



# SOCIAL COHESION FRAMEWORK

## social cohesion for stronger communities

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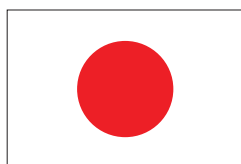
This Social Cohesion Framework was developed with a multitude of stakeholders from across Myanmar from February to September 2015, designed to inform the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Search for Common Ground's (SFCG) joint initiative Social Cohesion for Stronger Communities project. This framework is the foundational layer for the Social Cohesion Mainstreaming course that was designed to support the roll out of social cohesion trainings for government, ethnic armed organisations and civil society organizations across six states in Myanmar.

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The Social Cohesion framework forms a foundation for an on going visioning and exploration of a locally owned definition of social cohesion. We hope this framework may inspire the broader Myanmar society and peacebuilding community in its on-going efforts of supporting a democratic and peaceful Myanmar.

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**From  
the People of Japan**



**MINISTRY FOR FOREIGN  
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# 1. Introduction

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Social cohesion is an important determinant of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous nation. It creates stronger bonds within and across different groups, and fosters greater trust in the institutions of government. Reinforcing or promoting social cohesion needs to be an integral part of government policy and civil society engagement in countries where multiple identity groups share geographic space. It is even more important where there is a history or current context of conflict, hostility, or mistrust between different identity groups or the state and its citizens.

South East Asia (SEA) is a region of great diversity and disparity that has, in recent decades, undergone massive economic and social developments. While some countries such as South Korea have risen as global powers, others are still in various stages of emergence and are rapidly trying to catch up with the developed world. Migration, globalization and modernization are simultaneously influencing the social makeup of SEA countries in profound ways. Recently, slowing economic growth rates across the region, combined with poor social policies have revealed many social and economic fault-lines that were previously concealed or repressed. These latent conflicts are now emerging across the region, fuelled in part by real or perceived inequality, injustice and exclusion. After the financial crisis in the late 1990s, the Asian Development Bank warned that new challenges would “further strain the fabric of societies and erode social cohesion, from rising socio-economic disparities within and between countries, to rapid population aging, youth unemployment, increasing migration and the impact of climate change”.<sup>34</sup>

Myanmar has not escaped these societal shifts. As a country undergoing significant and rapid change while confronting multiple socio-ethnic-religious fault lines and hostilities, there is a pressing need to create and sustain a cohesive society equipped to withstand and embrace the changes and challenges ahead. It is therefore critical that across society, particularly at the local level, social cohesion becomes an integral component of policies, strategies and programs to manage conflict, to build peace and democratic governance, and to develop the country in an equitable and inclusive manner. Social cohesion is not the responsibility of the Union government alone; local governments, civil society, non-state actors, media and the people of Myanmar all have important roles to play in shifting cultural norms and creating a public consciousness that recognizes the many commonalities shared between diverse groups.

In order to successfully fulfil this role, civil society organizations, ethnic armed organisations, and government working at the national and local levels need to understand how broad definitions of social cohesion apply to the context of Myanmar, what their respective roles are in promoting social cohesion and how the concept can be measured. This document attempts to provide this conceptual framework, intended as a working tool not only for government, civil society groups, and ethnic armed organisations but also for the wider development community, political actors and other stakeholders in Myanmar.

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3 Deconstructing social cohesion: towards an analytical framework for assessing social cohesion policies, Corvinus journal of sociology and social policy vol.3 (2012) 2, 39–54, downloaded at <http://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development>

4 Nat J. Colletta et al, Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention in Asia: Managing Diversity through Development, The World Bank, 2001

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## 2. Context

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This conceptual framework has been developed as part of an initiative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in Myanmar titled 'Social Cohesion for Stronger Communities' (SC2). This initiative will develop a framework and training module on social cohesion to be used country-wide to help government institutions, ethnic armed actors and civil society organizations at the local level to better understand the relevance of social cohesion and how they can strengthen social cohesion at the local level (See Annex 1: Fact-sheet for further details). To develop this framework, and to vision a concept for social cohesion in Myanmar, consultative workshops were held in Mandalay for Upper Myanmar and in Yangon for Lower Myanmar. With keen interest demonstrated by target stakeholders, the consultative workshops successfully introduced the initiative to stakeholders, laying strong foundations for project implementation and developing a supportive network for the project that would later create a training manual, train trainers and roll out trainings across all target states on social cohesion mainstreaming. The consultations worked through sets of key questions under the following themes exploring 1) the understanding of social cohesion and its key components; 2) commonalities and diversity; 3) mainstreaming social cohesion; and 4) a vision for social cohesion in Myanmar.

Academics and experts, both national and international, were also consulted bilaterally for inputs into the framework. The framework was further developed in partnership with six implementing partners for the SC2 initiative from Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon and Shan States (namely, Chin Peace and Tranquillity Committee (CPTC), Karen Baptist Convention (KBC), Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS), Mawduklarmae Social Development Association (MSDA), Mon Regional Development Network (MRDN) and Yoma Ahlinn), and informed by their ethnic and cultural perspectives, expertise, experience, local assessments and discussions with local stakeholders.

This conceptual framework has been developed as a bottom up, iterative and consultative process, with stakeholders (experts, academics, CSOs, NSAs and government officials) from all ethnic states. This approach is intended to ensure a locally owned and relevant framework for fostering social cohesion in Myanmar with a focus on the ethnic areas.

## 2.1 Limitations

Despite best efforts, the authors of this document are cognizant of certain limitations that challenge attempts to realize a truly comprehensive, iterative, bottom-up consultative process. The following limitations were identified during the course of the project:

- **Inclusion of states and not divisions:** The consultative process for developing the framework was limited to the seven target states of the SC2 initiative. Additionally, while Rakhine State representatives contributed to the initial consultative process, due to state level dynamics and the local context in Rakhine State, activities there have been placed on hold. This has limited the geographical scope of the framework and prevented the project (and inter alia this Framework as a component of the project) from being truly nationwide in scope.
- **Natural disasters:** Recent natural disasters impeded data collection and jeopardized the participation of key implementing CSOs in the finalization of the framework.
- **Linguistic Variation:** Due to the multitude of languages and dialects spoken throughout Myanmar, it is not feasible to explore the linguistic depth and variation to its fullest when discussing social cohesion.

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## 3. Definition

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Numerous stakeholders have struggled to identify a term that adequately explains the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the force, or “glue”, that holds a society together and enables its members to peacefully coexist and develop. The term “social cohesion” has been used to describe this force, but there is no consensus on a single definition of social cohesion. Social cohesion carries different connotations, depending on context, identity, culture, and social and political dynamics.

Social cohesion is also one amongst many inter-related yet distinct terms used to describe processes of strengthening peace and development in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. For example, social cohesion differs from human security, which focuses on the security of the individual rather than the nation state. Due to its broad scope, practitioners have begun to transition away from this term to a more specific concept focused on the broader community. Social cohesion also differs from the process of peace building. Peace building aims to change or transform negative relationships and institutions while strengthening national capacities at all levels in order to better manage conflict dynamics, support the cohesiveness of society and build sustainable peace from the bottom up.<sup>3</sup> Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, social cohesion is often viewed as the desired outcome of effective peace building interventions and is inextricably linked in many contexts to the wider scope of democratic governance including thematic topics such as, but not limited to, human rights and social accountability. The local context often determines which term is used based on political sensitivity. However, sociologists, peace builders, and economists generally agree that social cohesion is an important quality for any society. Several governments and multilateral organizations have sought to define it.

