those in leadership positions within government have a military background and several ethnic groups still have armed militia. *"Government officials need to move from being **government** servants to being **public** servants"[9]* and there is growing public recognition of the need to reduce the domination and prominence of government and for civil society organisations to play a stronger role.

The 2008 constitution (that came into effect in 2011) has enshrined the right to association and assembly[10] as well as authorised the self-administration of six identified ethnic minority groups in the form of the Self-Administered Zones

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4. An example to illustrate this point: in an earlier case study of an entirely different partnership, PBA was confronted with one partner saying 'This partnership has been a total nightmare' and another saying 'I cannot believe what completely amazing things this partnership has achieved' and concluded that both perspectives were objectively correct!

5. Hurrell, Hussain-Kaliq & Tennyson (eds) 2008, The Case Study Toolbook – Partnership Case Studies as Tools for Change published by The Partnering Initiative and available for free download from www.ThePartneringInitiative. org

6. See page 24 for a list of names and agencies.

7. This statement comes from an individual working for the peace process who was formerly a rebel fighter from an ethnic minority group.

8. Readers will note that we are using Burma / Myanmar rather than either Burma or Myanmar and in preference to Burma (known as Myanmar) that is used quite commonly on foreign government websites. We believe this is an accurate reflection of the reality where different stakeholder groups have strong views about which name is preferable. Where one or other is selected by a speaker in a direct quote we have kept the name they have chosen to use.

9. Secretary of the Pa-O General Administration Department (Union Government).

10. In line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(SAZ). Five of these SAZ are for ethnic groups previously in armed conflict with the government but who laid down arms early on and agreed to work with the government. The status of SAZ is a tentative step towards allowing ethnic groups and citizens the right to self-governance, within the framework of the Union of Myanmar and in this light may be seen as a step towards lasting peace. SAZ has decision-making powers in a select number of areas.[11]

Since 2011, the President has publicly committed to a reform agenda and has spoken about the need for cooperation between government and civil society. Structures have been put in place to support this at the local level such as multi-stakeholder township development support committees and elected Village Tract Administrators; however the culture of working together is new and unfamiliar. The ability of stakeholders to develop relationships and work together with confidence in each other is made more difficult by the frequent turnover of government personnel who move post regularly at all levels and the fact that they are often from the majority Burmese ethnic group or not from the area in which they are posted. These factors add to the barriers between people.

If the SAZ's are to be effective and contribute to more democratic governance systems in which policy decisions are in the interests of a wide range of stakeholders, then government officials and civil society representatives within the SAZ need to be able to consult and cooperate with each other. While there is growing confidence in the political reform process, there is limited understanding of what it will take for individuals and groups to get beyond their mistrust of each other to find and build on their shared interest in the future.

It is important to understand the particularly deep-seated constraints people in Burma / Myanmar face in promoting a collaborative approach with a focus on equity. As noted above, the authoritarian government has been in place for over 50 years and requires people to request permission for most activities. Whilst the government's tight grip is felt to be loosening, there is an historical precedent of fear in challenging those with authority or even making decisions that may be disapproved of. In addition, in Burmese culture, across the spectrum of ethnic groups, there is a deep respect for those perceived to have authority – such as community elders and older people, Buddhist monks and men generally. Consequently, there are established norms of hierarchical structures and culture.

This is, however, a time of significant change in the country. Young people who have made a number of attempts over the years to make their voices heard, often repressed with violence, now have other means to express themselves. The liberalisation of the media and the governments support for a slow democratisation process including the formation of civil society organisations has provided channels for young people to express their deep desire for change, voice their opinions and constructively engage in new approaches. The peace process is on-going and there is a need to demonstrate that progress is happening, particularly for those from ethnic groups who signed ceasefires more than 20 years ago, and in preparation for the elections that are due to be held in 2015.

Against a backdrop of deep-seated mistrust, and long-standing norms of top-down authority, new channels of communication need to be built between civil society and government. Key players in all sectors are in need of new skills and approaches that will enable them to represent and advocate their views, talk to each other effectively and to '*Work Together for a Shared Future*'[12] as Burma / Myanmar starts a new chapter in its history.

3. Intentions and achievements

"Our President said we need four changes: bring peace and rule of law; eradicate poverty; mind-set change of the Government Departments; and increased awareness of the people. Your training aims at mind-set change. This is what we need."[13]

The project was designed to support Burma / Myanmar in moving towards more participatory, people-centred governance approaches. Specifically, it aimed to strengthen the capacity for collaboration among government bodies and civil society groups within the Danu and Pa-O Self-Administered Zones, which comprise 2 and 3 townships respectively and both lie within Shan State.

The SAZ has a local government with limited legislative and executive powers called the Leading Body with 10/12 members. 25% of these members come from the Defense Services/Army nominated by the Commander-in-Chief. Others are township elected representatives to the Shan State Hluttaw (Parliament) together with representatives selected by the elected representatives and Defense personnel, the Chairperson is elected by the members of the Leading Body. Any laws enacted by the Leading Body must be consistent with Union/State Hluttaw legislation.

The General Administration Department (GAD) under the Ministry of Home Affairs administers the country through a hierarchy established at central, regional, and local levels. GAD officers in SAZs especially the Township Administrative Officer, are key executive Government officials mandated and authorized to facilitate coordination among different line Departments, such as education and health, with the Leading Body, the Township Management Committee, Township Development Support Committee and the Village Tracts. A senior GAD Officer is posted to the Leading Body by the Union Government to support its activities. Each township has a Township Administrative Office, headed by a GAD Township Administrative Officer with other GAD Officers, clerks and other support staff.

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11. These include: urban and rural projects / construction and maintenance of roads and bridges / public health/ development affairs / prevention of fire hazards / maintenance of pasture / conservation and preservation of forest / preservation of natural environment in accordance with local laws / water and electricity issues in towns and villages/market issues in towns and villages.

12. Title of the workshop provided to Shan State SAZ stakeholders.
13. Chairman, Pa-O Leading Body whose request for assistance was one of the drivers for the project.

Two Committees have a key role in development planning and decision making: the Township Management Committee, chaired by the Township Administrative Officer, which has line department representatives – Health, Education, Immigration, Land, Livestock etc. as members; and the Township Development Support Committee, which mainly has civil society representatives, elected according to given criteria and chaired by a civil society representative. The Township Administrative Officer co-ordinates and chairs monthly meetings with Village Tract Administrators, Township Management Committee and Township Development Support Committee in order to discuss needs, requirements and proposals of the different village tracts.

For Government, whilst Township Development Support Committees are in place, and individual administrators as well as the General Administration Department have roles in facilitating 'bottom up development', the understanding of what this phrase means is limited. Rather the norm has been 'top-down' development – one Township Development Officer, consulted during the needs assessment phase, described his role in development projects as that of "co-ordinating, reporting on rule breakers and initiating punitive action". Historically everyone has needed permission to do any development work. Participatory processes and collaboration between organisations for development either in projects or in terms of law-making is new. As an indication of the highly controlled processes still at work in the country, this project's participants needed permission to attend.

For civil society there is relatively little understanding of how to work with the government in a new way in order to bring about people-centred development that reflects their needs. There is also relatively little understanding of the specific legislative powers that they have through the status of being a Self-Administered Zone. It is also clear that civil society groups do not work particularly closely or well with each other.

The training sessions as exercises in collaboration

Under the title 'Working together for a shared future' the training sessions aimed for participants to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- Gained knowledge and skills helpful in participatory processes;
- Increased understanding of each other's role, responsibilities and perspectives;
- Laid the concrete groundwork for participatory public policy making and development planning;
- Enhanced willingness to review and reflect on on-going collaborative efforts.

The sessions were structured to be highly interactive and participatory, building up experiences of co-operation through a number of group exercises. They also had some inputs on processes such as law-making, interest-based negotiation, collaboration principles, and partnering.

Early achievements

To help the people of the Danu and Pa-O Self-Administered Zones deal with these challenges, the project was designed to deliver a capacity-building workshop for the various stakeholders within the Self-Administered Zones. The individuals and organisations involved in this project are proud to have implemented a number of significant activities in just 5 months. These include:

- Intensive mobilisation of resources, logistics and people to support the project;
- 2 Needs Assessment visits;
- Identification of and consultation with relevant stakeholders in the SAZs;
- Design and development of a 3-day workshop curriculum to deepen understanding and experience of participatory law-making and development planning, drawing together technical know-how, negotiation and collaboration;
- Training and coaching of 4 National Trainers;
- Delivery of the 3-day workshop, 3 in each of the Danu and Pa-O SAZs to a total of 168 representatives from Township Development Support Committees, General Administration Department, Line Departments (e.g. Health, Education, Immigration, Planning etc.), SAZ Leading Body, Civil Society Organisations, Government operated NGOs and Village Tract Administrators;
- As a follow-up to the first workshops, some participants from each training group were brought together in a 3-day Across-Stakeholder workshop to learn and collaborate in developing consultation guidelines for law-making and development planning;
- Delivery of the above in both the Danu and Pa-O SAZs to multi-stakeholder groups comprising 36 people in total;
- Enabling participants to experience participatory training approaches (simulation, role play, etc.) to which they had never been exposed;
- Creation of fora for the exchange of ideas on collaborative approaches for community development;
- Beginning a dialogue and co-operation process in 5 townships across 2 SAZs and...
- ... this case study.

Whilst any real evaluation of the project can only be assessed in the longer term and follow-up is needed to support participants and ensure that gains made can be sustained, there are nonetheless some encouraging immediate observations based on the experiences of participants during the workshops.

There were a number of additional outcomes and outputs including:

- 3 additional layers of government were involved in the training: Line ministries, Township Development Support Committees and Village Tract Administrators;

- A set of tools created and modelled so that stakeholders can undertake their own participatory processes;[14]
- 2 additional workshops designed to bring together multiple stakeholders to explore and design consultation guidelines to leave something on the ground after the end of the project (this replaced the Training of Trainers events in the original concept whilst delivering the objective through coaching 4 national trainers who co-trained with the team);
- Common goal statements regarding development in the SAZs (Danu & Pa-O);
- Guiding principles for working together co-created by a mixed stakeholder group (Danu & Pa-O)
- A structured list of ideas for future guidelines for consultative public policy making co-created by a mixed stakeholder group (Danu & Pa-O) ;
- A cadre of cross-sector 'bridge-builders'[15] who are now linked and can take the approach and work forward this work in each of the two SAZs.

The participant's own collaboration journey

Identifying a shared experience within the SAZ

The training design involved a number of layers – combining critical content with the process of working together, connection with each other through real-life stories and a common shared experience in real time; they moved between hard thinking and connecting at a level beyond the cognitive.

