



PROMOTING

*Equitable &
Accountable*

CiViC
Engagement

IN MYANMAR

The full report of the final external review of the PEACE project is available on request. Please direct requests to myanmar@helvetas.org



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Local Resource Centre



Promoting Equitable and Accountable Civic Engagement in Myanmar (also known as the PEACE project) was implemented from August 2016 to July 2020 by a three-member consortium: HELVETAS Intercooperation gGmbH, the Local Resource Centre (LRC), and the Partnership for Transparency Fund e.V. (PTF). Co-funding was provided by the European Union.

The PEACE project’s objective was to contribute to local civil society organisations’ (CSOs) participation and influence in the planning, implementation and review of development projects, services delivery and policies at national and sub-national levels for more inclusive and equitable development in Myanmar.

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Disclaimer:

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**PROMOTING EQUITABLE
AND ACCOUNTABLE
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN
MYANMAR**

Yangon, May 2020



FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

Financial contributions to the PEACE project (in Euro)	
European Union	1,499,414
Helvetas Intercooperation	563,764
Partnership for Transparency	73,257
Total	2,136,435

FOREWORD

The Delegation of the European Union in Myanmar engages very productively with the Government of Myanmar and our international partners to ensure effective coordination of international support to Myanmar's democratic transition. The success of Myanmar's democratic transition is determined, in large part, by the robust and respectful relationships developed between Government actors and the citizens of Myanmar.

The EU Delegation is proud to contribute almost 1.5 million Euro to the project entitled Promoting Equitable and Accountable Civic Engagement (PEACE) in Myanmar. Project partners, Helvetas, Partnership for Transparency Fund and the Local Resource Centre (LRC), have worked tirelessly to build stronger, more respectful relationships between government and civil society groups. This was achieved through a unique combination of training to develop the capacity of small civic groups, providing small grants, network-building and advocacy, and institution-building for LRC.

As expected, the PEACE project strengthened relationships between civic groups and government and increased the capacity of civic groups to engage constructively with government. What we did not expect was the scale and the scope of the outreach of the PEACE project to groups that had never before worked with international organisations, the increased visibility of vulnerable people and significant changes in the confidence and self-image of civil society organisations. This document shares some stories of the PEACE project's successes, addressing both expected and unexpected results. It also reflects on the lessons learned through the project.

I trust this report will inspire continued efforts towards a smooth transition to democracy in Myanmar.

Dr Johann Hesse

Head of Cooperation Section, European Union
Delegation to Myanmar
30 May 2020

What?

Promoting Equitable and Accountable Civic Engagement in Myanmar (also known as the PEACE project) helped civil society organisations (CSOs) in Myanmar to develop stronger relationships with national and sub-national levels of government and to make community voices heard.

Why?

Participating in and influencing the planning, implementation and review of development projects, service delivery and government policies, civil society organisations can better contribute to more inclusive and equitable development in Myanmar.

When?

The PEACE project was a four-year project. It started in August 2016 and concluded in July 2020.

Where?

The PEACE project operated from offices in Yangon, Mandalay, Lashio, Mawlamyine, Hpa-An, and Dawei to support civil society organisations working in Yangon region, Mandalay and Magway regions, Northern Shan state, Mon state, Kayin state and Tanintharyi region.

Who?

The PEACE project was implemented by a three-member consortium: HELVETAS Intercooperation gGmbH, the Local Resource Centre (LRC), and the Partnership for Transparency Fund e.V. (PTF). Co-funding was provided by the European Union. The project collaborated with 785 civil society organisations in Myanmar.

This document shares some of the PEACE project's successes. It also shows the lessons learned from the project. It is hoped that readers will be excited by these successes and apply the lessons learned to their own work.

The big questions

How?

The PEACE project delivered:

- 1. Training for civil society organisations.** Training addressed civic engagement such as anti-corruption, budget transparency, social accountability, conflict sensitivity and advocacy skills, as well as proposal writing, project cycle management and grant management, among other things.
- 2. A small grants program for civil society organisations.** Securing a grant meant that civil society organisations could practice what they were learning in training sessions.
- 3. Advocacy for civic engagement from villages, districts, states and regions to national level and back again.** Together, civil society organisations formed regional networks – and a national network - for civic engagement.
- 4. Strengthening the Local Resource Centre.** The Local Resource Centre is the leading non-government umbrella organisation in Myanmar. It focuses on developing and empowering civil society organisations in Myanmar. Strengthening the Local Resource Centre was important for ensuring the sustainability of the PEACE project's work.

So, why should I care about the PEACE project?

The PEACE project was a significant project with a budget of Euro 2,136,435

The PEACE project is relevant here and now in many ways.

- It is relevant to the social and political context of Myanmar
- The priorities of civil society organisations in Myanmar
- The plans and priorities of the government of Myanmar, and
- It has also adapted to variations across the seven regions which it served and in response to emergencies.

Social and political context

By promoting civic engagement, the PEACE project makes an important contribution towards Myanmar's transition towards democracy. The timing of the project aligned very well with the national general election of 2015. The PEACE project helped civil society organisations to work with newly elected politicians who were very eager to make a difference for their communities.

Plan and priorities of government of Myanmar

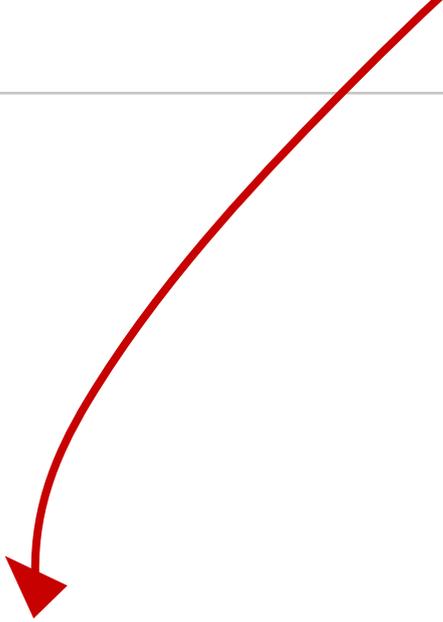
The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan (2018-2030) provides a framework for coordination and cooperation across all ministries, states and regions. Unlike other government strategies, this strategy is designed to achieve its aims through coordinated effort involving public entities, civic groups, as well as businesses. For example, strategy 1.5 seeks to "increase the ability of all people to engage with government". The PEACE project contributed significantly to this component of the government's strategy.

