



## LIFT HIGHLIGHTS

The dynamics of Myanmar's rural economy continue to evolve, with significant opportunities to reduce poverty, improve people's resilience and agricultural productivity.



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The case studies featured in this publication were selected to aid the reader's understanding of LIFT by illustrating specific, real-life examples/projects. The purpose of the case studies is not to highlight or overshadow some of LIFT's projects over others. While the case studies are essential projects, they do not provide the whole portfolio of LIFT's work. For a complete overview of all LIFT's projects, please refer to the [2018 Annual Report](#).

## **THE LIVELIHOODS AND FOOD SECURITY FUND**

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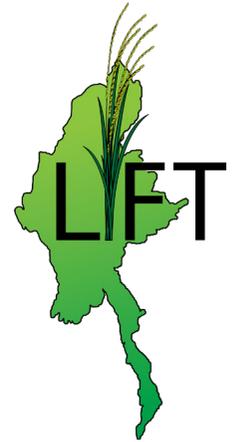
# PROFILE



## LIFT is a multi-donor fund

established in 2009. LIFT has received funding from 15 international donors to date and reached 11.6 million people in 75 per cent of the country's townships. LIFT's strategy has been updated three times since 2009 to maximise its impact in the dynamic and changing context of Myanmar.

2009-2012: LIFT's first strategy focused predominantly on humanitarian and rehabilitation work for rural households affected by Cyclone Nargis.



2012-2014: LIFT's second strategy shifted towards a more development-oriented approach to increase food security and incomes through agriculture and non-farm income generating activities.

2014-2018: LIFT's third and major strategic revision took an explicitly development-oriented approach to assist rural households to 'step up', 'step out' and 'hang in'. LIFT also included a stronger focus on nutrition and a new stream of work on migration.



## Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



2019-2023: The next phase of LIFT has at its heart 'leaving no one behind' in Myanmar's rural transition, building on the previous strategy. It is marked by a series of strategic shifts to:

- ❑ Increase focus on inclusion and social cohesion
- ❑ Intensify efforts on gender equality and women's empowerment
- ❑ Increase geographical focus on ethnic/border states and conflict-affected areas
- ❑ Bring internally displaced persons and returnees into LIFT's development programmes
- ❑ Increase programming in underserved urban and peri-urban areas
- ❑ Work with government at different levels on targeted policies and policy reforms

## Goals and results

LIFT will retain its main focus on strengthening people's resilience, particularly of the poor and vulnerable groups, through its work on livelihoods, food security and nutrition.

LIFT's goal is to contribute to Myanmar's broader efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11.



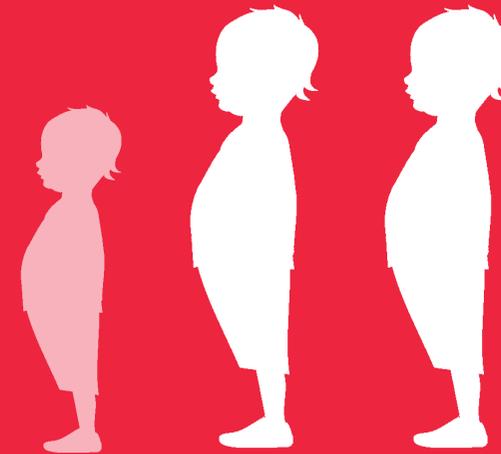
LIFT has organised its programming into four thematic areas that respond to these strategic shifts.

- ▶ Nutrition
- ▶ Financial inclusion
- ▶ Agriculture, markets and food systems
- ▶ Decent work and labour mobility

Each thematic area aims to contribute to changes at the policy, system and household/individual levels.

Myanmar's development hinges on a vibrant collaboration between civil society, the government and the private sector. To contribute to its goals and results, LIFT will work closely with these stakeholders wherever there are appropriate opportunities to strengthen the development process.

# NUTRITION



**One child in three** below the age of five in Myanmar is stunted, or chronically malnourished. This is mainly due to inadequate diets of children and pregnant and breastfeeding women, micronutrient deficiencies, and repeated infections in

the first **1,000 days** of life, from conception through to two years of age. The first 1,000 days is a window of opportunity to ensure the good nutrition necessary for optimal growth, development and health throughout the life cycle, and it starts with good nutrition for adolescent girls and women before pregnancy.

Stunting rates are highest in remote and conflict-affected areas with the highest prevalence in Chin, Rakhine and Kayah States.

## Nutrition

Since 2014, LIFT has established itself as a leader, coordinator and catalyst for nutrition in Myanmar. LIFT played a key role in the State Counsellor, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's, commitment to leadership on nutrition and the actions that resulted from it, including the establishment of the Nutrition Sector Coordination Group, led by the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS).

LIFT has also been active in the development of key nutrition-related policies including the Myanmar Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action for Nutrition (MS-NPAN), the Agriculture Development Strategy, the Rice Fortification Policy, the Social Protection Policy and contributing to the development of the Nutrition Social Behaviour Change Communication Strategy.

An estimate was made in 2013 in *The Lancet* journal that nutrition-specific interventions can only address 20 per cent of the nutrition problem. The remaining **80 per cent must be tackled through nutrition-sensitive interventions.**

The benefits from nutrition-sensitive interventions increase when high-level political leadership, along with inter-ministerial, cross-sector coordination is complemented by local ownership of context-specific nutrition programmes and their outcomes.

LIFT interventions focus on both nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive approaches that are proven to have a positive impact on nutrition outcomes of children, adolescents and women.

### Nutrition-sensitive agriculture

In the Uplands and Dry Zone Programmes, LIFT's implementing partners work with farmer groups to



promote vegetable cultivation while also providing information about nutrition and better dietary practices through social behaviour change approaches.

In Chin State, the Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development (MIID) works closely with the State Agriculture Institute to integrate nutrition education into the curriculum for agriculture extension officers. In the Delta, WorldFish teaches poor, rural households to grow micronutrient-rich small fish, alongside commercial species in home ponds, to promote small fish consumption in households, specifically targeting children of complementary feeding age.



### Did you know?

Children who get the right nutrition in the first 1,000 days complete more grades in school, earn 21 per cent more as adults and are 10 times less likely to die of childhood diseases. Poor nutrition is linked to 45 per cent of child deaths.

Stunting costs Myanmar USD 2-6 billion every year due to lost opportunities and high health costs.

Every dollar spent on nutrition in the first 1,000 days of a child's life can save up to USD 166 by eliminating the need for future development interventions.



## MCCT and nutrition

SAVE THE CHILDREN

LIFT has reached over 43,000 mothers with maternal and child cash transfers (MCCT) linked to social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) in the Delta, Dry Zone and Rakhine. LIFT works across government departments, including the Department of Social Welfare, the National Nutrition Centre, and the Health Literacy Promotion Unit, in support of the government-led MCCT programme in Chin State.

From the first pilot in Rakhine to MCCT programmes in these regions, LIFT has worked to ensure that a SBC component accompanies cash transfers, as evidence is clear that cash transfers together with SBCC deliver positive nutrition outcomes.

As intended when LIFT first funded the programme in 2017, the government announced in 2018 that state-wide cash transfers will be funded from government budgets starting in 2019. LIFT is now supporting DSW to implement MCCT programmes in Kayah and Kayin States.