According to the **UN**, a “cohesive society is one where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, recognition and legitimacy... Such societies are not necessarily demographically homogenous. Rather, by respecting diversity, they harness the potential residing in their societal diversity (in terms of ideas, opinions, skills, etc.).”<sup>4</sup> **UNDP** defines social cohesion as the state of a society’s convergence, or the ‘common bonds’ that unify different people and groups that share space or territory. It comes about when people buy into and interact with each other based on a common set of political, economic and social institutions.

**OECD** notes that while social cohesion is often perceived to be the overarching goal of social policy in Asia, little agreement exists on what it means.<sup>5</sup> For the OECD, a cohesive society works towards the well being of all members, minimizing disparities and trying to avoid marginalization within and between groups. Social cohesion can be reinforced by fighting discrimination, social exclusion and inequalities, by building social capital (i.e., networks of relationships, trust and identity between and within different groups of society) and by enabling upward social mobility.

UNICEF considers social cohesion to refer to “the quality of coexistence between the multiple groups that operate within a society. Groups can be distinguished in terms of ethnic and socio-cultural origin, religious and political beliefs, social class or economic sector or on the basis of interpersonal characteristics such as gender and age. Quality of coexistence between the groups can be evaluated along the dimensions of mutual respect and trust, shared values and social participation, life satisfaction and happiness as well as structural equity and social justice.”<sup>6</sup>

3 UNICEF, Key Peace building Concepts for Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA). East Asia and Pacific Desk Review and Situation Analysis. 2014.

4 <http://undesadspd.org/SocialIntegration/Definition.aspx>

5 OECD (2012), “Social Cohesion Indicators”, in Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2011, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264106154-11-en>

6 Key Peace building Concepts for the Peace building, Education, and Advocacy (PBEA) programme, UNICEF

**The World Bank** describes social cohesion “as the glue that bonds society together, promoting harmony, a sense of community, and a degree of commitment to promoting the common good. Beyond the social relations that bridge ethnic and religious groups, vertical linkages in which state and market institutions interact with communities and peoples can further cement the cohesiveness of a society if they are inclusive, transparent, and accountable.”<sup>7</sup> It implies a set of accepted norms and rules around inclusion and equity, social and national membership and access to livelihoods and basic services, as well as a state that actively promotes these.<sup>8</sup> The World Bank further emphasizes that the interplay between these vertical and horizontal ties is a critical component for conflict management.

The **Council of Europe** defines social cohesion “as a society’s capacity to ensure the well-being of all its members by minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization; to manage differences and divisions and to ensure the means of achieving welfare for all.” It is considered “essential for achieving social justice, democratic security and sustainable development.”<sup>9</sup>

**Search for Common Ground** regards social cohesion as the glue that bonds society together, essential for achieving peace, democracy and development. This “glue” is made up of four key components: 1) social relationships, 2) Connectedness, 3) Orientation towards the common good and 4) Equality. These components in turn require good governance, respect for human rights and individual responsibility. Social cohesion is not an ideal, but rather an attainable objective requiring the active and constant commitment of all levels of society and is critical to the process of building a peaceful society and nation.

In contexts where social cohesion is weak, conflicts are usually more frequent, more profound, more violent, and more destructive. Just because a society is socially cohesive, however, does not mean that conflict will not exist. Conflict will still occur in these societies but it is more likely to be effectively managed. A society or community that is inclusive, equal and united will more readily employ conflict management mechanisms to protect these values and is therefore more resistant to division. In the aftermath of war or violent conflict, the social fabric is often left in tatters, with high levels of mistrust, social isolation, exclusion and inequality. Rebuilding a sense of togetherness among divided groups, and between people and their governors is a crucial component of any Common Ground<sup>10</sup> peace building approach. As with the UN definition, the Common Ground approach addresses social cohesion with a fundamental recognition of the importance of valuing and celebrating diversity between groups while assisting them to identify their commonalities and to deal with conflict in a proactive and positive approach.

### 3.1 Examples of Social cohesion in Southeast asia

Social cohesion has been central to the formulation of Malaysia’s policy agenda since 1971. The Malaysian approach to social cohesion emphasizes the creation of national unity beyond ethnic and territorial divisions. The country’s approach is based on five pillars: material conditions, social order, positive interaction, social inclusion and integration, and social equality. An important means of achieving social cohesion through interaction and inclusion is the creation of a national culture

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7 Nat J. Colletta et al, Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention in Asia: Managing Diversity through Development, The World Bank, 2001

8 Andrew Norton & Arjan de Haan, Social Cohesion: Theoretical Debates and Practical Applications with Respect to Jobs, World Bank 2013

9 New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion, 2010 [http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/RevisedStrategy\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/RevisedStrategy_en.pdf).

10 The Common Ground Approach is a set of broad operating principles that guide SFCG’s conflict transformation work around the world. See <https://www.sfcg.org/our-mission/> for further details.



based around the use of the Malay language and the set of national principles and values.

Thailand, with its mix of traditional and modern ideas and influences, is a highly complex and pluralistic society. Different regions of the country possess distinct historical memories yet are controlled by a centralized, semi-authoritarian government. In this context, decentralized governance plays an important role in empowering minorities and expanding civic and political space for participatory decision-making. In order to promote sustainable and inclusive development, decentralization has to strengthen the participation of civil society in policy and decision-making. The provision of health and education services in Thailand has also been an effective means of reducing inequalities and improving human development. For example, extending health coverage to the majority of the population through the Universal Care scheme (UC scheme) has helped Thailand lower the costs of healthcare for the most vulnerable segments of the population who lack social safety nets.

In 2013, Singapore began the process of creating an analytic framework for social cohesion. Since achieving independence in 1965, Singapore has been heralded as an exemplary example of multiculturalism and social integration, objectives that were achieved through “controlled ethnicity.” A prime example is the bilingual policy whereby English is the official language of business and education and the ethnic mother tongues (i.e. Chinese, Malay, Indian and others) are used for official cultural and educational purposes.<sup>11</sup> Critics of controlled ethnicity have charged that it assumes homogeneity under broad categories and accentuates stereotypes to create differences between populations. Changing domestic and international socioeconomic forces (e.g. globalization, immigration and changing views of governmental hegemony) in Singapore have created new cleavages within existing groups while exacerbating the complexity of society. This has necessitated a re-examination of social cohesion beyond racial and religious dimensions, which remains an on-going process.

### 3.2 Defining social cohesion in Myanmar

The above-mentioned definitions and their application to specific case studies in the Southeast Asia region have sought to encapsulate the general features of social cohesion. Due to different understandings of social cohesion, and the power dynamics involved, approaching the concept of social cohesion in Myanmar requires a high degree of sensitivity. Decades of emphasizing “national unity” by the previous military administrations have created an aversion to the notion of national cohesion and unity amongst many groups in the country. The former military government’s attempt at forcible assimilation through “Burmanization,” which sought to divide and forcibly assimilate ethnic minorities under their territory into the dominant group, partly contributed to a resurgence of ethnic nationalism. In Myanmar, a country of great ethnic and religious diversity, there is no commonly accepted understanding or concept of social cohesion in Myanmar - either across the diverse array of languages, or within the dominant language of Myanmar itself – and inter-communal ties, most commonly leveraged in times of hardship when people are in need or in times of celebration when people rejoice at cultural and religious festivals, play a key role in any conceptualization of social cohesion. Although ethnicity, livelihood and religion are important identity markers in Myanmar, they are often subordinate to the overarching role that is played by community dynamics.

