PAUNG KU

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2017-2021

JULY 2016

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INTRODUCTION

OVERALL CONTEXT

Myanmar is a country experiencing intense change. In 2010, following decades of authoritarian military rule, elections were held under a new Constitution approved in 2008. The National League for Democracy (NLD), the key opposition party, boycotted the elections and the military controlled Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) swept 80% of the seats through what has been widely considered a rigged process. A "civilian" government led by President Thein Sein came into power and a series of social, legal, political and economic reforms were introduced. Despite questions over the legitimacy of the government, many Western countries lifted economic sanctions opening the way for increased foreign investment and development assistance. Nevertheless, many problems related to continued armed conflict in the ethnic areas, widespread corruption, weak governance and policies which favor big business have limited the impact of these developments for most of the population leading rather to growing inequalities and increasing environmental damage.

At the end of its five year term, the USDP led government held what has been accepted as "free and fair" elections in November 2015. This time, the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory sweeping 80% of all contested seats. With a government that has been elected by the people, there are now high expectations from the population that things will finally begin to change for the better, although the policies and plans of the new government are still not clear. The government faces an enormous challenge, in particular, to resolve the myriad of inter-ethnic conflicts that have flared up again despite, or as a consequence of, the signing of a National Ceasefire Agreement by the previous government with only eight of the ethnic armed groups. There is also an urgent need to redress decades of disinvestment in the country's economic and social sectors. The situation is further complicated by the need for the NLD to tread carefully in its relations with the military which still controls 25% of the parliament, three key ministries and, through its circle, a large segment of the business sector.

Hence, while Myanmar is experiencing a period of high hopes and optimism, it is also a period of highest uncertainty. In addition to the untested capacities of the new government and the tensions between the government and military, the existence of different factions in society give rise for possible manipulation to cause division and unrest rather than forging of a cohesive movement towards a common good. The resurgence of fighting among different militia groups and the rise of an ultra-nationalist Buddhist movement which has spread anti-Muslim rhetoric and supported the passing of new laws which constrain women's rights give cause for concerns.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society actors have been active throughout the different periods. During the period of the authoritarian military regime, organization of civil society was severely repressed. The government was suspicious of all forms of community organizing. Nevertheless, some civil society groups found ways to operate with or without the explicit endorsement of the authorities.

Under the Thein Sein regime, due to pressure to gain legitimacy and recognition, the government opened the space for civil society organizing. Both formally registered non-governmental organizations and informal community groups were allowed to operate at the local and regional levels as well as at the national policy level and many groups, organizations and networks took the opportunity to raise their voices and take action in a wide

range of sectors. A new Association Law was passed incorporating inputs from civil society groups, although by-laws operationalizing the law have not yet been developed.

Since then, civil society has been involved in a variety of roles -- providing services where the public sector has failed; building civic awareness and understanding of social justice; voicing opinions and demanding for the rights of those being dispossessed or exploited; and advocating for better protection of the country's natural resources and environment. With a government which was still strongly in the hands of the military and which favored big businesses run by their cronies, many in civil society took on an activist approach to push for political and social change and for reforms that would benefit the people and the country rather than those in power.

Despite the appearance of more openness, the experience under the previous government was mixed and the gains are still tentative. Land grabbing and land disputes proliferated throughout the country often involving the military or businesses closely related to the military. Where civil society was too vocal or openly defiant, heavy handed tactics were used to silence dissent, such as in the arrests of the students protesting against the education bill. Although civil society protests against the construction of the Myitsone Dam were successful in causing the suspension of project, the issue has never been conclusively resolved and there is pressure from the Chinese funding the project to restart the construction.

As the new NLD government takes shape, the outlook for civil society has changed but the pathways forward are still not clear. Although civil society organizations were active in the elections for voter education and election observation, the NLD has not acknowledged their contribution and has thus far appeared reluctant to engage with existing civil society groups. Although many individuals from civil society organizations have been elected as NLD representatives, they have been cautioned to refrain from their previous activities. Access to the NLD leadership is very limited and there have been few opportunities for civil society to engage with Aung San Suu Kyi who maintains a strong hold over the party and elected parliamentarians. The reasons for this stance are not clear but it appears that, as a government elected by the people, there is less need to seek a third party to represent community voices, and priority is on reaching out through its own networks. The government does not yet envisage a clear role for civil society despite the strong role they can play in functioning democracies.

Civil society itself is in danger of being divided and hijacked by different groups for its own interests as different political parties and interest groups seek to form their own organisations and influence existing groups through systems of patronage. Within this context, it is important that civil society remains steadfast in promoting values of justice, peace and human rights and finds ways to champion the concerns of minority and marginalized groups. There are many ways in which the political dynamics may play out at different levels and civil society will need to be flexible to find the space to engage as the situation unfolds. With a political leadership that is committed to positive social change, but with weak institutions and a bureaucracy which is steeped in its old ways, high level policy changes may yet take a long time to reach those most in need. While civil society can play a role in supporting positive initiatives of the government which benefit the people, there is also a need for checks and balances and for civil society to raise concerns when policies and programs fail to reach those most in need.

PAUNG KU

Paung Ku was established as a civil society strengthening initiative in 2007 by a consortium of local and international NGOs with Save the Children as the lead agency. Paung Ku's vision is for *a pluralistic society that*

values all of the diverse ethnicities, cultures and beliefs, and ensures equity and respect for the rights of all particularly those who are marginalized.

Under the consortium initiative, Paung Ku provided small micro-grants and mentoring support to community groups to implement community projects through a model of learning-by-doing at a time when government policies were still highly repressive of civil society organisations. With the onslaught of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, Paung Ku expanded rapidly in the Delta region as community groups took on an active role to deliver emergency relief and rehabilitation services to those affected. A similar response was launched following Cyclone Giri in Rakhine state in 2010.

As the space for civil society expanded, Paung Ku, under its Strategic Framework 2013 -2016, shifted its focus from supporting implementation of community projects towards also supporting advocacy efforts to influence power holders to change their policy and practice. Paung Ku partners worked on a range of critical issues related to land, education, disabled rights, civic and voter education, inter-faith and communal conflict, human rights, women's rights, peace, consumer rights, emergency response, constitutional change as well as the social and environmental impact of investment projects. In addition to community groups, Paung Ku also expanded its support to include civil society networks including regional and national networks, such as the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability, Land in Our Hands, Myanmar China Pipeline Watch Committee and National Network for Education Reform, which bring together community groups and organizations to collaborate to strengthen their individual efforts to influence the policies and practices of government and big businesses. During this period, Paung Ku supported between 150 to 180 civil society partners each year with provision of grants, mentoring and access to other technical resources and organizations.

Under the 2013-2016 Strategic Framework, Paung Ku also took the decision to become registered as a local organization – to be an active, leading *member* of civil society rather than just a passive external supporter. In 2014, Paung Ku thus became independent of the consortium members and was officially registered as a Myanmar organization.

