



Context Analysis for Ecosystem Management Unit Development Report

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List of Abbreviations

CEPA: Community Education Participation Awareness
CFDA: Coastal Farmer Development Association
CFM: Community Facilitation and Monitoring
EAFM: Ecosystem Approach to Fishery Management
EMU: Ecosystem Management Unit
FDA: Fishery Development Association
IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature
GoMP: Gulf of Mottama Project
FGD: Focus Group Discussion
MCCL: Myanmar Coastal Conservation Lab
MMK: Myanmar Kyat
TCC: Township Cluster Coordinator
TOT: Training of Trainer
VDC: Village Development Committee

1.0 Executive Summary

This assessment was conducted with the support of the Gulf of Mottama Project and supported by both the IUCN and Helvetas Myanmar. The overall objective was to understand how the Ecosystem Management Unit (EMU) might be able to adopt an intersectional approach, paying equal attention to gender, ethnicity, and social class to support ecosystem conservation in a sustainable, participatory, and equitable way.

To gain understanding, the research tools included disaggregated Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with both the Village Development Committee (VDC) members and non-VDC members and in-depth interviews with VDC members and non-VDC members. The researchers sought to understand how the communities under study related to their surrounding ecosystem and an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM). It looked for indications of behavior change reflected throughout all levels of their local community. In addition, the assessment looked at the enablers and constraints of behavior change according to gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic level in relation to awareness and participation in the EAFM approach. This will all be useful for the design of key strategies, including community training programs, to address key challenges and constraints of an intersectional approach to EAFM.

The village selection was conducted opportunistically in consultation with Ramsar Advisor/ Technical Officer from GoMP. The Ramsar Advisor/ Technical Officer in discussion with EAFM team of the project to select study villages for the analysis. In consideration for the location, four villages from 5 townships of GoMP were selected due to easy to access but lower security risks to conduct field activities. They are Zee Gone from Chaung Zone, Kar Te from Paung, Aung Kan Thar from Thaton and Kyauk Seik from Kyaik Hto. They were all in Mon State.

Findings from the research included 6 areas of inquiry including:

- Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it is located.
- Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.
- Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.
- Enablers and constraints in awareness and decision making of EAFM.
- Assessment of the EAFM approach including methods, and activities
- Community participation and perception of the VDC.

The communities all seem to have a basic understanding of their ecosystem combining knowledge from their family history with what they have learned from GoMP training. But they identified some difficulties following through with appropriate behaviors and mentioned illegal fishing issues both by local fishers and large fishing vessels from other areas. There also seems to be a need for better regulation of fish traders taking advantage of the local fishers with questionable business practices such as manipulating loans to fishers to keep them controlled in

relation to price and who they could sell their harvest to. Loans were mentioned more often as a problem than as a benefit, at least to the lower economic groups and fishers in 3 out of the 4 communities. The lower economic groups were taken advantage of because of their lack of understanding of financial management and how to effectively use a business loan. These issues stressed the ability of the fishers to appropriately harvest fish in relation to size and timing of fish harvesting.

Mangrove forests were also something the lower economic groups felt were being manipulated by their community leadership to maximize benefit for themselves causing more hardship for the lower economic levels.

Gender and socio-economic status in relation to their level of participation and decision making in the community followed behaviors that were handed down from the past with women focused on the home and men expected to work outside of the house and take on positions of leadership in the village. In many households though, due to the nature of fishers being out on the water, there was more of a representation of women in community meetings and training. Of the women attending the training or meetings mostly the wealthy and educated women would speak up while other women would attend and report back to their husbands. Women did take on more leadership in conservation activities such as planting mangrove trees.

Enablers and constraints in awareness and decision making of EAFM showed that economics was chosen over conservation. Community members followed economic needs even when they know what is best for the ecosystem. This includes such activities as fishing during spawning season, catching clams and other mollusks that are below size limit, poisoning fish, and using illegal nets. In addition, socio-economic status and level of education seems to separate the community with the lower socio-economic population being too busy to attend meetings and even if they attend often not empowered to speak up. More rules and oversight is needed for conservation along with role models in conservation, especially coming from the leaders of the community. Finally, economic enhancements that still support conservation of biodiversity would greatly help the community, especially for the lower economic groups.

Training from GoMP is another activity seen by many from all economic levels as focused on the Village Development Committee members and the wealthy in the community. Those with less education and lower economic status stated they do not have time or feel comfortable going to training programs in these 4 villages. In addition, instruction was reported by all groups as being limited to information delivery with a lack of guided interactions and discussions between the trainees or between the trainer and trainees. It was not seen as effective.

Community Participation and Perception of the VDC again showed a misunderstanding between VDC and non-VDC members as a split within communities between those with education and wealth and those without. The non-VDC members reported that they did not see the VDC committee as a source they could trust and instead felt disconnected or isolated from the VDC leadership. One person mentioned that “Conservation is the responsibility of the VDC members.”

Finally some recommendations were brought forward from the information collected from the 4 communities for further training and community development work including:

- Respect community (local) knowledge - “Seek first to Understand, then be understood.”
- Adjust the timing of the training to attract the right people and their full attention.
- Provide less information and include more interactions and discussions in training programs. In addition, give guidance on what and how to share back to the non-participants of the training programs.
- Offer Community / Organizational Development training including leadership and Conflict Resolution training for CFM and community groups especially the VDC leaders.
- Invite a mixture of gender and socio-economic groups to all training programs and adapt the training curricula so that it is understandable and relevant for all participants.

2.0 Project background

This assessment was conducted with the support of the Gulf of Mottama Project (GoMP), implemented by HELVETAS Myanmar, Network Activities Group (NAG) and the International Union of the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which implements Coastal Natural Resources Management in the Gulf of Mottama. This assessment will support the GoMP through giving insight into the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fishery Management (EAFM) and guidance in the development of the Ecosystem Management Units.

Three data collection tools were used for data collection. These included:

1. Disaggregated Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the Village Development Committee (VDC) members and non-VDC members. In-depth interviews with VDC members and non-VDC members and
2. Force field analysis with both the VDC members and non-VDC members

The 4 focal villages were selected by Ramsar Advisor/ Technical Officer and MCCL team to cover Mon State.

In this study we tried to understand the following areas:

1. Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.
2. Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.
3. Enablers and constraints to EAFM awareness and participation.
4. Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.
5. Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, and activities
6. Community participation and perception of the VDC.

To this end, the Ecosystem Management Unit (EMU) Assessment adopted an intersectional approach, paying equal attention to gender, ethnicity, and social class, in the GoMP area.

The data collected will be used to design strategies to address key challenges and constraints driven by EAFM knowledge levels and behavioral limitations related to gender and intersectionality that can be adopted by the GoMP and can help make the arrangements for ecosystem conservation to be more participatory and equitable and sustainable in the future. This could also be a useful resource for TOT trainers to guide the design of training to connect to GoM communities and be based on community interests and needs.

