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actalliance

NCA Country Plan 2013-2015
Myanmar

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- Part I: Strategy -

1. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

1.1 Analysis of Main Rights Deficits

Bordering China, India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Laos, Myanmar is the largest country in mainland South East Asia, with an estimated population of 47 -60 million people¹. Myanmar`s society is diverse and consists of some 135 ethnic groups². While rich in natural resources and with a strategic location, Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the region, with around one quarter of its population estimated to be living below the poverty line of USD 1.25 per day.³ According to official statistics, 89% of the population is Buddhist, 5% are Christians and 4% are Muslims.⁴ There are also smaller minorities of Animists and other faiths. The ratio between majority and minority faiths may be different in particular localities, and several ethnic minority dominated areas may have a Christian majority, while other faiths will be minority faiths.

During the past years a number of developments have had major effects on Myanmar and in turn shaped the humanitarian and development landscape. These include: Cyclone Nargis, which devastated large areas and killed 138 000 people in 2008; the political reform process initiated in 2011; the armed conflict that broke out in Kachin State in June 2011; ongoing cease fire negotiations initiated between the government and almost all of the country`s ethnic armed groups in early 2012; and ongoing inter-communal violence that flared up in Rakhine State in June 2012 and have later spread to other parts of the country.

Myanmar has large resources of forest, rivers, minerals and some of the biggest offshore gas deposits in Asia. With Myanmar being strategically located and representing one of the last untapped markets of the region, and at the same time a population that is poor and heavily exposed to natural calamities, former isolation has given way to an influx of development actors and businesses alike in recent years. At the same time, Myanmar is a fragile state, with weak links between the state and the public at large as one of several indicators.⁵

Participation

Over the past decades, the people of Myanmar were denied their right to organize, express political ideas and to freely associate. As a consequence their participation in political and civic affairs was severely curtailed. Political activists and members of opposition parties were routinely harassed, imprisoned and tortured, and in 2010 there were more than 2 100 political prisoners.

¹ No census have been conducted for the past 30 years, a new census is planned for 2014. Info in this overview is drawn from among others Banyaneer, *Country profile Myanmar*, September 2013, available at www.banyaneer.com, accessed on 21st October 2013.

² Although it is more common to speak of eight main groups (Burman, Shan, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, Kachin, Rakhine, Chin), cf. Smith, Martin. 1994. *Ethnic Groups in Burma - Development, Democracy and Human Rights*. London: Anti-Slavery International.

³ UNDP Poverty profile for Myanmar, available at www.mm.undp.org/ihlca/01_Poverty_Profile/, accessed on 21st October 2013

⁴ Independent researchers and religious leaders argue that the true figures for Christianity and Islam are higher, cf. Chin Human Rights Organization. *Threats to our Existence*. Report available at www.chro.ca, accessed on 21st October 2013.

⁵ OECD Fragile States 2013 Report. Available at www.oecd.org/dac/incaf/FragileStates2013.pdf, accessed on 21st October 2013.

In 2011, a civilian government was inaugurated under the leadership of President Thein Sein. Since then, a number of reforms have taken place, including the release of political prisoners, encouragements to form political parties, the participation of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) in parliamentary by-elections 2012, new laws that provide greater freedom of expression, permission to establish trade unions, peaceful assembly and political participation. Main elections are scheduled for 2015.

While the transition in Myanmar has started as a top-down process, it offers better hope for change in Myanmar in many decades. But the impact has been uneven between urban and rural areas, including conflict affected ethnic areas and between men, women and youth. Furthermore, decades of military rule have had strong impact on institution building, political processes and attitudes. An authoritarian culture remains, with little tradition for dialogue and consultation, representation and participation. Years of denying citizen`s right to organize has further resulted in a fairly weak and fragmented civil society. Traditionally, there have been no practices of public consultations prior to massive infrastructure implementations in communities, including forced displacement and forced relocation.

The by-elections in 2012 brought Aung San Suu Kyi into parliament as Opposition Leader. However, Myanmar politics continue to be male dominated, reflecting generally low participation of women in political decision making. Whereas women are better represented in business and professional areas than in many neighboring countries, in terms of public affairs, women are heavily underrepresented, be it in village committees, parliament or Cabinet, presently having only one female minister.

Equity

Myanmar`s political transition and economic reconstruction are intimately interlinked: "Achieving either depends on achieving both...It is hard to imagine successful political transition unless the government can secure macro-economic stability and sustained improvement to the lives of ordinary people, just as it is hard to imagine successful economic reform without political stability and continued shift away from the authoritarian past"⁶

The gradual stagnation of the economy over the last 50 years up till 2011 has resulted in serious equity concerns, with growing economic disparity which has left a large majority of the population struggling to gain access to the conditions necessary for a life in dignity and decent standard of living. Government revenues used to be diverted to the armed forces, strategic infrastructure projects such as airports and roads, and symbolic construction projects best illustrated by the new high security capital in Naypyidaw and the cyber city in Pyin O Lwin.