The first workshops included a session called '*In My World*' where participants worked in groups to explore the journey they had been on over the 5 years since the new constitution came into effect and how they envisaged the future for the SAZ.

Although there were differences, the message was strikingly similar across all stakeholder groups and in both SAZs - that change is taking place, that more change is desired and that such change will require each of them to play a role. Milestones discussed included:

2008: Constitution adopted through a country-wide referendum against a background of authoritarian military regime, weak administration, very little transparency, few social services, no electricity, no good roads, no free media, largely agricultural, only the rich had cars and telephones, most people walked, poor health facilities especially for children, cooking with firewood, poverty, gambling. In the Pa-O SAZ, conflict and high opium production were also features.

2010/11: Constitution came into force, new government comes to power, representation in Parliament and Union government, more support from Union Government, voting increasingly introduced, the beginning of media liberalisation.

2011/12/13: Access to electricity, bridges, cars and bikes, more schools and improved healthcare, factories being built, more livelihood opportunities and micro-credit schemes as well as improved community relationships. There have been early attempts by government to be transparent, including with regard to the

allocation of Union government budget for Township Development Support Committees (management committees at municipal level), notion of 'bottom-up' development increasing, infrastructure projects now open for tenders whereas the government previously delivered, media fully liberalised, support from international NGOs. "*Everyone, even market vendors, have mobile phones.*"[16]

It was also understood that development was at some serious cost including (in their words): *deforestation and environmental degradation, gradual agricultural decline and land-grabbing, more alcoholism, more traffic, less parking, more road deaths, human cost of infrastructure development promises made but not kept, lack of transparency in financial management.*

Desires for the future were articulated as: sustainable development, reforestation, better access to education and universities with better skilled teachers and more schools built, better skilled/resourced people, improved healthcare and hospitals, improved agricultural production/processing and livestock breeding, alternative viable crops in areas where poppies were being cultivated, rural development and increased livelihood opportunities for young people, more factories and jobs, improved road access (including to Thailand), access to their own cars and bikes, laws and policies created at SAZ level before next election in 2015, change in behaviour and attitudes, more transparent governance, more trustworthiness of the government and the political leaders, inclusive participation from different stakeholders in society – particularly business and local NGOs. In the Pa-O SAZ, securing a war–free future and reducing opium poppy cultivation were also high priorities.

Within the context of the powers of the SAZ to make laws and carry out development planning, the principles of partnering (defined as: equity, transparency and mutual benefit) and working together fairly were shared. Participants explored the diverse drivers and motivations of stakeholders, alongside the features of co-operation. There was a strong focus on understanding and building skills in negotiation essential to navigating differences of opinion and arriving at acceptable decisions. For most participants, the workshop was the first experience they had had of interactive learning, group exercises and role-play. These training methodologies are new in the Burma/Myanmar context. They engaged with them whole-heartedly.

Participants explored participatory public policy making and consultative processes already in operation in Burma / Myanmar, such as those related to the draft Law on Association governing people's right to be part of civil society groups as well as international examples.

Of the 131 people who completed the feedback form about the impact of the training on their willingness to collaborate in future:

- 58.01% said they were now '*more willing*' to co-operate and collaborate with other stakeholders to benefit development and rule of law in the area;
- 41.22% said they were '*much more willing*';

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14. Such as stakeholder mapping, situation analysis, consultation in action, and various group working methods.
15. aka 'partnership brokers'.

16. Community representative.

- Less than 1% said there was '*no difference*' in their willingness.

A three day Across-Stakeholder Workshop in each SAZ brought together some participants from each of the stakeholder groups (Leading Body/GAD/Line Departments; Civil Society Organizations; Village Tract Administrators/Township Development Support Committees). This workshop sought to provide a collaborative space for the different stakeholders in order to enable them to develop a common goal, principles and guidelines for consultative processes for law-making and development planning. The **process**, whereby they could connect with each other, was as important as the **content**, where they developed the common goal, principles and guidelines. The common goal developed during one of the workshops, through a methodology that aimed at consensus building, was:

> To be able to establish a transparent and corruption-free administrative and governance system and strengthen the collaboration among stakeholders, regional development and a better communication system.

The principles of collaboration produced by the participants themselves were: *Transparency, Equity* and *Inclusion*.

Introduction to new ideas

The theoretical framework of the training had three components, synthesised into a framework that could engage participants. These were:

- The principles and processes of participatory law-making and development planning in a rights-based approach, and helping them reflect on the enablers and obstacles in this context;
- The concept of interest based negotiation and the skills of negotiation;
- The foundation principles of collaboration and some basic concepts of partnering.

Some participant reflections include:[17]

> "It has been beyond price to have access to this learning."

> "Interest-based Negotiation and the seven elements of negotiation will be most helpful for us. Now we have an understanding of a way to negotiate and deal with arguments between departments and different stakeholders."

> "I have a clear understanding of a partnership approach and the steps and principle of working together with different stakeholders. Regarding the law making circle, I have also learnt that the law needs to be developed through different stages like a project management circle."

The creation of a space in which dynamics can change

For some participants, the opportunity to work together and actually listen to each other, to argue as equals, and even poke fun at each other was a transformational experience.

> "The exercises required us to listen to others, for them to listen to us. A space was created for mutual respect."

> "We sit in an office and try to understand and solve the problems. Through this training we came to understand the views and perspectives of the different stakeholders."

> "Different line departments have never worked together as they take their orders from the top. In the workshop we interacted and worked together, sharing challenges and ideas."

> "As a law officer at court I just stay in my office and deal with cases coming in. I had a chance to interact with different stakeholders, know their challenges, standpoints and needs. We get to know each other's views when we exchange ideas in the training. I mainly deal with Union level government but the community is important in drafting laws. Interacting with Village Tract Administrators I get to know their role, they get to know my role."

Desire to make it work

The Across-Stakeholder workshop was designed to help participants think through the challenges of a participatory consultative process.

> "I have learnt that consultation should be done before implementing any development activities or work in order to get comments, feedback and advice from the people."

> "I have learnt the importance of listening to other people in order to know their opinion and views in a respectful way."

> "I learnt the importance of understanding the interest of other people and the organisation to work together for a common goal."

> "I learnt the lessons of how to ensure that everyone has the chance to participate in a consultation process, and how their ideas and feedback should be used and how the GAD should value to work together with the community people."

After the closing event for the Danu Across-Stakeholder workshop, a member of the Township Development Support Committee took the initiative and called an impromptu meeting of all those present. He invited everyone to exchange contact details and discuss what they would do next to ensure they keep momentum. This was regarded as an important and unexpected sign of local ownership and confidence.

Though it was almost universally felt among participants that the training has been useful, some participants struggled to make links between the process that they learnt and the content of their own area of work. This may reflect a need to build more common understanding of the training objectives through pre-training interactions and, even better, to actually co-design such trainings with key stakeholders.

> "The training was interesting and I learnt quite a few things. I reflected on the skills we need to develop, such as listening, effective speaking. But it is not related to my specialist knowledge."

The way forward

The reflections of the participants at the end of the training matched their attitude towards the transition of which they are a part. There was excitement and hope mixed with deep concern. Excitement was from having found a way to promote inclusion, transparency and mutual benefit. Concern was to do with the fear that without equal commitment and drive from all stakeholders, especially the Government, the new learning may simply fizzle away.

Some concerns were expressed that without a follow-up, the effects of the training may not be sustained.

> "Our first experience of this type of lessons, this is just the first step to carry out long process of implementation, we need follow-up support so the training won't vanish."

> "I think differently now. I have realised that we need to work together. But we need more support. One training is not enough."

> "In Danu, they gathered and talked about how to work together in the future, it was really beautiful. In the Pa-O region we normally don't work together when we carry out our activities. We are in (non-violent) conflict with each

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17. All the quotes that follow in this section are sourced from feedback forms, focus group discussions and outputs from exercises where participants expressed what they learnt.

Despite the enthusiasm and confidence expressed by participants there was a strong concern over the need for greater government engagement - in their view the Government of Burma / Myanmar has to create the space and opportunities first and foremost.

"We understand the necessity for collaboration. But the Government has to take the first steps to include us, it needs to earn people's trust."

Some felt government collaboration attempts would be viewed with scepticism if government bodies were simultaneously undertaking activities to the contrary and there was a general call for more people to have access to the training, specifically taking it to the township level and building a common understanding amongst a critical mass of stakeholders who could all work together.

In more general terms, it was acknowledged by participants that some collaboration was already taking place, almost unnoticed. A couple of examples were cited:

• A private company needed water to be available in their village tract and the villagers needed electricity. They came to an agreement where the company got access to water and helped villagers to secure electricity supply.

• Three bus owners came together and formed a partnership to run a bus line every day of the week and gradually evolved processes so that their services became standardised and they collaborate rather than compete with each other.

One challenge is to bring these examples to public notice and acknowledge that there are different ways of making things work better. An even bigger challenge is to expand the scope of collaboration to public policy making. There is an expressed intent to do so, which needs to be followed up with systems to enable effective consultation and collaboration to take place in the public space.

The challenge will be how to expand the collaboration experience they had in the workshop to the complex realities outside the workshop, in their different contexts.

"I hope that the more we apply the learning the better the development of the region will be."

4. The Partners

The project was managed by Agriteam (a Canada-based consultancy) with financial support from the Government of Canada's Global Peace and Security Fund, which is managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)'s Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START). It involved a Burma / Myanmar based implementation partner (IID) and two partner organisations with subject expertise in negotiation/mediation (CIIAN) and partnership brokering (PBA). The representatives of the four

partner organisations involved with the project were based in Canada, India, UK and Burma / Myanmar.

Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD)[19]

In April 2012, the Government of Canada began actively exploring the opportunities for establishing a development program in Burma / Myanmar. The government organisation responsible for Canada's foreign engagement is the DFATD (a relatively new department created from the amalgamation of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT).

One of DFATD's tools for implementing programming in emerging democracies is the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) through their Global Peace and Security Program. START funds projects that:

• Strengthen and develop resources in the security sector and rule of law institutions by supporting initiatives that reinforce international best practices, norms and standards in fragile states.

• Reinforce and build capacity of non-governmental organizations, international government institutions and multilateral and regional organizations to plan, manage and conduct coordinated and integrated responses to peace and security challenges.

• Support policy initiatives and mentoring and training activities that promote civilian protection, safety of aid workers, justice and security system reform and respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee laws.

• Promote conflict resolution by promoting dialogue and reconciliation with communities, vulnerable groups and conflicting parties.

