

Effectiveness of LIFT support in strengthening civil society.

An appreciative inquiry.

Part 1. Discussion and conclusions.

Learning Edge – Empower Myanmar

December 2013

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Output 5 of the Livelihoods Trust Fund (LIFT).

One of LIFT's six outputs is *“Capacity of civil society is strengthened to support and promote food and livelihoods security for the poor”*. Around 9% of all LIFT funding is committed to this output, and almost 50% of grants include an output 5 component.

At the same time, the Output 5 indicators *“give only a partial view of the results of the capacity-building and provide little insight into how effective Output 5 interventions are when it comes to the development of civil society beyond an increase in the technical skill-set of local organisations”*.¹

1.2 The study.

This study has been commissioned by the LIFT Fund Management Office (FMO). The objective is to investigate, beyond the current indicators, the civil society strengthening strategies being used, determine their effectiveness, and identify facilitating and constraining factors to practice, learning and monitoring.

The study uses an inside-out approach by asking LIFT partners to identify examples of successful civil society strengthening. It then explores whether these “successes” go beyond technical capacity, and what factors have contributed to the different forms of success. “Appreciative” interviewing and discussion is used to uncover and unpack these successes.

The study-team's commentary and conclusions from the case-studies are reported in part 1 of this paper. The case-study detail is documented in part 2.

1.3 The study sample.

LIFT Implementing Partners were invited to propose themselves or local partners as organisations whose capacity has been strengthened over the period of their LIFT relationship. Seven organisations were nominated, and four were selected². One of the selected organisations generated two case-studies.

1.3.1 Better Life Organisation (BLO) has partnered with Oxfam in LIFT-funded projects in Kyaukphyu since January 2012. In the current project, BLO is a member of the Tat Lan Consortium with Oxfam and two other international NGO's. The project aims to improve the livelihoods of cyclone Giri affected communities in Rakhine.

1.3.2 The Disabled Peoples Development Organisation (DPDO) began its partnership with LIFT in February 2011. DPDO's project in 20 Magway villages aims to mainstream People with Disability into the mainstream of village economies.

1.3.3 The Padauk Ngote Self-Help Groups are implementing the DPDO project in their village in Natmauk Township. This SHG was proposed by DPDO as an example of successful strengthening of village-level civil society.

¹ToR for this study.

² One withdrew after discussion of the study's purpose, one was only willing to participate if core costs were the primary focus of the study, and one project was deemed to have an insufficient “Output 5” component.

1.3.4 The Banmaw Local Development Organisation (BLDO) has been a SWISSAID partner for 10 years, and joined their LIFT-funded project in February 2011. BLDO is implementing this livelihoods project in villages of Banmaw Township in Kachin. Both partners also have a clear aim of building BLDO capacity.

1.3.5 The Man Wein Village Development Committee is implementing the LIFT-funded CESVI project in one of the 100 target villages. The project aims to improve livelihoods in two northern Shan Townships through a community process that will increase food security, income opportunities and sustainable management of natural resources.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study methodology is described in some detail to reflect the ToR in making suggestions for LIFT's own learning and monitoring practice.

2.1 The approach.

The study is success-focused. It invited Implementing Partners (IP) and/or implementing Civil Society Organisations (CSO) to identify CSO's who were noticeably "strengthened" over the period of the LIFT-funded project. No criteria were provided. A sample group was selected (1.3). Five case-studies were developed. This paper describes the discussion and conclusions of the study-team based on the case-studies.

The study team is Matt Desmond, Sandar Myo, Thu Thu Nwe Hlaing and Sudip Joshi. Sandar and Matt are external consultants; Thu Thu and Sudip are members of the FMO team. The mix was intended to: enable future access to learnings by the FMO, ease access to LIFT documentation, and to ensure FMO staff were direct participants in an assignment that was likely to build the study-team's capacity.

The team designed a draft approach and named it "Inside-out and-starting- from-results" (2.2 and 2.3) A set of inquiry-lines and matching open questions was developed. Following a desk-overview of each project, a supplementary set of more direct inquiry-lines was agreed for each project – to be used when they had not been already covered in the open-question conversation. All lines were designed to assist informants to identify and detail the CSO successes, and "provide clues" on how these had come about. Some unscripted questions were asked by the team at the end of the group/interview to assist us develop the BDRI frame (4.0).

Where appropriate, further questions specifically addressed the project intention in respect of output 5, the model and approach being used by the "capacity-builders", the type and level of funding support for output 5, CSO plans beyond the project, and the role of specific partners. Many of these were answered by the full desk-review of the projects³, and required only confirmation at interview. All group/interview questions were directed at the civil society strengthening component of the LIFT relationships.

The study-team met with case-study informants:

- **CSO Board (2)**
- **CSO management (5)**

³ The des-reviews covered the project documentation, budgets, inception reports, semi-annual and annual reports and FMO field reports.

- **CSO team (5)**
- Project communities (5)
- Local officials (2)
- IP management (5)
- IP “LIFT” team (5)
- FMO staff (5)

In keeping with the inside-out approach, the CSO informants were treated as "key informants", and the supplementary questions in other conversations were tailored to include further comment on the CSO information. Most CSO meetings took the form of focus group discussions, and most other informants were interviewed singly or in pairs.

Once all information had been collected, the case-studies were documented by the two interviewers and reviewed/challenged by the full team. Documentation followed a common format and required the team to group data into "success-areas" and name these groupings⁴. CSO and IP informants have received⁵ their own draft case-study, and a small number of additions/corrections are included in the final versions⁶.

The case-studies were then further generalized into this Part 1 of this paper, including the table of "success-areas" (3.1).