Myanmar is ranked 149 out of 186 countries according to UNDPs Human Development Index (2012), and lags behind all its ASEAN neighbors in indicators for poverty, health and education. While the proportion of poor people has declined from 32 % in 2005 to 26 % in 2011⁷, overall incidence of poverty remains very high. Poverty is substantially higher in rural than urban areas, implying that rural areas count for 85% of total poverty in the country. Poor areas include ethnic states such as Chin (73%), Rakhine (44%) and Shan State (33%), but there are also very high incidences of poverty in Ayeyawady and Mandalay divisions. Lack of access to credit and inputs have had a negative impact on food security, livelihoods and the rural economy. The proportion of total household budgets spent on food is 68%. Access to land is a significant issue, with 24% of people being landless.⁸

⁶ International Crisis Group. *Myanmar–The Politics of Economic Reform*. Asia Report N°231, 27 Jul 2012, available at www.crisisgroup.com, accessed on 21st October 2013.

⁷ UNDP 2011: Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA)

⁸ Figures in this paragraph taken from Banyaneer, referred to in note 2.

Myanmar has long been at the bottom of health statistics in Asia and the Pacific due to lack of investments in the healthcare sector. The majority of the population, particularly in rural areas, have limited access to basic health care. Public health budgets have increased marginally since 2011⁹ and will continue to be low as compared to the rest of the region. As former conflict areas are opening up both for domestic and international interventions, there is a high chance for influx of new health service interventions entering into ethnic areas with the risk for a lack of coordination, transparency and participation.

Ethnic areas are severely affected by the lack of quality, affordable healthcare. Malaria morbidity rates are high. Decades of military conflict between the government and ethnic armed groups have had a particular negative impact on health conditions for girls and women in conflict affected areas with limited or no access to maternal and child health care services for pregnant women and limited or no access to family planning services for community members. There is little awareness of health and sanitation among many IDP communities. Maternal mortality rates are thus three times higher than the national average in conflict-affected Eastern Myanmar and the under-5 mortality is twice as high. Common practices of open defecation, use of unprotected water sources, and generally poor sanitation standards and hygiene practices are underlying causes for the high prevalence of water-borne diseases such as diarrhea, Hepatitis A and typhoid fever across Myanmar.

Education is another neglected area in the country. Only half of students finish primary school, and even less go on to secondary school and later university. The implications for the development of human resources in the country are significant. In terms of equity, especially women face challenges in terms of access to basic services, livelihoods and fulfilment of basic rights.

The end of international sanctions and the political reforms have led to renewed interest in Myanmar from international investors and businesses. The opening of Myanmar to international investments, poses challenges to environmental destruction, natural resource depletion, and for land grabbing and unequal development. While land confiscation has been increasing in Myanmar since the late 2000s, this has emerged as a major issue in connection with the reforms and the peace processes. New land laws adopted in recent year offer in some cases less protection against confiscation than did the old laws¹⁰. In addition, they do not recognise existing systems of land tenure in ethnic areas, including traditional systems of customary and communal law¹¹.

Myanmar continues to be ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world, ranged as no 172 out of 176 countries according to Transparency International's –Corruption Perception Index (2013), thus further distorting the distribution of resources in the country. Pillars for development such as a new investment law and new land laws have been adopted with minimal public consultation, and are widely seen as benefiting primarily the country's business cronies and ex-generals, who dominate the economy. The tracking of public expenditure and the development of policies for socioeconomic development benefiting the majority of the population are obvious challenges for the country.

¹⁰ Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). *Burma – Draft Law Denies Basic Rights to Farmers*. November 2011.

¹¹ Transnational Institute (TNI) and Burma Centrum Netherlands (BCN). *Access Denied – Land Rights and Ethnic Conflict in Burma*. Burma Policy Briefing No. 11. May 2013.

Protection

One of the initial steps taken by President Thein Sein after his inauguration was to embark on a peace process with the country's armed opposition groups. By the end of 2012, twelve ceasefire agreements had been concluded in the country. These ceasefires have led to an improvement in the humanitarian and human rights situation in conflict affected areas, with greater freedom of movement for individuals and less fear in the communities. For the first time since the Thailand Border Consortium (TBC) started recording figures of international displaced people in Southeast Myanmar, the agency in 2012 recorded a significant decrease in forced displacement affecting Karen, Karenni, Shan and Mon communities. At the same time, armed conflict continues in Kachin State and Shan State. Communal violence has also emerged as a significant problem in Rakhine State, with communal and religious tensions also marring other parts of the country, including populated areas such as the Dry Zone of Central Myanmar and Yangon. Political differences related to division of powers, control over natural resources and other issues remain at the root of armed conflict in Myanmar.