In order to achieve its objectives, START uses a flexible programming approach, inviting diverse organisations to present projects for funding that are in alignment with the previously-mentioned departmental priorities, rather than using a more conventional approach in which donors conceive of programs and projects to be implemented by contracted organisations. In selecting projects, START uses a two-step process: first, organisations present short concept notes for projects, then, if the idea is endorsed by DFATD, organisations prepare detailed project proposals.

"The Skills for Conflict Prevention project fits firmly within the START mandate as negotiation, mediation and facilitation are all inherent to conflict resolution at national and local level, and these skills facilitate dialogue and consultation that can help prevent conflict." [20]

Once projects are selected, the START program is responsible for ensuring that public funds are managed in accordance with its mandate and leading international practices for financial and administrative management; and for providing general oversight to project implementation. The parameters for delivery of START projects therefore involve a rigorous approval process, sound fiscal management policies, and timing of activities.

18. National Trainer.

19. http://www.international.gc.ca/START-GTSR/gpsp-ppsm.aspx?lang=eng&view=d

20. START Program Analyst, DFATD.

Agriteam Canada

Agriteam[21], a private sector development firm that supports capacity building, organisational development and institutional strengthening to developing and transitional country partners, has been implementing development programming since 1986. It has implemented more than 300 development projects in governance, health, education, agriculture, food security, legal and judicial reform, etc. In order to implement projects in such diverse sectors, Agriteam works with and through a network of organisations and partners.

Agriteam began working with the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START) in 2008, when it presented concept notes for projects to support village stabilisation, livelihoods and education in Afghanistan and develop training programming for the Community of Democracies in Mongolia. As the Government of Canada began to develop programming in Burma / Myanmar in 2012, Agriteam started working with partners to design a project that would meet the needs of Burma/Myanmar, was sound development work, and would match START's mandate and Government of Canada priorities.

In managing its projects, Agriteam is responsible for supporting effective development; ensuring efficient delivery of projects in compliance with donor requirement and in accordance with leading international practices; overseeing the delivery of activities with partners for the benefit of local stakeholders; and ensuring all project work meets performance targets. Whilst this was also Agriteam's first foray into Burma/ Myanmar, the assigned Project Manager had worked in Burma / Myanmar in the 1980s.

Institute for International Development - IID

IID-Myanmar[22] is a non-profit research and development organisation associated with the international IID network. It is focused on inclusive socio-economic development and poverty alleviation in rural areas of Burma / Myanmar, including sustainable natural resources management, environmental conservation and governance in ethnic minority communities. The Institute maintains a broad network of international and Myanmar specialists and is registered with the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development. Part of its mandate is to assist minority groups in Myanmar to understand their rights and obligations under the new constitution, in such a way as to inform legislation that supports equitable development, peaceful growth and conflict prevention.

IID Myanmar has been working in Shan State for a number of years and had explored the possibility of programming to support capacity building of stakeholders within the SAZ to be able to manage their public policy mandate more effectively.

"Before Agriteam approached IID with an idea for a co-operation, we had worked with a legal specialist from our network who had previously supported the Cambodian government in including human rights provisions in their legislation, to develop a concept note for a rule of law project. We wanted to be ready to respond to requirements in a field that we could see would need assistance as Myanmar opened up.

When contacted by Agriteam, we were in the final stages of preparing a regional development plan for the Pa-O and Danu ethnic groups. Our work with the Pa-O and Danu people focused on helping them identify their own development needs so that they could be in a stronger position to negotiate terms with regard to government support and external donor funding. The procedure was the first time ever in the history of Myanmar that a regional bottom-up planning process had been conducted." [23]

In implementing its programming, IID strives to: assist people with whom it has existing relationships and where needs are identified; learn how to build models that can be more widely used in Burma / Myanmar; support skills development in public policy making and participatory processes; influence how things are done; support peace-building initiatives; and promote the integration of ethnic minority groups.

The Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation (CIIAN)

CIIAN[24] is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the prevention and resolution of destructive conflict and to building sustainable peace at local, national, and international levels. It has been involved in international development work for more than 20 years, providing mediation and conflict resolution training in post-conflict situations. CIIAN and Agriteam had a relationship prior to this project through collaboration on the implementation of a Judicial Development and Grassroots Engagement project in Vietnam.

"Our practice includes work in Asia and professional relationships with former students from Myanmar. Prior to this project evolving, we had been consulting with peace activists from Myanmar."[25]

CIIAN works to develop its programming through networks in Canada and internationally, and by securing donor funding as a means of supporting its mandate for sharing knowledge on negotiation and mediation.

Partnership Brokers Association (PBA)

PBA[26] is a non-profit social business and international professional body for those managing and developing collaboration processes ('partnership brokers'). PBA's mission is to promote understanding of, and build capacity for, partnership brokering through capacity building, action research and advocacy through its global network of alumni. PBA has been providing professional training in this field for 11 years in a wide range of sometimes challenging contexts. This was its first foray into development programming as an entity, though the team members had between them more than 50 years' experience in partnership development projects and in building multi-stakeholder collaboration. Despite having worked in South Asia, specifically Bangladesh and India, this was PBA's first time working in Burma / Myanmar.

PBA and Agriteam had not collaborated before this project, but the lead person from Agriteam was familiar with PBA's work and had completed the PBA's partnership brokers training.

21. http://www.agriteam.ca/en/index.php
22. http://www.iid.org/myanmar.html

23. Project Principal, IID.
24. www.ciian.org.
25. Project Principal, CIIAN.
26. www.partnershipbrokers.org

PBA aims to bring its specialist training programme and collaboration insights to new contexts – exploring how good partnering process skills can help build greater engagement especially for those who are often marginalised. Through its action research activities, PBA gathers and disseminates knowledge about what it takes to collaborate effectively – whether at strategic, operational or grass roots level. Working with government, business and non-profit organisations PBA is currently developing a global programme in partnership brokering for the Humanitarian & Development Sectors.

5. The Journey

First steps

"The process of designing and implementing development programming is always challenging. Doing it right requires the capacity to balance competing interests and priorities, to manage the tensions between the practical realities of the field and the need for accountability, and to examine and work through the frequent incongruities among personalities and cultures – all within very demanding circumstances." [28]

In early May 2012, Agriteam contacted IID about potential collaboration on a Canadian government-supported project through the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force (START)'s Global Peace and Security Fund and submitted an initial concept note. In June 2012, Agriteam contacted CIIAN about collaborating on the project to add negotiation to the training content. Agriteam conducted ongoing discussions and a review based on START's feedback, given that the initial Concept Paper was not endorsed by DFATD. On May 16, 2013, upon further discussions with START, Agriteam submitted a revised Concept Paper. In late June 2013, DFATD endorsed the new version of the project and Agriteam was invited to develop a full proposal as per DFATD's two step proposal process.

From the start, the project and the partnership underpinning it were significantly influenced by four factors:

• The commitment of all involved to make the most of the opportunity to support the transition towards democracy in Burma / Myanmar and achieve something meaningful for the people in the Pa-O and Danu SAZs;

• The challenge of collaborating within hierarchical structures;

• The relative freedom and flexibility to shape the details of the project to the context;

• The pressure to start and finish the project by end February 2014, the donor's fixed deadline.

Convening the partnership

In June 2013 when Agriteam, IID and CIIAN were working to develop a full proposal, PBA was asked to join the partnership to bring in their partnering and partnership brokering

expertise to inform the training curriculum – one of the key outputs of the project. The relatively late introduction of a new partner was undertaken with some care through 1-2-1 conversations between Agriteam and senior members of IID and CIIAN.

The fact that the partner organisations spanned 3 continents meant that convening the partnership and introducing the new partner to the existing trio was completed on email, telephone and Skype rather than face-to-face. Bringing new partners together always requires sensitive exploration and alignment of different approaches and interests, and working at a distance inhibits the kind of in-depth relationship building and mutual understanding that is so critical in the early stages of a partnership. This case was no exception.

Creating a collaboration agreement

Around the same time as the proposal for funding was in the final stages of being approved, the organisational leads (known as the 'Project Principals') discussed (remotely), agreed and signed a collaboration agreement using a template document provided by PBA. This document was intended to help steer how the partners would work together and to be a useful support to the collaboration process. It is worth noting that this was put in place before the final project design was confirmed.

Whilst the agreement was developed collectively, and was agreed quite amicably and easily, its use was limited to the principal / strategic level. Whilst this was not done by design, the fact that the collaboration agreement was not more widely used by the project team raises the questions of whether or not the agreement was needed, how it was used and whether a different use – or document - might have changed how the partnership was operationalised.

Negotiating terms

"Creating a funded development project that meets needs and falls within the mandate of the government department who is making funding available is always a to-and-fro process, and this was no exception." [29]

Considerable effort was put into negotiation between Agriteam and DFATD to arrive at the approval of a project that effectively blended identified local needs and international interests. Since the START program had not received approval for continued activity beyond the end of the fiscal year (which was March 31st 2014), the entire project (including all reporting and monitoring and evaluation requirements) had to be completed by March 3rd 2014 – although an extension to March 17th was later negotiated to allow time for final reporting and for this case study to be finalised.

Due to staff turnover, the DFATD officer responsible for the project changed 3 times during the design period, requiring the project team to brief the in-coming representatives whilst also responding to requests for additional information on the proposed project's design. Additionally, as the programme used public funds and would be accountable for their use, the approval process was particularly scrupulous and therefore slow.

27. Project Principal, PBA.
28. Project Principal, Agriteam.

29. Project Principal, Agriteam.

The delay in getting final approval resulted in a further shortening to the project timeline which caused some concern about the feasibility of achieving meaningful results in the time available, particularly given that this would be a capacity building project in communities new to such interventions.

"Once we got going, CIIAN tried to raise the bar by suggesting we take a longer-term perspective rather than just a "one off" – we thought the project should have deeper elements to be credible and sustainable. We were disappointed when it became clear this was not possible, but adapted to the less-than-preferred situation and felt the whole collaboration was still good albeit from a narrower perspective." [30]

The time constraint issue was not, however, regarded by the team as wholly negative: *"I do feel that limited resources have imposed a resourcefulness and innovation in approach that may prove to be quite beneficial to implementation and collaboration."[31]*

Time constraints, whether due to the urgency of need or strict delivery deadlines, can indeed drive a partnership towards higher levels of innovation as was the case, to some extent, here.

Evolving the project design

Flexibility with regard to the project design enabled partners to negotiate what they believed would be the most effective intervention in the specific context and to build on what they could each uniquely contribute. The project stayed within the overarching donor focus – *skills for conflict prevention* – but shifted from working predominantly with government institutions to working with a variety of stakeholders. It was also modified from a legal training project to a more broad-based approach that included negotiation and collaboration skills.