Priorities of civil society organisations

Civil society organisations regularly request access to money and more technical support. In particular, senior staff ask for training in organisational management, planning, financial and project management, and monitoring and evaluation. Through training and a small grants program, the PEACE project provided the very things that civil society organisations say they most want.

Adapting to regional variations and emergencies

Every region in Myanmar is different. The PEACE project was able to adapt to the different priorities of each region, first, by having staff located in the regions and, second, by supporting civil society organisations to develop their own ideas for projects with few restrictions. The PEACE project was also able to adapt to a global pandemic (COVID 19). The PEACE project helped grant recipients to adjust their ongoing projects and revise their timelines. In addition, almost Euro 60,000 was made available to respond quickly to the COVID 19 crisis through the Civic Engagement Networks formed with the help of the PEACE project.



OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

Ok. So tell me more...

Training for civil society organisations

Altogether, about 1,000 people from civil society organisations joined training activities. Around 50 people from different regions were trained as 'core trainers'. LRC then supported these people to deliver 'multiplier' training in their own communities. Training was very well-received by participants and resulted in clear gains in skills and sometimes also accompanying changes in behaviour and attitude. Participants most appreciated learning about financial management, project cycle management and proposal writing. The success of training activities was increased by the project partners showing flexibility in how to design and deliver training as well as the physical presence of trained trainers in all regions where the project operated. Challenges were experienced in providing sufficiently comprehensive training and assuring the quality of training.

Small grants program

Altogether, 179 grants were allocated to 139 organisations over three years. One-third (33%) of grant recipients had never received a grant before. Most grants were between Euro 1,000 and Euro 14,000. The average grant was just under Euro 3,000. Grants were generally spent over seven months. Bigger grants were progressively made available after a mid-term review of the project. The grant selection process was well-conceived; it included diverse voices and was rigorous and transparent. Inviting government to join the grant selection process helped to build shared community and government ownership of local projects. Grant recipients reported

feeling empowered. Some challenges arose because supporting inexperienced grant recipients to manage their grants is time-consuming and intensive. Other challenges arose because some unsuccessful grant recipients became demotivated.

Advocacy for civic engagement

Networks for civic engagement were established in every region with clear terms of reference. As at May 2020, 287 organisations had joined a network. Shared advocacy agendas were created, with space for new issues to emerge locally. Regional networks were represented in, and supported by, a national network for civic engagement. Links between local, regional and national priorities were clear. The LRC is skilled in linking regional concerns to national and international opportunities. Many of the powerful stories of successful local advocacy address issues that fall outside the formal agenda for advocacy.

Strengthening the Local Resource Centre

LRC is stronger and bigger as a result of the PEACE project. LRC is a preferred partner of international non-government organisations and since the PEACE project began, LRC has observed a big increase in the number of requests for collaboration with government and international actors. LRC's capacities have improved, especially in terms of financial and human resource management, project management, grant management, and monitoring and evaluation. Helvetas and the Partnership for Transparency Fund have significantly contributed to strengthening LRC.



THE PEACE PROJECT was very ambitious. Even so, results achieved by the PEACE project extend far beyond the plans of the project partners and the expectations of the EU Delegation to Myanmar.