As of the time of writing, the peace process in the country has primarily engaged the government and non-state ethnic armed groups, while civil society has been largely excluded from the table. However, there is growing recognition of a risk of growing alienation from the peace process, unless participation is deepened to include conflict-affected communities, civil society and political actors¹².

The absence of women at the peace negotiation table has long been an issue of concern among border-based women's movement in Myanmar. Awareness of the importance of inclusion in peace making is also high among women in civil society inside the country. Participation in peace building is essential in order to advance women's rights. A more inclusive process is also likely to contribute to broaden the peace agenda, with greater attention being paid to a wider range of issues, thus increasing the likelihood for sustainable and just peace in Myanmar¹³, including returning of refugees.

Women outside the conflict affected areas are also vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence, including human trafficking, sexual abuse and violence. Both male and female migrants moving within Myanmar or crossing borders to the neighboring countries are at risk of human trafficking since most of the migration is illegal and migrants are vulnerable to exploitation by brokers, smugglers and "employers". They often lack legal status and these means they are also vulnerable to sexual abuse, exploitation and deportation back to Myanmar. Women's general low status, cultural and institutional constraints erode the rights that are supposed to be available. In turn, this exacerbates the culture of silence that surrounds gender-based violence in particular.

From the mid- 80s and up till 2011, forced victims of war and human rights violations in Eastern Myanmar fled to seek refugee in the border areas of Thailand. In 2009 1.3% of the world's refugees came from Myanmar¹⁴ and approximately 140 000 refugees¹⁵, mostly of Karen and Karenni ethnic nationality, were granted temporary protection in the camps on the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border. Another 200 000 Shan refugees live in Northern Thailand, many with real needs for protection. In Eastern Myanmar alone according to 2009 figures from TBC were more than 470 000 Internally Displaced

¹² South, Ashley, MPSI. "On broadening participation in the peace process" in *Myanmar Times*, 25 March 2013.

¹³ Janan Lahtaw and Nang Raw. *Myanmar's Current Peace Processes –A New Role for Women?*. Report published by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. May 2013; Swedish Burma Committee. *Where are the Women? Negotiations for Peace in Burma*. Report. May 2013;

¹⁴ United Nations Development Program (2009) *Human Development Report*

¹⁵ Thailand Burma Border Consortium (2009) *6 Month Report July–December*

People (IDPs)¹⁶ fleeing conflict and the consequences of militarization such as forced relocation, forced labor and food insecurity due to loss of land, crops and assets.

Since 2011 refugees at a modest level have started to return to Myanmar, and a prioritized challenge is to find feasible ways to prepare and encourage refugees to return. Despite recent ceasefires and peace talks, food insecurity, lack of access to livelihood and income generation opportunities, as well as lack of access to education continue to be major challenges for these groups. Sustainable peace along with better economic and livelihood opportunities and access to essential services are thus vital for the future return and reintegration of refugees and IDPs.

With its long coast line, Myanmar is prone to natural disasters and has over the last years been affected by a tsunami (2004) and several cyclones including the devastating Cyclone Nargis (2008). Other parts of the country are prone to floods, drought and other natural calamities

1.2 Role of local civil society and FBOs (in the context of state and market)

Myanmar has a diverse civil society, ranging from civil society organizations close to government to civil society organizations that are close to the opposition, from more "elitist" civil society organizations to community-based grassroots civil society organizations and networks, with various degrees of formalization. The extent to which civil society organizations are registered, and how they are registered, also varies greatly. Civil society in general is fragmented as a result of decades with a repressive and restrictive environment. One of the most visible fragmentations has been between border-based and Yangon-based civil society. More and open contact between border-based and Yangon-based civil society have been noted recently, accompanied with the initiation of some cases of cooperation between border-based civil society organizations and state level authorities in Myanmar.

Other conflict lines within and across the Myanmar society also contribute towards fragmentation of civil society, pointing towards the need for increased networking and strengthening of linkages among civil society groups at many levels, it be between urban based and rural civil society organizations, as well as among various ethnic and religious groups. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) have a key role, being civil society bodies with existing structures both at local and national level. In areas affected by displacements, former community structures have been broken up. As a result, people lack the organizational capacity, skills and networks that would enable them to take part in further opportunities that may open up.

