

# SYNTHESIS REPORT

## EVALUATION OF THREE MYANMAR NETWORKS

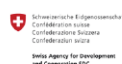
- Food Security Working Group
- Gender Equality Network
- Land Core Group

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## Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund



# List of Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b>	<i>Page 2</i>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	
1.1 Purpose of Report	<i>Page 7</i>
1.2 Approach	<i>Page 7</i>
1.3 Limitations of Evaluation	<i>Page 7</i>
<b>2. Networks</b>	
2.1 What is a network?	<i>Page 8</i>
2.2 The value of networks	<i>Page 8</i>
2.3 Characteristics of effective networks	<i>Page 8</i>
2.4 Evaluation frameworks	<i>Page 9</i>
2.5 Civil society in Myanmar	<i>Page 10</i>
2.6 Food security in Myanmar	<i>Page 13</i>
<b>3. The Three Networks</b>	
3.1 Introduction	<i>Page 15</i>
3.2 Network differences and similarities	<i>Page 15</i>
3.3 Integration of gender by networks	<i>Page 17</i>
3.4 Value of the three networks	<i>Page 20</i>
3.5 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges	<i>Page 20</i>
3.6 Overall findings and LIFT support	<i>Page 25</i>
<b>4. Recommendations: three networks and LIFT</b>	<i>Page 27</i>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. Introduction

This report provides an overall synthesis of the findings and learning from evaluations of the three networks: the **Food Security Working Group (FSWG)**, **Gender Equality Network (GEN)** and the **Land Core Group (LCG)**. It includes:

- An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges that face these three networking organisations in Myanmar, and
- Recommendations to LIFT for network development in Myanmar and how it can be effectively supported.

### 2. Networks

Civil society networks are a basic unit of collective action with a shared conception of the common good, a shared vision and passion for change. They are not social organisations by themselves but more a set of ‘nodes’ (individuals, groups or organisations), connected by ties, coming together in an open structure, able to expand and to integrate new nodes – with some definition of boundaries. They fit between the macro-level of nations and economies, and the micro-level of individuals, families and organisations.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Findings

The synthesis report looks at the place, value and characteristics of the networks and briefly at the dual contexts of civil society and food security in Myanmar. It then identifies the similarities and differences among the networks, the integration of gender by FSWG and LCG, and the scope of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

Networks of this type have a number of specific roles and functions. The four core characteristics are best described as: *Linking, Learning, Leading and Leveraging*.

#### Patterns about the place and value of the networks

Although there is variable effectiveness, the evaluations of the three networks indicate clear and consistent patterns about their place and value. These include:

- (i) Their reach – geographically, across civil society layers and bridging to other domains such as policy, parliament, international agreements and other actors such as in-country specialists and international experts
- (ii) Their shared purpose - when working well as a network
- (iii) Their collective knowledge and expertise through connecting and clustering diverse information and experience
- (iv) The authority of their collective voice, especially when focusing on specific change
- (v) Their collective influence and impact
- (vi) A place to belong to for relevant, smaller civil society actors
- (vii) A vehicle for building organisational capacity, and individual and group capability
- (viii) Their potential leverage for greater impact through strategic collaboration and sharing of knowledge, experience and lessons among themselves, funders and other networks

A distinctive Myanmar feature, common to the three networks, has been the approach taken for linking advocacy, capacity development and empowerment through a cycle of:

- (i) identifying the issue for collective action

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<sup>1</sup> Wells-Dang A (2009), *Building an Effective Network*, presentation to Myanmar NGO Network. Andrew completed a PhD on civil society networks in China and Vietnam

- (ii) training of trainers (TOT)
- (iii) training and outreach to constituency/community level
- (iv) feedback
- (v) synthesis and messaging by the network for policy makers
- (vi) feedback to engaged parties, and
- (vii) deepening and growing the cycle.

The respective agendas of FSWG, LCG and GEN and LIFT directly complement and reinforce each other, providing a strong basis for increased interaction at strategic, policy and operational levels.

Because networks are more than an organisation they can be complex, and could usefully be viewed by LIFT more as partners working towards achieving aligned goals, rather than as organisations (or agencies) which can be contracted to deliver agreed projects. Certainly the networks valued the open, flexible style of LIFT, which felt more like a partnership.

For LIFT, networks can expand and accelerate LIFT's own strategic priorities and the shared, common goals of the networks and LIFT. In very practical terms, this also helps to protect and enhance LIFT's investment. LIFT has a potentially important role to:

- (i) Have early conversations with network partners on longer term sustainability issues, options and strategies
- (ii) 'Walk alongside' networks when they are having difficulties and support them in appropriate ways to find steps forward
- (iii) Work with the networks on strengthening monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment knowledge, skills and practices
- (iv) Enhance its role as an advocate for effective civil society partnership within the wider donor community, as well as with government ministries and departments, in areas such as:
  - gender mainstreaming
  - quality MEAL and its translation into organisational and performance improvement
  - creating shared impact through partnerships and networking
  - the value of funding credible local partners irrespective of whether they are formally registered
  - the next Myanmar national development strategy<sup>2</sup> as a potentially key focus for joint civil society network advocacy, and civil society / international community cooperation
  - good partnership practice based on local ownership, mutual respect and accountability and a shared focus on results
  - sharing good practice between national and international governmental and civil society counterparts
- (v) Share its own understanding of being a type of network - connecting multiple and diverse interests - with an associated understanding of network dynamics and issues.

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<sup>2</sup> Raised in interviews by NGO staff

## **4. Recommendations**

The first two sets of recommendations are addressed to the three networks collectively, including with respect to the role they might potentially play as respected national entities within the broader civil society sector as a whole in Myanmar.

The third set of recommendations concerns LIFT's role as a member of the international community in Myanmar, leveraging off LIFT's role as a valued partner of the three networks and its credibility as a multi-donor body.

### **A. Recommendations to strengthen network effectiveness and sustainability**

#### ***Recommendation 1: Balancing strategic priorities with flexibility***

Ensure that key network strategic direction and planning documents are kept under regular collective review, balancing "staying on the case" of long term systemic initiatives with retaining flexibility and resources to respond to emerging issues from among the membership/partners and wider national environment.

#### ***Recommendation 2: Developing institutional sustainability strategies***

Consider the development of a sustainability strategy early in the period of the current LIFT funding, with a view to expanding the proportion of the respective networks budget which are flexible; exploring programmatic rather than activity-based funding approaches with donors to reduce 'projectisation risk'; and developing approaches to maximise membership/partnering opportunities to contribute skills, experience and resources to network initiatives and decision-making.

#### ***Recommendation 3: Enhancing monitoring, evaluation and learning***

Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning through prioritisation internally within each network (including allocation of network resources and tapping into member/partner expertise and experience) as well as seeking ways to work together across the networks for mutual benefit. A priority in this regard should be to link into LIFT's 2015-2018 strategy commitment to strengthen its role as a knowledge platform. In line with this, LIFT has developed a Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning and Accountability (MEAL) framework and a three-pronged theory of change, as well as supporting the new Myanmar Monitoring and Evaluation Association launched on March 16, 2016.

In this context, and given the nature and focus of each of the networks, there should be particular attention to monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning in the areas of policy advocacy and process-related activity (a focus of much discussion and testing internationally), and the quality and impact of training (both within the networks and with other stakeholders). Such steps are timely and will be important aspects of supporting the implementation of Recommendation 1 above.

### **B. Recommendations on potential role of the LIFT-funded networks in exploring and promoting broader civil society sector capacity development initiatives**

Underpinning the following recommendations is an understanding that each network and LIFT stand to gain from broader civil society initiatives in a number of ways. These include a stronger locally driven and owned civil society within which national networks are able to promote and support civil society interests and perspectives more broadly through 'home grown' capacities and initiatives. The latter includes engagement with government at policy, strategy and programmatic levels. While the recommendations primarily focus on actions

by the three networks themselves, the supportive role of LIFT, as a partner, is important and has been included where appropriate.

***Recommendation 4: Addressing staff recruitment and skills development gaps***

With respect to helping to ensure that the best possible staff are recruited for positions in the respective staff teams of the three LIFT-funded networks, consider collaborating with each other as well as with other relevant networks, to:

- (i) set-up a benchmarking study of CSO - NGO/INGO salaries/remuneration and employment packages in Myanmar
- (ii) research the development of cross-CSO training/learning for managers and leaders to help fill the gap in second tier management within organisations
- (iii) develop the skill base of financial managers; and
- (iv) identify and promote a common financial accounting package.

***Recommendation 5: Accessing mentoring by experienced civil society leaders***

The three-LIFT-funded networks to jointly initiate steps to deliberately tap into the depth of experience and wisdom available among Myanmar's established national network leaders and resource people, including within their own networks, for the purpose of:

- (i) organisational mentoring and advice, and
- (ii) individual mentoring of emerging leaders and senior managers.