In a number of lines, our analysis provoked the question "how might these findings compare with other LIFT supported CSOs?" We opted to follow this up on the question of budget-support (6.1) and a range of other project contracts were briskly reviewed.

2.2 An “Inside-out” approach.

The study’s methodology distinguishes between “inside-out” and “outside-in” perspectives of capacity development.

An inside-out approach investigates capacity development from an organisation’s own definition of its aims and mission, and from its own perception of success. From this perspective, the organisation is in the best position to know what its capacity is, what the capacity-goals are, and what changes are needed. The organization is also in the best position to bring about capacity-development – no amount of external support will compensate for the lack of a mission, goals or commitment to change. Outsiders may have a role in supporting the process, but change must come from within.

An outside-in perspective provides an external assessment of capacity, capacity-interventions and support for change from the outside. While this perspective does not preclude a community/constituency role in the process, in practice the outsider is usually in a “power-over” relationship with the organization.

⁴ Unfortunately (inevitably?) an element of copy-cattng came into the naming of groups.

⁵ Case-studies were drafted in English. It is very unlikely that all of the regional/national CSO teams, or any of the village CSO people, have been assisted to review the drafts. Further amendments may be necessary once the Burmese-language version of this paper is available to them (and verbally translated into Shan).

⁶ The CSO's have agreed that the detail can be made available to the other study participants but permission has not been sought to share the detail (part 2 of this paper) with a wider audience.

This study uses elements of both perspectives, but for the purposes of stepping outside the log-frame indicators, priority is given to the perspectives of the focus organisations. They are the key informants.

2.3 A “Middle-out” approach.

This approach is used to build on the inside-out assessment of organizational capacity – ideally an assessment that is repeated at different points in time. Once results ("successes" in strengthening capacity) are identified, learning is generated by looking backwards (downwards) to investigate what inputs or activities might have contributed to these changes, and forwards (upwards) to seek indications of wider impact.

A middle-out approach can be applied to the development of both general and technical capacity – even technical capacity is rarely acquired through a single input. The approach allows for a world where there are a variety of contributors to capacity-development. It will work best where there is ongoing accompaniment and monitoring (from the middle out). Yet it can also be effective where there is no external capacity-building support and the only impetus for change comes from within the organisation.

Model 1.

Starting from inputs	Starting from results	Starting from impact
IMPACT Wider impact on civil society Changed lives of communities Long-term results achieved by CSOs.	IMPACT Wider impact on civil society Changed lives of communities Long-term results achieved by CSOs.	IMPACT Wider impact on civil society Changed lives of communities Long-term results achieved by CSOs...
		
RESULTS Changes in capacity of CSO's	RESULTS Changes in capacity of CSO's	RESULTS Changes in capacity of CSO's.
		
ACTIVITIES Capacity building inputs and processes	ACTIVITIES Capacity building inputs and processes	ACTIVITIES Capacity building inputs and processes

The “Middle-out” or Starting-from-Results approach is often overlooked in favour of a bottom-up or top-down approach. All the FMO monitoring reports we reviewed point to impact or activity-centred inquiry. The Middle-out approach cannot guarantee that a specific capacity building input (e.g. a training or a workshop) will be mentioned as a contributory factor. The approach does not readily align with accounting to donors for specific capacity building inputs.

2.4 Limitations of the study.

- a) The sample is small – 25 LIFT grants have an Output 5 (strengthening civil society) component. At the same time, the sample does represent all the varied approaches within the LIFT portfolio: village groups *and* local NGOs; pre-existing partnerships *and* project partnerships; thinly-resourced *and* well-resourced Output 5 components; technical *and* general capacity development; organizational *and* individual capacities. The sample also covers five states/regions and a whole range of capacity-building approaches.
- b) The sample is self-selected and “success” based. The study leaves hanging such questions as:
- Did any of the non-participating projects see their Output 5 component as “unsuccessful”?
 - Were any of the non-participating projects unable to apply criteria of “success”?
 - Which non-participating partners saw the study as a potential risk to future LIFT funding?
 - Which participating partners saw the study as a potential window for future LIFT funding?
 - Why did most of the usually-reported Output 5 “stars” not volunteer for the study?
- c) The output statement is focused on civil society, while the projects (and the study) are focused on CSO's

LIFT's objective is to strengthen civil society. The Board's rationale is that

- *Social actors and social action are key to improving the food and livelihoods security of poor and vulnerable people in Myanmar*⁷.
- LIFT wants to build project implementation capacity *as well as supporting civil society to play a role in encouraging an economic and political context that is conducive to pro-poor economic growth.*
- *LIFT wants to build civil society capacity that outlasts LIFT-funded projects*

A civil society is a much larger space than the sum of its organisations (CSOs). Even if 100% success can be demonstrated in building CSO capacity, little can be implied about the strengthening of civil society.

It has been agreed that the study will limit itself to CSO's. Almost all FMO/IP support for output 5 is focused on organisations and their projects. All other FMO monitoring is focused on these sites. To broaden the study would require a much more diverse range of informants and sites of inquiry.

Attribution may be almost impossible. Nevertheless, this is a major limitation of the study in addressing the impact of output 5 support as targeted by LIFT.

These limitations can be somewhat overcome if study learnings can be tested and applied more generally to FMO and IP practice. The three “models” applied in the study are also offered as potential paths to further developing FMO/IP understanding and monitoring of civil society strengthening.

3. IDENTIFYING SUCCESS.

The case-study groups and organisations had little difficulty in identifying areas of capacity that have been successfully strengthened during the term of the LIFT relationship. Each of them was unanimous and clear that they are now a significantly stronger organization or group. Each of them was able to identify success-headings and success-detail. All of them could readily articulate clear intentions to build further capacity in the future.