FBOs are among the few local civil society structures that exists in these areas. Religious organizations are relatively better positioned with provisions for legal registrations in place, and there is some space for religious and social work, although within clear boundaries. The Buddhist Sangha has been under tight scrutiny and surveillance after their involvement in the 1988 uprising and the 2007 Saffron Revolution, whereas the Christian churches seem to have more legroom and are under less surveillance than the Sangha¹⁷. At the same time, the Buddhist Sangha has more space to engage in social work, while legal restrictions remain on some of the other faith minorities. As a minority church, which predominantly draws its members from the non-Myanmar population, the church further finds itself in a situation where it is not able to fulfill its prophetic voice in terms of outspoken advocacy initiatives. A comparative advantage of faith-based organizations is rootedness at community level, whereas it is a challenge to make links to national level. The Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), in general being careful with

¹⁶ Thailand Burma Border Consortium (2009) *Protracted Displacement and Militarization in Eastern Burma*

¹⁷ The institutionalized order of Buddhist monks.

advocacy initiatives, has come up with advices and concerns linked to the ongoing peace-process to encourage international support for peace being provided in a manner that really includes and unites the people concerned (August 2012).

The role of the country's civil society during the past decade has largely been one of working locally on social welfare and community development initiatives. In the aftermath of 2008's Cyclone Nargis, an impressive number of local and national groups such as neighborhood initiatives, businesses, faith-based organizations, and other organizations mobilized support for emergency relief and recovery.

Although there was some space for local level advocacy in the past, opportunities for local civil society organizations to directly engage with authorities at higher levels have been practically non-existent.

In January 2013 Myanmar President Thein Sein publicly stressed the crucial role of civil society organizations in political development, and further stated that the government is now trying to create a role for the civil society in the peace process. Despite the positive political change giving hopes for a more enabling environment for civil society organizations, significant restrictions remain. Legal reforms continue to be needed to institutionalize a more open and tolerant environment.

There is a need for existing civil society to find new roles for itself, such as in how essential services are delivered, moving from a charity based to rights based approach. For faith-based organizations, it can imply expanding the understanding of the diaconal role of religious bodies. Some civil society actors are gradually moving from service delivery to adopting a watchdog role towards government and businesses. The management of the country's national resources and foreign investments in the extractive industries is emerging as a mobilizing issue for several civil society organizations, and local communities seek to voice their concerns and have their rights respected. However, the challenge of how best to develop an advocacy or dialogue role towards authorities need careful testing out. It is also not always felt that engagement is genuinely possible, among others due to the lack of decentralization of power to states and divisions.

Media represent a potential powerful channel for civil society to have its voice and its opinions amplified. After decades of censorship, Myanmar is experiencing a reinvigorated media landscape, demanding capacity-building for exerting their new role. Moreover, political parties and parliament represent important arenas and actors for interaction between civil society and government. Since the 2010 election was the first in 20 years, however, most parliamentarians have little practical experience in operating in a more representative environment, this being another gap for capacity-building that needs to be gradually closed.

One result of the new-found domestic space for civil society is also an emerging debate on how to define the future relationship between local civil society and international NGOs, in such a way that the influx of international donors and INGOs does not have a detrimental impact on the development of local and national civil society in Myanmar creating new dependencies. A general challenge facing civil society organizations in fragile states, including Myanmar, is to strike the proper balance between being constructive watchdogs on the one hand, and on the other contribute to facilitate links between civil society and the state as part of ensuring both legitimate and accountable governance and government institutions.¹⁸

¹⁸ Oxfam Research Note: The Role of Civil Society in Fragile States, 2013.

1.3 NCA's comparative advantages in country

NCA has a long history of involvement with partners in the country, initially with the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC) from the early 90's, then through engagement in the refugee camps in Thailand and with border-based community-based organizations, and since mid-2000s increasingly with new partners inside Myanmar, with an office in Yangon since 2008. The country program is implemented with partner organizations representing various faith communities, ethnic groups and value-based organizations. Partners range from large and professionally run organizations like The Border Consortium (TBC) to small community-based organizations run by refugees and displaced people themselves, to organizations based on different faiths and finally more specialized resource organizations. NCA's partner portfolio is also geographically diverse, with some based in conflict areas and along the Thai-Myanmar border and others in Yangon and Upper Myanmar.

NCA's comparative advantage in Myanmar is closely linked to its commitment to its partnership approach. Being a faith-based organization, NCA has good access to local communities since faith-based organizations often constitute the only organized structure locally. The partner portfolio places NCA in a position to contribute to bridging the information gap that exists between partners, agencies and donors through initiatives such as bringing partners together for exchanges, networking and trust building. NCA regards this as important in a setting still influenced by misconception and mistrust.

NCA has a long term perspective with our partnerships, and this is reflected in a readiness to mobilize resources for developing partner capacities. Further on, most of our partners implement programs at the grassroots, and as local and national organizations they enjoy access to the communities and are well informed about the local situation. This is an asset with potentials for rooted advocacy-initiatives when required.

