

# Final Report

Independent Review of The Asia Foundation's  
**Myanmar Strategic Support  
Program (MSSP)**

## Final Report

As approved 10 December 2018

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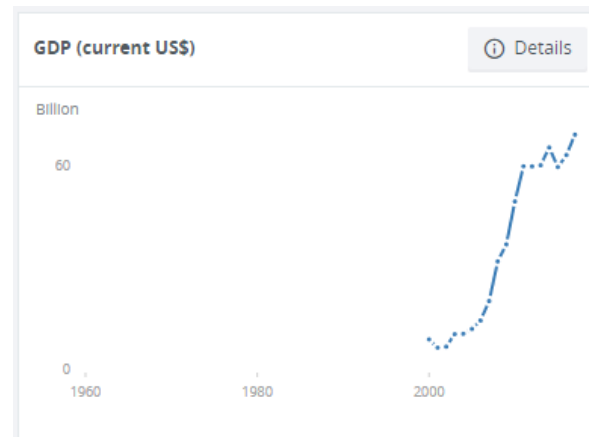
# Myanmar Data

States and Regions of Myanmar



Source: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar#/media/File:Burma\\_en.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myanmar#/media/File:Burma_en.png)

Myanmar - key economic data (2017)



GDP: USD 69.32 billion  
Population: 53.37 million  
GDP per capita: USD 1,299  
GDP growth: 6.4% p.a.

Source: *World Bank data*

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

DAO	Development Affairs Organisations
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government
DFID	The UK Department for International Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MSSP	The Asia Foundation's Myanmar Strategic Support Program
ODE	DFAT's Office of Development Effectiveness
PDIA	Problem-driven iterative adaptation
PFM	Public Financial Management
RI	Renaissance Institute, Myanmar
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
TAF	The Asia Foundation (in this context, The Asia Foundation in Myanmar)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

## Important Concepts and Definitions Used in this Report

(Adapted from earlier Bazeley *et al*/reports on TAF programs elsewhere)

### 'Chasing Change'

External aid and development interventions rarely introduce sustainable change *ab initio* or from the supply side: that can lack ownership, legitimacy and leverage. But aid and development interventions do often speed up, deepen, broaden and improve the quality of nascent change processes (through the determination of, for example, government, private sector or civil-society actors) where they already have some institutional legitimacy and indigenous champions. 'Chasing change' was a term introduced fifteen or so years ago as part of the debate about aid effectiveness in policy reform: put your money where change looks promising, not where it doesn't. The concept also reverberates in more recent discourses on thinking and working politically with notions of 'going with the grain' of policy reform, 'politically-smart and locally-led development', and TAF's own filter (developed elsewhere<sup>1</sup>) of 'technically sound, politically possible'.

### 'Governance'

The following is taken from DFAT's 2015 *Effective Governance* strategy<sup>2</sup>: "There are many definitions of governance, but all refer to how power and authority are used to manage a country's resources. Most definitions also refer to how power and authority are exercised by individuals and through institutions – institutions [being] the formal and informal rules that organise social, political and economic relations. They provide a structure for the way people live and interact – the way that people and groups of people agree and express their interests, and how competing interests are mediated."

### 'Institutions'

In this report I usually use the term 'institutions' in the *New Institutional Economics*<sup>3</sup> sense of the 'rules of the game': the rules, incentives and sanctions that ultimately shape how individuals, groups, coalitions, organisations, sectors and perhaps whole populations behave – socially, economically, and politically. They may be written and formal (for example, legislation) or informal and implied (for example, societal conventions or traditions) – and many things in between.

However, the term 'institutions' is also used in political science to describe organisational structures that are characterised by coherence, complexity, autonomy and adaptability. Across these four characteristics, effective institutions (whether bureaucracies, militaries or political parties) have the capacity to endure over time.

### 'Strategic Opportunism'

The notions of 'policy windows opening and closing', and of 'chasing change' (above) where the return on investment (or risk) will be highest, are important tenets of policy work. 'Strategic opportunism' captures this ability to be 'fleet and flexible' or 'nimble and strategic' and by so doing

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<sup>1</sup> A key concept in the TAF Philippines *Coalitions for Change* program, see text box on page 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Effective Governance: Strategy for Australia's aid investments* (March 2015). Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra.

<sup>3</sup> See for example North, D. (1990) "Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance". Cambridge University Press.

capitalise on unexpected opportunities that emerge through the inevitably chaotic and often unplanned processes of policy reform<sup>4</sup>. This is not to say that a program should deviate from its original objectives, but rather to recognise that no 'plan' is ever likely to capture, *ex ante*, all the relevant, interesting policy options and opportunities that may present themselves over time. This is particularly so where the priorities of both the donor and the partner government ebb and flow as political values change.

### 'Thinking and Working Politically'

See Annex 1 for a summary of some current concepts in working politically in aid and development.

### 'Transformational' (or 'Transformative') vs. 'Transactional' Development

When the development community started thinking about achieving the pace and scale of social and economic development implied by the Millennium Development Goals, it realised that it had to do far more than 'just buy things' that people or organisations needed. Rather, it had to leverage change in the 'institutions' (definition above) that ultimately shape the nature and course of the lives and livelihoods of whole populations of people. (Hence the parallel recognition of the irreplaceable role of government and good governance in such a process.)

Just buying results, where the value of the outcome equates to the value of the transaction (financial or otherwise) itself, for example providing food aid or renovating classrooms, is referred to as 'transactional' development. The total value of the intervention is essentially (and merely) the sum of its inputs. One could never deliver enough 'transactional' aid and development to achieve development goals at a global level, or even nationally in most cases.

By contrast 'transformational' development brings about fundamental change for the better in institutions whose reach goes beyond (hopefully far beyond) the direct influence of the development intervention itself. (Such change is often referred to as 'reform'.) The value of the intervention is more than the sum of its parts. In leveraging impacts the scope and scale of which is far greater than the input, transformational development is also about effectiveness, efficiency and value for money.<sup>5</sup>

Transformational change has also been described by UNDP<sup>6</sup> as "the process whereby positive development results are achieved and sustained over time by institutionalizing policies, programmes and projects within national strategies". This embodies the concept of institutionally sustained results – consistency of achievement over time.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Bazeley, P. et al (2013) 'Thinking and Working Politically: An evaluation of policy dialogue in AusAID'. Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Canberra

<sup>5</sup> Bazeley, P. et al (2014) 'Independent Progress Review of the Australia-TAF Partnership in the Philippines', Final Report, subsequently used (for example) in O'Keefe, M. et al (2014) 'Using Action Research and Learning for Politically Informed Programming', Development Leadership Program Research Paper 29.

<sup>6</sup> UNDP (2011) Supporting Transformational Change: Case studies of sustained and successful development cooperation, New York: UNDP

# Myanmar Strategic Support Program (MSSP)

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## Draft Report

As approved 10 December 2018

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## The Review

1. This was a short one-person independent review of MSSP undertaken in the final year of the current four-year programme. Its principal objective was [quoting TAF] "to cast a critical third eye" over Component 1<sup>7</sup> of the program to inform the conceptualisation of a putative 'MSSP Phase 2', commencing mid-2019. (Statement of Work at Annex 2.)
2. I was in Yangon in October / November 2018 (meeting schedule at Annex 3) and:
  - Studied relevant documents and reports;
  - Was briefed by TAF-Myanmar management and the three teams currently implementing Component One;
  - Was involved in meetings and workshops with TAF (and also its partner the *Renaissance Institute*) on current work-plans, research papers and – in particular – how a second phase might be configured, monitored and evaluated;
  - Met with MSSP's funding partners (DFAT, DFID and SDC) and with development organisations working in related areas: UNDP and the World Bank.
3. My review was not intended to undertake primary data collection and so relied on accounts of progress and issues arising provided by TAF and its partners.
4. I circulated an aide-mémoire and provided debriefings summarising my observations and conclusions at the end of my visit. TAF agreed with my conclusions<sup>8</sup> so, in the interest of concision,

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<sup>7</sup> Government policy, public financial management and social accountability, at sub-national level.