*Photo credit: Save the Children*



## Fortified rice

PATH

LIFT supports work with the private sector to introduce rice fortified with micronutrients. PATH works closely with the National Nutrition Centre, Department of Public Health, Myanmar Rice Millers Association (MRMA), Population Services International (PSI) and other key stakeholders to promote the purchase of fortified rice by consumers, and the distribution of fortified rice by the government and NGOs. PATH secured approval from Myanmar's Food and Drug Authority for fortified rice kernels and for production in private sector facilities.

In 2018, PATH supported a second fortified rice kernel producer, MAPCO Golden Lace (MAPCO-GL), with the installation of an extrusion machine. In 2018, a cumulative total of 1,639 metric tons (MT) of fortified rice was produced and 1,526 MT of fortified rice was sold through more than 850 retail outlets in Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Nay Pyi Taw, Bago, Mandalay, and Magway Regions and in Sagaing, Rakhine, and Shan State.

PATH increased efforts to increase consumption of fortified rice by those who most need it, the vulnerable poor. Social-sector procurement added up to 413 MT, distributed through public hospitals



under the Ministry of Health and Sports and feeding programmes under the Department of Social Welfare (DSW). In 2018, DSW expanded its school feeding programme to include fortified rice at schools in Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Bago, Nay Pyi Taw, Mandalay, Magway and Sagaing, reaching 12,500 beneficiaries. The MoHS committed to introducing fortified rice in 1,300 public hospital feeding programmes, 55 midwifery and nursing schools, and six sports institutes nationwide.

PATH partnered with PSI to implement a comprehensive demand-generation campaign through mass media and interpersonal face-to-face promotion. PSI and PATH worked with the Union of Myanmar Federation of Chambers of Commerce (UMFCCI) and Business Kind Myanmar to introduce fortified rice to garment factory workers, most of whom are young women, in peri-urban areas.

PATH supported two rice millers in Rakhine with the installation of blending units. World Food Programme began distributing fortified rice in Sittwe in September 2018 and reached 10,188 internally displaced people (IDP) living in six IDP camps with 304 MT of fortified rice distributed by the end of the year.

*Photo credit: PATH/Minzayar*



LIFT's Nutrition Programme supports Myanmar's implementation of the Multi-Sectoral National Plan of Action on Nutrition (MS-NPAN).

**The overall goal of the MS-NPAN is to reduce all forms of malnutrition in Myanmar**, which will lead to healthier and more productive lives that contribute to the economic and social aspirations of the country.

The MS-NPAN is based on the underlying assumption that collaboration between key actors and stakeholders is imperative for the long-term and sustainable improvement of nutrition for women, children and adolescents in Myanmar.

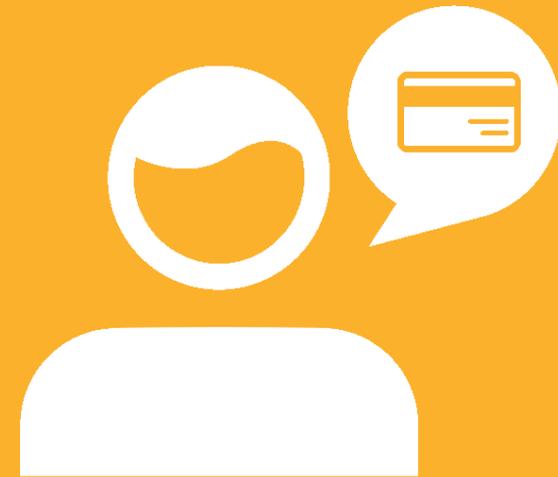
LIFT has committed to supporting the inception period of the MS-NPAN (October 2018–October 2019), which has three focus areas: 1) capacity assessment and development plans, 2) prioritisation of interventions and 3) monitoring and evaluation.

LIFT and the Access to Health fund are working together to support the MS-NPAN through government counterparts and are supporting the National Nutrition Centre with over 60 per cent of the costs associated with the inception year. LIFT will further explore the specific contributions it can make to the roles of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation and Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement in the MS-NPAN.

As LIFT shifts into prioritising conflict-affected areas and urban settings, the nutrition needs of affected residents and internally-displaced and migrant households will be addressed. LIFT will continue to focus on addressing the barriers to access, affordability and utilisation of a safe, nutritious and appropriate diet, while moving to incorporate the links between acute and chronic malnutrition.



# FINANCIAL INCLUSION



**USD 2.5 billion** was the estimated unserved demand for debt financing in Myanmar in June 2018. Large sections of the population remain unserved or underserved despite substantial expansion of the financial sector since 2012.

In the past four years, LIFT's Financial Inclusion Programme has grown from a budget of **USD 81.1**

**million to USD 363.2 million** with private sector co-financing to help bridge the gap in Myanmar.

## Financial Inclusion

Socially responsible and inclusive financial services provide a wide range of benefits to both individuals and the economy. While savings can play a vital role in helping households, **access to credit is crucial** to the growth and development of businesses that generate employment and income streams across all sectors of Myanmar's economy.

LIFT's financial inclusion programme continues to support microfinance institutions (MFIs) to develop and introduce more demand-driven financial services that serve diversified market segments.

By December 2018, LIFT-supported MFIs were delivering deposit services, lines of credit, leasing, term-finance, debt consolidation loans, financing for seasonal crops (beans, pulses, oilseeds, maize), livestock, small business and customised loans for low-income women, migrants, people with disabilities and the internally displaced.

LIFT has 26 financial inclusion partners (nine local MFIs, 13 international MFIs, one joint venture company, two cooperatives and one local bank) that reached 2,632,283 clients from 207 townships.

### MFI Client Protection and Social Performance

**Client protection is essential to ensure that MFIs do not inadvertently harm their clients.**

MFIs take reasonable measures that their products, policies, and practices avoid harmful or unfair

LIFT's emphasis and investment in the Financial Inclusion Programme is guided by the view that its development supports a pathway out of poverty to rural economic growth.

## Key 2018 microfinance results



**2.63 million**  
clients from 223 townships  
(growth of 61 per cent from 2016)



**USD 600 million**  
total assets (growth of 149 per cent since 2016)



**USD 803 million**  
in loans disbursed (during 2018)



**USD 96 million**  
in savings mobilised

treatment and appropriately balance clients' and their own interests as they conduct business.

This minimum standard of **'do no harm'** is essential to a business's good conduct, regardless of the MFI's specific mission, profit goals or ownership structure. Social performance is achieved if MFIs go beyond the 'do no harm' standard of client protection to measure and manage progress against a specific social mission, ensuring effective translation of the mission into client benefit and appropriate behaviour toward staff, the community and the environment. While MFIs' social missions may vary, the most common social goals pursued are outreach to underserved and vulnerable people, poverty reduction and empowerment of women.

LIFT's MFIs, the Capital Market Programme's impact investors and partner TCX and the government all support financial inclusion that serves to improve vulnerable people's lives. In recent years, the

movement towards responsible finance has shaped the industry's belief that financial service providers have a responsibility to deliver financial services in a way that is transparent, fair, safe and likely to generate benefits for poor clients.