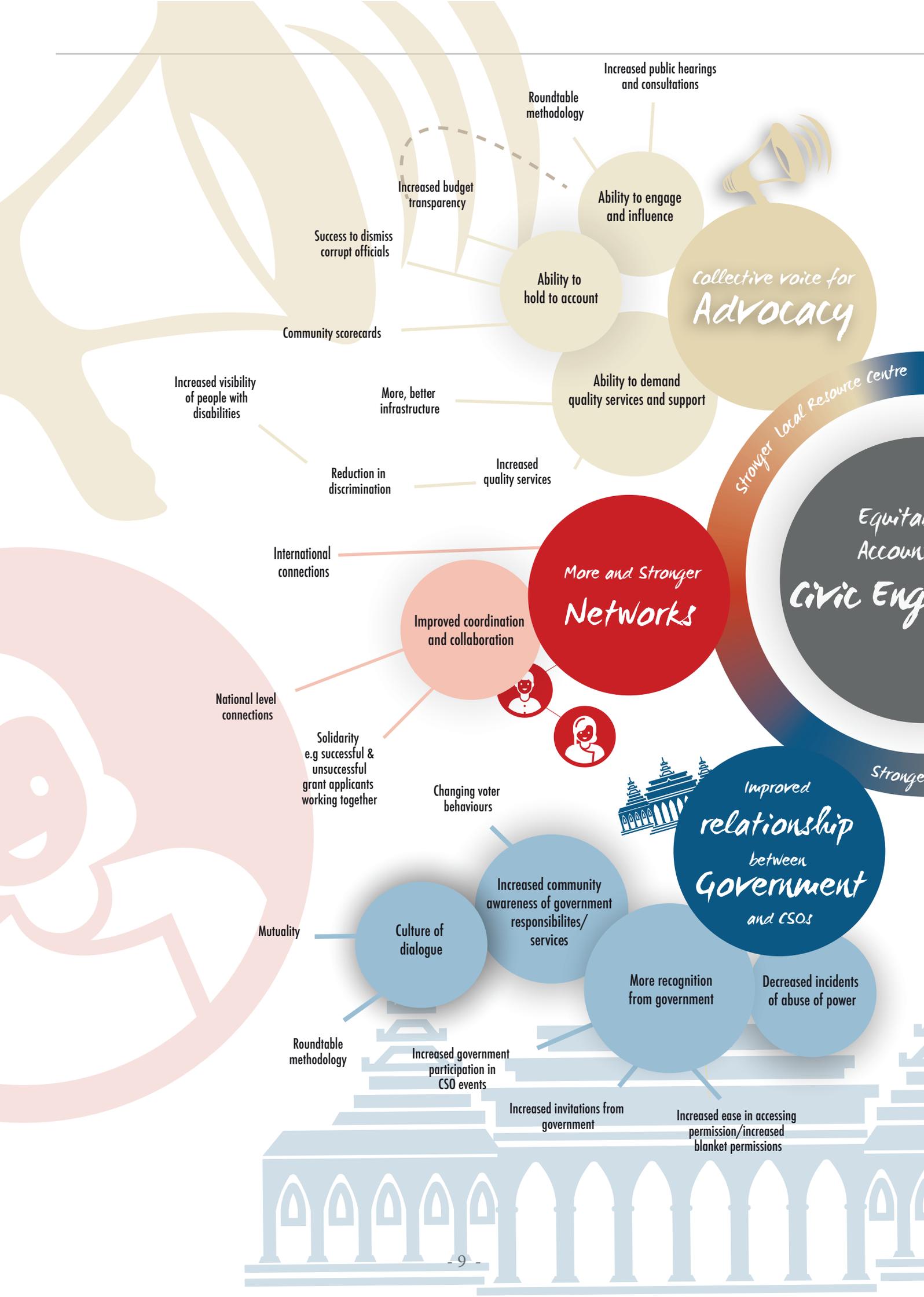


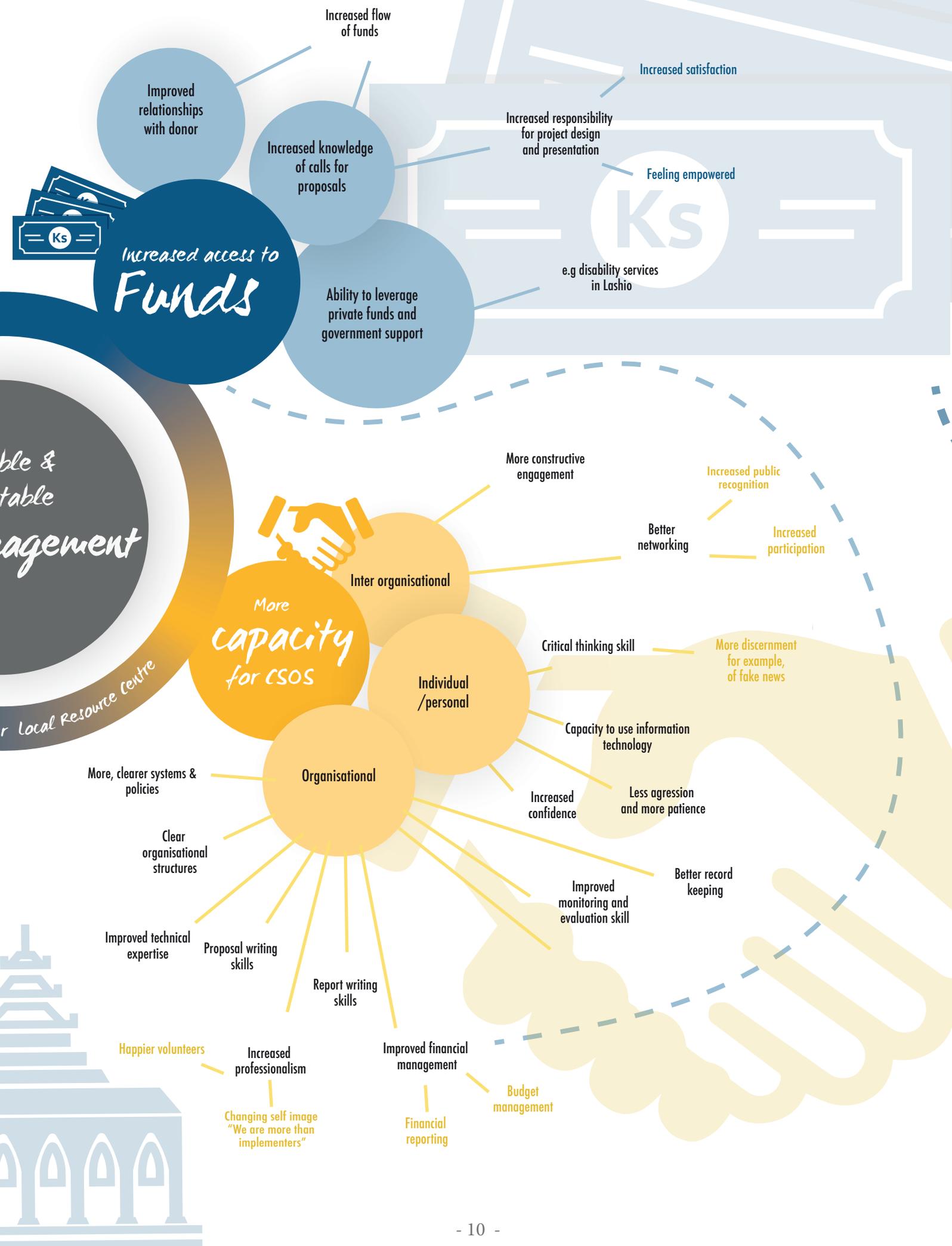
Ms. Anouk Van Neck, Programme Officer, EU Delegation to Myanmar

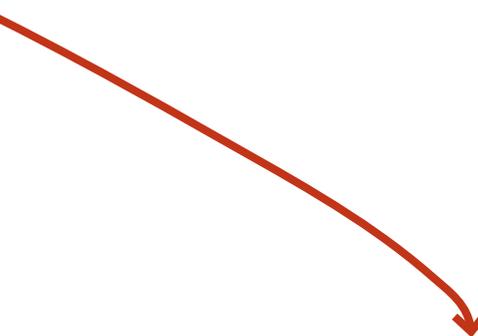
An evaluation of the PEACE project asked participants about the most significant changes they had seen in their communities. The reported changes are shown here in a mind map. Important changes are spread across five themes:

1. Improved relationships between government and civil society organisations
2. More capacity for civil society organisations
3. Increased access to funds for civil society organisations
4. More and stronger networks among civil society organisations and
5. Collective voices for advocacy.