NCA works in accompaniment with partners to strengthen their role as engaged actors that raise concerns on socio-political and economic development in the country to benefit the majority of the people/the poor. One of the issues thus being taken up by some partners is the responsible management of natural resources. This we do through providing faith and value based partners with competence and awareness on rights to participation and protection.

With a long history in Southeast Asia and Myanmar, NCA can draw on an extensive network for information, technical support and resource mobilization for partners, combined with competence-building facilitated by thematic advisors in NCA/HO. NCA is an active member of the ACT Forum¹⁹ in Myanmar which is used as a platform to foster collaboration and coordination around programming, capacity development of partners and staff, and advocacy. NCA shares offices with five sister organizations in the joint ACT-office in Yangon. Finally, NCA is part of the Yangon-based INGO Forum, which is important for coordination and information sharing.

1.4 Relevance in relation to development priorities

1.4.1 Relevance to national policies, plans and priorities

Given Myanmar's changing political landscape the inauguration of a civilian government in 2011, alignment of activities with government policies will be of increasing relevance

¹⁹ ACT is an alliance of 100 churches and church-related organizations that work together in humanitarian assistance and development.

for the remaining strategy period. In his inaugural speech, President Thein Sein highlighted several priorities of relevance to INGOs such as NCA, including: The country's health system also at community level; the livelihoods of peasants and workers; and the agricultural sector. For several issues, he underlined the government's commitment to working in partnership with the UN, INGOs and NGOs.

The government has initiated preparations for a Poverty Reduction Strategy with the overall aim of reducing poverty levels from the present 24% to 16% by 2015. A second key policy document initiated in 2012 is a new Framework for Economic and Social Development. In addition a donor conference in late 2012 resulted in an Accord for aid coherence. NCA and partners will follow closely the development of such policy documents and adjust activities were relevant in order to build better future alignment. For policies that seem contradictory to rights-holders' interests and to Myanmar's civil society, NCA will seek supporting partners with addressing concerns towards relevant authorities. NCA will also encourage partners to seek more extensive cooperation with authorities on local and state/division levels on issues such as health care services, and to coordinate with authorities on preparations for resettlement of IDPs and repatriation of refugees.

Myanmar has been a signatory to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child since 1997. The country has developed a *National Action Plan for Advancement of Women*, which was launched in October 2013. Chapter 4 of this national action plan promotes the elimination of violence against women, whilst strengthening mechanisms for responding to the needs of survivors and vulnerable women. An anti-trafficking law was approved in 2005. The government's commitment to solve the civil war in several parts of the country is reflected in the ongoing peace negotiations referred to in the preceding the chapter. Myanmar's plans to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is another policy development to take note of here.

Following the establishment of a Foreign Aids' Management Central Committee in 2012, the government has initiated a process to prioritize sectors and regions for international assistance. In his speech to the first meeting of the central committee, President Thein Sein thus suggested that Kayah State, Shan State and Ayeyawady Region are to be prioritized for the development of region-wide development plans due to the overall weak situation in these regions and states, Chin State, Kayah State and Kayin State are to be prioritized due to the high poverty rates in these states, while Kachin, Shan, Kayin, Mon, Chin and Rakhine States are to be prioritized for reasons of national reconciliation²⁰.

1.4.2 Relevance to Norwegian development objectives

This revised five year strategy is aligned with various Norwegian government policies and guidelines including Norway's Humanitarian Policy, the Norwegian Government's Action Plan for Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the Principles for NORAD's Support to Civil Society in the South. Reference is further made to Norwegian government focus in Asia on health and education, ethnic minority rights, natural resource management and gender equity (Prop 1 S 2013-2014). *Norway's Humanitarian Policy* gives paramount priority to protection and reintegration for internally displaced and refugees, emphasizing that the assistance should be based on conflict sensitive approaches and zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse.

²⁰ Speech by President Thein Sein to first meeting of Foreign Aids Management Committee, 9 June 2012, news covered by Myanmar TV on 20 June 2012.

In the first half of 2012, the Norwegian government facilitated the establishment of the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI). When former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg visited Yangon in November 2012 in order to open the Norwegian diplomatic mission in Yangon, he stressed that Norway will continue to offer support in areas where Norway has particular expertise. Democracy, natural resource management, protection of the environment and continued support for the peace process were highlighted. He referred to Norway's long-term support to democratic development in Myanmar, and assured that Norway will continue to support forces for reform and sustainable economic development in the country, including responsible private sector investment. These priorities are reinforced in the Norwegian government's 2014 national budget for Myanmar.

2. MAIN INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

2.1 Strategic Priorities and Programmes

Myanmar will remain a country in transition over the coming years, hence, this NCA revision for 2013–15 is a transitional country program plan with space for adjustments depending on context. NCA's overall strategy is long term development and strengthening of civil society through strengthening partner organizations' key roles in civil society, be it facilitating participation as a contribution to development of democratic practices, advocacy-initiatives, bridge building and networking, and relevant service deliveries where needed. Various partners will play different roles depending on their strengths and potentials. It is an ambition to expand the program portfolio inside Myanmar.