The complexity of inter-communal ties calls for an examination of the meaning of community in the Myanmar context. In Myanmar, the definition of community is complex, extending beyond mere inter-personal relationships within a collective. Community dynamics are based on access to resources, and the associated power that access provides to different groups and individuals within the community. This access to resources therefore plays a key role in creating and maintaining social hierarchies and centre/periphery dynamics - two phenomena that prevent the creation of socially

11 An Analysis of Social Policies Implemented in Singapore to Promote Social Cohesion amongst Races. Soon Ling Wei. 2012.

cohesive communities.<sup>12</sup> Social relations within communities are also influenced by identity and group membership and the diversity of identities thus greatly influences the definitions of social cohesion across Myanmar. For example, the identity of those who live in the regions of Myanmar is defined most clearly by their affiliation with their religious group, whereas those who live in the ethnic states expressed a more layered identity: as members of their ethnic group, their local community, or their religious group.<sup>13</sup> The complexities associated with the interplay between ethnic, geographic, and religious identities pose great challenges for understanding social cohesion in Myanmar.

Multiple definitions of social cohesion were suggested during consultations with diverse stakeholders. A number of definitions refer to ‘unity’ – with somewhat negative connotations and seen as a coming together of peoples by a degree of force. Other definitions were said to be missing a key component, which was later defined as akin to “peace”, “coexistence”, “tolerance” or “living harmoniously” with their neighbours.

Opinions about social cohesion amongst Myanmar’s ethnic groups share many similarities, such as a desire for harmony. However, they also exhibit interesting and nuanced variations:

- The **Chin** characterization invokes “sharing of life” in which cooperation, interaction, solidarity and collaboration are embraced by the social community during both joyous and sorrowful occasions.
- The **Barman** understanding frequently recognizes diversity and dignity, living through thick and thin, equity and give and take towards harmony and a common goal.
- The **Kachin** understanding recognizes harmony in diversity whereby like-minded people from different backgrounds collaborate in a way that satisfies the needs of all.
- The **Karen** understanding of social cohesion often emphasizes the value and security of the individual, particularly in terms of freedom of expression.
- The **Kayah** meaning is predicated on building trust through interaction with others and forming agreements between local government and citizens.
- The **Mon** description is often built around the metaphor of a common experience shared by people who are on the “same boat, same journey” to arrive at their destination harmoniously.
- The **Shan** understanding underscores the importance of social cooperation, coordination, camaraderie and sharing with others to support important social values (e.g. human rights and rule of law).

Respondents said that Myanmar could be considered socially and religiously cohesive if taking into account factors such as generosity and contribution to the collective good. However cohesion is lacking in power relations between those who govern and who are governed across the board. The linkages and similarities open up the space for common ground and a shared vision of social cohesion in Myanmar. During a CSO partner workshop, participants agreed that the most fitting Myanmar translation for social cohesion is “Lu Mu Yinn Nee Kyun Winn POUNG Sut Mu,” which can be most closely translated as “Social interaction and comity”.

At the national level especially, social cohesion was perceived as a somewhat intangible and unattainable social ideal,<sup>14</sup> rather than a process-driven framework through which pressing challenges

12 Feedback from participants – training on “Strengthening Community-level Social Cohesion Competencies Through Training and Support” held 20-24 July 2015.

13 Asia Foundation, Myanmar Survey: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society. December 2014

14 Consultative Workshops February 2015, Mandalay and Yangon.

facing the country could be addressed. The notion that social cohesion is something to be achieved, rather than a process which facilitates the achievement of other goals also gives rise to a certain pessimism or feelings of unattainability of the concept. There is a fine balance to be struck between fostering strong ethnic, cultural or religious identities alongside a sense of national belonging, the latter of which is especially contested and questioned in areas under ethnic armed administration. Another challenge is how to allow these identities to flourish while minimizing stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination between groups as well as nationalism and extremism. Willingness to reinforce social cohesion has already been expressed at the union and state level through improving relationships, bridging divides through exchanges, sharing information with others, dialogue, solidarity and shared cultural moments.

## 4. Measuring social cohesion

On review of the definitions of social cohesion from developmental, peace building and sociological perspectives (in both international and Myanmar contexts), certain important commonalities emerge. The first is that social cohesion requires strong social relations, a feeling of connectedness, orientation towards the common good<sup>15</sup> and equality. It also possesses economic, social, political and cultural dimensions.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, social cohesion extends horizontally within and across groups, as well as vertically, from people to their leaders, at local and national level.

As such it becomes evident that social cohesion has an important role to play in democratization, conflict management and development. We can also deduce that social cohesion does not entail the homogenization of a nation, but rather recognizes that social, ethnic and religious diversity can in fact contribute to the building of a confident democratic state.

Because of its recognized importance in nation building, a focus on measuring social cohesion has gained traction in recent years. As a result, different frameworks are emerging which provide comprehensive sets of indicators to accurately and concretely assess the strength of social cohesion at micro and macro levels.

### 4.1 Literature review

Schiefer et al (2012) identify three common components in social cohesion definitions that they suggest can facilitate its measurement, namely social relations, connectedness and orientation towards the common good. They present a selection of indicators for measuring each of these components, as presented in the below chart:<sup>17</sup>

| SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS                                                                                                                                           | CONNECTEDNESS                                                                                                                                 | ORIENTATION TOWARDS THE COMMON GOOD                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Social networking:</b><br>Quality and quantity of social relationships and social networks.                                                                 | <b>Feeling of belonging:</b> Self-perception as member of a group, sense of shared identity.                                                  | <b>Social responsibility:</b><br>Defending the interests of society even at the expense of one's own objectives and needs.                                                                                                             |
| <b>Participation:</b> Political participation (e.g. voting in elections) and socio-cultural participation (civic involvement in associations, volunteer work). | <b>Identification:</b> Identification with a region, federal state, nation, Europe, belonging rated as important aspect of personal identity. | <b>Solidarity:</b> Cooperation and support for fellow-citizens.                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Trust:</b> General trust in one's fellow human beings and in political institutions.                                                                        |                                                                                                                                               | Recognition of the social order and social rules/anomie:<br>Respect for social institutions and adherence to the rules of communal life (as well as the rules for changing the social order) vs. disregard and transgression of norms. |

15 Cohesion Radar: Measuring Cohesiveness – social cohesion in Germany, a preliminary review, Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012 [www.gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt.de/.../Social\\_Cohesion\\_2012.pdf](http://www.gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt.de/.../Social_Cohesion_2012.pdf)

16 Ibid

17 Cohesion Radar: Measuring Cohesiveness – social cohesion in Germany, a preliminary review, Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012 [www.gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt.de/.../Social\\_Cohesion\\_2012.pdf](http://www.gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt.de/.../Social_Cohesion_2012.pdf)

As part of the Peace building Education and Advocacy (PBEA) program, UNICEF also focuses on three determinants for measuring social cohesion: 1) Belonging and inclusion; 2) Respect and trust; and 3) Participation.<sup>18</sup> UNICEF's monitoring tool provides indicators and sample questions to measure attitudes and behaviours about:

1. Responsive and inclusive State
2. Mutual respect and trust (toward other groups/individuals)
3. Attitudes toward other members or groups of society
4. Group participation (at community level or individual level)
5. Structural equity and social justice (or perceptions thereof).

