

# Adaptive Programming in Fragile, Conflict and Violence-Affected Settings

## What works and under what conditions?

### *The Case of Pyoe Pin, Myanmar*

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## Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme (A4EA)

In a world shaped by rapid change, the Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research programme focuses on fragile, conflict and violence affected settings to ask how social and political action for empowerment and accountability emerges in these contexts, what pathways it takes, and what impacts it has.

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## Executive Summary

*'Pyoe Pin is ready to take a risk, they move fast. Other donors are much more rigid in their country strategies.'* Civil Society Leader

This paper examines adaptive approaches in aid programming in a fragile, conflict and violence-affected setting (FCVAS), namely Myanmar. A combination of desk review and field research has been used to examine some of the assertions around the 'adaptive management' approach, which has arisen in recent years as a response to critiques of overly rigid, pre-designed, blue-print and linear project plans. This paper **explores if and how adaptive approaches, including rapid learning and planning responses (*fast feedback loops and agile programming*) are particularly relevant and useful for promoting empowerment and accountability in such 'messy places'.**

This case study focuses on Pyoe Pin ('Young Shoots'), a DFID-funded, British Council managed governance programme, which has been running since 2007. Pyoe Pin focuses on encouraging political change using technical support, funding and process facilitation, rather than simply pursuing technical change by means of a politically informed approach. The distinction is important, because during ten years of extraordinary political and social turbulence, the Pyoe Pin team and its partners have facilitated social and political change by bringing together coalitions of groups and individuals to address particular issues of social, political, economic or environmental concern. To achieve this, Pyoe Pin supports a flexible number of issue-based programmes (IBPs) currently covering education, health, fisheries, forestry and extractive industries.

Our field research focused in particular on the fisheries IBP, which is considered by Pyoe Pin to be 'one of the first examples of public participation in state-level policy making in Myanmar'. A field visit to talk with officials, local NGOs, politicians and fishing communities added considerable insight and texture to our understanding of how Pyoe Pin works. Our meetings revealed an organization deeply embedded in relationships of trust with ministers, parliamentarians, civil society organizations and fishing communities, and using those trust relationships to facilitate significant progress in fisheries reform, which in turn is leading to widespread improvements in the lives of small-scale fishers.

### Observations and further questions

Our overall conclusion is that the kinds of **adaptive approaches pursued by Pyoe Pin can work in FCVAS**, and indeed may be particularly well suited to the volatile, fragmented and unpredictable nature of such places. However, for such approaches to succeed, they need to be applied by individuals with a deep and nuanced understanding of the local context and an instinct for flexible and adaptive decision making. Further, for such individuals to prosper, they need freedom to act on a daily basis while also being supported by longer term cycles of learning and planning. Achieving the right levels of decision making devolution is not easy and means that authorising teams must sometimes be prepared to swim against the tide of institutions, ideas and interests that shape the aid sector. Thinking about what this means in practice leads us to two main conclusions – and possible next steps for this research:

The first and perhaps most important conclusion from this research is that **there is a need to distinguish more clearly between adaptive delivery ('everyday PEA') and adaptive programming (a longer-term process)** and ensure that the two are both present and mutually supportive.

Much more attention (and perhaps more research) is needed on how to recruit, incentivise and retain entrepreneurial spirits of the 'adaptive delivery' kind we saw in Pyoe Pin – such individuals are born networkers, with a deep instinct for power analysis and grasp of the shifting landscape of opportunities and threats, and the patience and stamina required to get results. We are sceptical that staff steeped in linear thinking and compliance mentalities can be transformed into risk-taking, politically savvy entrepreneurs through a few workshops or a tweak in incentives. Determining who has these skills is an important task for those seeking to build a team capable of adaptive delivery.

There are some potential shortcomings of adaptive delivery that need attention, Pyoe Pin's focus on 'getting the right people in the room' means identifying the powerful players *within* a previously excluded group, and that risks overlooking marginalised people within such groups – we barely spoke to any women during our visit to

the fisheries programme. There is a danger that the win-win perspective involves *working with the grain* to such an extent that entrenched and excluding norms of behaviour go unchallenged. Political economy analysis begins at home. Pyoe Pin appears to find it easier to focus some IBPs on specific issues of marginalisation, rather than to mainstream inclusion across all IBPs. For example, on HIV, Pyoe Pin has set up networks for highly marginalised groups – the Sex Worker in Myanmar network - to good effect.

Adaptive approaches also need to guard against the risk of sclerosis, as investments (led by adaptive managers) in acquiring knowledge, experience and relationships can generate their own inertia and unwillingness to pivot towards new opportunities. Thus, there is a place also for adaptive programmers who can introduce mechanisms to guard against thickening arteries, such as regularly thinking about diminishing returns and local ownership and spinning off new initiatives that enjoy the agility and innovation of start-ups.

It may be that Pyoe Pin was more nimble in adaptive delivery terms than it was in terms of adaptive programming.

*Research question: in what ways can adaptive delivery and adaptive programming work better together?*

Our second main conclusion is that **the aid sector – the constellation of donors, consultants, implementing organizations, NGOs etc – struggles with the requirements of adaptive approaches.**

At a crude level, there is little compatibility between adaptive approaches and the pressure for predictability, for risk minimisation and for results (often in the short term) that dominate donor agendas, especially in FCVAS. Even if donors initially ‘get it’, as was the case with DFID’s pioneering work in setting up Pyoe Pin, their own internal volatility (of personnel and priorities) makes it hard for them to maintain the commitment over the timescale necessary to achieve real change in FCVAS. That may be an argument for seeking ways to minimise the impact of donor volatility, for example by using a new funding, monitoring or reporting mechanism to provide adaptive approaches with a bulwark against the shifting tides of the aid business.

In this case, these challenges have not been helped by the fact that Pyoe Pin has struggled to describe its work in ways that satisfy donors. The subtleties of adaptive delivery – operating below the radar; spotting and reacting to the frown on the face of the minister and often unpredictable results that this generates – can easily be overlooked or brushed aside in the search for cruder metrics to feed the results/value for money machine linked to achievements predicted within results frameworks.

This is doubly unfortunate because based on this visit, Pyoe Pin has a strong case to make that adaptive approaches can produce impressive results, even within the current institutional constraints. Were it to make this case well, donors would then face a strategic decision over whether to accept higher levels of risk and uncertainty in order to achieve greater results.

*Research question: what shifts in the way aid is financed, monitored and reported would make the most meaningful contribution to enabling adaptive delivery and programming, without losing the requirements of accountability?*

## Section 1: Purpose of the Case Study

Fragile, conflict and violence-affected settings (FCVAS) are messy and ambiguous contexts in which to plan and implement development initiatives. This is particularly true when these interventions are designed to stimulate or support citizen empowerment and government accountability (E&A) – since there remains considerable uncertainty over which E&A interventions work, where and why<sup>1</sup>. As a consequence, external actors are increasingly adopting an adaptive approach to E&A programming. This involves a *compass rather than map* approach, in which real-time political economy analysis, programme monitoring and evidence informed learning, are used in shorter than usual planning cycles to maintain strategic direction. Arguably, this both reduces risk and maximises opportunity.

This case study forms part of a research project set up to examine some of the assertions around the adaptive programming approach and to explore if and how adaptive approaches, including rapid learning and planning responses (*fast feedback loops*<sup>2</sup> and *agile programming*<sup>3</sup>) are particularly relevant and useful for E&A in FCVAS. Each case study focuses on a DFID flagship project, as identified from a desk review of relevant literature. According to this literature, the adaptive programming approach – because of the rapid learning involved - enables an evolutionary cycle of variation, selection and amplification of intervention experiments to trigger pathways of change that would otherwise not be achievable.

