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**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

RESEARCH REPORT

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES AND CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE

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Authors: Nilar Myaing and Khine Win

“Research Report on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and Civil Society Space”

1. Background & Rationale

The role of civil society as independent development partner for effective development cooperation was acknowledged at high-level forum on development effectiveness held in Accra, Ghana in 2008. Since that time and within 3 years of consultative processes and various levels of meetings among civil society organizations (CSOs), through global CSO-led Open Forum, thousands of CSOs took part to define principles and practices that should shape their effectiveness in development as distinct, diverse and independent development actors¹. One of the important outcomes of these initiatives was what we now call “Istanbul Principles on CSO development effectiveness” as civil society organizations reached a global consensus on these principles in Istanbul, Turkey in 2010 June. Subsequently, CSO framework for development effectiveness was adopted in Siem Riep, Cambodia in 2011. These principles and framework serve as standards and guidelines for CSOs in carrying out their various functions as independent development partners. At the fourth High Level Forum (HLF) on development effectiveness held in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2011, CSOs were invited for the first time to participate on equal basis with government and donors. At that HLF, principles of development effectiveness cooperation were agreed upon by more than 160 countries and 50+organizations². One of the principles is inclusive development partnerships and in order to monitor the implementation of these principles at country level, 10 indicators were developed with the agreement of all partners and indicator 2 states “Civil society operates within an environment which maximizes its engagement in and contribution to development”. These principles mentioned above ensure one way or another “enabling environment for CSOs particularly their ability to engage with other development partners through multi-stakeholder platforms.

¹ Better Aid, 2012, From Accra to Busan: CSO Initiatives to Strengthen Development Effectiveness.

² Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation(GPEDC), Principles: retrieved from <http://effectivecooperation.org/about/principles/>.

In addition, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development explicitly gives emphasis on the importance of partnership by putting goal 17 in Sustainable Development Goals which states “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”. Therefore, in 2015 and 2016, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and Swiss NGO Platform has conducted joint learning process on “Enabling Environment for Civil Society” in order to define their role more accurately in order to support civil society in Global South to be able to engage with relevant development partners effectively. Honduras and Laos case-studies were discussed in the Joint Learning Event in Switzerland and concrete measures to support civil society were decided. One of the measures discussed was the use of MSI for promoting and strengthening local civil society in policy dialogue³.

Furthermore, above-mentioned Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) Monitoring Framework’s indicator 2 is based on four modules and module1 is “Space for Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSI)” which addresses the importance of space for CSOs to engage in multi-stakeholder dialogues at different levels⁴. In a way, MSI are seen as platforms for contributing to enabling environment for civil society. However, much more in-depth analysis in selected countries needs to be conducted in order to gain more insight about MSI which contribute to creating enabling environment for civil society and the ways donors and INGOs can support MSI to protect and promote enabling environment for civil society. That’s why, SDC and Swiss NGO Platform propose to do second round of in-depth analysis in Myanmar and other selected countries⁵.

By conducting this second round of in-depth analysis, it is expected that SDC and Swiss NGO Platform in selected countries will understand more about issues and obstacles which are hindering civil society to engage with government and private sector (in some cases) for effective development cooperation and policy change.

Furthermore, above-mentioned GPEDC Monitoring Framework’s indicator 2 is based on four modules and module1 is “Space for Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSI)” which addresses the importance of space for CSOs to engage in multi-stakeholder dialogues at different levels⁶. In a way, MSI are seen as platforms for contributing to enabling environment for civil society. However, much more in-depth analysis in selected countries needs to be conducted in order to gain more insight about MSI which

³ SDC, Swiss NGO Platform, 20 March 2018, Research on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and Civil Society Space: Terms of Reference, p1.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ SDC, Swiss NGO Platform, 20 March 2018, Research on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and Civil Society Space: Terms of Reference, p2.

⁶ Ibid

contribute to creating enabling environment for civil society and the ways donors and INGOs can support MSI to protect and promote enabling environment for civil society. That's why, SDC and Swiss NGO Platform propose to do second round of in-depth analysis in Myanmar and other selected countries⁷.

