

Mid-term Review Report

**Social Cohesion through Service Delivery in
Rakhine State**



**Submitted to
Search for Common Ground-Myanmar**

**Submitted by
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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AA	Arakan Army/Rakhine Armed Group
CGA	Common Ground Approach
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DFID	Department for International Development
DM&E	Design, Monitoring and Evaluation
EOs	Ethnic Armed Organizations
FGDs	Focused Group Discussions
GAD	General Administration Department
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ILT	Institutional Learning Team
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
KIIs	Key Informant' Interviews
LAs	Local Authorities
MIP	Multinational Indicative Plan
MTR	Mid-Term Review
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SFCG/Search	Search for Common Ground
SI	Scholar Institute
S&J	Security and Justice
Tatmadaw	Armed Forces of Myanmar
UN	United Nations

Contents

Acknowledgements	2
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	3
Executive Summary	5
CHAPTER - ONE	8
1.1 Introduction	8
CHAPTER - TWO	12
2.1 Objectives and Methodology of the Mid-Term Review (MTR)	12
2.1.1 Key Questions for the Mid Term Review (MTR)	12
2.2.2 Methodology	13
2.2.3 Limitation of the Study	14
CHAPTER - THREE	15
3.1 Review Findings	15
3.1.1 Relevance of the Project to Target Communities/Stakeholders	15
3.1.2 Implementation Process	17
3.1.4 Nexus between Evolving Humanitarian Crisis and Search Project	24
3.1.5 Programme Implementation Challenges and Lessons Learned	25
CHAPTER - FOUR	31
4.1 Conclusions and Recommendations	31
4.1.1 Conclusions	31
4.1.2 Recommendations	32
ANNEXES	34
Annex 1: List of people Interviewed (Project Participants, Partners, SFCG Staff)	34
Annex 2: Terms of Reference (ToR) for the MTR	38

Executive Summary

Rakhine State is one of the poorest and highly vulnerable conflict zones of Myanmar. The highly sensitive and politically charged conflict dynamics make the lives of its citizens, especially those ethnic and religious minorities, extremely difficult. In this conflict context, Search for Common Ground (Search) Myanmar, in partnership with Scholar Institute (SI), is implementing a 3-year project titled ***Service Delivery Through Social Cohesion in Rakhine State***. With a total budget of €2.4 million, the project is funded by EU Myanmar, It started on 1 February 2018 and will continue until 31 January 2021.

The overall objective of the project is ***to enhance civil society organisations and local authorities contribution to governance and development processes, while its specific objective is to strengthen civil society organisations, especially women and youth organisations, in their collaboration with local authorities and provision of services to divided communities in Rakhine State***. It is designed to address two key challenges to the stability and development of Rakhine State: 1) lack of inclusive process of service delivery for Rakhine civil society, and 2) lack of communication around joint vision and services and planning resulting in tensions between Rakhine LAs and CSOs, and between different ethnic and religious groups. It intends to ensure that both LAs and CSOs (incl. women and youth leaders) develop a methodology to improve service delivery, that is not only conflict sensitive but contributes to social cohesion, will build on the work of the EU in supporting civil society space and the current transitional processes in Rakhine State. The project is implemented in four townships of Rakhine State: Sittwe, Ponyagyun, Rambree and Taungup.

The mid-term review is based on qualitative interviews carried out in four townships along with the monitoring data provided by 'Search DME team'. A total of seven Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and 20 Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted in those four townships with the partner, CSOs, local authorities and project participants. The review team also looked at a number of documents related to the Service Delivery project along with the Joint EU Development Partners' Transitional Strategy for Myanmar 2014-16.

The team reviewed the project under four evaluation criteria: Avenues for continued relevance in the evolving context of Rakhine State; implementation process, progress towards results; and challenges and lessons learned.

There was unanimity among all the stakeholders interviewed, including the project participants and CSOs that the project is highly relevant for the communities despite the state facing major political violence. People believe that the project on service delivery is highly relevant for the State which is undergoing humanitarian crisis and any activities or support that intends to address the challenges faced by the conflict affected community is a welcome effort.

Most of the activities planned for year 1 and year two have been completed with a few exceptions. The monitoring data shows that 433 LAs, CSO representatives, youth and women have been trained of which 243 (56%) are women. Similarly, 913 citizens, CSOs and LAs have

been able to interact with each other through a number of meetings, interaction and dialogue sessions, of which 414 (45%) are women. The project has been able to improve the knowledge and understanding of participants on leadership, community development, communications skills, Common Ground Approach (CGA), and local level service delivery provisions, among others. All together, the project has directly reached at least 1346 individuals of which 49% (658) are women, demonstrating a fair level of gender balance in participants selection. Even during the mid-term review interviews and FGDs, there were a good number of women present to talk with the review team who were open to sharing their perspective, learning and offering suggestions.

The project has made good progress towards improving the state of social cohesion and access to improved service delivery, especially making an attempt to bring CSO stakeholders, community and LAs together into one platform of interaction and dialogue. Despite having difficulty in building good relationships with GAD officials, there has been marked improvement in the relationships between DRD and CSOs. Though the review team believes that it is still early to make an attempt to draw conclusive results, there are enough early signals of momentum towards achieving the desired results set up at the beginning of the project. The success of the project was also vindicated by the opinion that it has created space for LAs, CSOs and local communities to collaborate with each other, facilitate dialogue between LAs and CSOs and community people, and provide government services to poor and minority groups at local level. The sub-grant activities have also opened opportunities for Search and SI to build linkage with the EU's humanitarian development agenda in the state by implementing various activities that deal with the immediate needs of the communities affected by the violent conflict.

The project also faced a number of challenges such as continued active war between AA and Tatmadaw in three of the four townships, not getting timely permission for qualitative research and survey form the government, leadership transition and lack of transfer of institutional memory of the project, delay of activity implementation by partner, delay in finalizing and disbursing sub-grants, poor capacity of COSs and lack of institutionalized monitoring data among others, that created obstacles in smooth implementation of the project. .

Despite all the challenges and weaknesses, the project has been termed as extremely relevant not only for promoting social cohesion and service delivery in the state, it is also found to be relevant to promote the humanitarian development nexus in the State. Despite some delays and weaknesses, it has been successful in enhancing capacity of local stakeholders and building relationships between LAs, public and CSOs and has given a sense to the marginalized communities and women that it is possible to access service from LAs without major obstacles.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn above, the MTR furnishes following recommendations.

- Expand the oversight function of PSC and increase its effectiveness through regular meetings and strategic guidance using problem solving approach.
- Organize multiple individual meetings with LAs and other stakeholders to develop personal relationships

- Invest in building the capacity of CSOs in peacebuilding, project management, financial management and understanding change.
- Use mini-grants as an opportunity for long term sustainability strategy and connect this project with EU's larger agenda of promoting humanitarian development nexus
- Strengthen the documentation of the proceedings and results of the dialogue sessions to create knowledge.
- Start developing mechanisms and tools to capture outcome-level data from various activities.
- Ensure strong monitoring of the sub-grant activities.
- Develop a system of maintaining institutional memory on project related knowledge, decisions, and processes.
- Work strategically with LAs to get their larger ownership and buy-in of the project..
- Strengthen efforts to enhance the overall understanding of CGA among participants as well as staff.
- Pay special attention to highlight the linkages of the project activities and their complementarity to cause sustained changes.
- Start planning for the project exit strategies and mechanisms.
- Request for a short reasonable extension of the timeline of the project to offset the initial delays.

CHAPTER - ONE

1.1 Introduction

Myanmar has a more than six decades long history of violent conflict. This is probably one of the most complicated conflict dynamics having numerous dimensions as well as actors having an influential role. With recent political developments and formation of a semi-democratic government, there have been efforts to build peace and accelerate socio-economic development in the country. The government initiative of signing Ceasefire agreement with as many Non-state actors (NSAs)/Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) followed by 21st Century Panglong Conferences held in 2016, 2017 and 2018 have generated hope for peace among Myanmar citizens as well as the international community. However, with recent development in the situation of violence in Rakhine State, the state of peace in this state remains a distant dream so far. Rakhine State, home to approximately 3.2 million people, is the second poorest state in Myanmar, with a poverty rate as high as 78%.¹ The violent conflict in the State has a multifaceted impact on people's lives, especially that of minority ethnic and religious groups. Many communities in the area feel that their voices are not heard at the government level and suffer from ineffective service provision. The roots of these problems are found in a legacy of distrust along ethnic lines, as well as towards the government, and poor communication between local authorities and civil society organizations.

The European Union (EU) has been strongly supporting Myanmar's peacebuilding and development process. The EU and Member States have responded in a gradual and measured way to the opening and reforms. The EU Comprehensive Framework sets out the EU and Member States' goals and priorities towards building a lasting partnership and promoting closer engagement. The overall EU strategic objective is rooted in the desire to support peace, security and stability in the country, while promoting inclusive and sustainable growth and poverty reduction, through the on-going reform process. To this end, the EU aims to support political, social and economic development, to foster respect for human rights and to assist the Government in rebuilding its place in the international community. It is a collective effort involving actions by EU Member States and EU institutions to support peace, democracy, development and trade.² As guided by the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP), the EU has prioritized four focal areas of support to Myanmar with peacebuilding support (EUR 78 million) being one of the four pillars³. The Programme underlines the EU's full commitment to support sustainable development and poverty reduction in the country for the benefit of all people living in Myanmar.