<sup>8</sup> TAF Country Representative; *pers. comm.* 9 November 2018

this report expands – succinctly – on the points discussed in the aide-mémoire rather than develop new lines of argument.

## Context

### *The country and its governance*

5. As one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia, and one with profound, lingering, social and institutional challenges, there is little doubt that supporting better governance<sup>9</sup> is relevant and necessary.

6. However this is complicated in that Myanmar’s transition to democracy is young, with its direction and parameters still up for debate. Elements of government policy, action and inaction worry the international community – and inevitably calibrate the aid response.

7. The strategic context for development efforts is therefore complex and still evolving. Political and institutional<sup>10</sup> structures and processes (sometimes usefully called ‘transforming’ structures and processes) are still finding their feet. Many of the organisational and operational norms of decentralised, inclusive and responsive government are yet to be worked out. The shift in roles and responsibilities, coupled with less-than-robust mandates and frames of reference, need time (and probably further institutional incentives) to mature, as well as new organisational capabilities. Meanwhile, poverty and exclusion from the benefits of economic growth and security provide little hope to much of the population.

8. However, we can be certain of some basic tenets: decentralisation<sup>11</sup> – a constitutionally-mandated strategy the elected government has chosen to pursue – has to reconnect citizens with a more inclusive government and be seen to be doing so. Sub-national governments have to make better policy and public expenditure choices, and be more accountable for them.

9. Developing locally-relevant policy, being more efficient and effective in planning and managing State and Region government expenditure, and developing a new level of social accountability, have been the core objectives of MSSP and are likely to remain relevant and central to future efforts for some time yet.

10. But there is relatively little clarity or depth of analysis over what the emerging political and institutional structures and processes mean or imply at an operational level. So that analysis has

“Despite its potential, Myanmar today is one of the poorest countries in Southeast Asia. With a population of 51.4 million, the country has a per capita GDP of \$1,105, and the poverty rate is 37.5 percent, one of the highest in the region. Among ASEAN countries, Myanmar has the lowest life expectancy and the second-highest rate of infant and child mortality. Less than one-third of the population has access to the electricity grid, road density remains low, at 219.8 kilometres per 1,000 square kilometres of land area, and ICT connections are scarce, with mobile phone and internet penetration rates at 1.1 percent and 0.3 percent, respectively. Myanmar’s level of development used to be on a par with countries such as Thailand and Malaysia only a few decades ago; today it is much lower [and] comparable with Lao PDR and Cambodia.”

*Source: World Bank Country Diagnostic Report No. 93050-MM, November 2014*

<sup>9</sup> Definition of ‘governance’ page v.

<sup>10</sup> In most cases I use the term “institutions” in the *New Institutional Economics* sense of “the rules of the game”, as opposed to ‘organisations’ – see definitions, page v.

<sup>11</sup> Political, administrative and fiscal

to be done in parallel. Development efforts must necessarily involve uncertainty, risk and innovation ... and expect to enter some blind alleys along the way.

11. And it will take time – decades, probably. The things we are doing now are – presumably – but the foundational elements of a much bigger and more impactful future effort. (Whether by TAF or by others.) Indeed, to some degree, current efforts are also about establishing a ‘net future value’ – *viz.* the ability (experience, networks, engagement, credibility, trust and utility) to be in the right place, able to do the right (and probably politically more complex) things, in the future as the country’s institutions, structures and processes of democratic government mature.

### *The aid context ... and The Asia Foundation’s niche*

12. Dependent as it is on funding partnerships with bilateral donors, TAF necessarily has – while maintaining its independent and here-for-the-duration mandate – to contribute meaningfully and strategically to the wider donor effort.

13. But Myanmar’s low dependency on aid flows (relative to the country’s natural resources and levels of foreign direct investment), raises the question – as elsewhere in Southeast Asia – as to where foreign aid can have most impact and how aid-funded development efforts should be configured. A question much complicated strategically by the country’s foggy institutions and politically by continuing tensions over the thorny issues of conflict and human rights (paras 7 and 8 above).

14. And, realistically, over what sort of timescale are we talking when we seek to effect significant, game-changing, shifts in the scope and quality of the country’s social and economic governance?

15. Different donors have different priorities and strategies, but in broad terms it is clear that:

- Poverty and inequality<sup>12</sup> – notwithstanding some reasonable macro-economic / aggregate indicators – will continue to headline the basic rationale for donors hanging in there in the medium to long term<sup>13</sup>;
- Fixing poverty and inequality is fundamentally an issue of *governance* (definition page v) – not least policy and public expenditure choices and public accountability;
- Applying a ‘technically sound, politically possible’<sup>14</sup> filter, focusing on sub-national government is sensible and strategic<sup>15</sup>, at least for the foreseeable future;
- Scaling-up from, and sustaining, the progress already being made is fundamentally important to all donors. How this might further be envisioned is discussed later;
- While funding cycles are necessarily time-bound and relatively short-term, there is an explicit acknowledgment that bringing about outcomes at societal level is a long-term endeavour. What we are doing now is correctly described by TAF as ‘foundational’: it’s about creating the knowledge, experience and ability to do more and greater things as institutions mature and policy windows open.

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<sup>12</sup> While, of course, humanitarian efforts and the peace process will feature large in the shorter term.

<sup>13</sup> With broader national interest objectives of stability and equitable economic growth in the region and beyond being closely associated.

<sup>14</sup> A concept championed by TAF Philippines in thinking and working politically.

<sup>15</sup> From the perspectives of both what can be achieved and what cannot be achieved through dialogue and engagement at different levels.

- But that said, all TAF's funding partners need to be able to see and report here-and-now 'results': intermediate outcomes that represent changed behaviour in individuals and organisations that indicate meaningful progress towards better governance.

16. So how can The Asia Foundation add most value to the international community's efforts and priorities?

17. Its comparative advantage is one of having a long-term purpose and reputation in the region, its unique political and analytical capacities, its partnerships and its penetration and credibility into both government and civil society. The Foundation's ability also to provide flexible, strategic, practical and often innovative support at ground level is fundamental both to its utility to those with whom it engages and to its highly valued analytical and research role.

18. But TAF's comparative advantage is probably not as an implementation agent for large-scale projects. So where that is called for TAF and its funding partners need to be clear about where and how those linkages are made.

19. In addition there has to be clarity over how TAF's necessarily-projectised funding has to be seen as a means to a more strategic and longer-term end.

## Findings

### **MSSP's strengths and weaknesses**

20. This review is not an evaluation: it was not intended to be one. My assessment of strengths and weaknesses is therefore one of extrapolating lessons from what has been reported and what has been said.