By conducting this second round of in-depth analysis, it is expected that SDC and Swiss NGO Platform in selected countries will understand more about issues and obstacles which are hindering civil society to engage with government and private sector (in some cases) for effective development cooperation and policy change. Furthermore, the research shall identify best practices and challenges of donor agencies and INGO related to the promotion of an enabling environment for local CSO.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The assessment started with the working hypothesis that the inclusion of civil society stakeholders in multi-stakeholder initiatives, good quality of the dialogue and decision making and accountability of follow-up in these MSI lead to a more enabling environment for civil society. Overall objective of this study is to **better understand the relevance of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSI) for strengthening civil society space, and to identify ways how donor agencies and INGOs can make best use of these initiatives for defending, promoting and strengthening an Enabling Environment for Civil Society.** More specifically, the study report

- mapped existing MSI supported by Swiss Development Corporation and Swiss NGO in Myanmar;
- analysed selected MSI in terms of their quality and thus potential for contributing to more civil society space; and
- provided recommendations to SDC and Swiss NGOs how to effectively use MSI for protecting and promoting civil society space.

Methodology

Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and Helvetas – Myanmar invited the consultants for briefing in the first place. With the inputs of Swiss NGOs and SDC, the consultants compiled an overview about existing MSI and prepared outline of report. In consultation with SDC and Swiss NGO, three MSI were selected for the assessment to understand the relevance of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSI) for strengthening civil society space, and to identify ways how they can make best use of these initiatives for defending, promoting and strengthening an Enabling Environment for Civil Society. Three selected MSI are 1) Fishery Co-Management in Gulf of Mottama, 2) Public Consultation of Agriculture Development Strategy and 3) The Myanmar Health Sector Coordinating Committee (M-

⁷ SDC, Swiss NGO Platform, 20 March 2018, Research on Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and Civil Society Space: Terms of Reference, p2.

HSCC). The first one is a multi-stakeholder coordination (MSC) in the frame of the SDC “Gulf of Mottama Project” which is implemented by the Swiss NGO (Helvetas) and partners at local and regional level. The second one is multi-stakeholder dialogue (MSD) for national level agriculture development strategy. The CSO engagement in this process was led by Food Security Working Group supported by LIFT fund where SDC is one of the donors at all states and regions. The last one is a national level health sector coordinating committee formed with all relevant constituencies and the SDC is one of the major donors of 3MDG Fund which is the main supporter of the M-HSCC.

Interviewed actors for three MSI include:

- 1) Fishery Co-Management: Head of Fishers Development Association of Thahton, Belin and Kyaikhto Townships in Mon State, Gulf of Mottama Project Leader of Network Activities Group (NAG) based in Thahton and Project Manager of Helvetas, Mon State and Chief Executive Officer of NAG;
- 2) Agriculture Development Strategy: Head of Agriculture and Food Security Domain, SDC, Executive Director of Land Core Group (LCG), Chief Executive Officer of NAG, Coordinator and Project Manager of FSWG, Civil Society Partnership Officer of LIFT Fund and Farmers’ Organizations in Magway region;
- 3) Myanmar – Health Sector Coordinating Committee: Health Adviser, DFID, SDC, Director of Marie Stopes International, Executive Director of Pyi Gyi Khin, Chairperson of Myanmar Positive Group and Director of Phoenix.

Most of the interviews were face-to-face but a few telephone interviews included in this assessment due to the busy schedules of interviewed participants or the locations of their offices.

3. Civil Society Space in Myanmar

Observers are saying that civil society space in Myanmar is shrinking or undergoing profound changes due to multiple transitions⁸. However, when one talks about civil society space in Myanmar, one must look at civil society from different dimensions. Among them, three looms large. The first is legal/regulatory environment for civil society, the second developmental and the third political.

Myat Thu (2018) pointed out in his paper “Civic Space in Myanmar”⁹ that although, after NLD government came to power in 2016, many repressive laws were abolished to safeguard personal freedoms, civic space in Myanmar is still vulnerable due to 2008 Constitution. There are many clauses in

⁸ Stephen Bachtold, 2017, *An Eclipse of Myanmar Civil Society*: Heinrich Boll Stiftung; EU/Altair, 2017, *Summary of the Assessment of the EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in Myanmar*.