Such an initiative could 'start small' within the three networks, but be developed over time as a wider civil society mechanism, with appropriate funding support, ensuring that experience, insights, knowledge and skills flow between established and emerging leaders.

***Recommendation 6: Strengthening local capacity to support civil society development***

With respect to strengthening capacity within Myanmar's civil society networks to address their own capacity development needs:

- (i) The three LIFT-funded networks to strengthen links with indigenous NGO support organisations, in particular to draw on locally-based resources, skills and experience for their own organisational development purposes
- (ii) LIFT to advocate for further prioritisation of international community support to indigenous NGO support organisations as a means to (i) strengthen civil society local ownership and capacities, and (ii) reduce external assistance dependence.

***Recommendation 7: Building understanding and knowledge of Myanmar civil society***

- (i) The three LIFT-funded networks to explore with national network counterparts the value of, and need to map current and existing civil society networks in order to identify trends, strengths, challenges and opportunities on which to build for future mutual support and collaboration purposes
- (ii) LIFT to act as advocate within the international community in Myanmar for support for such an initiative, the outcome of which would inter alia provide a useful guide for targeting future cooperation.

***Recommendation 8: Promoting opportunities for civil society leadership training***

Particularly with a view to strengthening second tier leadership, which was identified by stakeholder feedback as a key gap across the sector, the three LIFT-funded networks:

- (i) to promote the mapping and assessment (strengths, specialties and suitability) of leadership training opportunities for Myanmar civil society, both those available within the country and those available internationally
- (ii) consider in dialogue with other network leaderships whether such opportunities adequately provide for current and projected future sector needs, or whether

consideration of setting up a Myanmar based leadership training institute would be a viable option in the longer term. The latter would be dependent on the necessary international support and linkages for mutual benefit with similar initiatives in other relevant countries.

- (iii) LIFT to act as an advocate for such a study within the wider international community and encourage the necessary resourcing as a contribution to civil society sustainability and strengthening, helping to maximise the value of investments already made by a number of international agencies and NGOs.

### **C. Recommendations on LIFT's role as a member of international community**

As indicated in the three networks evaluation report, LIFT is valued by each of the networks as "more than a donor", being rather a partner, open to negotiation and informal engagement.

In addition to the LIFT references in the recommendations above, the further proposals are offered:

#### ***Recommendation 9: LIFT as an advocate for value and role of networks***

In liaison with the three networks individually or collectively as appropriate, LIFT to take opportunities within international development community mechanisms in Myanmar to act as promoter/advocate in areas of vital interest to the networks such as:

- (i) gender mainstreaming
- (ii) quality MEAL and its translation into organisational and performance improvement
- (iii) creating shared impact through partnerships and networking
- (iv) the value of funding credible local partners irrespective of whether they are formally registered
- (v) being responsive/supportive to joint civil society network advocacy around the formulation of the next Myanmar National Development Strategy
- (vi) good partnership practice based on local ownership, mutual respect and accountability and a shared focus on results.

#### ***Recommendation 10: Working with the networks in areas of institutional need***

Beyond formal reporting and consultation requirements, LIFT to be proactive in reaching out to the three networks to engage, advise and support in areas such as:

- (i) having early conversations on longer term sustainability issues and putting exit strategies on the table from the beginning in the spirit of partnership and commitment to results
- (ii) providing a sounding board, as appropriate, when network partners are facing issues which may affect their ability to deliver on LIFT-funded activities or more generally on wider network mandates.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of Report

This report is the second provided as part of an independent evaluation commissioned by LIFT of three national civil society networks they have funded since 2012: the Food Security Working Group (FSWG), Gender Equality Network (GEN) and Land Core Group (LCG). The first report, *Evaluation of Three Myanmar Networks* (18 March, 2016), analyses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the three networks and makes recommendations to address issues identified.

In line with the terms of reference, this second report provides an overall synthesis based on the findings and 'learnings' from the network evaluations, including:

- An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges that face networking organisations in Myanmar in the Food Security Sector, and
- Recommendations to LIFT for network development in Myanmar and how it can be effectively supported.

## 1.2 Approach

The approach we have taken includes:

- drawing on the individual evaluations of the three networks that are summarised in the above-mentioned first evaluation report
- providing background information on networks and networking
- providing background information on civil society in Myanmar as well as thinking on areas for future international support, including via the indigenous NGO support organisations which are emerging within the sector
- providing background information on the Food Security Sector, and within that the gender issues that are pertinent
- the use of two frameworks as key reference points for analysis. The first framework provided the basis of analysis to understand the mode of operation of each of the networks. The second was developed during the course of the evaluation itself and helps identify characteristics of effective networks.

## 1.3 Limitations of evaluation

This synthesis report brings together patterns, trends and analysis from separate qualitative evaluations of the three networks. The evaluation team received rich information, examples and data about the role and work of each of the three networks. Inevitably there were limitations, including an insufficient timeframe for more in-depth work, in certain areas, for each of the networks due to their busy schedules; lack of time to follow-up with key interviewees; the preference of some survey respondents to talk by phone rather than complete a survey; and the inability to undertake more extensive field visits. As well, there was insufficient time to bring the three networks together with each other, with LIFT and with other key informants to explore and test trends, patterns, challenges, opportunities and points of practical and strategic development.



## 2. Civil society networks, Myanmar context and frameworks

### 2.1 What is a network?

Andrew Wells-Dang, in a 2009 presentation to the Myanmar NGO Forum, usefully described the types of social or civil society networks that are the focus of this study as being:

- The middle (meso) level between the micro (individuals, families, organisations) and the macro (nations, economies)
- A set of nodes (individuals, groups or organisations), connected by ties
- Open structures, able to expand and to integrate new nodes – with some definition of boundaries in order to differentiate between networks and the social environment, i.e. who is part of a network and who is just an ally or supporter
- A basic unit of collective action. They are not social organisations by themselves. People enter networks via other people they already know. (The evaluation team noted that another very common way for joining a network is through membership of an organisation that, in turn, joins a network.)

In particular Wells-Dang noted that:

- *Civil society networks* link organisations and individuals with a shared conception of the common good, which can be interpreted as shared objectives and sense of purpose<sup>3</sup>

These core understandings underpin and inform the use of the term ‘networks’ and the analysis, findings and recommendations in this report.

### 2.2 The value of networks

The shared conception of the common good, a shared vision and passion for change are at the heart of the value of the type of networks we are discussing. This value is reflected in why people and organisations sign-up or join, and the benefits they see from belonging. The range of reasons includes:<sup>4</sup>

- Sharing experiences and learning
- Creating social contacts and mobilisation
- Speaking with one strong voice; because it is easier for decision makers to listen. This also helps create “safety in numbers” and reduces “divide and rule” approaches by decision-makers
- Access to resources (information being a resource too) – and the connections between individuals and structures
- Mutual inspiration
- Finding new solutions to problems - creating and implementing new ideas
- Pursuing shared goals
- Empowerment, because a network can speak on behalf of vulnerable people
- Access to information that might otherwise be structured through markets or the government.

Each of these reasons was mentioned in one form or another in the evaluation of the three networks.

### 2.3 Characteristics of effective networks

A South Australian study of networks identified the characteristics of a successful network as having a clear and shared **purpose**, with skilled **people** who can lead; **process** that

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<sup>3</sup> Wells-Dang A (2009), *Building an Effective Network*, presentation to Myanmar NGO Network. Andrew completed a PhD on civil society networks in China and Vietnam

<sup>4</sup> Op cit and [www.pir.sa.gov.au](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au)

ensures a degree of structure, **planning** for common goals and around activities (with timing and phasing being crucial), and ensuring tangible and intangible outcomes or **products**.<sup>5</sup> They found that “... a successful network is resourced and supported; has credibility with other agencies, networks and the community; makes decisions and gets on with it, and is sustainable because it is bigger than any one individual.”

They also found that within effective networks “... good leaders provide a climate that encourages others to develop their own networks and leadership ...” and that “... sharing leadership and mentoring others is essential.”

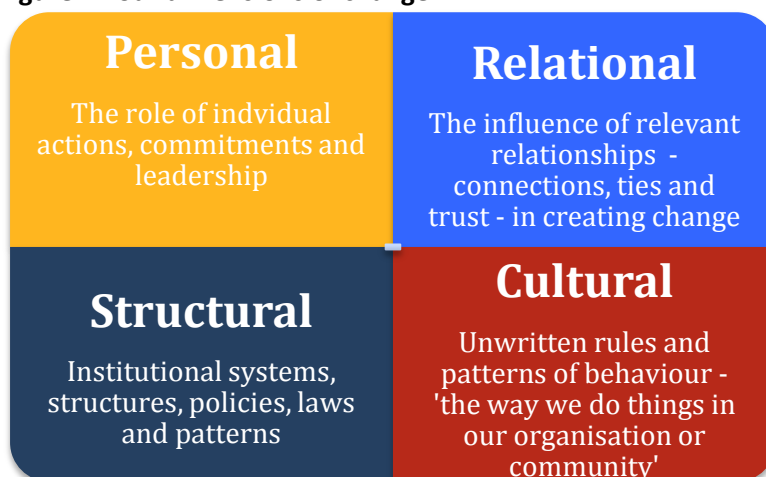
In terms of process “... there needs to be a way for new members to join and given time to acclimatise to the culture of the network.”<sup>6</sup> Overall, networks evolve to serve a need and may dissolve over time. Sustainable networks depend on an interconnected range of factors, including maintaining a clear sense of purpose and identity; being able to tap into and share the resources, knowledge, experience and skills of the participants; growing at a manageable pace, and (in the words of one of the NGO leaders interviewed) “keeping the passion alive.”