## Agribusiness Finance Programme

YOMA BANK

LIFT launched the Agribusiness Finance Programme (AFP) with Yoma Bank in 2016 to provide hire purchase finance for farm machinery to rural entrepreneurs. In 2017, the AFP expanded to deliver more rural financial services.

By December 2018, LIFT's USD 18 million contribution to the AFP had leveraged a value of USD 201 million USD (MMK 268 billion) of private sector capital from Yoma Bank. It is estimated that the programme has reached around 450,000 rural families through this innovative approach.

Since the programme began in 2016, new agriculture machinery and equipment valued at USD 138 million USD was financed to 6,530 small and medium rural agri-businesses and entrepreneurs. The finance was accessed through 47 Yoma Bank branches across 12 states and regions. It is estimated that the programme has reached about 200,000 rural families with direct hire purchase financing for farm machinery and with resulting farm machinery rental services.

### AFP farm machinery and equipment hire purchase financing

Before LIFT introduced the AFP, clients needed to make a down payment of 30 per cent. Under the AFP, the down payment has steadily reduced: from 21 per cent in 2016 to 14 per cent in 2017 and to 13 per cent in 2018. Clients have three years to repay the loan, rather than 12 months before the programme began. Repayments can be made bi-annually in line with small enterprises' seasonal cash flows.

About USD 115 million USD (MMK 153 billion) in financing resulted in agricultural machinery and equipment valued at USD 138 million (MMK 183 billion) being purchased by 6,530 rural entrepreneurs/rural agri-businesses. The reduced down payment and extended loan tenor enabled rural agri-businesses to buy higher quality and more powerful machinery and equipment.

The equipment financed includes:

- 4,002 four-wheels tractors (4WTs)
- 954 combine harvesters (harvesting and thresh)
- 272 two-wheels tractors (2WTs)
- 13 harvesters
- 1,289 agricultural transport vehicles

### Introducing innovative products

In the second half of 2017, Yoma Bank introduced **four new lending products** that were all new to the Myanmar market and are designed to increase supply of un(der)secured loans to agri-businesses in Myanmar.

By the end of 2018, AFP's disbursed USD 82 million in unsecured lending reached an estimate of 240,000 rural families through 27 Yoma Bank branches.

#### 1. Discounted accounts receivable financing

provides a cash injection at the top of the value chain enabling input dealers to sell to more farmers on credit. Yoma Bank provides working capital increasing agricultural inputs in the market. By the end of 2018, MMK 10 billion (USD 7.4 million) was disbursed, benefiting around 20,330 farmers.

#### 2. Dealer payable financing

is structured for the dealers in the middle of the value chain, rather than the suppliers at the top. This product helps dealers purchase inputs from suppliers. By the end of 2018, MMK 10.5 billion (USD 8 million) was disbursed, benefiting more than 15,000 farmers.

#### 3. Seasonal Overdraft Financing

helps small- and medium-sized maize traders to increase their capacity to trade and stimulate market expansion. By the end of 2018, MMK 13 billion (USD 9 million) was disbursed, benefiting an estimated 14,400 maize farmers.

#### 4. MFI lending

is a back-to-back, semi-secured funding product that allows overseas funding to be hedged resulting in more micro-loans to farmers. AFP built up the product, from the design phase including the introduction of credit policy, legal documentation, MFI scorecard, process flows, due diligence and more. By the end of 2018, MMK 80 billion (USD 58 million) was disbursed to 11 MFIs, benefiting an estimate of 191,500 farmers.





## Providing high-quality seeds to farmers

Awba

LIFT is providing funding to support the production, processing and marketing of high-quality seeds of priority crops, especially for beans and pulses, oilseeds, and other open-pollinated variety crops in the Dry Zone. LIFT is supporting the project led and implemented by Awba, a leading private sector input provider. The innovative initiative sees Awba create a locally-owned company with membership, shareholding, dividends and benefits linked to farmers' seed production. LIFT's support is crucial to catalyse private sector investment, which would otherwise not happen as the gross margins in open-pollinated seed production are significantly lower in comparison to the margins for hybrid seed production. Awba's role is to provide professional management expertise, investment capital and nationwide market reach as the distributor of the seeds.

The project's inception phase ran from April to December 2018, during which a detailed project plan was developed, including a seed production calendar.

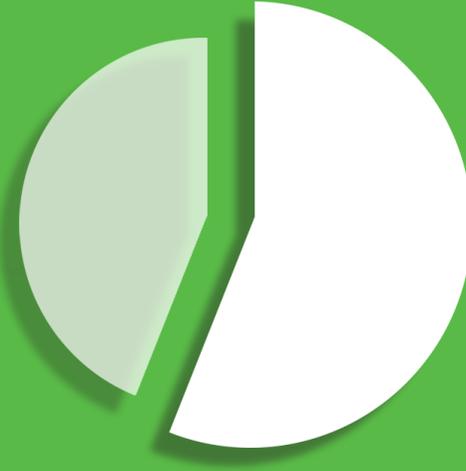
The first phase of activities focused on green gram, black gram and sesame seed production, followed by multiple seasonal crops such as groundnut, chick pea and pigeon pea in different production locations.

The first season of green gram was harvested in May and the second season in November, with an average seed yield of 12-14 baskets per acre. The processing was carried out by the Department of Agriculture and it was germination tested. Technical data sheets for each crop were recorded. Currently the project has 1.6 tons of registered seed in inventory.

As of December 2018, the project is on schedule to successfully establish a locally owned seed company — Pahtama Seeds Co. Ltd — by July 2019. Pahtama Seeds Co. Ltd contracted over 60 growers, 6,120 acres of certified seed, in Pale and Thongwa, Monywa, for green gram seeds production.



# AGRICULTURE MARKETS AND FOOD SYSTEMS



The agriculture sector accounts for about 30 per cent of Myanmar's gross domestic product (GDP).

With **56 per cent** of the nation's labour market positioned in the agriculture sector, it is

Myanmar's **largest employer.**

However, profitability and productivity of most major crops is low with average yields at about half of their potential. This is further exacerbated by post-harvest losses that are often greater than

**40 per cent** in certain commodities.

## Agriculture, Markets and Food Systems

Agriculture and market development have been central to LIFT's work since 2012. LIFT has supported and learnt from a wide range of projects and activities to sustainably improve the productivity and incomes of smallholder farmers.

### Strengthening smallholder farmers' position in the rice value chain

Functional farmer organisations are effective vehicles in integrating farmers and their produce into value chains, contributing to greater equity in benefit distribution, increased economic prosperity and democratisation of the entire food system. The basis of the business model rests on the notion that farmers who can group together and coordinate their actions generate improved bargaining power and attain efficiencies and economies of scale that bring financial benefits for members.

**Welthungerhilfe (WHH)/GRET's Delta RISE project** builds on producer organisations to deliver services along the value chain using cooperative and association models to structure their organisations.

Producer organisations promote group-based problem solving focused on issues of concern to farmers, such as improving production volumes, standardising and streamlining production and reducing costs of production through the introduction of new approaches and technologies. Together, GRET and WHH are supporting 42 producer organisations with 1,143 members.