A sixth change, a stronger LRC, underpins all other changes achieved by the project.







Sure, but will it matter in the long term?

The changes that resulted from the PEACE project are likely to be enduring.

This is because the changes have occurred at different levels in ways that reinforce each other.

Individuals

Individuals who are members of civic groups have more skills and knowledge and confidence. Even if they move to another area, they still bring their skills and knowledge and confidence with them to new communities and they can find other ways to apply their skills and knowledge.

Organisations

Civil society organisations, as a whole, are stronger: They have more effective systems and structures and processes. CSOs had the opportunity to put new skills and knowledge into practice by accessing a small grant. Applying new skills and knowledge is a good way to ensure that they are retained.

But in the end, organisations are made up of individuals. Even if these organisations do not endure, the people who are inside those organisations retain the knowledge of how to work with others using good systems, structures and processes.

Relationships and networks

Civil society organisations strengthened their relationships with government. Relationships are based on trust. Relationships are, by nature, more enduring than funded activities.

Civil society organisations are networked together in civic engagement networks both regionally and nationally. Network members are strong, but together, they are even stronger.

Supports and resources

Skilled and experienced trainers are located in the regions. They will continue to serve as a resource to their communities.

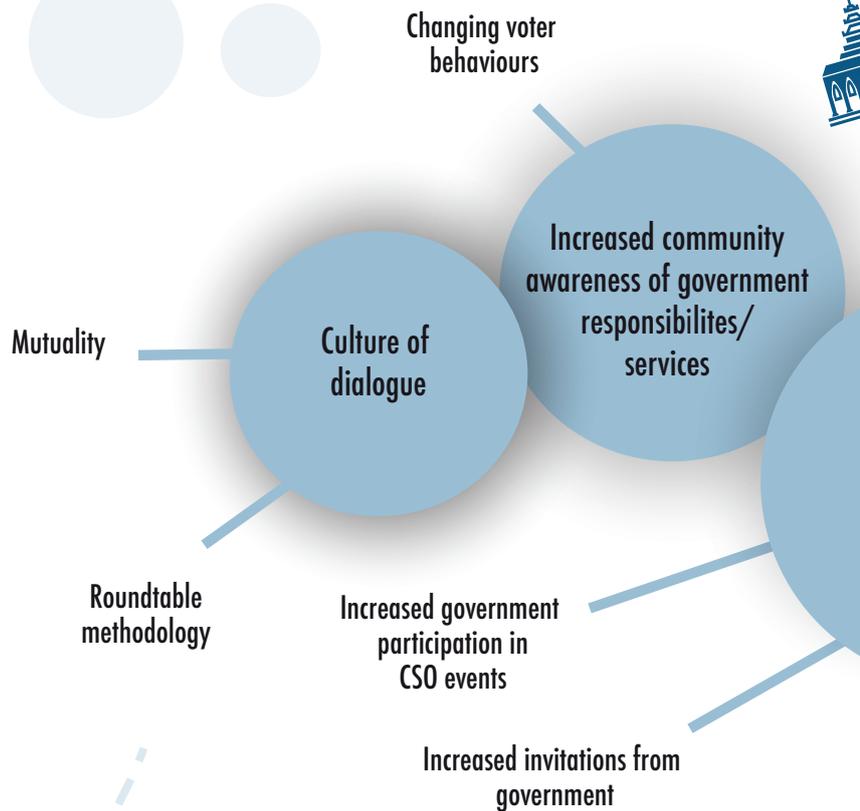
Finally, the LRC is stronger. This means that the LRC is better able to develop and empower civil society organisations in Myanmar into the future.

An enabling environment

While civil society organisations can accomplish a lot on their own, their success depends on having adequate space to operate. The government of Myanmar can ensure that space remains available for civil society. Along with individuals and businesses, government can also ensure that resources are available for civic action.



Civic Engagement training



TWO STORIES from civil society organisations in Magway and Mandalay shows how the PEACE project contributed to improving relationships between government and civil society.

We love roundtables

In Magway, there are many public hearings. Every week, these occur. But at the advocacy training delivered by the PEACE project, we learned a new technique called roundtable discussion. It is different from public hearings. We like it very much because it is an effective way to support community members to engage with government and technical experts. We can express our views very clearly at these events. We organised a roundtable discussion with police, a lawyer, a sex worker, and a doctor together. After this, discrimination of sex workers decreased in the community.