## 2.4 Evaluation frameworks

The above characteristics and value-adding factors highlight the rationale, nature and effectiveness of successful networks and are consistent with the framing used for the evaluation of the three LIFT-funded networks.

For the evaluation, the team drew on one particular framework - the four dimensions of change - in order to gain an understanding of where each network was placing greatest emphasis.<sup>7</sup> This framework was developed by practitioners, using multiple approaches to reduce conflict and create movements of positive social change. This framework identified key characteristics of how effective change was created, finding that the four dimensions - personal, relational, structural and cultural – together, form a winning combination. Each dimension may be emphasised at different times because of different circumstances.

**Figure1: Four dimensions of change**



<sup>5</sup> [www.pir.sa.gov.au](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au)

<sup>6</sup> Op cit

<sup>7</sup> Lederach, J.P, Neufeld, R. and Culbertson, H. (2007). *Reflective Peacebuilding: A planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit*. The Joan B Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

From a combination of research on networks, and the information gathered during the evaluation, the team developed a second framework identifying key characteristics for an effective network. This is mentioned here and discussed later in the report in relationship to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges for the networks.

**Figure 2: Four features of effective networks**



## 2.5 Civil society in Myanmar

### 2.5.1 Overview

The introduction to the first evaluation report: *Evaluation of Three Myanmar Networks*; summarises key features and development steps of Myanmar’s rapidly evolving civil society sector. The following outline elaborates on this summary<sup>8</sup> with particular emphasis on the development of national civil society networks and indigenous “NGO support organisations” to strengthen broader civil society capacity.

Myanmar’s vibrant and growing civil society encompasses a diverse range of interests and approaches countrywide. It draws on long roots that go back to organisations and processes that emerged from Buddhist and Christian-led social welfare activities focusing on poverty, health, and the daily needs of communities. In areas of weak central government control and armed conflict, civil society often performed the state’s service-delivery role at local level.<sup>9</sup>

The Asia Development Bank (ADB) *Civil Society Brief* (February 2015), identifies three types of civil society organisations in Myanmar: community-based organisations (CBOs), and local and international nongovernment organisations (LNGOs and INGOs). CBOs are informal or voluntary associations formed at the village level to perform social and religious functions, including health, education, and social services. They do not normally have paid staff, and members are typically beneficiaries. Although there are no government or other statistics on these groups, one estimate puts the number of CBOs in Myanmar at 214,000.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It draws extensively on the Asian Development Bank (ADB) *Civil Society Brief* (February 2015), [http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Ref\\_Doc\\_Brief\\_on\\_CS0\\_and\\_NGOs\\_ADB\\_Feb2015\\_0.pdf](http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Ref_Doc_Brief_on_CS0_and_NGOs_ADB_Feb2015_0.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Transnational Institute and Burma Center Netherlands. (2011). *Civil Society Gaining Ground: Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma*. Amsterdam. pp. 6–12.

<sup>10</sup> B. Heidel. (2006). *The Growth of Civil Society in Myanmar*. Bangalore. p. 43.

Local NGOs typically originate from cities, townships or other population centres and maintain connections with communities. These groups are usually unregistered with the government, often have paid and skilled staff, and are increasingly connected to regional and national NGO networks, and/or with international NGOs. In ethnic areas, many local NGOs build effective communication with ethnic armed groups to enable smooth implementation of activities and programmes.

Several large LNGOs are registered with government ministries and at times work with the government and development agencies to implement projects in diverse sectors, including food security, rural development and agriculture; gender equality; health care and education. Estimates vary widely on the number of LNGOs in Myanmar. One article claims more than 10,000 such groups,<sup>11</sup> while another study conducted in 2003 by Save the Children - the first detailed look at civil society in Myanmar - estimated there were 270 local NGOs at that time.<sup>12</sup>

International NGOs are also increasingly active in Myanmar. Present in small numbers since the 1990s, they have entered Myanmar in two recent waves: in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, and since the forming of the new government in early 2011.

### **2.5.2 Growth in national civil society networking**

Recent years have seen the development of several, often inter-connected national networks that bring together specific LNGO and CBO constituencies (with INGO participation in several cases). These networks demonstrate a range of different organisational forms, as evidenced by the three distinct institutional arrangements of the three networks which are the focus of this report.

Apart from the FSWG, LCG and GEN, key networks identified in the *ADB Civil Society Brief* are: the Local Resource Center (LRC); Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA); Myanmar NGO Network (MNN); Women's Organizations Network (Myanmar), or WON; Women's League of Burma (WLB); INGO Forum; IFI Watch Myanmar; Myanmar Positive Group National PLHIV Network (MPG); Myanmar Lawyers' Network and Myanmar Legal Aid Network (MLAW); Paung Ku (Bridge); and the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU).

As noted in the first *Evaluation of Three Myanmar Networks* report, linkages exist between many of the national networks as a result of both overlapping memberships and strong personal relationships based on trust and "like-minds," often forged during the period when civil society activity was repressed.

A number of key leadership/network "incubators" played vital roles in this context, providing space and opportunity for networking, strategising and building trust. These included INGOs, their circles of local counterparts and staff; and academic institutions and alumni (for example the Asian Institute of Technology [AIT] in Bangkok, Chiang Mai University in Thailand, the Yezin Agricultural University and the University of Forestry).

### **2.5.3 Local NGO support organisations build capacity from within**

An important development in this context is the growth in the number of what might be termed domestic "NGO support organisations," a trend with potentially significant implications for the sustainability and degree of local ownership of civil society organisations

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<sup>11</sup> The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. 2014. NGO Law Monitor: Myanmar (Burma). <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/Myanmar.html> (accessed 21 August 2014).

<sup>12</sup> See Reference 3 above, p. 11.

and processes within Myanmar. Often initiated by, or with the support of INGOs, several have become important sources of capacity development support to the broader civil society sector in recent years. They are highlighted in this outline due to the potentially important focus they provide for ongoing international support to Myanmar civil society and access to international experience and lessons in areas such as capacity and organisational development; research and advocacy; monitoring and evaluation; and civil society-government relations.

The **Capacity Building Initiative (CBI)**, for example, was established by international NGOs in 2000 to meet their growing demand for skilled and trained staff. Less an organisational development initiative, the Capacity Building Initiative fills an important skill development role for civil society in Myanmar.<sup>13</sup>

The **Local Resource Center (LRC)**, with its head office in Yangon and four regional coordination offices, is now the coordinating body for more than 600 civil society organisations, with links to over 30 civil society networks. Started in 2008 by local and international NGOs, the LRC focuses on the development of indigenous organisations by promoting institutional development through capacity building and information sharing.

Another prominent initiative is **Paung Ku (Bridge)**, a civil society strengthening initiative established by a consortium of INGOs and NGOs. It now operates as an independent local NGO and has been critical in linking international and local groups, and directing support to local civil society groups.

Other civil society capacity-building initiatives have a more issue-specific focus. The **Myanmar Information Management Unit**, for example, provides information management services to strengthen analysis and decision making of the humanitarian and development community. It maintains civil society databases by sector and based on nationwide, region, township, village tract, and village location as well as information on which group is doing what and where.

Founded in 2007 by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, **Pyoe Pin** works with local NGOs and community-based organisations to increase civil society participation in governance and policy processes.

There are also an increasing number of international NGOs working around Myanmar with a specific mandate to strengthen civil society. One prominent example is **ActionAid Myanmar**, which played a crucial role in the establishment of GEN (and Thadar Consortium), hosting the GEN Coordination Unit and managing its finances until the establishment of an independent GEN office in 2015.

#### **2.5.4 Government–civil society relations: Opening doors**

The landscape for civil society–government relations is rapidly changing. As well as engaging in policy processes at the national government level, particularly through national networks, civil society is increasingly working with, influencing, and coordinating activities with the government at the village, village tract (urban ward), township, state and regional levels.

A key factor identified in stakeholder consultations for this evaluation that has helped to 'open official doors' to CSO's policy advocacy role is the critical importance of 'inside-out / outside-in' dynamics between government and CSOs. Some key CSO leaders have worked in

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<sup>13</sup> Asia Foundation. (2014). *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions*. Yangon. p. 16.

government and brought their 'inside' experience, knowledge and connections into the work of their organisation or network.