3.0 Objectives

The objectives of the EMU Assessment include the following:

- Understand the concepts of ecosystems in the GoM area as understood by local stakeholders, including identifying what the community has learned and what they still might need to learn to sustain program inputs and activities.
- Identify and understand the enablers and constraints for EMU awareness and participation in the community structures.
- Understand the needs, opportunities and constraints or potential pitfalls for stronger community involvement in EMU.
- Identify what behaviors are needed and how different individuals and communities need to adapt targeted behaviors to establish a potential model environment.
- Understand how different men and women in their roles in the community perceive and relate to the environment surrounding them. Including what they think about biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.
- Understand the effectiveness of the approach, methods, and activities used to deliver EAFM awareness within GoMP and identify how the EAFM delivery might be enhanced.
- Assess further training needs of knowledge skills and attitudes for the CFM and CFDA to effectively sustain inputs of the GoMP.

Essential questions

- What are the key concepts and behaviors that local people need to know and do concerning conserving ecosystems in the Gulf of Mottama area?
- What do they know or what have they learned already from GoMP, and what do they still need to learn? What practices or behaviors are important?
- How does the GoMP build the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the communities of the Gulf of Mottama and what behaviors do they impact?
- What behaviors and attitudes are difficult for the local residents and what impedes these? What behaviors are readily acceptable for the community and why are these more readily changed?
- What do the communities have? What do they need more of and why is this important to reach program goals?

4.0 Methodology

Data were collected using qualitative tools, namely Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews from 4 villages along the Gulf of Mottama in Mon State which participate in the GoMP. A total of 8 FGDs and 46 in-depth interviews were conducted in the villages (Table 1).

Table 1. Surveyed villages

Village	Township	FGDs	In-depth Interviews
Kar Tae Village	Paung	2	12
Kyauk Seik Village	Kyauk Hto	2	12
Aung Kan Thar Village	Thaton	2	12
Zee Gone Village	Chaung Zone	2	10
Total		8	46

Table 2. Details of the Focus Group Discussions

Village	VDC	Non-VDC	Total
Kar Tae Village	6	7	13
Kyauk Seik Village	6	5	11

Aung Kan Thar Village	6	6	12
Zee Gone Village	8	8	16
Grand Total	26	26	52

The village selection was conducted opportunistically in consultation with Ramsar Advisor/ Technical Officer from GoMP. The Ramsar Advisor/ Technical Officer in discussion with EAFM team of the project to select study villages for the analysis. In consideration for the location, four villages from 5 townships of GoMP were selected due to easy to access but lower security risks to conduct field activities. They are Zee Gone from Chaung Zone, Kar Te from Paung, Aung Kan Thar from Thaton and Kyauk Seik from Kyauk Hto. They were all in Mon State.

Two FGDs were conducted in each village with: 1) a mixture of men and women VDC members. 2) A mixed group of non-VDC members from poorer households. An attempt was made to include a range of livelihoods and other social identities such as ethnicity and religion. To capture the interactions of both groups, the following 6 thematic areas were used, which include:

- Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.
- Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.
- Enablers and constraints to EAFM awareness and participation.
- Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.
- Assessment of the EAFM approach, methods, and activities
- Community participation and perception of the VDC.

The sampling also made a conscious effort not to be confined to beneficiaries of the GoMP or of existing village groups such as the Village Development Committees and other groups established by the GoMP. This was seen as critical since the point of the assessment was to help identify marginal groups and associated drivers.

Table 3. Details of the in-depth interviews

Village	Male	Female
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Kar Tae Village	6	6
Kyauk Seik Village	6	6
Aung Kan Thar Village	6	6
Zee Gone Village	5	5
Total	23	23

Table 4. Village profile

Village	Main livelihood	Ecosystems in the village	Number of households
Kar Tae	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fishing ● Crab collection ● Farming ● Wage labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mudflats ● Mangroves ● Coastal grassland ● Rivers 	150 households in the village. 93 households are VDC members. However, some of the members left the VDC committee.
Kyauk Seik	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fishing ● Wage labor ● Small shop ● Making fish nets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mudflats ● Rivers <p>Only get resources from the river, and one from Mudflats.</p>	<p>Around 93 households in the village. 43 are VDC members. However, some of the members left the VDC committee. 50 households are non-VDC members. 21 households moved from the Sittaung River area 3 Hindu households in the village and 3 WHH in the village.</p>

Aung Kan Thar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fishing ● Wage labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● River ● Mangrove ● Mudflats ● Coastal grassland 	More than 300 households in the village. One third of the households are VDC members. However, some of the members left the VDC committee.
Zee Gone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fishing ● Crab collection ● Snail Collection ● Farming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● River ● Coastal grassland ● Mangrove ● Mudflats 	180 households in the village 27-29 households are VDC members. However, some of the members left the VDC committee.

The FGDs and in-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured questionnaires. The questionnaire for the FGDs was standardized for the two FGD groups, and sought information on the following topics:

- EAFM knowledge and its application.
- Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.
- Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.
- Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, and activities.
- Community participation and perception of VDC.

Included in the research tool were approaches from Design and System Thinking to support in-depth thinking by the participants. This included:

Force Field Analysis: A tool that helps participants work together to better understand the “driving forces” and “opposing forces” to moving ideas and solutions forward.

Guiding questions for Force Field analysis:

- How can communities participate in EAFM activity and decision-making in a more inclusive manner? (gender and social inclusion)
- What knowledge and skills do communities need to understand and address community change and conserve the ecosystem?

For each of the above two areas, the following questions were asked:

- What are the driving forces?
- What are the restraining forces?

5.0 Findings

5.1 village specific results

Kar Tae Village

5.1.1 Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.

The community of Kar Tae village mostly fishes, and collects crabs and snails. VDC members reported that all fishers fish in the spawning season due to lack of other sources of income. The outcome of this is that they have noticed a decline in fish. This is magnified by more fishers from outside of the area fishing including large boats from other villages fishing in the area close to Kar Tae Village.

In the past, 10 years ago the ocean was located very near to the community houses and now, it takes a long time to go to the ocean and fish. Currently, due to sedimentation and alluvial formation, it takes 45 minutes to walk to the river.

The non-VDC members complained that they are more impacted by conservation initiatives because, unlike the VDC members, they cannot collect wood from mangrove forests or even walk through the mangrove to get to their fishing grounds. e They worry that VDC members might think they are thieves. This adds hours to their time.

One male non-VDC member mentioned that he is worried about snakes and wild dogs when he passes the mangrove area. Another non-VDC member mentioned that he was hurt by stepping on a hidden small wood fence that VDC members put around the mangrove area and when he told the VDC members not to put fences up, they didn't listen to him.

5.1.2 Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.

VDC: The VDC members claimed that they obtained information about ecosystems from their parents and other elders.