The UN Research Institute for Social Development proposes a series of indicators for macro-level measurement, the data for which is mostly available in World Bank or ILO publications. These can be summarized as follows:

1. **Social inclusion** – indicated by access to financial resources, economic activity, education, health and technology
2. **Cultural and ethnic homogeneity** – indicated by ethnic mix, recognized languages, foreign born populations.
3. **Trust** - indicated by perceptions of government institutions, immediate community, other ethnic groups, etc.
4. **Participation and solidarity** – as indicated by voting turnouts, volunteerism, community participation and activism, charitable giving, etc.<sup>19</sup>

OECD identifies five “symptoms” which taken together can inform levels of social cohesion:<sup>20</sup>

1. **Life satisfaction** - strongly associated with good family relationships, health and confidence in governance in the broader society.
2. **Trust** - extending from immediate family and community to government and public institutions.
3. **Pro-social behaviour** – specifically volunteering, giving money and helping a stranger. Anti-social behaviour is picked up by an indicator of perceived corruption.
4. **Rates of suicide** can indicate a deterioration of the social context in which a person lives (though has an important personal component also).
5. **Voter turnout** – high turnout is a sign that a country's political system enjoys a strong degree of participation.

18 Compilation of Tools for Measuring Peace building Results around Social Cohesion and Resilience, UNICEF, 2014

19 Jane Jenson, Defining and Measuring Social Cohesion, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development 2010

20 OECD (2012), “Social Cohesion Indicators”, in Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2011, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264106154-11-en>

## 4.2 Indicators for Myanmar

We have seen that social cohesion comprises political, social, economic and cultural dimensions. Therefore measuring social cohesion cannot be achieved through examining only one determinant. All dimensions should be considered when creating a monitoring and evaluation framework intended to measure change in social cohesion. Social cohesion is context-specific; and so generic indicators have to be adapted and data has to be disaggregated as the situation demands. It is both objective and subjective; and so it is important to measure using a combination of objective and perceptual indicators. Based on the frameworks above and consultations with key stakeholders in Myanmar, we can elaborate some sample indicators that can inform progress towards a more socially cohesive community, society or nation.

### Political indicators

- Voting levels
- Participation in town hall meetings, local assemblies and other consultation mechanisms
- Perceptions of being listened to and considered by the government institutions
- Levels of trust in government to provide basic services
- Levels of trust in government agents, justice system, police and military
- Levels of trust between government, civil society and non-state actors.

### Social Indicators

- Levels of trust within the group (family, friends, neighbours, members of the same ethnicity) and of other groups (strangers, other ethnic/religious groups, etc.)
- Perceptions of belonging, who is excluded and why?
- Who do individuals and groups go to for help? How readily accessible is that help?
- Membership of associations, church groups, community organizations, etc.,
- Levels of activism and volunteerism
- Levels of giving/donating
- Levels of interaction
- Levels of awareness about other groups
- Levels of access to information (how well informed do people feel) including at the national level.

### Economic Indicators

- Perceptions of social mobility (will my children be better off than me)?
- Satisfaction with living standards
- Attitudes towards the future
- Levels of access to basic services and livelihood/employment opportunities (affordability, geographical access, quality of service)
- Perceptions of economic inequality
- Satisfaction with the progress of development and economic opportunities.

### Cultural Indicators

- Levels of stereotyping of others
- Level of preconceptions and prejudices about others
- Perceptions of prejudice and discrimination against self
- Perceptions of prejudice and discrimination committed against others
- Recognition of one's own identity group
- Quantity and quality of contact with other groups
- Levels of knowledge of other cultures/religions/ethnicities
- Existence of mechanisms for resolving conflicts between groups
- Numbers of inclusive festivals/ceremonies.

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## 5. Dynamics of social cohesion in Myanmar

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### 5.1 Background: Country Context

Myanmar is undergoing significant economic, political and social change. The country's recent emergence from international isolation has presented its leaders and its people with both enormous opportunities and formidable challenges. As the country makes plans for its future as an active participant in regional and global affairs, strengthening social cohesion during this time of transition could empower Myanmar to be the driver of its own economic, political and social development. Efforts to mainstream social cohesion can contribute to a nation more resilient in the face of internal division and conflict and that presents a more coherent vision of its future to international partners.

Based on this framework and consultations with key stakeholders in Myanmar, we can apply some social cohesion dimensions and dynamics to Myanmar.

### 5.2 Communication and Trust-building in Political Reform

Politically, Myanmar has made significant moves towards democratic reform after many decades of military rule. As a result, the country has opened up to the global community while information and communications technologies (ICT) have given Myanmar people access to the outside world and across the country to each other in a way never before experienced. The media space, including social media, has also expanded in recent years, allowing a certain relaxation of censorship. This change has created a space for divergent voices and opinions, exposure to new ideas and information and sharing of news, information and cultural values.

These developments provide an important opportunity for promoting social cohesion and contributing to improved relations between conflicting groups. The peace process, which led to a national ceasefire agreement and inclusive political dialogue, demonstrates that there is increased commitment to dialogue between the government and the armed groups, and between these two stakeholders and the broader community.<sup>21</sup> Conflict-sensitive communication can be harnessed to reduce the negative impact of stereotypes and rumours, while valuing the strong ethnic and cultural diversity that exists in the country.

There is a strong need to address the low levels of social trust. Many people in Myanmar express the belief that 'others', out-groups, cannot be trusted, though levels of trust between people vary from one location to another with lack of trust higher in conflict-prone areas and slightly higher in rural settings than urban settings, and within urban areas, slightly higher at the neighbourhood level than at the community level.<sup>22</sup>

The 2013 Nay Pyi Taw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation emphasized the Government of Myanmar's aspirations for "people-centered development."<sup>23</sup> This declared interest in participatory approaches with civil society and development partners should also pave the way for increased accountability and transparency of public actions. However, while there is evidence of improved delivery of essential services, the results on the ground with respect to improvements in citizens' participation in local governance and development are mixed. Furthermore, some groups view decentralized development assistance and public services as veiled efforts to redefine fundamental grievances about lack of self-determination and systemic discrimination as simple economic disadvantage, as

21 Feedback from participants – UNDP-SFCG Consultative Workshops held 2-6 March 2015.

22 Asia Foundation, Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society. December 2014, p87.

23 International Center for Transitional Justice, "Navigating Paths to Justice in Myanmar's Transition" June 2014, 4, available at <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Myanmar-Development-Report-2014.pdf> (accessed 22 June 2015).



well as to extend the long arm of the central government.