Drawing on the trust and confidence of these links, civil society groups were consulted on the drafting of the Association Registration Law; trade union representatives were informally included in discussions on the Factory Act, the Social Security Act, and the Health and Safety Act; and the Interim Press Council has been drafting bylaws for the Media Law, signed by the President in 2014.

As the opportunities for, and activities of, civil society grow (notwithstanding uneven change across the country and current uncertainties about the likely approach and priorities of the new government), some national and local authorities are becoming accustomed to increased civil society participation and are beginning to recognise the valuable role these stakeholders have.

Some ministries and departments, e.g. the Department of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Department of Rural Development and the Department of Forestry have been particularly active in engaging civil society participation in their activities, including the development of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) and the formulation of the National Land Use Policy.

This context presents many challenges and opportunities for Myanmar civil society actors and their international partners, including LIFT. Some of these were articulated by the more than 650 representatives from 257 organisations and networks in Myanmar, in the first Myanmar Civil Society Organisations' Forum (14 – 16 October 2014) with the theme: "Civil Societies' Review on Myanmar's Transition Process: Prospects for 2015 and Beyond."

The Forum was clear in acknowledging the contributions of INGOs in a number of priority national development areas. However, it expressed concern about the prioritisation by INGOs of individual organisational agendas over local processes, often without adequate consultation. This was considered to have undermined the role and capacity of local organisations. This issue is highly pertinent to this evaluation.

Feedback received from civil society and other stakeholders during the current evaluation reinforced the same message of "instrumentalisation" and "projectisation" of local NGOs and CBOs by the international community, with the major share of resources flowing largely to INGOs in the first instance, often relegating local actors to be primarily project implementers on their behalf.

## **2.6 Food security in Myanmar**

Food security issues have been prominent on Myanmar's agenda for some time, both from within Myanmar and through the intervention of international agencies.<sup>14</sup> The FSWG draft strategic plan (2015-2017) notes that "Myanmar has the natural resources to produce sufficient quantity and diversity of food for complete diets for the entire population."

However, there is a myriad of interlinked technical, market, social and institutional reasons why the country is still food insecure<sup>15</sup> and food security remains a critical challenge. Currently 8.9 million people, or 16.7 percent of the population are estimated to be undernourished.<sup>16</sup> 70 percent of people live in rural areas and 29 per cent of rural

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<sup>14</sup> Magnusson A and Pedersen M, (2012) *A Good Office? Twenty Years of UN Mediation in Myanmar*, International Peace Institute, New York

<sup>15</sup> FSWG draft 2015-2017 Strategic Plan

<sup>16</sup> The state of food insecurity in the world, FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2014

households live below the poverty line. As elaborated in the next section, women and girls are over-represented among the food insecure.<sup>17</sup>

In 2010, 35 percent of children under five were estimated to be either moderately or severely stunted (height for age) in their growth.<sup>18</sup> “It can be as high as 58 percent in some regions and ethnic groups. Levels of child under-nutrition decrease with higher levels of maternal education and increased wealth. Acute under-nutrition is extremely high in some areas and ethnic groups, surpassing WHO emergency thresholds. Almost three quarters of pregnant women and children under five are anemic.”<sup>19</sup> LIFTS’s Household Survey estimated stunting levels in its project areas to range from 27 to 38.9 percent.

FSWG’s draft strategy 2015-2017 identifies the vulnerability for smallholder farmers in food production, particularly from weather variations, and the vulnerability for the rural landless to changes in food prices. The *FSWG 2015 Briefing Paper* further reviewed existing policy on food security and outlined a number of key issues to be addressed.<sup>20</sup>

In the last three to four years there have been significant changes related to food security in the political landscape. These include the formation of the Department of Rural Development, as part of the Ministry of Livestock, Fishery and Rural Development, which includes a focus on community-driven development (actively incorporating a structured approach to addressing gender issues); the National Action Plan for Agriculture (NAPA), Myanmar’s involvement with the international movement: Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and the National Land Use Policy (NLUP). These developments influenced LIFT’s 2014 strategy, in which LIFT outlined its three areas of funding focus as being to assist:<sup>21</sup>

1. Rural households with land, labour and/or commercial potential to ‘step up’ the value ladder and out of poverty through increases in labour and land productivity, as well as through enhanced capacity to market production.
2. Rural households or household members to productively ‘step out’ of agriculture, and into more productive sectors of the economy over time. This could be a local 'step out', finding better-paid employment in local non-farm activities. It can also be a 'migration step out' to take advantage of opportunities further afield.
3. Households who do not have the commercial potential to, or the ability to ‘step out’, to ‘hang in’ - using agriculture as a safety net, and improve their food security and nutrition outcomes during Myanmar’s period of economic transition.

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<sup>17</sup> Food Security Working Group. (March 2015). *Final Report: Gender & Food Security Pilot Study*. Yangon, Myanmar. The study presents the findings of 296 people surveyed in 6 villages across Ayeyarwady, Magway and Southern Shan, in addition to focus group discussions conducted in the same villages

<sup>18</sup> FSWG draft 2015-2017 Strategic Plan

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Network for Nutrition and Food Security, (2016): *Joint UN Nutrition Advocacy Brief*

<sup>20</sup> Food security Working Group, (2015 ) *Briefing paper: Food Security Related Policy Analysis Myanmar*

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.lift-fund.org/strategy>

## 3. The three networks

### 3.1 Introduction

This section of the report:

- summarises differences and similarities of the networks using the framework: four dimensions of change
- comments on the integration of gender issues within the networks
- summarises network value for participants and members
- analyses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges for each network
- identifies overall findings

### 3.2 Network differences and similarities

While the three network models are all quite different, they share some aspects in common. In terms of the four dimensions of change, they have all come from strong foundations with an emphasis on personal responsibility and leadership as well as relational approaches – a noticeable ‘human dimension’. These relationships have often been forged through network members / participants attending common universities and being part of alumni, or through working in the same agencies, particularly UN agencies or INGOs.

#### 3.2.1 Food Security Network

FSWG has a growing Community Based Organisation (CBO) involvement and the potential for effective engagement at the provincial, district and township level via the Regional Resource Centres. This potential is important to the ‘culture’ of FSWG - in the way the connections with grassroots developments are supported - as well as the structural relationship between local issues and their ability to inform national policy. Internal FSWG structures are in a state of flux with the need for governance/implementation discord and uncertainties to be addressed and resolved. This also needs to be extended to membership, which is governed by a very light membership criteria that are equally lightly enforced.

The long established relationships that helped form FSWG, and contributed to its development in the first 10 years, are not currently as evident, exacerbated by the departure of multiple staff and associated organisational memory loss. Culturally, FSWG has also, developed somewhat of a sense of paralysis through unresolved crises and lack of agreed governance/management role clarity.

There is however, strong individual commitment and interest but little “leading from the front,” combined with limited trust between those filling the governance and management roles (although there are important indications of potential for this to improve). In this context, and to a large extent because food security issues are so important, FSWG has still been able to undertake a range of activities, including to influence policy and legislation, bringing together local experience with the authority of parliamentarians and parliamentary committees. This indicates that the rationale and value of FSWG as a network is still relevant and there is potential for to be re-energised. Stakeholder consultations indicated continued membership good will and commitment among members despite recent challenges.

#### 3.2.3 Gender Equality Network

A core component of the GEN culture is a deliberate orientation towards encouraging membership engagement, underpinned by clear membership criteria and well defined organisational and network structures. The network connects with international agreements, frameworks and expertise as a key means of ‘systems and structural’ leverage for influencing national policy and legislation, combining this with local research and advocacy. Framing all GEN activities is a ‘transformational gender approach,’ which is



premised on deeper systemic societal change. A '360 degree advocacy approach' reinforces GEN's strategic outreach to other networks and actors to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres. There are publicly identifiable governance and management leaders within GEN. In considering the four dimensions of change, GEN is operating actively in each of the four dimensions, with particular attention being paid currently to strengthening the 'structural quadrant.'