⁹ Myat Thu (Yangon School of Political Science), 2018, *Civic Space in Myanmar*, p109-116 in *Civic Space in Asia: Emerging Issues and Policy Lessons from Six Asian Countries*; Asia Democracy Research Network, March 2018

2008 Constitution which restrict individual freedoms by stipulating that exercise of these freedoms must not violate existing laws. In addition, although 2014 Association Registration Law (ARL) allows voluntary registration, civil society organizations which want to register must pass through cumbersome registration process such as counterpart ministry's endorsement and application must be submitted to Ministry of Home Affairs which is under Commander in Chief. Time of reviewing for approval is very long and applicant does not have the right to appeal for denial of registration. Myat Thu, in his paper, quoted many activists from labor unions, youth groups and peace movement as saying that they have faced a lot of difficulties in registering their organizations. Inability to get association registration will prevent civil society organizations from opening official bank accounts which will lead to disqualification for applying funding from international donors. These examples are related to legal/regulatory framework for civil society which restrict its space for engaging in civic, developmental and political activities particularly formal engagement with government in contentious policy and right issues.

However, developmental and service delivery CSOs face less restrictions and difficulties for registration and implementing activities. According to one interviewee¹⁰, exponential growth of registered NGOs/CSOs has occurred within past two years and this number increased to more than 3000. The consultants' organization also applied for registration in 2017 and within 6 months it received it although it had to pass through cumbersome submission procedures. In the past, Ministry of Home Affairs might accept registration applications but only selected CSOs had received registrations. Many CSOs saw it as previous government's co-optation strategy to contain and use CSOs for their political legitimacy. The main reason for applying registration by CSOs particularly developmental ones is NLD government's legitimacy. Most CSOs believed NLD-led government would, as mentioned by Myat Thu in his paper, abolish repressive laws and promote civic freedoms. In return for this, they must be more transparent, more accountable to their constituencies and cooperate with government to address deep-rooted socio-economic problems. Therefore, they applied for registrations. Another reason is to have more access to donors' funding and enhance organizational development. Without having access to donors, it is almost impossible to enhance organizational development and implement activities more transparently, accountably and effectively. That's why, many CSOs have decided to apply for registrations and aim to acquire official status. Some interviewees also explained that relationship with government has improved significantly because ministers are more accessible and participate actively in multi-stakeholder meetings¹¹. He mentioned that previous Health Minister never attended M-HSCC meetings and now M-HSCC members can access, even send SMS messages to the minister any time they want. Another CSO leader explained that Ministry of Agriculture could be considered in the past very closed ministry but now

¹⁰ She is a member of MHSCC and also involved in association registration law and RTI law advocacy network.

¹¹ One is a member of MHSCC and another has engaged with government for Agricultural Development Strategy.

he thinks majority of relevant CSOs can participate in policy dialogues. For that, he wants to commend the Ministry which has sufficient courage to provide space to CSOs. Given these comments and analyses, it can be concluded that civil society space for developmental and service-delivery CSOs has enlarged in the past two years since NLD came to power although multi-stakeholder policy dialogues are not perfect and need improvement.

When talking about shrinking civic space in Myanmar, the most affected civil society organizations are political ones. Although CSOs can exist without registration in accordance with 2014 ARL, many CSOs have recently complained that the situation on the ground is registration is required in many instances such as holding meetings/workshops and demanded by General Administration Department's (GAD) officials who have authority to approve such events and venue owners. Rights-based organizations are protesting and expressing their disapproval on Peaceful Assembly and Procession Law which is being amended by NLD government and it only needs to be approved by Pyithu Hluttaw. As mentioned by Myat Thu in his paper, NLD government had amended this law in 2016 and got rid of two most abusive practices of charging protesters months and years after the protests and in multiple townships (2018, p111). However, NLD government's recent attempt to amend it again is being met by strong protestations from various groups and even its own members of parliaments¹² mainly because of its controversial Article-4 and Section-19 which defines the violations in very vague and broad terms and sentence the protestors to up to 3 years in prison. If it is enacted, it will considerably restrict the activities of rights-based groups which are involved in land confiscation issues, labor rights, environmental degradations due to unscrupulous mining and extraction of natural resources and other social movements. Without them, substantive policy change will most probably not materialize and policy dialogues between government, private sector and civil society will not be considered as legitimate and credible. Section 66-D of Telecommunication Law, Unlawful Association Act and Official Secret Act restrict substantially freedom of expression and media freedom. Under these laws, several journalists have been arrested and charged.