21. One can synthesise an overall message about MSSP of "doing good things well" from all the other agencies to whom I spoke – although not necessarily ticking every organisation's [inevitably differing] boxes as regards scaling-up and linkages to higher-level objectives. (See below.)

22. Notwithstanding the complex and challenging context, and with essentially only pilot levels of funding, MSSP can boast several examples of policy-related change (or 'reform') at sub-national level, relevant to the imperatives discussed at para 8 above. Tangible intermediate-level outcomes have been seen in terms of changed organisational behaviours and processes including things such as improved tax-takes, innovation and improved resource allocation in local service delivery, and in opening-up sub-national government to public scrutiny and accountability.

23. These early years have - given the low level of skills and organisational capacity inherited from the previous era at sub-national level – necessarily involved significant levels of essentially transactional<sup>16</sup> work (for example training, assistance with publications etc.). However, this has been for the purposes of supporting fundamental shifts in how business is done, led by State and Region governments and Development Affairs Organisations themselves.

24. One can thus say that we are witnessing the beginnings of more 'transformational' development. That is, development interventions that bring about change in the institutions (or the 'rules of the game') at sub-national level and therefore [potentially] impact at a scale well

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<sup>16</sup> See definition of 'transactional' vs. 'transformational' development, page vi.)

beyond the direct influence of the project itself. If this holds true, one can say that MSSP has also been efficient (bang for bucks), while generating sustainability (and hopefully scale) through the genuine institutionalisation of new ways of working. (See, in this regard, how UNDP's definition of 'transformational change', page vi, is relevant here.)

25. My view is that MSSP has been a relevant and effective program and will – providing its focus and strategies parallels the evolution of the institutions it supports – continue to be so.

26. Concerns about scaling-up and impact on higher-level outcomes may derive from a combination of:

- TAF not explaining to its partners (or indeed itself) a sufficiently robust theory of change and not maintaining an emphasis and focus in its reporting on the analysis of, and its contribution to, its implicit higher-level objectives of change in institutional behaviours. This is discussed further below in paras 37 to 39 below, and (in more detail) in Annex 4.
  - And without a robust theory of change and clarity over strategic intent to guide it, activity-level programming runs the *risk* of being (or being seen as) nugatory.
- Variable – or maybe just unresolved – clarity over:
  - A realistic time-frame for reform; and – related to that –
  - The strategic intent – and how that will evolve in the medium- to long-term future – of aid and development in Myanmar. There's only so much that can be done at this stage, and what is done at this stage is essentially creating the environment for significant change, not necessarily witnessing momentous change in the short term.
- Overly simplistic notions pervading of how scale is achieved in institutional reform. It isn't about providing inputs at greater scale: it's about understanding and supporting where and how reform of the rules of the game (at national or population-wide level) is politically possible and technically sound, how one might support and amplify the drivers of – and incentives for – change and overcome the obstacles to change.
  - TAF has an impressive reputation for doing this across the region and is a protagonist of such a 'thinking and working politically' approach. (See Annex 1 for a brief anthology of such contemporary approaches.)

27. However a significant "reconceptualization" of the programme and how it is contextualised has been undertaken recently and has been well received. It is now much clearer how its various pieces contribute to what has to happen, institutionally, at sub-national level. This also contributes a structure for any second phase.

28. As part of this reconceptualization some excellent work-in-progress is emerging on a more empirical method of outcome-orientated monitoring and reporting against institutional change at sub-national level, based on the introduction of standardised organisational 'competency scales'.

29. MSSP, through its structured and regular 'strategy testing' regime, is strong on learning and feeding this into adaptive programming: an appropriate implementation strategy in the context. There are examples of programming being adapted or redirected (or effectively terminated) in the light of lessons learned or analysis that resources would better be allocated to areas more likely to deliver results.

30. This 'stopability'<sup>17</sup> is positive: it should never be seen as failure. 'Chasing change' in such a complex and evolving political and institutional context is absolutely the right strategy.

31. However, I sense that 'programme adaption' could and should be envisaged on a bigger, more impactful, scale in a second phase. This may require a greater level of flexibility in budgeting and programming than MSSP currently enjoys, and possibly a reappraisal of both TAF's and its funding partners' appetite for *risk* (paras 61 to 66 below).

### **On the design of a 'MSSP 2'**

32. MSSP's current portfolio of activities remains relevant and is (at this stage of institutional development) delivering relevant results. There's plenty more to do along the same lines before those activities can be said to have run their course. But any future program should, at the same time, continuously be looking for and grasping opportunities, 'policy windows' and other entry points further to serve the same higher-level agenda.

33. Continuation of MSSP importantly also serves to deepen TAF's (and through TAF the wider development community's) long-term engagement, understanding and credibility at a level of government that is important for the future but which is still evolving and poorly understood at the moment.

34. However, a design document for a second phase needs to go further than the current program description in articulating a clear theory of change (see paras 37 to 39 below and Annex 4) in terms of how the interventions envisaged might rationally lead, over the long term, to the achievement of higher-level objectives. (Objectives of reconnecting citizens with a more inclusive government, with sub-national governments making better policy and public expenditure choices, and being more accountable for them – para 8 above.).

35. 'Thinking and working politically', and adaptive programming, undertaken under a mature and intelligent relationship with its funding partners over what 'results' mean, will remain important pillars of the design.

36. In working to articulate a clear and ambitious vision in drafting its proposals for a new phase, TAF should explore:

#### *A Robust and Politically-Nuanced Theory of Change*

37. The program's theory of change needs to include explicit relationship to political and institutional contexts, and – importantly – the analysis of the assumptions being made between MSSP's activities and outputs (within MSSP's control) leading firstly to change in policy and public expenditure choices and, subsequently, 'better', more inclusive and more accountable sub-national government (which is largely outwith MSSP's control).

38. This should include an analysis of (and almost certainly work on) the incentives and disincentives for, and drivers of, behavioural change (in individuals and in organisations), which are not yet clear.

39. Developing that theory of change is something TAF will be doing based on its substantial political and institutional savvy as it prepares a Phase 2 proposal. I do not have that level of insight,

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<sup>17</sup> A term coined by TAF Philippines' *Coalitions for Change* program.

but I sketch out in Annex 4 a concept (only) of what sort of things such a theory of change might usefully capture.

### *The 'Why'*

40. This is an analysis not just of the context discussed above, but also relevance to the purpose of MSSP's funding partners' presence and efforts in the country, and their long-term strategies for impacting at scale on poverty and exclusion, stability and growth. That may not be as straightforward as a discussion simply over activities and outputs would provide for.

41. Indeed, in contrast to a contract with a managing agent implementing a pre-formed design, TAF – in its proposal – is assuming the responsibility for ensuring relevance to context and the analysis of (and internalisation where appropriate) of risks and assumptions well above output level.

42. In summary the 'why' would most likely refer to the role assumed for decentralisation in 'reconnecting citizens with government' (and the necessary qualities thereof), and how in particular this might address the underlying causes of distrust and lack of inclusion (including gender disparities), and ultimately the impact of these on conflict and instability.

### *The 'What'*

43. In broad (and less boxed-in) terms I see the 'what' as continuing to be about improved policy and public expenditure choices, and greater public accountability, at sub-national level. This represents a slight nuancing of the "Public Financial Management" (PFM) and "Policy Reform" captions that have been used in the recent reconceptualisation of MSSP. This is because in my book it's about the wider enabling environment for reform and about sub-national government starting to make informed choices about policy and resource allocation for the purposes of being more inclusive, responsive and accountable. PFM and service delivery would be vehicles for that rather than ends in themselves. I would use 'supporting improved sub-national governance' (using the definition of 'governance' on page v.) as the all-encompassing objective, rather than the specific issue of PFM (important though that is as a component of good governance).