Within each case study, we examine the evidence of how this iterative process works and whether it leads to enhanced development outcomes. We focus in particular on the learning component of adaptive programming, firstly, to determine if and how the approach has enabled a better understanding of real-world opportunities and barriers and connected the programme's evolving *theory of action*<sup>4</sup> to a real-world *theory of change*<sup>5</sup> to generate better development results. Secondly, we seek to determine if and how real-time political economy analysis and programme monitoring approaches adopted, are dependent on *front-line workers*<sup>6</sup> and the extent to which they play a part in embedding local knowledge into programme decision making. In order to better understand both the barriers and the enablers to adaptive programming, we use the case studies to deepen our understanding of the sources of inertia and opposition (ideas, interests, institutions etc) to adaptive programming and to explain whether and why these approaches have been difficult to adopt and/or implement. Each case study has been shaped by questions that examine how adaptive programming relates to the *context* in which programming occurs, the *mechanisms* through which programming is delivered and the *outcomes* achieved. Questions include:

- how do **contextual factors** suggest the need for, enable or constrain an adaptive programming approach?
- what are the **mechanisms and strategies** employed for adaptive programming – what do they add and how do they work? In particular, how far has programme design enabled front-line workers to engage in regular analysis of power and political dynamics surrounding the programme and what kinds of learning, adaptation, issues and solutions do they lead to in practice?

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<sup>1</sup> Itad, 2016, *Macro Evaluation of DFID's Policy Frame for Empowerment and Accountability. Empowerment and Accountability Annual Technical Report: What Works for Social Accountability. Final version, 2016.*

<sup>2</sup> *Acknowledging uncertainty and complexity in development has led to an emphasis on rapid feedback loops to connect knowledge gathering to learning and decision making in order facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances and enhanced understanding.*

<sup>3</sup> *An agile programme is one which is adaptive, iterative and highly sensitive to performance metrics throughout implementation. The shift to agile is based on the notion that it is not possible to design solutions to complex problems: they can only be solved by adaptation and iteration.*

<sup>4</sup> *A theory of action sets out the strategy and tactics to be adopted for an intervention by a given organisation to explain how the exogenous intervention will achieve the outcomes expected.*

<sup>5</sup> *A theory of change sets out how endogenous change happens in any given system. See D. Green, *Theories of Change for Promoting Empowerment and Accountability in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*, IDS, 2017 and A. Christie and R. Burge, *The Role of External Actors in Supporting Social and Political Action towards Empowerment and Accountability with a Focus on Fragile, Conflict- and Violence-Affected Settings*.*

<sup>6</sup> *This term is used to describe a project employee who deals directly with beneficiaries or who is directly involved in delivering project activities.*

- what is different about the **type and nature of outcomes** achieved by adaptive approaches vs non-adaptive? Do adaptive programming approaches enable external actors to achieve better E&A outcomes? What is the nature of the flexibility and adaptiveness that is needed in FCVAS and how far do donor practices support this?

When observations and conclusions of all case studies are synthesised, it is hoped that lessons will inform both explicitly adaptive and more traditional donor programming, by formulating suggestions which help shape programme design, contracting, real-time monitoring and learning and programme management arrangements.

## Section 2: An Introduction to Adaptive Management

Following a sustained critique of previous approaches to aid that were characterized as over-prescriptive and linear<sup>7</sup>, a series of networks and initiatives have in recent years explored ways of ‘doing development differently’. Most discussion and experimentation has taken place in the field of governance and institutional reform, but discussions have spilled over into other sectors such as health and education.

While there are nuances and differences, the multiple threads, with names like ‘Adaptive Management’, ‘Thinking and Working Politically’, ‘Doing Development Differently’ and ‘Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation’ exhibit enough common ground for one practitioner to describe it as a ‘second orthodoxy’<sup>8</sup>:

- Context is everything: political economy analysis is central, and not just at planning stage.
- Best fit not best practice: aid programmes need to ‘work with the grain’ of local institutions, rather than import solutions from elsewhere.
- From blueprint → flexible, responsive, adaptive programming: Rather than conduct all analysis and design ex ante, aid programmes should accept that their initial design can only ever be a best guess and build in the capability to learn from experience and adapt accordingly.
- Real-time learning: this requires feedback loops being put in place that allow programmes to learn and adapt as they go, rather than simply evaluate at the end of the programme cycle.
- Long-term commitment: this kind of ‘learning by doing’ is ill suited to short programme cycles. Most success stories take a decade or more to show significant results.

## Section 3: An Introduction to Pyoe Pin

This case study focuses on the Pyoe Pin programme, which has been running in Myanmar since 2007. The programme has evolved over its ten-year life-time: in 2011 Pyoe Pin became part of a broader civil society strengthening programme – the Burma Civil Society Strengthening Programme (BCSSP) - and in 2016 Pyoe Pin became part of the Supporting Partnerships for Accountability and Civic Engagement programme (SPACE), which shifted focus from national to sub-national (local) governance and accountability.

Contextual changes have been fundamental to Pyoe Pin’s evolution. The programme was designed at a time when the operating context in Myanmar was very constrained and the degree of political, social and economic change in Myanmar over the lifecycle of the programme has been significant. There have been major and widely unanticipated reforms in Myanmar since 2010: including among others the release of political prisoners, candidacy to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2012; the opening up of the telecommunications sector in 2013; the reform of the Association Registration Law in 2014; and the historic elections in 2015 where Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory and formed a democratically elected government for the first time since 1960.

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<sup>7</sup> See for Example Easterly, *White Man’s Burden* (Oxford, OUP, 2007), Andrews, *Limits to Institutional Reform in Development* (Cambridge, CUP, 2013) or Levy, *Working with the Grain* (Oxford, OUP, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> <https://abtassocgovernancesoapbox.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/abt-associates-working-paper-series-issue-no-1-final-010617.pdf>

*'Civil Society had great expectations of the new NLD government – parliamentarians were 'our people'. But actually, it's not been easy. In the first year we didn't even know how to approach MPs and they saw civil society as a threat, not a partner. We have lots of friends among the new MPs but when we approached them we didn't get meetings.'* Civil Society Leader

Against this dynamic backdrop, Pyoe Pin's strategic direction has remained the same – to analyse power and political economy in order to identify entry points where it can promote social and political change by bringing together 'coalitions' of groups and individuals<sup>9</sup> to address particular issues of social, political, economic or environmental concern. In so doing, it aims both to achieve material benefits for the population of Myanmar, and to change behaviours and politics by strengthening the voice of civil society. The focus of the programme is governance, specifically how collective choices are or could be made. To achieve this, Pyoe Pin supports a flexible number of issue-based programmes (IBPs) currently covering economy (fisheries, garments), natural resources (extractive industries, land, sustainable forest management) and services (education, HIV, Maternal and Neonatal Child Health (MNCH), rule of law). In each of these IBPs, stakeholders are encouraged and enabled to come together to understand and address a particular issue. The combination of stakeholders varies from IBP to IBP and can involve civil society, private sector, media and research organisations as well as politicians and officials. In several cases, access to government is through the personal contacts of front-line Pyoe Pin workers who enjoy high levels of personal trust with both Government and Civil Society.

The original Pyoe Pin programme theory of change<sup>10</sup> was presented as follows:

- analysis of power indicates where change could happen through bringing together a variety of interests (with a positive balance of power and influence) around immediate and tangible real-life issues;
- the resolution of challenges around these issues bring about lasting changes to institutions (the rules of the game) and, more generally, to the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state;
- further, as people become more involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, they gain the power to improve their social, economic and general well-being;
- coalitions are encouraged and incentivised by responsive decision-makers, hence it is important to select issues which have the potential to lead to change;
- the likelihood of success (reform, behavioural change etc) depends on understanding the incentives and vested interests in all stakeholders – including both those who want social change and those who have the power to make change happen;
- access to power is necessary in the challenging context of Myanmar; thus, the coalitions that are brought together must include those who can facilitate this access;
- to identify who has power in a particular issue, an understanding is required as to who holds power and where they derive their power, whether from affiliation with the armed forces, the state, religion or as charismatic leaders, resource (land, business) holders;
- programme interventions are designed to support informal coalitions (plus some formal ones) around a few selected issues to support these change processes<sup>11</sup>;
- prior understanding of the political economy at a programme and issue level is essential to the identification of issues and the selection of actors to include in the coalition.