⁷Italicised quotes from Fund Board minutes March 2012.

“External” informants were often more reserved. It was noticeable that the further from the organization the informant was, the more difficult to stay focused on “successes”. Strikingly, there were only two instances where an external informant challenged an organisation’s own reporting of success. Almost all informants agreed with the self-assessments, but did not always agree that the success-areas were the most important from their (outside-in) perspective.

- It is not difficult for local organisations (and their close partners) to identify their own growth and the successes in “civil society strengthening”.
- The study found many examples of successful strengthening of these organisations and groups. Only a few of these will be picked up by the LIFT log frame indicators for Output 5.
- An inside-out & middle-out approach generates a whole new data-set for learning and monitoring purposes.

The table summarises the fields reported by the five case-study organisations. Fuller details are provided in part 2 of this report. The column on the far right is the subject of section 4 of this paper.

Successful strengthening.	CSO 1	CSO 2	CSO 3	CSO 4	CSO 5	
Growing profile/reputation.	*	*		*		2B
Have developed strategic direction				*		2B
Improved organizational systems	*	*	*	*	*	2B
Greater discipline & organization.		*	*		*	2B
Improved ability to learn (and adapt).		*		*		2B/2D
Increased self-belief/confidence.	*			*	*	2B
Stronger staff /people capacity	*			*	*	2B
Deeper commitment to mission and values.	*	*	*			2B
Enhanced team- culture and spirit.	*	*				2B
Growing focus on project/org. sustainability		*	*			2B
Increased organizational scale and presence.	*			*		2B/2D
More impact in supporting women’s leadership	*				*	2D

Successful strengthening.	CSO 1	CSO 2	CSO 3	CSO 4	CSO 5	
More promotion of community management	*	*	*			2D
Improved accountability and transparency					*	2B/2D
Improved transfer of skills & technologies				*		2D
More complex analysis & practice e.g. livelihoods/inclusion.		*		*		2D
More confident (assertive) in negotiating with donors.	*			*	*	2R
Stronger relationship with local authorities.	*	*	*	*		2R
More influential relationship with private sector actors.				*		
Starting/increasing collective action.			*			2D/2I

3.1 Discussion of main reported success-area: systems' capacity.

All organisations reported improved systems-capacity. The main capacities reported by village groups were the disciplines of recording, minuting, book-keeping, reporting etc. These are very sophisticated capacities which take all humans many years (or more) to develop. Because they are eventually internalized, they are often under-valued by those who have them.

The local NGOs reported major gains in all aspects of project management, especially in their understanding and practice of monitoring. The second area most frequently reported was in building organization-wide discipline in reporting, budgeting, scheduling and agenda-setting.

These gains were most frequently attributed to the opportunities enabled by the LIFT grant or project, plus the continuous presence of LIFT deadlines, monitors, and other requirements. We conclude that the systems being applied by the FMO are different from, or perhaps more acceptable, than those assumed to be used within the IP's own programmes. The FMO systems are also more HR-intensive – SWISSAID has a third of the staff for twice as many projects.

All organisations in the study reported that their monitoring systems and practice have improved as a direct result of the LIFT relationship. A word of caution - there are many elements in the FMO monitoring systems. The study responses suggest that international IP's most value the 6-month reporting system and the FMO feedback on their report; local partners most value the face-to-face problem-solving with FMO staff. None of these informants mentioned the field-monitoring de-briefing and subsequent FMO monitoring report.

Three of the four IP's reported that they too had developed systems' strengths from their LIFT relationship, even though this was not intended or resourced in the project.

This is LIFT's major contribution to Output 5 results. To the extent the LIFT Board sees strengthening civil society as a "means to an end"⁸; there may be a tendency to undervalue this contribution – to focus instead on activities or impacts, on top-down and bottom-up perspectives on learning and monitoring.

Stronger systems are primarily a result of LIFT support, but cannot yet be described as an impact. This will depend on whether these systems are being used solely for the purposes of the LIFT-funded project. The possible impact indicator "long-term results achieved by local organizations" would require a post-project relationship between the CSOs and LIFT.

- It is too early to measure the direct impact of LIFT support for systems' strengthening. We can see the improvement of the organizational and project systems, but cannot yet generalize how these will be applied to non-projectised goals.
- Compliance can strengthen capacity, but may only strengthen the capacity to comply. Meeting performance standards and timelines does sometimes improve organizational capacity, but sometimes it just improves ... compliance ... or defiance.

3.2 Discussion of main reported success-areas: profile, scale and self-confidence.

All of the case-study organisations identify, as successes, increases in their reputation and reach. These increases have resulted in a growing organizational confidence⁹. This is the second major direct contribution of LIFT - providing the platforms that have allowed this growth.

The primary platform is the funding/grant itself. Without increasing scale, DPDO could not have applied its learning from the Labutta SHG projects; the Magway SHG's could not have established a 60-group chicken farm; BLO could not have become a full member of the Tat Lan Consortium.

Especially for the local NGO's there is also a secondary platform - the connection to a large multi-donor fund. This has given them a profile with donors, local authorities and INGO's they did not previously have. The two local NGO's who are contracted through INGO's also identified the IP relationship as key to accessing the LIFT platform.

For local government profile, LIFT's national partnership with Ministry of National Planning has eased engagement with Planning staff at Township-level. For donor profile, all of the case-study organisations have been visited by LIFT Board-members and see this as an unprecedented direct engagement with donor representatives. Two of the three local NGO's said their increased ability to negotiate more assertively with donors is a measure of their increased profile and confidence.