The general outcome became: *the increased capacity of leaders, administrative units, and CSOs in the Pa-O and Danu Self-Administered Zones to engage in negotiation, facilitation and partnership brokering with other government agencies, donors and civil society and to better represent their interests.* The scope was intentionally broad with a view to arriving at greater focus during the two scoping missions.

"Be adaptable, sometimes more heads are indeed better than one, but also be clear about your expectations and ask for confirmation when you feel it is needed."[32]

Establishing an operational structure

Whilst collaboration as peers was fundamental to the approach, the project was located within a more conventional hierarchical model. Like many donors, DFATD typically works with one 'primary recipient' to ensure clear lines of reporting – Agriteam was the responsible lead agency in direct contact with the donor. Part of Agriteam's role was to carry the financial management, coordination and reporting responsibilities on behalf of the partnership. This was very much welcomed by the three partners especially as some partners did not always understand the rationale for the donor's decisions and depended on Agriteam to interpret and act as intermediary between different systems.

From Agriteam's perspective there was:

"A lot to learn about the relative experience or inexperience of the organizations in the partnership with regard to the 'rules' that govern these types of service contracts. The limitations imposed by such contracts and the clarity of the rules that they imply was both a help and a challenge to the creation of the collaboration and its governance."[33]

IID had primary responsibility for delivery in the field, including coordination, financial management, employing local staff and engaging local stakeholders. CIIAN and PBA would carry responsibility for curriculum design and delivery alongside a legal specialist contracted by IID.

Combining a collaborative approach within a hierarchical model, meant a complex and sometimes contradictory structure was established. The Agriteam Project Manager provided an important bridge between the two.

Organisational chart and stakeholder map

As indicated above, the partnership was created at 2 levels: strategic and operational. At the strategic level, the Project Principals were the organisational leads from IID, CIIAN and PBA together with a senior representative from Agriteam. From their pre-project discussions through to sign-off on this case study at the end of the project, this group 'met' virtually seven times, though never in person.

"A detailed planning meeting with all Principals early on in the process would have made sense, to discuss roles and expectations of each organisation as well as to agree a timeframe and methodology to avoid misconceptions. This could have included thinking through which individual(s) each organisation would send to the field and how continuity would be ensured. Constantly building upon existing knowledge is essential."[34]

At the operational level, Agriteam employed a consultant with whom they had worked for many years to manage the project. CIIAN and PBA sub-contracted their own specialists to work on negotiation/ mediation and partnership brokering / training design respectively. Being the 'host' agency providing field-level administrative, logistical and financial support, IID drew on existing staff and sub-contracted where necessary to expand capacity to enable project implementation. IID contracted the legal specialist and appointed a field co-ordinator to manage operations on the ground, co-ordinate the local team and provide the link to the training design team. IID also identified and contracted the national trainers at a later stage. Two local civil society organisations were also sub-contracted later on to help with workshop logistics in each of the Self-Administered Zones.

The operational level involved, effectively, four distinct teams:

- **The project team:** everyone on the ground in Burma / Myanmar who enabled the project to happen. This was a large number of people and evolved to include a number of different teams of people working together to achieve different aspects of the project, each team communicated with the Agriteam Project Manager.

- **The training design team:** initially comprised of the international subject specialists in law, negotiation and partnering. The training design team also worked remotely during some of the training design phase –being based in India, Canada, Sweden as well as Burma / Myanmar.

30. Project Principal, CIIAN.
31. Project Principal, Agriteam.
32. Project Principal, CIIAN.

33. Project Principal, Agriteam.
34. Operational team member from IID.

- **The training team:** after curriculum development the training design team expanded for training delivery to include national trainers who provided the essential interpretation, translation and local contextualisation and dynamism.
- **IID project support team:** including the Field Co-ordinator and all the finance and logistics support from IID and their networks in each of the two SAZs as well as translators for written materials.

From its base in Canada, Agriteam oversaw the operations via the Project Manager and liaised with the donor. The Field Co-ordinator from IID carried responsibility for day-to-day operations in the field. The Project Manager assigned to the project by Agriteam was not based in Burma / Myanmar nor present during the training design phase.
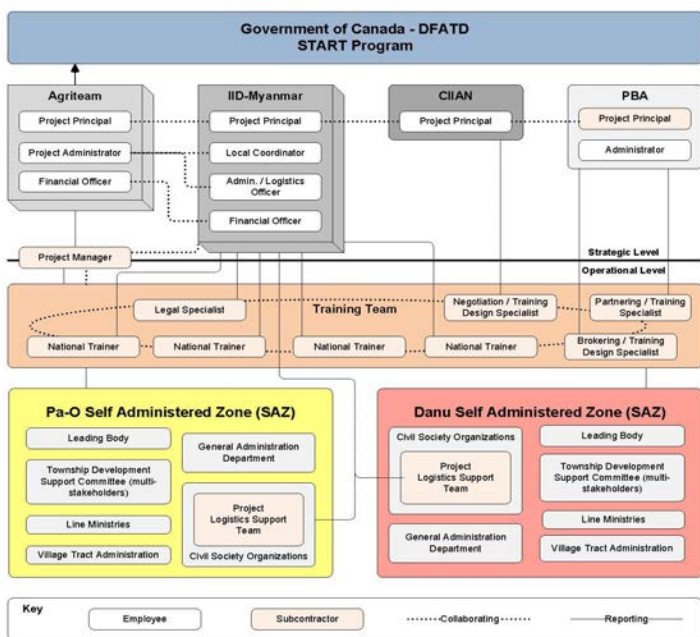
Whilst the partner organisations at the operational level were working hard to operate as a partnership, the structure of the project contained inherent hierarchies both in terms of accountability within each organisation and through Agriteam to the donor. In this instance, as often is the case in a partnership paradigm, there was a 3-way accountability system for the project team: formally, to the donor and within each partner organisation as well as informally (but just as critically) team members needing to be committed and accountable to each other.

Building a shared roadmap

Due to the time taken to finalise the project proposal and negotiate the contribution agreement with the donor,, the operational side of the project started at short notice with two scoping visits to Burma / Myanmar. This required the host agency (IID) to mobilise logistics in a very tight time and entailed a steep learning curve for all finance and administration staff in the 3 partner organisations that were providing the administrative back up to the visits.

When the international team members arrived in Burma / Myanmar in October, several were new to Myanmar and all were unfamiliar with each other and the project outline. Despite the fact that the Project Principals had been in discussions for a few months, the lack of time to prepare combined with the broad scope and flexibility meant that the actual focus was unclear. Those involved had to work hard to get to know each other at the same time as developing and delivering a complex project in a tight timeframe. They needed to make sense of what they were to deliver in the time available. The two initial scoping and planning visits involved detailed exploration of some fundamental questions including:

- What are we here to do and how realistic is it?
- Why has the project been defined this way? What were the drivers?
- Why are the timeframes so short? How can we deliver what is expected in just 5 months?
- How can we ensure what we do will be sustainable?
- Who are these other organisations and why are they involved?
- What does this person bring? What role will they play?
- What is the Myanmar governance system we will be working in and how can we ensure getting the right people?
- How will the local stakeholders regard us / our intervention? Will they engage?
- Given the lack of interaction between sectors here, how realistic is it to bring them together for this capacity building programme?
- How far can we push the boundaries into the unknown?

The training design team had a considerable level of freedom to design the training course as they saw fit in order to deliver the project's objectives. However, the extent of their decision-making authority was not clearly stated upfront and there was initial uncertainty about how much license they had. This uncertainty contributed to some hesitation in identifying and defining training content and approaches.

"I had a very vague idea of what the purpose of the project was when the assessment visit started. The terms of reference provided limited guidance. They referred to training on human rights, constitutional law, legal interpretation, law making and drafting of administrative decrees, which obviously could not be addressed any meaningful way in a 3-4 day training that should also deal with negotiation and partnership issues. This meant that one of the main challenges for me was to figure out what my role would be in the project and what type of legal component that would be meaningful from a needs perspective and that would fit in with the negotiation and partnering aspects of the training."[35]

While IID had networks and relationships in the target communities and supported the team by helping them to understand the local context, meet the appropriate stakeholders and manage logistics and expenditure, the team expected guidance from the Project Manager in order to optimise the freedom they had and ensure they stayed within the donor parameters.

"I knew from the beginning that it would be the training team who would define the project. That was very clear to me. I knew 3 of the 4 team members by reputation if not personally, and I was confident that they had the expertise

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35. Training team, Legal Specialist, IID.

to design the curriculum and that they would make valid recommendations. When the question of involving a wider base of stakeholders arose to include Line Ministries, Village Tract Administrators and Township Development Support Committees, I felt that the rationale was sound. Once the team began their deliberations and sent me an interim report, I understood their approach and had confidence in their ability to make sound decisions and recommendations."[36]

The training design team appreciated that the right to make decisions on what approaches would be most effective was theirs. They worked through numerous possibilities and evolved ways of making collective decisions about format and content.

In this period, patience and a sense of humour were found to be essential in keeping confusion and anxiety to a minimum.

"Had we been less experienced or more 'senior', more subject specialists rather than generalists with subject specialisation, we would not have engaged in the task at hand in the same way."[37]

Building a team

Whilst the team welcomed the relative openness and flexibility of the projects scope this also meant there was some uncertainty around roles and focus and a certain degree of stress and anxiety. In response to this, the group took control of the situation by a process of 'collective sense-making' as well as by negotiating (sometimes quite hard!) the roles and responsibilities within the team. They arrived at ways of working that they felt were both fair and constructive and reached a number of agreements including:

• Creating meeting protocols – Who would lead each meeting? Who would take notes? How would questions from others be handled?

• Streamlining communications with the Project Principals and the Agriteam Project Manager

• Daily planning to ensure all tasks were shared and completed

• Having open discussions to explore, understand and plan the needs assessment

• Working to understand better which of the team knew what and what each team member could contribute.

"The team members largely took a collaborative approach. Perhaps this was because most of us were questioning our part and in particular, how each of the parts fitted together. An additional factor was our struggle to understand the context in which we were working. We did this by reflecting aloud on what we were learning. It was confirmed for me, once again, how important it is to give space for different voices. Despite some strong personalities, it appeared important to each of us to try and make the project work."[38]

In more traditional development programming, the training design team might well have been sub-contracted direct to Agriteam or to IID with direct accountability to them. In this model, the training design team operated more autonomously with direct accountability to their own managers in the organisation that had sub-sub-contracted them.

