STRENGTHENING RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN CHIN STATE, MYANMAR

RESEARCH PAPER – OCTOBER 2020

HLDO

actionaid

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About Hualngo Land Development Organisation

Hualngo Land Development Organisation (HLDO) was established in April 2010 to support development of the Hualngo Area of Chin State, with the aim of eventually working in other areas of the State. HLDO was established by tribal leaders committed to serving their people to improve their quality of life. It seeks to pursue sustainable development through community empowerment and increasing people's abilities to analyse their community needs and identify effective solutions.

About ActionAid Myanmar

ActionAid is a feminist organisation that uses a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable, particularly women and youth, are heard. ActionAid is working with communities across the world to develop solutions that help people adapt to climate change impacts and build resilience. ActionAid is working with civil society organisations and networks across the world to protect civic and political rights.

In 2016, AAM and HLDO began to work together to establish the Fellowship programme in 60 Chin communities and increase HLDO's organisational capacity through training in financial and project management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), documentation, and reporting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ActionAid works towards protecting and fulfilling the human rights of people living in poverty as the best way to eradicate poverty and injustice (ActionAid, 2020, p.10). We see people living in poverty and exclusion as leading agents in their development process and in challenging unequal power.

In 2006, ActionAid Myanmar introduced the Fellows programme, which trained women and youth leaders to help communities to claim their rights. The Fellows programme supports youth leadership at village level, while also establishing bottom-up participatory development planning processes. An example of Fellows guiding their communities to critically analyse their needs and resources is a gender imbalance visualisation exercise, where men and women sit together to discuss, understand and visualise gender imbalances in the community using a 'cobweb' diagram. This exercise is a basis from which Fellows work with communities to reduce the differentiation between the roles of men and women, and build greater collaboration between genders by including women in village decision-making.

This study looked at the impact of the Fellows programme in Falam Township, Chin State; commissioned as part of AAM's ongoing commitment to participatory research to inform our programmes. Fellows were supported to develop research skills for assessing the programme, and to better understand the capacity of rural villagers to participate in planning and community development. To do this, the conceptual framework used emphasised limitations and opportunities related to traditional structures and processes of power and leadership on the village level; the intersectionality of the self-identity and empowerment of women, youth, and other marginalised groups, as influenced by traditional and religious influences, and; the dynamics involved in identifying and acting upon individual and collective agency to realise participatory planning and community development objectives.

Data was collected through thematic semi-structured interviews with participants in the project, and others familiar with the context, in order to answer the central question, 'how do the Fellows and the Village Book process create change in a community?' To do this evidence was produced to answer two research questions:

- How do the Fellows impact community power dynamics and leadership in terms of the inclusion of women and youth in community decision-making structures and processes?
- What factors contribute to strengthening village change processes?

This report presents a discussion of the research findings regarding community power dynamics and leadership, and the inclusion of women and youth in community decision-making structures and processes. It considers factors impeding the inclusion of these and other historically marginalised groups. For example, bringing previously excluded voices into village planning processes – such as young people and women – challenges traditional community spaces dominated by older males in leadership positions. Gendered social and cultural norms, values, and practices in Myanmar and Chin State have profound impacts on the life opportunities of women and men such as access to education, health care, and other social services.

There is evidence in the current study that the Fellow-led community development process can facilitate changes in these traditional power relationships. Women and other historically marginalised villagers have been invited to participate in village level meetings and other activities and encouraged to express their opinions and ideas. Some female Fellows have found that formerly doubtful male community members have become more cooperative and supportive of the inclusive participatory process. Self-help groups (SHGs) serve as women-only spaces that offer women opportunities to come together as a group to design and implement projects that address their needs and interests. These groups have offered women opportunities to engage in activities together, beyond their traditional household roles. These efforts have included village cleanliness projects, alcohol and drug use prevention, and the establishment of a new coffee farm. In one village, the SHG used its seed grant to prepare soap and groceries to sell in the village. This SHG also started a small business loan program, providing loans to business ventures.

Overall, the study concluded that:

- In communities where village affairs were formerly seen as arenas that only belong to village leaders, elders and household heads, local youth in the villages have become central actors of community development.
- Communities that formerly exhibited weak structures and collaboration processes have become more organised and united, self-sufficient, and developed the ability to identify and prioritise village needs and develop solutions to address them.
- Traditional views regarding community development have started to change. As a result of the introduction of Fellow-led community development, it is now seen as a participatory process that improves community members' skills and knowledge and requires contributions from the entire community.
- Through the establishment of SHGs and other elements of Fellow-led community development, women have become organised at the village level and started to

take part in village decision-making processes and contribute to projects that are valued community-wide. Women have gained more confidence to voice their opinions and ideas, as well as to question those of men.

- Changes can be seen in household dynamics wherein traditional gendered labour roles have started to shift. Women have gained more voice and new forms of authority within the household sphere.
- Youth have assumed village leadership roles through their work as Fellows, and women have gained new village leadership roles through their work with SHGs.
- Villages have experienced participatory community planning through the Village Book preparation process, organising CBOs, and negotiation of funding for village projects with local government authorities.
- SHGs and CBOs have contributed to the organisational capability and capacity in the subject villages, offering opportunities for women and villages as a whole to function in more inclusive and united ways to identify and act upon their common interests.

Factors contributing to strengthening village change processes included:

- The supportive role of a CSO (in this case HLDO) was essential.
- Training local youth to lead in community development created new village organisational capabilities and capacity to act.
- Encouraging inclusion, unity, trust, and respect promoted participation, collaboration, and teamwork among all community groups and villagers.
- Analysing traditional gendered norms, values, and practices and exploring what factors within the community result in inequality between men and women was important to women finding more important home and village roles.
- Offering knowledge and skills training to women and organising them through SHGs enabled them to be more involved in community decision-making and widening their work inside the communities.
- Engaging villagers through the Village Book preparation process and offering them tools that allow them to define their needs and actions required to address those needs, supported their ability to negotiate improvements with external actors.

Barriers to village change processes:

- Fellows need time and space to build trust. Initially Fellows were perceived as development workers getting paid for their activities and expected by villagers to implement the projects . As a result, Fellows felt under pressure and insecure at times.
- The spare time that residents of these Chin communities have available to participate in village affairs is clearly limited, and proves be a significant barrier to participatory planning.
- Long-term structural transformation of deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and values will take time. Religious norms and limited access to education are cited as deeply rooted causes of entrenched power imbalances between men and women.
- Since respondents agreed on the importance of HLDO to village participatory planning and community development, villages will require continuing support from HDLO to maintain and build upon the gains made through the work of Fellows, SHGs, and CBOs.
- The negotiation process with local government officials is an area where many villages are limited in their ability to effectively act upon their interests. They are often unfamiliar with governmental processes, unable to negotiate in Burmese, and the government may be unwilling to recognise local village planning as a form of legitimate decision-making.
- The sustainability of village participatory planning and community development is also challenged by internal village factors. These included a lack of technical skills needed to undertake projects that might range from planting a coffee plantation to developing a new water source. This is further complicated by villagers not being able to sacrifice the valuable of time required to develop these skills that are necessary to plan and implement village projects.