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<sup>9</sup> The term coalition refers to different interest and stakeholders – it does not necessarily consist of like-minded groups, except in the sense of a commitment to engage together to resolve a particular problem.

<sup>10</sup> See BCSSP, business case and mid-term review, 2013 (p.15). Note that the review does not clearly distinguish here between a theory of change and a theory of action. The list is more a Theory of Action but a Theory of Change would include weak civil society and state, opportunities for trust-building and malleable young institutions, amongst other endogenous characteristics.

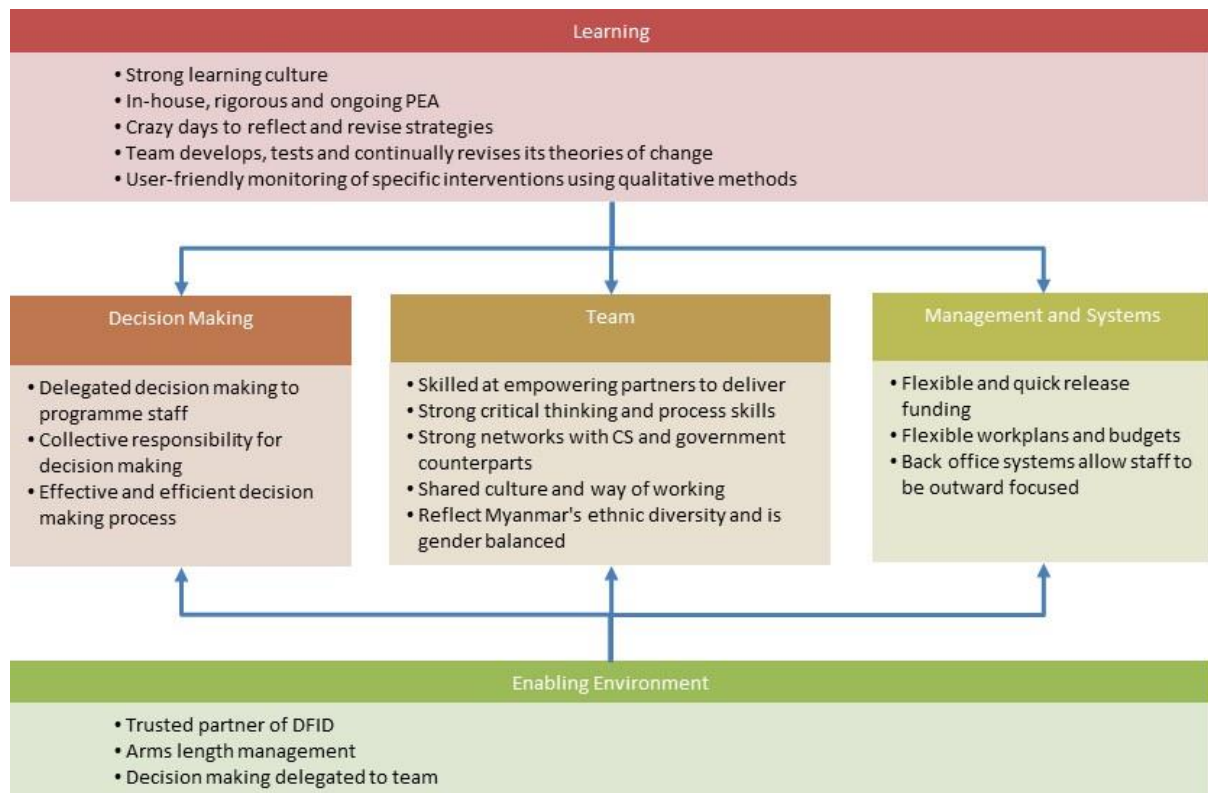
<sup>11</sup> This includes finding ways to placate potential opponents by reducing the costs to them from a given reform. It also recognizes that informal networks can sometimes be more effective, since they avoid the need to create new organizations, with their own institutional interests, and the distortions that can accompany the search for funding (author addition).

Pyoe Pin, which means “*young shoots*” aims to start small and grow iteratively within each IBP. The programme sees its role as one of credible facilitator and broker, dependent for its achievements on a politically skilled team that is able to directly involve itself in “incubation” processes within sectors. Pyoe Pin asserts that team members are readily available to stakeholders, are able to identify gaps in evidence using analysis, can open spaces to encourage wider involvement and bring technical expertise in support of coalition proposals and practices. This approach matters because through the work they can model inclusive, open and effective ways of working at a national and local level, supporting constructive civic engagement in policy processes and helping to build real ownership and agency over reform.

*‘Pyoe Pin is ready to take a risk, they move fast. Other donors are much more rigid in their country strategies.’ Civil Society Leader*

To maintain the approach in a cycle of continuous iteration, Pyoe Pin has adopted an approach to adaptive programming which recognises key principles relating to learning, decision making, its team, management and systems, and the enabling environment (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Pyoe Pin’s adaptive programming approach<sup>12</sup>**



In this case study, we explore how learning and adapting works in practice, examining the contextual and mechanistic enablers and barriers to positive outcomes and consider how they shape the role and effectiveness of front-line workers.

<sup>12</sup> Based on Pyoe Pin slidepack, 2015, section 3: “Pyoe Pin’s team and its systems make it possible”.



## Section 4: Exploring Pyoe Pin's Approach through one IBP, Fisheries

### 1.1 Timeline

- **From 2000:** fishery sector witnesses severe declines in production due to over-fishing and damage to coastal ecology
- **May 2008:** Cyclone Nargis 'opens the door', as Military Government allows in INGOs and CSOs and realized that they are not a threat/less of a threat than had been thought. One of the new CSOs, the Nargis Action Group, eventually renames itself the Network Activities Group, and goes on to become Pyoe Pin's main partner on fisheries work, with 400 staff.
- **September 2008:** Myanmar's new constitution published after a referendum. It provides state parliaments with the entitlement to legislate on, and derive income from, freshwater fisheries.
- **Early 2011:** State level assemblies formed for the first time, creating potential for sub-national governance to strengthen state-citizen relations: recently elected MPs could gain credibility with local constituents, building trust through improved service delivery and fairer representation.
- Particularly promising in Rakhine, where the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) wins the largest number of MPs - with 18 MPs, followed by 15 from Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) and 12 from the military. This political configuration – and distribution of power – presented an opportunity for increased participation by representatives of the Rakhine ethnic group in state law and policy-making (other minorities, such as the Rohingya, were not represented). Local MPs unhappiness at the continuing appointment of the Chief Minister by Yangon meant they were keen to find for spaces for local leadership. 2008 constitution provided just such an opportunity on fisheries.
- **2012:** Pyoe Pin begins work in Rakhine (in collaboration with the multi-donor funded LIFT programme), acts as catalyst for establishment of Rakhine Fisheries Partnership (RFP), made up of MPs, civil society, the Department of Fisheries, lawyers, private sector and fisher communities of different ethnicities.
- **2012:** civil unrest and communal violence sweeps through Rakhine. International community expelled from Rakhine, but the RFP process continues to engage communities to cultivate mutual trust. Begins two-year process of workshops, research and exposure visits.
- Pyoe Pin responded through conducting a conflict study to help RFP partners understand the underlying divisions. The RFP (particularly its parliamentarians) subsequently prioritised risk mitigation for the protection of the state's economic and social development.
- **End 2012:** RNDP passes legislation to end the tender fishing license system, converting most in-shore fishing areas to "open fisheries." This populist move presented opportunities to tackle fishing sector problems including: decline in the fish stocks, illegal fishing, land conflicts etc. This was because although initially, the RNDP scrapping of the tender system opened up the sector to even greater overfishing, the subsequent DoF response was to start to draft a state law to manage the situation – soon realising that an inclusive process was in most stakeholder interests.
- Late 2013: RFP began working towards drafting a Freshwater Fisheries Law. This involved community consultations on the draft law in ten townships – a first time in Myanmar. Significantly, the pilot also included consultation with Muslim communities in Buthitaung and Maung Taw.
- 2014: First exposure to Thailand and Cambodia, for a delegation from Rakhine comprising MPs, DoF officials and industry representatives.
- **October 2014:** Following incorporation of stakeholder concerns and perspectives into a 5<sup>th</sup> draft, the Rakhine State Parliament passes a new Freshwater Fisheries Law.
- **2015:** amendment to the Myanmar Constitution provides for the decentralisation of coastal fisheries management (both freshwater and inshore), (including revenue collection) to the States and Regions`.
- **2014 onwards:** RFP supports Myanmar's other coastal states and regions to adapt/replicate its successful approach in Rakhine.
- **August 2015:** Second exposure trip to Thailand and Cambodia, led by the Union Deputy Minister of the MLFRD (Myanmar Ministry of Livestock Fisheries and Rural Development), including regional and Union MPs, Department of Fisheries officers, civil society representatives and national journalists.
- **November 2015:** NLD landslide in national elections is a mixed blessing for fisheries. Department of Fisheries is marginalized, key USDP individuals lose their positions. New government initially not open to civil society engagement ('you've done your job by getting us elected, you can all go home now').
- **April 2016:** initiation of the Myanmar Fisheries Partnership (MFP), a new multi-stakeholder body working with the Ministry for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Conservation to develop a national policy framework for the four sub-sectors: off shore, inshore, freshwater and aquaculture. This is a substantially broader remit than the freshwater fisheries covered by the Rakhine process.