44. I would also – in terms of defining 'what' MSSP does – seek to differentiate between 'policy' (essentially a political statement of values to be prosecuted) with 'strategy' (a "cunning plan" to achieve stated policy objectives)<sup>18</sup>.

45. Given that 'prosecuting values' is the prerogative of sovereign governments (domestically at least), 'policy work' from the perspective of an external development intervention is going to be about:

- i. Developing and presenting the evidence to inform policy choices; and
- ii. Supporting legitimate *policy processes* within the relevant institutions of – in this case – sub-national government<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Again, a slightly nuanced disaggregation of TAF's own definition of 'policy'.

<sup>19</sup> Including, presumably, the process of determining fiscal transfers from the Union government.

46. Whatever the words, it still needs to be shown how such things as public financial management and citizens' budgets contribute significantly to change in the right direction higher up the hierarchy of objectives. Neither are ends in themselves in terms of the bigger prize.

47. This would also suggest that the 'what' of MSSP 2 probably also needs to go further in 'thinking and working politically' than it has to date at supporting legitimate policy processes where they are – for whatever reason – currently delivering sub-optimally. In Phase 1 policy processes have largely been interpreted as being limited by skills and capacity. Organisational (skills and capacity) development is likely to have been necessary and relevant. But it may not be – I would say is unlikely to be – *sufficient* to bring about changed organisational behaviours at scale. For that MSSP needs to analyse and support the mediation of how (in DFAT's definition of 'governance' – page v) "power and authority are exercised by individuals and through institutions ... [and] the way that people and groups of people agree and express their interests, and how competing interests are mediated."

48. Throughout this review I was repeatedly drawn to asking "What and where are the incentives for reform in sub-national institutions?", for – as well as skills and capacity – the *rules of the game* have to change for individuals and organisations to behave differently. That may relate to legislative or fiscal incentives and sanctions, or maybe to such things as power and leadership. I don't know, but TAF should.

### *The 'How'*

49. As above, it's going to be important to contextualise activities as contributors to bringing about meaningful change in the institutions of sub-national government. Supporting such change may involve working through examples in relatively transactional ways (technical inputs, training, appropriate technology etc.) initially, but these shouldn't be seen as ends in themselves: rather it has to be about exploring opportunities for supporting genuinely transformative shifts in how business is done in sub-national government. That involves thinking through what has to happen in those institutions beyond the program's immediate control but not necessarily beyond its *influence*. Indeed, having that influence<sup>20</sup> beyond the level of programme delivery surely has to be a defining characteristic of TAF's presence and efforts, and underlies the long-term nature of its engagement.

50. Anchoring the analysis of policy and public expenditure choices around the budget cycle (as now being articulated) is sensible.

51. The current work on 'Competency Scales' and horizontal learning (which introduce an element of competition) is highly relevant and a good example of looking for incentives for change that may not otherwise be there.

52. As above, MSSP 2 needs to be explicit in how its activities contribute beyond the level of intermediate outcomes to inclusivity (including gender dimensions of social and economic development). And in a 'policy reform' programme, that means analysing and championing policy and public expenditure shifts that impact across whole populations, not just ensuring inclusivity at activity level.

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<sup>20</sup> Particularly, perhaps, at the level of thinking about the institutional incentives for change.

### TAF's 'Development Entrepreneurship' Model

The goal of *development entrepreneurship* is to find “technically sound, politically possible” reforms.

“**Technically sound**” is defined by three characteristics:

- i.) Transformative. The proposed reform has the possibility of changing the incentives and behaviour of the majority of people and organizations. As a result of that change, the interplay will likely lead to better development outcomes.
- ii.) Institutionalisation. The proposed reform has the possibility of becoming part of and being incorporated into one of two structures: as part of structured and formalised bureaucratic practices or as part of responses to market signals. In both cases, the purpose of the change is to make reform the “new” status quo and thereby ensuring policy sustainability.
- iii.) Scale. With limited funding or support, the proposed reform has the possibility of expanding beyond the specific project intervention site or agency.

“**Politically possible**” is a situation when the political environment favours reform. Because people, emotions and interests are involved, determining “politically possible” is a difficult endeavour. In a world too complex to model, there is no empirical test to determine this condition. Instead experience and educated guesses are our tools. We turn to the “how to” and “who will” [to] find technically sound, politically possible reforms.

*Source: adapted from The Asia Foundation Occasional Paper No.12.*

53. Critical to a second phase of MSSP will, in my view, be:

- A greater emphasis on analysing the political economy of the policy processes that MSSP seeks to support, and then internalising as many of the assumptions made into the program itself.
  - For example, if a policy process has stalled because it is contested then think about what is driving the opposing arguments and what can be done to reconcile competing positions, to unjam logjams, to inform and reassure, to build coalitions of the willing.
- ‘Taking bets’<sup>21</sup> on the potentially most transformative interventions which are both technically sound and politically possible, and seeing what can be done to improve the quality, scope and speed of reform in those areas. And being prepared to pull back and invest the program’s resources elsewhere if it subsequently transpires that an adequate return on the effort seems out of reach.

### *Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Reporting*

54. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting has not always been able to demonstrate clarity and coherence in what MSSP is doing. MSSP’s reporting has sometimes failed to connect seemingly disparate lower-level inputs and activities to a bigger-picture strategy, and gains at activity level have not always been contextualised or their contribution to higher-level outcomes demonstrated.

55. The wordiness of its earlier reports – heavy on input and activity reporting – has also drawn comment. This is however something MSSP is addressing – through a more professional approach

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<sup>21</sup> A TAF Philippines / *Coalitions for Change* tactic

to M&E, through its recent 'reconceptualization' of how the programme is constructed and through the introduction of more empirical methods<sup>22</sup> of measuring change.

56. TAF is good and particularly innovative<sup>23</sup> at monitoring inputs and activities, at documenting indicators of 'change' (necessarily often qualitatively at this stage) and at learning from experience for the purposes of informing programming (for example through regular strategy testing).

57. But there is certainly more that TAF can do to differentiate and articulate results at the various levels of its theory of change (and a more robust theory of change<sup>24</sup>). This will become increasingly important as any second phase conceptualises 'what success will look like' more and more strategically (and probably politically), and judges itself for its contribution to bringing about the kind of policy and public expenditure choices, and public accountability, that are needed in the context described.

58. However, the 'focus on results' espoused in aid effectiveness debates has also been interpreted differently across TAF's several funding partners. To some extent MSSP's detailed and sometimes relatively low-level reporting is a result of previous requests for quantitative results. The design for MSSP 2 should incorporate a new consensus over 'who needs what information', what sort of 'results' we're talking about, and the frequency and detail of reporting required at different points in programme management cycles.

59. Given the context and nature of the programme, I would prefer to see more differentiated and fit-for-purpose reporting (and reduced frequency of reporting) across the different requirements of:

- Accountability and financial control/forecasting (probably still quarterly);
- Programme monitoring at output level (perhaps six-monthly); and
- The analysis of contribution to higher-level objectives (perhaps annually with six-monthly updates where appropriate).