In seeking to answer how the Fellows and the Village Book process create change in a community, this research found that the Fellows in Falam Township were able to initiate a process of change within their communities. They expanded the capacity of HDLO to reach and support villagers' livelihoods, while also changing attitudes towards community engagement through bottom-up participatory processes.

The Village Book participatory planning process helps community members work together as a group and has led to the establishment of a community-based organisation (CBO) in each village. In most villages CBOs represent a mix of youth, elders, women, and men. The organisations have offered leadership roles to village youth, and Fellows have supported CBOs as facilitators. CBOs critically analyse what should be done to improve the condition of villages. CBOs present their plans to local authorities and negotiate with them, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other external actors regarding funding needed to implement planned projects. The evidence gathered for the study demonstrates that the experiences of villages negotiating

with government authorities regarding funding for CBO-generated village plans vary greatly and is an area for further analysis and support.

Bottom-up planning processes can make significant contributions to the wellbeing of communities across Chin State. The current research shows that Fellows and the Village Book process have supported important changes in the subject villages. To sustain these accomplishments, the following actions are recommended:

- Community-level discussions regarding gender inequality, and how it intersects with other forms of discrimination, need to continue. These discussions must have a clear focus on how to break gender barriers and how to allow for women leadership at the village and township level.
- HLDO engagement with the bottom-up participatory process has been crucial. For the future, it is recommended that HLDO support the establishment of networks of trust across villages with similar planning priorities. It may look to the model of Village Tract Community-Based Organisations (VTCBOs) that AAM has contributed to implementing in Kayah State as offering practical ideas regarding how these collaborative inter-village networks can be established and operated. This collaborative approach could help villages to learn to work together through participatory planning and community development and to advocate for their common needs.
- Members of the SHG and CBO should continue to engage with government actors and township government decision-making processes on how to allocate the government's scarce resources through planning and budgeting. The CBOs and SHG governance structure must establish linkages with formal governance processes at the township, regional and Chin State and levels.

As stated in the Kayin Fellows research paper, these suggestions will only have 'meaning if they are part of a new approach embraced by governing actors to integrate village level participatory planning and community development into formal governance structures and processes'. (ActionAid, 2020, p.56). Participatory planning and community development through the Fellows programme and the Village Book, and informally advocating with local government officials for funding of resultant village projects, can be considered a form of 'proto-governance' – namely, nascent forms of governance between the village and local government level in Myanmar. Supporting this involves capability and capacity-building efforts prior to the creation of institutionalised linkages to the structures and processes of government. With time, AAM sees the forms of proto-governance it has promoted becoming one pathway to future settled patterns of governance at the local level that must emerge, and involve government, community organisations, NGOs, and other stakeholders.

ACRONYMS

AAM	ActionAid Myanmar
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
HLDO	Hualngo Land Development Organisation
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
SHG	Self-Help Group
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VTCBO	Village Tract Community Based Organisation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Objectives of the study

This research report is the first part of a study that looks at two examples of local governance-building supported by ActionAid Myanmar (AAM). The research was part of a project entitled 'Strengthening Community-Led Development in Myanmar', and involves a comparative study examining the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of two community development models in Myanmar. This report examines a Fellow-led community development model in Chin State, and its companion looks at a village tract community-based organisation (VTCBO)-led community development model in Kayah State.

AAM first piloted the Fellowship programme in Myanmar in 2006, and since 2008 it has been implemented through multi-year projects in states and regions throughout the country (ActionAid Myanmar, 2020, p.3). The Fellows programme supports youth leadership at village level, while establishing bottom-up participatory development planning processes. In this arrangement, the Fellows – young women and men – are trained by AAM to facilitate a participatory planning process that supports remote communities by critically analysing their community needs and resources, identifying priorities, and making action plans to stimulate development that reflect the perspectives of village residents (Ferretti, 2010; Löfving, 2011; in ActionAid Myanmar, 2020, p.3).

This research reflects on the learning of the introduction of the Fellows Programme and Village Book process in Chin State. The research seeks to answer the central research question - how do the Fellows and the Village Book process create change in a community – by exploring the following sub-questions:

- How do the Fellows impact community power dynamics and leadership in terms of the inclusion of women and youth in community decision-making structures and processes?
- What factors contribute to strengthening village change processes?

1.2 Chin State characteristics

Demographics and the impact of poverty

Chin State is in northwest Myanmar, bordering India and Bangladesh to the west, and Rakhine State, Sagaing Region and Magway Region to the south and east. The State is comprised of three districts: Mindat, Hakha and Falam. This study focuses on Falam District, and specifically one of its three townships, Tuanzang. This Township includes people of the Mizo, Zomi and Tedim ethnic groups (UNDP, 2014, p.1). In contrast with Myanmar as a whole, where over 80 per cent of the population is Buddhist, around 90 per cent of the Chin State's population is Christian (Boutry et al., 2018). With a population of 478,801, Chin State is Myanmar's second least populous state or region (UNDP, 2014, p.1).

Chin State has been characterised as Myanmar's poorest and most marginalised state or region. The 2014 Myanmar National Census found that at 79.4%, the literacy rate in Chin State is substantially lower than the Union literacy rate of 89.5% (Myanmar Census, 2014).[1] Its marginality in part can be ascribed to its mountainous terrain and limited accessibility due to poor road conditions, particularly during the monsoon season. The livelihoods of most the population are derived from agriculture, with traditional labour-intensive cultivation methods dominating. Chin State's farmers rely on the labour of their family members, occasionally supplemented by hired non-family labourers.

A large majority of Chin's population lives below the Myanmar poverty line. The experience of poverty includes daily challenges associated with unemployment, food insecurity, lack of basic community and household infrastructure, inadequate education, and limited access to public services such as healthcare. Due to limited economic opportunities, migration from Chin Sate to other parts of Myanmar, particularly Yangon, is high. There is also substantial migration to other countries such as Malaysia (ActionAid, 2015; Boutry et al., 2018; MMIID, 2014; Salai Vanni Bawi, 2015; Unicef 2014). Many households also suffer from inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitary waste disposal.

1 Literacy rates are higher for males (88.5%) than females (71.9%).

Father looking after daughter, a member of CBO, Doihkhel Village, Falam township

Local governance characteristics

Local governance in Chin State, and Falam Township in particular, reflect a general picture of weak governmental institutions and inadequate linkages between people and government. This is seen in the results of local governance mapping conducted by UNDP (2014) that identified three key issues related to the relationship between the villages of Chin State and the government. Firstly, inadequate information flows from the government to communities regarding the status of development plans and projects; secondly, limited participation of communities in government decision-making and; thirdly, weak trust in government among villages.

Considering the historic weakness of local government in Myanmar and Chin State, and the tenuous linkages between villages and the Union government, the resultant void in local governance has been partially addressed by civil society organisations (CSOs). While the UNDP has counted a total of 43 CSOs in Chin State, it also describes weak linkages among them. Local government views CSOs as playing important social work and advocacy roles that support township development. However, mistrust on the part of the government and among CSOs has to some extent affected government-CSO engagement (UNDP, 2014). However, since 2016, evidence has emerged of relationships between some Chin State CSOs and the government improving (PSF, 2018). Thus, the Falam Township project includes an assumption of the importance of CSOs to building governance capability in the space between villages and local government in Chin State.