Low level of trust in government institutions poses challenges to civic participation and participatory governance. The mistrust extends to government policies, often perceived as attempts to impose an enforced cultural unity by suppressing sub-national and ethnic identities. Former contested elections have also eroded the government's legitimacy in the eyes of many identity groups. While positive efforts to move forward are being made by the government, there is a strong feeling of exclusion from central-level political and economic decision-making. The gulf between government institutions and civil society adds to a sense of alienation, frustration and disempowerment. For its part, civil society too needs to demonstrate to the government its potential value and contribution to matters of national interest. Adversarial approaches have so far prevented real cooperation and have certainly not resulted in collaborative problem solving. However, constructive government/civil society engagement has yielded positive results, as demonstrated through government-civil society dialogue on the law on local NGO registration.

It is critical to emphasize that social cohesion can and does exist within diversity, so it is not perceived as a threat to sub-national and ethnic identities or as an effort to subdue, wash over or dilute diversity within the country. Great care should be taken when presenting social cohesion at all levels to avoid it becoming synonymous with an enforced homogeneity. It may be better discussed within the framework of processes that allow people and government institutions to interact, consult, engage and exchange, and within the social policies that impact on the population's general well being. A bottom-up approach is also critical so that the values linked to social cohesion (trust, respect, tolerance, solidarity, collaboration) are promoted at the family and village levels so that they can more easily permeate to other levels of society, both vertically and horizontally.

### 5.3 Economic Development And Inequality

Economic reform is a central feature of Myanmar's transition. As one of the last emerging market frontiers, the government is opening the country to eager international markets and foreign investors. Myanmar is in the midst of unprecedented economic development, with growth levels close to 7.8% annually. Foreign investment, natural resources and a large labour force are key forces driving Myanmar's impressive economic growth.

Yet behind the impressive economic figures, there are concerns about uneven growth and the potential negative impact of accelerated growth. There is also concern that development will move forward without mechanisms and structures in place for accountability, social protection, transparency or citizens' rights. For example, as international investment increases, and the formal economy grows, it also means that jobs in the informal economy (including small-scale agriculture) will disappear, disadvantaging people that don't have the skills to enter the formal economy.

Approximately 26% of the population is living below the poverty line, though a recent World Bank analysis puts poverty levels as high as 37.5%.<sup>24</sup> Poverty levels are highest in the ethnic states such as Chin (73%) and Rakhine (44%).<sup>25</sup> With large-scale foreign investment, development is unevenly distributed along socio-economic, ethnic, and geographic lines. The country's development is heavily dependent on natural resource extraction and foreign-funded development projects along the border areas or ethnic states. The resulting 'resource curse' raises national production levels but produces few employment opportunities for local people. The sudden access to Myanmar's resources has concentrated economic power in the hands of a small elite and caused numerous grievances, particularly in border areas where resource extraction benefits the interests of ethnic elites or military actors while creating or exacerbating grievances and conflicts among other ethnic groups.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank, Myanmar: Overview, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/overview>

<sup>25</sup> UNDP, Poverty Profile, 2013



Economic reform is also producing negative environmental and cultural impacts that further strain the already-fragile relationship between civil society and the state and risk sparking additional conflicts. Many large-scale development projects—such as Special Economic Zones (SEAs), dams, power plants and copper mines—risk adversely affecting rural communities through deforestation, land grabs and evictions. The practice of ‘land-grabs’ continues as the increasing demand for large-scale commercial agri-business, tourism and infrastructure projects necessitates more open land. This harmful practice disproportionately affects the country’s rural poor that constitute approximately 70% of Myanmar’s population, and risks exacerbating their vulnerability and consequentially, their poverty incidence.<sup>26</sup>

In order for economic growth to support social cohesion in Myanmar, all segments of the population must perceive themselves to be beneficiaries and agents in the process. Increased foreign investment and aid, since 2010, has increased the risk of social exclusion of some groups. If the economic development agenda considers social cohesion a cross-cutting goal, it will allow development programs to recognize and address some of the key factors which contribute to inequalities, lack of opportunity, social injustice and exclusion and the triggers and drivers of new or renewed conflicts.

## 5.4 Gender

Although women in Myanmar society are held in high regard, gender-based vulnerabilities and inequalities persist in many spheres and pose particular challenges. Women’s participation in national decision-making forums, particularly in the political sphere, is extremely low. Women occupy only 4.6% of seats in Parliament and less than 1% in local government.<sup>27</sup> Women’s exclusion from political participation has significant consequences for how issues such as violence against women, women’s rights and maternal health are addressed in critical national decision-making processes.

Women are traditionally less able to move out of poverty especially as they have less access to finance, micro-credit facilities, new inputs and training for alternative livelihoods and weaker representation in decision-making on such issues at the local level. In addition, in rural areas cultural norms and traditional practices as well as family pressure to provide income make women vulnerable to trafficking, abuse and violence. Progressive militarization has contributed to increased numbers of men joining the military or armed groups. Privileges allotted to personnel in the military - an exclusively male institution - have long been unattainable for women. Militarization has also exacerbated women’s vulnerability by increasing the risk of sexual and gender-based violence in times of conflict. Deeply ingrained cultural norms contribute to the suppression of this issue. At the same time, in violent conflicts, women are increasingly moving into domains traditionally occupied by men as providers of livelihoods and protection for their families.

## 5.5 Democratic Governance and Decentralization

Since independence, there has been resistance to decentralization borne out of fears that the Union of Burma might dissolve. In fact the potential secession of a number of ethnic states precipitated the military coup in 1962.<sup>28</sup> Modest autonomy for ethnic minorities was replaced by rule by military decree from the central government, which was governed by a unitary state constitution and overseen by a single-party political mobilization system. Although many important powers and responsibilities have been decentralized to subnational governments, increasing their role in local governance, national

26 UNDP, About Myanmar, <http://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/countryinfo.html>

27 Issue Brief: Strengthening Social Cohesion in Myanmar, April 2014, 5.

28 Steinberg, The State of Myanmar, 2001, p. 265.

level government institutions remain most prominent in people's minds. Centralization of power also led to increased personalization of power. As a result, personal loyalties have remained the central characteristic under all political regimes. The result has been a zero-sum game that makes power sharing untenable and poses a great obstacle to social cohesion at the national, regional and local level. Institutionalized corruption, across the country, and lack of transparency, accountability and rule of law continue to challenge the creation of constructive relationships between Myanmar's government and its citizens and between citizens, CSOs and EAOs. Nevertheless, the public continues to have a high expectation that the government will deliver an equitable and inclusive society.<sup>29</sup> The success of Myanmar's democratization process ultimately rests on the government's ability to engender trust in its institutions at local and national level.

## 5.6 Dialogue and Conflict Transformation

Myanmar has been in a state of internal conflict of one form or another, since its independence from colonial rule in 1948. Myanmar's civil wars and inter-communal violence have resulted in death, injury, displacement, damaged private and public property, disrupted livelihoods and social services, and fragmented family and social relations. The main conflicts are between the GoM and the EAGs, but there are also conflicts between groups and within groups.