This 2017-2021 Strategic Framework is a pivotal period for Paung Ku. Many changes are expected to be initiated by the new government and civil society engagement with government will shift under a new democratic framework that is being put in place. The Paung Ku program will remain flexible to support partners to respond to the changes through on-going assessment and analysis.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This framework has been developed through a process of consultation with Paung Ku partners, donors, Board members and staff. It has also been informed by informal discussions with other external stakeholders.   A key focus of the discussions and consultations was to ensure that the new Strategic Framework is forward looking and is relevant to the new political context.

Paung Ku will carry out an external final evaluation of its current 2013-2016 Strategic Framework programme in July 2016. Due to the timeframe required to approve and mobilize the resources required for this new Strategic Framework to start in January 2017, it is not possible to wait for the results of the evaluation to finalize the current framework document and both processes are being carried out in parallel.

It is not expected that the evaluation will significantly change the strategic directions of the framework but it is hoped that the evaluation will provide recommendations for how Paung Ku may improve on its operations, such as in the management of the programme teams and the monitoring system. Some elements of the framework may thus be revised following the results of the final evaluation expected in September 2016.

STRATEGIC APPROACH

PAUNG KU APPROACH TO CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING

The Paung Ku model is premised on the belief that its vision of a pluralistic society that values all of the diverse ethnicities, cultures and beliefs, and ensures equity and respect for the rights of all particularly those who are marginalized can only be achieved if there is *a strong civil society in Myanmar driving forward positive social change*. This is the goal of the Paung Ku programme.

Figure 1: Paung Ku approach to civil society strengthening
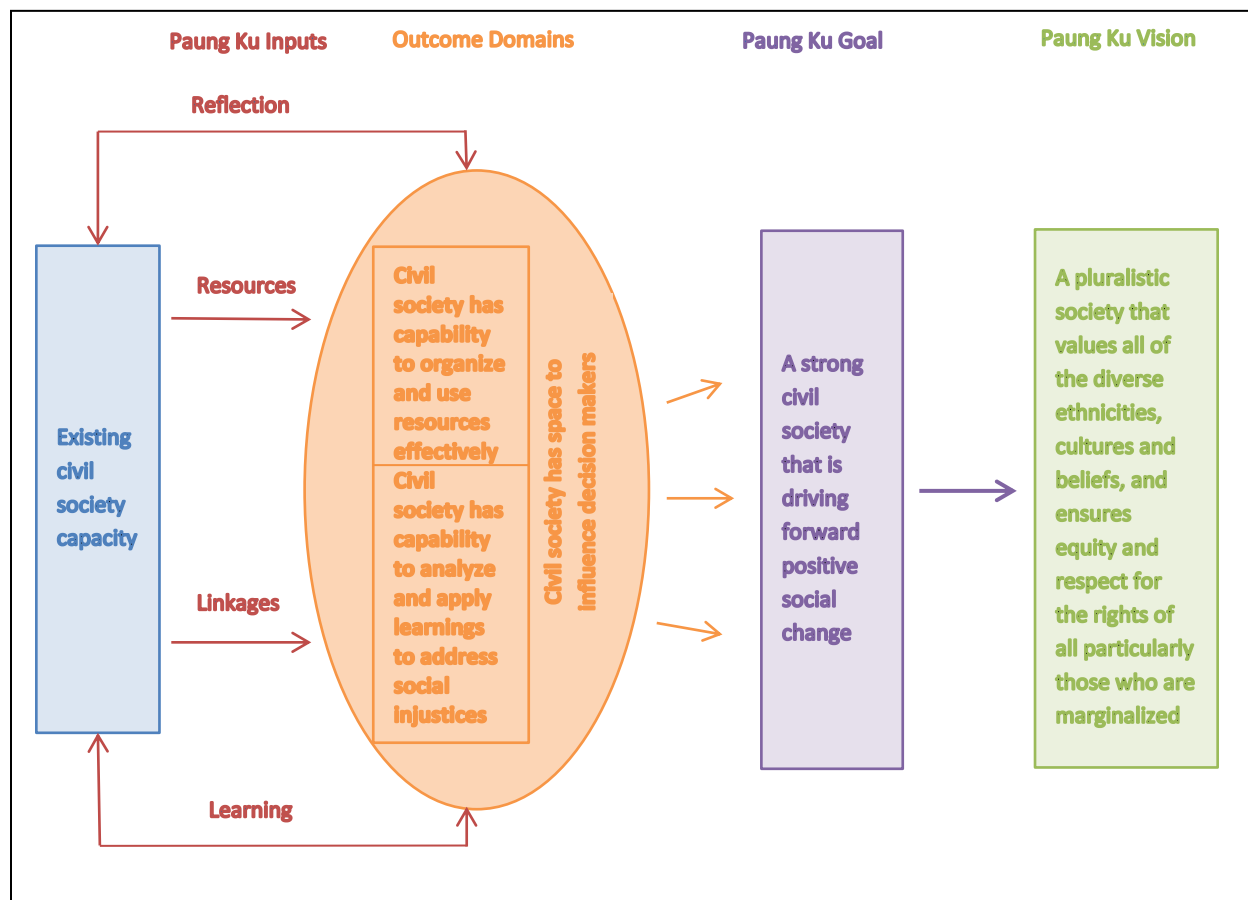
Paung Ku's approach to civil society strengthening starts from a recognition of the existing capacity and strength of civil society in Myanmar (see Figure 1). The majority of civil society actors supported by Paung Ku are informal community groups rooted in their communities, formed by volunteers (e.g. youth, farmers, women) from their communities. They have an intimate knowledge of the structures, dynamics and resources in their communities.

PAUNG KU STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2017-2021 (July 2016)

Paung Ku support aims to create an empowering and enabling process for civil society by (1) providing technical and financial resources, (2) facilitating linkages and networking with other stakeholders and (3) supporting reflection and learning so that partners are capable to (1) organize and use resources effectively, (2) analyze and apply learnings to address social injustices and (3) have the space to engage with power holders including with government authorities at different levels and with stakeholders from the business sector. Paung Ku support seeks to enhance the *capability* of partners (what the partners are able to do) in addition to their *capacity* (what they have)*.

For Paung Ku, civil society *strength* is envisioned as the ability of civil society actors to shape positive social change rather than as the capacity of organizations measured against traditional organizational systems frameworks. For Paung Ku, a strong civil society is made up not only of organizations that can implement projects and be accountable to donors for the use of their funds but also of dynamic and committed actors including individuals, groups, organisations and networks that are able to address social injustices and be accountable to their communities. Elements of a strong civil society are further described below.

Although shown separately within the figure above, the different inputs and support provided by Paung Ku are closely interlinked and are mutually supportive towards achieving the outcomes and goal. For example, learning is facilitated as part of the reflection process as well as through providing linkages with organisations that can provide technical support; financial resources are provided through grants that provide funds which may be used to facilitate learning and networking.

