

Village Development Planning – Myanmar

**“Rationale and Strategic Approach for a
National Model for Participatory Village Development Planning in Myanmar”**

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I. Rationale

From government or national perspective, village development planning (VDP) is needed for the following reasons:

1. National poverty alleviation and rural development initiative requires organizational approach for implementing projects that have direct impact on rural economic growth and poverty reduction of the rural population.
2. Reaching the poor in the rural area, in a comprehensive way, can be accomplished more effectively by anchoring support in the village development framework and plan.
3. VDP will also allow villagers to have comprehensive perspective of their current development situation and the strategy that can be adopted fully their development potential.
4. All of above, development situation, strategy and potential can be most effectively defined in a village development framework and plan.
5. Resources available from multiple funding windows – e.g. union budget allocated to ministries, member of parliament budget, region/state budget, external aid and other funding sources - can be coordinated and allocated more effectively and efficiently that responds to priority needs of villagers and resulting rural economic growth.
6. In this way, national policy emphasis on “bottom-up” planning and budgeting will be made operational precisely because funding allocation will be organized to meet priority of VDPs.

II. Additional utility of VDP

Besides decentralized planning and budget allocation, a VDP would be of benefit to:

1. Private sector – business entities will be better placed to organize their goods and service lines in response to the needs and demand reflected in the projects specified in the VDPs.
2. External aid can be coordinated at the township level where aid coordination mechanism can be set up by the government to situate aid resources in the context of priorities set out in the VDPs.
3. Other non-government contributions (e.g. those of philanthropic organisation) can be channelled in an orderly way.
4. VDPs have the potential of informing policy makers and government ministries for village and local development issues that require addressing through improved policy and regulatory measures as well as programmatic interventions.
5. Similarly, village development issues would also inform academic and research organizations to develop their research and training agendas that are relevant for rural development and poverty alleviation.

III. Strategic Approach

1. Several government organizations and also international development organizations (UN, WB, INGO) have carried out some form of village planning using participatory approaches and

models including participatory tools to mobilise and empower village communities. Much of the work has been done particularly since 2008.

2. These experiences provide useful lessons and contributions. However, all of such work has thus far been done as “pilot” intervention and without a clearly defined strategy for scaling up to cover all 63,899 villages in the country.
3. In any case, it is government that must assume leadership role for countrywide coverage of the VDP process using participatory tools and methods.
4. This prompted Ministry for Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development to take a national initiative to:
 - Develop a national approach or model by leveraging in-country and international experience; and
 - Pilot test the national model before
 - Rolling out the nationally driven model or approach for village development planning in a way to cover the entire rural area
5. This approach has guided the ongoing village development planning exercise. Presently:
 - A national approach or model has been developed together with Guidelines for Village Development Planning in Myanmar and a Manual for Conducting Village Planning.
 - Pilot testing of 170 village in 34 Townships covering all regions and states plus Nay Pyi Taw Council Territory has been initiated in April 2015 with the completion of two full scale village VDP of two villages in Pinyin township. Work in progress for the remaining 168 villages with the target to complete these by end July - August 2015.
6. This workshop provides an opportunity to share with you lessons and outcomes of the pilot phase of the VDP process accomplished thus far. Other presentations in coming sessions will share it with you.

IV. Limits of impact of VDP

1. Notwithstanding the importance and utility of the VDP process, I must mention that village development will require policy and programmatic support from union (central) and region and state (sub-national) and township (local) levels – in order to reinforce efforts of village communities and local initiatives.
2. These issues are also incorporated within the scope and content of a Village Development Plan, with reference to a dedicated section/chapter IV: “Policy and Programmatic Implications of Village Development Issues”. Such issues, for example, may be alluded in a VDP as:
 - Financial and banking sector reform
 - Investment in area- wide irrigation
 - Township-wide market development for expanding market penetration and expansion of village produce

- Grant to poorest households or families for their access to electric power in a village where the village community through their own initiative has also installed connection to national grid.
3. There is also a need to consolidate village development plans at the township level through integration with township development plans, for the following reasons:
- (a) Economy - a small village does not offer a viable market economy because of very small population.
 - (b) Government budget is allocated at the township level; hence if a VDP is consolidated and integrated into a township plan then the budget allocated would be more precisely allocated to the priority needs of the village community.
 - (c) External support and private sector services are organised generally at the Township level; therefore their support to meet village communities' priorities can be better programmed at the township level.
 - (d) Other service providers including suppliers of technical training are also organized at the township level.

The method and approach of consolidation of VDPs at the township level will be attempted upon completion of the 170 pilot village plans. The lessons of the pilot phase will allow for the formulation a methodology and approach for the consolidation and integration of VDPs with Township Plans.