Considering the growing humanitarian development crisis in the country, especially in Rakhine State and some other states/divisions, and guided by its strategic peacebuilding and development framework support to Myanmar, the EU is promoting/supporting policy and

¹ <https://www.sfcg.org/social-cohesion-for-better-service-delivery-in-rakhine-state/>

² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint-eu-development-partners-transitional-strategy-for-myanmar-2014-2016_en.pdf

³ <https://mohinga.info/en/profiles/organisation/EU/>

operational measures to address the joint humanitarian-development nexus approach. The nexus approach aims to increase the impact of EU external action and sustain progress towards EU development, humanitarian, foreign and security policy objectives. It recognizes the need to move away from crisis containment to a more structural, long-term, non-linear approach to vulnerabilities; emphasizing anticipation, prevention and preparedness through the linkages between sustainable development, humanitarian action, conflict prevention, and peace building in its Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises. The EU has encouraged the humanitarian and development actors to have multi-year planning and programming cycles, joint risk and vulnerability analyses, joined-up planning, and coordinated programmatic approaches based on a better understanding of the context of the country of implementation. Considering the crisis Myanmar is facing in humanitarian and development sector, the EU has selected Myanmar as one of the six priority countries with specific emphasis on situations of protracted displacement, to pilot and test this humanitarian-development approach to operationalizing the nexus, as each of these countries faces on-going, acute and protracted crisis.⁴

The EU Mission in Myanmar has provided funding support to Search for Common Ground (Search) and the Scholar Institute (SI), to implement a 3-year initiative to *enhance the contribution of civil society organizations and local authorities to governance and development in Rakhine State*. In particular, the project emphasizes engaging women and youth organizations in an effort to increase their collaboration with local authorities, foster participation in local decision-making processes, and improve the provision of services to divided communities in Rakhine State. This intervention recognizes that both local authorities and civil society organizations have critical skills and knowledge to support relationships across divides and align around a common vision for the community. Search is implementing the project in partnership with Scholar Institute (SI) – a local organization with extensive experiences in the Rakhine context. The intervention model is rooted in the existing practices in good governance and service delivery in Myanmar.

In Rakhine, Search and SI have been working with local civil society organizations, women, youth and local authorities by facilitating cohesive and collaborative development of the state by improving trust and relationships along different dividing lines. Building upon its experience and partnerships in Rakhine State, with this project, Search and SI are supporting the young civil society actors and key community influencers who, despite the challenges, are committed to learn and explore communication tools and to reduce the likelihood that hate speech on social media or rumors will trigger violence. This project is working to equip them with skills to mitigate and reduce the harmful impact of rumors and manipulated information, and to support positive messaging through social media, building social empathy among diverse communities in Rakhine State. Through strengthened capacities, young civil society actors and key community influencers will be able to positively challenge the rumors and misinformation online. The project is embracing a conflict sensitive approach to improving service delivery provision and builds upon

⁴ <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/the-eu-humanitarian-development-nexus>

the work of European Union (EU) to support ongoing democratic development and expansion of space for civil society. The project implements targeted activities on four townships – Sittwe, Rambree, Ponnagyun and Toungup.

The overall objective of the project is **to enhance civil society organisations and local authorities contribution to governance and development processes while the specific objective is to strengthen civil society organisations, especially women and youth organisations, in their collaboration with local authorities and provision of services to divided communities in Rakhine State**. This project is designed to address two key challenges to the stability and development of Rakhine State: 1) lack of inclusive process of service delivery for Rakhine civil society, and 2) lack of communication around joint vision and services and planning resulting in tensions between Rakhine LAs and CSOs, and between different ethnic and religious groups. This intervention intends to ensure that both LAs and CSOs (incl. women and youth leaders) have new skills and knowledge to support effective relationships across divides and to align on common visions to address needs of their communities. It specially intends to promote a methodology to improve service delivery, that is not only conflict sensitive but contributes to social cohesion, and will build on the work of the EU in supporting civil society space and the current transitional processes in Rakhine State. The project has been designed to deliberately take a moderately paced, participatory and bottom up approach that effectively manages and remains responsive to the complex conflict dynamics in Rakhine State.

The specific objective addresses the limited opportunity for CSOs and especially women and youth leaders to discuss, identify and address issues that directly affect them and promote equal participation at the community level and in public decision-making. The project logic addresses issues related to knowledge and communication barriers to support LAs, together with CSOs, and to develop inclusive and accountable processes recognising and supporting the ethnic and religious diversity in the State. It recognises that a lack of inclusion of youth and women in decision-making impacts on the services they receive for healthcare, social care, education, water and sanitation. By engaging women and youth leaders, women and youth beneficiaries will see improved services for their populations and will be empowered to participate in service delivery processes.

The project components include research on service delivery in Rakhine state, a conflict analysis and mapping of conflict stakeholders in the State which identifies the needs and barriers in service delivery processes and share the findings with all the parties involved. Following this, the project uses training, peer-to-peer activities, community, LAs and CSOs dialogues, exchange visits, coaching, and mentoring to build key skills of civil society actors and members of local authorities. Finally, the project brings these stakeholders together in common spaces, such as in Youth Innovation Labs and platforms, to work around shared areas of concern and build trust and understanding in the process. The project also works with selected local CSOs to design and implement mini-grants activities, that intends to address the challenges of relationships dynamics among community, CSOs and LAs, address the service delivery needs of different groups of people in the community, especially those from conflict affected communities, women

and youth. Throughout this project, a culture of accountability through feedback mechanisms, public discussions, and scorecards will be used.

CHAPTER - TWO

2.1 Objectives and Methodology of the Mid-Term Review (MTR)

The overall aim of the MTR is to identify measures, reflect on the indicative results of the project so far and adjust the next steps of the implementation in the direction of improvements in the methodology, approach and context. Therefore, the specific objectives of the MTR are:

- Take stock of the results so far;
- Unpack contextual changes that influenced the implementation of the project;
- Identify any changes in the context of social cohesion for better service delivery
- Explore the potential for moving project intervention into humanitarian development nexus

2.1.1 Key Questions for the Mid Term Review (MTR)

The MTR will be guided by the following Key evaluation questions under four major evaluation criteria:

Relevance:

- Do the key assumptions which guided our project design hold up to date? If not – how has the change in the assumptions impacted our realization of results?
- How relevant are the project strategies, approach and activities as perceived by the beneficiaries and other community stakeholders?

Implementation process

- Has the project achieved its milestones set for the period in a timely manner? If not, what were the challenges and what could/should have been the mitigation measures?
- How should we adjust the implementation plan to ensure that it caters to the emerging needs of the context?
- To what extent the preliminary results of the project are in course of meeting the specific objective of the project? If not, why?
- What is the monitoring mechanism and what are the mechanisms of the reflection and learning process that have been used?

Progress towards results

- Are there any signals of increased capacities and skills of project beneficiaries such as government stakeholders and youth/women representatives of CSOs? If so, what are they? If not, what could be the reasons behind it? What could be done to increase capacities among the actors concerned?
- What is the early evidence that the project interventions are contributing to expansion of space for civil society?
- What are the progress (or) Changes (if any) of the government service delivery process for the project targeted beneficiaries within the project area?
- To what extent the project is contributing to increase the trust and accountability between community, CSOs and Local Authorities?

- Is the project adding value to enhance relationships and collaboration among the concerned stakeholders?
- To what extent the project is contributing to make the government service delivery inclusive?

Challenges and lessons learned

- What are the potential project implementation risks for the second half of the project and what could be the mitigation strategies?
- What worked and what did not work? Why? What are the major lessons learned? How have they been incorporated into the programming?
- Are there any challenges for early preparations or steps being planned to ensure sustainability of the project?

2.2.2 Methodology

The mid-term review (MTR) was carried out by the Senior Regional DM&E Specialist of Institutional Learning Team (ILT) and logistically supported by Search Myanmar DM&E Coordinator. However, in specific cases of Ponnagyun, where the ILT Specialist was unable to visit for security reasons, the interviews were conducted by Search Myanmar DM&E Coordinator. Similarly, some of the CSO representatives/participants from Rambree and Toungup were brought down to Ngapali (Thandwe Townships) for interview as the security situation did not permit the review team to visit the townships.



Rakhine (Arakan) State in Myanmar

The SFCG approach to evaluation is grounded in the guiding principles of our work: participatory, culturally sensitive, committed to building capacity, affirming and positive while honest and productively critical, and valuing knowledge and approaches from within the context.

The review used a qualitative approach of data collection/information analysis to generate data/results for the review objectives and pulled existing quantitative output/monitoring data from the periodic project reports and monitoring database. It organized focused group discussions (FGDs) and key informants interviews (KIIs) among CSO representatives, youth participants, local government authorities (LAs) inclusive of gender, ethnicity and townships. Besides, interviews were also conducted with Search for Common Ground (Search)

Leadership and program staff, Scholar institute (SI) program staff.