Hence, from these findings, one can conclude that although civic space for developmental and service delivery NGOs has enlarged or improved markedly, space for political and rights-based civil society has been shrinking and can get worse if proposed Peaceful Assembly Law is approved by Lower House.

4. Analysis of Selected MSI

¹² (<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/upper-house-lawmakers-object-changes-peaceful-assembly-law.html>;
<https://www.mmtimes.com/news/activists-intensify-protests-against-peaceful-assembly-law.html>)

a) Fishery Co-management

Fishery co-management in Gulf of Mottama was a multi-stakeholders collaboration among local communities, village development committees, fishery groups, different government authorities at local level and regional government with the support of consortium members of the Gulf of Mottama Project (GoMP). In response to depleting freshwater fish stocks which are crucial for their livelihoods, ninety like-minded fishers from three villages located in Gulf of Motta formed a local fishers group in mid-2017. They got contact with GoMP, a consortium project led by Helvetas Myanmar together with a local NGO, Network Activities Group (NAG) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in partnership with Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA) with the goal of the equitable and sustainable management of the natural resources of the Gulf of Mottama (GoM) particularly the fisheries resources.

Within about a year, Fishers Development Association (FDA) becomes a district level association with altogether 726 members (May, 2018) from three townships (Thaton, Bilin and Kyaikto). FDA is a leading group for co-management of fisheries resources at local level as well as an advocacy organization for specific local needs in their areas. FDA is raising awareness to peer fishers on fisheries resources management related to rules and regulations of fishing and state level fishery law. Besides, they help the government collect taxes from fishers on behalf of the government. Besides, they also take responsibility to patrol their areas in coordination with local authorities and General Administration Department.

Success stories of FDA include 1) approval as a co-management fishery protection zone by Mon State Government, 2) designation of the northern part of the Gulf of Mottama as a Ramsar site at the mouth of the Sittaung River stretching along the eastern shore of the estuary in the Kyaikto and Bilin Townships 3) revision of Mon State freshwater Fish Law in consultation with key stakeholders including directly affected fishermen and 4) significant increase of fingerlings within a short time. FDA felt that this MSI turned out to be successful with the guidance and support of Head of Regional Fishery Department who is also the Secretary of State Fishery Development Committee. Helvetas, NAG and IUCN took a facilitating and networking role to empower the local CBO to be able to influence the policies and decisions of regional government.

Key factors behind the success of this MSI are 1) committed change agent at local level who passionately likes to address community problems; 2) strategic direction provided by the Head of Department of Fishery and 3) team synergy of GoMP who have different skills sets including strong advocacy skills and technical knowledge available to scale up the success of this MSI.

Analysis

- This multi-stakeholders collaboration is a perfect case study for community mobilization as well as for advocacy at regional level.

Loss of livelihood is the main concern of local community in Gulf of Mottama area. GoM project's goal coincided with their needs and with the support of GoMP, local community could successfully share their local problems to regional government as well as fishery department. According to this case study, local community seems to have **ownership** of the issue they addressed. They are looking for the outside group which can build capacity to solve their community problem as well as to **link up** with the authorities which can help them change the current environment. Fortunately, the time coincided with regional government's interest to raise local tax income. By chance, regional parliamentarians of these townships actively support too. In addition to these, Head of Mon State Fishery Department at that time supported local fishers group to reach to the goal they wanted. As a result, local fishers group nowadays becomes Fishers Development Association (FDA) at district level and an officially recognized civil society entity in the eyes of Mon State regional government.