ACTION-REFLECTION MODEL

Figure 2: Action reflection model
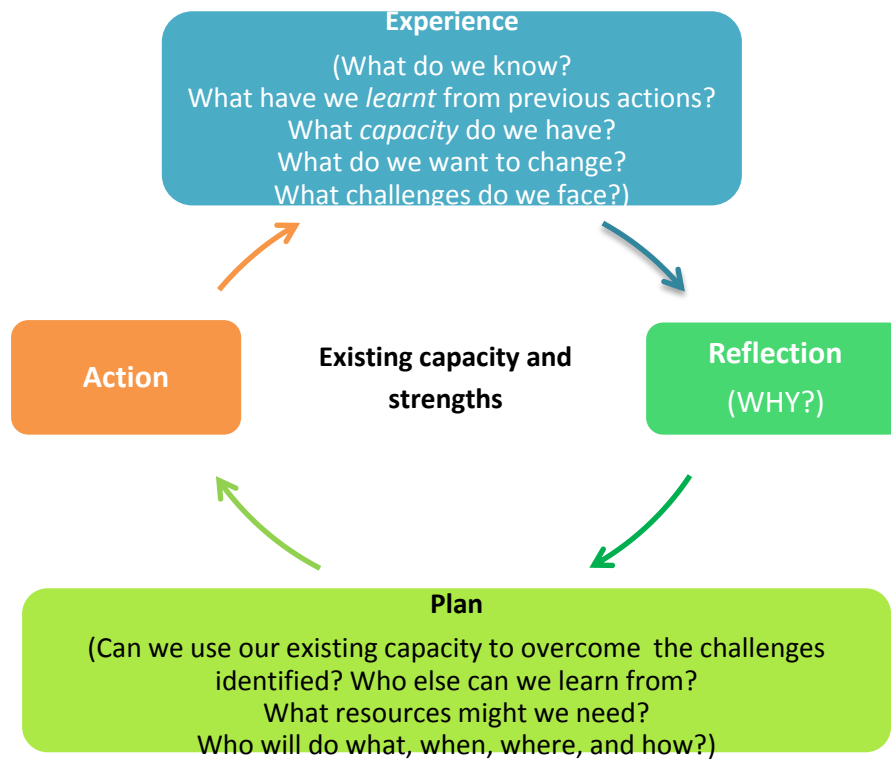
The Paung Ku approach is based on an action-reflection model that supports civil society actors to build on their strengths to address the issues faced within their own communities. Working closely with partners and using participatory tools, Paung Ku staff assist partners to analyze their situation in order to find sustainable local solutions to problems of social injustice, inequality and poverty. Through this reflection, partners identify and plan their actions drawing on additional knowledge and expertise that Paung Ku helps it to access through participation in learning platforms or linkages with other actors. Where needed, Paung Ku provides a small amount of funding in the form of micro-grants to support the action.   Drawing on their experience in implementing these actions, the partners again reflect on their situation and plan further action. Through this cyclical process, partners gain strength to more effectively address the root problems to drive positive social change. The process involves good listening as well as trust building with the partner.

CORE ELEMENTS OF A STRONG CIVIL SOCIETY

Over its almost ten years of experience of supporting civil society, Paung Ku has identified a number of "core elements" that civil society actors should have to be able to support positive social change. The core elements have been influenced by the socio-political context in Myanmar and have been reviewed and adapted over time. These core elements are envisaged along two axes – horizontal foundations and vertical influence – as shown in Figure 3.   For civil society to shape Myanmar's development, it must be strong along both axes.

The core elements relate to the three outcomes of the Paung Ku programme as shown in Figure 4.   Paung Ku's experience has shown that civil society strengthening is not a linear process. The core elements may strengthen and ebb with changes within the partner and in the surrounding environment.

Figure 3: A strong civil society
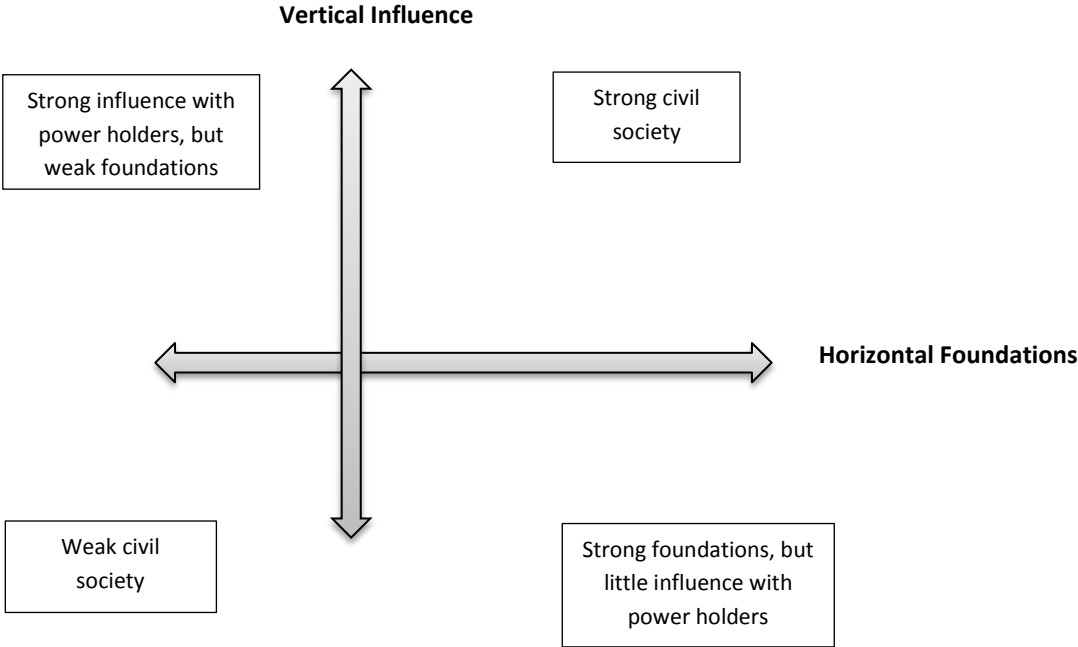
Vertical Influence

Strong influence with power holders, but weak foundations	Strong civil society

Horizontal Foundations

Weak civil society	Strong foundations, but little influence with power holders

Figure 4: Core elements of a strong civil society that can shape positive social change

Horizontal foundations		Vertical influence
Civil society is capable to organize and use resources effectively	Civil society is capable to analyze and apply learnings to address social injustices	Civil society has space to influence decision-makers
• **Linkages with and involvement of the community,** with strong downward accountability • **Dynamic, capable and committed members** • **Participatory leadership and decision-making** • **Accountable and transparent processes for mobilizing and managing resources**	• **Vision and values** based on justice, rights, equity and peace • **Diversity and inclusiveness of marginalized populations** • **Access to technical knowledge** of the issues addressed • **Analysis and learning, innovation and adaptation** • **Linkages with other actors** for learning	• **Access to power holders** • **Access to information** for evidence-based advocacy • **Credible and trusted** • **Linkages with others** for increased influence • **Voice** to be heard and to hold others accountable

PRIORITIES FOR CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING

In the previous Paung Ku strategic framework period, within the context of a government that had come into power through unfair elections and that had merely transformed itself by shedding its military uniforms, Paung Ku focused its support to partners on increasing their vertical influence in order to participate in the transition process and ensure that the reforms and development projects introduced by the government lead to betterment for all, particularly those who are poor and disadvantaged. While vertical influence will continue to be key in this Strategic Framework, Paung Ku will refocus its energies on supporting partners to strengthen their foundational base, in particular to ensure that they remain strongly rooted in their own communities in order to legitimately represent their concerns, particularly of those that are marginalized, including women.   Focus will be placed on the following core elements -- that partners are connected with and accountable to the communities that they work with, are able to analyze the situation to identify effective sustainable solutions that are inclusive, and are able to collect and document the evidence needed to influence change.