**Metta's Promotion of Farmer-Managed Schemes for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development project** organises farmers by establishing village tract development organisations (VTDOs). The VTDOs have a range of focus areas that include establishing inventory credit (IC) schemes. In 2018, 60 farmers used the scheme for summer paddy, depositing 8,100 baskets (169 tons) of rice with an estimated benefit of USD 7,100 to participating farmers.

### Improving the production and distribution of high quality rice seed

Access to quality seed of improved rice varieties that are well adapted to prevailing agro-ecological zones in the Delta, is a precursor to increasing productivity and ensuring homogeneity of the product delivered to millers. The use of quality seed of well-adapted and high-yielding rice varieties is one of the key bottlenecks in the rice value chain in Myanmar. To address this impasse, LIFT supports five projects that focus on farmer production of quality declared or certified rice seeds and the development of rice seed businesses.

**The Welthungerhilfe (WHH)/Centre for Development of Innovation (CDI), Wageningen University's, Rice Sector Support Development (RSSD) project** focuses entirely on developing the rice seed sector and includes support to the Department of Agriculture. Twenty-two smallholder seed growers and 13 cluster groups applying Participatory Guarantee Systems were selected and awarded funding in 2018 totalling USD 110,000 for a range of business investments.

**The Delta RISE project of WHH/GRET** has 77 seed growers producing quality seeds under the Participatory Guarantee System's certification. In 2018, 180 tons of quality seed were produced. The average profit for farmers who produced certified seed was estimated to be MMK 370,000 MMK (USD 256). The project assisted farmers to become established seed producers through training, supplying registered seed, linking producers with the Department of Agriculture for testing and certification of seed, linking with markets, forming producer groups, and in some cases registering groups as associations.

### Extension and advisory services

More private and public sector actors are providing training to farmers who are members of farmer organisations. Interested farmers have been trained on how to provide basic extension advice to members. Projects have explicitly promoted improved linkages with the Department of Agriculture and trained key farmers as trainers for ongoing advisory support. Extension services in the rice value chain projects in the Delta have directly reached around 15,000 farmers and resulted in significant yield increases.

**The Linking Labutta to Market (LLM) project** continued its collaboration with private companies, including AWBA, a large input supply company. In 2018, the LLM project worked with AWBA to promote the soil testing services through input supply and training managers (ITMs). By the end of 2018, there were 113 ITMs and 350 farmers who had received agricultural training or advice from government extension staff or a private company.



### Did you know?

While there is considerable potential for production and productivity gains in Myanmar, the agricultural sector has languished compared to other sectors of the economy. This is due to a lack of investment in infrastructure, limited financial and weak extension services and research.



## Mechanisation

To facilitate the adoption of mechanisation, LIFT funds a programme implemented by Yoma Bank that offers a hire purchase product to farmers and entrepreneurs in partnership with equipment dealers. Under the Agribusiness Finance Programme (AFP), supported by LIFT, Yoma Bank reduces the down payment to a minimum of 10 per cent, allows longer tenors and provides more loans with a bi-annual repayment cycle to accommodate farmers' seasonal cash flows. Once a farmer fully owns a harvester, the number of days a worker spends harvesting one acre drops from an estimated 4.9 days/acre to 0.3 days/acre.

## Linking the private sector with producers

LIFT explores opportunities through its implementing partners to create linkages between farmers and the private sector - input service providers, farm equipment dealers, viable seed suppliers, crop insurance and financial services providers, rice millers and traders. All have a role to play in ensuring that farmers can access the best services and inputs for their production systems.

**The Linking Labutta to Markets project** enabled 874 smallholder farmers to purchase high quality inputs from market actors with an overall value of USD 331,000.



## Supporting the aquaculture and fisheries sector

The fisheries sector in Myanmar plays a crucial role in shaping the national economy and provides livelihoods and food security to an estimated 2.6 million people. The Ayeyarwady Region is rich in biodiversity and fisheries production supporting hundreds of thousands of small-scale fishing and generating the highest revenue for the Ayeyarwady Regional Government.

**Network Activities Group (NAG)** supported the Ayeyarwady Regional Government's development of the legislation that opened up the licensing and use of inland water to small community co-management fisheries. It laid the foundation for the spreading of benefits derived from the Delta's fisheries resources and improving livelihoods, including opportunities for gender mainstreaming in sub-national governance. In 2018, 107 villages in 11 townships were engaged in co-management, with more than 6,000 households (nearly 27,000 people) directly benefiting.

**WorldFish's My Culture project** promotes sustainable growth of aquaculture in Myanmar to improve food security and income for communities. The project has reached 3,200 farmers directly and many have expressed satisfaction with the additional production that generates food and income. The project supports the Department of Fisheries-operated Hlaw Kar and Daedaye hatcheries to promote a genetically-improved farmed tilapia breeding programme to contribute to sustainable aquaculture development in Myanmar.

## Looking ahead

Approach that guides actions needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and ensure food security in a changing climate.

climate-smart agriculture  
approach  
value policy  
nutrition-sensitive  
agri-food system  
women's  
empowerment

Food-based approach to agricultural development that places nutritionally rich foods, dietary diversity, and food fortification central to addressing malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

activities and relationships that determine how food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed, together with the human and biological systems that shape these activities at every stage. Building resilience to shocks and stresses along the entire continuum.



# DECENT WORK AND LABOUR MOBILITY



## Myanmar is a country on

**the move.** There are over 9.39 million internal migrants and an estimated 4.25 million international migrants. Added together, this represents **a quarter of Myanmar's population.**

According to the World Bank, an estimated USD 2.8 billion was remitted by international migrants in 2018, which does not include the billions more that are remitted through informal channels. A nationally representative study on financial inclusion by UNCDF estimated that the real remittance account may be closer to **USD 10.8 billion.**

A lack of sufficient employment opportunities at home and the promise of higher wages at destination are key motivations for people to migrate, particularly for populations in rural and conflict-affected areas.

## Decent Work and Labour Mobility

Migration is an important livelihood strategy in rural areas, allowing households to diversify and stabilise their incomes. Sending a family member to the city or abroad for work can provide a measure of social protection against distresses associated with a sudden loss of income.

In spite of its social and economic importance, Myanmar has yet to establish a migration governance framework fit to manage its immense labour migration flows. **Migration is often a considerable gamble for migrant workers and their families**, with many experiencing abusive practices during their recruitment and employment (e.g. forced labour and human trafficking).

The benefits of migration disproportionately go to unscrupulous recruiters, exploitative employers and rent-seeking authorities rather than contributing to the social and economic development of migrant households.

To expand the opportunities for safe migration, LIFT began funding a USD 24 million Migration Programme in 2016. The programme has contributed to increased incomes and resilience for poor and vulnerable populations across Myanmar by making migration experiences safer and more rewarding.

Currently, LIFT's Migration Programme supports seven projects and is the largest funding window for migration in Myanmar.

### Did you know?

One in every four people in Myanmar is a migrant, while the global average is one in every seven.

### Strengthening the labour migration governance framework and mainstreaming migration into sectoral policies

Traditionally, government policy in Myanmar has addressed labour migration as a problem to be solved rather than a natural part of the development process that can bring significant social and economic benefits to the country if managed effectively. Because of this, the legal and institutional structures necessary to support labour migration governance remain under-developed and have had limited effect in shaping migration experiences.

To provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population (MoLIP), LIFT has supported the International Labour Organization (ILO) to implement the **Development of Internal and International Migration Governance (DIILM) project** since February 2016. The overall goal of this initiative is to establish a labour migration governance framework in Myanmar that enables women and men to migrate safely and benefit from their employment abroad.

Revision of the *Law Relating to Overseas Employment* was also moved forward in 2018. The existing law passed in 1999 became outdated for effective regulation of the labour migration process. Several drafts of the law were developed, and the latest draft of the amended law is expected to be gazetted during 2019.

### Collaborating with the private sector for a responsible and productive response for rural to urban migration

Female migrants report that a common challenge for obtaining jobs is a lack of training opportunities as factory owners are reluctant to employ untrained workers. If women are not able to find sufficient income quickly, they can be driven into debt or forced to take up exploitative forms of employment. There are also substantial problems with sexual harassment in the garment sector.

LIFT funds **The Aung Myin Hmu (AMH) project** to address these challenges. Implemented by a consortium of **CARE International and Business Kind Myanmar**, the project began in 2017. The AMH project expands the opportunities for decent work through increasing access to training, peer networks and support services for women migrants in the peri-urban areas of Yangon, focusing on Hlaing Thar Yar and Shwe Pyi Thar Townships. In addition, the project advocates for the development of sexual harassment policy and relevant complaint mechanisms in garment factories.

AMH project provided training for 2,000 women and men for work in the garment sector, and 95 per cent of AMH graduates have passed the National Skills Standards Authority's assessment test. Importantly, the training contributed to better working conditions for migrant women in the garment sector – 64 per cent of AMH-trained employees have higher salaries than those who are not trained.

## What is Decent Work?

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as involving “opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.” As such it can be regarded as one end of a continuum which stretches in the opposite direction to more exploitative labour practices that become, at their most extreme, forced labour and human trafficking.



Forced labour

Decent labour



### **BBC Media Action and information on safe and rewarding migration**

**BBC Media Action initiated a project** to leverage national and local media platforms to support more informed decision-making about migration and financial management in 2016. The project produced weekly episodes of a national radio programme and supported civil society partners in eight states and regions to facilitate inclusive community discussions about migration and household finances.

Broadcast weekly since September 2017, the Yay Kyi Yar (Towards Clearer Waters) radio programme has established itself as a trusted, informative and inspirational show. In 2018, 52 new episodes of Yay Kyi Yar were produced and broadcast.

BBC Media Action also organised 40 weekly listener clubs for the Yay Kyi Yar programme across 14 regions and states of Myanmar – engaging more than 2,000 individual listeners.

A nationally representative survey conducted in 2018 suggested that the programme reached 3.2 million listeners in Myanmar. Among this group, 43 per cent said they actively took initiative to better manage their finances as a result of listening to Yay Kyi Yar.



### **Eden Ministry and outreach to women migrants in the sex industry**

**LIFT has supported Eden Ministry** to deliver outreach and assistance to survivors of trafficking in Yangon’s sex industry since March 2017. The project provides women and girls with the opportunity to sustainably exit from exploitative situations.

Through outreach in Yangon’s red-light areas, the Eden project raises awareness about sexually transmitted diseases and provides free HIV testing services for sex workers. The project has screened 205 community members for HIV and provided counselling and referrals for those who tested positive. Since the start of the project, 62 women and girls have been identified and provided with protection services.

The project also offers holistic shelter and rehabilitation services for survivors of trafficking. Eden’s shelter facility provides trauma-focused counselling and creative and restorative therapies to help survivors after their experiences. Eden also provides skills training in jewellery making, hairdressing, computer literacy, coffee making, baking, sales and several languages to assist their beneficiaries with finding employment.

### **Establishing a migration knowledge partnership to inform the migration discourse**

Women and men migrant workers play a critically important role in shaping Myanmar’s economic and social development. However, the complexities of the migration-development nexus in Myanmar are still not well understood due to major gaps in the knowledge base.

Since January 2016, LIFT has supported International Organisation for Migration, Metta Development Foundation and the University of Sussex to conduct a large-scale research study on the relationship between migration and development in Myanmar. Their **Capitalizing on Human Mobility for Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development in Myanmar (CHIME) project** aims to fill this knowledge gap, so that the Myanmar Government, development actors, civil society organisations and the private sector can have an increased understanding of the migration-development nexus and are encouraged to act on evidence-based recommendations on leveraging migration for development.

The CHIME report was launched on International Migrants’ Day 2018 at the Myanmar Government’s official ceremony in Nay Pyi Taw, hosted by the Vice President, with participation of ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors, heads of United Nations agencies and other key stakeholders.

The findings of the research demonstrate that Myanmar has a highly mobile population. The study highlights that as Myanmar continues to develop and more opportunities for internal and international mobility open up, labour migration is likely to continue to expand. Bold policy measures are needed to ensure that the positive impacts of migration are magnified, while the risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrants are reduced.

Photo credit: *Eden Ministry*





**International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Twe Let project** partnered with civil society organisations to provide direct services to over 54,000 migrants across 732 villages in seven states and regions in 2018. These services include: pre-migration outreach, training on saving remittances, training on income generation, and skills development training and job matching. The innovative approach in pre-migration outreach has delivered safe migration messaging through a bold [live theatre show](#) in Chin State, reaching nearly 10,000 people in surrounding townships.

An outcome survey was organised to assess the results of the Twe Let project training activities in late 2018. More than 2,000 beneficiaries were interviewed across all four intervention areas.

The survey showed that knowledge of safe migration practices had increased significantly. It was also found that the training on financial literacy was successful in increasing the amount of remittances being saved for the majority of participants (71 per cent). For beneficiaries of skills training, 41 per cent reported having found a new job or business opportunity and 75 per cent said their income had increased as a result.

*Photo Credit: IOM 2018*

## Why theatre?

Chin State's unique context presented a unique challenge to the formal pre-migration outreach training methodology. Formal trainings structured around course work and exercises were not suited to Chin communities in difficult-to-reach areas with low literacy levels. It was quickly decided that a more oral methodology would be more appropriate to bridge the low literacy gap.

The Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) also found that the typical community-level pre-migration outreach event in Chin State was mainly attended by older men. Many of these activities had limited participation by women and the youth.

A different, more open and engaging method of implementing pre-migration outreach was clearly needed. Live theatre's strengths, namely its open-ended storytelling that goes beyond the passive consumption of stories, made it an appropriate candidate for pre-migration outreach.

A similar initiative in Thailand showed that theatre as an awareness-raising tool has several advantages. Live performances are engaging and include fluid and spontaneous interactions with audiences. As theatre is an oral medium, literacy is not an issue. Theatre shows can reach large numbers of people, and since electricity and complicated infrastructure is not always necessary, they can be organised even in very remote communities. More importantly, theatre shows involve and train large numbers of local people as actors, who in turn can disseminate knowledge in their communities' local dialect. As an awareness-raising tool, theatre shows can reach everyone, irrespective of their educational level or expertise in migration.

## Looking ahead

Under the framework of this thematic area, the protection of fundamental labour rights will be the cornerstone for building a foundation for decent work in Myanmar. This approach makes explicit that the path to achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth must be rooted in a labour market that provides fair wages and working conditions, allows for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, and does not permit forced labour, child labour or discrimination in respect to employment.

