

Honourable Deputy Minister H.E. U Khin Maung Aye

Respected Directors General and Directors

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to be back in the Ministry to attend yet another very challenging national initiative – the institutionalisation of village development planning in Myanmar. I was here on March 16<sup>th</sup> this year when the Ministry launched a series of national workshops to sensitise relevant ministries and departments about the scope of the Rural Development Strategic Framework.

One of the key programme components of the framework is village development planning. I would like to commend the Ministry and its Department of Rural Development for their effort to take on a truly immense challenge to develop a national approach or model for village development planning. But, the job is essential if we you are serious about planning that is people centred and bottom up.

Having read the guidelines for the government’s village development planning process, I am particularly impressed that the national village development planning approach has adopted international best practices of community mobilisation, empowerment and active participation of all groups and income classes, so that their “voices”, ideas, suggestions and priorities are fully captured in the village development plan.

Since 2008, a number of government organisations, national institutions, local organisations as well as international development agencies including UN Agencies and INGOs have carried out participatory village planning. Indeed, our organisation, LIFT is an active promoter of participatory planning and development. These initiatives have been undertaken within the scope and framework of poverty alleviation, livelihoods improvement and village infrastructure development. However, to date, LIFT’s work in this area, and the work of all other agencies, has had limited coverage in terms of villages and townships.

Nonetheless, these initiatives offer valuable experience and lessons for approaches and models of participatory village development. I am pleased to note that the Ministry also felt inspired by these village development initiatives and has used the accumulated in-country experience in village planning to develop a national model for participatory village development planning.

I have read and revisited the first two development plans - from two villages in Pyinmana township. I must say that these plans provide a comprehensive medium-term development framework for the villages. The plans also describe how the villagers themselves have committed to organise the implementation of their plans together with the support of the Ministry, the DRD and the Nay Pyi Taw Council Territory.

Going beyond the product – i.e. the plan document – I am sure that the village planning process itself has empowered the two village communities, as well as the government officials who have been engaged in the exercise in cooperation with the LIFT funded technical assistance team in the Ministry.

Honourable Deputy Minister,

I would like to congratulate you and your ministry officials and staff for a successful launching of the national village development planning process, initially aimed at completing the 170 pilot villages in 34 rural townships by end of July or August this year. I would also like to share with you what I see as four potential benefits of the village planning process, while also noting that there are challenges to overcome.

First, I believe the village development planning process could be instrumental in contributing to the government's intention to develop "bottom-up" policy development, planning and budgeting. The government has often emphasised its commitment to this ideal, but it is a difficult thing to achieve in reality.

Second, the "bottom up" planning process will require consolidation of the individual village development plans at the township level and in the process integrate the village plans into township development plans.

Third, the task of conducting village development plans for nearly 64,000 villages in the country's 305 rural townships will place enormous demands on the government to ensure that quality technical support is made available to villages. In this regard, I am sure the government will work out some innovative ways to accomplish this countrywide coverage, including the possibility of covering representative sample of villages in each township instead of having to cover every single village separately.

Fourth, the government will need to develop capacity at both union level and township level as well as, perhaps later, at the region and state level, to ensure that adequate technical and management capacity is organised.

I am sure the ministry is already addressing these four challenges as it progresses with its task. On behalf of LIFT, and the 13 donors to LIFT, I would like to express our pride of being part of this national initiative. We have already provided 8 development planners and 34 PRA Facilitators to augment the existing team in the Ministry in order to complete the 170 pilot village plans. We look forward to the outcome of the pilot phase. We stand ready to expand our cooperation with the Ministry, and the government more widely, in building national capacity in development planning for rural development, economic growth and enhancing socio-economic wellbeing of the rural population.

I wish you all a stimulating knowledge-sharing opportunity at this workshop.

Thank you.

*Statement delivered by Andrew Kirkwood, Fund Director, LIFT Myanmar  
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Nay Pyi Taw, July 9<sup>th</sup> 2015*