Four of the five case-study organisations are coming to the end of their current LIFT project¹⁰, and all are uncertain that they can maintain their gains in scale and profile. Only one has had a (inconclusive) conversation with LIFT about further funding. While the LIFT Board is clearly concerned with scale, it may not place an intrinsic value on the increased scale of individual partners, let alone sub-partners. The study-team concludes that each of these "successful" projects may end very abruptly given that the FMO's project closure process leaves little space for scale-down or exit.

⁸ Refer section 7 for further discussion of the twin aims of LIFT - to both strengthen CSO capacity to implement funded projects, and to support a more broadly-defined civil society as a critical long-term actor in assuring food and livelihoods' security in Myanmar

⁹ This suggests that the organisations are using an "outside-in" indicator for this success.

¹⁰ The fifth was very frank that the LIFT project (2013-16) was the difference between organisational survival and closure.

At the end of the day, it will be local organisations' profile with their memberships, communities, local funders and government that will determine their longer-term sustainability. Little of the capacity-building support has been directed to building these constituencies.

Notwithstanding these issues, when asked about future capacity goals, three of the organizations have ambitions to build further on their increased reach. BLDO aims to grow its technical and PCM capacities to manage larger projects and to attract direct grant-funding. BLO aspires to be a leading national NGO and draws on the example of the largest national NGO and some of the INGO's working in the country. The Village Committee in Man Wein seeks to expand its networks, and become a leader amongst VDC's in their Township. The uncertain funding future leads both DPDO and the SHG's in Padauk Ngote to prioritise consolidation rather than expansion. Both have plans to broaden their work, particularly at Township-level, if sufficient funds become available.

- The LIFT platform and logo is significant to and valued by local NGO's. Village-level groups may not know¹¹, and international IP's may not care.
- Given funding uncertainty and staff turnover, "strengthening civil society" certainly has a place for individual, as well as organizational, capacity-building.
- "Strengthening civil society" implies that future LIFT contracts should address issues of constituency and sustainability.

3.3 Discussion of main reported success-areas: values, culture and community management.

Much of the discussion with three of the organisations focused on the deepening and stronger application of organizational values in both internal group culture, and in their increasingly community-managed practice. Similar strengthening was reported for a fourth organization by the FMO and IP informants, but not by the organization itself. On this topic, the fifth reported development of their first organizational strategy incorporating a restatement of, and recommitment to, core values.

A deepened values-base was not only reported as a success in itself, but also a contributing factor to other success-areas in particular profile, sustainability, individual and organizational skills, and systems.

While there may have been no written intent in the LIFT contracts to strengthen these "capacities", there was very clear intent within the organisations' people and leaders. While a specific model or approach may not have been spelled out by the contracting partners, a values-based approach is central to each of these local organisations' own model of growth.

¹¹ When villagers' attention was drawn to the LIFT logo on a poster and the study-team asked "How long have you known about this?" the reply was "Since Grade 4".

Model 2.



The “Seven S” model of organizational analysis places organizational values at the heart of the organizational system. Around the values are grouped the organizational software (style, staff and skills), and the organizational hardware (strategy, structure and systems).

LIFT support has been almost completely focused on systems, skills and staff. The Seven-S model suggests this is insufficient to achieve lasting organizational impact unless there is also a (non-LIFT?) focus on strategy, style and values.

The model also suggests that, given the centrality of organizational values, it is possible that this may be the best predictor of output 5 impact. The study-team concurs. While not having the opportunity to meet with other LIFT partners, our collective experience of many of them suggests this sample of five is particularly values-driven.

Might these organisations have achieved less in deepening their missions and values if there had been stronger intent, or more resources, in the LIFT contract? The question alludes to the often-observed outcome of CSO “death-by-funding” when conditional external support pressures the organisation away from its core purpose and constituency. For the case-study organisations, we doubt this would have been a risk. They have either asserted their own strategy and autonomy at different points in the contract, or they are working with an IP that strategically respects the vision of local partners.

- Values-based practice may be the best predictor that output 5 support will be effective.
- FMO/IP staff are unlikely to see strengthening in CSO’s unless they are able to look beyond the organizational components they directly support.

4. LOCATING SUCCESS - applying a BDRI frame.

4.1 BDRI: the frame.

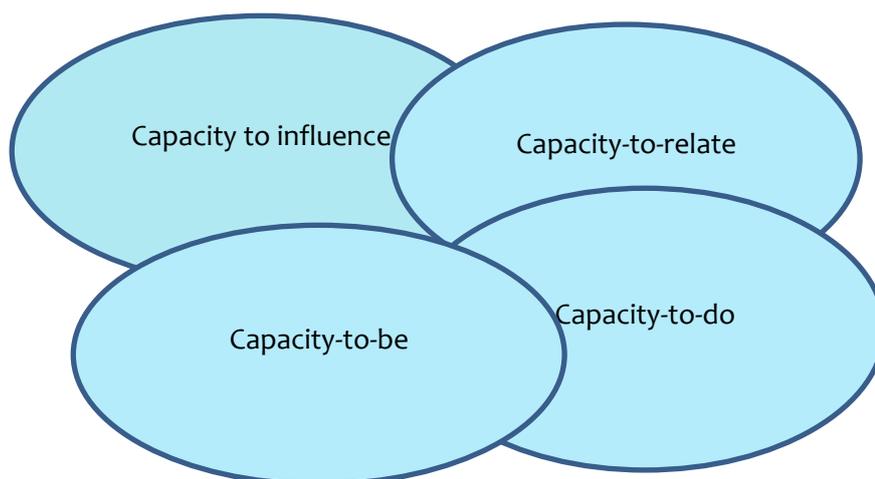
The study ToR ask that a BDRI frame is applied to the case-studies. While only one of many frames for viewing civil society strengthening, it is familiar to the FMO team, cited in LIFT documents, and is already used by some local organisations in Myanmar¹². The frame has four windows (over-page).