Nonetheless, the whole project team felt a strong sense of commitment to the project and, increasingly, to each other. Above all, plans were developed with a strong focus on the

participants for whom the training was being designed. This meant that, at times, the project team felt quite remote from their own organisations (to whom they were accountable) and closer to IID, whose networks and known communities were central to the project (and to whom only the legal specialist was accountable).

"There was little need to ask permission to make certain decisions either from the donor or the strategic level / Principals and there was no criticism for decisions made, demonstrating a certain trust to let people get on with it."[39]

Despite the remoteness of individuals on the project team from their own organisations, it was also true that in every case, the team members had long-standing relationships with the organisations that had contracted them and enjoyed a high level of trust and respect from the Project Principals to whom they were accountable.

Over one dinner, the international members of the project team spoke about their personal stories and what motivated them to be in Burma / Myanmar. This was helpful for building relationships and getting to know each other better as individuals and appeared to be a turning point for the group. It was also the moment when it became clear how very strongly each team member believed in the value of what the project and its potential to make a difference. This formed a solid foundation for the work ahead both individually and as a group, and it carried them through the immense stress of delivering under challenging conditions.

"Get things done, let things go. Pull out all the stops."[40]

The sense of team was solidified by a "*commitment to making it work and to each other*"[41]. Through ups and downs and considerable stress, the project team believes that this partnership has been highly productive and has worked well.

"I feel I have tried to keep up a positive attitude despite some frustrations, and feel like this has been the attitude of my fellow field colleagues as well. This has in my opinion helped us carry out a fairly smooth mission and achieve the goals."[42]

Trainers co-create

Once the needs assessment – in reality somewhat closer to a situation analysis – had been completed the 3 subject specialists had just 5 days to create a training plan that would meet the needs on the ground and the specifications of the donor – this was a challenge on several levels. The original scope was to design 6 curricula for 6 different stakeholder workshops, followed by a Training of Trainers course to build sustainability. The training design team concurred that it would be better to develop a single curriculum, which could be easily adapted to different stakeholder groups as necessary. They also agreed that the timeframe made a Training of Trainers programme un-workable. Instead, they suggested that after single sector stakeholder workshops, representatives of the different stakeholder groups would be brought together in a multi-sector workshop in order to create a collaborative opportunity in real time.

Initially project team members did not have a full understanding or appreciation of each other's specific

36. Project Manager, Agriteam.
37. Training team member, CIIAN.
38. Training team member, CIIAN.

39. Training team member, PBA.
40. Training team member, CIIAN.
41. Training team member, CIIAN.
42. Field Co-ordinator, IID.

expertise: *"Each partner organisation came with their own pre-designed modules and approaches."*[43] In each subject area, and despite a common approach to needs assessment, when it came to designing the curriculum, each tended to defend the value of their own organisation's approaches and materials.

The trainers agreed to develop the training around a framework that synchronised the three subject areas and applied them to the identified needs on the ground, as they had understood them. A significant breakthrough came when the team recognised that these could align and that weaving the approaches together would produce a truly innovative training in participatory law-making and development planning.

Underlying interests in negotiating the curriculum[44]

Law-making and Human rights	Negotiation and mediation	Collaboration and partnering
• Ensure a meaningful legal component from a needs perspective fits in with the negotiation and partnering aspects of the training • Make the case for an inclusive and non-partisan approach in terms of participant selection • Promote a practical approach and involve Burmese-speaking trainers as fully as possible • Make sure that the training is coherent and leads to tangible outcomes	• Develop a design and methodology that maximises engagement of participants in content • Ensure that sufficient time is allotted to negotiation so participants have a real taste of what interest-based negotiation actually is • Create a space that is safe enough for participants to risk voicing disagreements and different views • Make sure that the training is dynamic and specific to the context	• Ensure that concepts and skills for collaboration are embedded in the training(s) as it had been perceived to be a need • Build awareness of the concepts of collaboration and why they matter • Create the opportunities within the workshops for actual experiences of collaboration • Build up gradually so that over the course of the training(s) transformation can occur

What emerged through the detailed discussions and understanding each other's focus more deeply, was that each approach was equally strongly based on a commitment to transformation, though each using a somewhat different pathway (rights, skills or mind-set change).

"We stayed literally locked in a room for about 8 hours each day for 4-5 days, had breakfast, dinner and lunch together (though not necessarily all three of us had all the meals together). Something happened during that time, which probably defies a straight cut explanation. When I suggested the three foundation principles that underpin a partnering approach ('equity', 'transparency' and 'mutual benefit') – it seemed to attract more serious attention. Then Flaurie said she would like to add further principles from a negotiation perspective, so she added 'respect' and 'trust'."[45]

The design duly emerged though it was not an easy process – perhaps this is a microcosm of the overall findings of this case study – that partnering in this context and with this complex structure is not easy, but that working through the difficulties is absolutely essential to getting to the heart of things and to arrive at genuinely innovative and appropriate solutions. While the entire team may not have arrived at complete consensus, there was a fair level of alignment around what was produced and certainly a sense of satisfaction with it. The project team feel that the collaboration has led to the creation of a unique training module that may otherwise have never seen the light.

"As subject specialist I may have felt that there was not enough input of the subject I represent but as a joint product we did a good job."[46]

"The project timeframe did not allow for an effective training of trainers. The team's recommendations for an across-stakeholder workshop in each SAZ delivered with national trainers was a welcome solution."[47]

Had the project manager – or anyone else in the system's hierarchy – been more controlling of the design process and not enabled the design team the freedom to make decisions, it is likely that they would not have been able to innovate in the same way.

Re-negotiating

The project team had hoped that programming could continue to mid-March. It was only after a certain amount of planning had taken place that it became clear that programme delivery had to be completed by the end of February.[48] This had an impact on the format of the workshops and meant the curriculum had to be revised and re-negotiated. By this time all the international design team had left the country and so the re-designing took place online working remotely across 3 continents. A whole array of negotiations were needed: between the Project Manager and the donor on feasible end-dates, between the Project Manager and the training team to ensure continued buy-in and within the training team with regard to redesigning the curriculum.

"I discussed the training schedule with the programme officer at DFATD to negotiate a timeframe that met the donors contractual and reporting needs and also allowed the team to complete the training.

My confidence in the team was reinforced when they proved willing to adjust the original training plan to meet the new timeframes. When they recommended a curriculum that would utilise a master training module that could be adapted to different stakeholder groups I was happy to support that.

Watching the training team go through the curriculum development process online was remarkable. They consulted, revised, turned versions of the curriculum around quickly and met the deadlines they had committed to. This took considerable dedication, particularly as work had to take place over the Christmas / holiday season."[49]

Local partner creates the implementation and support team

IID was responsible for local project coordination and became the focal point for field management– this was an expansion of the role they had initially anticipated. There are specific considerations to bear in mind in terms of being the local

43. Legal Specialist, IID.

44. Law-making and Human rights: Legal Specialist & project team member, IID. Negotiation and mediation: Negotiation Specialist & project team member, CIIAN. Collaboration and partnering: Partnering Specialist & project team member, PBA.

45. Training team member, PBA.

46. Project team member, PBA.

47. Project Manager, Agriteam.

48. Special permission was, however, granted to extend the deadline for delivery of this case study to 15th March.

49. Project team manager, Agriteam.

host agency (in this case, IID's Yangon-based office). The complexity of coordinating arrangements and managing logistics for an international group working in a fairly remote area of the country should not be under-estimated.

"It has sometimes been difficult juggling the other work of the organisation, ensuring that you share all relevant knowledge to create the best learning experience for the visiting field colleagues and also ensure that logistics and administrative details are finalised in the most convenient manner, whilst also working on building up a good working relationship with new colleagues."[50]

Coordination was not an easy task and involved the challenging job of setting up meetings with stakeholders and securing buy-in from the local government to enable permissions for participation (a lengthy process) and ensuring satisfactory engagement between the team and the local stakeholders. IID also coordinated all of the local staff who would between them make the project possible, including recruiting the national trainers.

A large amount of communication with the different organisations was necessary, which in the Burma / Myanmar context is time-consuming and can be technically very challenging (due to the limitations of online infrastructure) plus the fact that IID is based in Yangon, not in Shan State. Extensive communication with Agriteam was necessary to carry out the project according to the collectively agreed upon initial framework and setup, most notably when it came to finances which are immensely challenging in Myanmar.

"The banking system is still developing. Everyone is learning and teaching. Bank Transfers have to be made via a 'through-bank' and often don't come through, and when money does arrive, we need to find out how much is there once the fees have been deducted and then write a letter to apply for it to be transferred to our account which can take 2/3 days. Once arrived, it takes us an hour to get to the bank in the traffic and then at least 2 hours waiting to get the money out. The limit is $10,000/day so often we have to go many times in the week, with each visit taking half a day which is time taken away from other work to be done."[51]

IID was responsible for translating the trainer and participant manuals, the slides and all other workshop documentation in the 2 weeks just before the training started as well as translating all the feedback forms compiled at the end of each training course. This was no easy task given much of the terminology used is new and unfamiliar to many.

Not being present in some of the project areas, and in order to bring in some local ownership, IID worked through two local CSOs for logistics in both the SAZs. Both these organisations were very willing to help often well into the night. Inexperience meant there was a learning curve here also.

IID held responsibility for administering the costs and financial auditing for the project's on-the-ground activities managing the finances, travel arrangements as well as per diems for internationals. The local partner organisations proved to be critically important, specifically where the office only has a small staff group based in Yangon.

"The administration of this project took a big toll on the administrative staff, there have been challenges but everyone has been extremely flexible and put in the extra mile. I have been very impressed by their efforts."[52]

Delivering collaboratively

One of the most difficult tasks was finding national trainers who could speak English well, had good communication skills for training and would conceptually grasp the course content with only a few days to prepare alongside translating well and quickly so as to act as interpreters for the international trainers.

"There are not many who fit the criteria and those who do are usually employed elsewhere for good salaries!"[53]

The selected national trainers arrived quite late in the process, and the project team quickly saw that they could be more deeply engaged. They had a steep learning curve to become familiar enough with the subject matter and the training methodologies being proposed. They had to deliver the first training after just 3 days of preparation. Both national and international trainers worked hard to create a sense of team.

"Working with the national trainers, we had to be as good as we could be to build something that made sense to them."[54]

The national trainers worked with the international trainers over the intense 4-5-day training programme and were gradually coached by the international trainers to take on increasing amounts of training themselves. They not only translated and worked with the training materials provided, but also added their own perspectives – providing examples and explaining complex issues more appropriately for the group. They also translated changes to the programme on an ongoing basis. This improved the quality and relevance of the training considerably and meant that the training (undertaken in the Burmese language) was genuinely embedded in the local context.[55]

"Local trainers localized examples of international experiences into Myanmar context that helped the trainees to adopt and digest ideas, principles and concepts provided by international specialists."[56]

During this time, the national and international trainers developed a more nuanced understanding of the need of participants and also developed a better understanding of each other and each person's training materials and training delivery styles. This lead to an increased appreciation of how all the component parts of the curriculum could fit together and support each other more synergistically.