The role of traditional and religious values, ethnicity and gender

The villages of Falam Township reflect the socio-cultural characteristics of other communities in Chin State with patriarchy, monogamy, and extended families with many children in evidence. Loyalty to the home village is another overarching social value, with natives of Chin State continuing to contribute to village wellbeing no matter how far away they have migrated. Thus, they contribute to the construction of roads, clinics, bridges, and as well as mini-hydro projects in their home villages. Villagers of Chin State also contribute to the development of their communities through their churches (Tiam, 2011).

Since Christianity is practiced by the great majority of Chin villagers, it has a powerful influence on social values and tends to reinforce traditional Myanmar values. This can be seen in the prevalence of patrimony and limitations on the community and household roles generally ascribed to women. In addition, the religious beliefs, and traditional norms of the people of Chin influence their political perspectives (Bawi, n.d).

According to the UNDP (2014) local governance mapping, in Chin state women are not represented in township administration leadership positions or in the general arena of citizen participation. Only one third of women were reported as participating in village tract, ward or village meetings. The UNDP mapping study shows that women are not invited to meetings regarding development and, as a result, are less engaged in public participation and are less informed on government plans and actions. This reflects the effect of traditional and religious norms that indicate men should lead in community decision making, recognised as household earners and property owners and entitled to greater influence than women in private and public matters (MIID, 2014).

Falam Township description

Falam township is bordered by Kale Township in Sagaing Region to the east, Hakha Township to the south, Bangladesh to the west, and India to the north. With a population of 41,457, Falam Township contains 4 wards and 80 village tracts (Myanmar Census, 2014) and is home to the Zomi Baptist Convention and the Zomi Theological College. Falam is famous for the heart-shaped Rih Lake. In the 1990s, similar to other townships in Chin State, Falam has historical experience of religious oppression whereby the national regime has sought to impose Buddhist institutions in the township through the teaching of Buddhist doctrine in all Chin elementary schools and the support and construction of Buddhist monasteries (Ling & Mang, 2004).

The literacy rate of those aged 15 and over in Falam Township is 88.5 per cent, which is higher than the literacy rate for Chin State (79.4%) but lower than the national rate (89.5%). 14.8 per cent of the population in the township has never attended school, and among those aged 25 and over, only 7.7 per cent have completed university education (Myanmar Census, 2014). Falam Township has one general hospital and 45 health centres and rural health sub-centres which have limited staff and equipment resources (UNHRC, n.d.).

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing are the primary forms of livelihood in Falam Township, accounting for 73.4 per cent of employment (UNHRC, n.d.). The labour force participation rate for the population aged 15-64 is 75.5 per cent and the unemployment rate for those aged 15-64 is 4.2 per cent. Young women appear most likely to be unemployed, with the highest rate of unemployment being among young females aged 15-24 (11%) – likely reflecting the role that young women are expected to play in the domestic sphere which acts a barrier to economic participation.

41.5 per cent of Falam Township's households have access to a television and about one in six households report having a radio. 37.2 per cent of the households in Falam Township report having mobile phones, the highest rate among townships in Chin State. 31.8 per cent of households use electricity for lighting, also the highest rate among Chin State's townships and more than double the rate for Chin State as a whole (15.4%) (UNHRC, n.d.).

Women carrying firewood along the Main Highway to Tedim Township, Chin State, 2019

1.3 Fellow-led participatory planning and community development

Introducing its Fellowship approach to Falam Township, in 2016 AAM and its local partner organisation, Hualango Development Organization (HLDO), trained young leaders to facilitate the Fellow-led community development process in their home villages. The Fellowship process provided Fellows with opportunities to learn how to mobilise community members through the establishment of community-based organisations (CBOs) and self-help groups (SHGs). As young community leaders, the Fellows supported villages to analyse the causes of poverty and community vulnerability; explore ways to reduce inequalities at community level; to define community needs, and; help villagers work together to formulate action plans to meet those needs. This report presents findings from the Fellowship approach in Falam Township in terms of impact on community development and inclusive village-level decision-making.

1.4 Conceptual framework

ActionAid uses a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to support people living in poverty and exclusion to become the leading agents in their development process. The HRBA approach brings together concepts such as agency, power shifts, and feminist principles (ActionAid, 2010). This research used a participatory approach to collect evidence for assessment within a set of theoretical frames including:

Rice terraces, Thinglei Village, Tedim Township, Chin State, 2019

- the capacity of rural villagers to participate in and contribute to participatory planning and community development;
- the limitations and opportunities related to traditional structures and processes of power and leadership on the village level;
- the impact of intersectionality on women, youth, and other marginalised groups, as influenced by traditional and religious influences, and;
- the dynamics involved in identifying and acting upon individual and collective agency to realise participatory planning and community development objectives.

The **capacity of rural villagers** to participate in and contribute to participatory planning and community development – often referred to as 'community philanthropy' – provides a frame for this study's assessment of the processes initiated by AAM and HLDO to strengthen community-led development. The concept has been defined as a process that aims to build local resources to drive development, create ownership and leadership within villages, strengthen community capacity and voice, and shift power to the village level. The intent is for villagers to gain greater control over their lives and strengthen their ability to define their future (Doan 2017; Hodgson & Pond 2018).

Consideration of **power dynamics** on the village level is also a central framing for this study. Chambers (2006) sees village power dynamics as involving 'uppers' (those who are recognised as dominant or superior to others in

a particular social context) and 'lowers' (those who are recognised as subordinate or inferior to uppers in that social context). Four types of power can be seen within this conceptualisation. First, power over, meaning the power of an upper over a lower, usually with negative connotations such as restrictive control, penalisation, and denial of access to opportunity. Second, power to, meaning effective choice, the capability to decide on actions and carry them out. 'Power to' also can be labelled as 'agency'. Third, power with, meaning collective power wherein groups together exercise power through organisation, feelings of solidarity, and acting together. Fourth, power within, meaning strengthened individual self-identity and self-confidence. The AAM Fellowship programme is based on this understanding of power, wherein youth and women become catalysts for changing power dynamics within communities, seeking to diminish the meaning of labels such as 'uppers' and 'lowers' allowing all groups to share power to realise community objectives. This conceptualisation is utilised to determine if power shifts occur and understand the resultant implications for participatory planning and community development.

The concept of intersectionality is linked to power analysis, as it describes how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics intersect to impact the social position and self-identity of individuals (Crenshaw 1989). Using the lens of intersectionality this study aims to obtain evidence regarding how gender, age, tradition and religion impact efforts to change the roles and relationships among women, youth, and other historically marginalised groups in the subject villages.

Often people living in poverty and exclusion are unaware of their rights. They may also lack the information, skills and knowledge to claim those rights. Awareness-raising and information sharing processes can help in these situations. Sometimes people might internalise their oppression seeing their condition as natural and unchangeable. Consciousness-raising processes can shift fatalistic beliefs and help people to increasingly see themselves as agents capable of bringing about change (ActionAid, 2020, p.31). This research uses the concept of **agency** as the result of a conscientisation process. Two forms of agency are identified: individual agency and collective agency. This is because in the traditional Fellowship model, individual Fellows facilitate the community development process in individual villages. **Collective agency** then takes a more central role as the development process is implemented by people working together in a community to claim their rights.