The Decent Work and Labour Mobility Programme will focus on reducing the structural vulnerabilities experienced by marginalised populations of workers, including women, migrants, ethnic minorities, informal sector workers, displaced people, people with disabilities and the LGBTQI community. The interventions will address sectoral exclusions from labour and social protection laws, ineffective labour mobility systems, gender-based bans on deployment, criminalisation of sex work and other sources of exposure to the risk of abuse.



# CIVIL SOCIETY STRENGTHENING

Strengthening local organisations' capacity to support sustainable development of livelihoods in Myanmar is an integral part of LIFT's work.

Since its inception, LIFT has worked with civil society partners through its various funding windows. In 2016, new processes were implemented to assist civil society organisations (CSO) to fulfil proposal requirements, resulting in an increase in the proportion of LIFT funds being granted to Myanmar CSOs. A strategic partnership modality was also established in 2016 and small grants funds were established in selected townships of the Delta, Dry Zone and Uplands. In order to increase LIFT's CSOs, LIFT's fund board has now decided that a minimum of 20 per cent of every funding window will be ring-fenced for CSO partners.

## Small Grants Funds

In the first half of 2018, all three small grants funds became fully operational, having developed and tested their systems, conducted township assessments, supported the formation of township-level networks and established representative grant approval and advisory committees.

**The Uplands Township Fund** is facilitated by a consortium of SWISSAID, Metta and GRET. By the end of 2018, the Uplands Township Fund had provided funds to 121 township-level partners from 15 townships.

**The Delta Small Grants Fund** is facilitated by GRET. There were 70 CSO grant-holders in Delta townships at the end of 2018.

**The Dry Zone Small Grants Fund** is facilitated by PACT and began issuing grants in 2018. By the end of the year, the fund had 76 partners from nine townships.

Around 36 per cent of the applicants have so far been funded. LIFT will continue its support at the township level. The township level is often where the most significant livelihoods practices and policies are enacted and have impact on Myanmar people's lives. It is also at this level where the weak linkages between village and state/regional/national civil society can be strengthened.

## Civil Society and Connectedness

LIFT aims to establish a **system-strengthening approach** by improving coordination among different stakeholders such as small grant partners, the private sector, local authorities and civil society actors. With LIFT's work in the past decade, there is growing evidence that the approach has been understood and the different stakeholders have started to work together.

For example, 52 per cent of the 76 CSOs in upland areas report that they are being increasingly recognised by local authorities; 89 per cent of CSOs in the Upland Township Fund report stronger connections with other civic groups in their townships; and six of the township-level CSO networks in the upland areas are now linked with state-level CSO networks.

There is also increased recognition of township-level CSOs by the private sector. Twenty CSOs that were awarded grants by the Upland Township Fund work with private sector associations such as the Myanmar Tea Cluster and Myanmar Organic Growers and Producers Association (MFVP) that provides farmers with market information, technical training support and hosts trips for farmers to areas where they can learn about facilitating market linkages between farmers and traders.

Township-level CSOs are also increasingly networking with each other as a result of the small grant funds and have started to work on joint policy advocacy with township-level authorities. In Salin Township in the Dry Zone, 30 CSOs attend monthly meetings to discuss health, education and other township affairs.

## Did you know?

LIFT continuously tracks the share of its total funding that is directly managed by Myanmar's CSOs. In 2018, 21 per cent of LIFT's funds were granted to Myanmar's CSOs, roughly USD 13.1 million dollars. The percentage is set to rise during 2019-2023.

## Civil Society and Gender

Small grants funds report that through LIFT-funded CSOs, women are increasingly advocating for, and achieving, greater economic inclusion. In addition to the 19 qualified women-led CSOs that were awarded LIFT grants, women are increasingly integrating themselves into interconnected livelihoods systems, often as a result of livelihoods trainings on increasing income and decreasing financial dependence.

**One of LIFT's strategic partners, the Gender Equality Network (GEN)** advocates to promote women in leadership roles. GEN organises regional, national, sub-national level workshops, forums and seminars and promotes women's leadership at events as participants, panelists and guest speakers, gaining media exposure of women's leadership at these events.

In 2018, GEN conducted a number of research studies for evidence-based advocacy:

- *A Hundred Cases*, which highlighted barriers that women faced in accessing the justice system
- *Service Provision for Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Myanmar*, which highlighted the many gaps in comprehensive service provision for gender-based violence survivors
- *Hidden Blanks to be Filled*, which explored legal frameworks needed to protect women and prevent violence

The studies reinforced the need for enacting the Protection of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) law and establishment of One Stop Service Centers (OSSCs) for women experiencing violence in states and regions.

The Department of Social Welfare has incorporated recommendations to increase the number of OSSCs in the Violence Against Women Technical Working Group Action Plan at the national level.

## Strategic Partnerships

LIFT has entered into six strategic civil society partnerships at the national level.

**The Food Security Working Group (FSWG), Gender Equality Network (GEN), and Land Core Group (LCG)** are network-based and work primarily on research and national policy advocacy on issues including gender-based violence, soil fertility, food security, farmland law, and women's political participation.

**Metta, Network Activities Group (NAG) and Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS)** focus on institutional growth and support, developing research, policy and practice capacity, and enabling project innovation.

## Looking ahead

At its February 2018 meeting LIFT's Fund Board approved a programme approach for LIFT's civil society support. Building on the pilots of 2017/18, a full and interlinked set of funding modalities will come on-stream in 2019: ring-fenced shares of LIFT's thematic-focused funding windows, a civil society research facility, strategic partnerships, small-grants funding and a CSO learning and networking support..



# RESILIENCE

Myanmar is the country second most-affected by climate change in the world. Over the last six decades, Myanmar's mean temperature and overall rainfall has increased, extreme weather events have become more common and sea levels have risen. These changes impact on everyone in Myanmar but the poor, the vulnerable and those relying on subsistence agriculture are most affected. LIFT targets these households and builds their capacity to cope with climate shocks and stresses and adapt in the face of climate change.

Through these pathways LIFT's programmes support households and people to:

- ❑ 'step up' the value ladder within agriculture, and out of poverty
- ❑ 'step out' of agriculture into other productive sectors of the economy
- ❑ 'hang in' by using agriculture as a safety net, and improving their food security and nutrition

LIFT's programmes build resilience through context-specific interventions targeted to the needs of local people in each agro-ecological zone. Projects and programmes identify risks of climate change and disasters, rate them and describe appropriate actions in their regularly updated risk matrixes.

Taking mechanisation, for example, supported by LIFT's Agribusiness Finance Programme, improves farmers' resilience in all regions by ensuring certainty to the timing of rice harvesting and planting.

## Delta

Delta programme has a strong focus on the seed value chain and helping farmers 'step up' the value ladder within agriculture. The Delta Programme also

looks at the long-term impacts of climate change and seeks to conserve quality local seed varieties and safeguard biodiversity.

When farmers have access to good quality seed their resilience to climate shocks and stresses is improved in the long term.

The growing of high yielding rice hybrids that are well adapted to the summer dry season extends the overall production period for rice in the Delta with high yield potential. Through farmer organisations with linkages to the private sector, fertiliser recommendations are made based on soil test results and have resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in nitrogen use.