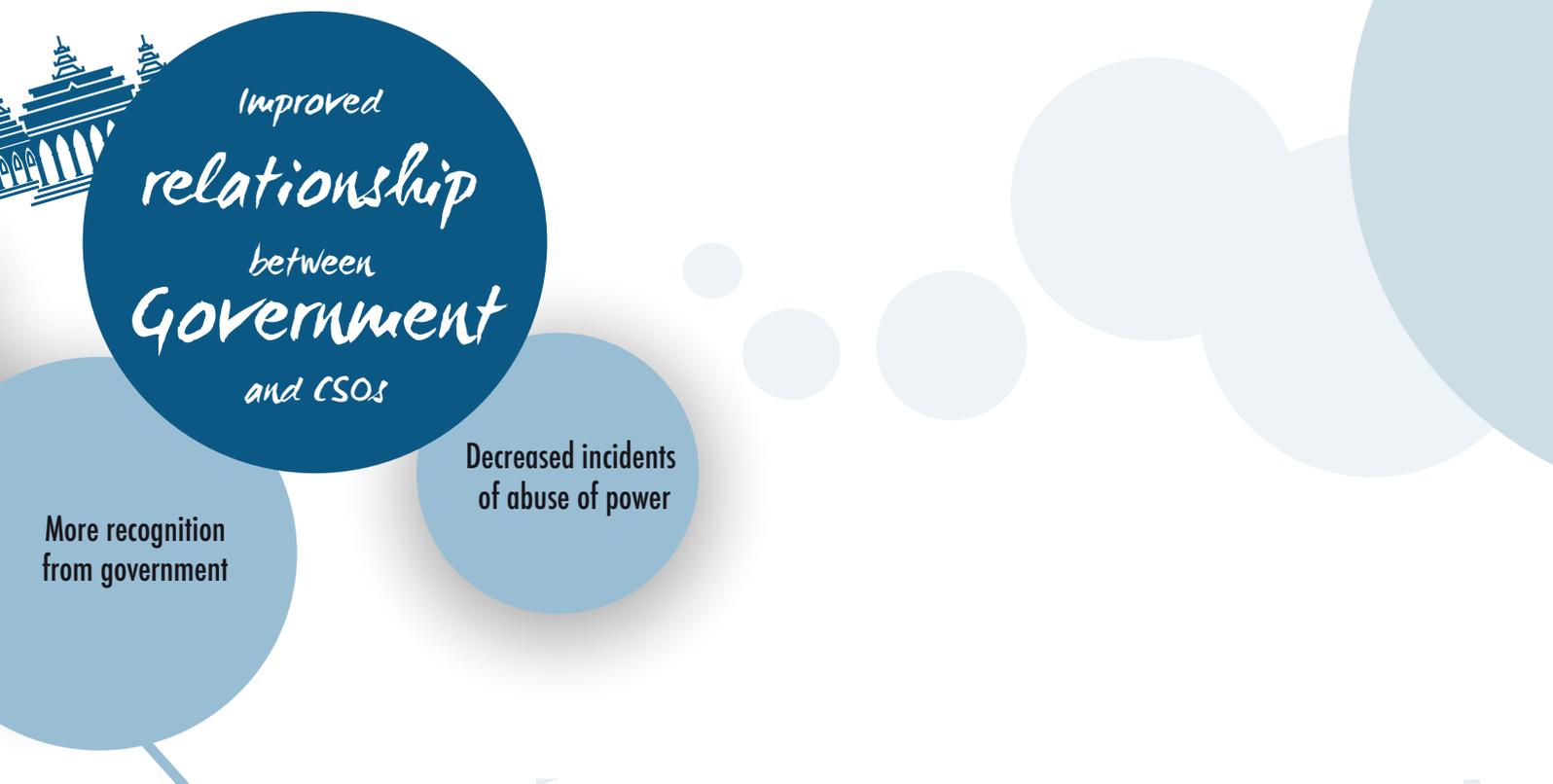
We had another roundtable discussion about gender-based violence. We brought a lawyer to the village and gave community members an opportunity to ask questions to the lawyer for free(!) Community members learned that they have enough skills to consult a legal expert.

Before the PEACE project, we did not know about roundtable discussions and there was no opportunity to access funds to run a roundtable discussion. No chance. No money.

Now we know what to do and we know how to get money for our ideas. The process of making a roundtable is simple. First, we decide the place, date and panellists. We have to design the table so there is equal representation from government, community and other. We try to bring government and community together, but it depends on the topic whether the government will participate. For sure, our elected politicians will participate, even if government officials do not.

Once the details are agreed, we announce it to public. We can just do it, no need for approval.

CSOs in Magway



Improved
relationship
between
Government
and CSOs

More recognition
from government

Decreased incidents
of abuse of power

Increased ease in accessing
permission/increased
blanket permissions

Government standing up for civil society

The regional government based in Mandalay directed the township-level General Administration Department (GAD) officials to cancel an event that we had planned at township level in association with the campaign, 16 days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. However, township GAD officials defied the order on account of their good relationship and trust with us. GAD organised directly with police, members

of parliament and other government departments (justice and education) so that we could continue with the event. And GAD took full responsibility for managing any potential fallout with the regional level government. They really stood up for us!

CSOs in Mandalay



TWO STORIES, one from Mon State and one from Northern Shan, show how the PEACE project developed collective voices for advocacy.

Budget Transparency in Mon State

Mon State is leading the union with its good practices in budget transparency. We are lucky that the budget director for the Mon Hluttaw was trained (in Yangon) in the importance of budget transparency and he was already committed to improving budget transparency even before he came to Mon State.

Because of the PEACE project, we now have the skills and knowledge to work with him and his team. We are also trying to push for more budget transparency – and we feel relief that now we have a listening ear in the regional government.

Mon is the only state in the union that has public consultations about the approved budget. These consultations are led jointly by the budget department and public accounts committee, that is, by the executive and legislative branches of government together. These consultations involve explaining

to the public about what will be spent and by whom, based on the approved budget. Civil society organisations are invited to join these events and monitor implementation of the approved budget. Because of the training on budget transparency that we accessed through the PEACE Project, we recognise how important it is to join ... and we can ask good questions.

There is also media coverage of these events. Recently, the Mon State Parliament has invited LRC to lead a community consultation on the 2020 budget. This is good news for us because LRC can and does help us to engage more fully in the budget process.

Civic Engagement Network members, Mon state

IN NORTHERN SHAN the capacity of disabled people to organise themselves, secure funding, build partnerships with government and win major successes in advocacy and access has been simply outstanding. This is their story:

The disabled persons' organisation was established in Lashio in 2017 and we were quickly able to access a grant from the PEACE project. Since that time, the organisation has achieved many successes from increasing access to services, reducing government corruption, leveraging private monies, strengthening relationships with government and overall, increasing the visibility of people with disabilities in public spaces. Learning about advocacy through the PEACE project was a real turning point for us.

First, we are able to communicate well with government officials: We can collect and share information with government about the status of disabled persons in our community. Villagers are collecting information about the number of disabled people in villages to strengthen our advocacy work. Using the information we collected, we were successful in getting wheelchair-accessible ramps installed to the local school and hospital. Because of this, parents of children with disabilities are more aware that their disabled children can be in public, go to school and access health services. Some schools are ready to accept children who have disabilities.

Now, we are advocating for schools to further improve their access to disabled children. We have made a connection with a private donor who is willing to donate funds to ensure that schools are accessible to all, specifically by building toilets in schools for children with disabilities who use wheelchairs.