- There are so many takeaway points from this successful MSI model. Balanced combination of political interest of regional government to be able to raise local tax income in fishery sector, local fishermen's critical issue to manage depleting freshwater fish stocks and willingness and strong administrative capacity of Head of fishery department shapes the success story of fishery co-management in that region. Project Manager of GoMP shared his experience how he improved the relationship with regional cabinet members as well as with Fishery Department and General Administration Department (GAD). He highlighted the fact that when they did advocacy, they never pushed so hard beyond the capacity and interest of the minister. When dealing with difficult and important group, GAD in this case, he advised to identify the one who could give orders to them rather than dealing with them directly. Right timing is very important according to him. Before policy window opened, he built good relationship with respective authorities by sharing information regularly. Regular meeting and regular information sharing to the authorities can build trust and good relationship. Technical support and accompaniment of NAG which could bring a replicable model from Ayeyarwady delta after Nargis contribute much for this success. Last but not least, committed and dedicated community leader with his group is the key for this remarkable MSC.
- Although fishery co-management as multi-stakeholders collaboration effort in Mon State is currently a great success, **sustainability** of the effort is still questionable. As mentioned before, with the blessings of leadership of Mon State Fishery Committee, fishery co-management could happen. Recently, Head of Mon State Fishery Department was transferred to other region and FDA need to rebuild relationship with the new Head. At the same time, under democratic government, the government may change every five years. Whenever the new government changes, it is unrealistic for advocacy groups to start advocacy efforts from zero again. Staff turnover rate in the FDA is high and

when capable staff left, the FDA has to train new staff again. The FDA itself is a good example of the situation of community based organizations in Myanmar.

b) Agriculture Development Strategy (Multi-stakeholders Dialogue)

Public consultation of agriculture development strategy (ADS) was initiated by Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MoALI) in early 2017 as the grant funding requirement of Global Agriculture and Food Security Program. Food Security Working Group (FSWG) was assigned to take the leading role for public consultation process of ADS in Agricultural Sector Technical Working Group meeting in April, 2017. This multi-stakeholders dialogue was led by organizing team formed with ADS technical expert, 25 staff from Department of Agriculture trained in Nay Pyi Taw and FSWG staff. Altogether 17 consultation workshops were organized in 14 states and regions of Myanmar plus one in Nay Pyi Taw and three in Shan State (Southern, Northern and Eastern Shan States). Average number of participants in each area is 150 and participants are from regional government, parliament, farmer groups, FSWG member organizations and non-members from each region and private sector. According to FSWG, about 200 CSOs from all over the country joined the workshops. Farmers and animal husbandry groups from different regions also joined the workshop.

Although Food Security Working Group (FSWG) had to take leading role for public consultation, the group had not enough resources prepared for consultation process. FSWG admitted that they were not well-prepared for the consultation and this initiative was the first ever collaboration between FSWG and the staff from Department of Agriculture. Furthermore, MoALI expected to finish consultation process in two months. With all these pressures, FSWG had to leave their daily activities and work plan behind to organize consultation workshops in 17 areas. Unsurprisingly, some CSOs complained that documents translated into Myanmar language were not the same as mentioned in English version. Some CSOs questioned representation of relevant actors of ADS and some were not satisfied with the way the consultation was organized. Some key interest groups could not participate in the workshop because of their prior commitments. In addition, according to interviewed stakeholders, consultation was so packed with presentations that only small room left for discussions. However, participants of the workshop shared their concerns and inputs as much as they could within available time in the workshop.

The biggest question of most participating agencies in this dialogue is how all inputs from consultative meetings were integrated in the fourth draft of agriculture development strategy. Executive Director of LCG highlights the point that technical expert who is the key player of ADS is a retired person and he had no power to go beyond internal politics of the ministry. Interviewed CSO leader gave comment that there was no feedback and tracking whether ADS was revised integrating inputs from the consultation workshops or not. Food Security Working Group (FSWG) also could not follow up how

their great efforts within two months ended up in the next draft of ADS. But they stressed that technical expert was capable enough to incorporate inputs from consultation workshops into the policy in Agriculture Development Strategy.