"The better we got as a training team, the better quality training the participants got."[57]

The significant adaptations to the final course included a completely new co-created session drawing on the expertise of all those in the training team rather than the earlier model where sessions were designed and delivered by one team member. It was a notable indicator of maximising collaboration that the team started to involve each other in the delivery of 'their' sessions. It was a tribute to both national and international trainers that the multi-stakeholder workshop was largely lead by national trainers. The international trainers, who also had training of trainers, mediation and counselling skills between them, monitored group work

50. Field Co-ordinator, IID.
51. Finance and Administration Manager, IID.
52. Project Principal, IID.

53. Field Co-ordinator, IID.
54. Training team member, CIIAN.
55. Burmese was selected as the language of training in the needs assessment.
56. National Trainer.
57. Training team Legal Specialist, IID.

through translation to check for and manage any difficulties that might arise. Whilst there were lively conversations and a lot of negotiation, there were no significant problems in the multi-stakeholder training. This appears to have validated the decision to bring stakeholders together, initially thought by some to be too risky.

In addition to content and process learning, national trainers "*appreciated that space was created for everyone to express concern and issues regarding workshop delivery, in which all views were equally respected. This provided better understanding amongst the training team.*"[58]

National trainers reported several challenges that they worked hard to navigate including:

• the complexity of becoming familiar with the training methodologies and content in a short timeframe

• discussions to ensure mutual understanding

• effectiveness and alignment in learning facilitation as well as

• very different expectations of work culture. This is dealt with later in the challenges section.

The final result was a genuinely collaborative and original effort. Individual skills and behaviours were perceived to be enabling rather than disabling or controversial factors. The dedicated professionalism of all the members of the team made it work well despite the limitations and there was a perceptible move from an individual to collective perspective.

" A learning journey: continuous improvement."[59]

6. The Challenges

Funding a collaborative model

Creating proposals for funding from donors requires skill, experience and time. The costs associated with this process and the lack of certainty about being successful means that many smaller organisations cannot afford to take the risk and therefore do not submit proposals, despite subject expertise and ability to offer highly relevant – often unique – experience. To bring in the specific expertise needed for the project, Agriteam chose a partnership delivery model and acted as intermediary between the smaller specialised partner organisations and the donors. This role was critical and was valued by all parties.

A partnership model involves the additional costs and risks of building proposals as a participatory process. This can put considerable additional pressure in the proposal development phase, since those involved have already built up a deficit in terms of staff time and other organisational resources before any funding is guaranteed – a significant issue for small entities.

Understanding donor demands

Donor financial reporting protocols are typically strict and, to those who do not have first-hand experience of working in this way, somewhat impenetrable. Donors undoubtedly recognise that small organisations are likely to have limited cash flow, but the full impact of complex procedures and delays in payment may not be fully appreciated. Agriteam provided a project manual describing the financial reporting requirements for timesheets, expense claims, etc., but the process was still daunting for those who had not worked to such requirements before and who had very limited administrative and financial management infrastructure.

"We totally underestimated the investment of time and effort required to be sub-sub-contracting to our operational team under a sub-contract to Agriteam. This is unfamiliar territory for us as an entity and was highly problematic because although we are international, we work in a highly de-centralised model through local Associates and partners... we have precisely one full time member of staff who juggles a huge and very varied workload!"[60]

Considerable consternation, pressure and loss of time was experienced by both Agriteam and the administrators from the other three partner organisations from mistakes in recording / reporting / transmitting (time sheets and expenses claims) and the subsequent delays in payment to partner organisations that in turn delayed payment to individuals working in the project team.

Bureaucratic protocols and the limitations of email as a means of resolving issues sometimes created uncomfortable feelings that affected, and sometimes undermined, the sense of being in partnership and added a layer of frustration and irritation that was distracting and could have been avoided. Agriteam, as the coordinating entity, worked hard to provide a buffer between the two sets of needs / requirements and indeed saw this as one of their key roles.

"The START Burma project has four partners, with two of those located outside of Canada. The complexities lie in the fact that each partner has its own administrative and financial models. The challenge is to have each partner collaborate in a way that achieves the goals of the donor, DFATD. DFATD's reporting and financial management requirements are outlined in the Technical Assistance Manual for Executing Agencies. Agriteam is required to manage the project according to the rules outlined in the manual."[61]

The administrative procedures remained a cause for anxiety throughout the project. Better understanding of each other's systems and being able to work things through as partners applies as strongly to the administration as to strategic and operational levels.

Managing the money

The reality of international projects like this one is that money needs to move between organisations, countries and individuals both transparently and efficiently. The issue of money flow between partners and between partners and their team(s) was a frequent distraction during the project, especially at the beginning. Specific challenges included the limitations of the Burma / Myanmar banking system, and the swiftness with which money needed to be dispersed. Delays in disbursement of funds meant the local partner organisation found itself overstretched.

Usually, consultants are expected to front their own expenses and claim back retrospectively. However, in this case, the long periods of time the project team needed to spend in-

58. National Trainers – written feedback.
59. Training team member, CIIAN.

60. Project Principal, PBA.
61. Finance & Administrator, Agriteam.

country and therefore the amounts they needed to pay out in personal expenses (combined with the difficulty in getting access to money whilst there) meant that individuals were also overstretched. Responding to the needs of those on the ground, Agriteam and IID swiftly adapted when this problem became clear and the project team were directly given expense allocations at the start of their visits rather than the more cumbersome route through their organisations after the visit was completed. This was greatly appreciated and the issue ceased to be a distraction as a result.

Time constraints

Although Project Principals and the project team committed to the project knowing the time parameters involved, there were a number of contextual constraints and no one had anticipated quite how stressful the entire project would become. Administrative processes take a long time in Burma / Myanmar and government permissions are needed for most activities. Building the detailed project design from an understanding of local needs took more time than perhaps those outside the country had anticipated. Time was so pressured, that the seasoned international development specialists at times questioned whether such a capacity-building project could be effectively implemented within the time limitations.

There were a number of challenges faced as a direct result of the short timeframe. The list of how many pressures the shortage of time put on the whole project is a long one:

Time pressures at administrative level in:

- Preparing for the initial scoping visit to Burma / Myanmar which involved heavy administrative and logistical burdens for all the partners;
- Enabling partner organisations to become familiar with (quite complex) financial and reporting protocols;
- Gathering and processing information between finishing the delivery and completing the final reports.

Time pressures at project level in:

- Undertaking consultation in-country;
- Those invited to participate in training sessions getting permission to attend;
- Locating local examples / stories of negotiation and partnering to help inform and contextualize the training;
- The host organisation (IID) getting all the logistics together and identifying the national trainers;
- Participants invited back to a second workshop: getting permission and being able to make arrangements to take a full 6 days out of two weeks to participate fully (several of those invited back were not able to come);
- National trainers preparing for delivery and absorbing cultural differences (between international and national approaches) very quickly;
- Individuals involved being able to rest and refresh – the project team often worked through official holidays and on their rest days and the training team worked almost non-stop for 4-5-days. Whilst this seemed to be the only

way to get the project completed, it was not an example of international good practice and it was out of sync with cultural norms in Burma / Myanmar.

Time pressures at the strategic level in:

- Providing detailed briefings between Project Principals and their teams;
- Partners (both at organisational and individual levels) being less able to learn about each other up front and therefore less able to maximise each other's potential contributions;
- This case study (a subordinate and yet important element in the project) becoming burdensome in ways that had not been anticipated

Partnering long distance

"An obstacle to collaboration has been the project partners' working in different time zones and trying to design a project long-distance. Communication becomes difficult. Coordination becomes difficult. Roles and responsibilities get unclear. Misunderstandings easily occur because things in writing are easier to misinterpret than face-to-face. Some people may take on less work and responsibility than they ought to. I personally have found it challenging keeping track of communication flowing back and forth via email and figuring out what was relevant and what was not. On this account I might have missed questions requiring answers from me or missed assignment of work that I was expected to take on."[62]

There are both practical and conceptual challenges to working long-distance. For example, in relation to PBA's late inclusion as a partner, the Agriteam Project Principal noted "*when I had the negotiations with the existing partners about bringing in PBA as a new partner, there were no entrenched views against it.*" However, it became clear that the lack of objection was not an indication of consensus, since one of the other partners reported later: "*Agriteam did a great job, walking the talk of collaboration although it was unclear to us why or how potential partners had been selected. We did not recognise the name of the new partner organisation, had not crossed paths with them and we wondered what their capacity and track record were.*"[63] No questions were raised at the time, and there was no indication that there was an unresolved issue. However, it came up strongly among the project team, and required some navigation at the operational level.

It is sometimes hard to raise concerns when you are operating long-distance and this was evident at a number of levels. In addition to the issue of bringing on board a new partner, other issues included:

- Working with an operational Project Manager based in Canada;
- Internal partner communications when the project team members and their Project Principals were continent's and time-zones apart;
- In country – since the host organisation was remote from the location of delivery;
- Navigating this case study between the key players based in different locations and with very different degrees of connectivity.

Generally, and in new and sensitive contexts especially, when

62. Project Team Co-ordinator, IID.
63. Project Principal, CIIAN.

there is a lot of stress and a sense that things are somewhat fragile, people find it hard to communicate by email and can become fearful of undermining the work by raising concerns – risking unresolved issues and potentially undermining the work at some later stage.

Collaboration depends enormously on good communication. It would be an interesting study to review this whole programme from a communications perspective – not least to uncover in more detail what kinds of things were communicated at what levels.

Seeing some of the communication challenges from two ends of the spectrum can be instructive. For example, the project team learnt how to communicate well and were able to work through many areas of discomfort and discord at the operational level and they were critical of the lack of communication between themselves and the Project Principals as a decision-making group. However, the Project Principals felt that it was perfectly appropriate that the project team should focus so closely on collaboration and on building the project with a degree of self-sufficiency, whilst they themselves played an equally important (though perhaps more invisible) role in keeping the programme on track and not allowing it to become de-railed by the project team becoming too introspective.

