



SOCIAL COHESION FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Stories from the field



Chin Peace
and Tranquility
Council



KMSS-Myitkyina

Karuna Myanmar
Social Services -
Myitkyina



Kayin Baptist
Convention



Mawdu Klarmae
Social Development
Association



Mon Regional
Social Development
Network



2

This work is made possible with the strong cooperation of the Progress of Border Areas and National Races Development Department, Ministry of Border Affairs of the Government of Myanmar and the contributions of the Governments of Denmark, Finland and Japan to UNDP

WHAT IS SC2 ?

Social cohesion can be described as the glue that bonds society together, essential for achieving peace, democracy and equitable development. (UNDP & SFCG)

လူမှုကျွမ်းဝင်ရင်းနှီးပေါင်းစပ်မှုသည် လူမှုအဖွဲ့အစည်းများအား ပေါင်းစည်းပေးသော “ကော်” အဖြစ်တင်စား နိုင်ပြီး ငြိမ်းချမ်းရေး ဒီမိုကရေစီနှင့် သာတူညီမျှသော ဖွံ့ဖြိုးတိုးတက်မှုတို့ ရရှိရန်အတွက် မရှိမဖြစ် အရေးကြီးပါသည်။ (UNDP & SFCG)



AT A GLANCE



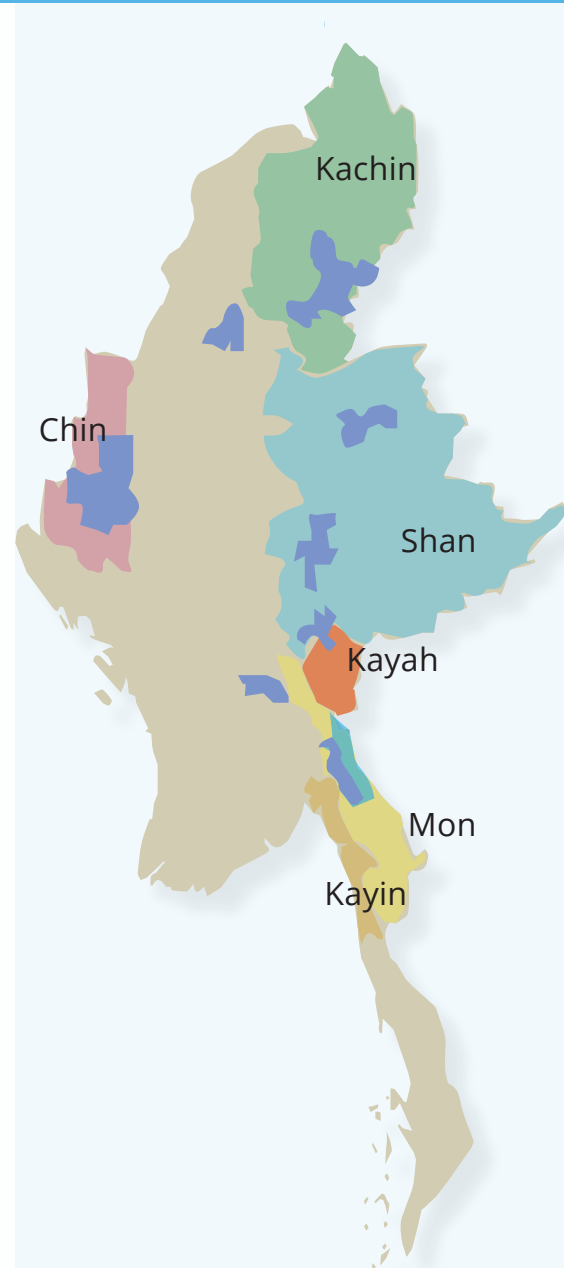
Social Cohesion
for Stronger
Communities

In January 2015, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Search For Common Ground Myanmar (SFCG) launched the initiative *Social Cohesion for Stronger Communities (SC2)*, a visioning and capacity building process to support skills that contribute to social cohesion among local-level actors in Myanmar. The six-day foundation course and supporting manual trained over 1167 people, including trainers and participants, from government, ethnic armed organizations (EAO), and civil society in six states and 18 townships. It has increased abilities to bridge ethnic, religious, social and political divides and is changing the way people interact and work together.