The major tools for the Evaluation are as follows:

- **Documents Review:** The MTR team reviewed the project proposal, log frame and detailed M&E Plan, research and baseline survey reports, periodic project reports submitted so far and monitoring data collected by the project team.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with beneficiaries:** The MTR organizes 7 FGDs with women/youth representative CSOs and other concerned stakeholders.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** The MTR organized 20 KIIs with local government officials, civil society leaders, Search staff and other concerned key stakeholders.
- **Observation of the Mini-Grants Kick off meeting:** The MTR team also participated and observed the mini-grant Kick off meeting where selected CSO representatives were oriented on implementing the mini grants, especially the financial and administrative compliance. The meeting was attended by at least 24 participants.

Furthermore, as part of the data collection and analysis process, the review team ensured the following Ethical Principles:

- **Comprehensive and systematic inquiry:** The team made the most of the existing information and full range of stakeholders available at the time of the Evaluation. They will conduct systematic, data-based inquiries. They will communicate the review methods and approaches accurately and in sufficient detail to allow others to understand, interpret and critique the work. The review team will clearly explain the limitations of the Evaluation and its results.
- **Respect for people:** The review team will respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents and program participants. They have the responsibilities to be sensitive to and respect differences amongst participants in culture, religion, gender, disability, age and ethnicity.
- **Conflict sensitivity especially Do NO Harm Principle:** The review team was very careful in ensuring the conflict sensitivity of diverse participants and making sure that their conversation with the review team does not jeopardize their person secured or privacy. Most of the interviews were conducted in closed door private places.
- **Safety and security of respondents as well as the Review team;** Considering the safety and security of the respondents and review team, some of the participants from Rambree and Toungup were brought down to a nearby tourist spot for an interview. Similarly, the interviews in Ponnagyun were conducted by the Search DM&E Coordinator considering the personal safety and security of the expat ILT Specialist.

2.2.3 Limitation of the Study

The MTR was not without limitation. One of the major limitations was the security restriction for the lead reviewer to travel to Ponnagyun, Rambree and Toungup. Participants were brought down to safe places outside of their township. Another issue was the translation. The reviewer feels that a lot of information may have been lost in translation. Similarly, the gap between some of the activities and the MTR was quite long and the participants were unable to remember what transpired in those activities more than a year ago.

CHAPTER - THREE

3.1 Review Findings

This section presents the findings generated from the four thematic areas: Relevance of the project and its intervention in the current social, political and conflict dynamics of Rakhine State, especially the four target townships; implementation process over the last two years; progress towards achieving results as articulated in the design document; and challenges and lessons learned so far. Findings related to each thematic area have been presented as one sub-section in this chapter.

3.1.1 Relevance of the Project to Target Communities/Stakeholders

Despite the gradual institutionalization of democracy in the country, the challenges caused by the ongoing active violence/civil war in the State, the entire project period from the day of its inception to date is being implemented under the shadow of active violence/civil war. In response, the international community is focused on discussing solutions on repatriation, camp closure, government accountability, there is no effort on creating vertical social cohesion in the divided society. The project implementation faced a high level of sensitivities and government scrutiny arising out of this. The basic foundations of governance and the context around people's access to government services, their relationships with the government, LAs trust and relationship towards civil society organizations (CSOs) and the credibility of local agencies/authorities as reliable source service ice delivery has not improved. Thus, the project and its interventions are considered equally relevant in the current context, if not more. Besides, the project has exhibited adaptive tendencies in project implementation based on the contextual realities. Following are the summary points highlighted by the project participants to justify the relevance of the project in the current context:

- The project design is very good and activities are extremely relevant and people have valued project intervention because they facilitate building relationships between government, CSOs and communities, create platform for discussing service delivery issues among the community members and between government and communities/CSOs through awareness raising, bringing the community, CSOs and the local authorities (LAs) together to break the ice between them and creating the opportunity to jointly identify challenges surrounding service delivery for the people, especially poor and the marginalized and remote communities. The following quote from a respondent in Rambree Township summarizes the relevance of the project not only for the current context, but also for the sustainable peace in the future. He said, *“Small Improvement in SD may not do the wonders in conflict resolution. However, it helps enhance relationships and trust building between communities and LAs. And Enhance CSO credibility with both LAs and Community. It could be a tool for longer term tools for participatory peacebuilding in the region.”* Despite being highly relevant in the local context and local needs, overcrowding of training without ample follow up activities/mechanisms to engage the training participants and help them frequently practice their knowledge and skills in daily

life has minimized the potential utilization of the training and its impact in people's personal and professional life.

- The project continues to remain especially relevant and important for the poor, marginalized and women in the rural communities because they are still deprived of government service delivery because of the lack of awareness among community people, especially among rural and ethnic minorities, and lack of willingness of the LAs to reach out to less accessible communities and hard to reach people. The project identifies their challenges and helps address them by empowering the deprived while working, side by side, with the CSOs and sensitizing LAs. One of the respondents from Tougup said that based on their locally generated data '*there is only 40% public satisfaction on government service delivery*'. There was unanimity among all respondents surveyed that the project is highly relevant considering the state of poor service delivery and emerging dynamics of conflict not only among warring parties, but also between communities and the local authorities because of their inability to deliver service effectively.
- There is a strong feeling among participants that there is a trust deficit between LAs and the local CSOs as well as communities. There is a strong sense of suspicion among LAs that the local CSOs support (directly/indirectly) NSAs (which is strongly denied by the CSOs) and the CSOs and community believe that the LAs only serve the urban elite and people in the power corridors and do not care about the plights of the poor, minority groups, and communities in the rural remote areas. Thus people believe that the intention of the project in facilitating constructive dialogue between the communities and CSOs with LAs and sensitizing them on actual needs of the poor, marginalized and rural communities is highly relevant.
- Since people in the communities (even the participating CSOs and youth) have very limited understanding of the types of government services (especially the software government services) and how they get those services, project will be highly relevant to enhance their understanding of types of important government services and how can they avail those services from their respective local government offices.
- The project has just completed the kick off meeting for the implementation of mini-grants by the local CSOs in respective townships. 10 CSOs have already been selected through a rigorous selection process comprising a 'selection panel' that includes individuals from outside of Search and SI as well. The review team believes that the mini-grants will be stepping stones for each of the selected CSOs to strengthen their foot at the respective communities and build a stronger working collaboration with LAs through these projects. This was also reinforced by the CSO participants present in the kick off meeting.
- The capacity building component of the project consisting of five different training modules to civil society groups, youth, women and LAs has been termed as a highly relevant activity considering the poor quality of leadership and management skills among CSOs and community members. Most of the respondents interviewed echoed this fact and said that this was something they needed desperately in order to build their capacity in driving development and societal transformation in their respective communities.

- Considering the lack of clarity on peoples’ understanding on what constitutes service delivery, what are the service delivery source, mechanisms and processes, the research carried out at the beginning of the project quite instrumental in setting ground realities on service delivery awareness, implementation, assessing the existing mechanisms and processes and identifying local priority on service e delivery needs as described by people in the communities. It was also relevant in identifying the challenges LAs are facing in delivering service to the local communities, especially in the rural and remote areas, which are affected by violent conflict.
- Considering the humanitarian crisis facing the state and the township covered by the project, community stakeholders need to be empowered on positive leadership, community level dialogue skills, understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizen, local government process and mechanisms , role of CSOs in supporting government mechanisms and benefits of LAs and CSOs collaboration and strengthening state-citizen relationships and (mutual) trust, this project is really relevant as it works to empower local communities, women and CSOs in community peacebuilding approach and leadership capacity.
- People said that engagement of CSOs in service delivery is important from the community perspective as they are locally based, understand the current community needs and local conflict dynamics very well. With enhanced capacity, they could become bridges between communities and local government authorities and enhance the service delivery, improve the living condition of people and contribute culture if collaboration and coexistence.

3.1.2 Implementation Process

External/Internal Factors and Project Implementation: The first year of the project implementation met with multiple challenges. The on-going violent conflict and unpredictable conflict dynamics in Rakhine State and conflict sensitivity associated with this, the challenging environment in getting permission for research, inaccessibility of getting appointment of relevant government authorities to seek their permission as well as inviting them in the project activities, the lack of interest of the GAD officials in collaborating with national and international organizations, lack of government trust towards local CSOs and increasing demand of local community for hardware humanitarian support rather than software support to enhance social cohesion through improved service delivery in Rakhine State increase further challenges in project implementation . Further, the leadership transition within Search Myanmar and the program focal person transition in SI has also some bearing on an effective project implementation process and institutional memory. The details about these challenges will be discussed in section 3.1.4.

Annual Plan vs Execution: Despite some of the contextual and activity implementation challenges highlighted above, mostly beyond the control of Search and SI, the project has progressed relatively well. The following table provides a detailed list of the activities planned for each year and corresponding annual achievement. The table 1 Below shows that the activities planned for Year 1 and Year 2 have been completed and have exceeded the planned outputs with a few exceptions of Youth innovation Lab (60% in 2018) and Field visit to Government offices

(60% in 2019) and Grant Information Sharing Workshop (77% in 2019). However, with one more year still remaining in the project life, this should not be considered an alarming case.