As the new government seeks to define its policies and programs, it is important that civil society is able to formulate and contribute to a development agenda that is owned by the people. Recognizing that relationships will evolve under the new government, Paung Ku will support partners to find ways to engage that are not confrontational but that provide a check and balance for both the government as well as external negative forces that may seek to destabilize the government and create conflict or that seek to exploit people and resources and are environmentally destructive. Through the action-reflection model, Paung Ku will support partners to be more analytical and to ensure that changes and developments also benefit those who are marginalized[1].

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[1] Paung Ku's gender and diversity work has previously identified exclusion and marginalization as occurring most frequently in relation to gender and gender identity, sexuality and sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, religion, disability, and socio-economic status. All Paung Ku partners will be encouraged to develop their understanding of the ways in which exclusion and marginalization operate in their communities, and to find ways to tackle this.

PAUNG KU STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2017-2021 (July 2016)

The new government has made establishment of peace one of its highest priorities. Currently, many of the ethnic areas are among the least developed regions of the country and there is not a strong ethnic representation in the new government.   The government has also opened up the space for civil society to provide input to the peace process through a parallel forum. Civil society can thus play an important role in raising issues from the community in the peace talks. Civil society can also be an important link between ethnic and Burman groups as peace cannot be achieved without an understanding and trust between these communities. Paung Ku will thus place high priority on working with civil society in ethnic regions and to link them with civil society in Burman majority areas.

A RESPONSIVE APPROACH

Since its inception, one of Paung Ku's key strengths has been its ability to respond to different issues that emerge in any region of the country, including in remote areas in a timely manner. In 2017-2021, Paung Ku will seek to maintain this flexible, responsive approach as Myanmar continues to experience significant social, economic and political change.

Paung Ku will remain open to providing support in a wide range of sectors and respond to issues emerging in the next five years. However, it is expected that most partners will be working on four broad areas: (1) community development; (2) peace, social justice and human rights; (3) land, responsible investment and environmental protection; and (4) democratization and good governance. Paung Ku staff have a good understanding of these issues and will link partners to technical expertise and resources from other organizations.

The program will be implemented in all 14 states and regions. In 2017-2021, Paung Ku will seek to increase its support to civil society actors in the ethnic states in support of the peace process. Paung Ku's regional program teams will be restructured to extend their capacity to reach out to civil society actors in the ethnic states.

Paung Ku will maintain its decentralized structure allowing its regional teams to make decisions, including in the approval of micro-grants in accordance with its grants management policies. The decentralized structure allows funding approvals and disbursements to be made quickly at the level closest to the partners.

GENDER AND DIVERSITY

Paung Ku's vision -- of a pluralistic society that values all of the diverse ethnicities, cultures and beliefs, and ensures equity and respect for the rights of all particularly those who are marginalized -- is based in the belief and experience that diversity is strength.

However, the reality (in Myanmar and elsewhere) is that injustice and inequality gather around certain forms of diversity, such as gender and gender identity, sexuality and sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, religion, disability, socio-economic status and other culturally specific hierarchies. For example, inter-communal conflict against Muslim communities has emerged in some parts of the country and is being instigated by some sections of society.

Paung Ku has supported its staff and partners to protect and promote diversity and equality (including gender equality). This work will be strengthened in 2017-2021, with Paung Ku continuing to mentor its partners in identifying, reflecting on and working to redress inequalities and injustice related to all forms of diversity. Paung Ku will support partners to ensure that their interventions do not exclude any groups intentionally or unintentionally.   Where exclusion is deeply rooted within cultural beliefs, for example, in social gender norms,

Paung Ku will support partners to question such discrimination and promote equality within their organisations and their communities. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring that the peace processes are representative of the diversity that exists within Myanmar's ethnic communities.

PAUNG KU SCOPE

In the 2017-2021 Strategic Framework, Paung Ku will maintain the same level of programming reaching civil society partners in all 14 states and regions but with an increased focus on civil society actors in ethnic regions in the country.   The programme will aim to work with at least 150 civil society actors each year.

Paung Ku currently has six regional programme teams covering the different states and regions in the country. The teams are:
- Mandalay-Kachin team covering Mandalay and Sagaing regions and Chin and Kachin state;
- Shan-Magway team covering Shan and Kayah states and Magway region;
- Delta team covering Ayerawaddy region;
- Yangon team covering Yangon and Bago regions and Mon and Kayin states;
- Coastal and Collaborative Initiatives A team covering Tanintharyi region and national and cross-regional initiatives; and
- Coastal and Collaborative Initiatives B team covering Rakhine state and national and cross-regional initiatives.

Under the 2017-2021 framework, Paung Ku will review the geographical coverage of the teams to assess the reach in different states and regions with the view of increasing its focus in ethnic regions. The six teams are currently based in two offices in Yangon and Mandalay. Based on the restructuring of the teams and to ensure its ability to respond in a timely manner, Paung Ku may establish one new office to strengthen its ability to reach out to ethnic regions.

Paung Ku has developed a Partner Management Manual to provide guidance on working with Paung Ku partners. A partner selection criteria is included to guide the selection of partners. For the 2017-2021 period, Paung Ku will review the selection criteria to ensure that it is relevant to the changing context in terms of the political environment, role of civil society and issues to be addressed.

As in the previous strategic framework, Paung Ku will continue to support both community-based and issue-based partners. Community-based partners are often organized around a geographical area and include both formal and informal groupings at the village, township and state/regional levels. Paung Ku has established strong partnerships with community-based groups through emergency responses such as in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis and Giri as well as through the consortium partners at the time when Paung Ku was still a consortium project. These partnerships have evolved from support for service delivery type projects to more rights-based projects seeking to redress root causes of problems and social injustices through advocacy to local authorities and private sector companies for improved services or compliance and proper redressal of social and environmental impacts of large investment projects. In the 2017-2021 framework, Paung Ku will seek to expand its support to community-based partners in rural ethnic areas.

Issue-based partners are those organized around a specific issue of regional or national importance. In the 2013-2016 framework, Paung Ku has supported several regional and national networks working on key issues such as

education, natural resource management, land and peace. These include formal and informal networks such as the National Network for Education Reform, Myanmar China Pipeline Watch Committee, Land in our Hands and the Myanmar Accountability and Transparency Network. Paung Ku will continue to support and build on this work.