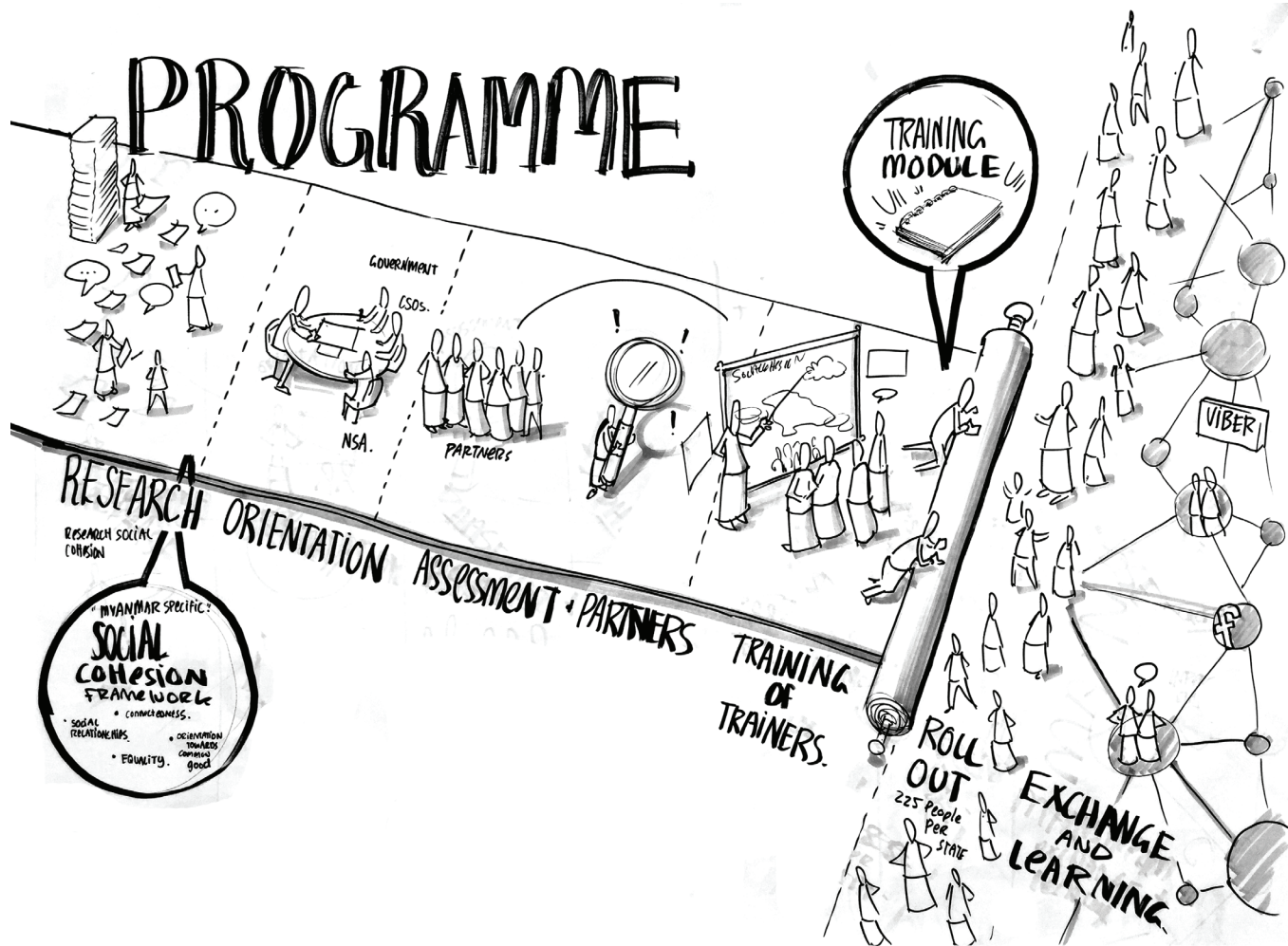
At the heart of this initiative is a Social Cohesion Framework that outlines a Myanmar-owned definition for social cohesion. This definition evolved from a 10-month consultation process with stakeholders in all states of Myanmar. It inspired the content and design of the SC2 initiative, which was developed with the intention to not only introduce key social cohesion competencies to key stakeholders, but through intentionally sequenced activities, to foster and deepen understanding and trust between stakeholders.

We are happy to share a collection of stories about how SC2 has inspired individual change, transformed relationships and created positive impact and initiatives at the community level in six states in Myanmar.