Non-VDC: One male non-VDC member mentioned that VDC members are considering splitting up the mangrove forest into 3 acres for groups of 5-6 VDC members. The same male non-VDC member also mentioned that the VDC committee makes decisions without consulting the general population like constructing a road to the river.

Some non-VDC members have negative attitudes toward some VDC members. One male non-VDC member mentioned that one of the leaders of the VDC is a loan shark. They mentioned that VDC members get all the benefits from the conservation effort. He also said, to save the natural resources is the responsibility of VDC members who have knowledge and education.

They also don't know whom to talk to join VDC. One non-VDC member mentioned that he wanted to be part of the VDC committee, a person from the committee said he could not join, but didn't tell him why.

5.1.3. Enablers and constraints for EAFM awareness and participation

VDC: The VDC members reported that only leaders attend the training workshops outside of the village and women needed to consult with their husbands who will attend the training because men are often too busy or not patient to attend the training. The VDC is split by social status, so you need to own land to speak about land issues. The fishers do not get much support from the VDC to deal with the large fishing boats often found fishing in local waters, taking local fish. Everyone knows that the resources are declining but VDC members think the non-VDC members are not interested in conservation efforts.

Non-VDC: The non-VDC members say it is not true that they are not interested. Actually, they have no time to join because of their work and they feel their lack of education is a hindrance. Hindus don't want to attend and have no knowledge of conservation. The non-VDC members think that the VDC committee should solve conservation issues though.

5.1.4. Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.

VDC: The VDC members mentioned that more women join the meetings and training because their husbands are not free. VDC members also attend workshops from other NGOs and they feel it is important to take a leadership role in resource management. They said that being a woman does not affect participation in decision-making.

Non-VDC: Non-VDC members interviewed said that women were important in household but not in community level though they cook at meetings, men make the decisions, women might be interested but are not allowed to go, their husbands would respond to their interest in attending a meeting with, "what do you know?" Women need to take care of household chores and children. Though the interviewee did admit that some women attended meetings and shared back with their husbands and children.

Non-VDC members mentioned that they don't have time to join because they are working to earn income. VDC members also don't share information from the meeting and training to non-VDC members.

5.1.5 Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, and activities

VDC: VDC members mentioned that VDC membership is important to participate and make decisions in natural resource management. A VDC member said that VDC meetings were long meetings, especially too long for more elderly people. Another male VDC member had joined VDC originally expecting that training would improve his livelihood but found the training was

not practical and relevant to him, so he left the VDC committee. Additionally, the timing of the training was also difficult for fishers to be able to attend. There is an equal ratio of participants in the meeting but only people who are in a position of leadership of the VDC attend training outside the village. The incentive for VDC members in conservation is to get land in the mangrove forest.

The VDC members could not remember the information from the training. The training content was advanced, objectives were not clear and the training needs to focus more on the benefits of conserving the ecosystem. It also needs more hands-on activities like visiting the mangrove areas.

5.1.6 Community participation and Perception of VDC.

VDC: The secretary from the VDC committee mentioned that if the project can provide daily wages to the people, then non-VDC members can also participate in the conservation activities such as planting mangrove trees. Currently, there are many people who don't participate in conservation activities because they are working to make money for their family.

Non-VDC: The non-VDC members think that only the VDC members benefit from the project (GoMP) and that there is a big division between the VDC members and non-VDC members. They are irritated that conservation keeps ecosystem resources from the non-VDC. They feel that the VDC is not transparent and makes decisions in the way that everyone in the village has to agree. They expressed that only wealthier people and mostly men participate in VDC. They are not well connected to the non-VDC members and reportedly, don't consult with them.

Kyauk Seik village

5.1.1 Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.

VDC: A VDC member from Kyauk Seik village mentioned “We rely on fishing for our livelihood but there are 1 or 2 VDC members doing illegal fishing in the village due to the economic situation and Covid, and such people normally don't have knowledge about conservation. But we generally don't allow illegal fishing, because we are working to conserve ecosystems. In the village, people who are not VDC members can help and participate in catching illegal fishing boats. Illegal fishnets are the main cause of decline in fish stock. However, the Department of Fishery is corrupt, but we want them to lead in catching illegal fishing nets”. It is difficult to deal with illegal fishing boats because they are big and have more people on them. The workers in the big fishing boats who do illegal fishing are from other areas and don't know about different fishing nets, for example, setbag nets and stow nets.

VDC member mentioned that “When we talk with illegal fishing boats, we have to have at least half the number of the people in the big fishing boat because people in big fishing boats could harm us”

Non-VDC: A non-VDC member from Kyauk Seik Village said that “People use setback nets” and leave them in-place in the river for weeks. This is causing sedimentation and alluvial formation. Moreover, bridge construction also caused many problems leading to erosion and sedimentation.”

“Another reason for less fish in the sea is because of illegal fishing methods such as, battery shock fishing technique and using pesticide for poisoning fish. People from Motpalin area used those fishing techniques and the result is that there are fewer fishes near the shore. And there is also a rumor that one fisher in the village is using fish positioning technique. There are also less fishes in the river because the tidal bore has changed”.

The non-VDC member also mentioned that there is small-scale sand mining happening in the village. For sand mining, we heard two different views between VDC members and non-VDC members: non-VDC members mentioned, “It is good for fishing, as it makes holes in the river and is good for river flow”. But on the other hand, it was also mentioned by VDC members that sand mining causes less fish.

5.1.2 Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.

VDC: It was mentioned that there were 21 households that moved from Sittaung area and were involved in gambling. They did not get along with the VDC members because they didn’t join the VDC committee and didn’t participate actively in village development.

Relating to knowledge, the VDC member mentioned that, “All people who rely on fishing have knowledge on how to protect the environment or ecosystem.” Also, VDC members attend meetings and EAFM training.

One VDC member mentioned that they share knowledge from the meeting with other fishing boats at tea time. They also said that other non-GoMP villages also need to receive awareness about illegal fishing nets.

Non-VDC: One of the non-VDC members interviewed said that, “Even if you are not a VDC member, but were previously, you can get access to EAFM training. There are ten households in the village who are poor and don’t attend meetings because they are busy with their work. The non-VDC members don’t know whom to contact and what are the requirements to join the VDC committee. Most of the non-VDC members hesitate to speak up in training or meetings.”

The lower part of the village receives less information from the VDC meetings because the meetings happen in the upper part of the village and there are only a few people sharing back to the households in the lower part.

5.1.3. Enablers and constraints for EAFM awareness and participation

VDC: One of the leaders from the VDC committee mentioned “I want to empower youth and women in my village because I saw youths and women leading and participating in the meetings and the training I attended in the city”.

Non-VDC: One female non-VDC member said, “In the meeting, there are some people who try to act like they know things but don’t really contribute, just talk to try to look smart. So, we only let 5 or 6 people from the VDC committee who are in the leadership position to speak.”

5.1.4. Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.