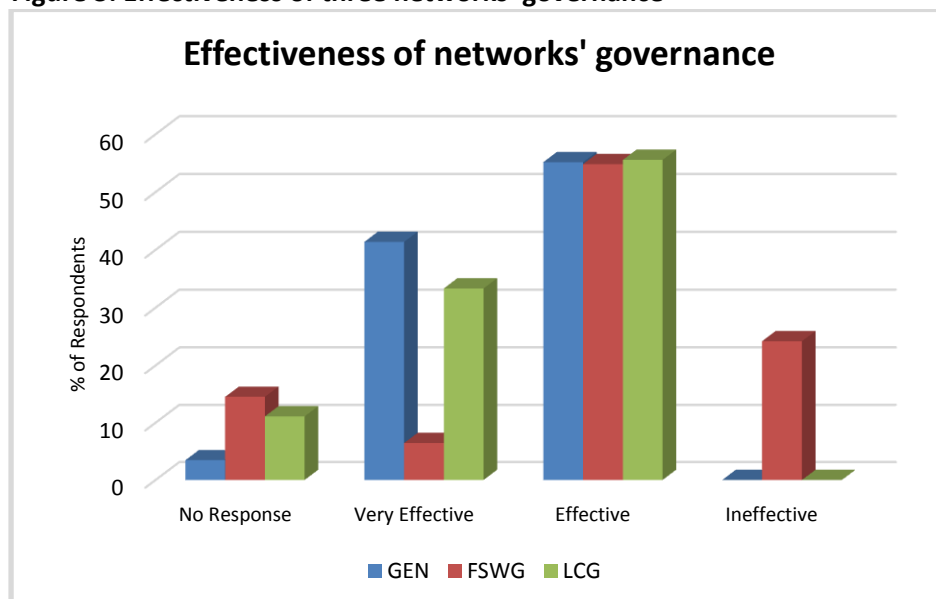
### 3.2.4 Land Core Group

LCG has an issue-based, flexible partnership approach which allows initiatives and leadership to emerge. In terms of 'culture' this leadership is supported from multiple points within the network and from staff. LCG's newly established governance group - the Board of Directors - spent the first of its three meetings consciously developing and focusing on the appropriate culture of the 'governance team,' highlighting this quadrant of the 'four dimensions of change.' Individual leadership, especially by the Executive Director, is particularly noticeable and acknowledged. Relationships are consciously strengthened in order to develop both a shared understanding of key land use/tenure issues with INGOs, LNGOs, donors, other governments, relevant UN agencies or the private sector, and for designing and enacting particular strategies. Like GEN, LCG is operating actively in each of the four dimensions.

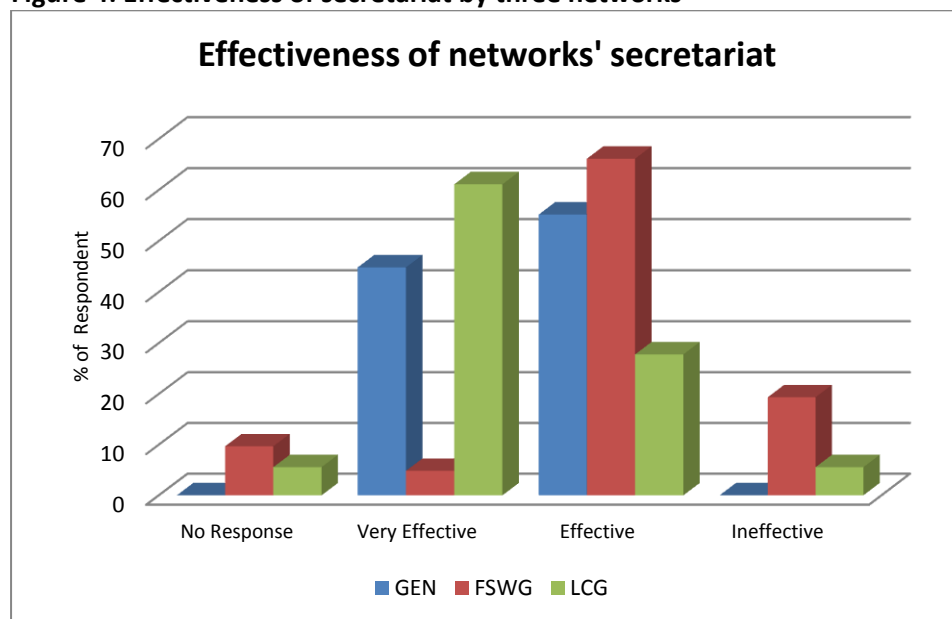
Further to the above, there is a cultural dimension to the development and operation of networks in Myanmar which goes beyond internal organisational dynamics. As the *Evaluation of Three Networks* report states, there is a tendency for international actors to only recognise the organisational forms (e.g. formal NGOs) that they are familiar with elsewhere and not see the diverse forms and approaches of indigenous civil society in Myanmar, which may reflect different cultural forms and practices arising from the national context. This 'higher level' application of the 'Culture' quadrant of the four dimensions of change framework is also very pertinent to understandings of Myanmar civil society and how international actors interact with it.

The differences in how the networks respectively align to the framework are to a certain extent represented in the network survey results on governance and secretariat effectiveness. As indicated in in Figures 3-5 below, among generally positive ratings, there is less satisfaction and more dissatisfaction with FSWG in these respects.

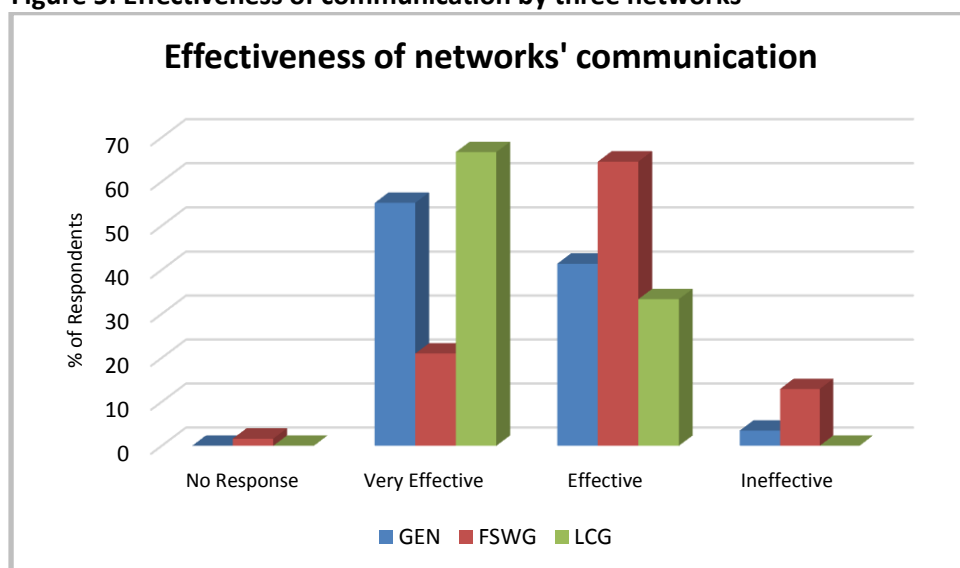
**Figure 3: Effectiveness of three networks' governance**



**Figure 4: Effectiveness of secretariat by three networks**



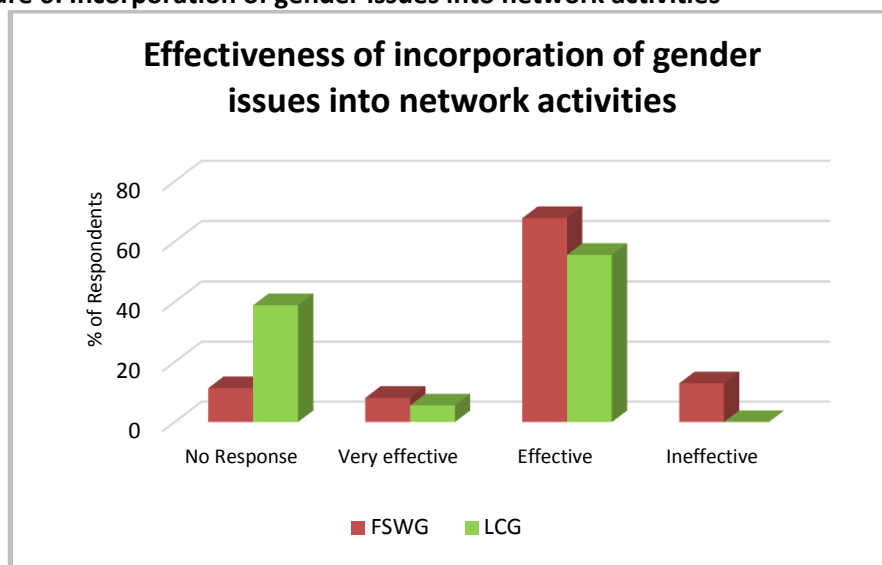
**Figure 5: Effectiveness of communication by three networks**



### **3.3 Integration of gender issues into network policy and implementation**

The evaluation team was pleased to see attention being given to, and integration of, gender into the research and policy work of FSWG and LCG. We consider that there are opportunities to strengthen this through working together in a more deliberate and planned manner, with advice and feedback from GEN and drawing at the same time on lessons and feedback from LIFT's experience and implementation of its own gender policy.

**Figure 6: Incorporation of gender issues into network activities**



The nexus between gender, food security and land provides a strong underpinning to LIFT’s partnership with the three national civil society networks that are the focus of this evaluation. The respective agendas of FSWG, LCG and GEN directly complement and reinforce each other in this respect, providing a strong basis for increased interaction at strategic, policy and operational levels.