Although it was a donor-driven process or the government owned initiative, interviewed participants from Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), Land Core Group (LCG), Food Security Working Group and one local NGO which involved in the dialogue unanimously agree that the government had to open space for inputs in drafting process of the most important agriculture development strategy which could affect about 70% population of the people living in rural areas.

Key stakeholders at regional level could learn about agriculture development strategy which can have significant impacts for them. Regional CSOs got to know one another in the workshop. FSWG's visibility became higher not only among regional CSOs who were not FSWG members including farmer groups but also regional governments and parliaments. 17 public consultation workshops could be organized successfully all over the country within two months. Generally speaking, this dialogue could also be assumed as the first-time confidence building exercise between MoALI and their key stakeholders even if the process and result of the dialogue did not look perfect.

Analysis

- This dialogue is a ground breaking move of the MoALI. The ministry did not have such an experience dealing with their key stakeholders or never showed willingness to listen to the voices of their stakeholders in the past. MoALI opened the consultation allowing FSWG to invite anyone interested and no one was intentionally excluded. In some areas, individual farmers and private sector people also joined the event. At regional level, there was no such multi-stakeholders event organized by regional government or parliament.
- Time limitation given to finish all public consultation workshops and time allocation provided for discussion in the workshop are the key issues that affected the quality of the consultation. Areas to be discussed in ADS are so broad and diverse. Actual workshop period is only one day followed by focus group discussions with private sector. It was impossible to expect active and meaningful participation of all key stakeholders.
- The procedure, time, resources, ways of consultation as well as incorporation of the inputs from CSOs need to be improved. The strategy has already been drafted. The consultation was organized with the third draft. In theory, public consultation must have come first before the first draft was developed. The quality of the dialogue was seriously questionable.
- Instead of judging the quality of this MSI, the ministry should be praised for opening the space for CSO as Executive Director of Land Core Group said. It is an evolutionary process and along the way, it is possible to take corrective actions. Under civilian government, voices of the people like to be

responded although the system is still weak and responses are ad hoc. Such public consultation workshop can make better relationship and help understand each other.

c) Myanmar Health Sector Coordinating Committee (M-HSCC)

The Myanmar Health Sector Coordinating Committee is a national coordinating body for all public health sector issues of the country. M-HSCC is also the official health sector coordination group under Development Assistance Coordination Unit (DACU). Originally, it was established as Myanmar Country Coordination Team and later called Country Coordination Mechanism (M-CCM) around 2002-2003 as the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) requirement for three diseases (Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS) fund. Since the beginning, Global Fund asked the M-CCM to give seats for civil society organizations (CSOs). At that time, the government included INGOs, LNGOs and Government sponsored NGOs as the donor's requirement without allowing real participation. Global Fund left Myanmar in 2005 and when it returned back in 2009, representation of different stakeholders was requested and civil society organizations got more seats in the M-CCM. Later, private sector groups such as private hospital and pharmaceutical groups were also invited to join the platform. In 2011, the M-CCM was transformed into Myanmar Health Sector Coordination Committee acting as a catalyzer to aid the country in all public health sector issues. The Committee is comprised of all major constituencies in the health sector chaired by the Minister of Health and Sports.

This platform is a well-established institutionalized platform run by a Secretariat hosted by UNAIDS. The committee has a shared, agreed common purpose with clear and realistic objectives and a work plan. Together with the government officials, UN and donor agencies, international financing institution, representatives from INGOs, National NGOs, Community based or Faith based Organizations, Private Sector, Direct beneficiaries groups (Disabled group, People living with or affected by diseases) and academic constituency are included in the Committee. (Please see detailed structure and governance manual in www.myanmarhsc.org) The committee is supported by various sub-committees, technical working groups and ad hoc teams as needed. Sub-working group and technical strategy groups have meetings before the M-HSCC.

As the M-HSCC is originated from the M-CCM which was formed as a requirement of GFATM and these diseases are still problematic in the country, the meeting was sometimes overwhelmed with funding issues of these diseases until now. Sometimes, meeting participants were frustrated because time spent for important topics such as health system strengthening did not have enough time. CSO representatives get five or ten minutes to give community update and space for CSO is minimal in the meeting. However, if there is any burning issue of their constituency they want to raise to the high level officials, they can approach them informally on the meeting day. As CSO representatives sometimes

made high level visit together with government officials and could build relationship for advocacy. In addition, when they want to do any activity at regional level, they get full support from Department of Health as the representative of the M-HSCC because state level health personnel know that the CSOs have direct access to the minister of MoHS in the meeting.