NCA Myanmar's **five global programs** during the revised planning period 2013-2015:



Livelihood and Trade:

- Rights holders are organized to secured sustainable livelihoods in rural and urban environments
- Rights holders have relevant vocational training skills, diversified production and entrepreneurship skills, including access to save-and-loan groups
- Rights holders have gained access to domestic and/or international markets

Resources and Finance:

- Rights holders have claimed their right to benefit from natural resources.
- Moral duty bearers have been challenged to protect vulnerable communities against violations caused by natural resource exploitation
- Duty bearers have been challenged to demonstrate increased transparency and accountability of public financial flows

Access to Quality Health Care:

- Right Holders have the knowledge and means to protect themselves from diseases that are likely to represent a significant risk to health
- Health facilities are professionally managed, accountable and inclusive - and relates to national health policy
- Right holders have access to safe maternal and child care services

- Rights holders have access to clean water and sanitation facilities and knowledge of good hygiene practices

Gender Based Violence (GBV):

- Right holders are mobilized to claim their rights to a life free from gender based violence
- Faith- and community based organizations have been influenced to transform and change beliefs, attitudes, behavior and practices that uphold GBV
- Duty Bearers are influenced to implement national laws and domestication of legal frameworks preventing GBV and promoting the rights of women and girls (CEDAW, CRC, regional protocols etc.)
- GBV survivors and groups at risk have access to safety and justice

Faith Communities and Peace Building:

- Faith actors have implemented peace-building interventions that address driving factors of violent conflicts.
- Faith actors have accompanied local communities and minority groups to protect their right to peace and security
- Faith actors at local and national level have formed strategic alliances for peace advocacy

Comments to programs and their interdependence

The two programs *Access to Quality Health Care* and *Livelihood and Trade* to a large extent build on existing interventions and ongoing partner cooperation. The program on *Resources and Finance* was initiated in 2010, but has been substantially revised in 2012 for effective implementation from 2013 onwards. The program on *Gender Based Violence* has been implemented since 2012 in cooperation with Diakonia.

A new program on *Faith Communities and Peace Building* will be introduced during the revised project period, building upon the work on conflict sensitivity (“Do no Harm” methodology) that NCA and partners have already undertaken in Myanmar. In any peace-building intervention, NCA is especially concerned that proper conflict analysis is in place, combined with proper civil society participation, be it community-based organizations, women organizations and others. NCA will contribute to enable partners to work with their respective faith communities and strengthen the protection of the rights of faith minorities, encourage linkages between minority and majority communities, and between civil and political groups. There is furthermore a close relationship between this program and the program on *Resources and Finance*, which is focusing i.e. on the management of natural resources and revenues from natural resources in Myanmar.

In a country like Myanmar with widespread poverty and poor government services there is a close correspondence between *livelihoods* and *health*. Given that NCA also has a focus on empowering people at the grassroots to claim their socio-economic rights, a dual focus on livelihoods development and improved access to quality health care is of utmost relevance. Improved food security and income translates to opportunities for better health in a society where significant portion of household income is spent on medicine and health care, and poor health is a real threat to the household’s livelihood. The resources and finance program supports the livelihoods program with its focus on natural resource issues on community level and advocacy on natural resource management at higher levels. Gender based violence, such as human trafficking, is to a large extent a result of poverty and disparity, and development of the household economies and specific income generation opportunities for young girls at risk illustrates the interconnectedness of the program areas above. Health, especially reproductive and sexual health, and GBV are also interrelated and access to health care is highly important for victims of sexual and other forms of violence. Women facing and threatened by violence cannot fully utilize their potential as individuals in the family or in

the community and this also impacts the socio-economic situation at these levels. Given the links between vulnerability to disasters and livelihood security, NCA will integrate key *disaster risk reduction* activities into its long term development programs in disaster prone areas as part of its livelihood and trade program.

As space opens up, there is a need for civil society to take charge and define its own role and the premises for its engagement with the transition. Challenges include how to find ways to include those groups who still are excluded from taking part in the new system, to overcome tensions between those belonging to the old school of thought, including parts of the bureaucracy, and the champions of newly established rights.

Geographical Priorities

NCA main geographical focus since mid-90s has been towards refugees in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, along with support to organizations from the informal civil society based in border areas. By mid-2000s, NCA began expanding its partnerships inside Myanmar, with a focus on cooperation with partners working with internally displaced people in Southeast Myanmar. In the wake of Cyclone Nargis, NCA also began supporting partners providing emergency assistance and partners working in the areas of the Ayeyawady Division affected by the cyclone and other natural disasters. As part of the introduction of the new program on Faith Communities and Peace Building, NCA intends to conduct a conflict analysis of its various programs as well as the overall country program, which will look into geographical, inter- and intra-ethnic priorities. The outcome of this conflict analysis will impact on future geographical priorities. With reference to ongoing process of geographical government priorities (1.4.1 above), NCA will also take into consideration government priorities when finally deciding upon the geographical scope of the Myanmar country program.

