

# ***INGOs working in Myanmar: An Overview of the Context***

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# Introduction

*“Name any sector in Myanmar, from judiciary to tourism, you can be sure we have to reform it”*

*GUoM’s high rank official, Yangon, January 2012*

*“If you don’t have a Myanmar visa in your passport, you’re a nobody”*

*Private investor, Bangkok, October 2012*

# ***Current Main Challenges in Myanmar***

- 1. The peace process (and ongoing inter-ethnic and – religious conflict).***
- 2. The political system: Major role for the Army.**
- 3. Macroeconomic policies.***
- 4. Private capital flows.***
- 5. Resource extraction (including renewable resources like hydropower, palm oil, and rubber).**
- 6. Land grabbing.**
- 7. Agriculture sector development.**
- 8. Education.**

# *GUoM's Priorities as per II MD CF*

1. Electricity,
2. Water supply,
3. Agriculture sector development,
4. Employment creation,
5. Tourism development,
6. Financial development,
7. Trade and investment development

## **Cross-cutting:**

Peace making, education, and people centred rural development

## Context for INGOs – General

- ▶ Still highly centralised and hierarchical decision making system;
- ▶ Nay Pyi Taw vs. State/Region & Township;
- ▶ In principle, the Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation recognises Myanmar's ownership for its own development, strengthens the coordination among GUoM and Development Partners and aligns development assistance with national priorities/strategy;
- ▶ Though the unique local context in Myanmar is considered the starting point in the NPT Accord, such a diversity is often the first obstacle to the Effectiveness;
- ▶ Still not easy to get access to reliable data;
- ▶ Large influx of Aid:
  - i. Around a billion USD in Multi-Donor Trust Funds;
  - ii. Approximately USD 1.5 billion in loans;
  - iii. Hundreds of millions committed to “peace and conflict resolution”.
- ▶ Donors' (nowadays re-called “Development Partners”) trend to pool resources and to fund bigger project/programmes through consortia.

## Context for INGOs – Specific Issues

- ▶ High administrative and running in-country costs;
- ▶ Issues related to **national human resources** management and costs:
  - i. Due to the “*scientific demolition*” by the Military Junta of the country education system, number of adequately qualified staffs is still low;
  - ii. Since 2012, volume of aid as well as number of humanitarian and development actors have significantly increased;
  - iii. Fierce competition among all actors, including private sector, to recruit qualified staffs;
  - iv. Raising costs of personnel, also for not qualified personnel - supply does not meet demand - quality implementation at risk;
  - v. High staff turnover – up to 3 / 4 different jobs per year per job seekers looking for higher and higher salaries;
  - vi. LNGOs and governmental offices are the most exposed to undergo such a HR drain and to worsen performances

## *Context for INGOs – Specific Issues*

- ▶ Variable attitude towards INGOs from LNGOs, CBOs, authorities, press, communities;
- ▶ Communication system still not reliable (but improving);
- ▶ Increasing number of humanitarian and development actors;
- ▶ Still barriers for new comer INGOs to work smoothly in the country;
- ▶ Even though access restrictions are less stringent than before, still good planning (and an MoU) is needed to get visas and TAs.

## Ceasefire/Conflict Areas (I)

“..(The blueprint) assumes that large-scale industry and infrastructure developments are appropriate for the area and will be implemented in parallel with the peace process (..) Our analysis shows that **the exploitation of local natural resources and disrespect for land rights** by central military authorities are two key causes of the more than 60 years of conflict in ethnic areas of Burma/Myanmar (..) This should be understood within the larger context of **the state’s denial of ethnic people’s demands for self-determination**. The current peace process has **not yet** led to a meaningful **decentralization of constitutional powers**, (..). **It is indeed dangerous to ignore** the underlying causes of conflict in the region, and **to invest** money or technical support **without consulting communities** (..) (Such a strategy) **cannot possibly lead to sustainable development. A more likely outcome is increased conflict** (..).”

Excerpt from **The Critique of Japan International Cooperation Agency’s Blueprint for Development in Southeastern Burma/Myanmar** by Karen Peace Support Network, Sept 2014, at <http://theborderconsortium.org/media/52396/2014-09-19-kpsn-report-en.pdf>



## Ceasefire/Conflict Areas (2)

- ▶ Forced migration, internal as well as abroad-bound, was due not only to the armed conflict or political strife, but also to:
  - i. Wider counter-insurgency activities by the Myanmar Army (following its policy of “self –reliance” in front-line areas);
  - ii. Development-led displacement (i.e. big dam construction);
  - iii. generalised inadequate livelihoods.
  
- ▶ Changes in Myanmar perceived positively by ethnic communities (more freedom to travel and spend time in their farms, less taxation/bribes, less abuses and better livelihoods;
  
- ▶ However, still trust is weak and there are concerns about the durability of ceasefire; most common concerns include land-grabbing and big infrastructure projects;

## *Ceasefire/Conflict Areas (3)*

- ▶ Patron-client links within country/displaced ethnic communities;
- ▶ Dev. interventions can potentially lead to tensions, especially with little or no consultation;
- ▶ Ethnic groups more interested in finding a political settlement before development – **concerns** about the real intentions of GUoM;
- ▶ Land mines as well are a key issue;
- ▶ Diversity, multi-cultural and multi-language areas;
- ▶ Many stakeholders, each with its own agenda and interests;

## Ceasefire/Conflict Areas (4)

- ▶ Uncertainty about spontaneous return of refugees from Thai camps;
- ▶ According to the latest available data the scale of return to former villages or resettlement nearby remains limited;
- ▶ Exploratory visits - returnee profile shows usually 1-2 members of a household on a temporary visit to assess the situation;
- ▶ Refugees consistently reporting they are waiting for some withdrawal of troops, and landmine clearance first;
- ▶ General agreement that conditions are not yet conducive to sustainable, spontaneous and organised return;
- ▶ Return and reintegration require time and wide stakeholders' engagement.

## *Recurrent problems in CIC areas - Kayah State case*

- ▶ Still limited access to primary basic education, especially in remote areas;
- ▶ Even more problematic is access to secondary education;
- ▶ Secondary school high drop-out rate leads to a high number of unskilled, and idle youth – widespread drug use;
- ▶ Lack of jobs and vocational training opportunities;
- ▶ Limited access to health services and to health-related info;
- ▶ Still few rural infrastructures;
- ▶ Land mines;
- ▶ No support to farming and land infertility.

# Some Recommendations

- ▶ Bearing in mind the history of the country and that the recent developments have been extremely fast;
- ▶ Importance that external interventions understand and support the existing social networks and their capacities, and coping strategies;
- ▶ Do not harm unintentionally both the peace process and CBOs' operational efficiency, and their efforts towards peace making and their own development;
- ▶ Patience (and due diligence) required for partnerships with small LNGOs (the majority, while the big ones are already overstretched);
- ▶ Small LNGOs are neither used to co-operating with INGOs nor have familiarity with the complex donors' requirements;
- ▶ Long term strategy and commitment;
- ▶ Integrated and flexible interventions;
- ▶ Synergies to be sought for complementarity, effectiveness and cost efficiency, not just because induced by Donors (or DPs);
- ▶ Coordination.



**Thank you!**

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