Decision-making

At times there was a lack of clarity about who had decision-making power over what issues. This may well have been the result of mixing a collaborative approach within a more conventional management structure. Many key project decisions were made by the project team, when necessary in consultation with the Project Principals. At other times, however, decisions were made more unilaterally and announced to the team causing discomfort and, sometimes, anger. Such decisions included:

• Deciding which individuals from the project team should participate in the early needs assessment / scoping visits (some of these decisions were made according to who was available at short notice, additional effort was then necessary to ensure continuity and knowledge transference between the project team members);

• The role of project team leader being allocated to one of the team members without consultation with the team (the project team discussed the matter quite frankly and opted to change the proposed role from 'project team leader' to 'content coordination' and to share the role – handing the baton of team leadership between them);

• The selection of workshop participants being made by the local partner organisation in consultation with the managing partner rather than in consultation with the wider project team who were designing the programme (the training design team made the case for including a wider group of stakeholders to ensure greater representativeness, sustainability and to model inclusiveness in participatory processes).

Whilst these examples may have been perfectly acceptable decision-making processes in a more conventional model,

they caused a level of disruption in this collaborative model. The project team found it hard to understand why they were not included in decision-making processes that had direct impact on their work, when involving them would have been relatively easy and would, in their view, have led to better conclusions.

Collaboration between cultural differences

There were a number of assumptions made about acceptable norms of behaviour and expectations between nationals and internationals. At times this was cultural, such as in terms of gestures and tone of voice. At others this seemed less to do with national culture and more to do with work culture and perhaps individual personalities. Not enough time was dedicated to exploring cultural differences or personal preferences for how people work together.

An example of this was with regard to the schedule the international trainers expected of the national trainers. It was understood that the training approach would need to be adaptive given the need to contextualise and respond to participant feedback. International trainers' expectations of schedules were not always in line with cultural norms. There was an assumption from the international trainers that everyone would work from early morning (pre-breakfast briefings), through the day (delivering the training), after training (on debriefs) and then into the night (on integrating changes). The national trainers did not have any prior warning regarding this and were not used to this level of pressure and considerable time commitment. The international trainers, although recognising the punishing nature of this schedule, believed that this was the only way to deliver the project to the highest possible standard.

Whilst it was understood and agreed that there was a need to deliver a product of quality, this created considerable stress in the team and often led to exchanges that brought out sharp differences in cultural norms. Prior briefing and discussions regarding what the training delivery entails might have led to different solutions, more negotiation around what was reasonable might have resulted in building a broader team of national trainers, translators and logistics personnel in order to achieve a more suitable distribution of tasks. National trainers were very accommodating given they had not signed up to this unfamiliar and demanding level of work extended over a duration of six and a half weeks.

A high level of teamwork meant that the project team faced each challenge together, ensuring that the work was completed with no major crisis and no unresolved issues.

"We were pushed, there were challenges, it was bitter. But I learned a lot and I really appreciate that."[64]

Local engagement in programme design

Despite the call from political leaders in Burma / Myanmar for more 'bottom-up' development, the project did not leverage wider stakeholder involvement in the early design phase. Capacity building programmes that seek to influence and change mind-sets needs far deeper and longer engagement

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64. National Trainer.

than a purely technical training. At times the content of the training programme (collaboration, consensus-building, interest-based negotiation) seemed at odds with the process of programme design being deployed since stakeholders from the target communities and national trainers were not part of the design process per se.

"Before we worked together, more dialogue was needed on how to work together. If the project design been different, we could have worked with the internationals on designing the curriculum"[65]

Whilst Government bodies were supportive of the programme and enabled participation of their officials and others, they too did not participate in project design though they were consulted during the needs assessment mission. This not only meant that certain assumptions about what was wanted and needed were made, but also meant that the level of government participation was not as high as desired and there was little ownership of the programme by government for future work. There seemed to be resistance from some elected officials at higher levels to participate in a training programme that was designed for a wide range of stakeholders although some Leading Body representatives did participate in at least part of the workshop and some did complete the training.

"We need constructive engagement from Government. Government has the power and needs to take the lead. Government needs to use us and needs to make the space for different actors to come together. Everything depends on them."[66]

7. Lessons for ourselves and others

"The drive to be consultative will always need to be balanced with the drive to be productive. It is hard. Every situation and every set of individuals is unique. No one gets it 'right' 100% of the time because situations are always changing and human beings are fallible. Collaboration requires a process of harmonising different systems and diverse perspectives. It can be messy, is often stressful and may not always be worth it. But the conclusion I draw from this experience is that, despite the discomfort that working in a new way may bring, collaboration can be a highly productive mechanism for genuine stakeholder engagement, sustainability, innovation, mind-set change, and fairness. For this reason, it is worth rolling up our sleeves, taking a deep breath and walking knowingly out of our comfort zones."[67]

Every partnership is unique and thus every partnership offers a distinctive 'laboratory' for experiment, observation and deductions (though few are given the unique opportunity to do this as systematically as we have been able to here). In trying to present an accurate picture of this partnership, we have tried to remember that there is never just one story; rather each partner and each person has a different perspective and experience which itself changes over time, as it is remembered and reflected upon. Whilst there are valuable lessons throughout this case study – there are a number of significant 'headlines' about international collaboration that we have drawn out in the hope they may prove useful for the many players worldwide seeking to make partnerships for development work well.

We believe that capturing the emerging experience throughout this project has produced a number of invaluable lessons for partnership practitioners worldwide.

65. National Trainer.
66. Participant feedback.
67. Training team member, PBA.

1. Partnering as a mechanism for inclusiveness

While this project originated outside of Burma / Myanmar, and was driven and implemented by an external donor and (for the most part) external partners, the project became **increasingly co-created** by the national trainers and other key locals – with the international team adopting support and mentoring roles. As this local ownership emerged, it was possible to ask if the project was 'for the people?' or 'of the people?' and reflect on whether the external origin of a project necessarily makes it an imposition, or if a programme of work is generated at the grass roots that it is, by default, appropriate and / or locally owned?

As pointed out earlier (Section 2, page 4), Burma / Myanmar is governed through a hierarchical system where non-governmental entities feel largely un-empowered and where women and young people typically give way to the dominance of men and elders. With its focus on collaboration and its inclusion of as wide a range of people as possible together with a training delivery approach that assumed a level of equity (even if not equality), it is to be hoped that many were able to experience a **more inclusive and engaging model of development**.

It is worth noting, for example, that 27% of the participants in the single sector training courses were women and that a significantly higher percentage (44%) of those saying they were 'much more willing' to collaborate as a result of the training was women. This seems to support the finding that partnerships / collaboration is a mechanism particularly well suited for **promoting inclusion** and for re-defining ways of interacting and that this may well be one of its most valuable attributes.

Having said that, despite the fact that collaboration is a much talked about concept in Burma / Myanmar, it is still largely vague and undefined. This uncertainty about how to collaborate will take time, persistence and, to some extent, a willingness to work through a level of confusion and 'messiness'.[68]

2. Collaboration and hierarchy – complex accountabilities

There is an inherent paradox in working as a partnership within a hierarchical system that can cause unhelpful confusion in terms of operating principles, reporting lines, accountabilities and decision-making. When do line management priorities prevail and when do collaborative processes? How can one build genuine equity where some partners simply have more power, responsibility and accountability for key decisions than others?

At the strategic level, the Project Principals played a role in 'cushioning' the project team, giving them some freedom from managing the partnership to develop the content of the project through locally appropriate and co-created decisions. Without this layer, the training design team, for example,

68. One could see this as a direct parallel to the experiences of collaboration within this project – perhaps it confirms one of the general findings that such changes in ways of working and the development of collaborative practice is challenging and takes time.

might have been more constrained by traditional working structures and accountabilities and not had the freedom to innovate in the same way. While this was seen to be a great boon to the project, it also created some discomfort for the project team. Having parallel accountabilities (vertically to each person's line manager and to the donor as well as horizontally to the on-the-ground partnership and fellow team members) required that each team member do a considerable amount of juggling to shape a project that made sense while meeting the expectations that they didn't have a large part in setting.

The relatively soft touch of the Project Principals vis-à-vis the project team, while providing an opportunity for the project team to co-evolve a design, it may have been a missed opportunity for greater engagement among the partners. On the other hand, a heavier touch might have reinforced the hierarchies of the project and eroded the relative independence at the operational level that generated so many good results.

One of the options for bridging the gap that did grow between the strategic and operational levels could have been the establishment of negotiated and agreed principles and review mechanisms that would have allowed individuals at each level to voice the concerns and discontents that had no formal outlet in the team as it was set up.

"What would have helped would have been to establish a real partnership rather than just being separate organisations involved in the same project in what appeared to be an ad hoc fashion. For example, at the beginning setting partnering principles and agreeing how the partners would operate and make decisions over and above an organisational chart."[69]

This partnership highlighted some of the challenges inherent to the application of partnering principles (for example equity, transparency and mutual benefit) and interest-based negotiation in what is a hierarchical world. It raised many important questions about how partnership can really work when there is an imperative for clear accountability, and a world in which 'management' ultimately has to decide.

3. Building genuine 'added value' from working in partnership

The project took on the challenge of trying to work through a partnership model of delivery in a short time frame. It did so in the hope that the multi-stakeholder collaboration would enable the project to bring together a diversity of cultures, values, approaches and experiences to the benefit of local participants in the project. The best partnerships relish such diversity and find ways of celebrating and building innovation from the diversity of approach. This, however, requires time to get to know each other and to penetrate beneath assumptions and preconceptions – by listening and asking questions and, if necessary, by choosing to conduct some difficult-but-necessary conversations.

There were several instances in this project where one or other of the partner organisations involved in this project felt that their approach was quite different and that it was quite hard to bring their perspective to the table. Actively seeking out and relishing the potential 'added value' from diversity of

input is critical but with time pressures and project delivery priorities it is easy to fall into a pattern of simply building on assumptions about each other and each other's potential contributions. This may mean that even where there is genuine potential for added value, it is simply not realised.

Whilst recognising that more could have been made of the partnership, most (but perhaps not all) of those involved in this project felt that whilst the partnership didn't necessarily maximize its potential, it did arrive at outcomes and outputs that were the direct result of the collaborative model.

4. Re-framing who 'knows best'

The project team members had an impressive set of specialist skills and knowledge in a number of fields. Each individual was contracted to contribute their expertise and this is what they did, to a high professional standard. Each specialist was regarded and respected as a 'subject expert'.

During the design phase, the training design team began to share knowledge and influence the design of each other's sessions. But as there was no (stated or perceived) mandate to leverage this expertise for the collaborative process itself, the team tended not to offer this expertise for this purpose. The specialist knowledge focused on the product (the training curricula and delivery) not on the processes per se.