2.2 Strategies for strengthening local civil society from a rights based approach

The role of Myanmar civil society will be crucial in the coming years as the current government implements a reform agenda, Western nations roll back sanctions and international donor assistance increases. Civil society has the potential to promote good governance and people-centered development through broad citizen participation. NCA has made a strategic choice to work through local partner organizations, believing that this is the most feasible approach both to ensure ownership, sustainability and a stronger Myanmar civil society.

Networking and participation

NCA's strategy for addressing the fragmentation of civil society referred to in paragraph 1.2 is to support a variety of actors, who will provide constructive support for socio-political changes, including tolerance towards a more pluralistic society. NCA will encourage connections and networks across the Myanmar civil society, including the more and open contact between border-based and inside-based civil society organizations. NCA's planned program on Faith Communities and Peace Building will be another entry point for creating space and bridge building between conflicting groups. NCA will encourage coordination and cooperation with social movements related to projects that NCA and partners are involved with.

In response to the weak linkages between the population at large and the state in fragile states like Myanmar, NCA will dialogue with partners as to how they best can strike the balance between being constructive monitors of government policies and contribute to popular legitimacy of government institutions. NCA further on shares offices with five organizations within the ACT Alliance, and is committed to take active part in the ACT-forum in Myanmar

NCA will encourage and capacitate partners to strengthen rights holders' ability to participate in identifying needs, program planning and implementation. Such participation may be an important entry point for further democratic practices.

Advocacy and accountability

As space to some extent opens up for rights based advocacy, NCA will encourage and support those partners who are best positioned to advocate towards government bodies. Facilitating enhanced partner knowledge about relevant Myanmar government commitments, policies and legislation, including international treaties signed, is an important part of NCA's rights based approach. Further, reference is made to advocacy topics linked to each of the programs described in paragraph 2.1 above.

Despite past restrictions, basic principles of Rights Based Approach (RBA) have been carefully applied by some of NCA's partners, and will be further encouraged and supported by NCA. These partners base their program interventions on social analysis and adherence to principles of participation, empowerment, equity, inclusiveness and accountability. Increasingly, they are gaining the capacity to document local concerns such as natural resource and environmental issues, or the impact of state infrastructure development projects in order for such documentation to be used in advocacy, including for holding international corporations accountable for investments in projects encroaching on poor people's human rights.

NCA's vertical networks and strategic partners such as the ACT Alliance and the World Council of Churches will continue to be used for lobbying and advocacy in the present planning period alongside other international networks we have relationships with.

Resource organizations and capacity building

An important component of NCA's aim to strengthen civil society will be the expansion of our network of resource partners who will be strategically engaged to develop our partners' and own staff's capacities. Specific areas for capacity development and mutual learning will be identified in dialogue with partners and will focus on generic issues such as project cycle management along with relevant working approaches and cross-cutting issues such as gender mainstreaming, conflict sensitivity and rights-based approaches. This long term perspective also lends itself to development of trust and deeper relationships with partner organizations which results in improved programming and ultimately better results.

NCA will continue to link partner organizations for the exchange of experiences and mutual capacity development. The annual, joint partner meeting is an important arena in this respect. NCA further will continue to draw upon our global network, and facilitate exchange visits with other NCA programs of relevance to Myanmar. Moreover, one tool is NCA's new mechanism of Communities of Practice (CoP), which brings together relevant NCA staff from the representations and partners and NCA/HO to be further trained and share experiences linked to specific global programs. An important part of NCA's partnership approach is adherence to the HAP standards formulated by the Humanitarian Accountability Project, see below.

2.3 NCA Integrated Approach

NCA aims for an integrated approach in Myanmar, where long-term development, humanitarian and emergency assistance and advocacy activities are integrated in the planning and implementation of the various programmes. NCA's programs have up till now had main emphasis on humanitarian assistance in refugee camps and border areas. NCA will gradually increasing support to long-term programs inside Myanmar.

The largest program in NCA's Myanmar country program has been responding to violations of people's basic rights under the protracted conflict situation in Eastern

Myanmar as long as there was no progress in resolving the ongoing conflict in this area. While the situation for the civilian populations in these areas remains precarious, and while large populations displaced from Karen and Karenni states continue to seek protection in the camps in Thailand, the prospects of refugee return are brought to the agenda. At the same time, community based organizations among the refugee and IDP communities are concerned that the repatriation of refugees will be pushed before necessary preparations are made on the ground.