The capacity-to-be (2B) window directs us to the internal organisation. Capacity-to-do (2D) considers organizational or project performance in the programme context. The capacity-to-relate (2R) focuses on the ability to establish and deepen relationships with external actors. The capacity-to-influence (2I) considers whether the other three windows have a practice impact beyond the organization's own programme – usually within the wider private, public and civic sectors.

The last column of the table on page 6 describes where the reported successes in this study might sit in a BDRI frame.

Capacity in one BDRI window is often dependent on capacities in others, and increased capacity in one window will often contribute to increased capacity elsewhere in the frame. There will always be an area of overlap between the windows.

Model 3.



4.2 BDRI: the case-studies.

Over half of the success-areas reported in the study can be described as internal capacities – capacities 2B. Establishing themselves and building organizational identity are critical concerns for these organisations. They are likely to dedicate a large portion of disposable resources to these ends. This may conflict with the intentions of donors and intermediary agencies. With the exception of the BLDO case, none of the IP or FMO informants mentioned capacity-to-be objectives as aims of their support.

The study observes that LIFT and its contracted IPs are more focused on the local organisation's capacity 2D, and that they will tend to focus resources in this window – perhaps at the expense of the other three. This reflects some tension between LIFT's twin goals of achieving projectised results, and strengthening

¹² Main reference is Lipson and Hunt 2008. Paung Ku (a LIFT partner) added the 4th window in 2010.

civil society in a broader sense. While the study's 2D window is more sparsely populated than the 2B window, the future strengthening intentions reported by these CSO's suggest that this will start to reverse over another three years. The "age" of a CSO will be a significant factor in setting output 5 objectives. Building organizational performance may require first addressing some of the issues of identity and establishment.

2D capacities can be seen as an application of to-be capacities – applying identity, skills, strategy etc. to a live programme context. Interestingly, the study-team's categorization of 2D successes does not include any that are solely related to implementing the LIFT-funded project, and some that are completely unrelated.

Examples of stronger capacity 2R were mainly provided from the final phase of projects, or after the organization had been established for some years. IP support was the main attribution for these capacities; assistance with linkages, introductions to networks, convening of technical forums and multi-project or multi-partner events. Four of these organisations also reported that their capacity 2R has increased as a direct result of the changed operating context over the project period, particularly their relationships with government. Only one of the organisations mentioned the private sector (buffalo-traders and land-seeking businesses) in this regard.

These case-studies produced only a few examples of increased capacity 2I, although the review of project proposals found that all the projects embarked with some "influencing" aims. Perhaps IP proposal-writers are more ambitious in this respect than their local partners. Perhaps this reflects a donor expectation. To the open question, most focus groups participants were initially unable to identify how they would know if they had developed their influencing ability. However, when provided with "local authority", "community-leader", "policy-maker" and "donor" prompts, 3/5 groups identified influencing activities where they had already been successful. It was in this context that success-areas such as "assertiveness with donors" and "influence with private sector actors" emerged. A fourth CSO (DPDO) reported that their aim to influence the "inclusion" practices of the LIFT Fund is in the early stages of being realized.

Despite the references in proposals, the study finds that there is not a strong understanding or ambition to build capacity 2I. The experience of another LIFT partner may be helpful – Paung Ku research suggests that influencing capacities are rarely sought by CSOs until the 4th or 5th year of the organization's life. These contracts are for three years and are unlikely to be enter a further LIFT-funded phase.

4.3 BDRI: LIFT, the IP and the CSO.

In this study, the most reported results are found in the 2B window. These are primarily driven by CSO intention and resources. Establishing themselves, building identity, deepening organizational culture and values rely more on a sense of mission than on available funding. LIFT and IP support also contributes through the resourcing of project-related skills development, which a confident CSO is able to adapt, or even divert, to organisational ends.

Most LIFT and IP support is intended for the 2D window - specifically to implementation of the funded project, presumably through the application of the new capacities. However the degree of CSO project-ownership may determine how directly this support is channeled in the manner intended. A lack of specific training objectives, workshop evaluations and systematic follow-up to skills-development limits the study's ability to link the 2B inputs to the 2D practice. These CSO's generally report their 2D

"results" in terms of the organizational mission rather than the project objectives. In the 2R window, IP or umbrella organization support is key. In the 2I window there is insufficient data as yet, but the FMO can play a stronger support role.

- LIFT funds provide a significant platform for to-do strengthening. All these CSOs and some IPs take this opportunity to promote 2D capacity beyond the project's requirements, and to support strengthened identity and mission (2B). These CSOs (and IPs) are more likely to be able to report the overall and longer-term strengthening of local organisations.
- At least in the early stages, local organisations may prioritise 2B capacities. Their partners (FMO/IP) may perceive these as 2D capacities.
- LIFT's Accountability Framework and the FMO's planned engagements with regional groups of CSOs are suitable environments for supporting capacity to influence. They are not yet being used for this purpose¹³.

5. LOCATING SUCCESS: Intentions and Models.

5.1 Intent to strengthen.

Does success require a clear intention/plan to "strengthen civil society"?