2. RESEARCH PROCESS

2.1 Research activities

ActionAid believes in a participatory research approach, with research itself playing a role in creating change by empowering communities and people living in poverty. This approach requires their organisations to be actively involved in the drawing up of research plans and research activities. This participatory study took place between March 2019 and March 2020. Five Fellows (three male and two female) from ActionAid's partner organisation in Chin State – Hualango Development Organization (HLDO) – were chosen as research participants for the study. Each Fellow worked as HLDO staff in their villages, alongside supporting the research activities. This meant that Fellows knew the project well, and all of them had an interest in exploring the impact of their work. An AAM researcher worked closely with the Fellows throughout the process.

The research process consisted of five parts that were implemented in the following order:

- research training on how to conduct semi-structured thematic interviews;
- follow-up meeting;
- final meeting;
- writing the preliminary analysis report, and;
- data collection begun after the research training had been completed.

2.2 Data collection and analysis

The study used semi-structured thematic interviews. Fellows identified different stakeholders to interview. Then, the Fellows and the AAM researcher worked together to develop interview themes and questions. The AAM Researcher also conducted additional interviews to explore in greater depth the issues arising from the interviews conducted by the Fellows. Table 1, below, summarises the interviews carried out:

Table 1: Interviews conducted

	Interviews conducted by Fellows	
	Stakeholder interviewed	***No. of interviewees***
1	Fellow	**5**
2	Volunteer	**3**
3	Community member	**3**
4	Village Head	**1**
5	TBA	**2**
6	CBO member	**4**
7	SHG member	**3**
	Total no. of interviews	**21**

	Interviews conducted by AAM researcher	
	Stakeholder interviewed	***No. of interviewees***
1	HLDO Fellows	**4 (2 pair interviews)**
2	HLDO Programme Director	**2**
3	Fellows from Chin State	**4**
4	CBO President	**1**
5	SHG members	**2 (1 pair interview)**
6	Community member	**1 group interview with 20 community members**
	Total no. of interviews	**11**

Data collection and analysis was to a certain extent ethnographic in discipline and inductive in approach. It was ethnographic because it involved the researchers making observations of the processes of community development as they occurred in their context. It also followed a process that allowed for data collected to inform subsequent interviews, allowing a dialogue to emerge between different sources (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2010, p.160). It followed an inductive pattern of reasoning because the researchers did not set out to prove or disapprove any particular hypothesis about community development in Falam Township, but rather to explore the ActionAid participatory planning and community development approach, allowing new patterns and areas for inquiry to emerge as the study progressed.

Working out a compost pit with Kawilam SHG.

Kawilam villagers working out Bokashi pitage

Coffee Nursery, Dam Suan Ngin, Fellow from Ticirch Village

2.3 Research ethics

The study followed the ethical guidelines provided by the American Anthropological Association (2012) and the research was conducted in accordance with ActionAid's Child Protection Policy. All the research data was anonymised and does not reveal personal or sensitive information about the respondents. Where individual quotations are cited in the report, names of villages, dates and locations of interviews are not revealed, in order to protect interviewees from being identified by their role (eg village head).

All interviewees were over 18 years old and no children were involved in the study. Each interviewee was informed beforehand about the motives of the study and about the ways the data collected was to be used in the research process. Before each interview, written consent was requested from each interviewee, and every respondent was assured they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Contact details were gathered from each respondent at the end of the interview, but this information has only been collected for the use of the research team to seek clarification of responses, or to arrange a second interview where necessary. The Fellows also gave their contact details to the interviewees in case the respondents had questions after the interview.

Only the Fellows and the research team at ActionAid Myanmar have had access to the data during the research process. Hard copies of data were gathered and stored in safe places within HLDO in Rih town, Chin State. At the end of the research process all hard copies of the data were stored safely under lock and those in digital format were stored under password protection in the Department of Programme Quality and Research of ActionAid Myanmar.

2.4 Limitations

Several limitations have impacted the study:

- All Fellows were employees of HLDO working only part-time on the research. On the one hand, this was an important part of ActionAid's participatory research approach. For example, Fellows working in their village of origin or work placement have a relationship with the people they interview, making it easier for the Fellows to have conversations with respondents. However, this dynamic introduces potential bias because Fellows are aware of HLDO's funding relationship with AAM; and due to power differentials between CSO and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) and between interviewer and respondents. A reflective process was used in the analysis of the data to counteract any reactivity biases.
- The fact that most Fellows – 3 out of 5 in during data collection, 2 out of 3 during analysis – were male, means there may be a gender bias, albeit minimal, in the standpoints of the researchers.
- Only 3 of the 5 Fellows who conducted data collection continued with the research project to assist with data analysis. Changes in the research participants are detrimental, because participatory research is about the degree of engagement of participants within and beyond the research encounter. However, this reflects the challenges of participatory research where the research team has ongoing responsibilities as Fellows and as contributors to the livelihood activities of their families and communities.
- The nature of ethnographic and participatory research often means data is collected often a long period of time. This study was no exception, with the research process lasting one year. A longer timeframe allowed Fellows to fit in interviews around their other responsibilities. However, it meant the research team needed to take extra care to accurately record data to manage human error issues associated with recall, which can increase over time.
- Language differences must also be recognised as a significant factor in this research, which was primarily conducted in English and Mizo. Five translators participated in live interpretation of interviews, and translation of written interview transcripts. When using a number of different translators, consistency is a challenge and has undoubtably impacted the quality of the research data, in addition to the usual problems of accuracy and authenticity when working across more than one language. One mitigation strategy for this issue was the use of translated data in group analysis, where all research participants produced inclusive accounts using their own words and frameworks of understanding, via a range of participatory exercises.
- The aim of the research was to analyse the change process that takes place in the communities because of the Fellow-led community development process. The scope of this topic is potentially huge, as the work of Fellows covers multiple different areas, and change that has taken place at village level is dependant of several crosscutting issues. Had the analysis focused on one specific aspect of the Fellow-led community development process, such as women's empowerment, the analysis could have explored the topic much deeper and developed more in-depth understanding of how and why change happens and/or does not happen in that particular arena of the work.

3. FINDINGS

This chapter presents key research findings.

The first section (3.1) explores the role of Fellows as young leaders in the village development process, and explains how their presence has transformed community members' views toward community development, created unity and collaboration among villagers, and allowed community members to start shaping a shared vision concerning the village future.

Section (3.2) describes how the work of Fellows and the community development process has impacted village roles of women.

Finally, the third section (3.3) considers to what extent the Fellow-led community development model in Chin State has enabled villages to self-sufficiently organise, negotiate community improvements, and lead development processes.

3.1 Giving youth the lead

> "The work of the Fellow is very important. … they are deeply involved in the [community development] process and lead the villagers."
>
> –Community member

Seeing community development differently

Before establishment of the Fellowship programme in the Hualngo area, community development was seen by many as an externally driven activity, focused exclusively on physical changes such as infrastructure construction. The Fellow-led community development process supports village members in defining community needs and identifying actions to meet those needs. Participation in village planning is led by village members. The work of Fellows was directed at empowering villagers such that they want to be participants in their community's development.

According to the HLDO Programme Director, the Fellowship process has made community development work at the village level more effective. Working through Fellows has allowed HLDO to simultaneously reach multiple remote communities and to replicate the process in a variety of locations in a short period of time. Fellows have provided support to villages on a daily basis to respond to problems as they arise. Thus, the presence of Fellows has supported a shift in the mindset of villagers toward community development and the work of HLDO.