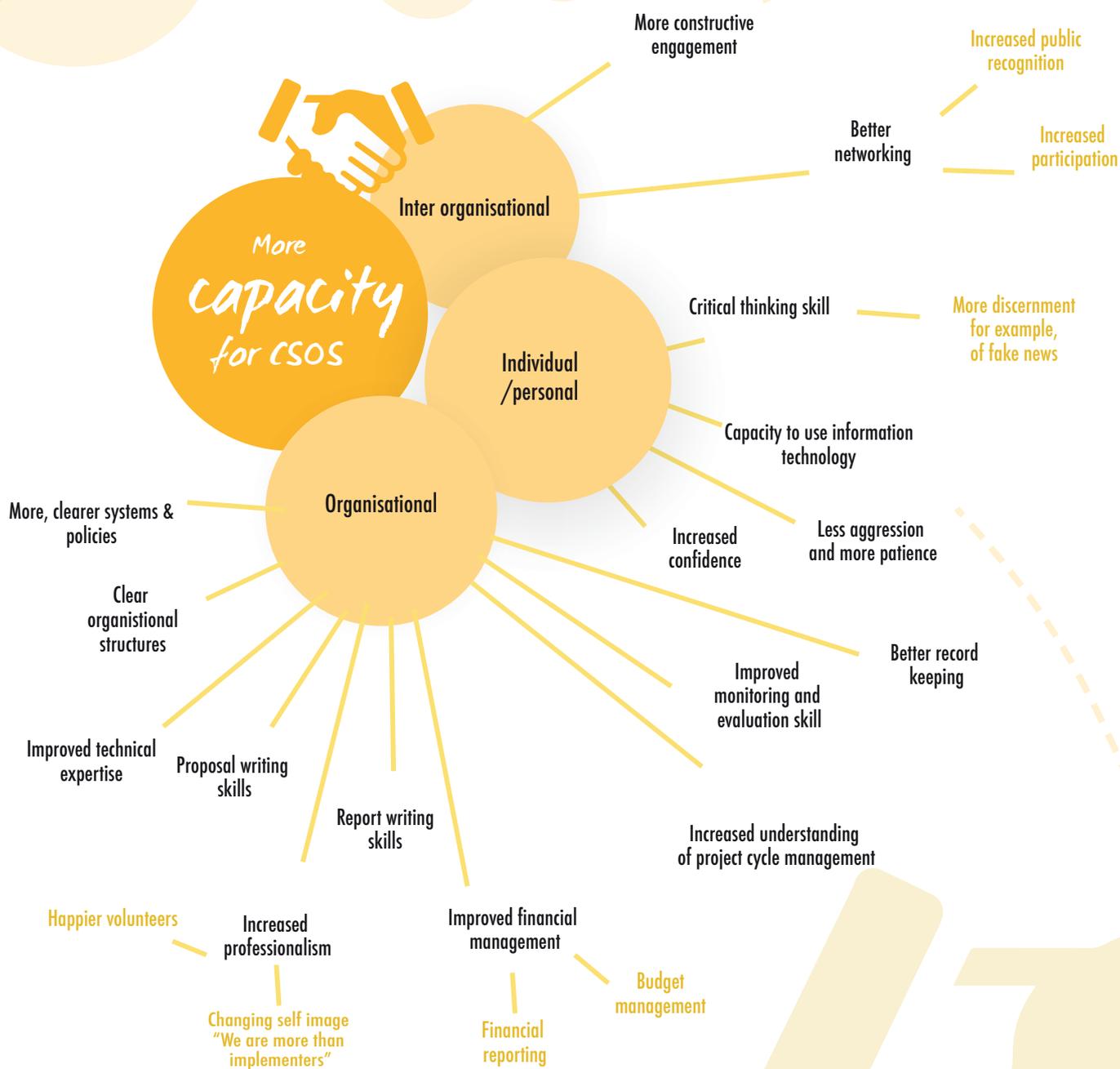
The Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Health and Sport are each building new premises in our region. GAD has directed that these new government buildings be accessible to all. This is one of the results from our advocacy efforts. We are happy that GAD sees the importance of this for themselves now.

The government supports us a lot. The government provides a space for us to have an office inside a government compound. The government also supports us with other in-kind donations, such as the donation of five wheelchairs to distribute to people with disabilities in our community.

We went to Taunggyi to visit the Minister for Culture in the State Parliament. We wanted to advocate for improving disability access in our region. The people with disabilities participated directly in the advocacy process. Through this meeting, we learned that some funds from the regional parliament were intended to be issued to people with disabilities, but we knew that the funds never arrived. We found that there were a series of bribes and corruption that prevented the funds that were destined for people with disabilities from arriving. After our meeting with him, the Minister for Culture immediately informed to government officials that he was aware of this corruption and that it had to stop. He directed officials to provide more support to people with disabilities.

We are proud of all of our efforts. We did this! We pushed them. We strongly believe that the government would not have changed had we not pushed them. And it is really good to see that people with disabilities now feel more entitled to use public services and spaces. Government services are for people with disabilities too!

A disability organisation, Northern Shan





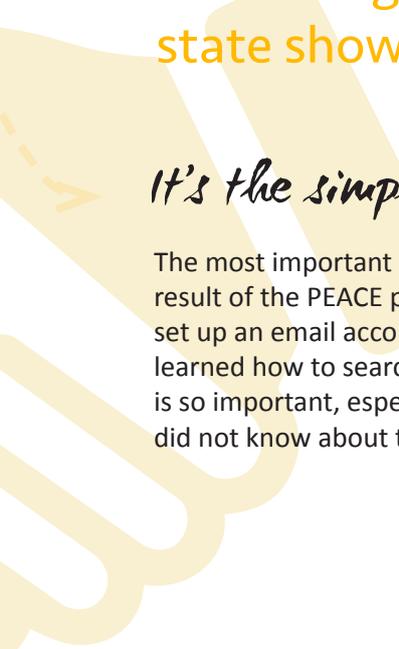
A CHANGE OF HEART – or approach – can transform our relationships, as this story from Kayin state shows.