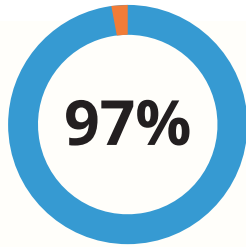
These stories reflect SC2's 3 key aims, a) to increase knowledge and skills; b) to create spaces for relationship-building; and c) to bring social cohesion ideas into practice.



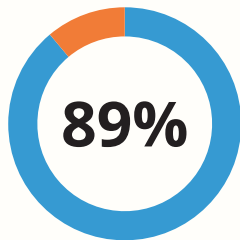
SC2 PROCESS



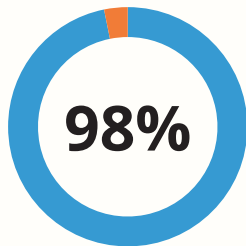
IN NUMBERS



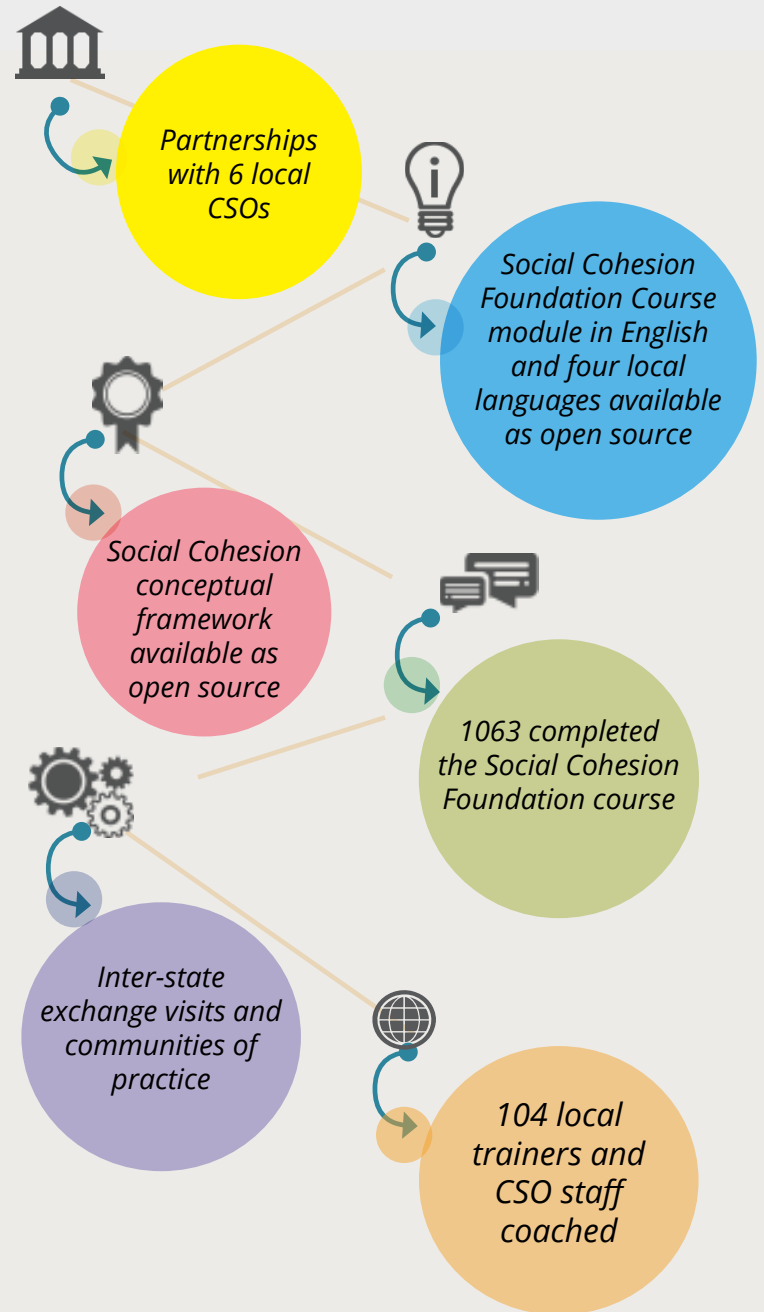
97% of trained participants successfully apply the knowledge and skills on social cohesion gained from the trainings into their work.



89% of participants surveyed reported increased levels of trust towards others as a result of the SC2 course



98% of participants surveyed are implementing measures of equality and inclusion in their existing/upcoming work



I. TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUALS

97% of trained participants successfully apply the knowledge and skills on social cohesion gained from the trainings into their work.