Rakhine state experienced two serious bouts of violence in 2012 and localized outbreaks and human rights abuses continue. While the conflicts have shifted over time, the key contestations have always been around equality (how power and resources are shared) and acceptance (how ethnic, religious and cultural identities are respected). While the nature of conflict is somewhat different in Rakhine state to the other conflicts, both communities (ethnic Rakhines and Muslims) feel that 'the other' is threatening their identities. Ethnic minorities have a long experience and strong perceptions of being excluded and discriminated against by the state and the majority ethnic group. Like in many other countries, this has led them to seek a change in the status quo. Over time, ethnic minorities have made their own arrangements for security (e.g. armies), local governance (e.g. councils) and social services (e.g. schools). The Rakhine conflict also spills out beyond just Rakhine-Muslim relations and has eroded trust and goodwill between Muslims and other groups within the state.

Myanmar finds itself simultaneously at multiple points of the conflict spectrum, with some conflicts receding while others escalate, new conflicts emerging, and processes underway to bring reconciliation between ethnic groups and the government. Even as the government leads an unprecedented open multi-lateral negotiation towards achieving a Nationwide Comprehensive Agreement, numerous conflicts have erupted or re-emerged. The challenges are numerous and many of these internal conflicts require individually tailored strategies. Looking at the conflict landscape through a social cohesion lens could be an extremely useful means of developing appropriate and effective conflict resolution approaches.

The lack of trust at all levels, the perceived and real inequalities, the lack of bridging institutions and relationships across groups and between ethnic groups and the government and the incapacity or unwillingness to contribute to the overall national interest all point to a need to identify and address the fundamental elements that may support social cohesion in Myanmar. Therefore by fostering greater trust and understanding between the government and armed groups through dialogue and consultation, investing in horizontal and vertical structures and institutions, and fostering a national vision of togetherness, the national ceasefire agreement has a far greater chance of success. The time is ripe for armed groups, civil society and government to make a concerted and genuine effort to ensure that a strong social cohesion strategy accompanies peace and dialogue processes.

29 Asia Foundation, Myanmar Survey: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society. December 2014 p12.

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## 6. Analytical framework for social cohesion in Myanmar

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### 6.1 Commonalities

Based on the framework above and consultations with key stakeholders in Myanmar, we can elaborate some useful points for framing social cohesion in Myanmar.

In creating an analytical framework for social cohesion in Myanmar, it is essential to recognize and build on components identified by local stakeholders, both at state and national level to ensure an inclusive, Myanmar-owned process. The following commonalities in Myanmar do not comprise a definitive list; they are many of the shared leverage points identified through the process of consultation with stakeholders.

- **Expressed desire for peace across all states, including incorporating peace in education:** despite differences across ethnic and political divides, the desire to live in a peaceful society is frequently expressed by all groups, coupled with the need to bring about a shift in mind-set through informal and formal education.
- **Existing peace building organizations:** forces for peace, organizations with similar visions, exist across all layers of Myanmar society and present opportunities for scaling up social cohesion efforts at both intra-state and inter-state levels.
- **Significant acceptance of diversity in urban areas:** urban areas, with diverse ethnic and religious inhabitants, provide good examples of social cohesion, which can be analysed and replicated in areas with poorer cohesion.
- **Shared sense of solidarity due to historic exclusion and suffering:** Many groups have experienced a coming together in the face of exclusion, and there are opportunities for facilitating exchange and shared learning, both online and in person as a way of building common ground.
- **Shared family, traditional and cultural values including helpfulness and hospitality:** the positive aspects of family and community values (family support, donation and alms-giving, inclusion during festivals) provide a leverage point across all states and regions in building upon existing tendencies to support the common good.
- **Shared desire to protect national resources:** challenges of resource exploitation, land grabbing, damming and deforestation, were highlighted as shared concerns to be addressed through non-adversarial approaches at the both the intra- and inter-state levels.
- **Recognized culture of conflict avoidance:** across cultures there is a traditional tendency to avoid conflicts, allowing tensions to simmer to a point where they surface destructively. There is an identified need to address this practice and to help individuals and groups to positively transform conflict.
- **A shared pride in resolving one's own problems and conflicts without external intervention and mediation:** national pride in developing Myanmar without external foreign assistance and supporting community-owned mediation was identified as a leverage for fostering a sense of inclusion and shared pride.
- **Resilience and mutual assistance, including in the aftermath of natural disasters:** the immediate instinct to support people in times of natural disaster, as well as social protection through donations and alms were identified as fairly unique to Myanmar. Myanmar is listed

as one of the most generous countries in the world.<sup>30</sup> This characteristic can be leveraged to build stronger empathy for vulnerable groups.

## 6.2 Dividing Factors

In order to foster social cohesion, identifying divisions becomes a necessary prerequisite. The following divisions in Myanmar do not comprise a definitive list; they are a survey of many of the key divides currently underlying active conflicts.

- **Divisions between Bamar majority and ethnic and non-recognized<sup>31</sup> minority groups:** Structural violence is deeply rooted within Myanmar society. Ethnic minority groups and non-recognized groups face legal, social and cultural exclusion across all target states and divisions. Majority groups, such as the Bamar, remain largely unaware of the challenges minorities face. Due to the ethnically stratified policies of former military governments, which were further compounded by decades of armed conflict, Bamar<sup>32</sup> Buddhists are perceived and promulgated as the superior ethnicity. This perception has created a shared sense of exclusion among minority ethnic groups that unites them against the Bamar.
- **Intra-ethnic divides:** Divisions exist amongst those ethnic groups that consist of multiple sub-groups or tribes speaking different languages and dialects, sometimes complicated by religious differences. These divisions have often contributed to the separation of ethnic, political and armed groups from the larger group. Furthermore, persons of mixed heritage in ethnic areas who do not easily fit within the ethnic categorization feel rejected by their own communities. There is a widespread perception that the government maintains a long-established practice of encouraging these divisions.
- **Religious divides:** Laws in Myanmar commonly use religion to determine ethnic classification. The classification of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and other religious minorities as being of foreign origins (Indian, Pakistani or Bengali) is a legacy of the British colonial administration. As a result of this practice, members of these groups are generally not recognized as Burmese identity groups.<sup>33</sup> Modern religious divisions are prevalent across the country with little variation between urban and rural areas. Although there are a multitude of local NGOs, informal groups and networks that work to transform inter-religious division, there are also actors and networks that actively work to incite conflict and hatred. The rise of Buddhist extremism across Asia and particularly in Myanmar has contributed to a rise in prejudice and violence towards the 'other' non-recognized groups, particularly towards followers of Islam. Hate speech, rumours and propaganda perpetuate this dynamic.
- **Divides between citizens and non-recognized groups:** According to the 1982 Citizenship Law, a citizen of Myanmar must belong to one of the national races or have had ancestors settled in the country before 1823.<sup>34</sup> Some groups not recognized by the government as citizens of Myanmar include those of South Asian and Chinese descent. Despite the ability of many of

30 World Giving Index 2015, Charities Aid Foundation available at <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2015-publications/world-giving-index-2015>

31 The term 'national races' refers to those 135 ethnic groups chosen by former general Ne Win as ethnic groups of Myanmar receiving guaranteed citizen status. Ethnic groups included as 'national races' are referred to as 'recognized groups' while ethnic groups not included in this list are referred to as 'non-recognized groups'.

32 Bamar refers to the majority ethnic group in Myanmar that lives primarily in the Irrawaddy River Basin and speaks the Burmese language.

