



**PROVISION FOR POST-PROJECT EVALUATIONS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS  
DEMOCRACY FUND  
Contract NO.PD:C0110/10**

**EVALUATION REPORT**



**UDF-MYA-07-180 Deepening democratization processes through youth  
leadership in Myanmar**

**Date: 2 October 2011**











## I. Executive Summary

### (i) *The project*

The project “*Deepening democratization processes through youth leadership*” set out to “foster a culture of youth leadership and debate to address the knowledge gaps by providing information and capacity to engage with local authorities around community entitlements, and to develop leadership potential.” It aimed to do this as an integral part of a broader initiative that had established a „youth fellowship” of young men and women (average age 25 years). The UNDEF-supported component of this broader vision aimed to identify new youth fellows, train them in leadership and concepts of democracy and governance, and prepare them to lead development projects in their communities. This was done through both formal training and field „placements” with local grassroots organizations.

The 130 trained youth fellows were supported through the fellowship network, including meetings at local and state levels, and by more than 400 youth volunteers identified during community „reflect circles” that the fellows facilitated. Together, the fellows and volunteers led and established a large number of development projects within the communities, ranging from pig rearing to the building of early education centres.

An add-on research component aimed to provide new knowledge on areas of community concern. Planned training of journalists and the development of a website proved not to be possible in the political climate in Myanmar and were replaced by the production of a series of newsletters for the fellows and for broader dissemination.

During implementation of the project, two significant events prompted minor modifications of the planned activities: Cyclone Negriz hit Myanmar in May 2009 and rescue and reconstruction became priority activities for the youth fellows and communities in affected areas. The first multi-party election in November 2010 also, at least temporarily, opened up spaces for dialogue with various ministries at technical level but also meant rescheduling of partner meetings because mass gatherings were not allowed.

### (ii) *Evaluation Findings*

The project was highly **relevant** in a country where young people, in particular, have been disenfranchised and disempowered in their own communities, and where tensions among different ethnic groups have constructed obstacles for young people’s cooperation and joint action.

The model chosen – creating a „fellowship” of trained young people, supported by youth volunteers and „placed” in communities where they will lead development projects and so position themselves as community leaders and representatives, is ideally suited to both produce the expected outcomes and also lay the groundwork for potential future representation at national level.

The project activities maintained a suitable balance between training and community

The project **far exceeded its own expectations**, reaching more than 100,000 people through project activities. All the indicators show this: there were more fellows, more meetings more research projects, more newsletters and more community groupings („reflect



**(iii) Recommendations**

AAM might:

*f*

II.

authoritarian regime for half a century, with a top-down political culture and processes that

### III. Project objectives, strategy and implementation

**(i) Logical framework**

TRAINING AND YOUTH FORUMS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xTraining of „youth fellows in development, participatory methodologies and change processes, followed by placement of fellows in the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>x30 youth fellows trained and placed in communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership capacity of young people grows and they become active in communities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>xAdvanced leadership training for existing fellows</li> <li>xLeadership capacity-building of village leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>x100 youth fellows capacity is upgraded to allow them to lead youth forums and take principal roles in youth leadership</li> <li>xVillage leader networks are formed and functioning</li> <li>xNetwork meetings are held</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities are mobilized around youth and village leader networks at different levels</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>x Training for community volunteers</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people ± youth fellows, volunteers ±are mobilized, equipped and supported by informed communities to promote democratic practices to strengthen community participation and support the preparation of political transition.</li> </ul>

**(ii) Project approach**

The project was designed and implemented within a broader, ongoing AAM initiative to develop and support youth “fellows,” youth leaders and village leaders to drive change processes through development and dialogue. The establishment and facilitation of networks among these mobilized groups is further supported by ongoing training and the commissioning of research studies that are used to focus discussion within the communities and to underpin dialogue with national authorities.

This particular component of the ongoing initiative originally also included a media component, involving a known media group publishing approximately five articles based on the work/research, however during implementation this was replaced with the publication of a number of newsletters for dissemination among the youth participants. AAM was already working with a number of youth fellows when the UNDEF activities began, and the up-

organization used different criteria to identify and select the youth fellows, however, common criteria that all partners set were:

- f* University graduate (to allow use of English), although this was sometimes given lower priority in cases where the person was highly involved in community development activities;
- f* Commitment to work in rural development for at least two years;
- f* Likelihood that the person would be respected by the communities;
- f* Good communication and social skills to allow penetration into the communities;
- f* Ability to establish pro-active relationships with the authorities;
- f* Ability to establish respectful relationships with faith leaders of all religions and provide potential support back to the partner organizations.

The youth fellows received an initial six weeks of training in leadership and community development before being allocated a two-month field placement under the supervision of the local organization and project management team. Follow-up training lasted four weeks and focused on lessons learned during the placements, rights and power, technical skills and work planning. The fellows then returned to their communities to begin work with “reflect circles.” The community assignments lasted an indefinite period, depending on the availability of the fellow. Most fellows stayed in the communities for a year, although some stayed longer.

During implementation of the project, a number of significant events prompted necessary responses in line with the planned strategy: Cyclone Negriz hit Myanmar in May 2009 and dealing with its aftermath became a priority rescue and then development activit(he)3(n)-15F(t)-4( )-156

## IV. Evaluation Question Answers and Findings

### *(i) Relevance*

#### *f Appropriate, timely actions*

In a country where for more than half a century people – especially young people – have been disenfranchised and disempowered, this was an appropriate action, carefully planned to work within remaining restrictions and designed not to create conflict or controversy but legitimate grassroots-level processes that further the attainment of people's rights without putting them at unnecessary risk. Its design as part of a broader, longer-term undertaking means that it is embedded in processes that already have legitimacy among both communities and authorities. The UNDEF-supported component of this larger undertaking was particularly timely, also, because it coincided with the calling of multi-party elections for the first time in five decades and provided a forum for vital education on voters' rights and participatory processes.