The SC2 Foundation Course, led participants and trainers through a long process of reflection and introspection, examining their own assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes and identities. Through interactive activities, reflective homework, and social interactions with participants from very different professional backgrounds, ages, genders, and religions, these individuals came out of the experience with improved knowledge, skills and personal attitudinal change.

Born in conflict, committed to peace

“I realized that I myself have prejudices towards other people. Now I am friends with my fellow classmates from different backgrounds, and from the Myanmar Government”

Nang Maunt Youmt Sai, is a member of the ethnic armed group Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA). She was born in one of the conflict areas of Shan State, where the Myanmar Army and Shan ethnic armed groups have been fighting for almost 60 years. Growing up in the midst of violence, she was unable to complete high school due to the constant danger and disruption of war. As a result, she had a negative perception of the government and the military, and by extension, of the Bamar ethnic majority. She refused to even eat traditional Bamar snacks because she felt that they were products of the enemy. After the fourth week of the SC2 Foundation Course, she explained, “I realized that I myself have prejudices towards other people. Now I am friends with my



fellow classmates from different backgrounds and from the Myanmar Government.”

Nang Maunt Youmt Sai now sees an opportunity to share her social cohesion knowledge with a community that knows conflict all too well. Following the course, she ran a training workshop for 40 youth participants from Shan State, where she covered components of social cohesion and conflict analysis. Nang Maunt Youmt Sai describes the feedback to her efforts as very encouraging. All participants were eager to learn and commented on how social cohesion skills were particularly important for the new generation of RCSS/SSA leaders as they try to reduce distrust, avoid further conflict and set the stage for sustainable peace in Shan State.

Min Zaw Oo: A leader for peace is born



“Even this very small gesture has improved the respect that we have for each other”

Working at a health NGO in Lashio, Shan State, Ko Min Zaw Oo has witnessed conflict and violence in his community. One of his key takeaways from the course was the realization that conflicts in his community derive directly from people’s prejudices about different ethnic and religious identities. After the course, overcoming his own prejudices, he met with religious leaders and interfaith networks, and through dialogue encouraged mutual understanding of their religion’s doctrines highlighting both the differences and commonalities between them.

This change in perspective has permeated other areas of his life as well. At the heart of his family, the training transformed the way he resolved conflict with his loved ones. He started by recognizing other family members’ interests as much as his own. Starting with simple things like TV time, he moved from fighting and imposing

his taste, to having a shared experience with his wife and daughter. “Now my family watches the MITV channel with me and I watch Korean drama series with them. Even this very small gesture has improved the respect that we have for each other.”

After attending the course, Ko Min Zaw Oo moved quickly to share social cohesion knowledge in his community through personal and professional contacts in local media, political parties and CSOs. In addition to his regular work, Ko Min Zaw Oo and other community members established a local committee to counteract rumors and misinformation as triggers of violence in Lashio. The network, which conducts community training on information management, among other outreach activities, has incorporated social cohesion as part of its core institutional goals, training content and positive messaging strategy. He hopes that this effort contributes to reducing tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence in his community.

Creating Space for Social Cohesion in Kayah State

“I have been a trainer for many years however this is the first training that I have experienced that has brought people together from different backgrounds.”

The participants in the SC2 course hang on the every word of the dynamic and captivating Daw Pan Sein. In the final session of the six week course, the participants - from government, community based organisations and ethnic armed administrations - together recalled what they had learned; using songs, visualisations and drawings to summarize their newfound knowledge as a group and to share how they will individually use their new knowledge and skills in the community.



Daw Pan Sein is a former school teacher, and has led trainings for international and local organisations for over 19 years. She is just one of 36 ethnic SC2 Foundation Course trainers from across six ethnic states. Daw Pang Sein shared that in all her years of experience this is the first training that has ever brought people together from different backgrounds in Demoso, Kayah State. "What is important," she shares, "has been the process; the training provides a space for diverse participants to learn together, from each other, and to find shared solutions to real community challenges."

Recounting a moment when the Village Tract Administrator shared how he applied his knowledge from the course to solve a community problem between a couple in conflict, Sayama Daw Pang Sein thinks that this type of training is critical for the communities in Kayah State. "Especially, during this time of democratic transition and ongoing peace process, this course provides very meaningful skills important for our future," she states.



II. TRANSFORMING RELATIONSHIPS

89% of people surveyed report that their level of trust toward others has increased as a result of their participation in this initiative

Understanding different perspectives while finding common ground with others, individuals overcame their prejudices, paving the way for mutual understanding, collaboration across dividing lines and improved relationships built on increasing levels of trust.