33 Sai Latt, "Burma's Ominous Political Debate over Ethnicity", The Irrawaddy, 25 June 2013.

34 Burma, Pyithu Hluttaw, Pyithu Hluttaw Law No. 4 of 1982, 3rd Pyithu Hluttaw, 3rd Session, Rangoon: Working People's Daily, 1982, Web, available at <http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs/Citizenship%20Law.htm> [accessed 9 April 2015].

these people to trace their ancestry back many generations in Myanmar, their inability to acquire citizenship, and by extension nationality, essentially renders them stateless. Persons from non-recognized groups additionally face structural and social discrimination, such as prevention from accessing education, documentation, work and travel. They are further subject to acts of violence and threats within their communities, with often little or no means to achieve legal recourse or access justice.

- **Gender divides:** Although women in Myanmar are held in high regard within society, gender-based vulnerabilities and inequalities persist. Women's structural exclusion from political participation prevents them from addressing problems that disproportionately affect them, such as gender-based violence, women's citizenship rights and maternal health.
- **Inter-generational divides:** strict social hierarchies mark traditional parent-child relationships, with children expected to show complete deference to their parents. Relationships between youth and elders follow a similar pattern. Children and youth must refrain from voicing opinions, and deviating from such expected behaviour is considered troublesome.<sup>35</sup> Partly as an outcome of increased exposure to globalization, there are increasingly different points of view between elders and youth, often resulting in conflict.
- **Government and civil society divides:** Mutual mistrust between the government and civil society is common in Myanmar. Weak involvement or exclusion of civil society representatives from the peace process and other decision-making processes increases their suspicion towards leaders of political and armed groups. Fear of arrest remains high for many civil society groups through military-era laws that allow arbitrary arrest and imprisonment. These include the Unlawful Associations Act, the Electronics Transactions Act and the State Protection Act. In addition, newly developed laws used to stifle civil society include The Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Law, The Draft Associations Law and The Draft Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law, amongst others.<sup>36</sup>
- **Socio-economic inequalities in ethnic areas (access to livelihoods/infrastructure/social services/education/resources):** poverty and rising social inequality exacerbate tensions and increase potential for the escalation of conflict, as people compete over resources and opportunities.
- **Media propaganda:** Media propaganda in Myanmar negatively portrays various minorities and social groups, particularly on the basis of gender, ethnicity and religion. Stereotypes of women in particular are commonly promulgated, as being subordinate to men and to be judged to different standards in terms of their behaviour, dress, etc. The rise of social media had led to increased stereotyping, false propaganda and hate-speech against ethnic minorities, mainly Muslims, and has often been the source of violent attacks against them.
- **Unequal social power structures based on patronage system:** Ethnic stratification in the government, military and civil service creates and reinforces division. On-going exclusion of non-Bamar from positions of power, as well as general exclusion of religious minorities, tacitly allows for religious and ethnic discrimination by government, military and civil service. This exclusion also creates resentment among disadvantaged groups. Respondents commonly described problems experienced with government employees and army officials whom they claimed would not exist if these institutions were more diverse.

35 Information from Mi Mi Khaing, *The World of Burmese Women*, The Pitman Press, 1984, p. 16 – 22.

36 A review of key laws provided in "Rule By Law: An Analysis of the Use of Legislation to Stifle Civil Society Space in Burma", Burma Partnership, 30 September 2013.



- **Migration:** Due to conflict, depletion or destructive exploitation of natural resources, land grabs and lack of economic opportunities and livelihoods in many areas of the country, populations are being continually forced to migrate from their traditional homes. This migration has resulted in numerous economic, political and social challenges. For example, large caseloads of internally displaced persons (IDPs) reduces individual security, increases the vulnerability of certain groups (i.e. women, children and the elderly) and strains resources in camps and receiving communities. Additionally, the asset stripping caused by forced displacement of individuals from their property has created economic and legal challenges for land rights and livelihoods. Economic migrants of working age tend to leave older people to look after their children.
- **Racism, stereotypes and prejudices (ethnic, regional, religious):** Racism in Myanmar is deeply embedded in society as a result of the country's colonial and authoritarian past. British colonization created lasting divisions between the Bamar and ethnic groups, still played out in common stereotypes of mainland (Bamar Buddhist) and highland (ethnic minorities) divisions and Burman paternalistic notions of ethnic stereotypes countrywide exacerbate feelings of exclusion of ethnic minority groups, as well as those of South-Asian origin, many of whom faced institutionalized discrimination under the successive military regimes. In addition to the continued use of a wide array of discriminatory laws from the military era, new laws have imposed additional restrictions, such as restrictions on religious conversion and marriage. These laws validate fears harboured by the majority Buddhist population of the threat of a Muslim takeover of the country, and implicitly sanction discrimination and violence against Muslims.
- **Education:** The government education system, religious education institutes, and parallel ethnic education systems promote different versions of core narratives, and histories, and contribute to a lack of recognition of shared commonalities. A depoliticized shared history, cognizant of diversity, will help bridge deep long-standing divisions, firstly within the existing educational frameworks and in the future in a shared national educational system. Inclusion of ethnic languages would support both diversity and an acceptance of shared identity and would greatly bolster trust between people and government institutions across the country.
- **Private sector interests eclipsing public interest:** The emergent private sector is shaping Myanmar's development path and creating obstacles for certain groups as they seek to actively participate in their own development and enjoy its benefits. As previously mentioned, the rush of private investment, particularly in the natural resources sector, has created a myriad of conflicts that will need to be properly addressed if the country is to benefit fully from the wealth generated through new industry.
- **Internationalization of national issues:** International discourse regarding conflict in Myanmar is creating contested narratives among foreign observers and actors in Myanmar and antagonism and opposition from Myanmar people towards foreign actors in the country. For example, poor historiography that accepts superficial and simplistic explanations for causes of conflict or equates contemporary violence to a singular historical event reinforces the conception of complex conflicts as inevitable and historically determined.

By identifying the shared commonalities and being cognizant of the divisions, the following actors in Myanmar at the local, state and national levels can support mainstreaming of social cohesion through process-orientated initiatives.

### 6.3 Actors

- Local and central government – especially administrative bodies
- Military
- Ethnic armed groups
- Religious leaders
- Community leaders
- Civil society groups
- Media
- Political parties
- Youth & Women's groups
- INGOs/international financial and technical partners
- Private Sector
- LNGOs
- Citizens
- Parliament



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## 7. Social Cohesion Mainstreaming

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If Myanmar civil society, non-state actors and government are to fully engage with the process of reinforcing and promoting social cohesion, they must be armed with the conviction that social cohesion is relevant, measurable and achievable both through public policy and through grassroots efforts. Based on the frameworks above and consultations with key stakeholders in Myanmar, below are broad strategies for social cohesion mainstreaming in Myanmar.