Table 1: List of activities planned for each year and corresponding annual success rate

1. Plan vs progress

SN	Activity	Target 2018-2021	Target 2018	Ach 2018	% successes	Target 2019	Ach 2019	% Successes	Target 2020/21	Ach 2020/21	% Ach	% Tot ach
1	Project Launch			188								
2	CGA training	32	32	56	175%							
3	Training for participatory research methodology	32	32	43	134%							
4	Participatory research on service provision Qualitative Data Collection			184								
5	Dialogue Workshop for verification of research results											
6	Training for Youth	80				80	96	120%				
7	Training for CSOs	80				80	94	117.5%				
8	Training for Women	80				80	75	93.75%				
9	Creation of youth innovative lab	80		48	60%	80	81	101.25%				
10	Training of Youth Leaders in facilitation skills	80				80	69	86.25%				
11	Creating platform for Service Delivery Planning (Information Sharing Meeting)	560		0		300	329	109.7%	200			
12	Learning and Exchange with youths	32		0		32	51	159.4%				
13	Field Visit to Government office	128		0		30	18	60%	110			
14	Grant Information Sharing Workshop	80				80	62	77.5%				
15												

However, based on the information collected during the field visit, it was noticed that most of the activities planned under implementing partner, Scholar Institute (SI), have not been started yet because of the lack of clarity on how to take the activities forward and recent project management transition within the organization. The former Project Manager transitioned to be one of the Directors of the organization and they recruited a new Project Manager. However, there seems to be no proper handover plan and transfer of institutional memory followed by lack of monitoring data and proper documentation. Thus, the interview with the SI team did not yield any significant information and their accomplishment in the project so far.

There is a Project Steering Committee (PSC) comprised of Search leadership and SI leadership, which has not been very effective in guiding the project team forward and/or overseeing the execution of activities according to the plan. This could also be attributed to the leadership transition within Search as well as transition of one of the directors in SI, who left SI and he was replaced by the former Project Manager.

Overall progress of two years: Search team has been successful in ensuring the implementation of most of the activities planned so far, with few exceptions. According to the latest data available, Search and the partners have 33.4% total budget spent against 64.7% project life elapsed by 31 December 2019. However, this could be attributed to the fact that there was delay in finalizing the mini-grants award in the scheduled time, which caused less expenses against time spent. With the Disbursement of 10 mini-grants in the first quarter of 2020, it is expected that the budget expenditure will be expedited.

Most of the project activities under Search portfolio slated for year 1 and year 2 are completed on time. Table 2 shows different 14 activities organized so far and corresponding number of participants for each activity. The project has so far trained 56 participants on Common Ground Approach, 56 participants on participatory research methodology, 69 youth on facilitation skills, and 265 CSOs, youth and women on five modular training comprised of life skills training, visioning for the future/Who Am I, communications for change, leading collaboratively for change and provisions for change. Each module ran for three days and most of the participants were repeated for each module with a few exceptions.

However, considering the prevailing conflict dynamics and on-going war in townships except Sittwe, or because of some internal issues within Search as well as SI, they were unable to implement some of the activities within the planned time frame.

Participatory Research: The participatory research turned out to be quite challenging. Participatory research was conducted behind the planned schedule because the Rakhine State Government announced any organisation needs permission to conduct research activities in Rakhine. Therefore, research activity was delayed but completed in 2019. Despite the research being completed in 2019, the finalization of the research report stretched until the beginning of 2020. While the local context contributed significantly, internal context of leadership transition within Search also contributed to this delay. The research has been completed and shared and used internally and it is getting ready for external dissemination subject to sensitivity verification.

Dialogue workshop for verification of research results: Because Of the delay in finalizing the participatory research and overlapping with five modules training for youth, CSOs and women, dialogue workshops for verification of research results have been delayed. Further Search Myanmar claimed that the research was sensitive in Nature and they do not want to rush to finalize the report and disseminate it to a wider audience.

State Level Advocacy Dialogue: Dialogue and Training Programme for local authorities also have been delayed as the consequences of intensifying clashes between Myanmar Army and Arakan Army in Rakhine State. On the other hand, access to the UN, INGOs/NGOs and CSOs in Rakhine has been restricted by the State Government.

Domino effect of the research delay in project implementation plan: The delay in research and baseline survey completion had a domino effect in rest of the project activities implementation as many of the activities depended on the results of the research. This has particularly impacted the activities that were to be implemented by SI, which has barely implemented activities except organizing a few meetings. Even many activities planned by Search had to be delayed time and again.

Delay in sub-grant disbursement: According to the Initial Plan, the Sub-grant disbursement was to start the first half of Year 2 with the formation of the fund mechanism and selection process. This was to be followed by contracting and implementation starting in the first half of year 2 and to be completed by the first half of year 3. However, due to the delay in selection of the CSO proposals for sub-grants, the sub-grants were not awarded during the time of the MTR. The CSOs have been given the grant during the report writing process and they have been preparing for the implementation of the grants in their respective villages. However, the Project team also complicated things by taking almost six months to form a committee forming CSO Grant Selection Committee composed of representatives from DFID, USAID, Search and SI. This committee also took quite a while to finalize the grants recipients through a rigorous selection process. However, the proposals selected were based on their thematic areas only and they needed to be rewritten in order to be considered as good proposals with some clarity on their objectives, outcomes and corresponding activities. The MTR believes that the process was made complicated instead of developing a set of specific criteria of selection of-mini project and framing an internal selection committee to expedite the process. It is a lesson learned for Search and SI that one should not overpromise while working in a complicated conflict context and mechanism and process should be devised to make them fair and transparent while keeping them simple.

3.1.3 Progress Towards Results

A mid-term review (MTR) does not look into concrete results, rather focuses on assessing the implementation process and immediate results and effectiveness of each activity and drawing lessons for the next phase of the project.

The project is progressing well, albeit relatively slowly. Search has been successful in implementing a majority of the activities planned so far, with a few exceptions as described in the previous section. This section attempts to capture the indicative results captured so far. The

mid-term review, obviously, does not intend to look into the detailed results as many of the activities are yet to be implemented and it will be too early to try to look into the overall project achievements. However, the result trends will definitely speak for what this project might achieve in the remaining project period. The following table below provides details of the output achieved so far:

Table 2: Major activities implemented so far and corresponding outputs (until Jan 2019)⁵

SN	Activities	Total Outputs	Participants		
			Male	Female	Total
1	Project launch meetings	4	155	33	188
2	CGA Training	4	29	27	56
3	Participatory Research Training	2	20	23	43
4	Participatory qualitative research	1	-	-	-
5	Participatory research on service provision	4 times	80	104	184
6	Training of youth leaders in facilitation skills	4	38	31	69
7	Creation of youth innovation labs	4	36	45	81
8	Training program for youth	Five module training x 4 township	46	50	96
9	Training program for CSOs	Five module training x 4 townships	57	37	94
10	Training program for Women	Five module training x 4 townships		75	75
11	Dialogue Workshop for verification of research results				
12	creating platform for service delivery planning (information sharing meeting)	11 meeting	158	171	329
13	Learning and exchange with youth	2 Visits	22	29	51
14	Field visit to Government office	1 Visit	7	11	18
15	Grant information sharing meeting	3 Workshops	40	22	62

The table shows that the project reached 188 local stakeholders including Local Authorities, political actors, civil society groups and women and youth, including that of minority ethnic groups. However, it has been able to invite only 17.5 percent women participants out of the total. This is probably because most of the leaders in government agencies and CSOs are men and they represented in the meeting.

According to the data provided by the project team, a total of 74 training (quite a lot!) have been completed by the end of year two. Out of those training, 433 participants graduated, of which 243 (56%) are women. Despite a very small proportion of women joining the project launch meeting, the participation of women in the training is encouraging as they outnumber men.

⁵ The data was provided to the MTR team on the 4th week of January 2018.

Similarly, the project also organized four youth labs (one in each township) in which 36 young male and 45 young females participated.

When talking to the training participants from Sittwe and Pongyayun, it was revealed that the participants cannot remember the name of the training they attended, name of the organization which organized the training and the content of the training they underwent. The training were conducted a year ago and there were no follow up activities in between and the knowledge retainer rate diminished with the passage of time. Further, most of the participants were sitting in such training for the first time in their life and many of the topics/issues discussed were quite new to them and it takes more intensive approaches and sustained follow up process to retain such knowledge by the participants. The MTR also noticed that there were too many training within less than a year period without any follow up activities. However, this was not the case with participants from Rambree and Taungup because the training were completed relatively recently and they were able to list the name of the training, basic content covered by the training and some of the general benefit gained from the training.

The participants of the training counted some of the benefits of the various training as follows:

- After participating in training, Youth are more Interested in community activities, including providing support to people when they are living in fear amidst the violence taking place in their communities.
- Now youth better understand the community problem as they have increased ability of analyzing the community issues.
- They have learned many new knowledge on conflict and violence, common ground approach, dialogue facilitation skills, other life skills, communication skills and thinking for their future, among others.
- Youth have become more confident in their actions and have developed leadership skills at local level.
- Information management training helps us to understand how to be careful with fake news and how to verify them.