Our desk-review of proposals, contracts budgets and activity plans covered the five case-study organisations, and five other contracts signed in 2011 that had an output 5 component. Screening these contracts in 2011 for intention to strengthen either the CSO or civil society more broadly, we might have predicted only one of the first group of CSOs would be a subject of this study in 2013. FMO interviews support this conclusion.

We find only a weak co-relation between the expressed intent for civil society strengthening in the LIFT project/contract and the outcomes (as assessed to be successful here). Firstly, if intent is weakly expressed, the co-relation will be weak. Secondly, if intent is expressed largely in project performance terms and outcomes are described largely "beyond" the project, the co-relation will not be strong. In BDRI terms, expressed intentions appear largely in the 2D and 2I windows. CSO-reported results are more frequently in the 2B and 2R windows.

Two of the proposals provide a beyond-project rationale for the intended civil society strengthening, although even these two are largely silent on how this will be achieved. For BLDO, the IP proposal spells out the envisioned role of civil society in tackling Myanmar's many socio-economic challenges. For the Magway self-help groups, the IP proposal clearly states the long-term social-inclusion role of the SHG's that will be formed by the project. In the proposal related to the Man Wein Committee a general reference is made to building empowering social infrastructure.

¹³"We can practice by influencing the donors, then move on to the government." from CSO interview.

In their contract with LIFT, there is no stated intention for the strengthening of DPDO – we assume this was an oversight. Similarly the Tat Lan proposal and contract make no mention of strengthening BLO¹⁴ as an aim of the LIFT support.

Focus groups and interviews with villagers and individual group-members also demonstrated that these stakeholders' priority intentions were not the building of civic capital per se, but were to improve household livelihoods and to successfully implement the LIFT-funded activities.

Contrary to the points above, interviews with the case-study groups and organisations themselves revealed a strong intent to build their organisations and networks. For four of them this was a primary reason for engaging in the LIFT-funded project. For all of them this intent remains. They each articulated to us clear aims for future strengthening.

- We cannot predict Output 5 impact from whether or not a proposal contains a clear intention and rationale for civil society strengthening. However in every case-study, there was strong existing intention within the local partner itself.

5.2 Models of "civil society strengthening".

What models are being used? Are some more successful than others?

The case-studies demonstrate general approaches to CSO-building rather than models of either CSO-support or of civil society strengthening. Applying a model requires a "fit-for-purpose" test, and in three case-studies there is no statement of Output 5 purpose. There is no rationale or intention beyond building CSO capacity to implement the project. In the other two, the project formulation is not developed to the extent that a model of civil society strengthening becomes apparent¹⁵.

The project plans and reports show a very strong reliance on a "training" approach. For Man Wein and Padauk Ngote the training is provided around a "form/support/ maintain" approach to community groups. There is no plan to strengthen DPDO but their remarkable gains over the project period are almost entirely derived from applying their values and ambitions to the platform provided by the LIFT contract. For BLDO and BLO the training is largely topic-driven – for BLO provided within the Consortium structure rather than their own component of the project. An approach to building CSO capacity that is dominated by training-events is likely to disappoint all stakeholders.

The literature (and key FMO staff) distinguishes between technical and general capacity-building. Technical capacity building is usually targeted at a specific skills-area and at specific individuals, often oriented to a particular project or activity, and very often attempted through a training event. Despite the number and frequency of such training events, the study heard that no-one is yet satisfied with the results. We suggest there are two overlapping reasons. Firstly, the quality of inputs – widely-reported difficulties in finding suitable trainers; use of non-contextualised "blueprint" training designs from IP's or consultants; the priority given to the raw number of training participants. Secondly, training follow-up and support for participants' application is largely absent for the technical trainings described by study informants. The projects may be over-reliant on delivery of training, and fail to address support for its application.

¹⁴Although Consortium correspondence does claim the project's intent to build the capacity of BLO.

¹⁵ We did learn from the BLDO study that the IP has done considerable work developing such a model since the grant was signed.

Local organisations place a high value on increased technical capacity. Four of these case-study organisations prioritise aspects of technical expertise amongst their future capacity-building aims, and two report disappointment that the current project has fallen short in this regard.

“General” capacity-building addresses organization-wide competencies. For the case-study organisations, the targeted capacities largely fall into the cluster of “*capacities in systematic planning, implementation, monitoring, budgeting, accountability and reporting*”¹⁶. Even though a training-dominated approach has again been used, increases in these capacities are the success-area discussed in para. 3.2. These capacities are applied, they are followed up, and there is a continuous stream of feedback on the application. One informant suggested that “project-cycle-management” skills have become the new technical capacities required by the projectised funding system. If correct, this would risk neglect of both sector-based techniques, and of all other aspects of general capacity-building that address more fundamental organizational change and growth. Strengthening organizational mission, vision and values is more complex and continuous than adoption of techniques, and is largely unresponsive to a training approach. Para 3.4 refers.

The IP partner of BLDO uses the term “accompaniment” to describe a core aspect of their approach to civil society strengthening. This refers to a continuous capacity-building relationship, of mutual learning, where capacity-support is requested rather than provided (demand-driven). The DPDO project team “lives, works and eats with the villagers”. This is a form of accompaniment. BLO’s IP has recruited an on-site programme support officer to support BLO’s capacity in finance, logistics, HR and admin. To the extent this goes beyond assuring compliance, this is a form of accompaniment. Man Wein’s IP staff provide facilitation support to the VDC in conducting appraisals, and coaching in VDC processes. To the extent these are demand-driven, this is a form of accompaniment. All these examples go beyond training, are directly related to follow-up and support for skills application, and were all cited as reasons for the successful strengthening.