### 7.1 Role of Government

Ways in which government institutions can mainstream social cohesion into their work may include:

- Organize forums for consulting the public on policy decisions that affect them
- Increase outreach and consultations with under-represented groups
- Take measures to increase the participation and representation of under-represented groups in political processes
- Adopt pro-poor development policies and programs
- Ensure development programs target inequalities
- Ensure development programs reach under-served areas and communities
- Provide timely and accurate responses to requests for information
- Build collaborative relationships with civil society groups
- Build an inclusive social protection system
- Disseminate information transparently
- Create formal mechanisms to resolve dispute
- Set up processes where the public can hold government institutions accountable (social accountability mechanisms)

### 7.2 Role of Civil Society

Ways in which civil society groups can incorporate social cohesion into their work may include:

- Identify and use mechanisms that support solidarity and conflict management
- Support social networks that bring divided groups together
- Work through CSO alliances and coalitions
- Work across identity-lines; build CSO coalitions across identity-lines
- Reflect and improve social cohesion values in organizational practices
- Foster a common sense of belonging, a shared future vision and a focus on what different groups have in common
- Encourage participation and active engagement by people from different backgrounds in political processes and community activities
- Facilitate dialogue between conflicting groups and between citizens and local government
- Promote social cohesion values
- Encourage responsiveness from local government towards its citizenry
- Seek and propose win-win solutions in working with the government on various agendas

### 7.3 Role of Ethnic Organizations ethnic armed groups

Ways in which ethnic organizations and ethnic armed groups can mainstream social cohesion into their work may include:

- Ensuring effective communication systems between EAGs and constituents

- Building collaborative relationships with stakeholders through dialogue

## 7.4 Role of Religious leaders

Ways in which religious leaders can mainstream social cohesion into their work may include:

- Issue joint statements condemning acts of violence or violent discourse based on religious differences
- Promote messages of tolerance and peaceful co-existence towards other religious communities
- Work in and through alliances with other religious leaders
- Use religious-based schools and training institutions to build awareness of social cohesion

## 7.5 Role of Media

Ways in which media can mainstream social cohesion into their work may include:

- Highlight individuals who actively work for peace and social cohesion
- Highlight success stories of social cohesion (reconciliation across ethnic divides, successful dialogue with local government, etc.)
- Provide balanced factual information and thorough analysis of current democratization and peace processes
- Give voice to marginalized groups on issues which affect them
- Seek solutions to social, economic and political problems
- Avoid promoting stereotypes of ethnic and social groups

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## 8. Points of reflection

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### Questions for continued reflection:

- Do we start by identifying the ingredients that make up social cohesion and then coin a suitable term for it?
- How to promote social cohesion without challenging or threatening ethnic/cultural/religious identity?
- What core behaviours/relations need to change if social cohesion is to be improved?
- How to translate social cohesion from the realm of theory to everyday life (e.g. In the last week, I observed an example of social cohesion when I saw...../I improved social cohesion when I did ....)
- How to ensure marginalized groups recognize and participate in governance?
- What are the bridging institutions and relationships in Myanmar? Who can cross divides at local and national level?
- What starting points to use when speaking of social cohesion – is it a goal in itself or a pre-requisite for other goals (democratization, peace, development, etc.)?
- How can trust be re-established vertically and horizontally?
- How to make social cohesion a core element of any engagement between CSOs and government?
- How to link social cohesion to key current events in Myanmar (reintegration, decentralization, reform, peace process, national political dialogue, urban migration etc.)
- How to “de-politicize” the term social cohesion so that it is not synonymous with national unity?
- How to make social cohesion “real” for stakeholders?
- What is potential role of media to highlight incidences/individuals/events that incorporate the values of social cohesion?
- Social cohesion in a time of conflict – what approaches can be applied while armed groups are still active?
- How is the concept of social cohesion perceived in each state?
- What are the shared commonalities (at local and inter-state levels)?
- How can social cohesion take root?
- How to ensure the inclusion of gender issues in social cohesion programming? How to be more gender-inclusive, with gender inclusiveness involving both women and men?

- How to increase citizen buy-in and increase the feeling of representation in the country's development?
- How to increase trust in government institutions? How to increase accountability of civil society organizations to their government?
- How to institutionalize social cohesion in Myanmar?

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## Annex 1: Fact-sheet

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### Strengthening Local-Level Social Cohesion Competencies through Training and Support (SLSC)

**Duration:** 26 January 2015 – 16 September 2016

**Target Locations:** Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon State, and Shan State.

#### 1. Introduction

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with Search For Common Ground (SFCG) will implement an 18-month initiative aimed at strengthening social cohesion competencies at the local level through training and support. This initiative is being implemented under the UNDP Myanmar Livelihoods and Social Cohesion Output 5, of the UNDP Country Programme Action Plan (2013-2017).

This initiative will develop a framework and training module on social cohesion that will be translated into Myanmar and ethnic languages. Both are being developed from a bottom up, iterative approach, resulting in locally owned tools to be used country-wide for helping government institutions, non-state actors and civil society organizations at the local level to better understand the relevance of, and how they can strengthen social cohesion at the local level.

#### 2. What is Social Cohesion?

There are many definitions of social cohesion globally, and no one definition fits every country or society.

**Search for Common Ground and UNDP** regards social cohesion as the glue that bonds society together, essential for achieving peace, democracy and development. This “glue” is made up of four key components: 1) social relationships, 2) Connectedness, 3) Orientation towards the common good and 4) Equality. These components in turn require good governance, respect for human rights and individual responsibility. Social Cohesion is both about strengthening the relationship between the state and the people, and between different groups of people. Social cohesion is not simply an ideal, but rather an attainable objective requiring the active and constant commitment of all levels of society.

#### 2. Project Goal and Objectives.

**Goal:** To contribute towards the process of mainstreaming social cohesion in Myanmar .

- **Objective 1:** Increase social cohesion competencies (knowledge, skills, tools) among local government, Non State Actors (NSA), and civil society actors participating in development, governance, and peace building work.
- **Objective 2:** Increase levels of trust between local government, NSAs, Civil Society, and the communities.
- **Objective 3:** Enhance the mainstreaming of social cohesion sensitive considerations across all sectors of local government, NSA, and civil society engagement.

### 3. Implementation Activities and Timelines

| Phase   | End Date               | Focus                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 1 | January - May 2015     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consultative workshops with key experts from all target areas to develop a base framework and training module.</li> <li>• Introductory missions to states to brief and consult with stakeholders on the initiative.</li> </ul> |
| Phase 2 | June 2015              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of local partners/resource persons.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Phase 3 | July-August 2015       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mapping and assessment of training needs in target areas.</li> <li>• Strengthening/adapting/finalizing of conceptual framework and training manual.</li> </ul>                                                                 |
| Phase 4 | September-October 2015 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training of trainers</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Phase 5 | November - July 2016   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roll out of trainings in target locations and exposure and learning through inter-state visits.</li> <li>• Developing a community of practice and exposure learning opportunities for CSOs.</li> </ul>                         |

### 5. Township Locations

| No. | State  | Township                       |
|-----|--------|--------------------------------|
| 1   | Kachin | Myitkyina, Waingmaw, Bhamaw    |
| 2   | Kayah  | Loikaw, Demoso, Hpruso         |
| 3   | Kayin  | Hpa-an, Kawkareik, Hlaing Bwe  |
| 4   | Chin   | Hakha, Mindat, Matupi          |
| 5   | Mon    | Mawlamyine, Paung, Chaung Zone |
| 6   | Shan   | Taunggyi, Hopong, Lashio       |

## 6. Photos phase 1-4





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## 6. For further information, suggestions or feedback.

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We request and appreciate your input into this initiative. For further information or suggestions, please contact:

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