60. Given, also, the long-term and adaptive nature of MSSP's interests, I recommend a longer time-frame for MSSP, possibly framed as 4 + 2 years, with an external mid-term review early in Year 4 (on the basis of which the '+2' would be confirmed or otherwise).

### *Risk*

61. The *fiduciary* and *financial* risks associated with MSSP appear low and well managed. While providing of course for due diligence, they do not, it would seem, warrant any particularly elevated level of analysis or mitigation in MSSP 2's design.

62. Two other forms of risk do need discussion and consensus with funding partners however:

63. Firstly the *programmatic* risk that despite TAF's and others' best efforts, there is either:

- A failure to reach objectives due to external political or institutional obstacles (beyond the program's control) or significantly changed context; or (more likely)

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<sup>22</sup> Notably the development of institutional 'Competency Scales'.

<sup>23</sup> The 'program timeline' app TAF has developed for this is most impressive and has resulted in teams better capturing their field activities, more robust strategy testing, and more informative visual reporting.

<sup>24</sup> MSSP's current theory of change makes some 'leaps of faith' in terms of bold and unexplained assumptions, and does little to suggest 'what success looks like' in practice.

- Activities and outputs (within the program’s control) not yielding a sufficiently convincing return on the program’s investment of time and money – perhaps because, in the light of experience, there isn’t the traction among the individuals and organisations with whom the program is engaging.

64. It is important that the inevitability of such programmatic risks, in a program that is necessarily and appropriately working at the boundaries of what is technically sound and politically possible, are understood. There will be false starts and dead-ends in some activities, others will show only modest results ... but hopefully some initiatives will yield a high return on investment in term of bringing about meaningful reform. Indeed, this is all about ‘chasing change’ (explained page v) and its positive impact on aid effectiveness.

The head of Australia’s aid program in the Philippines set out his expectations of the TAF Coalitions for Change initiative as: “In the context I’ll be perfectly happy with maybe couple of major wins, a few moderate gains ... and inevitably a few areas that don’t work out – that’s not a problem”.

*Source: DFAT Coalitions for Change Phase I Final Review, 2014*

65. So a mature and mutual understanding of, realistically, what rate of success such a programme is likely to have – and what represents ‘good enough’ – is needed, particularly in terms of how funding partners themselves account for progress.

66. Secondly – given the politically-charged wider context for MSSP – *political and reputational risks* need to be calibrated to reflect TAF’s and its funding partners’ respective red lines, or at least the ability established to maintain an arm’s length association with such risks. Operational guidelines about what sort of potential political and reputational risks there are and how they should be handled (including such everyday things as branding and crediting funding sources) are important. But ultimately this is about establishing a level of understanding and trust between TAF and its funding partners about the program’s choices and direction through continuous dialogue.

*Thinking longer-term in the context of a bigger-picture strategy*

67. MSSP needs to be planned and funded across a manageable timeframe – such as the 4+2 years suggested above. But the programme – and TAF Myanmar more widely – is also ultimately part of a bigger, longer, game plan for how bilaterally-funded aid and development efforts might most strategically contribute to population- and economy-wide outcomes over (realistically) perhaps 20 or more years. TAF’s proposal for MSSP 2 should reflect this and position itself within an analysis of how such a bigger, longer-term evolution of the country’s governance might be imagined. See the conceptual theory of change at Annex 4.

68. Maintaining an ability to inform such debates over time, and engage in a politically-savvy way with emerging issues and policy reform opportunities, has to remain one of TAF’s core competencies and unique selling points. Perhaps funded through a rekindled ‘innovation’ fund within MSSP 2, or perhaps as part of a longer-term deepening of strategic partnerships between TAF and funding partners.

## Recommendations

The design for the new phase should:

### **1. Assume a longer timeframe.**

What MSSP is about is a long-term endeavour – perhaps generational. However for funding purposes it needs to be broken up into programmable phases.

**Design MSSP Phase 2 as '4 + 2' years, with the '+2' being informed by a mid-term review (which needs budgeting for) early in year 4.**

### **2. Contextualise and justify MSSP 2 in terms of the major political, societal and institutional challenges, and how aid and development – particularly that associated with the enduring mandate and comparative advantage of the Asia Foundation – can best and most strategically position itself in the short, medium- and long terms.**

### **3. Articulate a robust theory of change for MSSP 2 which also analyses the external risks and assumptions in the programme logic, and what success looks like, through to the highest-levels of outcome and impact.**

This to include a theory of change for how sub-national policy and public expenditure choices can [eventually] impact on the 'wicked problems' of poverty, social exclusion and the peace process.

### **4. Incorporate more (and more explicit and adequately funded) political and institutional analysis, and work on the potential drivers of, and obstacles to, transformative change likely to deliver on higher-level objectives.**

And then relate MSSP's interventions to that.

### **5. Rationalise and simplify, but at the same time make more strategic, MSSP's results framework and programme reporting**

Differentiate reports and reporting according to 'who needs what information' across program managers, the TAF executive, and TAF's funding partners.

**Where possible and agreed with external stakeholders, reduce reporting frequencies and degree of low-level detail**

## Acknowledgements

69. I am extremely grateful for the time and insights provided by all those whom I met: your analysis and observations were all very helpful and constructive.

70. Special thanks, too, go to TAF's managers and support staff for all the logistical arrangements.

## Annex 1: Approaches to Working Politically

<p><b>Problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA)</b> (Andrews et al., 2012)</p>	<p><b>Problem-driven iterative adaptation</b> has been advocated by researchers at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. It focuses on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding indigenous solutions for locally defined problems in performance.</li> <li>• Creating an authorising environment for decision-making that encourages positive deviance and experimentation.</li> <li>• Embedding this experimentation in tight feedback loops that facilitate rapid experiential learning.</li> <li>• Engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, relevant and supportable.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Thinking and working politically</b> (Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice, 2013)</p>	<p>In 2013, representatives of donors, together with leading thinkers and researchers, created a community of practice promoting <b>thinking and working politically</b> in development and focusing on what donors can do. Recognising that political economy analysis has not shifted donor practice, three core principles are promoted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong political analysis, insight and understanding.</li> <li>• Detailed appreciation of, and response to, the national and local context.</li> <li>• Flexibility and adaptability in programme design and implementation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Politically-smart and locally led development</b> (Booth &amp; Unsworth, 2014)</p>	<p>Booth and Unsworth document programmes that are characterised as <b>politically smart and locally led</b>, understood as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politically informed by a sense of history and an in-depth understanding of country and sector context, including continually updated national/subnational political economy dynamics.</li> <li>• Politically astute by using information about politics intelligently and creatively. Donors and partners must be clever operators, with the capacity to work with or around politics, as well as donor constraints. Third parties will be more politically informed and astute than outsiders can ever be.</li> <li>• Nationally and locally owned, not just in the narrow, technocratic sense, such as the Paris Declaration, but focused on problems that have salience for potential beneficiaries and at least some individuals/groups with the power to support, influence or block change.</li> <li>• Nationally/locally negotiated and delivered, prioritising national and subnational leadership and capacity to search for solutions to locally identified problems. Locals will more likely have the motivation, credibility, knowledge and networks to mobilise support, leverage relationships and seize opportunities in politically astute ways.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Doing development differently</b> (The Doing Development Differently Manifesto Community, 2014)</p>	<p>The <b>Doing Development Differently Manifesto</b> commits signatories to develop programmes that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on solving nationally/locally defined problems that are debated and refined in an ongoing process.</li> <li>• Are legitimised at all levels (political, managerial and social), building real ownership (not just on paper) and momentum.</li> <li>• Work through national and local conveners to mobilise all those with a stake in progress to tackle common problems and introduce relevant change.</li> <li>• Blend design and implementation through rapid cycles of planning, action, reflection and revision to foster learning from success and failure.</li> <li>• Manage risks by making 'small bets': pursuing activities with promise and dropping others.</li> <li>• Foster real results – real solutions to real problems that have real impact: that build trust, empower people and promote sustainability.</li> </ul>