VDC: A female VDC member said, “Women have some difficulties attending long meetings due to housework. “Women involvement is needed because mostly women attend the meetings and share back to their husbands, and men often can’t attend the meeting due to their work. Most women make decisions in the VDC meeting on their own and lead in resource conservation because men do not have time.” “90% of attendees in meetings are women, and men don’t receive as much knowledge as women since they are usually out to sea.”

VDC members mentioned that women's involvement is important, men are quick and short-tempered and they can react physically when they have different perspectives. Women are patient and can resolve conflicts.

One interviewee mentioned that men are smarter than women and are able to discuss, and women are forgetful. One female VDC member said that she quit her job and now spends most of her time on village development.

Non-VDC: One female non-VDC member mentioned that “I am interested in attending the meetings”. She also mentioned that “in the village meeting, even if I don’t agree with opinions, I keep it in my heart and then go along with what is decided”. “We need more young people to participate in conservation but they are busy.”

The non-VDC member mentioned that, “There are problems with funding, loans and paying them back, and some people have to leave for Thailand. The youths often go to Thailand to make money for the family, especially if they cannot pay back a debt on a loan.”

5.1.5 Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, and activities

VDC: Training makes villagers more disciplined and a little higher in social standards as people don’t throw trash on the street and manage their trash better. In the training, visuals were used and people could ask questions and the trainer gave prizes. They mentioned that they don’t remember much from training although the training was fun. Women shared what they learned from the training with their husbands. One VDC member mentioned that “Regular training will help people remember more about the training and information”.

VDC members mentioned that “The challenge for village development and conservation is that out of 10 members, 2 are not supportive and collaborative”. One person mentioned that he was

told by a VDC member that if he could answer the questions from the researchers well, and they will help his project. So, he memorized the information from the training he attended.

Non -VDC: Non-VDC members mentioned they don't know about EAFM training.

5.1.6 Community participation and Perception of VDC.

VDC: Everyone over the age of 18 can attend training and meetings. Every VDC member has to attend the meeting and if they are absent, they have to pay a fine of 3000 MMK. Some members left the VDC committee because they didn't want to attend hours-long meetings and they couldn't attend the meeting every month. If they do so, they don't have time for their jobs such as pig feeding. In order to join the income generation group, a person needs to join at the beginning of the six-month loan period.

A VDC member who left the VDC committee said, "People leave VDC because they have no time to attend the meetings". She also mentioned that "I don't feel comfortable asking for help if I have challenges because I am no longer part of the VDC."

There is no transparency within the VDC committee - one male interviewee asked in a VDC meeting "How much did it cost for that water tank? Can you show me the voucher?" Another VDC member was irritated by that question and the person who asked the question was not invited to other meetings nor village activities any more.

Non-VDC: In the village, everyone mentioned that they cared about village development and conservation, and they want to follow if the leaders could lead. The interviewees mentioned that they want business training to understand more on how to run their business.

Aung Kan Thar village

5.1.1 Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.

VDC: Currently, all the fishers have stopped fishing for three months due to limited fish stock in the river, increased price of petrol and other things. VDC members mentioned that there is less fish stock in the sea due to illegal fishing. The number of fish in one illegal fishing boat per one fishing trip is equal to that of fish caught in one year of fishing by 20 local boats. The fish left by one illegal fishing boat is equal to the number of fish from ten ordinary fishing boats. For the time being, the VDC and non-VDC members are patrolling for illegal fishing nets. If we don't have enough people on patrol boats, we can get into trouble if we meet up with illegal fishing boats from Alhlat, Kyiakhto, Asin or Zoakkali villages. In the past, the villagers reported illegal fishing boats to the state level authorities but the responsible person from the government just asked to pay a fine and released the people who did illegal fishing. Another reason for less fish stock in the sea is farmers' use of pesticides to kill snails. Pesticides drain into the sea from the land and are poisonous, particularly impacting fish during the spawning season. Also, there is an ongoing conflict between small fishing boats and large fishing boats from other villages. This is

due to the large fishing boats catching fish from the fishing area just offshore from the village. Those big fishing boats use drift nets and catch most of the fish in the area and leave the fish that don't get a good price for the market.

People should not collect crabs that are less than 100 grams and should not use illegal fishing nets. However, there are still some people who fish in the spawning season due to their low level of livelihood. Patrolling activities can include both VDC and non-VDC members. Although they have funding for patrolling, only the leaders from the committee take the funding.

Fishers need to pay 24,000 MMK for a license every year, if they don't, the authorities will arrest them on the way to fishing. Even though they have to give money for a license, the government doesn't solve the illegal fishing problem. There is one fisher who does illegal fishing every 15 days. When the villagers go and fish in the area where illegal fishing happens, they don't get any fish. Before 2021, we controlled the illegal fishing boats by reporting to the Department of Fishery and the Department confiscated and burned the nets. After the capture of the illegal fishing nets, we noticed there were more fish in the river. One of the interviewees also mentioned that he had to wait to get the license for his fishing boat because the village leader told him he can only get a license when there are 60 people requesting a fish license.

In the past, we caught so many fish we could build a monastery with the money from their sale. But due to illegal fishing nets, there are now less fish in the sea.

Mangrove areas in the village were originally protected as conservation areas. However, some parts of mangrove areas are owned by Oat Pho Chaung and Thone Eain Su villages, and now people from these villages transformed the mangrove land to paddy field and it doesn't benefit the other villagers. They expanded paddy fields and right now 390 acres are being transformed into paddy fields. Villagers from Aung Kan Thar village bought those lands for farming. The other villagers reported the problem of transforming mangrove forests into farmland to the State level authorities. However, the problem remains unsolved. It was even pointed out that Oat Pho Chaung village and Thone Pin Chaung villages have worked with the State level government, using that power to transform mangrove forests into paddy fields. One non-VDC woman mentioned that due to land transformation, she could not collect crab easily like in the past. In addition, she mentioned "If I collect crabs from the paddy field embankment, the owner will scold and beat me."

VDC members mentioned that dam construction was helpful because it created a water way where there was previously no route to travel to Thaton. In addition, the dam prevents erosion problems. In the past, due to rough water and large tidal flow, some of the boats sank. Now with the dam, the tidal flow is reduced and water is more calm, easier to navigate with small boats. Yet the dam has had a negative effect on fish stock. Fishing stock has been lessened because of sedimentation and alluvial formation due to the dam construction. In addition, now fishers have to walk much further around the dam to fish.

Non-VDC: One male non-VDC interviewee mentioned, "Site selection for mangrove tree planting was not right because the planted trees get carried away with the tide." The VDC members knew that the mangrove plantation area would collapse later but alluvial were getting

rougher, so they planted mangrove trees. They expected to reduce natural disasters and get a better livelihood from mangrove planting. People can go to the mangrove forest and are allowed to collect crabs as long as they don't destroy the tree roots.

Another problem in the village was loan issues as many villagers couldn't pay back their loans. Our village was nice to live in and we didn't hear noises in the neighborhoods, but after the loan company entered, we now are facing the loan issues. People take loans from different loan companies and can't pay back the money. Now, I hear many arguments in my neighborhood and even in my house because my wife has taken out many loans.