Bringing villagers together

Prior to the introduction of Fellows, despite having clear community leadership structures that included elders and village leaders, villages often appear to lack consensus on how their challenges should be approached. Community development was often seen as an activity that could produce tangible changes, such as physical infrastructure. Villages had become accustomed to community development activity being defined and implemented by external actors, such as NGOs.

It can take time to explain and secure involvement in participatory planning processes. One finding of this study is that the time and patience required can easily be underestimated, a reminder for AAM and HDLO that as outsiders it takes time to build trust. Indeed, Fellows reported that encouraging villagers to participate in meetings often takes time and effort. Yet, once villagers hear more information and begin to see the potential for community impact, they begin to attend meetings and show increasing interest. One factor in this reluctance to participate may be because community meetings are traditionally led by village heads and elders, with important community decisions made by these older men. This in contrast with the model of Fellow-led community development that emphasises that the entire community – including women, young people and vulnerable groups – can, and should, participate together.

While this new decision-making approach is more egalitarian, it has not displaced the traditional male and elder dominated authority structures. Rather, the more inclusive community approach finds ways to feed into traditional authority structures when there is a need for it. A Fellow said:

> "In the meetings [in the past] women with babies or young people, they can feel that they are not included and important. So, they want to avoid meetings. But when the Fellow calls a meeting, they know they are included, and they can participate. They do not have that excluded feeling. It is the way the Fellow works. Also, disabled, elders, everyone. All are included." (Interview conducted by AAM Researcher)

This inclusive approach encourages integration of women's self-help organisations, youth groups, and village-based organisations into the development process. It cannot be ruled out that livelihood grants provided by HLDO have significantly contributed to incentivising these new patterns of participation, therefore an important measure of success for HLDO and AAM will be whether these new structures sustain beyond the grant funding period.

Traditional birth attendant checking the pregnant lady, Siallam Village, Falam Township

Challenges faced by Fellows

Breaking through traditional gender and hierarchy-related norms that impede inclusive participation in participatory planning and community development was complicated by challenges related to economic hardship, traditional lifeways and Fellow self-identity. Fellow respondents reported that, since villagers often must focus on their household and livelihood responsibilities, it is difficult for them to find time to participate in village affairs or assist Fellows in their work. Some villagers said that, since Fellows receive stipends for their work, they and their families should do most of the community development work. Even when some villagers are able and willing to participate in community meetings, others do not take part, so not all opinions are heard before decisions are made.

The effectiveness of Fellows has also been impacted by their self-confidence in the role. Fellows reported feeling insecure at the beginning of their community development work regarding their capabilities and fearing that they would not be taken seriously because of their young age. Continuity of the Fellows programme has also been put at risk with Fellows leaving for better-paying job opportunities. During the study period, a total of 3 out of 32 Fellows left the project. This turnover has occurred despite HLDO's efforts to recruit Fellows who it believes will remain in the programme.

Fellows also felt under pressure to meet both their obligations to community leadership and their personal responsibilities. While most Fellows are deeply committed to their role and performing well, some of them only have certain hours each day when they can organise community meetings because they also have other responsibilities.

Self-help group, Ticirh Village, Falalm Township

3.2 Transforming roles of women

Gendered social and cultural norms, values, and practices in Myanmar and Chin State have profound impacts on the life opportunities of women and men such as access to education, health care, and other social services. They define work done by women and men and to what extent members of each gender can make decisions in private and public matters (GEN 2015; Oxfam 2013; Pansy Tun Thein 2016). Rural women's roles in Myanmar are often valued lower than those of men, and women tend to be allowed less voice in community affairs. Leadership in general is strongly associated with men (Oxfam 2013; 2019; GEN 2015; UNDP 2014). While women perform agricultural work alongside men, their space in the community tends to be associated with reproduction and household responsibilities. In the home, women are less influential in decision-making regarding family matters and have limited power to make decisions regarding their health (AYO 2015; GEN 2015). Men tend to be seen as household leaders and breadwinners. Since men are traditionally considered heads of households, they also represent the family in community affairs (GEN 2015).

Supporting women to self-organise at community level, improving their social status in the community, and creating new forms of agency for female village members have been core to Fellow-led community development work in Chin State. Fellows have supported women taking part in community level meetings and self-help groups (SHGs) that create space for women and girls to come together in every village. As part of the village book process, villagers have also started to critically analyse the situation of women and men and question the traditional power relations between

Man drying rice at home, Rih, Falam Township, Chin State 2019.

the two. Interviews with female community members and other village stakeholders offer the following evidence on changes that have taken place at the community level and in women's personal lives.

Experience of women as Fellows and inclusive village decision-making

Respondents in this study generally agreed with existing evidence (e.g. Oxfam 2013) that traditional social norms determine a limited role for women in village level decision-making, with men dominating village committees. Interviews conducted with SHG members supported the assessment that society and culture preference men, placing them above women in community affairs including, for example, speaking in community meetings.

Through the Fellow-led community development process, there is evidence this dynamic has slowly started to change. Women and other historically marginalised villagers have been invited to participate in village level meetings and other activities and encouraged to express their opinions and ideas. The 7 women Fellows participating in the Chin project facilitated the engagement of women in village participatory planning and community development. Female Fellow respondents reported that they found it easier to work with female community members than with men in the community. Men were less cooperative and expressed scepticism regarding Fellow-led the participatory process. However, with the assistance of village heads and village administrators, some female Fellows have found that some formerly doubtful male community members have become more cooperative and supportive of the inclusive participatory process.

To support women's participation in village decision-making and to increase villager knowledge regarding gender imbalance, the Village Book process includes a "cobweb exercise" that was conducted in each village. The exercise was facilitated by Fellows and implemented according to a village book manual created by ActionAid (Figure 1). This exercise explores the positions of women and men in multiple areas within the village structure, including leadership, employment, education, household care, property ownership, control of resources, and safety. The exercise is done when the community is together.

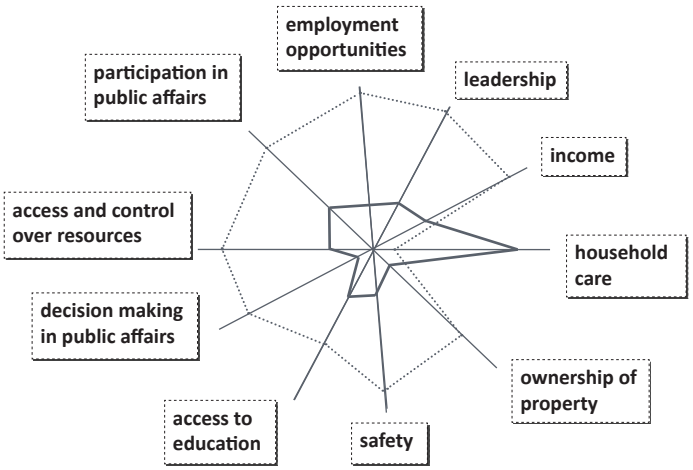

Figure 1: AAM Village Book Manual includes a cobweb diagram visualising gender relations The exercise is conducted at the beginning of each village community development process, with maps regularly as the process proceeds, allowing the community to visualize progress on gender relations. Respondents reported that applying the cobweb analysis made community members re-think village gender dynamics in terms of the roles of women and men. They stated that many women gained more confidence through the exercise and afterward took on more active roles in village meetings. They indicated that there was some movement towards reduced differentiation between the roles of men and women, and greater collaboration between the genders. Women gained more confidence to question male decisions and opinions and to more openly offer advice to men (ActionAid, 2014).