- We cannot predict Output 5 impact from whether or not a proposal contains a clear model for civil society strengthening.
- However, some predictive clues are available within these proposals. What is proposed in addition to, or instead of, training events? What is the time-allocation of project staff in both the IP and local partner across technical/PCM/general support?

6. LOCATING SUCCESS: Resourcing and support

6.1 Funding civil society strengthening.

By April 2013, the investment in output 5 was around 9% of the total grants’ budget or a little under \$11m. LIFT is certainly the largest single donor source for civil society strengthening in Myanmar.

This figure does not factor in the funds usually allocated within outputs 1 and 2 for technical training most often targeted at village groups, local NGO’s and individual citizens. The sum becomes even more significant if we include the personnel costs for those IP staff whose primary role is coaching/

¹⁶ IP proposal

accompanying/supporting the development of their local partners.

The case-study projects are not typical of the general pattern of LIFT grants – output 5 funding in their contracts is somewhat lower.

Output 5 budget (% of total contract) ¹⁷									
The five case-study projects.	11.3	13	0	29	12				
The five other projects desk-reviewed.	40	37	0	13	12				

This study can find no co-relation between budget resources allocated to output 5, and the impact of the civil society strengthening component. Neither could we find a co-relation with total resources allocated to civil society strengthening - funds included in other budget-lines appeared relatively similar across the case-study organisations. If these are five of the more successful strengthening projects, then level of budget resourcing appears to have little relevance.

The case-study CSO that is a direct Implementing Partner has no budget allocation under output 5. We found that nil output 5 budgets are the norm for local IP's.

Output 5 budget (% of total contract) ¹⁸									
The nine direct CSO grants.	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	6	26
Most recent nine international IP grants	11.3	27	48	73	25	100	81	0	0

This may reflect that the FMO does not have the capacity or the mandate to directly support CSO strengthening. It may point to a perception that CSOs do not yet have the capacity to strengthen each other. More likely, in 2010-11 there was little attention paid to output 5 by either LIFT or its local partners. This pattern is confirmed by the “network” grants¹⁹ which are LIFT’s primary form of support for strengthening civil society more broadly than through specified CSO’s. Output 5 budgets in the international IP “network” grants range from 40-100%, in the local IP grants from 0-6%.

The LIFT-funded inputs for civil society strengthening are both event-based, included in output budgets, and people-based, included in personnel budgets. Training courses fit well to event-based budgeting. Costs are predictable and known, and scheduling the number of days required is within project managers’ control. It is possibly for these reasons, that so much training is found in LIFT project budgets. In Section 5.2, this paper also suggests a trend towards more PCM-focused training and less technical training.

¹⁷ Figures are indicative only for these specific organisations. The budgets are spread across a range of organisations and groups in most grants.

¹⁸ Figures are indicative only for these specific organisations. The budgets are spread across a range of organisations and groups in most grants.

¹⁹ We have included MERN, MSN, GEN, FSWG, Paung Ku in this cluster.

A better understanding of project staff time-allocation is required to gauge the allocation of personnel budgets to civil society strengthening. We found no examples of specifically process-based funding that may be better suited to more evolutionary capacity-building support. This could be encouraged by freeing up some “indicative” budget-lines for civil society strengthening, or by requesting that personnel costs for direct coaching/accompanying/supporting are moved into output 5 budgets.

6.2 Indirect costs.

In addition to contracted cost-lines, LIFT budgets include a 6% allocation for indirect costs. These are an acknowledgement of non-projectised costs that will be borne by partners. Indirect costs can be allocated at partners’ discretion. Traditionally, these funds have been retained by the primary contractor. More recently sub-contracting CSOs are asking for their share of these budgets. One of LIFT’s local partners would only agree to participate in this study if these indirect costs²⁰ were its primary focus.

While all the case-study organisations have achieved increases in systems, staffing and skills, the financial underpinning for this has been project-based donor funds. For four of the five, these are largely LIFT funds. If there is any time-lag before entering new project agreements, they have minimal reserves to continue paying project-recruited and trained staff, office rent or equipment hire. Increased scale often leads to higher expectations from a larger number of communities. There are costs involved in establishing presence in new communities, and in maintaining presence and relationships between projects. All the case-study organisations reported these issues.

BLDO anticipate their greatest challenge will be to hold onto their newly-acquired scale and capacity once the current project is completed²¹. Their IP currently retains the “indirect costs” of the LIFT project budget, allocating it to joint partner activities. It is not yet clear whether any of these funds will be available for staff retention. DPDO, as an IP in its own right, is planning to use these funds as working capital to source local income for future operations. BLO is the first LIFT sub-contractor to receive their share of these funds, and will use them to retain and up-skill their HQ team. The village-level organisations were not familiar with indirect costs but were clear how they would use discretionary funds. Man Wein VDC priorities are wider exposure to other projects and VDC’s, and building up the development fund for village-initiated projects. The Padauk Ngote SHGs’ priorities are increased capital for collective enterprises, and retaining the services of the project’s community facilitators for a further 1-2 years.

- The level of output 5 expenditure is not a useful predictor of output 5 results (with the reservation that there is no standardised approach to allocating output 5 budgets and expenditure).
- Funding patterns imply that CSOs are not seen as implementers of output 5 – either for civil society at large or for managing their own organizational development.
- Discretionary funds are an under-utilised form of capacity-building in their own right. The current “indirect costs” provisions can be readily revised to start using this opportunity.

²⁰ The current discussion in Myanmar is somewhat vague on the distinctions between indirect costs, core costs, discretionary funds, and basket-funding.

²¹ “An endless cycle of capacity-incapacity” from CSO interview.