Pyoe Pin considers its fisheries work as one of its 'jewels in the crown', hailing it as 'one of the first examples of public participation in state-level policy making in Myanmar'<sup>13</sup>. It has since become a model for public

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<sup>13</sup> Pyoe Pin, *Project Completion Report, Phase 2, 2016, Annex 2, p7*

consultation on a variety of national and regional reforms, covering issues such as Land Use Policy and Cultural Heritage. Pyoe Pin staff suggested it as the focus for the case study and associated field visit. Its most significant achievements to date have been in Rakhine state, but due to the violence there, we instead visited Ayeyarwaddy region, where Pyoe Pin is involved in significant progress on fisheries reform.

### Initial Problem and Objective

**Institutional Obstacles:** Prior to 2011 there was no mechanism for collaboration between fishery sector actors to make informed collective decision-making at any level from village to union (national) level. Government departments had tended to work in isolation competing for management and control of resources and protecting their individual interests. This resulted in ineffective management of natural resources and inevitable decline. Short term tenders (1-3 years) led to a lack of investment, overfishing, and considerable illegal fishing, using damaging dragnets and destroying mangroves.

This was no accident. Fisheries production in Rakhine and elsewhere has traditionally been controlled by powerful and close associates of the authorities, who benefited from a tender system that was corrupt and effectively closed to small scale fishers. Tender owners then subcontracted to small-scale fishers through a cascade of sub-tendering, which sometimes ended up with poor fishers collectively paying ten times the original cost of the tender for the right to fish. Sometimes they borrowed the money from the tender owners, entering into a form of debt bondage (interview, Pyoe Pin staffer).

This meant that the benefits of Myanmar's natural resources were never shared widely across the fishing communities. Problems were compounded by institutional incoherence (for example, mangroves are the responsibility of the Forestry Ministry at low tide, and the Fisheries Ministry at high tide). Ongoing conflict and mass displacement further exacerbated the situation by introducing competition between communities for access to resources. For example, in Rakhine shrimp farmers need to hold shrimp as long as possible in salt water before harvest, whereas farmers want to grow rice in fresh water, where salination reduces yields.

Initially working in Rakhine, the Fisheries IBP aims to demonstrate the benefits of inclusive, open and fair policy-making. It supports a range of civil society, business and government actors to collaborate around recovery of the local fishery and related issues of land use. The IBP seeks to increase opportunities for communities to participate in decision-making roles and thereby exercise increased control over issues that affect their lives. (PCR Annex 1 & 2)

### How does Pyoe Pin do this?

**Understanding the system:** A political economy analysis<sup>14</sup> suggested Rakhine state as the best place to start. Fisheries are particularly important in a state with such a long coastline (25% of GDP and nearly half of all jobs depend on fisheries), and the politics was propitious. Following the victory of the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) in 2011, state parliamentarians were keen to find opportunities for local action, not least because in Rakhine, the Chief Minister was appointed by the national president, and so was from the national majority party – the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USPD) – which was a major source of frustration for RNDP MPs.

Pyoe Pin's analysis was that the different stakeholders were looking at their differences rather than what they had in common, but the PEA suggested that a coalition of interests could be built. Pyoe Pin supported the formation of the Rakhine Fisheries Partnership (RFP), which played an important role in the process of drafting a new Freshwater Fisheries law, ensuring widespread consultation with fishing communities.

**Learn from Success:** Pyoe Pin began its support in Rakhine by looking for other countries in the region where similar problems had been resolved – for example, if it could be done in Cambodia then surely even easier in the more democratic Myanmar? Local actors were enthused by the experience of Pyoe Pin facilitation – in the absence of a history or culture of working together, trust-building was vital.

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*14 Pyoe Pin, Political Economy of Rakhine with a Focus on the Fishery (unpublished); Pyoe Pin, Using an Issue to Build Bridges In A Divided Environment: An Example of How Political Economy Analysis can Underpin Positive Governance Results – The Case of Fisheries and Land Management in Rakhine State in Myanmar, February 2013*

Pyoe Pin identified legal reform of the fisheries regime as a vital step, and an opportunity following the scrapping of the tender system. It sought inspirational leaders who could create alliances, building these in workshop settings and over time. Getting the right people together in meaningful dialogue is a complex and skilled facilitating task. The engagement process itself helped learning, as new actors emerged with new perspectives.

The law was passed in a 5<sup>th</sup> draft in late 2014, setting out plans for:

- Better protected stocks through reduction in use of illegal fishing gears.
- Fairer access to natural resources through community fishery associations: demonstrating the practical possibilities of federalism to the people.
- Increased transparency in fisheries revenue collection.
- Reduced conflict amongst natural resource users through strong community organisations.
- It also offers a platform to achieve broader benefits such as labour protection and poverty alleviation.<sup>15</sup>

### Beyond Rakhine

The Rakhine legislation opened the way for a series of networks of officials, parliamentarians, fishing community representatives and CSOs, aimed at adapting and spreading the initiative to other coastal states and regions. Pyoe Pin, working in close collaboration with its implementation partner Network Activities Group (NAG), and key individuals from the RFP. Initially it included Ayeyarwaddy MPs in the Rakhine process (including the exposure trips to Cambodia and Thailand) as they had already passed a state fisheries law (albeit not a very good one). This led to them wanting to amend their fisheries law using the Rakhine experience. As time went on, Pyoe Pin adapted its plans to work in other states and regions. MPs, DoF and other actors were supported to participate in meetings in Bago, Mon and Tanintharyi. Pyoe Pin also supported the creation of a national umbrella group, the Myanmar Fisheries Partnership (MFP), which is working with the national government to develop a national policy framework for the four sub-sectors: off shore, inshore, freshwater and aquaculture. This is a significant expansion from the freshwater category covered by the Rakhine law.

### What did we see in Ayeyarwaddy?

From 2014 onwards, Pyoe Pin and RFP supported Myanmar's other coastal states and regions to adapt/replicate the successful approach in Rakhine. As a coastal region heavily dependent on fisheries, Ayeyarwaddy was one of the most promising. Pyoe Pin partner Network Activities Group (NAG) built linkages between different stakeholders and their equivalents in Rakhine state. They organized and funded frequent exchanges to encourage policy convergence.

The NLD landslide in national elections in November 2015 was a mixed blessing for fisheries. The Department of Fisheries was marginalized, as key USDP individuals lost their positions. The new government was initially not open to civil society engagement, arguing that the fact of its election represented the victory of civil society among others, and CSOs should now cede politics and governance to society's elected representatives. However, as new state governments and parliamentarians acquired confidence, Pyoe Pin and its partner NAG, were able to start reform processes in Mon, Bago and Thaninthary. One example of adaptive delivery (rather than adaptive programming): Pyoe Pin staff realized that MPs were reacting badly to suggestions that they run 'consultations' in the fishing communities: politicians were worried that this would imply a commitment to act on what the communities said, and were worried about stoking conflict between small-scale fishers and tender owners. Pyoe Pin changed their language, suggesting 'hearings' instead, which the MPs found less of a threat, and made sure the first hearings were held in the least conflictive communities, to ease the MPs' fears. The politicians rapidly came to attach enormous value to these exchanges with the grassroots.