Evidence of altering home and community roles

As noted above, decisions in the home and in village life are dominated by men. With the initiation of the work of Fellows to facilitate community meetings and conduct the cobweb exercise, there is some evidence that the situation has slowly started to change for some. Respondents to this study said that men and women have begun to share more household responsibilities, with women gaining more voice in household affairs. One reported example of change was in the relationship between children and their parents, with the children in the home now expected to listen and obey both parents equally, as opposed to listening only to their fathers.

Village SHGs serve as women-only spaces that offer women opportunities to come together as a group to design and implement projects that address their needs and interests. These groups have offered women opportunities to engage in activities together, beyond their traditional household roles. SHG members have received training from Fellows and HLDO, including on leadership skills, facilitation techniques, financial literacy, and project management. After these training sessions, each SHG group received a start-up seed grant to support women-led community projects.

Through the SHGs, women have made contributions to village life in a variety of ways. These efforts have included village cleanliness projects, alcohol and drug use prevention, and the establishment of a new coffee farm. In one village, the SHG used its seed grant to prepare soap and groceries to sell in the village. This SHG also started a small business loan program, providing loans to ventures including setting of coffee plantations, poultry farms, tailoring shops and others. SHGs also have provided leadership to improve community information sharing, collaborate with parents and teachers regarding the education needs of young people, and heighten recycling awareness. It is thought that a further impact of the SHGs could be increased harmony among village women, and greater cohesion across community groups.

Has the status quo been challenged?

Based upon existing research and AAM's experience, an assumption of this research was that deeply rooted societal beliefs and values and established institutions make patrimony and village hierarchy powerful forces, which are resistant to change particularly in terms of expanding the roles of women (ActionAid Myanmar 2014 & 2020). However, respondents to this study have offered evidence that the position of women in the home and village has improved through the introduction of the Fellow-led the community development process.

Yet, the evidence also indicates that the deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and values persist, and the achievement of long-term structural transformations in existing gendered dynamics will take time. For instance, religion is powerful influence. The image of an ideal woman is influenced by the practice of Christianity, which like most religions can be interpreted to reinforce traditional beliefs regarding an expectation of submissiveness to men. Respondents indicated that these traditional normative influences are also reinforced by low levels of education among women in rural villages, suggesting that with better education women would be better able and willing to participate in community affairs. Respondents were very direct in stating that it would take a long time for women to overcome these powerful normative and cultural barriers to attaining equal status with men in community affairs.

3.3 Self-sufficient communities?

> "To do big development is a very difficult work. But it is not an impossible work, it needs the members to be united. It also needs funds and professional workers and a good government."
>
> –Community member

Villages defining their needs and identifying solutions

The Village Book is a process and product through which a village analyses its situation, defines its needs, and develops solutions that it believes will address those needs. The process usually takes up to one year to complete and includes participatory practices that helps villagers work together as a group to assess their situation holistically. Because of the participatory nature of the process, all villagers can and are encouraged to join. The process includes exercises that consider the perspectives of all village groups, with special emphasis on exploring the needs of vulnerable groups, including women, youth, children, the elderly, the disabled and others (ActionAid, 2014).

As with other organisational activities pursued by Fellows, the village book process helps community members work together as a group. Yet, since the process requires that villagers work together in ways they may be unfamiliar with, it is often challenging for them. It can take time for the Fellows' to foster interest and participation in the process.

Through the village book process, villagers document their existing situation, learn to analyse it from diverse angles and thoroughly consider the perspectives of all village groups. The process also offers community members opportunities to develop capabilities needed to collaborate successfully as a group.

Creation of community-based organisations

As part of the Village Book development process, a community-based organisation (CBO) is established in each village. Respondents offered positive assessments of CBOs. The most frequently mentioned strength is that CBOs include the whole community, with every villager having opportunities to take part in them. As a result, in most villages CBOs represent a mix of youth, elders, women, and men. The organisations have offered leadership roles to village youth, and Fellows have supported CBOs as facilitators.

CBO leaders describe their role as addressing local priorities that the government cannot pursue. In their development of a village plan, CBOs critically analyse what should be done to improve the condition of villages. CBOs present their plans to local authorities and negotiate with them, NGOs, and other external actors regarding funding needed to implement planned projects.

The evidence gathered for the study demonstrates that the experiences of villages negotiating with government authorities regarding funding of CBO-generated village plans vary greatly. While some villages have been successful in receiving funding for multiple projects, others have negotiated with government and other NGOs, but have not received funding for any of their proposed projects. Some respondents indicated that, due to their familiarity with working with the government, sometimes village heads rather than CBO representatives presented their plans to government officials. In other cases, the CBO, village head, and other village leaders collectively negotiated with local government officials. Among the types of CBO-planned village projects approved by the government have been road improvements, bridges, schools, electrification, and water source development and transmission.

Limits to village community development capacity

As demonstrated above, the evidence from this study indicates that villages are exhibiting increased self-sufficiency in terms of their ability to identify their needs, specify projects that can effectively address those needs, and present project proposals to local government officials. However, the evidence also makes it clear that many communities continue to rely on the assistance of Fellows, leaving open the question as to whether these villages would be able to stand on their own to continue the community development work independently.

This assessment was shared by community members and HDLO leaders. Respondents pointed to the negotiation process with local government officials as an area that indicates continuing limitations of the ability of many villages to effectively act upon their interests. These limitations are the product of several factors. First, the new CBO participants are not familiar with governmental processes, including the actors and rules involved. Second, Burmese is the official language used in government negotiations (as opposed to local languages and dialects), and many villagers either do not speak Burmese or have limited competence. The language problem is further emphasised by the fact that Village Books – the central physical representations of this bottom-up village planning – are not written in Burmese. Third is that the village-based community development planning reflected in the CBOs is not fully recognised by the government as a legitimate component of their financial and administrative planning process.

Beyond these capability and capacity issues associated with the relationship between villages and local government decision-making, the sustainability of village participatory planning and community development is challenged by internal village factors. The ability of villagers to plan and implement projects without outside assistance is limited by

Mother looking after her children, Doihkhel Village, Falam Township

a lack of technical skills needed to undertake projects that might range from planting a coffee plantation, to developing a new water source. The capacity of villagers to undertake community projects is also challenged by existing time commitments to home and work. As with other states and regions of Myanmar, rural villagers have very low incomes. As a result, sacrificing productive agricultural work time to participate in village projects is a difficult choice to make. Yet, the most important recurring capacity problem that villages face that limits their ability to pursue projects involves financing.

These outward- and inward-looking capacity and capability problems reinforce the importance seen in the roles of Fellows and HLDO. Respondents broadly agreed that the work of Fellows, SHGs and CBOs support the villages' development process. Furthermore, without Fellows time engagement, community members questioned whether these components of village centric community development can survive. Respondents also agree on the importance of HLDO support for village participatory planning and livelihood-related community development. HLDO contributes to the intra- and extra-village legitimisation of the process – in the eyes of villagers and the government.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.4 Research Findings

This research aimed to explore how and to what extent the fellow-led community development model contributes to change in rural villages in Chin State. The study sought to answer the question:

What has been the impact of the fellow-led model of participatory planning and community development in the subject villages?