#### *f Intelligent balance between training and community activities*

- f* Cultivated land development
- f* Road renovation
- f* Bridge construction and renovation
- f* Hydropower construction
- f* Construction of electric power lines
- f* Village youth libraries
- f* Gravity water flow projects
- f* Water pond construction and renovation
- f* Primary and nursery school construction
- f* Child night study groups
- f* Early childhood care programmes
- f* Adult literacy projects
- f* Building of sanitary facilities.

*f* **Good integration of gender**

From the outset, the project design aimed to maintain appropriate gender balance and to ensure that women participated fully in the project. This is especially important in grassroots actions where women as leaders are not the norm in some parts of Myanmar.

Of the 130 youth fellows involved in the project, 64 were women. Importantly, images of women leading workshops, taking the microphone in forums and participating equally in the project's actions were included in newsletters and other publications. One newsletter was formally devoted to discussion of women's rights.

One possible omission was in the selection of research topics, where a gendered analysis of community concerns might have thrown up alternative ideas for topics of study.

**(ii) Effectiveness**

*f* **Strong project implementation structure**

One of the strengths of the project was the well structured and managed partnerships involved. Although AAM kept oversight of all elements of the project, implementation – including decision making and prioritization – was fully devolved to grassroots partners. Although the frequency of partner consultations was adversely affected by the calling of national elections (when large-group meetings were potentially risky), there was regular





### **(iii) Efficiency**

#### **f Appropriate balance in structure and budget**

(See above on implementation structure). There was an appropriate balance between the activities undertaken at central (AAM) level and actions at community level, and the budget was both designed and managed to facilitate this.

Resources intended to cover media training and website development were diverted (with UNDEF approval) to the publication of six “Fellowship Newsletters” covering: Fellows and the fellowship programme; Environment and climate change; Youth volunteerism; Disaster risk reduction; Women’s rights; and Youth volunteerism in emergency response. This was an appropriate use of the funds.

### **(iv) Impact**

#### **f Change agents active on the ground**

The major impact of this (and the broader) AAM project is the success of the “fellowship,” which has seen more than 100 trained youth fellows become real agents for change in their communities. The fact that they have been able to attract the support of more than 400 youth volunteers, and that “reflect circle” processes and other forums for consultation have been established around them means that their personal commitment has a broader support base and is more likely both to have a positive impact and also be sustainable.

#### **f Phased identification and training of fellows**

This project involved both the training of a new contingent of fellows and the more advanced training of fellows already active. This progressive introduction of new fellows to the fellowship bodes well both for impact (by extending the pool of fellows and so the outreach) and also sustainability, since some fellows will inevitably move on to further education, work, family life etc. As a result of this phasing, the ages of the fellows involved in the UNDEF-supported work ranged from early 20s to late 30s (with one fellow in the 40s); although they were not all, therefore, officially “youth” fellows, this age range is an inevitable (and not





## VI. Recommendations

### (i) For AAM:

*f* **Consider bringing in a gender specialist at project design stage** to suggest ways in which a clear commitment to women's participation and gender sensitivity can be translated across the range of project actions and outputs. Although the project design aimed to maintain appropriate gender balance and to ensure that women participated fully in the project and there was appropriate attention to gender balance in the selection of fellows for training, for example, gender is not always integrated into all the project components (for example research).

*f* **Re-think the research component of the broader project**, and in particular consider how different types of research might be used to deliver different project outcomes. Where academic research is useful to initiate policy dialogue with the authorities, for example, action-research can provide the opportunity for capacity building of the fellows and can also be a useful tool in deciding, designing and promoting community initiatives.

*f* **Make sure that documentation does not under-sell the processes** or outcomes of projects. Apart from the obvious advantage of documenting all that has happened for internal use, clearly identifying outputs, outcomes and also lessons-learned is useful for attracting ongoing donor support and for underpinning future project design and implementation.

### (ii) For UNDEF:

*f* There is a **clear space for UNDEF in Myanmar**, a country where many agencies and organizations still find it difficult to work. The key is articulating UNDEF's mandate and activities in terms that will allow project activity, and this of course requires careful selection of implementing partners in-country. AAM has manoeuvred sensitivities well and might be a reliable future partner.

*f*

## VII. Overall assessment and closing thoughts

The project "*Deepening democratization processes through youth leadership*" is an example of what can be achieved when projects are designed and implemented by an implementing organization that has a longer-term vision and a clear country strategy.

This project could not have achieved what it set out to do had it been an isolated, 24-month activity, for a number of reasons ranging from the need to have a strong partnership structure to the imperative of identifying and phasing in youth fellows and placing them in communities where the real "proof" of leadership needs to be demonstrated in concrete actions and outputs.

The outcomes of the project, in particular the "fellowship" of youth leaders and volunteers, and the grassroots processes they have initiated, had significant impact and are likely to be sustainable. They will continue to be tested, however, while they remain limited in scope because higher-level leadership and representation are stifled.

**VIII. Annexes**

**IX. Annex 1: Evaluation questions**

## **X. Annex 2: Documents reviewed**

Project document UDF-MYA-07-180  
Mid-term/Annual Progress Report  
Final project narrative report





**XII. Annex 4: Acronyms**

AAI	Action Aid International
AAM	Action Aid International in Myanmar
DFID	(UK) Department for International Development
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
KDN	Knowledge and Dedication for Nation building
RRDS	Ranmarwaddy Rural Development Service
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	