In the remaining planning period, NCA will pay particular attention to developments concerning refugee return. Support to cross-border and Thailand based assistance will continue depending on needs, and with special focus on measures that can prepare safe and sustainable return. With reference to natural calamities, NCA will continue to support partners financially to render emergency relief and recovery, and assist in strengthening partners' operational and technical capacity to bring interventions in line with ACTs Code of Conduct and international guidelines for humanitarian interventions.

Again, the ACT Forum can be used for developing NCA staff and partner capacity, for coordination of responses in future emergency operations and for development of emergency preparedness plans. NCA will also strengthen its regional team's preparedness and regard staff employed at the respective country programs in Southeast Asia as flexible resources to be mobilized in the case of major emergency operation in Myanmar and the Southeast Asia region. Given the links between vulnerability to disasters and livelihood security, NCA will integrate key disaster risk reduction activities into its long term development programs in disaster prone areas as part of its livelihood and trade program.

Opportunities seem slowly to be opening up for national level advocacy with the new parliament. Non-confrontational advocacy and dialogue are more likely to bring positive outcomes than more direct approaches. The empowerment of groups and communities should remain one of the key strategies for rights based programming.

Given greater engagement in Myanmar by various Norwegian stakeholders, including government, business and civil society, it will continue to be important to hold Norwegian duty bearers accountable for their engagement in the country. In the remaining planning period, NCA's humanitarian advocacy will keep a particular focus on the Norwegian government and the MPSI, Norwegian funding policy in general, and support for refugees, migrants and IDPs in particular. NCA will also engage in dialogue with other Norwegian stakeholders in Myanmar, including business actors.

2.4 NCA Accountability Commitments

NCA was certified as an international HAP-partner in 2011, and Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) commitments were introduced for Myanmar partners in the annual partner workshop the same year. For the remaining period of the five-year plan, NCA will continue to focus on developing and quality assuring our accountability to rights holders, host communities, partners and other stakeholders based on the HAP accountability and management standards. Focus will continue to be on providing information, securing participation and developing systems for feedback and complaints focusing on rights-holders and host communities during all phases of project or program implementation.

By the end of the planning period, clear commitments and expectations on accountability in our relationship with partners adapted to the specific partnerships will be in place. The HAP accountability plan from 2011 will be revised to ensure the necessary capacities and systems are built within NCA itself and for partners, in order to strengthen their capacities and systems for accountability. NCA will also cooperate closely with other ACT Alliance members on accountability and form a grievance and accountability mechanism.

2.5 NCA Commitments to mainstreaming development principles

2.5.1 Gender equality

Grounded in NCA Statement of Principles and policy documents by WCC, ACT and LWF, NCA has a commitment to women's rights and gender equality which recognizes that gender inequalities and continued discrimination of women are based on unequal power relations, access to resources and assets. A right based approach to changing this through addressing the distribution of power, resources and responsibilities whilst challenging men's attitudes, behavior and patriarchal structures and values is how NCA foresees contributing to greater gender equality outcomes.

Based on this NCA applies the guiding principles of gender-sensitive planning and implementation. NCA as part of the ACT Alliance is also committed to promoting gender equality as a common value and gender mainstreaming as a method of work to achieve gender equality through the ACT's Gender Policy Principles. The Policy Principles outline how this should be done in humanitarian action, long term development and advocacy.

To mainstream gender equality, NCA country offices will undertake gender analysis in an effort to achieve greater gender equality in policy and programming outcome. This knowledge will be incorporated into organizational action and especially decision-making. Capacity development, development of clear responsibilities and follow-up plans will take place at each country office, guided by the Gender Equality and Action Plan 2011-2015.

2.5.2 Conflict sensitivity

NCA has worked with a conflict sensitive approach to programming in Myanmar since 2007. The "Do No Harm" approach is an integral part of NCA's work and partners have been trained and will receive training annually. Close engagement with religious leaders who hold a powerful position on local and national levels of society and the use of a constructive rather than confrontational approach when engaging with the government are also key efforts part of a conflict sensitive strategy in some program areas. Sharing of information as well as focusing both on participation from rights holders and on keeping duty bearers informed are also mechanisms to mitigate potential conflict.

The security situation, including socio-political developments and how these may be relevant towards NCA and partners effect on conflict lines will be monitored on an annual basis as part of the risk analysis and mitigation chapter in the Annual Plan.

2.5.3 Environmental sustainability

Grounded in NCA Statement of Principles is a commitment to the protection of the environment as part of the Creation with its inherent value that shall be respected and preserved. NCA shall contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources for the common good of all humanity and the benefit of future generations. NCA will only support emergency or long-term measures that do not have negative impacts on the environment.