As mentioned earlier, UN data<sup>22</sup> indicate that women and girls worldwide, are overrepresented among those who are food-insecure, accounting for an estimated 60 percent of undernourished people.

The impact of gender equality on a country’s economic growth is the single most important determinant of food security. This is well documented (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen 2004; World Bank 2012), and is cited by a cross country study covering the period 1970 – 1995. The study found that 55 percent of gains against hunger were due to the improvement of women’s situation within society (Smith and Haddad 2000). More recent global comparisons show a strong correlation between hunger and gender inequalities. Countries ranking highest on the index of global hunger are also those where such inequalities are more severe (von Grebmer et al. 2009).

A joint study by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2013 highlights the impact of discriminatory laws and social and cultural norms on food and nutrition security for women and girls, noting that the cost of this to society is considerable, both in lost productivity, and worse, in health and nutritional outcomes.

The report emphasises that challenging the constraints women and girls face, and enlarging their access to opportunities, is an essential component of efforts to end hunger and malnutrition and reduce food insecurity. However, removal of these constraints requires “more than good intentions and legislative reform of discriminatory legal provisions. Social and cultural norms, and the gender roles that these norms impose, must also be challenged.”

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council [ECOSOC] 2007, para. 14; World Food Programme [WFP] 2009a, p. 6 cited in: Asian Development Bank.(2013). *Gender equality and food security—women’s empowerment as a tool against hunger*. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Asian Development Bank

In the Myanmar context, the Report of *Gender and Food Security Pilot Study* carried out by the FSWG in 2015<sup>23</sup> reflected the global findings, reporting that women comprise at least 47 percent of the agricultural workforce and perform the bulk of work in the 'care' economy. Yet they are marginalised because they are time impoverished, assuming the triple burden of carrying out household chores, care and production responsibilities.

The report highlights the prevalence of inequality in women's access to livelihoods, the amount of time allocated to unpaid care work, food consumption, access to assets and decision making. In terms of land ownership, even when registration is in place, it is rarely in the name of women. The report recommends that women's 'time poverty' be addressed as a fundamental measure to address the inequalities identified and contribute to efforts to promote food security. This requires the transformation of social norms that define gender roles and responsibilities, in complete alignment with GEN's core approach and priorities.

Key steps that are proposed in this direction include encouraging men's roles in unpaid care work, allocating state resources to provide services that enable women to participate in the labour force, the provision of labour saving technologies, equal access to information and education, legal protection to combat domestic violence and appropriate social protection mechanisms to address food insecurity.

A specific perspective related to women's access to assets is the growth of mobile communication in Myanmar. A recent study noted the potential for mobile phones to play a role in Myanmar's socio-economic development. It estimated that 90 percent of wards and villages have a mobile signal and mobile ownership is growing fast. But "... women in Myanmar are 29 percent less likely to own a mobile phone than men ... and the gender gap is higher among lower income households." The study notes that the gender gap "... is due to a combination of low household income and traditional gender roles..."<sup>24</sup>

LIFT has a clear gender emphasis and aims to promote gender equality to ensure targeted women and men have equitable access to, and control over, resources (e.g. livelihood supports) provided by (e.g. food security) and through benefits gained from LIFT-funded projects. The specific objective of LIFT's gender strategy is that all aspects of LIFT-funded projects (including design, implementation, monitoring and learning) integrate gender through gender analysis, gender-sensitive implementation, and the use of sex disaggregated information. LIFT has positioned gender as an important cross-cutting issue in its overarching institutional strategy.<sup>25</sup>

Exploring this nexus between food security, land and gender reinforces the value of the three networks working together and of LIFT intentionally supporting such a strategic relationship. Such support is also consistent with LIFT's aim to be a collective and influential voice promoting programme coherence, innovation and learning, and providing a platform for enhanced policy engagement on agriculture, food security, and rural development in Myanmar. In this regard, the three networks align with LIFT's aim and provide a mutually reinforcing set of platforms and spaces to support LIFT's connection with wider interlinking national constituencies.

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<sup>23</sup> Food Security Working Group. (March 2015). *Op cit*

<sup>24</sup> GSMA, LIRNEasia. (2015). *Mobile phones, internet, and gender in Myanmar*. Yangon. Myanmar  
[http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSMA\\_Myanmar\\_Gender\\_Web\\_Singles.pdf](http://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/GSMA_Myanmar_Gender_Web_Singles.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.lift-fund.org/lift-gender-strategy>

### 3.4 Value of three networks to members and participants

Survey respondents in the evaluation of the three networks identified key reasons for belonging to each of the networks. The responses, summarised in Table 1, show considerable similarity but some differences.

**Table 1: Reason for, and benefits of, becoming part of network\***

Reason for, and benefits of, 'Joining'	FSWG	GEN	LCG
Build capacity of own organisation, e.g. through training			
Support local development, e.g. in Chin state			
Expand networks and links			
Access to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• technical information and research</li> <li>• small grants</li> <li>• legal and policy information</li> </ul>			
Increase status of issues			
Greater coordination amongst like-minded groups			
Access to resources and experience			
Collective power: policy influence and advocacy			
Build strong (issue-focused) leadership network			
Shared commitment to change			
As partners in research			
Space for sharing and mutual learning			

\*(Black ticks indicate dominant activity and orange ticks indicate less emphasised activity)

While the responses from those involved with the three networks is not comprehensive, the points of difference are interesting relating to: a focus on local issues, building strong issue-based leadership and shared commitment to change through creating a collective voice.

FSWG is more focused on member capacity strengthening and sharing of resources. Supporting local development, through CBO activity, is an important factor in FSWG's network membership. The GEN and LCG emphasis includes member/participant shared commitment to change, exercising collective influence and building a network that exercises and demonstrates strong leadership based on membership consensus.

### 3.5 Overall strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges

#### 3.5.1 Key network characteristics

It became clear during the evaluation process that for networks of this type there are a number of specific roles and functions. Together they help distinguish networks from an organisation with its own particular activity or service delivery focus. The four core characteristics we identified as best representing these roles and functions are: *Linking, Learning, Leading and Leveraging*.

When these are working together effectively, a constructive space is built focusing on creating solutions and building opportunities. Each characteristic is amplified by the others and together they create an impact that is more than the sum of the parts.

When considering *Linking* there is, for example, linking between network members and their constituencies on the one hand, and then linking these to national policy-makers via network initiatives, on the other.

*Learning* encompasses research; sharing information, expertise and experience; building capacity and the ability to recognise and understand impact.

*Leveraging* is the ability to broker relationships with, and contribute expertise to the policy-making and legislative system, at the same time creating or strengthening ties between local civil society and national decision-making. When successful, these actions alter the nature and power balance of ongoing relationships and the operating environment.

*Leading* is about proactively leading while creating space for other, individual or group, leaders to emerge, and at the same time intentionally building leadership capability.



The core characteristics contained in each quadrant interact dynamically with, and amplify each other via the “constructive space” in various ways. These include formal or informal membership processes (e.g. the GEN and LCG monthly membership meetings and the FSWG General Assembly, as well as respective network membership-based working groups); collective research and advocacy activity (e.g. LCG on the National Land Use Policy; GEN on NSPAW and PoVAW, and FSWG on the Farmer Protection and Welfare Laws); and wider network engagement with other networks and actors (e.g. GEN collaboration with WON and WLB on the 16 Days of Activism and International Women’s Day, LCG collaboration with “Land in Our Hands” on the National Land Use Policy and FSWG collaboration with GRET on mapping Myanmar farmers organisations).

### 3.5.2 Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges

The following tables summarise the status as assessed by the evaluation team of each of the networks in this regard. More detailed and wide-ranging analysis is provided in each of the areas highlighted by the first *Evaluation of Three Networks* report.