In Ayeyarwaddy, they had a further advantage. The new Fisheries Minister is a keen proponent of fisheries reform (see below). One of Pyoe Pin's contributions was actually to help the Minister back down from an overly confrontational initial stance:

'The new NLD minister wanted to scrap tenders and redistribute fishing grounds directly to small fishers, but he faced such a backlash from the big guys that the reform got stuck. Instead we facilitated a process to bring

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<sup>15</sup> For more on the Rakhine process, see the short (16m) film, which interviewed many of the key players [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJjG\\_-4pPtc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJjG_-4pPtc)

everyone together in a ‘great game’ to build trust. The tender owners knew change was coming and wanted to keep a slice of the action; the MPs were new and still trying to work out what they could/couldn’t do. Pyoe Pin did technical work on the ways the tender system worked in each area. We identified the low value tenders, so that they (the big guys) could be asked to give those up first and expand from there.’ [Kyaw Kyaw interview]

Once the reform was passed, Pyoe Pin and NAG concentrated on ensuring its implementation. They supported fishing communities to develop co-management plans as the basis of their tender. The plan presented how co-management would lead to conservation, reduce conflicts and share funds across groups. It took time to win a tender. When the first attempt failed, trust had to be discreetly built with the Department of Fisheries. NAG helped mobilise fishers at village level, while Pyoe Pin worked with the Department. NAG encouraged the villagers to gather evidence (the number of nets) to demonstrate their credibility. The Department responded positively - motivation and information were the key, rather than money. Benefits include the legal framework, the sub-contracts, greater access to fish and increased income.

While a significant achievement, legal reform is only the start of the process. What matters now is the way in which the new laws influence behaviours, help fish stocks to recover, and transform the lives of poor communities. Although we saw and heard some encouraging signs, we are unable to state with any certainty on the basis of a brief visit and supporting documentation, how much difference this breakthrough has yet made to poor people’s lives.

### Box 1: Building Trust between Minister and CSOs

U Ba Hein, Ayeyarwaddy’s Minister of Fisheries and Agriculture, is huddled over a laptop going through the latest analysis by Yin Nyein, a Masters student in Australia who works with NAG. They agree to meet up for two hours the next day to go into the detail. This is not how ministers usually work, but then U Ba Hein is a former agronomist. Support from CSOs is part of his strategy. The exchange is informal, collaborative and respectful – no-one talks of ‘capacity building’ here.

‘There are 3 main tasks and reasons to work together: to move from subsistence to markets; to reduce rural poverty, and to conserve/improve the environment.

50% of the population in Ayeyarwaddy are landless and/or small-scale fishers. They have been cut off from the fishing grounds for decades, due to an exploitative and exclusionary tender system. Our aim is to help them get access, but also to preserve the ecosystem – balancing interests both today and by preserving stocks for future generations. There were lots of problems – uprisings, protests, court cases. The Central Government came to investigate me, but we got through it. As long as we are together, we can manage this.

Initially the tender owners thought this was a threat. Now we have said a maximum of 40% of tenders will go to small fishers, so we can guarantee the big interests. The process is smoother now. We call it ‘making sure there is enough food for the goat *and* for the elephant’!

Previously small-scale fishers poisoned the waters of the big tenders and stole fish. That’s stopped now that they feel ownership too. Some communities even asked for a reduction of tender price in return for stopping poaching fish and we agreed – it’s a process of formalization. We think the new law will increase tender revenue, and also the number of taxpayers in the communities.’

### Box 2: Building Trust between Politicians and Communities

The conversation starts off formally, but rapidly becomes animated as the Speaker (H.E. U Aung Kyaw Khine) and Deputy Speaker (San Min Aung) of the Ayeyarwaddy Regional Parliament, both from the NLD, discuss their role in the fisheries reform:

‘Fisheries are a vital reform issue, the most important element in our programme. But when we took power in 2015 we didn’t really know where to start – support from partners was crucial in helping us decide on a process. We learned from Rakhine just how influential partnerships can be.

We worked with Pyoe Pin and others to analyse the issue and began the law review process, bringing together technical experts, academics, CSOs. Pyoe Pin also funded visits to see fisheries reforms in other regions – all the partners came along; it was an important moment. The new law will be approved next year.

The consultation brought a lot of unexpected information and will have a big influence over the reform. The most striking moment was when we came back from all the consultations and workshopped the results. The initial impressions from the consultation were that we need to give more priority to small scale fishers, and the potential role of community fisheries groups; we need to understand the balance of interests between them and tender owners and how to resolve the conflicts between them, along with boundary issues and conflicts between small fishers and rice farmers.

The law doesn't just enlighten us on fisheries; it shows us how to govern resources in general. This is also a process of institutionalizing democracy, creating institutions that empower fishers and communities.

It's not either/or: we need both political and technical support. It's opened our eyes, especially on the importance of building trust between government and parliamentarians – we want to strengthen that. I used to work in government – we never knew what Parliament was doing!

When I became MP we had no-one to learn from! Previously, all laws were made by one person, and were often exploitative. When we came to power we asked ourselves 'what is the purpose of law? Who will benefit? How can we listen and balance interests?' We learned through workshops, visits, exchanges with other regions and countries. That is my pride and pleasure. The process changed us, our view of our role. There is a very significant pride in the community when it can say 'what we said is now in the law. This is what representatives are for!' Then they start to value their vote.'

### Box 3: Building Trust between Fishers and the State

The signs of progress are tangible as we enter Danuphyu village, in Ayeyarwaddy. The new road, and access to electricity are indirect spin-offs from the fisheries reform: a newly organized and self-confident community was able to use its newfound relationship with its MP to access his constituency fund. In the village hall, we meet with fishers, their leaders (U San Min, U San Oo, and U Soe Win), elected at regional level), their MP and two young women from the Department of Fisheries (DoF). The leaders do most of the talking:

'Initially we thought if we presented a tender application to the DoF, we would get it. We didn't. We had to find different ways, build a network to earn credibility and trust with the DoF. The major value of NAG and Pyoe Pin was bringing us together, coming up with collective proposals, and money for mobilization. Plus, technical support on plans for co-management and support for our contacts with DoF.

Our first contact was in 2012. Before that we had never talked to the DoF. At the first meeting, they got very annoyed and said, 'why have you come here?' We presented the plan and they said 'just leave it with us'. Nothing happened – it was very frustrating. The two big challenges were convincing the DoF and getting the villagers to believe they could change things, which went against all their previous experience.

To build trust we had to show the DoF that we were honest – we showed them our fishing nets, said 'these are what we will use'. From that moment, the DoF started to respond differently. We had to know how many nets, collect the data, show we could really do it. The (big) tender owners brought money; we brought information and inspiration.

We only won one tender, enough for 6 villages, but it got people starting to believe. It's a huge change: now we have to manage the ponds; we have money and fish for our families but also for the association, which pays out to members for 'happy occasions' and 'sad occasions'. We feel more secure and have fewer problems with the old tender owners.

The recognition of our role as fishers really matters to us. At the top level of the DoF, they used to think of a fisher as someone with 30 boats – we were just seen as labourers. In the first workshop, they started to see we were fishing for ourselves, we existed. Now the DoF has small scale fishers embedded into its plans. There are still anti's of course – people in the DoF who did well from bribes, but we also have allies there now.

What did we need from outside? Help to come together – even collaboration between villages was new; lessons from elsewhere; building the relationship with DoF and MPs. If we'd been on our own, ideas would not have come, we'd still be labourers, at the whim of the bosses. A lot of areas would be fished out by now. We'd never have realized we needed to engage in law reform. Big fishers used to kill small scale fishers – that would still be happening. The greatest success of all is the end of conflict.