When it comes to application of the knowledge gained from the trainings into practice, they counted following specific actions:

- Facilitations skills applied in the internal meetings while communicating with each other.
- Always verify news from online sources and social media before jumping into conclusion or sharing with others. This has been quite effective with women as they gossip a lot. without verifying such news or messages. Now they have started verifying such news.
- Increased communication and negotiation skills in family disputes and community conflicts. They are able to facilitate dialogues in issues of contention in their community.
- Able to share public service provisions with community people.
- Increase problem solving skills. One of the participants from Taungup said, *“I have two friends who were very close to each other and they used to always be together. However, they developed a misunderstanding and they fought with each other. They stopped speaking to each other. I felt very bad when two good friends turned into foes. I met both*

of them separately and heard their respective perspectives and convinced them to meet with me. When they came to me and I explained them all the misunderstanding and they realized that it was just because of a fake news spread by someone else. They realized their mistake and became friends again. I was happy to facilitate the dialogue between them and bring back their friendship”.

Similarly, after a long delay of selection of the CSO for receiving the mini-grants/sub-grants, the sub-grants selection committee identified 10 CSOs from four townships and worked with them to enhance the quality of proposal to make them good enough for implementation. The projects address issues such as addressing education problems (5 projects), enhancing service delivery (1), improving health care (1) improving environment and sanitation(2), and mangrove conservation (1). Considering the nature of the project selected, these projects can be well hooked up with project goals and objectives and provide some sustainable support to communities affected by violent conflict in the townships. The budget allocated for these projects are relatively good and they can make significant contributions to the community, if implemented strategically and effectively to generate value for money. In order to do so, the local CSOs need enhanced capacity in project implementation, financial management supplemented by stronger monitoring mechanisms from Search and SI.

Table 3: Mini grants awarded to CSOs in four townships

SN	Organization	Seator	Grant Amt	Euro
1	Yaung Chi Thit	Education	66,922,000	42954
2	Khami Force Foundation	Service delivery	39,445,000	25318
3	Ramree Township Development Organizations	Education	36,128,000	23189
4	Mro Literature and Culture Associations	Education and Culture	34,347,500	22046
5	Humanity Youth Centre	Education	31,624,000	20298
6	Rakhine Young New Generation	Education	57,360,000	36817
7	Ponnagyun Development Youth Organization	Health care	30,957,500	19870
8	Rakhine Ethnic Congress	Municipal Environment and Sanitation	66,865,000	42918
9	Public Service Committee + Taungup Youth Network	Municipal environment and sanitation	38,456,000	24683
10	Rambree Youth Network	Mangrove Conservation	33,060,000	21220
			435,165,000	298553

The mid-term review team found encouraging signals of change while gathering information and data from project participants, state stakeholders and implementing partners. There is a good ownership of the project activities among project participants and state stakeholders.

The project team said that the pre and post-test data of various activities revealed positive

changes of community perception towards LAs and their relationships with CSOs. However, considering the low educational level of participants in the training, the project team developed simple questions for the pre-test and most of the participants answered correctly during the pre-test and there was not much visible increase in knowledge among participants.

The project activities have been contributing to empowering local communities, especially youth and women. The monitoring data generated by Search's DM&E Department shows some changes in knowledge and understanding about LAs and CSOs and youth and women's confidence towards the LAs in comparison to the status before the training, and dialogue events. The overall impression of participants on LAs has been enhanced, as is evidenced by the data. The data generated during MTR shows that there were similar statements coming from women participants interviewed. Women said that they were not comfortable to visit LAs earlier. When they were provided with a platform to interact with LAs and CSOs, they were able to speak with the participating LAs and they might go to the local government office and speak to them in the future.

The review team also got the opportunity to talk to some of the participants of community dialogue events. There have been more than 20 township level dialogue sessions in which a total of 329 (49.5% women) people participated. The participants said that it helped them to understand the work of local government service delivery process and mechanisms, build relationships with them and overcome prejudice/fear against them. However, there is no practice of documenting the proceedings of the dialogue sessions. Thus, it was difficult to generate evidence of contribution made by these dialogue sessions in addressing local conflicts or issues of contention around service delivery and their relationships with community and CSOs..

However, there is not enough monitoring data available to demonstrate concrete success of the various training, dialogue facilitation skills and youth labs as most of these skills will be practiced while implementing the mini-grants which will be implemented in 2020.

The project is conceptualized within the framework of the Common Ground Approach (CGA). However, the review team found that despite the rounds of CH+GA training already delivered in all townships, the conceptual understanding of the CGA among partners and participants, especially the CSOs, youth and women is quite weak.

The review team felt that the participants understood the project activities as one-off events (probably because of the lack of follow up activities to link those activities with other activities) rather than understanding it as part of the larger goal of achieving social cohesion in their communities. Thus, the implementers need to pay special attention to highlight the linkages of the project activities and their complementarity to cause sustained societal changes.

3.1.4 Nexus between Evolving Humanitarian Crisis and Search Project

Rakhine State is undergoing a serious violent conflict that has been affecting the lives of people in the areas where fierce fighting is going on between the various armed groups and the

Tatmadaw. The people in the rural areas of the central and northern areas of the state, especially ethnic minorities and Muslims including Rohingyas,, are facing this challenge

The project annual report for year 1 highlights that during the research process in Sittwe and Ponnagyun, the project consortium observed that many local communities and civil society leaders were concerned with the ongoing clashes between AA and Tatmadaw. In particular, the minority communities, such as Mro, Khami, Thet, Dainet and Maramagyi, felt that they are in acute situation and want the local CSOs and International community to provide humanitarian support. Their perceived slow response from INGOs and the UN during the current crisis has reinforced the existing narratives that international communities are only concerned with and give attention to the Muslim community. Though the project does not provide direct support to the humanitarian efforts, the project continued building the research/survey capacities of the enumerators who are carrying out the humanitarian response to IDPs, and Search has been sharing information within donor and humanitarian networks

Considering this conflict context and its impact on people's lives, the service delivery model could prove to be an effective tool in addressing the humanitarian needs of the people in crisis. The project has already a strong component of locally developed service delivery projects led by CSOs that can be tailored to the mixture of community service delivery needs project as well as humanitarian needs of the conflict affected communities especially minorities one. This provides an opportunity for the donor as well as the implementing organizations to develop a new project by rebranding this project into a service delivery heavy component which addresses the humanitarian as well as service delivery needs of the community in conflict zones.

As already mentioned, the MTR observed very low developmental capacity of the local CSOs and this project could focus on building on the capacity CSOs in order for them to enable for effective programming with a clear vision of addressing the humanitarian needs of local communities and build strong younger generation that can lead such initiative in the future.

3.1.5 Programme Implementation Challenges and Lessons Learned

As already mentioned, the project faced several challenges throughout the project period, many of which were beyond the control of Search and few of them were within Search control. In particular, there were following challenges:

Highly volatile conflict dynamics: The project is being implemented in the shadow of war between the AA and the Tatmadaw along with the highly vulnerable, sensitive and highly politicized Rohingya crisis that has dragged Myanmar Government to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), whereas the certain part of the State is facing serious humanitarian crisis resulting more than 700,000 Rohingyas crossing the border as refugees and many more remained as captives in their own village under the shadow of guns. Under this situation, implementing activities smoothly has been a major challenge. The MTR believes that maintaining continuous challenges and accomplishing most of the tasks planned for year 2 within the same year is already an achievement.

Lesson Learned: It is important to be quite flexible while planning activities in a highly sensitive and vulnerable conflict zone.

Research delay: The project consisted of a major research component and a baseline survey. The research consultant selection was quite challenging as there were not many applications to choose from. There were only three teams applied, two of which were less than competent for doing qualitative research in Rakhine state. However, one of the consulting firms was quite competitive and suitable for doing the research. Search decided to hire this consulting firm after a rigorous selection process. There was some delay in the consultant election process for some administrative reasons and this was followed by the challenges in data collection in the field. It took quite a while for getting permission for the qualitative interviews despite efforts from Search staff, Scholar Institute and the research firm itself, which has been working in Rakhine regions for some time and they have some local linkages to deal with the concerned government authorities. Once the permission was received from the government, the data collection in the four townships started. The local researchers were trained in Sittwe and they were mobilized in the field. However, the Research Team Leader (who is a Danish national) and the Research Advisor (who is an American national) were unable to go to the region for data collection and they had to fully depend on the data collected by the Field Research Coordinator (a Myanmar national) and locally hired and trained researchers. The data collection was completed by the end of year 1 of the project. The data transcribing and data cleaning took a while, as a result, and the draft report was submitted in April 2019 and the report was finalized by the consulting firm in July 2019.

Lesson Learned: We need not be overambitious to include large scale research as part of a time bound project in a highly volatile conflict zone, unless the organization has a full-fledged internal research capacity. The donor should also be cautious to approve such research as part of the proposal being considered for funding.

Challenges in getting government permission for Baseline Survey: The baseline survey was another activity that Search and SI struggled to implement and complete. The team organized the baseline implementation training in January 2019 with a plan of completing it within the first quarter of 2019.