GOAL AND OUTCOMES

The goal of Paung Ku is that civil society in Myanmar is driving positive social change. For Paung Ku, "positive social change" is a process, progressing towards Paung Ku's vision of a pluralistic society that values all of the diverse ethnicities, cultures and beliefs, and ensures equity and respect for the rights of all particularly those who are marginalized. This is a Myanmar with a civil society that can shape the country to have freedom, justice, rights, peace and development that is pro-poor and environmentally sustainable.

The **expected outcomes** for the programme will be defined within the following outcome domains:
- Civil society is capable to organize and use resources effectively
- Civil society is capable to analyze and apply learnings to address social injustices
- Civil society has the space to influence decision-makers

These outcome domains relate to the three elements of an organisation – to be, to do and to relate.

OUTCOME DOMAIN 1: CIVIL SOCIETY IS CAPABLE TO ORGANISE AND USE RESOURCES EFFECTIVELY

Paung Ku support will enable partners to strengthen their internal structures and systems ("to be").

As noted above, most Paung Ku partners already have strong linkages with and knowledge of the community they work with and have dynamic capable and motivated members. Paung Ku support, through provision of resources, opportunities for reflection and learning, and linkages with other civil society actors and stakeholders, helps partners to strengthen these existing capacities as well as to develop the other core elements – involvement of the community, including downward accountability; participatory leadership and decision-making; accountable and transparent processes for mobilizing and managing resources -- which help them to organize and use resources more effectively. In this Strategic Framework, focus will be placed on supporting partners to be accountable to the communities that they work with.

For example[2], Paung Ku may support an organisation which has been providing food support to children from poor families to develop a feedback mechanism for the children and parents to give their views on the support provided. Based on the feedback, the organisation learns that parents are more concerned about the education of their children. Consequently, Paung Ku helps the partner to link with an organisation in Yangon which works on early childhood development to establish a center in their area. Paung Ku provides a grant for the organisation in Yangon to train the community teachers. Funds which were used for food support are used instead to pay for running of the center. Through the process, the organisation learns to better manage the resources they have,

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[2] The examples offered for the Paung Ku outcomes are hypothetical examples based on the experience of how Paung Ku has supported civil society organisations to grow and gain in strength.

prepare a proposal for external funds needed, be more responsive to the needs in the community and be more accountable to the community members they support.

OUTCOME DOMAIN 2: CIVIL SOCIETY IS CAPABLE TO ANALYZE AND APPLY LEARNINGS TO ADDRESS SOCIAL INJUSTICES

Paung Ku support will enable partners to strengthen their capability to analyze the situation in their communities and to apply their learning so as to act on social injustices -- to voice such issues and respond where possible ("to do").

One of Paung Ku's criteria for selection of partners is that the partners have a vision that is consistent with Paung Ku's vision. This is a prerequisite for all partners. The support provided by Paung Ku helps them in analyzing the situation in their communities, to identify the root causes of their problems, identify groups that are marginalized and centers of power in order to develop solutions that are inclusive, just, equitable and sustainable. Paung Ku provides increased access to financial resources to enable partners to take action to address social injustices. The actions can cover a wide range of activities including advocacy for changes in policy and practice, creating awareness and influencing public opinion and support for improved services. Through reflection and learning, Paung Ku supports partners to adapt and innovate to be more effective in their actions. Paung Ku also provides access to technical resources through participation in learning platforms and linkages with other organisation. Technical resources include knowledge and information on human rights, social justice and peace, as well as knowledge and information related to specific sectors. Paung Ku also links partners to other civil society actors to foster sharing and cross-learning. In this Strategic Framework, focus will be placed on supporting partners to analyze the situation to identify effective sustainable solutions that are inclusive.

For example, Paung Ku may support a partner to identify and document the causes of fish depletion in their area and hold a community meeting with involvement of the women in their community to develop a strategy to bring their concerns of water pollution to the owners of a nearby factory. Paung Ku also supports a micro-grant for the partner to visit another organisation in the Delta region that has addressed a similar problem and to introduce the partner to the regional Minister of Environment to raise the issue with the regional government.

OUTCOME DOMAIN 3: CIVIL SOCIETY HAS SPACE TO INFLUENCE DECISION-MAKERS

Paung Ku support will enable partners to create spaces, formal or informal, including physical and institutional spaces where their voices can be heard to influence power holders ("to relate").

Power holders include government officials at different levels, companies in the business sector and other non-state actors.   Paung Ku support contributes to partners developing the core elements for vertical influence --- access to power holders; access to information for evidence-based advocacy; credibility and trust; linkages with others for increased influence; and voice to be heard and hold others accountable.   In this Strategic Framework, focus will be placed on supporting partners to collect and document the evidence needed to influence change

For example, Paung Ku may provide funds through a series of micro-grants for a group of civil society organisations to meet regularly to develop a common platform to provide input into the Environment Protection Law being developed by the government. Paung Ku also links the partner to an international organisation conducting a study on the forest systems in northern Myanmar and assists the organisations to present the results of the study to a

group of Parliamentarians. Subsequently the partner forms a civil society network on environmental protection and the network is invited by the government to participate in the law formulation process.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

PAUNG KU REGULAR PROGRAM

Paung Ku program activities fall under three key areas – (1) reflection and learning, (2) resources and (3) linkages and networking. The activities are closely related and mutually reinforcing. They are implemented by the six Paung Ku program teams. Each program team has three Program Officers led by a Program Coordinator.   Each Paung Ku partner is supported by one focal Program Officer who ensures that the support provided is cohesive and appropriate for the specific partner. The Paung Ku teams also work with external mentors who are individuals from the area and have good understanding of the local situation and/or issue to provide additional mentoring support to some partners.

REFLECTION AND LEARNING

Paung Ku program teams and mentors facilitate reflection and learning among its partners through a mentoring process during a variety of activities: during visits to the partners, visits from the partners to the Paung Ku office, emails and phone calls. Reflection and learning are usually closely linked to the grants provided, although at times partners receive mentoring support without grants.

As described previously, Paung Ku uses an action-reflection model to assist partners to facilitate learning. Partners are supported to analyze their situation and problems that they aim to address. Paung Ku staff raise questions and probe to get partners to explore issues and identify causal patterns and linkages from the information they have; typical questions seek to understand the root causes of the problem, the importance of the problem, the effect on different groups, who the power holders are, who are possible allies, what information is available and what needs to be further collected, what are most effective solutions, and how can these be sustained. In this strategic framework period, a strong emphasis will be on exploring whether any groups are being excluded and ensuring that activities reach those who are marginalized. Based on this, partners are supported to identify solutions and develop plans to address the issues. Following implementation, (with financial and technical resources from Paung Ku if needed), the partners are again supported to reflect on their experience and to adapt their plans as needed. In addition to reflection on the issues and activities, mentoring also assists partners to reflect on their own capacities and how this can be strengthened.

In addition to open-ended meetings and discussions, Paung Ku uses a number of participatory tools to support the reflection process:
- a Participatory Capacity Assessment Tool (pCAT) which involves partners in assessing their own capacities and identify areas for strengthening;
- an end-of project review to assist partners to reflect on the activities they implemented and identify lessons for the future.

Paung Ku will review and improve the above tools based on the new strategic framework.