*Source: Adapted from Hadley, S. & Tilley, H. (2017) Governance for Growth in Vanuatu: a review of a decade of thinking and working politically', ODI Report. London: Overseas Development Institute, in turn adapted from Denny, L. & Barron, P. (2015) Beyond the Toolkit: supporting peace processes in Asia. ODI Report. London: Overseas Development Institute*

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## Annex 2: Statement of Work

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### **Independent Review of the Myanmar Strategic Support Program**

#### **Background: Myanmar Strategic Support Program (MSSP)**

##### **MSSP PROGRAM SUMMARY:**

**Program Name:** Myanmar Strategic Support Program

**Supported by:** SDC, DFID (starting June 2015) and DFAT (starting May 2016)

**Project period:** June 2015-April 2019

The Myanmar Strategic Support Program (MSSP) supports Myanmar's historic but highly challenging democratic transition through dynamic, responsive, and flexible interventions aimed at supporting reform momentum through the 2015 elections and beyond.

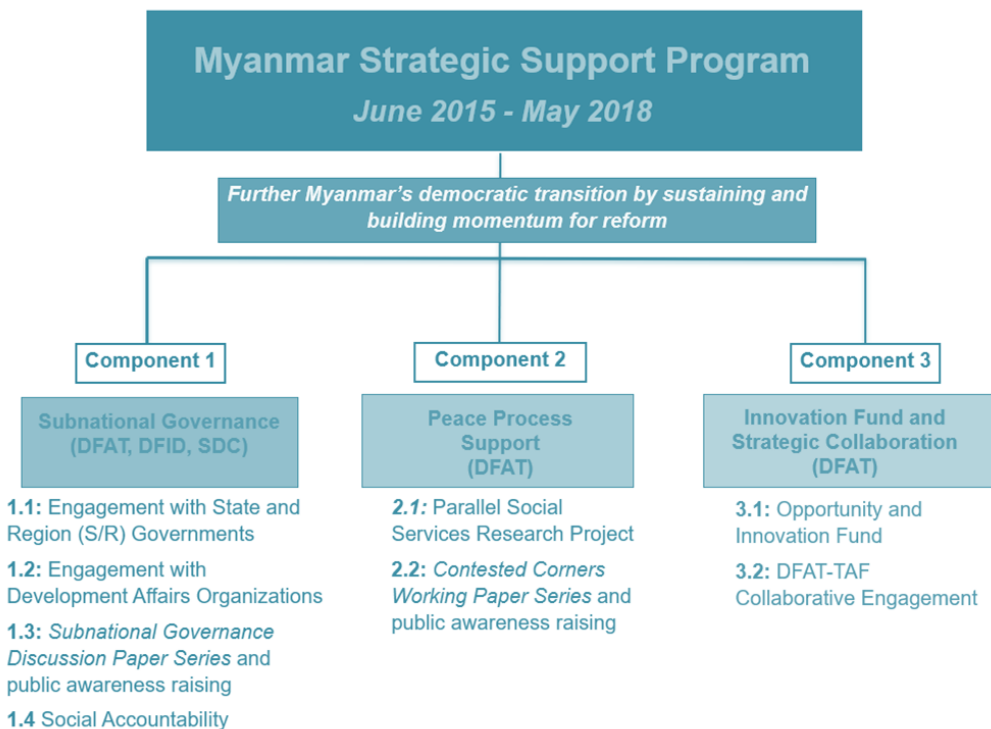
The key focus of the MSSP is to strengthen the capacity of subnational governments (state/region and municipal) through direct technical support and trainings; facilitate engagement with the public; explore and test new ideas; and raise public awareness through quality research on subnational governance. The components of the program will then inform and contribute to policy decisions of the current government and reshape the relations between Union and subnational governments and civil society.

The sub-national governance support provided under the MSSP is based on the following theory of change: 'by providing targeted and timely capacity building and policy support directly to state and region governments about pressing policy challenges and at key decision points,<sup>25</sup> it will be possible to achieve improved policy formulation and implementation, enhanced PFM systems and institutions, and greater social accountability at the subnational level.'

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<sup>25</sup> "Key decision points" to be understood as points where there are opportunities for reform in policy, practice, or law.

## 1. The MSSP had three components:



### The specific objectives of the MSSP Component 1 (component scope for the assignment):

#### Component 1:

- Sub-Component 1.1: Strategic Support to State and Region Governments
- Sub-Component 1.2: Strategic Support to Development Affairs Organizations
- Sub-Component 1.3: Subnational Governance Discussion Paper Series and Awareness Raising
- Sub-Component 1.4: Social Accountability and Public Engagement (this is newly added in Year 3 to highlight the importance of fostering transparency and accountability to build citizen cooperation and support to government reforms.)

**Component 1 Theory of Change:** By providing targeted and timely capacity building and policy support directly to state and region governments about pressing policy challenges and at key decision points, it will be possible to achieve improved policy formulation and implementation, enhanced PFM systems and institutions, and greater social accountability.

**End of Program Outcome 1.1:** Strengthened state and region governments with improved policy formulation and implementation, enhanced PFM systems and institutions, and greater social accountability.

**End of Program Outcome 1.2:** Strengthened DAOs with improved policy formulation and implementation, enhanced PFM systems and institutions, and greater social accountability.

**End of Program Outcome 1.3:** Subnational governance policy discourses strengthened and catalyzed through the dissemination and uptake of high quality research on subnational governance processes, structures, and dynamics.

**End of Program Outcome 1.4:** Increased opportunities for collaborative action between government and civil society organizations in promoting transparency, accountability, social inclusion in service delivery.

### Objectives of the Independent Completion Review

The Independent Review (IR) will focus only on the MSSP program. The IR comes at a time when current MSSP donors are considering funding for a second phase of the program and seeking compelling reasons to justify such a decision.

The **objectives** of the review are to:

- a) Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the program's existing theories of change, strategy, design, M&E, and management, as well as the substance of outcome contributions with the intention of strengthening current program performance.
- b) Use these findings to make recommendations for the design of a new MSSP phase.

### Focus Areas

The assessment will cover the whole period of MSSP Phase 1 — from July 2015 to present.

The IR will not include a detailed review of MSSP Components 2 and 3 given their small size relative to Component 1. However, the IR will comment more generally on the potential for similar partnership agreements going forward to include multiple sectors of work.

Given the comparative strength in likelihood of continued DFID funding (relative to the other two donors) the review will be informed by DFID's performance and quality criteria. However, TAF's Strategy Testing approach to monitoring and evaluation may provide guidance in the assessment noting the non-traditional nature of the MSSP. Below are the review questions for the IR:

### On the program strengths and weaknesses

**What elements of program strategy, design, M&E, and management are positively contributing to MSSP's objectives?**

Consider the high-level objectives of improved policy formulation and implementation, enhanced PFM systems and institutions, and greater social accountability at the subnational level, as well as the objectives of the program's sub-components.