There was uncertainty for a very long period as Search and scholar were trying to get some kind of green signal from government authorities. However, all these efforts were unsuccessful in convincing the government authorities. Despite multi-pronged effort from Search and SI, it was not possible to get a formal permission to start the data collection.

Then Search and SI changed their strategy and invited youth from the local community to sit in a training of enumerators and hire them to carry out the baseline survey in their respective villages by keeping the whole process in a very low profile and complete the data collection. However, the local youth did not have prior experience of doing a survey and there was a lot of compromise on respondent selection and survey data quality. Further, the situation in Pongayun is quite violent with the Tatmadaw and AA fighting with each other on a regular basis, so the team could

not do the survey in this township. Since the process was completed, the data analysis and report writing process is recently completed and the report is being finalized.

Partnership modality and implementation process: Partnership modality and partnership management are among the major factors that determine the quality of programme implementation. Generally there is a good coordination between Search and Scholar Institute as both organizations are housed in the same physical space. However, there are some challenges in activity implementation from the SI, as most of its activities are yet to be implemented even if the project is already into its final year of implementation. While asked the reason for this delay to the new Project Manager of SI, there was no clear response to explain this delay. While they said that they were waiting for the research to be completed for the activities to be completed, there was no alternative plan for implementing the activities even if the pre-draft report (7 April 2019) of the research was ready and shared (accompanied by a three-hour long verbal presentation) with them almost a year ago, while the formal draft was shared on 31 May and final report was submitted on 19 August 2019.

Lesson learned: Clarify roles and responsibilities very clearly from the moment the project gets underway and make sure that the project oversight team remains vigilant and provides concrete guidance to the project execution team throughout the life of the project.

Less effective role of PSC: The Review found that the PSC has not been as effective as it expected to be. This could be attributed to the transition of the members of the PSC from both Search and SI. There was a transition of CD and Head of Programs in Search Myanmar whereas there was also transition to Executive Director of SI almost similar time. With this transition, the role of PSC has diluted and it has not been able to organize timely meetings and make strategic decisions and oversight to make the project implementation effective. The staff have not been able to receive required guidance and logistical and technical guidance when faced with challenges. Some of the clear examples of this is the delay in finalizing and disbursing the sub-grants and lack of clarity in delay of some of the activities to be implemented by SI.

Lesson Learned: The PSC should meet regularly and make strategic decisions based on the challenges of the project as communicated by the Project implementation team, PSC members should receive strategic information from the project team and make concrete decisions regarding those challenges and communicate back to the project team without wasting time. There should be clarity among PSC members what is their role and responsibility as well as accountability and how they should be fulfilling their responsibilities and accountability..

Challenges in securing co-funding: Search has been struggling in securing co-funding agreed with the EU at the beginning of the project. This has been challenging particularly because of the on-going conflict dynamics resulting in some of the potential donors either withdrawing their support from Rakhine State or reluctant to fund projects in the State.

Lesson learned: Securing co-funding is not always easy, especially projects designed for highly sensitive conflict zones. Be strategic while committing a co-funding and try to remain as low as possible.

Weak Capacity of the COSs: Further, the MTR found that the project implementation capacity of the selected CSOs is quite weak and they might need some strong capacity building support in project management and implementation as well as monitoring of the activities to cause and articulate change from their respective projects and how they link these mini-projects and achievements with the larger objective of promoting social cohesion and service delivery in their township and the state. Those organizations have been provided a sum ranging from Euro 20,000 to 43,000, which is quite a large sum considering their capacity and timeframe available for them to implement these activities. If these projects are implemented strategically and effectively, they might be able to contribute significantly to the betterment of their communities in these respective townships. These mini-projects bear a major stake in final evaluation of the project and if they are not completed within the next 3 months or so, it will not be easy to see the results generated out of these activities.

Lesson learned: Identify CSOs as early as possible and carry out their capacity needs assessment and develop their capacity building plan to enhance the project effectiveness.

Retainer rate of knowledge among participants: The review noticed that there were many trainings provided to youth, women and CSO members who had not undergone such training in the past and their knowledge retainer rate was found to be low. No specific follow up activities were planned for engaging them regularly and they didn't know how to apply those knowledge and skills when they return to their community and, thus, the (any) knowledge and skills gained from the training diminished over the course of time. There was room for a more strategic approach for engaging them regularly as Search and SI staff were rooted in each township to look after the project activities and its results.

Lesson learned: A combination of training and follow up activities among participants helps increase the effectiveness of a training. Cramping too many training events within a tight timeframe might end up being counter-productive. People belonging to marginalized remote areas and young people need time to digest the knowledge gained and it needs more follow up engagement. Lack of follow up activities with the participants (even small follow up meetings) seems to be the major issue as they have participated in such training rarely and it is difficult to expect them to remember the content and essence of the training just because of One-Off training.

Leadership and staff transition: During the year 2 of the project, Search Myanmar and SI both saw leadership and Project Manager (respectively) transitions during the same time. Search Country Director and Director of Programs departed Search in a quick succession leaving behind a leadership vacuum, which also affected the effectiveness of the PSC, which was clearly visible during the MTR. Their respective departure in July 2019 and May 2019 indirectly affected the project implementation as it always takes New Country Director *who joined July 2019) and the

head Of Programs (joined late August 2019) time to understand the program and process, before they actually demonstrate the leadership.

Lesson learned: A well-organized transition plan and handover of institutional memory to the incoming staff is very important for successful continuation of the project.

Lack of trust in government structures among community people: According to the Search and SI staff interviewed, it was challenging to convince people about the fairness of the government structures and make them understand the process. Similarly, the community people and CSO representatives interviewed showed apathy and very low level of trust towards government authorities as there is very little communication between citizens and government authorities. This has a historical meaning as most of the government officials are appointed by the former regime and they had never tried to build positive relationships with community people. Citizens still hold a sense of fear of government employees and avoid reaching out to them or communicating with them to avoid negative repercussions.

The fragile LAs trust towards CSOs: The CSO representatives interviewed said that the government authorities (including LAs) mostly look down towards them as the supporters of the armed groups and enemy of the government. It is always difficult to convince them that their efforts are intended towards supporting the government efforts towards promoting peace and development. As a result, most of the government authorities are reluctant to attend the program organized by CSOs rather send the SPs (Special Police) to scrutinize the program proceeding. Search trainer said, *“when we organized CGA training, the SP came to the training and sat there for the day. We were very conscious and were very careful on what we say in the training. We were unable to discuss openly about conflict and violence in the region and had to give examples from outside of Myanmar. The participants were also quite scared and they would not speak anything in the training and rather just listen to whatever we explain. It directly affected the quality and essence of the CGA training.”*

Lack of awareness among citizens about service delivery provision: The result of the people’s reluctance to reach out to LAs and LAs’ lack of trust towards citizens and CSOs, there is very little awareness among people on how to access the service delivery easily. This was a significant challenge in making people understand the importance of improved service delivery and how it contributes to enhance social cohesion in the conflict affected communities.. However, there is visible change in the level of awareness and willingness to access Service delivery as expressed by the beneficiaries, especially youth. One of the youth in Sittwe said, *“we have been able to develop some sorts of individual personnel-based relationships with government authorities especially in the Department of Rural Development. However, such relationships have not been institutionalized. If that person gets transferred, we have to start the relationship building process all over again.”* However, all the respondents interviewed said that it is extremely difficult to reach out to authorities within the General Administration Department (GAD), which is the most powerful government agency at all levels.

Lesson learned: The government citizens relationship and government COSs relationship turned out to be more critical than expected. It is important to invest more effort in building that relationship and invest more on building state ownership of the project activities.

Program quality is a major challenge

Lack of clarity on coherence of the activities: The project wants to improve relationships, wants to facilitate enhanced service delivery, wants to improve social cohesion but there is still lack of clarity among staff and partners on how that a nexus between these three aspects can be created.

Permission for the sib-grant activities: One of the major concerns raised by CSOs is that they are worried that they might face a stiff challenge for getting permission for the planned sub-grant activities. They are already thinking of using local parliament members to get that permission as local parliament members are more supportive and easily accessible than local authorities. Further, most of the CSO representatives interviewed mentioned that it is quite challenging to reach out and deal with local government authorities directly appointed by the Government through GAD. GAD is found to be the most difficult department to deal with. Despite lower levels in hierarchy, LAs are more rigid than parliamentarians, because of their nexus to power corridors inherited from the past regime, while the parliamentarians are elected by people and majority of them are NLD and others are from regional political parties. People found it easier to deal with parliamentarians and convince them to facilitate the approval process rather than directly reaching out to LAs, who are quite reluctant to listen to CSOs and citizens, let alone facilitating the approval process.

Lesson learned: It is important to understand the power dynamics in the townships and political circle and identify easy to access and influential stakeholders to facilitate the action smoothly. The GAD is the most difficult state agency to reach out to, without whose full support it is very difficult to implement activities in the townships. while DRD look relatively easier to deal with and collaborate

CHAPTER - FOUR

4.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the conversation with more than 50 stakeholders and project participants, review of various documents and monitoring data, the mid-term review team has drawn a number of conclusions based on which the evaluation has furnished a number of recommendations for the effective implementation of the rest of the project components.