There are also bird hunters in the village and though they can't sell, they just eat the protected birds due to their low level of livelihood.

5.1.2. Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.

VDC: VDC members mentioned that due to many households in the village, they have to meet 2 times with 80 people in one meeting. Fish buyers in the village don't check if the fish has been caught legally and so buy fish from illegal fishing nets. That's why the illegal fishers can still sell their fish to the markets.

One male VDC member mentioned that to conserve the ecosystem only the fisherman is responsible.

Non-VDC: Non-VDC members didn't receive information about the GOMP project in the village and VDC members also didn't share what they learned from the meeting with the non-VDC members. One female non-VDC member mentioned that the committee was formed by rich and educated people and they only recruited the people who are close to them. It would be better if non-VDC members could be involved in meetings organized by the GoMP. Non-VDC members attend village meetings and receive conservation knowledge. One male non-VDC member mentioned he gained knowledge from his parents not to fish with small mesh stake nets.

Another non-VDC man mentioned he received conservation knowledge and about illegal fishing from his work experience.

5.1.3 Enablers and constraints for EAFM awareness and participation

VDC: 14-20 participants used to attend the monthly meetings and almost 50 participants attended the annual meeting. Normally, the committee only invites older people. There are only three people who have to attend the training (chairman, accountant, secretary) in the city. One male VDC member registered with his name in the VDC committee, however, his wife attends the meeting because he is not free. Social status affects participation and decision making at meetings. Educated people can be included and participate more than uneducated people.

One female VDC member mentioned "If I have a chance, I want to join the training in the city but currently I cannot join due to my low education level. People who are educated and wealthy

go to the city and attend the training.

Non-VDC: One female non-VDC member mentioned that people who are old and cannot participate actively can't join the committee. Young people should attend the training more than older people because young people are active.”

5.1.4. Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.

VDC: During the period of neap-tide, an equal ratio of men and women attended the meeting but during the high tide, men are not free and women attend most of the training. Waste collecting in the village is women's responsibility. Women and men are allowed to speak in the meeting, but people with low education cannot participate fully in the meeting.

One male VDC member mentioned that “The women's sector is weak in the conservation effort but their role is powerful in cooking and preparation when organizations come.”

Non-VDC: One non-VDC male member mentioned that women with young children should not go to meetings and training. He also mentioned that although the membership name is in women's name, men attend the training in the city because women should not go on overnight trips.

5.1.5 Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, activities, and bird conservation.

VDC: VDC members said “2 people from each village attended the EAFM training in the city. The two people from each village VDC who have education and are able to speak out attended the EAFM training in Bago and then they were responsible to share back to the village, which they haven't done yet. In the EAFM training, the trainer used visuals and a projector along with discussion methods.”

They also mentioned that “there is no EAFM training in the village. Neither non-VDC members nor VDC members know about EAFM. However, they do have knowledge about mangrove trees and illegal fishing. One woman mentioned that the meeting in the village should have a clear objective and should explain the objective in the meeting.”

5.1.6 Community Participation and Perception of VDC.

VDC: When one joins the VDC they are expected to give some of their time for community affairs. Many people cannot afford to volunteer their time because they need to work for their family to survive. Some people leave the VDC committee after joining because they can't give time or volunteer for the committee activities like illegal fishing monitoring due to their work and health. When they joined, they did not realize they had to volunteer so much time.

If someone leaves the VDC committee, the committee doesn't allow that person to join the group

again. If a person wants to join the committee, they have to put money into a VDC account that is used to loan money to community members. New VDC members need to pay all the money that other members have paid for years and often this sum is too much for them to join.

In Aung Kan Thar village there is an ongoing misunderstanding between the income generation group and the fishery group. A woman from the income generation group felt that because most of the people in the income generation group are poor and don't own boats, they don't get an equal opportunity to attend training like the fishery group. The income generation group gets only 300,000 MMK for a loan whereas the fishery group gets 450,000 MMK for a loan.

There are other organizations such as Worldview who also give loans. When people who are members of both VDC and Worldview request a loan, the committee checks to see if that person has paid their loan back to Worldview and if not, they will not give them a second loan.

Non-VDC: Other areas of conflict and conflict of interest that commonly affect the community include business loans. Fish dealers give loans to the fishers and then take advantage of them. It was reported in two villages that fish brokers in the village take advantage of fishermen in relation to measurement, using false measurements or estimates on fish sizes, weights, price of petrol, price of fish and fish bladders (highly valued by Chinese consumers). The fishers in these cases took an advance from the fish trader and was controlled by the same trader who he owed money to. This fish trader was a relative of the VDC leadership. So VDC members ignored the fish trading problems.

VDC members are the rich people in the village and support the opposite political party whereas most of the non-VDC members support a different political party. In fact, one non-VDC woman mentioned that 10 committee members started the VDC committee in her village and only recruited people who were close to them. VDC members mostly have a higher educational background in the village. Non-VDC members also mentioned committee members get more benefits such as loans.

One non-VDC woman mentioned she couldn't join the committee, because she has only lived in the village for 7 years. She also mentioned that she didn't join because she didn't have her husband to support her. 'If I join the committee and cannot attend the meetings and training regularly, I will be warned and I don't want that.'

One male non-VDC member mentioned that his brother found 15 mangrove plants in the sea and grew them at the back of his house. Then, the leader from the village came and said "If you pluck the mangrove tree, you will get fined." I was very angry and threw back the mangrove trees back into the river and since that time, I don't attend any meetings anymore."

Zee Gone Village

5.1.1 Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.

VDC: We depend on the sea to get Bombay duck fish and shrimp. Both VDC members and non-VDC members hire fish workers for their fishing boats. 10 years ago, one fishing trip caught many visses in 7 days of fishing but we get less vis now due to the increasing use of drift net boats and many fishers in the sea, fish are rare now.

Out of the 180 households in Zee Gone, only 50 households don't engage in fishing. Everyone in the village faces the problem of drift nets used by big fishing boats. The local community use setbag nets and when the large boats put out their drift nets they can get tangled with the setbag nets. Then the large boat fishers cut the setbag net and the local fishers lose their catch and their nets. So, the large fishing boats catch most of the fish in the area. When the local fishers go and fish in the area where fishing boats with drift nets fish, they don't get high quality fish. The big fishing boats leave the fish that don't get good prices in the market. It is difficult to address this problem because there is no Department of Fishery in the village. It is located in an urban area (Chaung Zone). One interviewee mentioned "If we establish a group to solve the drift nets problem, it would be good". However, the local fishermen in his village are not interested in establishing a group.