**What, if any, are the blockages in program strategy, design (including articulation of desired change), M&E, and management to achieving MSSP's objectives?**

Consider the high-level objectives of improved policy formulation and implementation, enhanced PFM systems and institutions, and greater social accountability at the subnational level, as well as the objectives of the program's sub-components.

**To what extent is MSSP contributing to the objectives of DFID, DFAT, SDC and TAF in Myanmar?**

Taking into consideration any variance between MSSP's intended reform intentions and actual implementation efforts.

On the design of MSSP Phase 2

**What features of the current MSSP and what features currently missing from MSSP should be incorporated to the design of MSSP Phase 2?**

Consider the findings of the program's strengths and weaknesses and how effective MSSP has been in targeting high impact reform areas and remaining flexible in responding to strategic opportunities.

**How should MSSP Phase 2 position itself in relation to other actors in the PFM and urban governance space in Myanmar?**

Consider other recipients of same donor funding (such as World Bank, UNDP, and the Cities for Inclusive Growth program), to identify where TAF's comparative advantage lies and how to best exploit this.

Required Tasks

The independent reviewer will be required to do the following:

Participate in a verbal briefing (with Post on key issues, by phone while developing the evaluation plan, followed by in-country briefing)

Review background, reports, evaluations and other relevant materials

Initial planning, allocation of tasks, and review of relevant documents, prior to the in-country mission

Liaise with TAF in Yangon to finalise the Review Plan, meeting schedule and logistical arrangements.

Conduct a series of in-house workshops with TAF's MSSP teams to review program strengths and weakness and identify program needs and entry points to inform the new phase of the MSSP

Conduct consultations with internal stakeholders in Yangon (Country Director, Deputy Country Director, TAF Program Management Team, sectoral teams)

Conduct consultations with external stakeholders, including:

- Key MSSP grantees such as Renaissance Institute and Koe Tech

- Donor partners from DFID, DFAT and SDC
- Government stakeholders, such as state/region officials and MPs, as well as civil society, think tank actors, and technical advisors in Yangon

Provide well-written reports in a format to be agreed with TAF;  
Use evidence to support the review and final assessment; and  
Provide exit debriefing to DFID, DFAT, SDC and TAF prior to completing the in-country mission.

### Required outputs

The independent reviewer will be required to produce the following outputs:

A review plan — providing details on how the reviewer will execute the review. The plan should include assumptions, approaches, guide questions, timeframe, and deliverables. The plan will be finalised after consultation with TAF.

An aide memoire (of no more than 5 pages) on preliminary findings and recommendations to be presented to TAF (prior to completion of in-country mission)

Exit Briefing to present the preliminary findings and recommendations to be presented to TAF and MSSP donors

A final IR report of no more than 20 pages in length (excluding annexes), provided to TAF Myanmar in electronic version.

The participation of TAF in the review will be as follows:

Arrange for stakeholders to be consulted and, once agreed, schedule and arrange external meetings and interviews.

Brief the independent reviewer on MSSP.

Provide the independent reviewer with TAF knowledge products included in the reading list.

Provide the independent reviewer with information on implementation of MSSP as well as views and motivations of TAF.

Respond to the independent reviewer's inquiries and clarifications.

Where appropriate, TAF staff will accompany the independent reviewer in select meetings and interviews with external stakeholders.

### Review reading list

- MSSP Project Documents
- TAF Strategy Testing: An Innovative Approach to Monitoring Highly Flexible Programs
- MSSP Phase 2 draft Concept Note
- MSSP Monitoring and Evaluation/Results Framework
- DFID Evaluation of PFM Portfolio, 2018
- MSSP Quarterly and Annual Reports

- MSSP knowledge products (i.e. policy papers, project briefs, case studies, reform stories)
- Media pieces on MSSP activities

## Annex 3: Review Schedule

Date	Schedule
Tuesday 23 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrive Yangon</li> <li>• Initial meeting with TAF management</li> </ul>
Wednesday 24 October (Myanmar public holiday)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAF briefings and introductions. Political and historical context of Myanmar and MSSP.</li> <li>• Telecon with TAF Country Representative</li> </ul>
Thursday 25 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop with Team 1</li> <li>• UNDP Chief Technical Adviser, Anki Delinas</li> <li>• Workshop with Team 3</li> </ul>
Friday 26 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop with Team 4</li> <li>• Meeting with World Bank Zubair Bhatti</li> </ul>
Saturday 27 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> </ul>
Sunday 28 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading</li> </ul>
Monday 29 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshop with TAF and Renaissance Institute</li> </ul>
Tuesday 30 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with SDC Rea Bonzi</li> <li>• Meeting with DFAT Counsellor Tim Vistarini</li> </ul>
Wednesday 31 October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with DFID Tom Coward</li> <li>• <i>State &amp; Region Government</i> report launch</li> </ul>
Thursday 1 Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAF management: focus on M&amp;E</li> </ul>
Friday 2 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TAF management: focus on MSSP 2</li> </ul>
Saturday 3 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write-up aide memoire</li> </ul>
Sunday 4 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write-up &amp; distribute aide memoire</li> <li>• Meeting with Head of DFID, Gail Marzetti</li> </ul>
Monday 5 November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal debrief with TAF tem and senior management</li> <li>• Exit briefing with DFAT</li> <li>• Depart Yangon</li> </ul>
Friday 9 November (UK)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telecon with DFID Economist, Nick Wintle</li> </ul>