RESOURCES

Financial resources

Paung Ku provides micro-grants for initiatives that increase the capability of partners to respond to problems faced in their communities or to help strengthen partners through a process of learning-by-doing. The micro-grant projects supported vary widely depending on the local situation and may include support for meetings with stakeholders, awareness raising events, seminars or conferences to develop common positions on new laws or policies, trainings and cross-learning visits, data collection and documentation, strategy development and networking exchanges. Provision of grants is closely linked with provision of other Paung Ku support of reflection and learning, technical resources, and linkages and networking. For example, Paung Ku staff often provide mentoring support to revise a project proposal for a grant or to establish systems for managing human and financial resources linked to the grant.

The majority of grants provided by Paung Ku are micro-grants of an average size of Kyat 5,000,000 for short term activities. In 2015, Paung Ku also began a European Union funded project to provide larger small grants of about Kyat 30,000,000 to support partners which have the capacity to grow and manage longer term projects. At the end of the European Union funded project in 2017, Paung Ku will evaluate this experience and consider whether to continue this scheme.

Grants are managed by the Paung Ku program teams in accordance with guidelines in the Paung Ku Partner Management Manual. The decentralized system of grant management is designed to be responsive in terms of timeliness, the issues addressed and the ability to reach out to remote areas. Paung Ku programme teams know well the issues in their regions and conduct regular reflection exercises to review the situation and assess the relevance of the partners supported. Civil society actors that wish to apply for a grant may submit proposals at any time (except for the EU funded grants). Proposals are reviewed on a continuous basis by the program teams using a Grant Assessment Checklist. Depending on the proposal, Paung Ku teams may provide mentoring support to revise the proposal and can approve grants up to the level of their approval authority (Kyat 7million). Grants of a larger amount are submitted to the Senior Management Team for approval.

Paung Ku gives priority to projects which fit the following criteria.
- **Innovation**: The proposal seeks to address the issue in new ways to be more effective in addressing the problem/needs of the community.
- **Added value**: Paung Ku can provide added value, e.g. proposals which other donors cannot fund due to their sectoral limitations, when a rapid response is needed, to a new group with unproven capacities but strong potential.
- **Strategic opportunities:** The proposal is of a strategic importance, e.g. addresses a tipping point moment.

Technical resources

Paung Ku supports partners to participate in learning platforms such as trainings, seminars, exchange visits and conferences. Learning platforms may be organized by Paung Ku or the partner with funds from a grant, or Paung Ku may support partners to attend learning platforms organized by other stakeholders. Paung Ku is well connected with a wide range of organizations and institutions with different technical expertise in the legal, political, economic and social sectors. Paung Ku partners learn from specialized agencies with technical expertise as well as from each other and from other civil society organisations. The topics covered by the learning platforms

depend on the needs of the partners and the issues emerging within the local and national context. Topics may be related to technical issues of a specific sector or to issues of rights and good governance.

In addition to learning platforms, partners also gain access to technical resources through publications distributed by Paung Ku.

LINKAGES AND NETWORKING

One of Paung Ku's key strengths is its network and linkages with a wide range of civil society actors, individuals within government, regional and international organisations and other stakeholders in the development agenda, and its ability to develop new linkages when needed.

Paung Ku works with more than 250 partners and also has strong links with other civil society actors throughout the country. Through its network, Paung Ku supports partners to form linkages with other civil society actors to promote sharing and collaboration within civil society. Paung Ku is able to help partners from different parts of the country to share information and good practices and learn from each other's experiences. Paung Ku also supports civil society actors to work together to establish formal or informal networks and coalitions to strengthen advocacy efforts to influence policy and practice.

Paung Ku also supports partners to form linkages with external stakeholders including local and international universities, regional and international organisations and policy institutions which have strong technical expertise including in training and research. Through these linkages, a number of collaborative initiatives have been established such as with the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies in Cambodia, Spirit in Education Movement in Thailand, MOSAIC and the University of Mawlamyaing. In addition to technical inputs, such partnerships help to strengthen the profile and credibility of local initiatives. For example, a number of the collaborative initiatives have resulted in the documentation and publication of evidence collected by local communities on issues affecting them; these publications have been used to raise awareness and to support advocacy efforts.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

In addition to its regular program, Paung Ku responds to emergencies created by natural disasters such as cyclones and floods. The experience in Myanmar has shown that local civil society is active and can rapidly mobilize to respond to emergency situations. Paung Ku has supported the coordination of such local responses to carry out initial assessments and ensure delivery of essential support to all affected areas. Paung Ku will build on its past experiences and work with other Myanmar organizations to strengthen local capacities for effective coordinated emergency responses.

Although Paung Ku may use some of its regular resources to respond initially to emergencies, additional resources will be raised for specific emergencies depending on the scale and capacity of Paung Ku and its partners to respond in the particular circumstance.

MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

A new Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework will be developed with Paung Ku staff and partners prior to the start of the new Strategic Framework. The following describes initial ideas for the new framework.

INTERNAL REFLECTION AND LEARNING

Paung Ku sets high priority on being a learning organization that is able to draw on its experiences and is adaptable to a changing environment. Myanmar is a country still undergoing rapid social and political change. The operating environment continues to be dynamic and complex. Although there are more opportunities for civil society to engage, they are often difficult to predict and the time to respond is short. Paung Ku and its partners must constantly monitor the overall environment and the opportunities to respond. In order for civil society to be accountable to the communities they work with, it must be able to adapt and respond to different issues which emerge. Paung Ku and its partners must be able to constantly reflect on the situation on the ground and be ready to respond to the changing circumstances.

Paung Ku's approach for internal learning is built on the same action-reflection model it uses to facilitate learning among its partners. Each regional programme team holds a quarterly reflection meeting to review and plan their work with support from a Senior Programme Coordinator. During the quarterly reflection meetings, teams review the social and political developments in their area, reflect on how they are supporting partners and strategize on their plans for the next quarter. A key area for reflection will be how Paung Ku is progressing towards its expected outcomes guided by the reflection questions on the core elements as identified below.

In addition to team meetings, a joint meeting of all teams is also held every quarter to share information and experiences among the teams as well as to review and reflect on how national level changes in the social and political environment are impacting on Paung Ku and its partners. These meetings provide opportunities to highlight key emerging issues and discuss how Paung Ku and civil society can actively engage and influence these issues. In the past, Paung Ku has highlighted issues such as land grabbing, health impact of coal power plants, hydropower projects, natural resource management, federalism, inter-communal conflict, women's participation in the peace process and special economic zones in these meetings.

The learnings from these various reflection opportunities will be documented and analyzed regularly for learning across areas and the organization over time.

ASSESSING CHANGE

Civil society in Myanmar is very diverse and thus their needs vary significantly depending on their own circumstances. Processes supporting partners to increase their capability thus also vary significantly among different actors and organizations. Furthermore, Paung Ku's experience is that strengthening of the core elements is not a linear process and a group's capacity may change with shifting dynamics and participation of different individuals within the group. There is thus not a fixed model and process for strengthening partners and measuring change must encompass an understanding of both the internal and external environments.