Therefore, CSO representatives feel that they can use this platform to get things done. All interviewed participants generally agreed that the M-HSCC is an effective multi-stakeholders platform for health policy and health sector issues in the country. As it has a secretariat and technical working group to support the functions of M-HSCC to be effective, efficient and productive, the committee is functioning well. Key achievements of this MSI include stronger donor coordination on health sector, responsive and effective funding mechanism which can reach to needy areas and implementation of health projects and programs with full transparency and accountability. The committee could discuss national health plan effectively and National Health Plan is one of the outcomes of the MSI.

Analysis

- The M-HSCC is a functioning coordinating body with clear and comprehensive governance manual. The platform invites all multi-stakeholders involved in health sector and these constituencies require representatives to be elected formally. Because of the comprehensive support from Global Fund and other donors, the Committee has enough human and technical resources with sub-working groups and technical strategy groups . The platform is well-established and well informed. With newly developed e-government system, almost all the information about the M-HSCC including meeting minutes is available on line.
- The M-HSCC could open the civic space related to health sector. Everyone assured that the voices of CSOs were heard and they could send complaints to the decision makers using this platform. Using this legitimacy, representatives from CSOs can organize health forum or form health network effectively. One positive externality of this platform is that relationship built in this high level committee can be used for other advocacy efforts and some CSO leaders are empowered to be advocacy champions for enabling environment of civil society in other sectors. One concrete example is while advocating for new association registration law in 2012, member CSO representatives of the M-HSCC could significantly support advocacy efforts using their good relationship with Director General of General Administration Department which is the focal department for association registration.
- One CSO representative from the M-HSCC shared that he raised the concerns of his constituency in sub-working group but nothing happened but he did not see any outcome or feedback of his complaints. His legitimacy in the constituency is questionable because he cannot be accountable to

them or responsive to their concerns. So also, some CSO representatives from the M-HSCC meeting just joined the meeting for the sake of attending without active or meaningful participation because of lack of understanding of real essence of this M-HSCC, their limited capacity, hierarchy or inadequate data from their constituencies. In the past, the Secretariat used to have community strengthening program and invited participation of CSOs explaining about functions of the M-HSCC. Sometimes, they used to organize the CSOs to get inputs for the technical strategy groups. Nowadays, they did not have such community strengthening program. CSO representatives especially from People live with/affected by diseases or marginalized group felt that they still needed presentation, negotiation and advocacy skills to participate effectively in the M-HSCC.

The M-HSCC organized oversight visit once a year. The area selected for the visit is fortunate to get all necessary health assistance because the CSOs there can raise all the issues they feel concerned and health officials respond their requests in short time. But such response is ad hoc and the situation of other areas remains the same. In other words, such type of ad hoc actions taken based on the field trip contradicts to the mandate of the platform to strengthen national health system. In this sense, the mission and mandate of the M-HSCC as a policy coordinating body on public health issues are questionable.

5. Key Observations and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the assessment of three MSIs and analysis, the following observations are made:

1) **Successful factors** from the case studies:

- ✓ Trust between government and CSO actors.

Ways to reach this: develop personal relations; regular information sharing; joint field visits; joint exposure trips

- ✓ Mutual benefits.

In the case of the fishery co management the benefit for the local fishery associations are increased catch, benefit for the government is increased tax collection

- ✓ Donor requirements / conditionalities

Donor pressure can serve as an initial door opener to create MSI. Example: ADS.