## Food Security Working Group

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Challenges
<p>Membership from across the country</p> <p>Involvement of CBOs</p> <p>Regional presence</p>	<p>Active links not built between members</p> <p>Variable member expectations. CBO expectation of receiving services</p> <p>Regional Resource Centres: – passive, barely operating or not fulfilling potential</p>	<p>Agreeing a structured membership system, with clear, reciprocal roles</p> <p>Building network unity through tapping into strengths of diverse membership through focusing on renewed purpose</p> <p>Regional connections a significant opportunity for strengthening networks, building CBO capacity, linking with local government and local issues with national policy</p>	<p>‘Mindset’ shift among staff and members from service provision to mobilising collective capacity</p> <p>Moving from the habit of a ‘light touch’ approach to membership recruitment to a clear systematic membership approach</p> <p>Recruiting staff with right skills, locating the centres in appropriate places; focusing on delivery of passive services, rather than dynamically building connections and collectively identifying issues</p>
<p>Multiple activities: training, research, sharing, resources, learning and advocacy</p>	<p>Acting almost as agent, delivering projects through LIFT contract, rather than clear connections with FSWG strategy – reduces impact and leverage</p> <p>Activities appear more ad hoc than coherent with limited follow-up and monitoring</p>	<p>Recreating a clear and unified purpose, strategic direction and priorities</p>	<p>Agreeing on, strategy and priorities in a manner that actively engages members but with sufficient leadership from the SC and senior staff</p> <p>For FSWG to promote/broker member strengths and not provide what members can do e.g. training</p>
<p>Enduring network that has expanded</p>	<p>Sense of vision and purpose diminished as membership expanded and multiple staff left in two waves</p> <p>Lack of cohesion and ‘being on the same page’ between governing group and senior staff</p> <p>Over-dependence on LIFT as key funder</p>	<p>Recreating a clear and unified purpose and strategy</p> <p>SC and senior staff finding common ground, developing associated clear governance / management roles and structure</p> <p>Building an organisational culture of respect and inclusion</p> <p>Concerted focus on sustainability, especially through greater clarity of FSWG purpose and strategy</p>	<p>Ensuring sufficient skills available, time given and appropriate processes used to build engagement and ownership</p>
<p>Examples of policy and systems change leveraged by FSWG eg Farmer Protection and Welfare Laws, and of effective relationships</p>	<p>Connections between training, research and policy/structural changes insufficiently developed in general</p>	<p>With clear strategy and priorities (developed from the ‘bottom up’ as well as understanding nationwide opportunities), the national links of members, combined with research can influence key policies/laws</p>	<p>Developing a policy influencing set of skills, ‘examples of the local-issue to policy’ pipeline, and mindset among staff, the governing group and members</p>

## Gender Equality Network

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Challenges
<p>Clear purpose, strategy and priorities, while still responsive to new opportunities and changing circumstances</p> <p>Effective leveraging of international frameworks and opportunities.</p> <p>Highly analytical and 'big picture' perspective reinforced by transformative gender approach</p> <p>Quality, reliability, proficiency of technical and research work</p>	<p>GEN currently well positioned with respect to strategic plan, resourcing and quality of governance and secretariat function</p>	<p>Ongoing opportunities to leveraging international frameworks</p> <p>Potentially the new government, with international spotlight in areas including SDG 5, Beijing PoA and CEDAW. Prospective public sector reform initiatives - opportunity to bring gender mainstreaming lens to bear</p> <p>Perspectives, experience, constituencies and resources coming into GEN via new members</p> <p>Strengthening M&amp;E as basis of continuous assessment of priorities/context</p> <p>Diversify funding base: Regular approaches from new international donors</p>	<p>Potential risks that 1) political will to address gender equality in fact diminishes; 2) there is less openness to engagement with civil society and: 3) extremist politics set back progress</p> <p>Delays in PoVAW finalisation and NSPAW implementation leads to loss of momentum and commitment</p> <p>Managing increasing demands on GEN and growing diversity of members while pursuing long term priorities</p> <p>Managing risk of becoming seen as a provider of services to members rather than a membership-driven network</p> <p>End of LIFT funding after 3 years leaves substantial resourcing gap, requiring sustainability strategy</p>
<p>Clarity of respective governance and management roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>Staff turn-over leading to loss of institutional memory and skills</p>	<p>Continuous learning from experience via stable and well balanced Steering Committee</p> <p>Positive interaction between governance and management functions allows open discussion about priorities and issues</p>	<p>Maintaining network identity and balance between leadership, secretariat and membership components</p> <p>Ensuring the right skills and experience within staff team, including on network coordination and governance.</p>
<p>Strong orientation towards membership engagement</p>	<p>Network meetings mainly in Yangon</p>	<p>Potential contributions of new members.</p> <p>Indications from survey that members want to increase engagement. Data on members' substantive and geographic focus via the GEN-WON membership mapping</p>	<p>Building network capacity to carry out network objectives at all levels. Ensuring membership engaged in prioritisation shifts which may be required in changing context</p> <p>Strengthening outreach to provincial/regional and community levels via members' constituencies</p>
<p>Excellent and open relations with key national department counterparts, particularly DSW; strategic and effective links with other networks</p>		<p>Using CEDAW findings and policy/institutional initiatives within new government to build and expand relations</p> <p>Strategic relations with other networks, including FSWG and LCG, as basis to promote GEN agenda</p>	<p>Change in key official counterparts in context of restructuring under new government</p> <p>Impact of any shifts in political will to address gender equality and/or engage with civil society</p>



### Land Core Group

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Challenges
Clear purpose, strategy, priorities and values, while still being adaptable to circumstances		To treat the strategy as a living document, maintaining focus but also fine tuning – and building ownership and visibility for those who are part of the network	Holding to the strategy when pressures and expectations from others mount and try to divert attention
High quality relationships with key stakeholders and partners	Dependence on one or two key people in LCG	Working with those relationships to influence effective change on land issues	When people leave organisations the relationships and influence go with them
Thoughtful approaches to building leadership within the network (e.g. leadership can come from any quarter) and a culture of learning and leadership among staff and governance group	Network meetings primarily in Yangon - reinforcing the skills and opportunities of those who already have greatest access	This approach increases people’s sense of engagement and contribution, builds knowledge and expertise and increases the opportunity to identify potential points of influence	Expanding this approach beyond Yangon and strengthening links with grassroots level
Addressing sustainability especially through partnership funding and a culture of involvement of network participants	Growing too quickly because of high quality reputation  Ensuring high quality information and research	To actively plan and monitor multiple aspects of sustainability  The partnership with the 8 year One Map Myanmar initiative is an example of sustainability	Reducing focus on sustainability because of strategic and day to day demands
Creating a shared space, bringing different groups together to influence policy. National Land Use Policy seen as the standout example	No obvious weaknesses with this approach	The style of working with government and sector NGOs, helping redesign government consultation processes to be more inclusive, undertaking training of trainers for community-based/NGO sector interests provides a model to build on	Knowing when to seize the opportunity to initiate input into policy change Building the capacity for those, other than current senior staff, to lead such initiatives

### **3.6 Findings on the networks and how they can be supported by LIFT**

#### **3.6.1 Shared strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges**

While there is variability among the three networks, as indicated in the above tables, there are also some shared strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. These include:

Shared strengths: Policy influence; good relations with government counterparts; expanding nationally-based memberships, including LNGOs and CBOs (indicating relevance); and multiple activities offering a range of options and avenues for membership/partner engagement.

Shared weaknesses: Yangon focused in terms of organisational focus, culture and meetings, although counter-balanced to a degree in the case of FSWG by the Regional Resource Centres.

Shared opportunities: Mainly related to internal dynamics and circumstances which offer opportunities for strengthening effectiveness and institutional capacity, with particular opportunities and challenges highlighted in the GEN case within the external political environment.

Shared challenges: The importance of developing and maintaining clarity of purpose and strategic orientation, while ensuring flexibility; longer-term sustainability, particularly when substantial LIFT funding comes to an end in three years in the case of FSWG and GEN; and recruitment and retention of the right staff skills and experience.

One of the shared opportunities and challenges for the three networks, and others, arises from growing internet connectivity and access to cell phones. This will particularly impact networks' communications approaches from website through to the use of social media, and influence approaches to capacity strengthening, research, access to technical information and data collection/sharing.

#### **3.6.2 Patterns about the place and value of the networks**

Analysis of stakeholder feedback further indicates that there are clear and consistent patterns about the place and value of the networks. These include:

- (i) Their reach – geographically, across civil society layers and bridging to other domains such as policy and parliament, in-country specialist and international experts, and to international agreements e.g. CEDAW, and inter-country agreements and frameworks e.g. SUN
- (ii) Their shared purpose - when working well as a network
- (iii) The collective knowledge and expertise through connecting and clustering diverse information and experience
- (iv) The authority of their collective voice, especially when focusing on specific change
- (v) Their collective influence and impact
- (vi) A place to belong to for relevant, smaller civil society actors
- (vii) A vehicle for building organisational capacity, along with individual and group capability, through learning together and from experience, as well as facilitated access to training and other opportunities
- (viii) Their potential leverage for greater impact through strategic collaboration and sharing of knowledge, experience and lessons among themselves, for example in areas such as strengthening advocacy, organisational development and models, M&E and mainstreaming of gender.

A further point in common, as elaborated in the three networks evaluation report, was the distinctive approach taken to linking advocacy, capacity development and empowerment

through a cycle of (i) identifying the issue for collective action; (ii) training of trainers (TOT); (iii) training and outreach to constituency/community level; (iv) feedback; (v) synthesis and messaging by the network for policy makers; (vi) feedback to engaged parties; and (vii) deepening and growing the cycle.

Networks are more than an organisation (consisting as they do of several and diverse organisations of varying purposes, sizes and forms), but also do require organisational capability and capacity to support the networking function. As a result they often demonstrate quite a high degree of complexity and can usefully be viewed more as partners working towards achieving aligned goals, rather than as organisations (or agencies) that can be contracted to deliver agreed projects. Certainly the three networks were very clear about the flexible and open approach taken by LIFT. LIFT was seen to be acting as more of a partner than a funder overseeing contract accountability.