Paung Ku's monitoring system is built on a combination of monitoring quantitative indicators and documenting qualitative changes through a process of reflection and analysis as described below. The indicators and reflection questions identified below will be reviewed following the final evaluation of the 2013-2016 Strategic Framework that will be conducted in July 2016 and that will assess what constitutes success and how to measure it in the context of the Paung Ku programme. Paung Ku will further develop the monitoring and evaluation approach to be used in the Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation Framework which will be developed in the last quarter of 2017

prior to the start of the new Strategic Framework. The detailed Theory of Change, definitions of the indicators, means of data collection and targets for the indicators will also be finalized at that time.

- At the activity level, the programme will monitor a number of *quantitative and qualitative indicators* to track the progress towards achieving outputs over time.
- At the outcome level, the programme will monitor a number of *quantitative indicators and use a set of reflection questions based on the core elements* of a strong civil society to reflect on progress within each of the outcome domains. In addition, appropriate approaches to evaluating outcomes will be identified and embedded in the program cycle at more regular intervals than the typical 'mid-term' and 'end-term' evaluation which are insufficient to support a learn-and-adapt program in rapid change.
- Changes at the impact level will be assessed using innovative evaluation approaches which have been shown to work elsewhere for similar programs and which have gained considerable recognition within the evaluation community in the past decade.

These processes are further described below.

MONITORING ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

The proposed quantitative and qualitative indicators at the activity and output levels are identified below. These will be reviewed and finalized in the new Monitoring and Learning framework that will be developed before the start of the new programme. The Paung Ku teams will collect the data for these indicators and submit monthly reports on the indicators below. The data will be compiled by the Monitoring and Learning team. Paung Ku will compile six monthly reports on the progress of the Paung Ku programme.

Activity area	Indicators
Overview	• No. of partners supported (by state/region) • No. of new partners supported (by state/region)
Reflection and learning	• No. of visits to partners • Examples of how proposals have been revised following mentoring support • No. of partners conducting participatory capacity assessments • Examples of partners identifying actions to increase their capacity • No. of partners carrying out end-of-project reviews • Examples of lessons learnt by partners in end-of-project reviews • No. of publications distributed by type
Resources	• No. of proposals reviewed • No. of new grants signed • Amount of new grants signed • Issues addressed by new grants • No. of participants attending learning platforms with support from Paung Ku • Topics addressed in learning platforms
Linkages and networking	• No. of networking and collaborative initiatives supported • Examples of linkages supported

REFLECTING ON OUTCOMES

The Paung Ku teams will hold quarterly reflection meetings to reflect on the expected outcomes drawing on examples and case studies of partners supported during the quarter. The following are examples of reflection questions that can be used to assess changes in a partner. The reflection questions are based on the core elements and the list below is indicative and not exhaustive. In addition, the teams will regularly collect data on the indicators identified.

In addition, appropriate evaluation approaches will be identified including a strong focus on analyzing and interpreting existing data and collecting additional data where needed. Programs, such as the Paung Ku program, that need to adapt regularly to changing needs and contexts, need to be supported by evaluation approaches that 'run along' the program and thus, the intent is to embed evaluation more firmly in the program.

Outcome domain	Reflection questions
Civil society is capable to organize and use resources effectively *Core elements:* • **Linkages with and involvement of the community,** with strong downward accountability • **Dynamic, capable and committed members** • **Participatory leadership and decision-making** • **Accountable and transparent processes for mobilizing and management resources**	*Indicators* • Number of partners supported to strengthen participatory processes for decision-making and involvement of members • Number of partners supported to strengthen downward accountability and community involvement *Reflection questions* • How is the partner involving the community in identifying issues and solutions? How is the community involved in the partner's activities? How is the partner sharing information about its plans and achievements with the community? • Who are the members within the partner? How are they involved? • How are decisions made within the partner? Are they transparent and fair? • How are plans made and monitored? • How does the partner mobilize resources? • How does the partner manage its financial resources? Is financial information shared among members? What internal controls are in place? • How are tasks shared among members/staff? • How has Paung Ku supported the partner in the above areas?
Civil society is capable to analyze and apply learnings to address social injustices *Core elements:* • **Vision and values** based on justice, rights, equity and peace • **Diversity and inclusiveness of marginalized populations** • **Access to technical knowledge** of the issues addressed • **Analysis and learning, innovation and adaptation** • **Linkages with other actors** for	*Indicators* • Number of partners whose projects address the needs of marginalized communities • Number of partners who apply the concepts, ideas, techniques, knowledge and skills gained from participation in learning platforms attended *Reflection questions* • What is the partner's vision and values? How do they relate to principles of justice, rights, equity and peace? • How is the partner working with different groups within the community? Is the partner reaching and involving marginalized communities? How is it promoting diversity and inclusiveness? • How does the partner access the technical knowledge and skills on

Outcome domain	Reflection questions
learning	• the issues it is working on? • How are partners drawing on past experiences to improve their interventions? What innovative ways has the partner found to address the problems? • How is the partner collaborating with other stakeholders share learnings? • How has Paung Ku supported partners in the above areas?
Civil society has space to influence decision-makers *Core elements:* • **Access to power holders** • **Access to information** for evidence-based advocacy • **Credible and trusted** • **Linkages with others** for increased influence • **Voice** to be heard and to hold others accountable	*Indicators* • No. of partners who engage with power holders, including government, private sector and non-state armed group actors, to advocate for issues faced • No. of partners who collect information and data for evidence-based advocacy • No. of partners who make public statements on issues of concern *Reflection questions* • How is the partner engaging with power holders? • Is the partner collecting evidence from the community to inform its advocacy initiatives? How are it documenting and using he evidence? • How is the partner perceived by power holders? How has the partner been able to gain the recognition of power holders? • How is the partner networking or collaborating with others to increase its voice? • How is the partner finding ways to amplify its voice? • How has Paung Ku supported partners in the above areas?

EVALUATING IMPACT

Paung Ku will carry out external evaluations to assess the impact, draw lessons and provide recommendations to Paung Ku to strengthen its program.   The evaluations will aim to provide an independent assessment of the program.

The evaluation approach to be used will be identified in the development of the new Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation framework. As noted above, Paung Ku will seek to use evaluation approaches that are appropriate to the adaptive nature of the Paung Ku program. Such approaches seek embed evaluations to 'run along' the program rather than the traditional mid-term and end-term time points.   Particular methods that will be considered for their suitability to evaluating the Paung Ku program may include: collaborative outcome reporting, outcome harvesting, outcome mapping, contribution analysis, developmental evaluation[3]. [Note: 'outcomes' are used as a broad term here and may include 'intermediate results' and 'impacts'.]

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[3] Information on these methods are available from the Better Evaluation website www.betterevaluation.org.

Specific evaluation questions will be identified early on in the implementation of the new strategic framework, based on the Paung Ku Theory of Change, so that data needs are identified and can help focus some of the monitoring activities. This will not only maximize the utility of the data collected for program improvement and reflecting on progress on the way, but also help to reduce the amount of additional data that needs to be collected to answer impact-related evaluation questions. The information needs will be regularly re-assessed and revised as needed.