Another male VDC member mentioned that in his village, fishers faced the drift-net problem 2 or 3 times a year. They cannot continue their fishing business because each time it costs from 800,000 MMK to 1,000,000 MMK to repair their setbag nets. The drift net fishing boats are large and when we argue with them, they can sink our boats. Because our boat is small and if we both pull the fishing nets, our boats can sink. Usually if our boats are around when the drift nets get tangled with the setbag nets then they don't cut our nets deeply or they untangle by themselves.

As one fisher described to us, plastics are more abundant than ever before. "If we catch 3 bags of fish in our nets, we would catch one bag of plastic. Now, due to all the waste thrown into the ocean, fish are rare. When I catch fish with longline hooks, I just get waste like old clothes."

Currently the mangrove trees are being conserved by the GoMP project. The villagers don't cut the mangrove trees but collect dry wood and cut the branches. Currently the community takes the drift wood that comes along down the river. When the villagers cut the mangrove tree branches, they cut the amount that can fill one boat because mangrove wood lasts a long time when it is burned. Most of the households in this village depend on the mangrove wood to boil shrimps. Only one third of mangrove trees are left from cutting. Sepalar villagers come and cut the mangrove trees and carry them away with the big boat. The village leader also knows the mangrove trees are being cut too much but he ignored them because poor families cut the dry mangrove and sell it and their lives become difficult if he stopped them.

There are less crabs in the mangrove forest because there are more crab collectors in the village. Both rich and poor people collect crabs. In the past, they used bamboo crab traps but currently an iron crab trap is used. There is more sand from the tide and it threatens to cover the crab hole and make it difficult for the crab to enter its hole to hide.

One Hindu household had grassland in his paddy field, and when it grows, the farming didn't work well. He then had to burn the grassland, so he could grow rice again. In the village, there are still bird hunters in the village and people know they should not catch birds.

“Raw fish is more expensive than dried fish. We could transport more raw fish if the transportation was better.”

Non-VDC - When talking about their relationship with the ecosystem either the VDC nor non-VDC male fishers knew about fish spawning season.

One male non-VDC member mentioned that “When a boat owner gives the order to catch fish with small mesh stake nets I will because I took a money deposit from him. Our fishing nets are often damaged and destroyed by other villages’ drift nets and then are sold in Chaung Zone market at second-hand price, when we request to get them back, they don't give.”

10 years ago, villagers threw waste on the beach and left fish heads and crabs that were not useful for them because they didn't have knowledge about waste management. Later, they learned about waste management and now bury the trash away from the village.

The fish buyers in the village take advantage of fisher in the fish weight.

People who have recently moved to our village would often clean the fish with sea water instead of water from the well. As a result, the dried fish turned red and very salty. With only a 500 MMK difference in price, one interviewee mentioned that she was worried that more people will clean their fish with seawater and cause the fish products from their community to be of lower quality in the future.

5.1.2. Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.

VDC: Though men register with their name in the VDC committee, their wives attend the meeting because men are not free to attend due to their work.

One male non-VDC member mentioned that he never sees a meeting and training invitation for him, they only invite older people. In the village, there are only three people who have to attend the training (chairman, accountant, secretary). To conserve the ecosystem only the fishers are responsible.

Non-VDC: There is a signboard in front of the village leader's house. It shares update information from the board. The committee was formed by rich and educated people and they only recruited the people who were close to them. Non-VDC members don't get information about the GOMP. It would be better if non-VDC members can be involved if there is a meeting from the GOMP because there are many issues to work out in the community for example:

- One interviewee mentioned he wants training to understand their business.
- One VDC woman mentioned that villagers along their road were not invited for the meeting.
- Both VDC members and non-VDC members don't know about EAFM.

Before loans came to our villages, they were nice to live in and we didn't hear noise from other households, but now that a loan company has entered, we are facing the problem that we can't repay the money so that most households have internal problems due to loan issues and we can hear our neighbor's arguments often.

5.1.3 Enablers and constraints for EAFM awareness and participation

VDC: The village group with lower social status does not have a voice in the meeting because they don't have money and education. People from the lower area of the village are not free and don't attend the meeting because they are too busy with their livelihood. One interviewee mentioned that they don't want to attend the training in Mawlamyine because it is too long and it takes the whole day. Even though they are provided with a daily allowance, it was not enough to travel. Another interviewee mentioned that it is difficult to remember the training and they don't understand it.

Non-VDC: When the Villager administrator conducts a meeting, men attend the meeting, if other organizations conduct a meeting, women attend it. If the VDC committee call the training, they need to announce that it is very important for everyone's livelihood so that the community will be interested in the training because after they finish a fishing trip, men are too tired to attend meetings so women attend the meeting instead of the men. If the meeting is relevant for men, they would more likely attend the meeting. Males from the village are shy and even when they attend the meeting, they don't speak up. However, VDC members should share with non-VDC concerning what the VDC is doing to support the village.

The Fishery department collects the license fee from the fishers but doesn't take any action on the issue they are facing - their fishing nets are being cut by the drift nets fishing boats. In the village, one house is being taken by the company because of a loan problem.

5.1.4. Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.

VDC: VDC members mentioned that mostly women attend the meetings and they are curious and remember more about the meeting than men. Mostly, women lead in loan taking and men focus on only one thing - fishing. However, women have more responsibility in the fishery sector and have to work longer than men. Men work 7 days and rest 7 days.

Non-VDC:

Quotes from non-VDC members interviewed"

- "Women with education make more decisions in the household".
- "Men who fish can get more money than women."
- "Men just fishing, women have to do all other processes related to fishing".
- "Women cannot go to other activities such as meeting and training if they don't finish

their work such as fish processing and drying the fish.”

- “If women participated in decision-making, it could be better for the future.”
- “It will be better if the ministry of fishery department is involved in conservation with villagers leaders and the community to work together to conserve natural resources”.

5.1.5 Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, and activities

VDC: The VDC is not quite clear about EAFM training. They mix up EAFM training with the CEPA training. There is only one person who attended CEPA training from the village. They recommend that trainers should not use the English language in training because some people have poor educational backgrounds.

Non-VDC: One man mentioned that the community doesn't have knowledge of natural resource conservation. In relation to conservation issues, there is no explanation or sharing when they put up vinyl signs around the village like do not use nets under 1 inch in the village. They recommend that they need training on working with loans because of all the loan problems in the community.

5.1.6 Community Participation and Perception of VDC.

VDC: There are three areas in the village. In the lower part of the village, poor people live, in the upper part, rich people live in and a third part in which Karen people and low social status live.

Only 26-27 members are in the committee now. Members left the committee because they are out in the sea and fishing so that they are often not available to attend the meetings. Some people also left the committee because they can't pay back the loan they took.

One female VDC member mentioned that “I am thinking of leaving the VDC committee and taking my savings money from the committee due to the other loan problem, I am afraid that problem will link GoMP's income generation fund.”

Boats can't be easily kept at the shore because of the sedimentation and changes in the current. In the past, they could easily keep their boats at the shore.