Some team members felt strongly that this was a lost opportunity but others felt that intruding their specialism onto the process would have been an imposition. Whichever view is held, development professionals at all levels do need to practice what they advocate to communities in development programming if they are to be authentic in what they do. To what extent do the limitations of time and the need to keep a positive focus on the job at hand and the specific project deliverables limit the opportunities for the team itself to work through participatory, inclusive and / or brokering processes?

Ultimately none of us know what we don't know and partnering can provide us with an extraordinary – perhaps unique ¬– opportunity for people from very diverse backgrounds and world-views to explore their assumptions and knowledge and to re-frame what they know and to respect others for knowing different things or knowing things differently.

5. Agreeing to disagree

When partners disagree, it can be exactly what is needed to push boundaries and problem-solve collectively and creatively. However, disagreement is often seen as negative that all too often people seek to smooth over issues that may be controversial or difficult to resolve. It may be that those involved in collaborative ventures tend to push too hard for agreement (often settling for the lowest common denominator rather than the highest aspiration). It is at least worth considering whether partnership can offer us a model to work for alignment where a collective decision that is in the best interests of the project / partnership goal takes precedence over organisational or individual preferences or positions. In other words, there is sincere agreement to disagree on a certain issue in the interests of an agreed higher priority.

69. Training team member, CIIAN.

Finding opportunities for this dialogue – and facilitating it skilfully – is not easy, particularly when people are not in the same room or have never met each other face-to-face or feel intimidated by a person's authority. In the realities of 'long-distance partnerships' it may be that some serious attention needs to be paid to ensure differences of view are really worked through in ways that build depth and transformation rather than defensiveness.

A key lesson from this experience is the importance of creating space within partnership processes that allow each partner (at whatever level) to adopt a broader view of the process and their place within it; to voice discontents and disagreements quite candidly and to contribute ideas and suggestions beyond the immediate role / expertise they have. This is where collaboration is most likely to achieve depth, breadth and innovation.

6. Time – a 'make or break' partnering issue

"The great coup was pulling it off despite the time constraints we were working to."[70]

This topic has been covered exhaustively elsewhere (see page 18). What appears to be clear is that time is of critical importance in a partnership model but it may be as much a question of how time is allocated as of how much time is available. In other words, a modest investment of time and effort in building understanding and capacity in the partnership formation phase may both save time later on and mean that project activities can be undertaken more time-efficiently because more trust and understanding between the key players leads to less need for ratification of every issue, however small.

7. Communications – a fine art

Working at a distance from one's partners and colleagues is one of the major challenges of international development. Emails can be ambiguous and they may not address the underlying concern. They also do not allow for immediate exchanges of ideas or opinions. This is particularly true when there are significant time differences. Although Skype has been an enormous boon to international communications, a call that involves several members of a team over two or three continents facing the challenges of time zones. The opportunity to quickly check in with a colleague or partner is often not there. Therefore, while communications may be more frequent and available nowadays, we need to remember that they are not always more effective.

The project would have benefited from more careful thinking through of who needs to communicate with whom, when and how. A communications strategy co-created by the partners could have been helpful in ensuring fluid communications between partners and also between the strategic and operational levels of the partnership.

A key lesson agreed by the project team has been the importance of asking questions and seeking clarification, rather than working from assumptions or trying to solve problems in isolation. Had the operational team all been involved in

the initial scoping visit, for example, many of the challenges and questions that arose during the needs assessment could have been addressed before they became problematic. There were both timing and financial reasons as to why this did not happen, but it is an important consideration for future capacity building initiatives.

8. The critical role of 'enablers'

What we have not covered here is the influence of individual personalities. Whilst this is invariably a significant factor in collaborative activities (the impact of extroverts vs introverts, for example) it is not so easy to capture and generalise – and it is, of course, completely unrelated to formal roles. In this project, there were those who were 'shapers' with a strong sense of direction and focus; those who were relationship-builders; those who were analysts with a strong interest in conceptual frameworks; those who were pragmatic and practical and just wanted to 'get on with it'; those who sought to stabilise and balance; those who energised; those who wanted to push project boundaries; those who wanted to keep things safe; those who avoided conflict; those who worked hard to surface the difficulties… and more besides. All this, if it can be harnessed consciously, adds yet another dimension.

In addition to these more visible styles of operating, there is the additional, often more invisible, style of the 'enabler'.[71] In this project there were several who operated as enablers at different times and who probably did a considerable amount behind the scenes to find solutions to challenges, smooth ruffled feathers and / or act as interpreters between different perspectives and positions.

It is clear that effective partnerships can owe much to quiet diplomacy and 'servant leadership' even though it is rarely acknowledged or reported (or even, perhaps, fully understood).

9. Different lessons at different levels

This project has raised a question as to whether there are really quite different lessons about partnering to be understood and implemented at different levels. In other words, generalised lessons about partnering or collaboration may miss the subtlety of specific lessons applicable to specific parts of the partnership, especially when the collaboration is layered or complex in other ways. Building on the many suggestions of what could have worked better in this project, we have drawn out the following lessons from this experience for those involved in partnerships at different levels:

Strategic level: 'Leaders'

- Include key others in initial programme design to maximise diversity of input, deepen organisational engagement, seek alignment through dialogue, and bring people along with you;
- Support the partnering approach as rigorously as possible throughout the cycle of the project of work and duration of

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70. Training team member, CIIAN.

71. PBA has coined the term 'broker' for this role as it manifests in a partnership – and has a growing amount of evidence and action research about its importance in providing competencies for the partnering process (see www.partnershipbrokers.org).

the programme and seek to maximise the added value for both the partners and the partnership;

- Embed communications across partners at the senior level (rather than simply within each partner's own organisation);
- Instigate a regular collaboration 'health check' or, for longer projects, partnership review procedure;
- Help partners at all levels to voice and address concerns / tensions;
- Seek opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate achievements / progress.

Operational level: 'Implementers'

- Agree collaboration principles at an early stage and work to enshrine them in all aspects of the project (content development and process).and bring those operating at strategic levels along with you;
- Agree procedures (at both operational and strategic levels) to flag issues at the right time in the right way;
- In raising issues 'up', take time to reflect on the process and the wider purpose;
- Make as much as possible of the passion, commitment and individual interests / ideas rather than put key players into straight-jacket roles;
- Ensure a mechanism (formal or informal) for ongoing dialogue and learning between partners;
- Seek to understand co-workers better rather than make assumptions.

Community level: 'Change agents'

- Work for the genuinely transformational when engaging in collaborative activities;
- Actively seek out the disenfranchised voices and model inclusive approaches at their authentic best;
- Be imaginative in how to create opportunities for coming together across traditional divides and boundaries;
- Use interest-based negotiation as a central approach to working together;
- Build equity, transparency, mutual benefit and inclusion into communication at the community level;
- Be confident about challenging 'implementers' and 'leaders' in this scenario when necessary.

10. Partnering challenges as 'solution' not 'problem'

It is tempting to deduce from the considerable collaboration challenges identified in this case study that partnering is extremely difficult and probably to be avoided rather than embraced. But this is not our conclusion. Rather that it is possible to see the challenges inherent in formal collaboration as a microcosm of the challenges of the complex and fragmented world in which we live.

How we as individuals learn about ourselves, each other and our world and how we internalise those lessons and begin to operate and engage differently is the disciplined approach that partnering requires of us. It is also what life requires of us. Whether we are operating as individuals with diverse world-views; or organisations with divergent values or community-based groups with a history of hostility, we can work through difficulties by working together systematically and constructively. This offers us an opportunity to explore and build a new world order.

Whether or not partnerships **ever** reach their full potential is an interesting question, but they do appear to offer an extraordinary opportunity to re-frame approaches and to learning how best to work within, or where necessary, challenge and change the rules of the game.

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We started this case study with a number of key questions (see page 3) and it is possible that we have simply raised more questions rather than found conclusive answers to the original questions we posed.

It seems that for some of those involved in this project, the partnering aspect has been exceptionally challenging and may not have added enough value to justify such a strong focus on a collaborative approach. For others, the amount achieved in the time available was itself evidence of the exceptional added value that can be derived from a highly diverse and committed team given the freedom to do what they do best. For yet others, the challenges themselves have justified the partnership since, as suggested above, many of the challenges faced are symptomatic and sometimes symbolic of an approach to development that urgently needs to be transformed. This last point is particularly valid if, as development actors, we are to maintain our integrity in our advocacy of consultation, participatory process, inclusion and democratisation in development programming.

Perhaps the final questions we are left with are somewhat different to those we started with:

- What, ultimately, is the real added value of a collaborative approach?
- Does it truly lead to greater innovation, more participation, greater impact, more genuine inclusiveness and sustainable outcomes?
- Is it too complex and time-consuming to be practical – when action on the ground is so urgently needed?
- Is it the only authentic way forward in our layered and complex world if we are to give space for different voices and ensure participation for all?

Our choice of title, *Collaboration Complexity*, indicates our over-riding experience of the layers of learning about partnering from this project. For all of us, delivering the project effectively and appropriately was always the paramount consideration and there were many instances where compromises in an ideal partnering process were accepted as necessary to ensure project completion and good outcomes.

This case study was understood by all as being a secondary not a primary output. Having said that, we believe, it is a valuable additional product from the Skills for Negotiation project and we hope it is a useful contribution to the partnership debate and to understanding better what it really takes to collaborate across traditional boundaries effectively and successfully.

Contributors[72]

Aleisha Arnusch	START Program Analyst, DFATD
Ann Thomson	Project team: Project Manager, Agriteam
Bawi Tha Thawng	Project team: National Trainer, project team support, IID
Ben Hoffman	Project Principal, CIIAN
Bulbul Baksi	Project team: curriculum design and Trainer, PBA
Charity Philo	Project team: National Trainer
Emily Claire Poupart	Project Principal, Agriteam
Flaurie Storie	Project team: curriculum design and Trainer, CIIAN
Freddy Sao Kyi Than	Project team: Training Support, IID
Helene Brejnbjerg	Project team: Field Co-ordinator, IID
Henrik Alffram	Project team: curriculum design & Trainer, Legal Consultant, IID
Joanna Pyres	Project team: Trainer, PBA
Joern Kristensen	Project Principal, IID
Kamkong Khun	Project team: National Trainer
Ko Mann Thaik	Project team: National Trainer
Natalie Johnson	Finance and administration, Agriteam
Phyu Hnw	Project team: finance, administration and logistical support, IID
Ros Tennyson	Project Principal, PBA

Case Study team:

Research: Joanna Pyres

Editor: Ros Tennyson

Advisors: Bulbul Baksi, Emily Poupart & Ann Thomson

Design and layout: Emily Wood (PBA)

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72. Listed in alphabetical order by first name.