To answer this question, the study utilised semi-structured thematic interviews to obtain evidence to answer two research questions:

- How does Fellow-led community development impact village power dynamics and leadership in terms of the inclusion of women and youth in decision-making structures and processes?
- What factors contribute to strengthening village change processes?

The evidence produced by the study support the following findings regarding these questions.

How does the Fellows impact community power dynamics and leadership in terms of the inclusion of women and youth in community decision-making structures and processes?

As a consequence of the Fellow-led community development in Chin State, shifts in power relations have taken place in the following ways:

- In communities where village affairs were formerly seen as arenas belonging to village leaders, elders and household heads, local youth from the villages have become central actors of community development.
- Communities that formerly exhibited weak structure and collaboration processes have become more organised and united, self-sufficient, and developed the ability to identify and prioritise village needs and develop solutions to address them.
- Traditional views regarding community development have started to change. Community development used to be seen more from a service delivery perspective and as something that primarily served to better village infrastructure. Yet, as a result of the introduction of Fellow-led community development it is now seen as a participatory process that improves community members' skills and knowledge and requires contributions from the entire community.
- The roles of women are traditionally exclusively connected to the household sphere, with little influence in village matters. Through the establishment of SHGs and other elements of Fellow-led community development, women have become organised at the village level and started to take part in village decision-making processes and contributed to projects that are valued community-wide. Community members have begun to critically analyse the position of village women and men and the traditional power relationships between them. Women have gained more confidence to voice their opinions and ideas, as well as to question those of men.
- Changes can be seen in household dynamics wherein traditional gendered labour roles have started to shift. Women have gained more voice and new forms of authority within the household sphere. The scope of women's work at the village level has also widened and women have taken on new community roles and activities.

The Fellow-led community development process implemented in Chin State has influenced community leadership in the following ways:

- Youth have assumed village leadership roles through their work as Fellows.
- Women have gained new village leadership roles through their work with SHGs.
- Villages have experienced participatory community planning through the Village Book preparation process, organising CBOs, and negotiation of funding for village projects with local government authorities.
- SHGs and CBOs have contributed to the organisational capability and capacity in the subject villages. They have offered opportunities for women and villages as a whole to function in more inclusive and united ways to identify and act upon their common interests.

What factors contribute to strengthening village change processes:

- The supportive role of a CSO (in this case HLDO) was essential.
- Training local youth to lead in community development created new village organisational resources.
- Encouraging inclusion, unity, trust, and respect promoted participation, collaboration and teamwork among all community groups and villagers.

Cooking Lunch, Fellow from Zimte village, Tedim Township.

- Analysing traditional gendered norms, values, and practices and exploring what factors within the community result in inequality between men and women was important to women finding more important home and village roles.
- Offering knowledge and skills training to women and organising them through SHGs enabled them to be more involved in community decision-making and widening their work inside the communities.
- Engaging villagers through the village book preparation process and offering them tools that allow them to define their needs and actions required to address those needs, supported their ability to negotiate improvements with external actors.

Barriers to village change processes

- The evidence from the study clearly indicates that the village level changes sought through the Fellow-led and Village Book-oriented participatory planning and community development process will take time. Unsurprisingly, Fellows need time and space to build trust with villagers and village leaders. Initially Fellows were perceived as development workers getting paid for their activities and expected by villagers to implement projects. The hard work and time commitments required often pulled Fellows away from their home/family commitments. As a result of this combined pressures, Fellows experienced stress and felt insecure at times. These factors contributed to turnover among the Fellows. This suggests that new support mechanisms should be considered.

- Due to their work and household obligations, the time that residents of these Chin communities have available to participate in village affairs is clearly limited. This was found to be a significant barrier to establishing new participatory planning community development processes.
- Long-term structural transformation of deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and values will take time. The study found that religious norms and limited access to education powerfully support entrenched power imbalances between men and women.
- Respondents agreed on the importance of HLDO to village participatory planning and community development. In light of the substantial amount of time required to build adequate village capacity and capability for participatory planning, community development, and effectively negotiate with government authorities, villages will continue to require support from HDLO to maintain the gains made through the work of Fellows, SHGs, and CBOs.
- Areas for further exploration include the negotiation process with local government officials. Villages are limited in their ability to effectively act upon their interests. This is because they tend to be unfamiliar with governmental processes, are unable to negotiate in Burmese, and the local village planning is not an official form of decision-making.
- The sustainability of village participatory planning and community development is also challenged by internal village factors. These included a lack of technical skills needed to undertake projects that might range from planting a coffee plantation to developing a new water source. This is further complicated by villagers not being able to sacrifice the valuable of time required to develop these skills that are necessary to plan and implement village projects.

In seeking to answer how the Fellows and the Village Book process create change in a community, this research found that the Fellows in Falam Township were able to initiate a process of change within their communities. They expanded the capacity of HDLO to reach and support villagers' livelihoods, while also changing attitudes toward community engagement through bottom-up participatory processes. Evidence suggests that in five villages where the development process was externally driven, they were able to start planning and development through the Village Book process.

The Village Book participatory planning process helps community members work together as a group and has led to community-based organisations (CBO) to be established in the subject villages. In most villages CBOs represent a mix of youth, elders, women, and men. The organisations have offered leadership roles to village youth, and Fellows have supported CBOs as facilitators. CBOs critically analyse what should be done to improve the condition of villages. CBOs present their plans to local authorities and negotiate with them, NGOs, and other external actors regarding funding needed to implement planned projects. The evidence gathered for the study demonstrates that the experiences of villages negotiating with government authorities regarding funding of CBO-generated village plans vary greatly and is an area for further analysis and support.

4.5 Areas for further study

Through the study's analysis, issues emerged that were not part of the original research plan and warrant further exploration:

1. **Instead of only analysing how change happens, understanding should also be built around barriers to change:**

The comparative research that will compare two community development models in Kayah and Chin states will explore what drives change in a community. The evidence from the current study demonstrates that there are deeply rooted socio-cultural norms and behaviours that challenge village level change in both states. These barriers are particularly powerful in impeding progress with empowering women. Long-established patterns of village hierarchy and patrimony also challenge the ability to change decision-making structures and processes. While this study demonstrates incremental changes in the direction of inclusive participatory planning and community development, it also strongly suggests that continuing change will likely require many years and substantial support from external sources.

2. **Three specific theoretical discourses should be used as a theoretical framework to analyse the data collected regarding the Fellow-led community development model implemented in Chin State:**

Based on the evidence from this study, a continuing analytic framework should be built around three sets of theoretical discourse:

1. The role of youth in rural community development,
2. Self-help groups (SHGs) and the empowerment of rural women, and
3. Participatory rural community development.

The combined effect of these sets of theory support the findings of the study regarding the incremental progress found at village level in Chin State. The findings from the current study support the continued use of this intersectional theoretical framing for inclusive participatory planning and community development in rural village settings of Myanmar.