When one becomes a VDC member, besides having to attend training one has to pay monthly dues depending on what group you belong to. Each person in the income generation group of the VDC pays 3000 MMK each month to the VDC committee. The fishery group and agriculture group pay 5000 MMK each month to the VDC committee. This money becomes part of the income generation funds and is then loaned out to other VDC members who apply to the leadership group of the VDC who determines who gets the loan.

In Zee Gone initially, 57 people wanted to join the VDC committee but only 30 people out of 57 got the loan. Only the people who received a loan joined the VDC the rest decided not to join. One female VDC member mentioned that she bought a cow with a loan from the VDC income generation funds. In addition, she acquired five goats from GoMP livestock.

Non-VDC: There are conflicts between 2 groups in the village. One is richer and has more influence in the decision-making. The other has lower social status and contributes to village development with their labor. One does not participate if another leads.

One male non-VDC member mentioned that you cannot easily join the committee. The committee selects who is to join, especially those who are trustworthy and respected in the community. Another interviewee mentioned that the reason why they do not participate in the VDC committee is that they are afraid to speak in the meeting.

One male non-VDC member mentioned that we migrated from other areas, and don't want to join the VDC committee because we are not interested and don't have time. Also, they only recruit people who are close to them. It seems that social status affects making decisions in the meeting, the rich people are being favored more than poor people.

One female non-VDC member mentioned that “I don’t know much about the GoMP committee activities and haven’t been invited to attend ever. I have a young child and it would be difficult to attend.”

One non-VDC member mentioned that one VDC member lends the loan money back to other villagers. In the village, the VDC loan amount is 10 lakhs unlike other villages. Although the GOMP project entered the village, there is no significant improvement for the villagers.

5.2 Comparative results

5.2.1 Community relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.

People said that they mostly want and believe in conservation but it is still second to making a living, especially in the case of the poor. Conservation efforts are seen more to benefit the VDC members - especially around Mangrove forests.

5.2.2 Ecosystem and EAFM knowledge, its application, and how it has changed behavior of VDC and the community.

The interviewees know that they depend on the sea for their livelihood, that the populations of fish, shrimp, crabs, and snails they depend upon are sensitive to overharvesting and in need of conservation strategies, but they do not have the will to keep focus on and follow through with conservation efforts. Though many people want to follow conservation principles, they find it difficult if others are not following conservation principles and, in many places, give in to old ways of doing things.

With the division of the villages into wealthy people and poor daily workers, their communities are not united but broken down into different groups that do not interact well and don’t really feel the need to organize closer connections.

Lack of effective government oversight, control and interaction makes everything much more difficult as there is little outside support and intercommunity connection.

Hours-long meetings are the barrier for meaningful participation in conservation and information is not retained after the meeting. Economic situation is a barrier for many to participate in the village development and conservation activities. It also affects the decision making in the meeting where many have mentioned across villages that wealthy people and educated people are favored more in the meeting and get more opportunities such attending the training in the city.

Some trainers do not seem to connect with their participants and only deliver information which is not retained well by the local people. Training also seems, in the perception of the locals, to be for the wealthy and village leadership not for the working people.

There is a large knowledge gap between VDC and non-VDC members in terms of managing, conserving resources and understanding gender equality. Even within the VDC committee, there is a gap between rich and educated members and members from low-income households.

5.2.3 Enablers and constraints for EAFM awareness and participation

Sharing knowledge about conservation of natural resources in the village meetings empowers both VDC members and non-VDC members to understand the issues in their ecosystem and collaborate together to protect the resources. However, in villages where the knowledge about protecting the resources is only shared to the VDC members, others perceive they are not responsible and important in conserving resources.

Loan issues are widespread and seem to cause problems in the community.

5.2.4 Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.

Across all villages, the majority of the meeting attendants are women, because these are predominantly fishing villages, and they share what they learn to their husbands. VDC leaders mentioned that women participation is needed and is beneficial for the community and VDC committee. In Kyauk Seik village, women are leaders in conservation activities and possess more conservation knowledge because men are not free to attend the meetings, mostly due to fishing in the sea.

Non-VDC members from Kyauk Seik also mentioned that women are needed to participate in meetings because women are patient, curious, and often help to do mediation when there is conflict in the meeting. Men tend to be quick-tempered and can become physical (fight) when they have different perspectives.

Although the VDC membership is in the woman's name, their husbands attend training in the city because of the belief that women should not go on over-night trips.

In poor households, women have some difficulties attending long meetings because they have to work and cook for their family. Some male non-VDC members perceive women as not as skillful as men and often don't allow women to join VDC meetings.

5.2.5 Assessment of EAFM approach, methods, and activities

Village level training does not seem to be effective; it seems most people either don't understand or don't remember what it is about. There seems to be a lack of connection between the trainers and the trainees.

2 or 3 people from each village attended EAFM training and they are responsible to give the EAFM Training to their own community. They don't feel comfortable to give the EAFM training back to the community because they don't understand the training well and don't remember the contents due to their education background.

5.2.6 Community Participation and perception of VDC.

The VDCs are for rich people and mostly the poor and those without property are not welcome to join. VDC committee is made up of people from high social status and people who are close to the leaders and don't welcome every household to join.

Non-VDC people don't know what the GoMP and VDC is doing - because the VDC makes little attempt to connect with them and they suggest VDC member should share the information to the non-VDC members

6.0 Key Insights

The Communities relationship to the ecosystem within which it was located.

- Mangrove plantation projects in some areas cause conflict in the community. It seems the leadership and members of the VDC claim a certain amount of land for themselves and keep everyone else out. The poor people who rely on harvesting crabs are not allowed to harvest them.
- A main issue is the illegal fishing problem and just fixing this would have a big impact on the community livelihoods. It seems they know what to do and why, but cannot control themselves to follow the rules, or get other areas and large fishing boats to cooperate.
- There is a need for the regulation of fish traders taking advantage of the fishers with price, inappropriate weighing and loans from the fish traders which force the fishers to sell back their fish only to that fish trader whatever his prices.
- Loans have often been more of a problem than a solution and have perhaps only helped the wealthy. It seems that loans are given out without a good business plan or check on the ability of the person receiving the loan to be able to utilize the loan well and pay it

back. There seems to be a lack of understanding on financial management and utilizing loans.

Gender and socio-economic status related to awareness, participation and decision making in the EAFM.

- Gender norms tend to be archaic, and most men and women seem to still follow what was handed down from before, especially in decision making. Exceptions are found with some wealthy women, able to break free from the gender norms and actually contribute to groups like the VDC.
- Women are leading in conservation activities such as planting mangrove trees, attending meetings and training and sharing back to their husbands and neighbors. Men mostly from poor households are busy with fishing and are not interested to attend meetings and training

Enablers and constraints for EAFM awareness and participation

- Economics is chosen over conservation - community members in the Gulf of Mottama seem to try to be sensitive to conservation principles as best as they understand from training, or more likely their past experience. But if it gets down to whether they eat or not they will forget conservation principles and fish during fish spawning season, catch clams and other mollusks that are below size limit, poison fish, use improper nets.
- Many communities seem to be divided into haves and have-nots with not much connection between the two outside of working. Those with less education lack confidence to speak up in meetings. If they are a female then they can cook or furnish refreshments at the meeting.
- Lack of good role models in conservation - role models are needed for each community and would best come from the community leadership, VDC.
- A balance between community needs, livelihoods and conservation rules is still not achieved and needs to be developed by each community.
- Currently, there is no recourse for breaking the law because of inadequate government oversight. It is difficult to prosecute law breakers without a higher level of authority, usually provided by a government department and their rules and regulations being respected.