When considering LIFT's role as a multi-donor trust fund in this context (with its own organisational capability and capacity, including for partnership development and management), a number of suggestions were made by stakeholders during the evaluation process. These included:

- (i) LIFT has a potentially important role to 'walk alongside' its network and other funding recipients when they are having difficulties and to support them in appropriate ways to find ways forward. In very practical terms, this also helps to protect LIFT's investment
- (ii) Having early conversations with network partners on longer term sustainability issues, options and strategies, especially with this current three-year funding cycle having been publically identified as being the last. Such early conversations would include putting exit strategies on the table from the beginning in the spirit of partnership, transparency, commitment to results and maximising the value of investments made
- (iii) Working with the networks on strengthening monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment knowledge, skills and practices – enhancing the capacity of each as a 'learning organisation' able to apply lessons from experience to improve effectiveness and accountability. The LIFT monitoring and evaluation workshop for Myanmar on 16 March is a positive launching pad in this regard.
- (iv) Enhancing its role as an advocate for effective civil society partnership within the wider donor community, as well as with government ministries and departments, in areas such as:
  - gender mainstreaming
  - quality MEAL and its translation into organisational and performance improvement
  - creating shared impact through partnerships and networking
  - the value of funding credible local partners irrespective of whether they are formally registered
  - the next Myanmar national development strategy<sup>26</sup> as a potentially key focus for joint civil society network advocacy, and civil society / international community cooperation
  - good partnership practice based on local ownership, mutual respect and accountability and a shared focus on results
  - sharing good practice between national and international governmental and civil society counterparts
- (v) Sharing its own understanding of being a type of network - connecting multiple and diverse interests - with an associated understanding of network dynamics and issues.

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<sup>26</sup> Raised in interviews by NGO staff

## 4. Recommendations

### 4.1 Overview

The separate, and first, evaluation report on the three LIFT-funded networks sets out a number of recommendations that are specific to each of the networks concerned. In addition, some shared recommendations and areas of common interest were identified. These are drawn upon in the recommendations below.

The first two sets of recommendations are addressed to the three networks collectively, including with respect to the role they might potentially play as respected national entities within the broader civil society sector as a whole in Myanmar.

The third set of recommendations concerns LIFT's role as a member of the international community in Myanmar, leveraging off LIFT's role as a valued partner of the three networks and its credibility as a multi-donor body.

### 4.2 Recommendations to strengthen network effectiveness and sustainability

#### A. Recommendations to strengthen network effectiveness and sustainability

##### ***Recommendation 1: Balancing strategic priorities with flexibility***

Ensure that key network strategic direction and planning documents are kept under regular collective review, balancing "staying on the case" of long term systemic initiatives with retaining flexibility and resources to respond to emerging issues from among the membership/partners and wider national environment.

##### ***Recommendation 2: Developing institutional sustainability strategies***

Consider the development of a sustainability strategy early in the period of the current LIFT funding, with a view to expanding the proportion of the respective networks budget which are flexible; exploring programmatic rather than activity-based funding approaches with donors to reduce 'projectisation risk'; and developing approaches to maximise membership/partnering opportunities to contribute skills, experience and resources to network initiatives and decision-making.

##### ***Recommendation 3: Enhancing monitoring, evaluation and learning***

Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning through prioritisation internally within each network (including allocation of network resources and tapping into member/partner expertise and experience) as well as seeking ways to work together across the networks for mutual benefit. A priority in this regard should be to link into LIFT's 2015-2018 strategy commitment to strengthen its role as a knowledge platform. In line with this, LIFT has developed a Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning and Accountability (MEAL) framework and a three-pronged theory of change, as well as supporting the new Myanmar Monitoring and Evaluation Association launched on March 16, 2016.

In this context, and given the nature and focus of each of the networks, there should be particular attention to monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning in the areas of policy advocacy and process-related activity (a focus of much discussion and testing internationally), and the quality and impact of training (both within the networks and with other stakeholders). Such steps are timely and will be important aspects of supporting the implementation of Recommendation 1 above.

## **B. Recommendations on potential role of the LIFT-funded networks in exploring and promoting broader civil society sector capacity development initiatives**

Underpinning the following recommendations is an understanding that each network, and LIFT, stand to gain from broader civil society initiatives in a number of ways. These include a stronger locally driven and owned civil society within which national networks are able to promote and support civil society interests and perspectives more broadly through ‘home grown’ capacities and initiatives. The latter includes engagement with government at policy, strategy and programmatic levels. While the recommendations primarily focus on actions by the three networks themselves, the supportive role of LIFT as a partner is important and has been included where appropriate.

### ***Recommendation 4: Addressing staff recruitment and skills development gaps***

With respect to helping to ensure that the best possible staff are recruited for positions in the respective staff teams of the three LIFT-funded networks, consider collaborating with each other as well as with other relevant networks, to:

- (i) set-up a benchmarking study of CSO - NGO/INGO salaries/remuneration and employment packages in Myanmar
- (ii) research the development of cross-CSO training/learning for managers and leaders to help fill the gap in second tier management within organisations
- (iii) develop the skill base of financial managers; and
- (iv) identify and promote a common financial accounting package.

### ***Recommendation 5: Accessing mentoring by experienced civil society leaders***

The three-LIFT-funded networks to jointly initiate steps to deliberately tap into the depth of experience and wisdom available among Myanmar’s established national network leaders and resource people, including within their own networks, for the purpose of:

- (i) organisational mentoring and advice, and
- (ii) individual mentoring of emerging leaders and senior managers.

Such an initiative could ‘start small’ within the three networks, but be developed over time as a wider civil society mechanism, with appropriate funding support, ensuring that experience, insights, knowledge and skills flow between established and emerging leaders.

### ***Recommendation 6: Strengthening local capacity to support civil society development***

With respect to strengthening capacity within Myanmar’s civil society networks to address their own capacity development needs:

- (i) The three LIFT-funded networks to strengthen links with indigenous NGO support organisations, in particular to draw on locally-based resources, skills and experience for their own organisational development purposes
- (ii) LIFT to advocate for further prioritisation of international community support to indigenous NGO support organisations as a means to (i) strengthen civil society local ownership and capacities, and (ii) reduce external assistance dependence.

### ***Recommendation 7: Building understanding and knowledge of Myanmar civil society***

- (i) The three LIFT-funded networks to explore with national network counterparts the value of, and need to map current and existing civil society networks in order to identify trends, strengths, challenges and opportunities on which to build for future mutual support and collaboration purposes

- (ii) LIFT to act as an advocate within the international community in Myanmar for support for such an initiative, the outcome of which would inter alia provide a useful guide for targeting future cooperation.

***Recommendation 8: Promoting opportunities for civil society leadership training***

Particularly with a view to strengthening second tier leadership, which was identified by stakeholder feedback as a key gap across the sector, the three LIFT-funded networks:

- (i) to promote the mapping and assessment (strengths, specialties and suitability) of leadership training opportunities for Myanmar civil society, both those available within the country and those available internationally
- (ii) consider in dialogue with other network leaderships whether such opportunities adequately provide for current and projected future sector needs, or whether consideration of setting up a Myanmar based leadership training institute would be a viable option in the longer term. The latter would be dependent on the necessary international support and linkages for mutual benefit with similar initiatives in other relevant countries.
- (iii) LIFT to act as an advocate for such a study within the wider international community and encourage the necessary resourcing as a contribution to civil society sustainability and strengthening, helping to maximise the value of investments already made by a number of international agencies and NGOs.

**C. Recommendations on LIFT's role as member of international community**

As indicated in the three networks evaluation report, LIFT is valued by each of the networks as "more than a donor", being rather a partner which is open to negotiation and informal engagement. In addition to the LIFT references in the recommendations above, the further proposals are offered:

***Recommendation 9: LIFT as an advocate for value and role of networks***

In liaison with the three networks individually or collectively as appropriate, LIFT to take opportunities within international development community mechanisms in Myanmar to act as promoter/advocate in areas of vital interest to the networks such as:

- (i) gender mainstreaming
- (ii) quality MEAL and its translation into organisational and performance improvement
- (iii) creating shared impact through partnerships and networking
- (iv) the value of funding credible local partners irrespective of whether they are formally registered
- (v) being responsive/supportive to joint civil society network advocacy around the formulation of the next Myanmar National Development Strategy
- (vi) good partnership practice based on local ownership, mutual respect and accountability and a shared focus on results.

***Recommendation 10: Working with the networks in areas of institutional need***

Beyond formal reporting and consultation requirements, LIFT to be proactive in reaching out to the three networks to engage, advise and support in areas such as:

- (i) having early conversations on longer term sustainability issues and putting exit strategies on the table from the beginning in the spirit of partnership and commitment to results
- (ii) providing a sounding board as appropriate when network partners are facing issues which may affect their ability to deliver on LIFT-funded activities or more generally on wider network mandates.

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