4.1.1 Conclusions

The entire project period from the day of its inception to date is being implemented under the shadow of active civil war. In response, the international community is focused on discussing solutions on repatriation, camp closure, government accountability, there is no effort on creating vertical social cohesion in the divided society. The Project also faced many internal as well as external changes that created obstacles to smooth implementation of the project. Some of the challenges are the on-going war between AA and Tatmadaw in the townships outside Sittwe, difficulty in getting government permission, leadership transition, and lack of LAs and citizen/CSOs trust for each other among others. Despite all these challenges Search and SI have maintained their constant presence in the project townships and the project is being implemented with some adjustments depending on the conflict context and other administrative and managerial hurdles.

There was unanimity among all the stakeholders interviewed, including the project participants and CSOs that the project is highly relevant for the communities despite the state facing major political violence. People believe that the project on service delivery is highly relevant for the State which is undergoing humanitarian crisis and any activities or support that intends to address the challenges faced by the conflict affected community is a welcome effort.

The project has made good progress towards improving the state of social cohesion and access to improved service delivery, especially making an attempt to bring So stakeholders, community and LAs together into one platform of interaction and dialogue. Despite having difficulty in building good relationships with GAD officials, there has been marked improvement in the relationships between DRD and CSOs.

The monitoring data shows that 433 LAs, CSO representatives, youth and women have been trained of which 243 (56%) are women. Similarly, 913 citizens, CSOs and LAs have been able to interact with each other through a number of meetings, interaction and dialogue sessions, of which 414 (45%) are women. The project has been able to improve the knowledge and understanding of participants on leadership, community development, communications skills, Common Ground Approach (CGA), and local level service delivery provisions, among others. Altogether, the project has directly reached at least 1346 individuals of which 49% (658) are women, demonstrating a fair level of gender balance in participants selection. Even during the mid-term review interviews and FGDs, there were a good number of women present to talk with

the review team who were open to sharing their perspective, learning and offering suggestions. Though the review team believes that it is still early to make an attempt to draw conclusive results, there are enough early signals of momentum towards achieving the desired results set up at the beginning of the project. The success of the project was also vindicated by the opinion that it has created space for LAs, CSOs and local communities to collaborate with each other, facilitate dialogue between LAs and CSOs and community people, and provide government services to poor and minority groups at local level.

In a nutshell, the project, despite all the challenges and weaknesses, has been successful in building relationships between LAs, public and CSOs and has given a sense to the marginalized communities and women that it is possible to access service from LAs without major obstacles.

4.1.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the review team has identified following recommendations that may help the project implementation team to produce better results in the remaining project period.

- Expand the oversight function of PSC and increase its effectiveness through regular meetings and strategic guidance using problem solving approach. SC needs to be more active and make decisions that will have a positive contribution on the quality of programming. Explore the possibility to invite the both Project Managers as non-voting members of the PSC. This will help bridge the current gap in the role of PSC and the operation of the project team.
- Organize multiple individual meetings with LAs and other stakeholders to develop personal relationships, better sensitize them, and bring them onboard to the broader objectives and our intention to support government efforts. One sample tool of improving relationships with people is the frequency of meeting and converting personal relationships into institutional relationships.
- Invest in building capacity of CSOs in peacebuilding, project management, financial management and understanding change to enhance the effectiveness of their work at the community, especially the implementation of Sub-grant activities.
- Build ownership of the project among all stakeholders and help them understand the project in whole, rather than parts.
- Use mini-grants as an opportunity for long term sustainability strategy and connect this project with the EU's larger agenda of promoting humanitarian development nexus in Rakhine State as well as in Myanmar. Search Myanmar needs to be more strategic to explore more options to link this project to the Humanitarian development nexus.
- Strengthen the documentation of the proceedings and results of the dialogue sessions to create knowledge as these proceedings will be a valuable data source for capturing changes at the end of the project period.
- Start developing mechanisms and tools to capture outcome-level data from various activities such as community dialogue, mini-grant implementation and application of training into practice.

- Ensure strong monitoring of the sub-grant activities as they will have a large bearing on demonstrating the success of this project during final evaluation.
- Develop a system of maintaining institutional memory on project related knowledge, decisions, and processes so that the project implementation and partnership challenges could be managed well.
- Make efforts to enhance the overall understanding of CGA among participants as well as staff.
- The review team felt that the participants understood the project activities as one-off events rather than understanding it as part of the larger goal of achieving social cohesion in their communities. Thus, the implementers need to pay special attention to highlight the linkages of the project activities and their complementarity to cause sustained changes.
- Start planning for the project exit strategies and mechanisms for sustainability of the initiatives beyond the life of the project.
- Finally, given the continued high relevance of the project and its gradual realization of the results, it is recommended that a short reasonable extension of the timeline may help offset the initial delays caused by the internal as well as external factors, especially the violent clashes in three of the four townships. This might also help institutionalize the achievements gained so far.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of people Interviewed (Project Participants, Partners, SFCG Staff)

SN	Name	Township	Gender	Ethnicity	Organization	Remark
17-12-2019						
1	Tin Tin Mya	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	People for people	Youth - FGD participants (at Home Li Restaurant)
2	Hnin Hnin Wai	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	Youth Lab	
3	Lae lae Win	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	Youth Lab	
4	Soe Thank Htike	Sittwe	Male	Rakhine		
5	Sapay Oo	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		
6	U Tin Myo Aung (PO)	Sittwe	Male	Rakhine	Scholar Institute	KII session at Scholar Office
7	Daw Aye Kwyut Thandar (PO)	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	Scholar Institute	
8	Ko Harry (PM)	Sittwe	Male	Rakhine	SFCG	
18-12-2019						
9	Hnin Ei San	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	SAY	Women- FGD participants (at Home Li Restaurant)
10	Ma Ni Htwe	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		
11	Ma San Moe	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		
12	Ma Khaing Line Oo	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		
13	Ma May Thu Hlaing	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		

14	Ma U San Yi	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		
15	Ma Shwe Win	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine		
16	Ko Zaw Zaw Tun	Sittwe	Male	Rakhine	REC	KII session at their office (to confirm date)
17	Ko Than Hla	Sittwe	Male	Rakhine	RYNG	KII session at their office (to confirm date)
19-12-2019						
18	U Hla Baw (LA)	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine	Communication and liaison department	KII session at his office
19	Not written	Rambree	Male	Rakhine	CSO	FGD at Sittwe Hotel
20	Not written	Rambree	Male	Rakhine	CSO	
21	Not written	Rambree	Female	Rakhine	CSO	
22	Not written	Rambree	Female	Rakhine	CSO	
20-12-2019						
23	Not written	Taung Gyut	Male	Rakhine	CSO	KII at Sittwe Hotel
24	Not written	Taung Gyut	Female	Rakhine	CSO	
21-12-2019						
25	Myo Chit Aye	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine	HYC	Youth - FGD participants (at HYC) Ponnna Gyun
26	Aung Su Myaing	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine	HYC	
27	MyoThant Oo	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine	HYC	
28	Zaw Myo Oo	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine		

29	Aye Myat San	Ponnagyun	Female	Rakhine		
30	Thu Thu San	Ponnagyun	Female	Rakhine		
31	Khin Khin Htay	Ponnagyun	Female	Rakhine		
32	Aung Naing Lin	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine		
33	Khin Kywut Oo	Ponnagyun	Female	Rakhine		
34	Kyaw Khant Naing	Ponnagyun	Female	Rakhine	HYC	
35	Mg Hla Aung	Sittwe	Male	Rakhine	MYDA	Small Group discussion at Homeli restaurant
36	Ma U Khin Thein	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	RYNG	
37	Ma Hla Wyut Yin	Sittwe	Female	Rakhine	Yaung Chi Thit	
38	U Kyaw San	Ponnagyun	Male	Rakhine	HYC (Founder)	KII at HYC office
23-12-2019						
39	Thaw Zin Tun	Rambree	Male	Rakhine	CSO member	FGD at Merciel Hotel (Youth/ CSO)
40	Aung Tun Lin	Rambree	Male	Rakhine	CSO member	
41	New New	Rambree	Female	Rakhine	CSO member	
42	Phyo Hnin Wai	Rambree	Female	Rakhine	CSO member	
43	Nyo Nyo Khine	Rambree	Female	Rakhine	CSO member	
44	Aung Thein	Rambree	Male	Rakhine	CSO member	
45	Ma Su Yandar Hlaing	Taung Gyut	Female	Rakhine	CSO member	FGD at Merciel Hotel (Youth/ CSO)
46	Min Ko Oo	Taung Gyut	Male	Rakhine	CSO member	

47	Wai Yan Phyo	Taung Gyut	Male	Rakhine	CSO member
48	Myo Min Khine	Taung Gyut	Male	Rakhine	CSO member
49	Ma Thet Ei Phyo	Taung Gyut	Female	Rakhine	CSO member
50	Mg Myo Htet Htwe	Taung Gyut	Male	Rakhine	CSO member
51	Tin Tin Htwe	Taung Gyut	Female	Rakhine	CSO member

Annex 2: Terms of Reference (ToR) for the MTR

Organization Background

Search for Common Ground (Search) (www.sfcg.org) is an international peacebuilding organization that strives to transform the way the world deals with conflict - away from adversarial approaches and towards collaborative problem-solving. Search is working in 35 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the USA. Search works with governments, civil society, state institutions, youth, media organizations and other stakeholder groups to promote peace, reconciliation, tolerance, and collaboration across dividing lines.