The previous tender owners were big businessmen and they have plenty of other interests, in rice farming etc. To be honest, they weren't happy but they had already made a lot of money and had to accept the decision! The future? Strengthen our institution, help other fishers in other states and regions. Now we're looking beyond fish – to the environment, the wider importance of the law, new sources of finance. And integrating rice farming and fisheries better.'

## Section 5: Case Study Observations: what have we learned about adaptive programming?

This section presents Observations on context, mechanisms and outcomes as proposed in section one.

### Context: the evolving political economy in Myanmar

*“Political change is happening fast in Myanmar. At a national level, many of the main features of this are widely known – the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and ... various measures aimed at liberalising the economy, including the sale of selected state assets and the elimination of the dual exchange rate mechanism. While debate remains about the depth of these changes – for example because the military retain formal powers through the constitution – it is substantially evident that these changes have moved beyond a point of no return.”<sup>16</sup>*

Such was the summary statement provided by a political economy analysis of Myanmar, with a focus on Rakhine State, undertaken by Pyoe Pin in 2012, well before the crisis of violence which engulfed the Rohingya population in 2017. Across Myanmar, this and numerous other tensions and conflicts are ongoing – representing the interests, the prejudices or the resistance of various factions of the population. Several of these groups are represented by ethnic armed organisations. This presents donors used to working with the state with a problem, since an ability to identify and work with such non-state partners and understand the sensitivities of all is critical to making a meaningful contribution to change. Inevitably, from an external actor perspective, navigating such volatile and sometimes violent complexity is very difficult, especially in a way that facilitates inclusive decision-making and enhances internal accountabilities. Flexibility to respond to flares of hostility as well as new opportunities is a vital element of an ability to learn and adapt during implementation. Understanding the context is only possible with a local team that is sufficiently embedded within the context to read and respond to risk and opportunity.

Observations from our short visit to Pyoe Pin to learn if and how adaptive programming helps the programme operate in the Myanmar context include:

**Observation 1: Opportunity and risk are amplified in Myanmar (rather like a game of “snakes and ladders”), making Pyoe Pin’s ability to be flexible and adaptive vital.** The Myanmar context is volatile, with unpredictable and uneven economic, political and social change events and opportunities presenting over time and space. This has required both *flexibility* (to respond not only to risk but also to opportunities) and *adaptability* to learn from intervention experiments. For example: in mid-2011, the Myanmar government unexpectedly announced its wish to sign up to EITI. In response, Pyoe Pin rapidly mobilised resources to enable civil society’s full participation in EITI’s shared decision-making platform alongside government and the private sector. This tripartite relationship was a foundation for trust and improvements in resource governance. Initially, civil society was not open to participation since there was a lack of trust in government but through a process of facilitated articulation of interests, civil society confidence grew. Over time Pyoe Pin has been able to reduce its support and the World Bank and other donors now provide funds for the formal EITI process. Myanmar became a candidate country in 2014 and produced its first EITI report in January 2016.

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<sup>16</sup> Pyoe Pin, *Political Economy of Rakhine with a Focus on the Fishery (Annex IV, LIFT report)*

*'Without Pyoe Pin, EITI would never have happened', Civil Society leader*

**Observation 2: Since adaptive programming enables the engagement of multiple players beyond state and CSO actors in relevant ways and at relevant moments, the approach can help address social and political fragmentation.** Pyoe Pin's approach to context analysis has been to improve its understanding of the structural and institutional features that shape Myanmar's politics in relation to specific issues. Further, Pyoe Pin argues that one of its strength lies in choosing partners to work with who understand local sensitivities and divisions and don't exacerbate tensions. They recognise that perceptions matter in fragile settings and so it is important that the core Pyoe Pin team are seen to be working towards consensus or in ways which are seen to be constructive by all parties. In this way, the team and partners have been able to develop an understanding of the actors, interests and contests that shape and constrain change. In order to sustain an ability to work on such issues, the team encourages a non-confrontational approach – promoting change through strategic networking and influencing, building bridges to reduce fragmentation. This is a significant change of tone in a setting often characterized by polarization, mutual suspicion and animosity. An example of such an approach is in the education sector where Pyoe Pin initially focused on non-state, monastic education, working with this parallel system on teaching standards as a potential starting point for building bridges across to the government system.

*'Civil society was split by the military. Trust was broken. Everyone was suspicious of each other.'*  
Pyoe Pin staffer

#### ***Pyoe Pin's approach to context***

*Reflecting back on the characteristics of the Pyoe Pin approach set out in section 2 above (figure 1), those most relevant to operating within the Myanmar context appear to be:*

- *strong critical thinking and process skills;*
- *strong networks with civil society and government counterparts;*
- *flexible workplans and budgets and*
- *decision making delegated to the delivery team.*

*Others we might add include:*

- *local staff embedded within the culture and systems of the country and a*
- *non-confrontational approach.*

## **Mechanisms: the Pyoe Pin Approach**

Pyoe Pin focuses on political change using technical support, funding and process facilitation rather than on pursuing technical change by means of a politically informed approach. This is achieved by identifying coalitions of interest and engaging with the actors using a win-win perspective. Pyoe Pin coalition facilitators work through partners (currently 40-50 partners altogether), managing adaptively as well as programming adaptively.

*'Pyoe Pin is about political change with technical support, not technical change with political support'* Pyoe Pin staffer

Our observations on the mechanisms or strategies employed by Pyoe Pin and which support adaptive programming include:

**Observation 3: Coalitions of interest are not the same as (formal) coalitions.** The Pyoe Pin team selects issues that will have traction with all the actors who would be needed for long term solutions and gain. Thus, a wide range of actors need to see positive change as a result of their participation. Pyoe Pin recognises that these actors may have very different incentives despite the common interest in change and very often the actors would not normally associate – and indeed may never meet or be aware of each other's specific interests. The

programme supports each stakeholder group to realise their own interests and begins this process not with a large upfront commitment, investment or plan – but with exploratory bilateral conversations with as broad an array of actors as possible. Adaptive programming enables Pyoe Pin to shape the nature of its support to each group according to their interest.

*'All actors may never be in the same room' Pyoe Pin staffer*

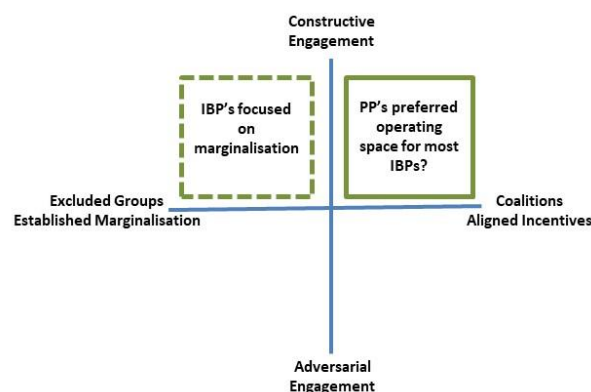
**Observation 4: Transformation may start small.** Pyoe Pin emphasises the importance of being able to fund small initiatives: having some “skin in the game” can be the starting point for, building trust and help organisations demonstrate “funding value” before they become big and formalised enough to satisfy donor requirements. For example, Pyoe Pin gave SWIM a small amount of money to get started, then moved to \$100k in 2016 and is now handing over the support requirement to other donors.

*'She came to me in a conference tea break and was very keen, but also crying. We started with a small grant, helped them write the proposal, otherwise no-one was going to help. We helped them write a constitution for the network, get training on the law (they wanted to advocate for decriminalization)' Pyoe Pin staffer on future SWiM leader*

**Observation 5: From a political perspective, weak and inexperienced state representatives (parliament or government) have responded well to demonstration effects in similar contexts.** Visits to other countries with similar problems have enabled a range of actors to explore together what might work in Myanmar. Such visits are partly about networking and building relationships and partly about acquiring technical knowledge ...but perhaps most significantly they demonstrate what works in practice *in similar contexts*, rather than simply promote generic good practice. Pyoe Pin’s exposure of lawyers to legal aid systems and networks outside of Myanmar, for example, was instrumental in inspiring changes in the law and the creation of a Southeast Asian lawyers’ network to continue the exchange.