## Dry Zone

The green manure approach applied in the Dry Zone resulted in increased organic matter in the soil. This, in the long-term, increases carbon sequestration and improves the soil's resilience to short droughts.

Department of Agriculture staff in six townships and more than 25,000 farmers have been trained in good agriculture practices of conservation agriculture.

Farmers have learned about the soil, crops, and the impact of climate change. They now employ an improved fertiliser regime optimising the use of the fertiliser at the time needed by the plants. They learned about using different crop rotations and sensible plant protection approaches and have access to improved varieties.

## Definition

Resilience is the increased capacity of individuals, households and communities to cope with, and recover from, shocks and stresses arising from climate change, and/or macro and micro socio-economic pressures.

## Rakhine

Rakhine State is the region in Myanmar most prone to cyclones and is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including flooding and salt water intrusion. The Rakhine Tat Lan programme has built 340 kilometres of embankments to protect 42,000 acres of paddy fields from salt water intrusion, building the resilience of more than 7,000 households. These interventions supported farmers to 'step up' the value ladder within agriculture and protected them from socio-economic shocks as well as the impacts of climate change.

## Uplands

CORAD in Chin State is promoting slash-and-mulch techniques as a climate-smart farming strategy. The technique is an alternative to the traditional slash-and-burn method that results in improved soil water storage and conservation, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and soil carbon storage.

In Kachin State, Metta works on community forestry focusing on regeneration of degraded forests through the planting of well adapted tree species that include high value teak and primary succession species.



# GENDER

LIFT's gender mainstreaming focus continued to increase in 2018. In early 2018, LIFT developed gender sensitivity guidelines that were included in Calls for Proposals to promote integration of gender aspects into projects from the design stage.

LIFT's Gender Action Plan was also finalised in the early 2018, consisting of gender-related and gender-specific actions for each of LIFT's programmes. Each activity in the action plan is accompanied by an indicator and an expected timeframe for completion of the activity with new monitoring sheets that are developed and used by the programme's gender focal points to document progress on gender mainstreaming on a bi-annual basis.

As part of capacity building support for its partners, LIFT conducted a second gender training for its implementing partners at the end of May 2018. The training was delivered in Myanmar language to ensure gender mainstreaming was well understood by national partners.

Gender training was also held within LIFT's Fund Management Office (FMO) in October 2018. This training prepared the FMO programme staff and the gender focal points for the increased focus of gender in LIFT's programming for 2019-2023.



## Challenges

Microfinance institutions report challenges when it comes to changing women's roles in financial management practices and decision making in the communities. LIFT partners working on agriculture extension activities in Chin State also report that social norms and gender roles are barriers to meaningful and equal participation of women in agricultural production.

The Pwyat Yar Pumped Irrigation Project identified that women's participation in trainings (35 per cent of participants in farmer group training) does not necessarily mean that women are empowered. Instead, often the women are sent by their husbands and then not allowed to apply the knowledge and skills they learn in agricultural production.

In Rakhine, the Danish Refugee Council and Norwegian Refugee Council found that employment of women in non-traditional sectors challenge gender norms and create tensions in households. A particular risk is when women become the primary breadwinners or work in jobs that are traditionally reserved for men, as this can lead to a feeling of emasculation among men, who often react with a violent reassertion of their dominance. The project is applying a number of effective measures, such as establishing gender teams, women groups, gender-based violence trainings, problem-solving methods, and communication skills for the beneficiaries of their technical, vocational and life-skills training activities.



## Did you know?

All calls for proposals launched by LIFT in 2018 included the gender-sensitivity guidelines. A call for proposals designed in late 2018 and launched in early 2019 on reducing the vulnerability of internal migrants in peri-urban areas of Yangon, included, for the first time, a gender budget of 20 per cent, as one of the requirements for selection.



# DISABILITY

Data on disability in Myanmar is very scant and relatively unreliable. It is viewed as a condition linked primarily to old age, which may lead to under-identifying disability in younger people.

Disability in Myanmar is likely linked to a lack of attention being paid to ongoing prevention, a lack of decent healthcare infrastructure and a lack of specific knowledge on how to treat disabilities.

What is critical for all persons with disabilities in Myanmar, and especially for older persons, is for the government and the donor organisations to refocus much of their efforts and resources on prevention and treatment programs, and to do so immediately, because the aging population is not going to wait.

—*A Situational Analysis of Disability and Ageing in Myanmar (HelpAge International, 2018)*

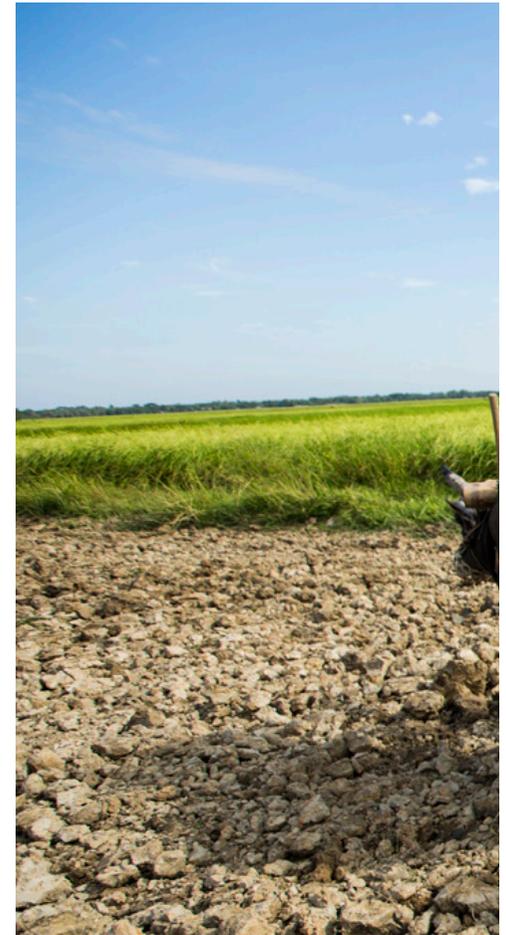
In 2018, LIFT increased its efforts to promote inclusion of people with disabilities in livelihoods and community activities. LIFT launched a funding window titled Inclusion of Persons with Disability and their Families in Social Protection and Livelihood Programmes in April 2018. After proposals were appraised and selected, five implementing partners were contracted to implement projects that started in late 2018. Four of the implementing partners are small local organisations that work in Chin State, northern Shan State, Sagaing Region, Magway Region and Kayin State.

## HelpAge International and Social Protection

HelpAge International provides its project villages an initial payment of MMK 3 million (USD 2,100) to set up social protection funds that are managed by Village Development Committees and/or Social Protection Committees.

The social protection committees together with project staff arranged home and health care trainings for community volunteers to assist older people and people with disabilities. These volunteers provided social care to almost 6,000 older people and people with disabilities. The project also created linkages with Township Medical Officers to provide professional health care in the villages and almost 5,000 older people and people with disabilities received health services from skilled health staff. These services provided physical health relief as well as mental support. Recipients reported an increased sense of dignity due to improved personal hygiene, improved confidence, less depression and more hope for the future.