7. FUTURE SUCCESS.

7.1 The twin aims of Output 5.

Time and again during the study, the team encountered an apparent tension between the twin aims of Output 5. LIFT, its IP's, and its CSO partners aim to both strengthen CSO capacity to implement funded projects, and to support a more broadly-defined civil society as a critical long-term actor in assuring food and livelihoods' security in Myanmar. There seems to be no conceptual reason for this tension – it is systems and practice that are constraining the supplementary/complementary nature of these aims.

We observe that the FMO (and Board?) has emphasized the first aim through its recruitment, contracting, granting and monitoring and reporting practice. The vision of the case-study organisations is aligned more to the second aim, and the IP's take various positions in-between. We found many instances where the tension is being creatively resolved, but this is almost always being done by CSOs and IPs, and consumes resources that could be spent more effectively. It is most unlikely that all LIFT-funded projects are managing this tension as competently.

The dual aims are at work in all the CSOs and IP's we met. They inform the resourcing and results in each of the BDRI windows (section 4). They suggest why an inquiry that starts from CSO-defined results will generate such different data from one that starts from activities or impacts (section 2.3), and why it is so difficult to link the summary of successes (section 3.1) with the log-frame indicators. The tension helps explain the differences in prioritising organizational components by the Fund and its local partners (section 3.4). It underlies the questions of balance around projectised and non-projectised resourcing (section 6). It manifests itself in the abrupt project closure and exits that these CSO's are currently facing.

For these case-studies, the “contracting moment” was the primary window for focusing the support for these twin aims. This is when the Fund and the CSO (often through the IP) share their overlapping interests; when the CSO agrees to support LIFT/IP project implementation; and when LIFT agrees to support the CSO's civil society intentions.

While the design of “calls” and the contracting moment have been the windows, both are now shrinking. LIFT will never again have the extensive portfolio of local partners it has in late 2013. There is a clear shift to more formulated programmes with fewer and larger IP's, and the remaining “call” opportunity is increasingly off-limits to local organisations²².

The FMO's experience and learning in civil society strengthening also has potential value for the programme future of the LIFT donors. As donors develop their own relationships and programmes with government, it is the civil society, rather than the project-implementation, aim that will be critical.

7.2 Future success – conclusions.

- a. For LIFT's "strengthening civil society" intention, a modest aim could be related to the long-term results achieved by CSO's (refer table page 5). Contracts would require upgrading to include: adequate exit activities over and above project closure; resources that support CSO sustainability

²² The FMO's internal table of I&L grants shows the trend, but it was also observed or reported by the three local NGOs in this study.

where desired by the CSO²³; co-assessments 12-24 months after project completion to provide both useful learning and evidence of impact.

- b. Given LIFT's direction, future success will depend as much on overall Fund management as on individual CSO and IP/CSO contracts. Boosting output 5 results and impact will rely on such factors as:
 - the significance given to output 5 in programme formulation and design
 - a civil society imperative in the forming of consortia
 - maintaining post-project relationships with CSO partners, and engaging them in LIFT's policy platforms and LIFT-convened events.
 - the priority given to output 5 in programme-wide reviews and evaluations.
 - the place of output 5 in the ToR for the upcoming project evaluations that the Fund Board is requiring, and the FMO is endorsing
 - ensuring access for local organisations in the design of current and future "call" windows.
- c. This study concludes that meaningful detail²⁴ for both aims of output 5 can be revealed through a CSO-centred and CSO-specific process. The Fund Board has already mandated the place of self-assessment in LIFT's organization development support²⁵. Where CSO's are developing higher capacity to respond to changes in the civil society context, and becoming more adaptive and stronger learning organizations, this detail may take the form of moving targets.
- d. To support LIFT's strategic intent, "the FMO will need to increase its own capacity in the areas of partnership principles and strategies for building and assessing capacity of civil society"²⁶. This is necessary both to support and monitor IP's, and also in the significant number of direct contracts with CSO's where the FMO is effectively "the output 5 IP".
- e. CSO's are increasingly requiring "indirect cost" support from their donors. The study found that discretionary funds can be a potent support for increased organizational and constituency capacity. LIFT is in a good position to lead donor practice on this question as it represents multiple donors, and already provides these funds in its direct CSO contracts.
- f. Two further LIFT processes that can be used to support output 5 are implementation of the LIFT Accountability Framework (or at least the CSO part of it), and commencing the agreed regional civil society forums.
- g. In the case of output 5, the separation of personnel and output budgets can obscure the respective weighting being given to the "mentoring and monitoring" roles. IP personnel are a key resource for both CSO and civil society strengthening – this resource is dissipated if they come to be seen as solely project "managers".

²³ The study suggests that the CSO profile with their memberships, communities, local funders and government will determine their longer-term sustainability (page 10).

²⁴ "Details" might include objectives, results, milestones and indicators.

²⁵ FB paper "Civil Society Strategy" March 2012, page 5.

²⁶ Quote from the FB paper which also states "There is more potential value in the process than the scores/ratings. A good facilitator can get somewhere with no tool or a very thin tool. A comprehensive, well-tested tool will achieve little without a good facilitator".

- h. An approach to building CSO capacity that is dominated by training-events is likely to disappoint all stakeholders.
- i. A training-event approach is often clearly stated in the proposal and budget. Before signing-off, both the funder and the implementer could be more thoughtful about the processes of targeting, needs analyses, follow-up, support for application, accompaniment and training evaluation.
- j. There is a risk that "project-cycle management" training will become the new "technical" training – that the most important project techniques will become scheduling, budgeting, monitoring and reporting. CSO's are generally disappointed with the increases in technical capacity they have achieved during the project.

18 December, 2013