RISK ANALYSIS

Paung Ku is in the process of developing a risk management policy. At present, risks are identified and monitored by the Senior Management Team with input provided from the Board. The risk management policy will establish procedures for maintaining a risk register with clear responsibilities for identifying, assessing and monitoring different areas of risk.

The following risks and mitigation strategies have been identified by Paung Ku for this Strategic Framework.

EXTERNAL RISKS

That the new government is reluctant to engage with civil society actors and limits their involvement in legal and policy formulation and monitoring processes
- *Likelihood*: Low, Impact: High.
- *Mitigation*: Paung Ku will continuously monitor the overall operating environment as well as the space for civil participation in specific issues. Paung Ku and its partners will seek opportunities to increase the understanding of government representatives of the role of civil society in a democratic system. The Paung Ku Board has extensive experience in engaging with the government, including with current NLD representatives, and will work together with other civil society actors to lobby for recognition of the role of civil society.

That civil society splits and stagnates due to new socio-political developments and/or deep-seated divisions in Myanmar society
- *Likelihood:* Low, Impact: High.
- *Mitigation:* Within this Strategic Framework, Paung Ku will highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion. Paung Ku will seek to bring together and support civil society actors to share their views and concerns in order to overcome these divisions and build tolerance for a pluralistic society that is respectful of diversity. The Paung Ku Board and senior management will monitor Paung Ku partners and staff to ensure that they do not inadvertently exacerbate these problems.

INTERNAL RISKS

That Paung Ku staff become overstretched as the social, political and economic transition intensifies and demands for urgent immediate responses multiply in a wide range of sectors
- *Likelihood*: Medium, Impact: Medium
- *Mitigation*: Paung Ku will seek to maintain the same level of programming over the Strategic Framework period and will not increase the number of partners supported. However, work with partners may become more intensive; if so, Paung Ku will consider expanding its programme teams to take on the additional workload. Paung Ku will also review its systems to help staff better manage their workload. Supervisors will

monitor the workload and welfare of staff and ensure that staff take advantage of Paung Ku leave benefits to attend to their personal and development needs. Paung Ku will also plan opportunities for staff team building and relaxation such as during all team meetings.

That the system of decentralized grant management and partner support by regional program teams leads to disparate projects which have limited impact on broader social change

- *Likelihood*: Low, Impact: Medium
- *Mitigation***:** Paung Ku will hold quarterly meetings of all teams in order to reflect on the overall social, political and economic developments in the country and share experiences among program teams in order to promote shared learning and analysis by the regional teams. Teams will be encouraged to adapt the learnings to their own situations while maintaining the relevance and coherence of the overall program. The Paung Ku Program Manager and Senior Program Coordinators will lead this process.

That Paung Ku's lack of sectoral focus leads to responses that are not technically rigorous and so lack credibility and impact.

- *Likelihood*: Low, Impact: Medium
- *Mitigation*: Paung Ku has a large network and is well connected with both national and international organisations with strong technical expertise and links partners to these organisations to provide technical support. Furthermore, although Paung Ku staff are not technical experts, they have a good understanding of many of the issues addressed by Paung Ku partners through their participation in workshops and seminars on these issues. Paung Ku staff are thus able to guide partners to seek additional technical expertise when needed.

That financial resources are lost through mismanagement or fraud by local organisations

- *Likelihood:* Medium, Impact: Medium
- *Mitigation:* Paung Ku has an anti-fraud, anti-corruption and whistleblowing policy to encourage detection of fraud. All partners and Paung Ku staff are oriented to the new policies with a clear emphasis on zero tolerance for fraud by the Paung Ku Board and management. In addition, the Paung Ku finance and field program teams provide training and support to Paung Ku partners to develop internal controls and systems for financial management.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Paung Ku program is implemented by six regional program teams. Each team has three Program Officers and is led by one Program Coordinator. The overall program is managed by a Program Manager and three Senior Program Coordinators; each Senior Program Coordinator manages two program teams. The program is decentralized and decision-making on activities with partners are delegated to the level closest to the partners with clearly defined limits on levels of authority. The Program Manager and Senior Program Coordinators provide management and coordination to support reflection and ensure quality and consistency of the program. The organization is led by the Executive Director who provides overall leadership and is one of the leading members of civil society at the national level.

A Monitoring and Learning team is responsible for supporting the program teams in collating and analyzing data submitted by the program teams. The Monitoring and Learning team is also responsible for preparing six-monthly

and annual reports of the Paung Ku program. A Communications Officer supports the development of internet-based and print materials and publications.

The program team is backed by a strong finance team which provides support for management of Paung Ku finances as well as for support to partners in financial management of grants. In addition to the central finance team, a Finance Officer/Assistant is attached to each regional program team to manage the grants and assist partners in establishing/strengthening financial procedures for proper use and control of funds.

An administration team provides administrative, logistical, information technology and human resource management support for the program.

PROPOSED BUDGET

The five year projected budget for the 2017-2021 Strategic Framework is shown below. The total estimated cost of the five year program is $12,137,340. Paung Ku seeks to maintain the same level of programming over the five years with modest growth in the budget to account for inflation and some internal growth in areas such as documentation and communications. Detailed annual budgets will be developed each year.

Budget Items	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Total	Percentage
Program	1,331,000	1,294,260	1,358,973	1,426,922	1,498,268	6,909,422	57%
Program Personnel	532,080	564,005	592,205	621,815	652,906	2,963,011	24%
Office Running Cost	125,840	156,011	163,811	172,002	180,602	798,266	7%
Core Support Personnel	141,840	150,350	157,868	165,761	174,049	789,869	7%
Management Fees	66,311	66,847	70,189	73,699	77,384	354,429	3%
Travel	27,600	29,256	30,719	32,255	33,867	153,697	1%
Equipment	40,000	19,610	20,591	21,620	0	101,821	1%
Audit	12,000	12,720	13,356	14,024	14,725	66,825	1%
	2,276,671	2,293,059	2,407,712	2,528,097	2,631,801	12,137,340	100%

VALUE FOR MONEY

Paung Ku operates with a program approach where donor funds are pooled in support of the overall Paung Ku program as described in this Strategic Framework. Funds from different donors thus reinforce each other and work together to increase the possible impact from any one donor's funds standing alone. This generates greater value for money for each donor's funds.

As an organisation that evolved from being a consortium project under Save the Children, Paung Ku has been able to adapt and develop strong programmatic and financial management systems which can meet the due diligence requirements of international donor organisations. At the same time, Paung Ku works with a local cost structure that does not require high salaries and international management support costs.

The majority of Paung Ku's funding is channeled to Paung Ku partners for grants and learning events. About 57% of the budget is allocated to grants to partners and to support learning by partners through meetings, workshops, cross-learning and exposure visits and mentoring. Overhead costs (for finance and administrative support staff, office running costs and equipment) amounts to 15% of the overall budget. A high percentage of funds are thus passed through to the communities and civil society actors. Paung Ku provides an effective mechanism for reaching a large number of small partners in different parts of the country.