The most significant change in Kayin State is our engagement tactics. I was formerly a political prisoner. I only knew about antagonistic activism. We would go on strike and argue. That was all I knew how to do. But now I have learned that we can engage with government and I have learned new techniques for doing that. Through the PEACE project, we received advocacy training. We learned about constructive engagement. It inspired us to look for more information and more partners to help us learn. And we connected to the Open Myanmar Initiative which also helped us to learn.

Now in my organisation, I am the strongest advocate for building trust with the government. I think we need to register our organisations and share our plans and budgets with government. It sets a good role model. You have to give trust to get trust.

Former political prisoner from Kayin State

INCREASING THE CAPACITY of civil society organisations means supporting individuals to learn and grow, strengthening organisations with their structures, systems and policies, as well as helping different organisations to work together effectively. Simple things can sometimes make a big difference as this story from Northern Shan state shows.

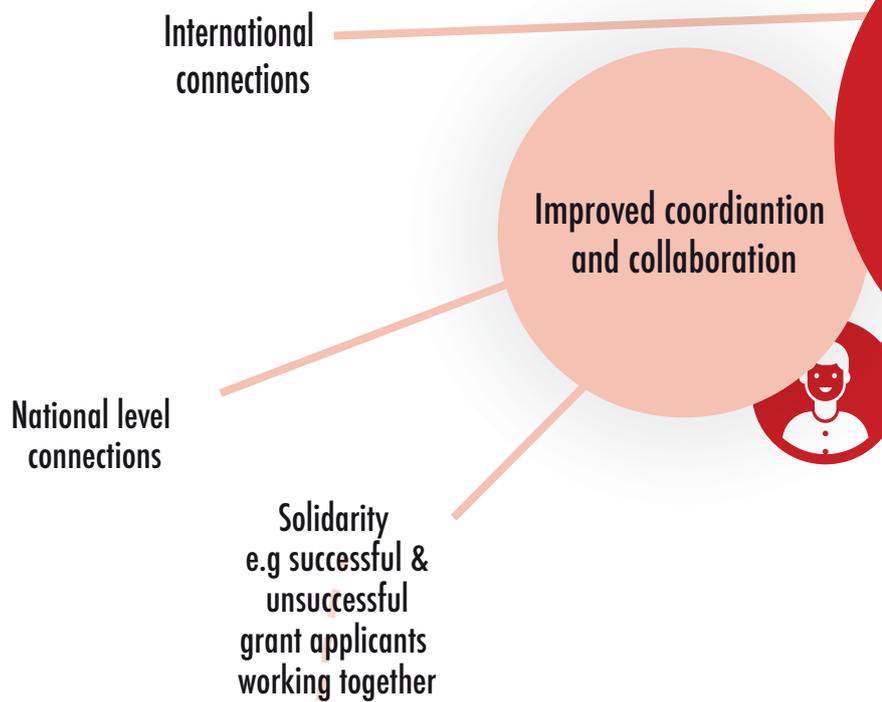


It's the simple things

The most important change that happened for us as a result of the PEACE project is that we learned how to set up an email account and send an email. We also learned how to search for information using Google. It is so important, especially for the women who mostly did not know about this before. Now we can be so

much more effective. We can contact 509 villages at once. And we can be in contact with the government officials via email.

Northern Shan CSOs



HERE ARE SOME STORIES from the networks created through the PEACE project.

Regional network in Thanintharyi

Our regional civic engagement network is strong even though it is still only new. In less than one year, we grew to be about 40 members in our network. And others who are not full members as yet join us too. We started with 21 members. So our growth – in numbers and strength – is very rapid.

We have parallel workstreams – on one hand, we have a watchdog function and we closely monitor the government, and on the other hand, we have constructive engagement and dialogue with government. It is a sophisticated approach. LRC is supporting us with technical skills for this work. Already, our network has built international connections. We have been able to reach out to the ASEAN people’s forum in Bangkok and to participate in the human rights forum in Indonesia.

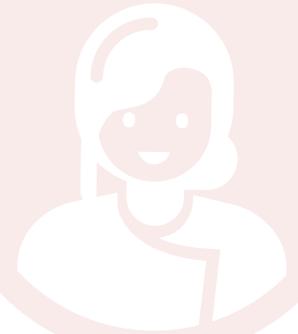
We also have good national connections: The national level development effectiveness conference was held in Nay Pyi Taw in December 2019. The State

Counsellor and Prime Minister attended. We were able to participate in this too.

One of our network members is personally invited to join an election watch mechanism at union-level. This invitation is like a recognition of the strength of civil society in our region. Civil society IS very strong here. Do you know that we could put the chief minister of this region in jail in 2017? It was because of his corruption. We complained directly to the president. We were very careful and we kept confidences very closely while we were planning and executing this complaint. Also because of our complaint and our advocacy, two of the cronies of our former chief minister, leaders from the private sector, were also jailed for their involvement in the chief minister’s corrupt practices. Government should heed the lesson to work with integrity.