**Observation 6: A focus on aligning incentives, finding win-wins to bring institutions together may inadvertently exclude marginal groups.**

*Figure 2: The Pyoe Pin approach in relation to marginalisation*



Pyoe Pin’s theory of action suggests that by supporting issue-based reform processes, more people will be enabled to have a voice and stake in decisions that affect their lives. Inclusive processes here appear to mean the engagement of stakeholders who were hitherto not included in decisions taken within an authoritarian regime. However, that focus on ‘getting the right people in the room’ means identifying the powerful players *within* a previously excluded group, and that risks overlooking marginalised people within such groups – we barely spoke to any women during our visit to the fisheries programme and our conversations with small-scale fishers and their leaders. There is of course a risk of the best being the enemy of the good – insisting on a laundry list of excluded groups being included in every conversation could throw sand in the wheels of Pyoe Pin and undermine its agility and responsiveness. But there is a danger that the win-win perspective involves *working*



*with the grain*<sup>17</sup> to such an extent that entrenched and excluding norms of behaviour cannot be challenged. Political economy analysis begins at home.

Our observations also suggest that Pyoe Pin finds it easier to focus some IBPs on specific issues of marginalisation, rather than to mainstream inclusion across all IBPs. For example, on HIV, Pyoe Pin has set up networks for highly marginalised groups –the Sex Worker in Myanmar (SWiM) network - to good effect. However, this represents a focused rather than mainstreaming approach to marginalisation (figure 2) and raises a question of whether working with the grain elsewhere reduces opportunities for inclusion.

Pyoe Pin staff argue that it is also sometimes a matter of timing. Once trust has been built and results achieved it becomes easier to introduce other elements. For example, its forestry work was initially about supporting communities to get access to community forestry certificates. Later on, it became easier to introduce the notion of land certificates with joint male/female ownership – previously only the head of household (generally male) had rights.

This is the optimistic case; a more pessimistic reading is that absent a high level of vigilance and a commitment to adaptive programming (see next Observation), accepting exclusion in the initial stages can lock it in to what follows thereafter. There may well be no clear answer to whether initial inclusion leads to better politics, or vice versa.

**Observation 7: The difference between adaptive programming and adaptive delivery is important.** It is the ability of the Pyoe Pin team to deliver adaptively that is key to success. Pyoe Pin demonstrates very well that being adaptive works on two levels and in very different ways.

Adaptive delivery is a way of doing development differently in the day-to-day. Instead of Implementing *The Plan*, frontline staff think on their feet, continuously navigating through a fog of complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty. They do this using curiosity, evidence, emotional intelligence and instinct (noticing the frown on the face of the minister and changing tack in mid conversation) in a powerful blend of short-term learning, thinking and decision-making. The focus on learning is critical to all that Pyoe Pin does, for it is not only frontline workers who learn. Pyoe Pin facilitation means that all actors learn more about their context, the issue they engage with; they learn new ways of working together, learn more about one another's interests and incentives, learn more about the options available for improving things. In this way, frontline workers come up with best guesses on what to do next, then test and correct in a continuous engaging and learning process.

Adaptive programming on the other hand is a slower more deliberate decision to step back, commission political economy analysis and bring in critical friends to help set new directions. Connecting adaptive delivery with adaptive programming is critical to achieving results. Getting “stuck” in an IBP as a result of building good relationships, creating project opportunities and wishing to retain technical staff, is a risk and may signal that the politics and priorities of this particular intervention are wrong. The inertia that follows extensive investments in building knowledge and networks and the desire to ‘stay in the game’ as more and bigger players enter is a temptation that can only be overcome if strong adaptive programming is prepared to over-ride the next steps approach of adaptive delivery to make the next leap for the programme. In the case of Pyoe Pin, political openings also multiplied the opportunities in a given sector, further leading to lock-in and fuelling the argument for realising the full benefit of sunk costs, when a more strategic approach might have targeted new and significantly different spaces, such as the Peace Process<sup>18</sup>. In this sense, value for money considerations need to be able to incorporate a consideration of opportunity cost.

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<sup>17</sup> Brian Levy's view in his book (Levy, 2014) of this name is that reformers need to learn to live with imperfection - in some settings, a seeming excess of chaos may be less a signal that a country is off-track than part of the medium-term nature of things

<sup>18</sup> Pyoe Pin does have examples of how its achievements contributed to the peace process. For example, the fisheries work provided an entry into supporting the Karen National Union (KNU) on their natural resource governance policy which in turn provided the KNU the credibility to act as a convener across NCA (national ceasefire agreement) signatory and non-signatory lines. Work in education opened up opportunities to work on mother tongue language and has helped bring ethnic armed groups and the state together by helping to shift (or at least nuance) the narrative from one of self-determination to the technical benefits of learning first in mother tongue. This has been a key issue for ethnic armed groups and opened up dialogue between them and the state.

**Observation 8: Entry points and exit strategies are vital but the significance of weak signals may be hard for external actors to read.** In many ways, Pyoe Pin is a confident organisation, which holds its nerve in the face of low signals for change and high risk of engagement. For example, although Pyoe Pin struggled initially to see a way into the forestry sector given the degree of state capture and cronyism, the programme team recognised strong incentives for community engagement in Kachin in order to protect the ecosystem. This enabled Pyoe Pin to work with partners to demonstrate the value of community forestry. Pyoe Pin facilitated the establishment of the Myanmar Environmental Rehabilitation-conservation Network (MERN), a platform set up to engage with government. Pyoe Pin conducted value-chain analysis to demonstrate the joint benefits of community-private sector partnerships and supported MERN to develop common policy positions while at the same time working with ex-government advisers to help create strategies that would speak to Ministry interests.

Forest User Groups have now been set up in Kachin, Shan, Rakhine and Chin through IBP partners. Pyoe Pin's ability to read and respond to signals from government that they had an appetite to disrupt monopolisation was impressive. So too their positive response to this despite low confidence among citizens in community forestry tenure due to restrictions to commercial benefits. Over time Pyoe Pin has contributed significantly to a formalisation of relations between civil society, business and government for sustainable forest management.

## The role of Front-Line Workers:

Front-line workers are vital to the successful application of Pyoe Pin's adaptive delivery approach. Their work requires active strategic oversight and steering to help determine when the time has come to continue, adapt or exit. Our main observations relate to some of the Observations above but are expressed here specifically in relation to frontline workers:

**Observation 9: Everyday PEA is vital to adaptive delivery and different from medium/long term PEA for adaptive programming – it is more instinctive, harder to report; and needs to be blended with intervention monitoring.** Relationships are the currency and foundation of effective adaptive delivery. Trust takes time and energy to build but is easy to undermine. Working with different actors across coalitions for change in Myanmar requires a hands-on and personality driven process born of a recognition that most actors are emerging from decades of mistrust and division, and personal relationships often substitute for weak institutional networks.

Key Pyoe Pin team members are 'development entrepreneurs' (Faustino and Booth, 2014)<sup>19</sup> and compulsive networkers who spend much of their time in informal meetings with government, civil society, private sector and political actors to better understand what is happening locally, what incentives are driving behaviour and building trust. This ability to 'dance with the system' (Meadows, 2008<sup>20</sup>) is essential to adaptive delivery and exceptionally hard to inculcate through training and incentives.

**Observation 10: Trust is an essential ingredient and knowing how to build it is vital.** It is Pyoe Pin staff and partners who create the organisation's identity. Pyoe Pin has been patient in its recruitment of staff, waiting for the people with the right type of qualities for each IBP. In particular, recruiting staff from amongst the change agents that Pyoe Pin interacts with has given the programme access to important political intelligence.

**Observation 11: A conundrum for front-line workers is that relationships are both what allows you to convene/broker etc, but also what traps you in a given issue/sector.** It is perhaps not surprising that it is easier to enter a sector than to leave. In the garment sector for example, Pyoe Pin has been able to broker agreements between factory owners, Unions, Worker Representative Groups, "Brands", the ILO, the National Skills Standards Authority and the Ministry of Industry among others.