Training

- It was reported to us by multiple communities surveyed that training is not attended or intended for those who are poor and uneducated. Training seems to be mostly focused on VDC members and the wealthy in the community. The non-VDC members and poor have reported a number of times that they don't feel comfortable or able to join the training offered by the GoMP. It is felt that training, especially related to conservation or ecosystem management, to be effective needs to include all socio-economic levels of the communities. The level of education should not be a hindrance to attending this type of

training and the trainers need to adapt training for all socio-economic and educational levels.

- Training is not thought of as being effective. Participants responded that trainers only deliver information and there is a lack of stimulating interactions between trainer and community participants. With interactions limited to the delivery of information, the result was the content was quickly forgotten.
- 3 hours of training is a long time for the participants to attend, and trainers delivering a lot of technical and advanced information in the workshops makes it more difficult for the community to understand and then change their behavior.

Community Participation and Perception of VDC

- Misunderstanding between VDC and non-VDC seems to come from the split of communities between those who have education and social status and those who don't. VDCs also seem to be biased against those who are not members of the committee.
- The VDCs seem to be mostly disconnected or isolated from lower socio-economic levels of the community. In addition, the VDC was reported by more than one person as being controlled by a small group of the wealthier people in the community, usually men.
- Because of the split between VDC and non-VDC, non-VDC members don't see the VDC as a source they can trust to report and share issues they face in fish trading. They feel the VDC is mostly looking out after itself. As a result, the non-VDC feel they are being left out, this results in their commitment to conservation programs promoted and led by the VDC being negatively impacted, they say that "Conservation is the responsibility of VDC".

Issues with other organizations that may affect cooperation with the GoMP

One misunderstanding was reported in Aung Kan Thar village, concerning another organization, Worldview, who also works in the GoM area. Worldview International is very active in parts of the GoM, it has 500 acres of mangrove. A female VDC member mentioned conflict with Worldview International. Worldview is now digging a water pond in the village and told the villagers that they were not allowed to collect water from there. Worldview International gave big clay pots to store water to the poor households in Aung Kan Thar village but took them back after one day, and said they planned to give those only to their members. People from those poor households feel shame and now have a negative feeling of Worldview and don't want to receive anything from Worldview International. This misunderstanding shows the importance of clear communication between representatives and workers from development organizations and the community.

The same female, a VDC member, pointed out other actions by Worldview have caused issues with the community. For example, the woman asked to join Worldview International 2 years ago, but they ignored her request and didn't explain why. She also stated that male staff members from Worldview International had a bias toward younger women.

Both of the above points about Worldview are good learning points for any project working with community development.

7.0 Recommendations

Training

- Respect community (local) knowledge. This is especially relevant for both trainers and community leaders. There is a saying among educators, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” (Stephen R. Covey)
- Conduct organizational development training - for community organizations
- Conduct training on financial management for those interested in taking a loan - financial management and business principles training and a simple one-or two-day training could be a requirement toward getting a loan.
- Conduct conflict resolution training for CFMs and community leaders.
- Cover less topics / information in training, and clearly communicate training objectives to the participants.
- Conduct interactive training following Experiential / Adult Learning Principles.
- Identify the right and most appropriate participants for meetings and training, and communicate the importance of their participation.
- Put more focus on fewer topics to enhance community understanding.
- Include what to share back to the community in all training programs, because people who attended the EAFM training stated they were not clear about the training objectives and didn’t know how to share the training back to the community
- Pay attention to the timing of activities. If the participants can't focus because they are busy then they will, at best not learn, and may become negatively biased with the whole program.

Gender

- Provide gender training - Women seem to be underutilized and with limited resources in many of the communities, this is a problem the communities cannot afford.
- Include the concept of gender equality and the importance of equal gender participation along with protecting the ecosystem in village training and meetings.
- Provide entrepreneurship training especially focused on women and the poor. Entrepreneurship and conservation can be linked.
- Support Non-Formal Education (NFE) in communities, including language, math, and thinking skills. It could be connected to the loan application process.

Community Engagement

- Build relationship, connect, and coordinate with other organizations working in the area (reinforce each other) and also with the community before a training or meeting, or at least at the beginning of training.
- Conduct needs finding for each community to be able to identify interests and the best timing for men and women to participate.

- Understand the village's needs and be mindful of gender, ethnicity and social status in setting rules to conserve ecosystems.
- Initiate - programs focused on the disenfranchised (people left out). Look for and connect with people who are not connected into the mainstream community networks to gain their understanding and support. This can also turn them from being negative or anti-community, to pro community, a community resource.
- Make use of existing community systems and the VDC committee to identify key focal points in the community and to communicate clearly about project activities. Promote transparency of key project activities while continually focusing attention of both VDC and non-VDC community members on conservation activities happening in the village. Finally make the process and requirements to become a member of the VDC transparent.
- Create a community culture of caring - reaching out to support each other - a few ideas related to community development could be part of every training program such as communication, collaboration, and thinking skills
- Identify and promote other communication channels such as information boards, peer to peer sharing, to share knowledge and empower all of the community members
- Emphasize clarity and inclusivity in empowering the community to take ownership of the conservation activities in the village such as mangrove planting activity. Both VDC and non-VDC members need to understand and communicate to each other otherwise there will be a split between beneficiary and non-beneficiary

Monitoring and Follow-up

- Conduct regular check-ins with project staff are necessary to identify key issues and misunderstandings happening in the community regarding conservation and project activities.
- Conduct follow-up support for the community trainers who will give EAFM training back in the community and provide coaching/ mentoring to the community trainers.
- Define simple expected outcomes.
- Give clear and simple guidance within activities focused on what individuals can do to support their local ecosystems. This can be focused on both individual contributions to ecosystem conservation and group or cooperative activities toward ecosystem conservation. Such as throw away your trash in a proper way and every month, have a community clean up where everyone goes out and picks up trash from around the community. This can also relate to fishing, mangrove forests and be included in all training.

Next steps

- Share key insights to the relevant GoMP officers and project staff to know the issues happening in the community.
- Initiate meetings or workshops to highlight, discuss and identify learning that needs to be activated or integrated into the program implementation of the EMUs.
- Hold capacity building workshops about community development, communication collaboration skills and gender equality for CFMs, FDAs and CFDAs.

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