These sets of theory also should be juxtaposed with

Woman cleaning household, Ticirch Village

AAM's growing understanding of the dynamics associated with the concepts of 'proto-governance' and 'pockets of effectiveness' in governance building in Myanmar. By 'proto-governance' AAM refers to nascent approaches to governance-building between the village and local government level in Myanmar. It involves capability and capacity-building efforts prior to the creation of formal institutionalised linkages to the structures and processes of government. With time and maturation AAM sees the forms of proto-governance that it has promoted taking hold to become part of the settled pattern of governance on the local level that involves government, community organisations, NGOs, and other stakeholders. However, creating permanent formal bridges between village level participatory planning and community development and the structures and processes of government decision-making should be the objective of village level governance capacity and capability building in Chin State and elsewhere in Myanmar.

The concept of 'pockets of effectiveness' refers to successful cases of governance capacity and capability building in settings of otherwise weak governance structures and processes. AAM argues that, particularly in light of the slow incremental nature of governance building in Myanmar as evidenced in the current study, it is important to identify and learn from those instances wherein successful outcomes have been realised.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Bottom-up planning processes can make significant contributions to the wellbeing of communities across Chin State. The current research shows that Fellows and the Village Book process have supported important changes in the subject villages. To sustain these accomplishments, the following actions are recommended:

- Community-level discussions regarding gender inequality, and how it intersects with other forms of inequality need to continue. These discussions must have a clear focus on how to break gender barriers and how to allow for women leadership at the village and township level.
- HLDO engagement with this bottom-up participatory process has been crucial. For the future, it is recommended that HLDO support the establishment of networks of trust across villages with similar planning priorities. It may look to the model of Village Tract Community-Based Organisations (VTCBOs) that AAM has contributed to implementing in Kayah State as offering practical ideas regarding how these collaborative inter-village networks can be established and operated. This collaborative approach could help villages to learn to work together through participatory planning and community development and to advocate for their common needs.
- Members of the SHGs and CBOs should continue to engage with government actors and township government decision-making processes on how to allocate the government's scarce resources through planning and budgeting.
- The CBOs and SHG governance structure must establish formal linkages with formal governance processes at the township, regional and Chin State and levels.

As stated in the Kayin Fellows research paper, these suggestions will only have 'meaning if they are part of a new approach embraced by governing actors to integrate village level participatory planning and community development into formal governance structures and processes'. (ActionAid, 2020, p.56). Thus, these recommendations for village level governance capacity and capability building should be pursued in terms of the 'proto-governance' and 'pockets of effectiveness' analytic frameworks described in the preceding section.

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ANNEXES

1: Stakeholders interviewed by Fellows and interview themes

No.	Stakeholder	Interview themes
1	**Fellow**	- Becoming a Fellow - Personal change - Community change - Challenges related to Fellow's work - Leading a community - Village Book - Negotiating with the local government - Collaborating with NGOs and other external stakeholders - CBO and SHG - Value of Fellow's work - Working together with the volunteer - Future of the village
2	**Volunteer**	- Becoming a volunteer - Work of a volunteer - Personal change - Future
3	**CBO**	- Establishing the CBO - Work of the CBO - Role of the CBO in the village - Role of the CBO among the CBO members - Negotiating with the local government and NGOs - Coffee planting - Future of the CBO
4	**SHG**	- Establishing the SHG - Work of the SHG - Role of the SHG in the village - SHG and the position of women - Future of the SHG
5	**Village Head**	- Village Book - Negotiating with the local government by using the Village Book - Village development process - Village Book and the village development process - Work of the Fellow

6	**Child Space***	- Establishing the child space - Work of the child space - Role of the child space in the village - Future of the child space
7	**Community members**	- Community development - Work of the Fellow - Opinion on SHG - Opinion on CBO - Opinion on Child Space - Opinion on village council
8	**Vulnerable group***	- Community development process - Personal needs and village development process - Involvement in community development process - Future changes
9	**TBA**	- Motivation for working as a voluntary TBA - Situation in the village before TBA - Situation in the village after TBA - Training of TBA - Collaboration with the Fellow - Future

**Due to limited time available for the study and Fellow's ability to find participants for the interviews, no interviews were conducted with this stakeholder group in the end.*

2: Codes used in the transcript analysis.

No.	Stakeholder	Codes
1	**Fellow**	1. Challenges in Fellow's work 2. Usefulness of Fellow's training 3. Personal change within Fellow 4. Change in the community after Fellow 5. Change in women's position after Fellow 6. Qualities of a good Fellow 7. Role of Village Book in community development process 8. Collaboration/Preparation of Village Book 9. Negotiating with local authorities 10. Purpose & Role of CBOs and SHGs 11. Why change has happened 12. What sustains Fellow's work

2	**Volunteer**	1. Role of volunteer in community development process 2. Challenges in community development work 3. Change in community after community development process 4. Why change has happened 5. What sustains community development
3	**SHG**	1. Why SHG was established 2. Work of SHG 3. Purpose and role of SHG in the village 4. Challenges in SHG work 5. What sustains the work of SHG 6. Gender dynamics before SHG 7. Gender dynamics after SHG 8. Interpersonal changes within women 9. Why women's position changed
4	**CBO**	1. Establishment of CBO 2. What sustains CBO 3. Work of CBO 4. Role and purpose of CBO 5. Changes in community after CBO 6. Why change has happened after CBO 7. Challenges in CBO work 8. CBO negotiating with government
5	**Village Head**	1. Collaboration 2. Negotiating with government 3. Challenges in community development work 4. Changes in the community 5. Why change happened in the community 6. What sustains community development
6	**Community members**	1. Challenges in community development process 2. Changes in the village 3. Why change happened 4. Role of Fellow in community development process 5. Challenges faced by Fellow 6. Village before SHG 7. Village after SHG 8. Role and purpose of SHG 9. Role and purpose of CBO 10. Village after CBO 11. Role and importance of child space 12. What sustains community development work
7	**TBA**	1. Village before TBA 2. Village after TBA 3. Why change happened after TBA 4. Interpersonal change within TBA 5. What sustains TBA work 6. Working with own language 7. Challenges in TBA work

NB: the coding is done on the interviews conducted by Fellows

3: Hierarchy of power dynamic shift

1. HLDO

HLDO recieves training and capacity building from AAM and growns stronger as an organization. HLDO is able to implement the project as planned and support fellows in their work.

2. YOUTH

Youth from rural communities are recruited as fellows and community volunteers who recieve training from HLDO and AAM that offer them process in a community. By working as fellows and volunteers youth gain new kind of position, image and agency in the community.

3. WOMEN

Women in rural communities gain training from the fellows which offers them new skills and knowledge that gives them ability to organize among themselves as a self help group (SHG) and start implementing projects that benefit the enteir community. Through the development process and the work of the SHGs women become part of decision-making at the community level and gain new type of status and agency within the community.

4. COMMUNITY

Communities gain training from fellows which offers community members new skills and knowledge. This again gives community members ability to organize among themselves and prepare a village book through which they decine their own needs as a community and actions that should be taken to meet those needs. Community members gain ability to establish a village level community-based organization (CBO) that imblements projects for the community, responding to the needs identified in the village book. Through this work, communities gain ownership of the community development process.

5. LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Local communities present the results of the community development process to local authorities in Chin State through which local authorities recieve accurate information about the situation of local communities and are able to allocate available budget in a way that it responds better to the real needs of the communities.

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