Civic Engagement Network members, Thanintharyi

More and Stronger Networks

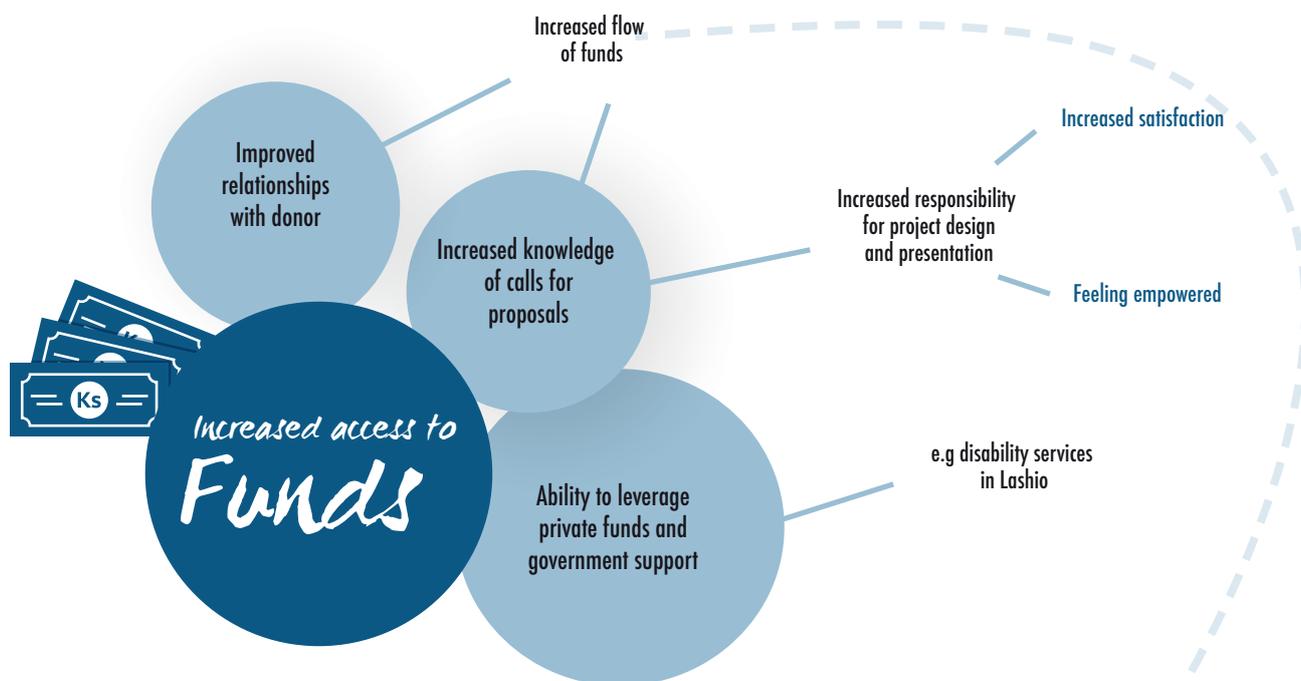


collaborating to follow the rule of law

The Enabling Legal Environment Working Group (ELE-WG) was created at a national civil society conference in 2013 attended by about 200 civil society organisations. ELE-WG successfully advocated for the Association Registration Law 2014. Now, ELE-WG seeks to monitor the implementation of the Association Registration Law 2014, among other things. The Association Registration Law 2014 allows for CSOs to register voluntarily with the government; it is widely regarded as among the best such laws in southeast Asia. However, challenges are experienced with the consistent implementation of the law.

The effectiveness of the Enabling Legal Environment Working Group increased significantly through the PEACE project. Members of ELE-WG include members of other civic engagement networks established through the PEACE project, as well as grantees. The ELE-WG found that, after receiving training and grants,

members and their local colleagues were better able to document the extent and nature of challenges in the implementation of the law as well as contribute to planning for further advocacy. On the strength of evidence collected, ELE-WG commissioned a more complete impact assessment (funded by the British Council, with support from the PEACE project) and produced a guidebook containing advice about how to register. The guidebook is a major success of the ELE-WG. It has proven helpful for government officials and civil society organisations alike to follow the rule of law.



ONE INDICATOR of the strength and effectiveness of civil society organisations is that they are more successful in attracting funds to do their work.

From zero to eight

Our group, the Legal Knowledge Sharing Group, was founded in 2017 in Mandalay. We are interested in legal reform. We were happy that we got the first grant for which we applied. This grant came from the PEACE project in 2018; we secured a medium grant of 8,249,700 Myanmar kyat (Euro 5000). Since then, we have grown from strength to strength. We have accessed seven more grants from different sources since 2018. We have practised writing proposals and now we are quite skilled at this. To have secured eight grants in two years is amazing. Our grants have come from organisations like Paung Koo, Gender

Equality Network, Equality Myanmar, and Thar Thi Myay Foundation. Having this success with fundraising means that we can employ three paid staff. We also have seven volunteers, five of whom who are experienced lawyers.

U Thwin Ko Ko Latt, Legal Knowledge Sharing Group

CONCLUSION

Overall, the PEACE project was very successful. Its scope, scale and outreach make it impressive, as does the wide range of positive and unexpected impacts. It is unusual for a project to reach so many diverse civil society organisations, including in remote areas, with the budget like the PEACE project had.

To summarise the key successes:

- Training was wide-ranging. International and national expertise was accessed to train the core trainers. Trainers were able to 'multiply' the training in regional areas.
- A well-conceived small grants program enabled civil society organisations to apply what they learned in training. Funded projects also provided a foundation for advocacy work.
- Civil society organisations came together to form networks for powerful and evidence-based advocacy work.
- The LRC, as a leading umbrella organisation for CSOs in Myanmar, was supported to grow stronger. This means that LRC is better able to provide support to CSOs into the future.

The project partners experienced two main challenges in their work:

- Delivering training to sufficient depth and assuring the quality of training in regional areas.
- Managing the large number of grants was intense and time-consuming, and made more challenging by having many inexperienced grant recipients.

Like all projects, many things have been learned along the way. Here, the project partners share advice about how to conduct a successful project to promote social accountability in Myanmar.

Key principles for success

- Invest in developing good relationships and shared understandings among the partners at the beginning of the project
- Plan for high levels of regional variation
- Recognise that 'working with government' means different things to different people in different areas
- Plan different interventions and strategies for elected politicians, government officials and other branches of government, as applicable (because one size cannot fit all)
- Recognise that one-off training is unlikely to be sufficient; plan ahead for follow up/refresher courses, and set up peer support for trainees, communities of practice, mentoring or coaching services, online reinforcement of learning, or other similar things.
- Give attention to the production of high-quality resource materials such as documentation of curriculum. This is an important contribution to the sustainability of project outcomes.
- When using a competitive process to distribute small grants, develop strategies for engaging unsuccessful grant applicants
- Include storytelling in monitoring and evaluation frameworks, wherever the opportunity arises