HelpAge also implemented a project that provided social pensions for people aged between 85 and 90 until October 2018 when the government began delivering the pensions. In 2018, the project supported 1,671 elderly people with social pensions. Disability grants were given to 2,165 beneficiaries.



## Did you know?

The prevalence of households with at least one person with a disability is slightly higher in the Dry Zone (16 per cent) than in other LIFT-supported villages (14 per cent).



## Civil Society and Disability

GOLDEN PEARL

After noticing there were limited support services and poor access for people with disabilities (PWDs) in Lashio, Northern Shan State, Golden Pearl was founded in May 2015 in Lashio, northern Shan State, by three people to improve support services and access for people with disabilities. They worked as volunteers, conducting home visits to households with people with disabilities to interact and provide psychological support.

“Disability services are even more limited in rural areas than in the big cities – even to get a wheelchair in Lashio, we have to go to Yangon to get it”, said Golden Pearl Project Assistant Daw Moe Thuzar. “It costs a lot of money and travel time that the families cannot afford.”

Golden Pearl was awarded a grant by the Uplands Township Fund and began engaging with the Department of Social Welfare to initiate advocacy work, public awareness raising of disability issues and advocated for the implementation of Myanmar’s 2015 Rights of Persons with Disability Law with communities and government institutions. Golden Pearl set up an office and recruited full-time staff.

Golden Pearl also formed the Golden Future disabled groups network, which organises public awareness campaigns regarding people with disabilities.

“When Golden Pearl staff came to visit my house, I used to hide in the room and I asked my family members to tell them I was not at home”, said Ma Myo, who lost her vision. “I served as a police woman for about 14 years. Then I lost my vision and I had to quit my job, which I loved. After I lost my

vision suddenly, I didn’t want to talk or meet anyone except my relatives and close friends. Because of Golden Pearl staff’s continual encouragement and support, I have confidence and courage again to meet with other disabled persons. Now I have become a community facilitator. I am so proud of myself, and my family, especially my children, are so proud of me.”

Golden Pearl also supports people with disabilities with financial aid to set up micro-enterprises and provides vocational training. They run awareness-raising campaigns through primary schools, to the general public and with other CSOs and government. They advocated to the Lashio Township Municipal Authorities and a private company was contracted for construction of public facilities in Lashio that are suitable for people with disabilities.

The Shan State Burmese Ethnic Affairs Minister linked Golden Pearl with the YMCA, to assist the YMCA to identify 20 young people with disabilities to be involved in a three-year project that will provide financial capital assistance for small business management and livelihoods activities.

With support from LIFT, and through the Uplands Township Fund, Golden Pearl is now a benchmark for supporting the rights of people with disabilities in Lashio. They are now in the process of registering as a state-level organisation to extend their work to other townships in northern Shan State.

Golden Pearl also engaged with parliamentarians and the Department of Social Welfare. Their work resulted in support for around 300 disabled people in 2017 and 2018.

# LAND

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Secure land tenure and rights over other natural resources such as water, forest and biodiversity are key to ensuring future investments and growth of the agricultural sector and of rural areas more generally.

Yet the challenges facing the nation in managing the complexities associated with land administration reform in a context of overlapping land right claims, unclear administrative guidelines, large-scale concessions and largely informal and customary rights are immense and require consultation, dialogue and compromise.

The Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Land Law and recent amendments have brought land reform, rights, tenure and administration to the forefront of public debate and policy discussions.

LIFT continues to play an active role in land tenure issues. LIFT's policy objective is to promote and support secure land tenure rights for Myanmar's smallholder farmers in all regions and states, including customary land tenure rights for ethnic communities. LIFT has provided support for many land-related activities, including research, legal training and community awareness, public consultations and projects.

FEATURED





## Vacant, Fallow, Virgin Lands Management Law

Amendments to the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) Lands Management Law were approved on 11 September 2018. The VFV Central Committee then issued notification of implementation of Article 22(b), with the intention of allowing those who use VFV land without formal permission of the VFV Central Committee to register the VFV land within six months. This action caused confusion and concern among members of parliament, CSOs and local communities. GRET, Land Core Group and others submitted letters of concern to the Union Minister of MoALI and the VFV Central Committee, copying them to the speakers of the upper and lower houses of parliament and to relevant parliamentary committees. Suggestions included halting the implementation of the amendment until clear legal definitions on the exempted land categories were developed. Groups expressed concern that for the law's implementation to be strategic and effective, more preparation was needed. Other organisations called for the abolition of the VFV Land Law and its amendment.

LIFT shared many of these concerns and posted a statement on its webpage. LIFT's Fund Board members also jointly signed a letter to the Union Minister for MoALI, who serves as the Chair of the VFV Central Committee. LIFT's concerns about the VFV Land Law included:

- ❑ According to the provisions of the law that requires smallholder farmers to register any VFV land by March 2019, millions of rural people could be considered trespassers and could be punished with up to two years' imprisonment and evicted.
- ❑ Given that the majority of VFV land is located in ethnic areas, this law will undermine the peace process.
- ❑ Land conflicts and grievances may increase

around the country, thus undermining economic development.

- ❑ Displaced persons (IDPs) may lose rights to land in their places of origin, along with facing penalties for using land in their current locations.
- ❑ Key elements of the National Land Use Policy, such as land use rights of ethnic nationalities and restitution rights of displaced persons, will be negatively affected.

In December 2018, LIFT observed that only three months remained until the deadline announced by the VFV Central Committee. In the interest of promoting long-term, peace, prosperity and stability of Myanmar, LIFT suggested that implementation of the VFV Land Law be suspended; the VFV Land Law be amended; and the VFV Central Committee be consulted and MoALI to develop a comprehensive roadmap for reforming and strengthening land administration in line with international standards and best practices.

LIFT's engagement with government on land re-allocation Reclaiming Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) lands that are underutilised after allocation, and re-allocating these lands to smallholder farmers with secure tenure over land resources for improving agricultural livelihoods, is a priority for the Union Government. The re-allocation of land associated with concessionary land returned to the state is seen as an opportunity to address issues associated with forced land acquisition and rightful return to original owners along with addressing the vexing challenge of landlessness among the poorest in rural communities.

In 2017, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MOALI) submitted a concept note to LIFT requesting support to conduct a pilot programme

on land re-allocation. Field assessments to potential pilot sites in Magway, Sagaing and Mandalay regions were conducted and two pilot sites were selected in Minhla Township of Magway Region. A design mission was undertaken in March 2018 by a consultant team to develop a programme design document Reclamation of Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands, Re-allocation and Development by the Rural Poor (REAL DEV Programme). Consultations with farmers and communities were conducted in Magway in October, 2018. A call for proposals was issued by LIFT in December 2018 for the REAL DEV programme.

The timing of the launch coincided with increasing concerns about the amended version of the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin (VFV) Land Law, announced in October 2018. Several organisations and individuals opposed to the VFV Land Law took issue with what they saw as LIFT's apparent support for the law.

In response to concerns raised directly with LIFT, the LIFT FMO undertook a series of consultations with CSOs and convened a public consultation about the REAL DEV programme in January 2019. LIFT re-affirmed its commitment to proceed with the REAL DEV call for proposals, while also recognising that organisations may choose not to apply in the context of controversy surrounding the VFV Land Law. The call for proposals closed in January 2019.

# NOTES