From political adversaries to allies for peace in Shan State

“Now, after discussing, laughing and eating together, I will no longer hesitate to ask him for help”

Despite the promise of ongoing national peace negotiations, government officials, Ethnic Armed Groups (EAOs), Ethnic Organizations (EOs), and CSOs at the local level continue to serve in places torn apart by conflict and where distrust runs deep.

In Hopone town in Shan State, Khun Hla Aok, liaison for the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) and Ko Aung Minn, a local member of the Myanmar Police Force, have overcome this trust gap and are on their way to forming a close friendship. “I have been living in Hopone for 30 years but never made friends with a government officer,” says Khun Hla Aok. Ko Aung Minn agrees, adding, “now, after discussing, laughing and eating together, I will no longer hesitate to ask him for help.”

Khun Hla Aok and Ko Aung Minn are just one example of how these shifts in attitude are not only impacting individuals, but



making the peace process more effective, as participants take their learning and renewed trust back to their workplaces. Since the conclusion of the SC2 Foundation Course, Khun Hla Aok and Ko Aung Minn are now cooperating on security incidents in their area.

Social cohesion is all about preventing and transforming conflict



“Social cohesion is all about preventing and transforming conflict”

Sa Soe San Min participated in the course as a representative of the Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC). He was born and raised in Kawkareik township and as part of his job at KNU/KNLA-PC he attended meetings with government and communities on human rights issues and ceasefire monitoring.

Sa Soe San Min first attended the SC2 course out of respect for his supervisors, who asked him to respond to the invitation extended by UNDP. However, when he realised that the SC2 Foundation Course was all about preventing and transforming conflict, he became very engaged and active.

Soe San Min has already been proactive mainstreaming social cohesion into his community. As a member of the KNU/KNLA-PC he has the opportunity to participate in important negotiations between civil society and local government. Soe San Min is using the skills he gained from the SC2 to mobilize the community around common issues and facilitate more effective dialogue. While he initially compelled by his supervisors to join the course he now wants to raise awareness about the importance of social cohesion and the benefits of its application at the individual and community level.

An opportunity to build new trust

“I credit this success to the training I attended, as it provided me with the conflict analysis and negotiation skills to facilitate a solution.”

Ko Thiha Phyo Aung Htet is a deputy staff officer at the Department of Agriculture in Kayah State. He discovered how useful it is in his work to have social cohesion competencies.

“The area under my responsibility is far from the town in an area so remote that previous agriculture officers never took the time to visit. After the SC2 Foundation course, I was sent there. The local farmers, from Inn Thar ethnicity, were not happy to see me. They were angry at the agricultural department for ignoring their requests for irrigation support which they needed to keep their rice fields healthy. The farmers were so frustrated they were threatening to destroy all of the irrigation canals and pipes and go to jail in the process if necessary.

Luckily, I had already started the SC2 course by the time I visited this community and my confidence and relationship building skills had grown. So I decided to mediate between the farmers and our department. After listening to the farmer’s concerns, I went to see the State Agricultural Manager, which is something I would never have dared to do in the past. I met him and explained the frustration of the farmers and suggested that we should help them. I came to know that the Manager was not even aware of the situation as he had never been fully briefed by his subordinates. He immediately authorized a budget to repair the irrigation canals and to link them to the main source of irrigation water. I credit this success to the training I attended, as it provided me with conflict analysis and negotiation skills to facilitate a solution. Now I have a very good relationship with the farmers in the village and they are happy to host me whenever I visit their village.



III. TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

98% of trained participants report that they are implementing measures of equality and inclusion in their existing/upcoming work.

After gaining confidence and skills, and building relationships with other participants, participants explored ways to mainstream social cohesion competencies in their work, supporting impact in their wider communities.

Growing social cohesion in Mon State



“So much knowledge and important issues can be shared here”


In Paung Township, Mon State, engagement with issues of social cohesion did not end with the conclusion of the SC2 Foundation Course. Out of 60 participants that completed the six-day workshop, 40 decided to form their own community of practice, called the Paung Social Cohesion Network. Led by the Mon Region Social Development Network, a local CSO, the new network has gathered several times since the SC2 Foundation course.