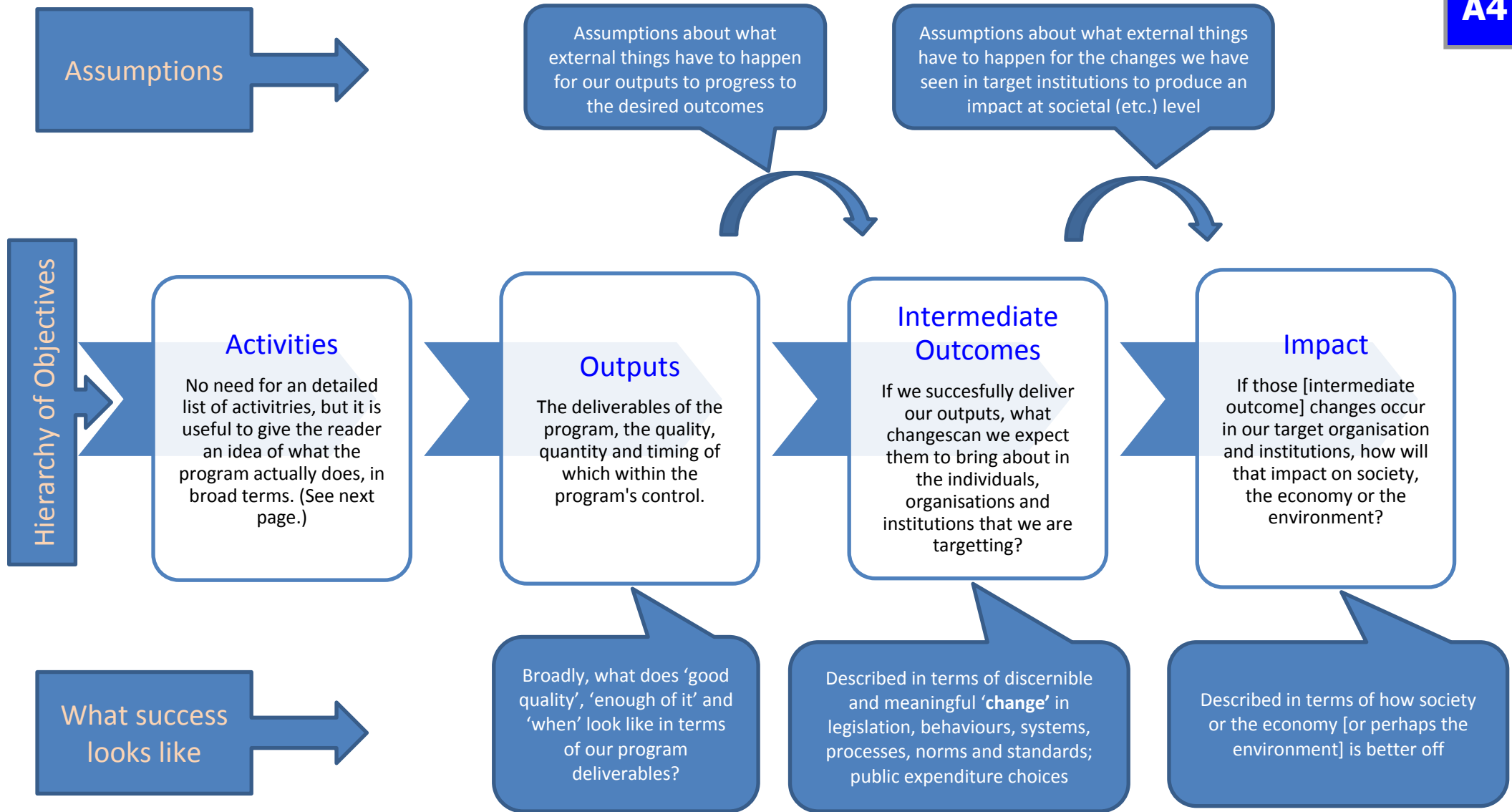
## Annex 4: Conceptualising a Theory of Change

There are many graphical models for presenting a program's logic, assumptions and indicators of success. It doesn't matter which is chosen, provided it properly serves the function of:

- Succinctly<sup>26</sup> making clear<sup>27</sup> **a logical cause-and-effect hierarchy of objectives** (or 'intervention logic' or 'program logic'), from the activities and outputs of the program (which are within the manageable interest of the program implementer) through intermediate outcomes (changes in behaviours, norms or values of the organisations and institutions which the program seeks to influence) through to the impacts those institutional changes have on society, the economy or the environment.
  - There should be no unexplained 'leaps of faith' in progressing from one level to the next.
- **Analysing and making clear the assumptions being made** in progressing from one level of the hierarchy of objectives to the next:
  - If we deliver our outputs satisfactorily, what has to happen beyond our immediate control (but not necessarily beyond our influence) before we see the intermediate outcomes – changes in behaviours etc. – that we expect?
  - What 'rules of the game' have to be adjusted?
  - What incentives need to be brought to bear (or disincentives removed)?
  - Ditto at the next level up – the outcome-to-impact level.
  - Assumptions at this level will probably relate to big shifts in institutions that affect whole populations. But they must nonetheless be realistic – politically possible and technically sound. (By 'technically', we would also start to address fiscal implications, etc.)
  - Assumptions should not be so trivial that they are really within the program's manageable interest ("policy options understood"), and not so wild that they become killer assumptions ("fiscal transfers are trebled").
  - Importantly, can any 'externalities be internalised'? That is to say, if there's an assumption that – for example – a Chief Minister approves a particular policy option, what can we do within the program to support and improve the quality and efficiency of the decision-making process?
- Outlining **what success probably looks like** at each stage. This is not an exhaustive results framework with indicators of every single activity and output but, rather, what sort of change do we hope to see, having what [degree of] effect, and over what sort of period of time. (Quality, quantity, time – QQT.) A good starting point in thinking about this is 'what's currently wrong?' and thus what 'better' would look like.

<sup>26</sup> "Succinctly" should probably mean no more information than can readily be absorbed and remembered.

<sup>27</sup> Making clear to those making both strategic and day-to-day programming choices, and to a program's partners and investors.



This graphic shows a simple four-level hierarchy of objectives. In more complex programs, perhaps where multiple levels of influence are at play (typical of public policy reform) it may be appropriate to outline multiple levels of intermediate outcomes. It may also be useful to have theories of change for short, medium, and long timeframes. A short-term theory of change will be less ambitious but more definite, while long-term theories of change – even if they are subject to change – help justify and contextualise the program in terms of the higher-level outcomes and impacts that might reasonably be anticipated (under current analysis).

## For MSSP 2 ...

**Activities** described should not be exhaustive or prescriptive – they are for program management to devise and adjust as the program progresses. But most external stakeholders value some idea about what the program actually does, and how. For example, what the TAF Philippines *Coalitions for Change* actually did under the banner of its ‘development entrepreneurship’ approach was poorly understood by externally and the following explanation was well received:

### Example: TAF Philippines Coalitions for Change Activities

- Identifying relevant and important policy reform areas through a ‘technically sound, politically possible’ lens.
  - Sometimes in response to requests for assistance from existing reform champions; sometimes the product of ongoing TAF analysis and engagement.
- Identifying committed champions (and anti-champions) of change in important policy areas.
  - Usually through TAF’s longstanding connections and networks of Philippines policy advocates.
  - Drawn from a multiplicity of backgrounds and organisational contexts; sometimes temporary, sometimes enduring; sometimes formal coalitions, sometimes informal networks.
- Analysing the political and technical context and developing an evidence base for reform.
  - Either through TAF’s in-house resources or by contracting them in.
  - Including the identification of entry points into policy debates and processes – whether they be people, organisations, events (political, economic *etc.*) or contemporaneous external trends, influences and forces.
- Mentoring partners on politically-savvy strategy and process
  - Using proven political- and policy-analysis methodologies.
  - Including technical assistance in areas such as legislative drafting, *etc.*
- Convening power and process facilitation – promoting and supporting policy dialogue and advocacy and providing practical support to actors or groups working on policy actions and reforms ... including hands-on help in ‘getting things done and making things happen’.
  - With sensitivity about the subtlety of any connections to external resourcing.
- Iteratively analysing progress, and adjusting strategy accordingly.
  - Which might include dropping the initiative if it’s not showing promise.

*Source: Coalitions for Change Phase I Final Review, 2013/14*

**Outputs** ... are well described in current MSSP documentation. However, keep them strategic and limited in number. Most funding partners aggregate output data and use it to report on progress at county-program level. It is unlikely that there would be the quantity and frequency of significant outputs – if they are pitched strategically enough – to report on them quarterly. Perhaps six-monthly, or even annually.

**Intermediate Outcomes** – need to centre on institutional changes of significance, and ones that are likely to contribute tangibly (in due course) to positive impacts on society at large.

**Impacts** described ultimately provide the justification for the program. The whole program logic leading up to the impacts needs to be framed as not merely being “in line with” such higher-level objectives, but being the optimal route and choice of actions and reforms to bring about such higher-level objectives. A subtle but fundamentally important difference.