Search for Common Ground Myanmar

Since 2014, Search has been working in Myanmar with the government, civil society, media actors, ethnic armed groups, and the wider public to support an inclusive democratic transition, focusing on reconciliation, trust-building, and collaboration across dividing lines. Search's approach is to support locally led processes at different levels of society in order to transform local level conflict. Search Myanmar has been supporting an inclusive peace process at the local level, and skills building and trust building with and between a multitude of stakeholders, including government, the private sector, the media, and civil society including women, youth and minorities. Search Myanmar works with local partners across six states and three regions to support Myanmar in its priorities of peace, development and democratic change.

Project Summary

In Rakhine, Search has been working with local civil society organizations, women, youth and local authorities to enhance the better cohesive and developed state by improving trust and relationships along different dividing lines. Building upon its experience and partnerships in Rakhine State, with this project Search will be supporting the young civil society actors and key community influencers who, despite the challenges, are committed to learn and explore communication tools and to reduce the likelihood that hate speech on social media or rumors will trigger violence. This project is working to equip them with skills to mitigate and reduce the harmful impact of rumors and manipulated information, and to support positive messaging through social media, building social empathy among diverse communities in Rakhine State. Through strengthened capacities, young civil society actors and key community influencers will be able to positively challenge the rumors and misinformation online. The project is embracing a conflict sensitive approach to improving service delivery provision and builds upon the work of European Union (EU) to support ongoing democratic development and expansion of space for civil society. Search is implementing the project in partnership with Scholar Institute (Scholar) – a local organization with extensive experiences in the Rakhine context. The project implemented targeted activities on four townships – Sittwe, Rambree, Ponnagyun and Taungup.

The **overall objective** of the project is **to enhance civil society organizations and local authorities , contribution to governance and development processes.**

Specific objectives of the project is **to strengthen civil society organizations(CSOs), especially women and youth organizations, in their collaboration with local authorities and provision of services to divided communities in Rakhine State.**

To reach the project objectives, four expected results/ Output (ER) are setting up as following:

ER (1.1): Increased research initiatives and dialogue between local authorities and civil society organizations about gaps and issues related to mutual collaboration, conflict sensitivity and service delivery processes.

ER (1.2): Established collaborations and partnership among youth and women civil society organizations for design and planning of service delivery in local communities.

ER (1.3): Supported joint actions between civil society and local authorities in service delivery planning and budgeting.

ER (1.4) Raised evidence based awareness of issues related to collaboration between local authorities and civil society and service delivery by conducting community-based campaigns.

Objectives and Methodology of the Mid-Term Review (MTR)

The overall aim of the MTR is to identify measures, reflect on the results of the project so far and adjust the next steps of the implementation in the direction of improvements in the methodology, approach and context. Therefore, the specific objectives of the MTR are:

- Take stock of the results so far;
- Unpack contextual changes that influenced the implementation of the project;
- Identify any changes in the context of social cohesion for better service delivery.
- Explore potential for moving into the humanitarian development nexus

Key Questions for Mid Term Review (MTR)

The MTR will be guided by the following key evaluation questions under four evaluation criteria:

Relevance:

- Do the key assumptions which guided our project design hold up to date? If not – how has the change in the assumptions impacted our realization of results?
- How relevant are the project strategies, approach and activities as perceived by the beneficiaries and other community stakeholders?

Implementation process

- Has the project achieved its milestones set for the period in a timely manner? If not, what were the challenges and what can/should have been the mitigation measures?
- How should we adjust the implementation plan to ensure that it caters to the emerging needs of the context?
- To what extend the preliminary results of the project are in course of meeting the specific objective of the project t? If not, why?
- What is the monitoring mechanism and what are the mechanisms of the reflection and learning process that have been used?

Progress towards results

- Are there any signals of increased capacities and skills of project beneficiaries such as government stakeholders and youth/women representative of CSOs? If yes, what are they? If no, what could be the reasons behind it? What could be done to increase capacities among the actors concerned?
- What is the early evidence that the project interventions are contributing to expansion of space for civil society?
- What are the progress (or) Changes (if any) of government service delivery process for the project targeted beneficiaries within the project area?
- To what extent the project is contributing to increase the trust and accountability between community, CS and Government?
- Is the project adding value to enhance relationships and collaboration among the concerned stakeholders?
- To what extent the project is contributing to make the government service delivery inclusive?

Challenges and lessons learned

- What are the potential project implementation risk for second half of the project and what could be the mitigation strategies?
- What worked and what did not work? Why? What are the major lessons learned? How have they been incorporated into the programming?
- Are there any challenges for early preparations or steps being planned to ensure sustainability of the project?

Mid Term Review (MTR) Methodology

The Midterm review will be led by ILT's Senior DM&E Specialist (The Reviewer) and close coordination and collaboration with the SFCG Myanmar's DM&E Staff.

The SFCG approach to evaluation is grounded in the guiding principles of our work: participatory, culturally sensitive, committed to building capacity, affirming and positive while honest and productively critical, and valuing knowledge and approaches from within the context.

The project midterm review will be based on qualitative data/information analysis to generate results for the review objectives and will collect existing quantitative output/outcome monitoring data from the project team and monitoring as well as periodic project reports.

The sampling methodology will be designed by the reviewer in consultation with the project team. The major tools for the Evaluation are as follows:

- **Documents Review:** The reviewer will review the project proposal, log frame and detailed M&E Plan, research and baseline survey report, periodic project reports submitted so far and monitoring data collected by the project team.
- **Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with beneficiaries:** The MTR will organize at least 4 FGDs with women/ youth representative CSOs and other concerned stakeholders.

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** The MTR will organize at least 16 KIIs with local government officials, civil society leaders, Search staff and other concerned key stakeholders.

The MTR will interview key relevant stakeholders, and direct project participants in all 4 project targeted area as much as possible. The MTR sample should adequately cover project those target areas and be representative of the community structure.

Furthermore, as part of the data collection and analysis process, the review team will ensure the following Ethical Principles:

- Comprehensive and systematic inquiry: The team will make the most of the existing information and full range of stakeholders available at the time of the Evaluation. They will conduct systematic, data-based inquiries. They will communicate the review methods and approaches accurately and in sufficient detail to allow others to understand, interpret and critique on the work. The review team will clearly explain the limitations of the Evaluation and its results.
- Respect for people: The review team will respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents and program participants. They have the responsibilities to be sensitive to and respect differences amongst participants in culture, religion, gender, disability, age and ethnicity.

Deliverables

The final deliverables of the MTR will include the following documents:

- **An inception Report, containing an evaluation plan matrix**, outlining the specific data collection strategy, responsibility, data collection tools, draft questionnaires and a detailed work plan within xx December 2019. The plan should consider the following principles:
 - a) Inclusiveness, the methodology should include a wide range of viewpoints, specifically ethnicity, gender and age-sensitivity.
 - b) Rigor of evidence, gathered information needs to be reliable and transparent.
 - c) Ethics, the methodology needs to consider ethics in order to ensure that the evaluation is fully objective.
- A final review report due within 4 weeks of the completion of the data collection. The report should be no more than 30 pages in length (excluding appendices).
- The final review report should be submitted electronically in an MS-Word document. It may include:
 - 1) Cover page
 - 2) Executive Summary of key findings and recommendations;
 - 3) Introduction, including brief context description
 - 4) Methodology
 - 5) Review findings, analysis and conclusions with associated evidence and data clearly illustrated. The findings section should be subdivided as sub-chapters according to the evaluation criteria.
 - 6) Recommendations for the future, which should be practical and linked directly to conclusions;
 - 7) Appendices, including review tools and questionnaire.
- The report will be credited to the review team and will be placed in the public domain, including on the Search website and the DME Learning Portal (www.dmeforpeace.org).

Duration & Deadlines

The duration of the review will be a total period of xx weeks to begin xxxx . The review team will finalize the dates and duration of the review in consultation with the Project team.

Logistical Support

Search Myanmar will provide all necessary preparatory and logistical assistance to the evaluator, which include:

- Background materials (project proposal, implementation plans, progress reports, success stories, etc.)
- Duly analyzed and tabulated monitoring data based on the templates provided by the reviewer
- All project reports and documents
- Locating respondents and scheduling a meeting with them and their contact information.
- Accompanying the review team in the field visit and taking care of all logistics.

Proposed timeline and Plan

STAGE	CONTENTS	DURATION
Preparation	-Review of the project goals and baseline study -Design the study plan -consultation with the DME regional support -selection of the methodology of the Evaluation -approval of the study plan	
Design	-Structuring the tools for the Evaluation -Determination of target groups/beneficiaries -Determination of the sample size of the study	
Implementation	-Preparation for field study -Collection of primary data -collection of secondary data	

Analysis and Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Double checking the data-Coding data-Analysis of the data-Writing the first draft of the Evaluation report-Writing final report-Approval of the report	
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