In one of the meetings, they discussed the problem of drinking water scarcity in one of the villages of the township. As Ko Kyaw Thiha, a CSS staff and member of the network, shared, “We discussed this problem and decided to approach the Transportation Department. The meeting went very well, resulting in the provision of a truck by the Transportation Department to carry water from the nearby rivers to the drought affected villages and they shared that they were willing to provide the truck for similar work in the future as long as Paung informed the Department ahead of time”.

The network has met with the Members of the National Parliament representing Mawlamyine, a Member of the State Parliament representing Paung Township and a State Minister to discuss health service challenges, land conflicts and access to education. At the same time, the group has been proactive with fellow community members. They have already performed a Social Cohesion training for people from Paung Township. The members voluntarily facilitated the training and the logistics were provided by the CSO partner, MSDN, in Mon State.

Member U Aye Naing hopes to use the network to build social capital in his community. He is already impressed by the size and potential of the network, with each member serving as a link to broader and more diverse circles within Paung Township. “So much knowledge and important issues are being shared here,” he explained.

Social cohesion for future generations



“If we are able to teach and transfer social cohesion skills to our students, we can make a major contribution towards building a more peaceful community and a more peaceful country”

“I am Than Soe from Lashio, Shan State, and I am member of a CSO. I am the principal at a monastic school. My school welcomes a total of 412 students from different ethnic groups such as Bamar, Shan, Palaung, Chinese, Wa, Kokang, and Kachin. They study under the supervision of 17 teachers, including monks.

“Lashio is situated in an armed conflict area between the Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army (RCSS/SSA) and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). In this sensitive situation, Shan and Palaung youth have been arming themselves with knives and other weapons. Anticipating a conflict, I prevented the tension from escalating into violence by bringing the two youth groups together using the tools I learned from my social cohesion course. ”

After I completed the social cohesion course I realized that we, the teachers, have an important responsibility. If we are able to teach and transfer social cohesion skills to our students, we can make a major contribution toward building a more peaceful community in Lashio and a more peaceful country."

The capacity to learn is a gift; the willingness to learn is a choice

Daw May Nu plans to incorporate elements of social cohesion in the woman's program she will be delivering along the Thai-Myanmar border.

70-year-old Daw May Nu is a leader of Hpa'An Anglican Church's Women's Network in Kayin State and is SC2's most senior participant. Initially Daw May Nu felt she was too old to attend the course yet the 6-week experience provided her with renewed energy to combine her experiential learning and her knowledge on social cohesion and share it with the married woman, parents and youth with whom she works and guides. She thinks that women, especially married women and parents, should learn the skills of this course. Skills such as conflict resolution, and understanding different people's perceptions and interests, equip the adult members of the community to positively influence their children's perception on social cohesion and encourage them to support a peaceful society. Daw May Nu plans to incorporate elements of social cohesion in the woman's program she will be delivering along the Thai-Myanmar border.







*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

United Nations Development Programme

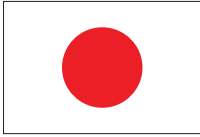
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works to eradicate poverty, inequalities and exclusion in over 170 countries, with a focus on democratic governance and peacebuilding, sustainable development, and climate and disaster resilience. UNDP understands that strengthening peace and social cohesion requires building responsive institutions that are able to deliver essential public services, promoting inclusive political processes and constructive state-society relations, and strengthening resilience in communities so that they are able to prevent and overcome crisis. In Myanmar, UNDP currently provides support to the national political and socio-economic reforms that underpin the country's transition. UNDP's support is channeled through a programme that seeks to strengthen institutions of democratic and local governance, support the environment and disaster risk management, and support government efforts for poverty reduction over a seven-year period (2013-2017).

Search for Common Ground Myanmar

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is an international peacebuilding organization working in 35 countries for over 30 years. Our mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches and toward cooperative solutions. We work at all levels of society to build sustainable peace through three main avenues: Dialogue+, Media+ and Community+. Since April 2014, Search Myanmar, has been driven by an overarching mission to support social cohesion across the country. With an ethnically and religiously diverse team, and with partners from across the country, we implement projects at all levels of society, to bring people together across dividing lines to build sustainable peace. Together with Government, Ethnic Armed Groups/Ethnic Organizations, Youth, Women, Religious Leaders, Civil Society Leaders, and the Media, we work to bring about societal change through creative conflict transformation.



photo for both covers: Kyaw (izeven)
graphics : Ink Strategy
layout design: ZZDD
press: ZZ Design studio & Printing Serve



From
the People of Japan

DANIDA



MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF FINLAND