- ✓ Institutionalization of the MSI

A well-functioning MSI needs transparent documentation (e.g. a well-accessible website) and a sufficiently capacitated secretariat (health case study)

2) **Challenges** identified from the case studies

- ✓ Lack of leadership
Frequent turnover of key decision makers on the government side, transfers, change due to elections
- ✓ Alibi consultations / participation of CSO
At the example of the ADS, risk if donor induced
- ✓ Lack of institutionalization
Example of ADS consultation process
- ✓ Lack of accountability
Consultations are taking place – but nobody tracks whether suggestions made are really considered (e.g. ADS)
- ✓ Lack of legitimacy
CSO representatives often lack legitimacy to represent other CSO; CSO don't report back to their constituencies
- ✓ Lack of capacity on the side of CSO to engage
due to a lack of information, lack of coordination among CSO, lack of confidence to express themselves in public meetings
- ✓ Sustainability of the MSI
At the example of the Fishery Co-management, ownership of the government is essential; CSOs should get legitimate roles at community level
- ✓ Inclusiveness in the MSI
In the case of M-HSCC, ethnic health organizations should have a legitimate role when integrated health system is considered.
- ✓ INGO push local CSO out of the MSI
- ✓ Fatigue / frustration of being consulted on the side of the CSO

Actionable Recommendations for SDC and Swiss NGOs in Myanmar

Based on the recommendations from interviewed participants involved in the selected MSI and above mentioned key observations in this assessment, the following actionable recommendations would like to be given in consideration with three key essential factors for a successful multi-stakeholders initiative (MSI) _ 1) Public interest 2) Political will and 3) Capacity to implement.

1) Document space for CSO

There are not many interesting case studies systematically recorded how a community problem can be solved or advocated for policy change successfully as well as lessons learnt from the initiatives in Myanmar. Both the success or failure case studies can be helpful for enabling environment of the CSOs.

2) Push but don't impose CSO participation in MSI

It is good to push the government by a development partner agency like the SDC to allow CSO participation in MSI to assure balanced, accountable, legitimate participation in MSI.

3) Support institutionalization of MSI (e.g. funding transparent documentation and a capable secretariat)

A capable secretariat with committed staff can provide effective support to both the government and other stakeholders according to the findings. Therefore, the SDC should support institutionalization of MSI for sustainability with enough resources.

4) Support capacity building on how to run a MSI and the proficient facilitation of MSI.

Swiss NGOs can act a catalyzer between different government agencies and the CSOs. In the process, it is necessary to provide necessary capacity support too.

5) Create spaces for trust building (regular information sharing, joint exposure, joint field visits)

Findings in this assessment indicate that regular information sharing, joint exposure trip and field trips as activities of the MSI are very helpful for relationship building and trust building. The SDC and Swiss NGOs can support such activities to create spaces for civil society.

6) Support coordination among CSO to be prepared for policy dialogue

Three case studies in this assessment indicate that the MSI can create space for the CSOs participating. However, there are activist and political groups who are outside the MSI. For enabling environment of civil society, it is important to strengthen coordination among CSO to be prepared for effective policy dialogue.

7) Provide core funding to CSO for engagement in MSI

The CSOs have funding limitation and without having funding allocated for proper public consultation or committed staff, it is impossible to be dedicated for the MSI.

8) Support capacity building of CSO, in particular related to

- a. Create evidence for evidence based advocacy
- b. Access to information
- c. Accountability of the CSO representatives to their constituencies (legitimacy issue)

Finally, the capacity of CSO plays a vital role in a successful MSI and Swiss NGOs can effectively design capacity building plan for the CSOs addressing their specific capacity needs for effective participation.

Conclusion

The findings from this research validate that Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSI) are effective platforms for CSOs to engage constructively with government and private sector in order to address contentious

policy issues. However, effectiveness depends a lot on CSOs' capacity in framing issues, advocacy and communication. Capacity building can be enhanced by SDC and Swiss NGOs' continuous support to them in this area. However, rights-based groups and political CSOs at the moment are being excluded from these MSI and due to this the relationship and mutual trust between developmental and rights-based ones are not so smooth and it needs to be addressed and supported by SDC and Swiss NGOs. Their role in development effectiveness cannot be and should not be underestimated and therefore all the stakeholders including government must find ways to include and engage with rights-based and political CSOs in MSI and without their participation civic space for development effectiveness will continue to exist at sub-optimal level and substantive policy and institutional change cannot be expected particularly in land, environment and natural resource sectors.