The sector is important since it is predicted to grow tenfold over the next decade, employing more than a million people. Much has been achieved already in terms of standardisation of training, labour rights and accreditation. Collectively, the sector is now pursuing a master plan for change, with lots of donors now working in this sector. At this point, although Pyoe Pin clearly retains strong relationships and considerable experience, there is a

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<sup>19</sup> Faustino and Booth, 2014

<sup>20</sup> D. Meadows and D.H. Wright, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).

question to answer about whether this has now become a technical project from which Pyoe Pin should step back.

The question of when to step back relates to the point made earlier on when adaptive programming should over-ride adaptive delivery. In theory, Pyoe Pin can exit in at least three ways. It can act as an incubator then pass projects on to bigger, more slow-moving funders (or another programme) once the CSO has matured sufficiently; it can decide to withdraw once an organization like the fishers' associations develops a local resource base; it can drop things that don't work, or the context changes and there is no longer a plausible prospect of progress.

Alternatively, it can semi-exit into a new role, e.g. from primary sponsor/funder to occasional accompanier. In practice, it seems hard for Pyoe Pin to let go altogether, and it prefers the two options of switching to TA or passing clients on to bigger donors. But that runs the risk of leading to an accumulation of dead wood in the IBPs and opportunity costs in the shape of new issues that are not picked up.

The process of (not) letting go epitomises the messiness and contestation of adaptive approaches. Individuals within Pyoe Pin sometimes differ over whether a given IBP is 'succeeding' or 'failing' and what to do about it, and that is inevitable given that the approach is about making intelligent bets, and then testing different options in practice. Furthermore, when the political landscape is evolving as rapidly as was the case in Myanmar, there is no guarantee that analysis of the opportunities and risks is not going to be reversed within the ensuing weeks and months.

There may be a case at times for a more relationship/solidarity-based rather than adaptive approach, developing a good set of networks based on an initial PEA, then sticking with the partners through the unpredictable rapids of change that follow, rather than chopping and changing according to the partial and time-limited findings of the latest analytical update. Knowing when to work adaptively can be as much of a skill as being adaptive.

***What does this add up to in terms of Pyoe Pin's adaptive mechanisms?***

*Reflecting on the characteristics of the Pyoe Pin approach set out in section 2 above (figure 1), those most relevant from our observations are:*

- *delegated decision-making to programme staff,*
- *effective and efficient decision-making processes,*
- *being skilled at empowering partners to deliver,*
- *strong critical thinking and process skills and*
- *flexible workplans and budgets.*

*Others we might add include:*

- *every-day PEA*
- *a win-win approach*

*There is also a possibility that some other characteristics should be added to the list:*

- *a fuller recognition of the role of adaptive delivery*
- *clearer distinctions AND connections between adaptive delivery and adaptive programming*
- *consideration of how to deal with issues of inclusivity*
- *the identification and use of exit criteria*

## **Outcomes: has an adaptive programming approach enabled external actors to achieve better E&A outcomes in Myanmar?**

Outcomes achieved by Pyoe Pin using an adaptive programming and adaptive delivery approach seem to have been born of Pyoe Pin's accompanying style of engagement and the team's ability to identify and respond to critical moments.

Our observations on outcomes include:

**Observation 12: There is more to tell in terms of critical moments in the contribution of adaptive programming, institutional change and the benefits which follow; probably less to be claimed in terms of overall attribution.** There are several agencies within Myanmar who will contest Pyoe Pin's claims to achievement, largely because several organisations have often been involved in convening and brokering processes around an issue, making questions of attribution difficult to answer. Pyoe Pin would do better to focus on reporting its critical contribution and resist any temptation to claim attribution. To do this it appears most important to recognise the political aspects of change – to answer questions of how power has shifted and changed and how Pyoe Pin has played a part in this. For example, in the case of SWiM, it is not only the technical changes in the law that has made a difference (reduction in sentences, access to medical care and legal aid) but the political gains – for example shifts in understanding and attitude which have accrued through the establishment of the network of hitherto informal groups of workers; registration of their organisation; participation of their representatives on parliamentary committees; meetings with the House Speaker and access to training for the police.

**Observation 13: It is easy to under-record and under-communicate inspiration & improvisation at critical moments.** Despite a range of diagrammatic and reporting devices introduced by Pyoe Pin, the logframe remains the principal vehicle for Pyoe Pin accountability and has not been structured in a way that captures the programme theory of action or allows reporting on adaptive decision making in response to critical moments. Many Pyoe Pin staff can provide persuasive examples of adaptive delivery in practice and connect this to context and results. However, the enduring pressure to report against 'predicted' results means that some of the less predictable change processes in Myanmar can go unreported. Those who understand the relevance of real results as well as the story behind them – front-line workers (Pyoe Pin and partners) and coalition members – may need more opportunity to tell their story. This is complicated by the fact that the local NGOs that Pyoe Pin works with are often difficult to engage in such processes.

**Observation 14: It is not clear if and how change scales and spreads.** The long-term impact of Pyoe Pin support is hard to track. Building trust between civil society and decision makers is not easily substantiated, let alone measured. Institutional progress may be hard to tie to specific socio-economic gains. For example, in relation to initial support for the EITI process, Pyoe Pin enabled a large cross-section of civil society to come together for the first time to discuss EITI. A civil society statement of requests to government was formulated in return for participation and as a result, civil society was guaranteed the right to participate without threat or restriction. A committee of representatives from 14 states and regions was established which catalysed the creation of the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability (MATA). MATA is now a nationwide platform to coordinate and communicate civil society interests. But what difference has MATA made on the ground? Pyoe Pin needs to think more carefully about how to track and report the consequence of the changes it helped trigger. Such an exercise is not cost-free, of course: Pyoe Pin, like any organization, has to consider the prior question of how much time and brainpower to allocate to detailed monitoring and learning, compared to doing the work in the first place.

***What does this add up to in terms of Pyoe Pin's adaptive programming outcomes?***

In terms of the characteristics of the Pyoe Pin approach most relevant to delivering outcomes, the absence of clear contribution reports makes this difficult to assess. It seems that Pyoe Pin would benefit from more thinking on IBP theories of action and the introduction of mechanisms to connect adaptive delivery decision-making with results reporting and adaptive programming.

## How far have donor practices supported this?

Adaptive programming approaches require flexible and patient donor systems and procedures. Our observations on the relationship between the Pyoe Pin programme and donor practices are that these were not always present:

**Observation 15: Operating below the radar may be good for effecting change, but it is bad for reporting.** We observe that Pyoe Pin has two problems in this regard. First, it is arguable that the substance of adaptive programme outcomes in FCVAS emerges from relationships that have already been built in advance of the opening up of windows of opportunity for change. However, the value of the waiting game is hard to demonstrate *before* such opportunity knocks and adaptive programmes need to find ways to deliver while they wait for *step-change* moments. This presents everyone with difficulties, since a requirement to deliver outputs that generate outcome-level change along a predicted pathway may pressurise adaptive programme teams to think in terms of spin rather than substance or become less entrepreneurial/agile.

*'What is the right level of constraint? You can't just say 'go and do stuff', but nor can you say 'just follow the logframe'. DFID official*

Secondly, Pyoe Pin also reasonably argues that it creates space for others to work in and then withdraws. For example, the revision of the Association Registration Law was partly enabled through resources provided by Pyoe Pin to partners for this crucial reform opportunity that emerged fleetingly and with a brief window of opportunity (as parliament granted only a two-week consultation period). The final bill enacted in June 2014 enshrines simple, voluntary registration procedures with no restrictive measures, meaning that networks supporting marginalised populations – such as sex workers and drug users can now attract funding. However, it has been difficult to receive full recognition for the critical moment and the contribution made.

*'Donors want to see formal decision points, but that's not how it works. The chat with a minister or permanent secretary is continuous. Sometimes you sense a bit of movement, but it's not clear until long afterwards. There's no clear decision point to show the donors.'* Pyoe Pin team-member

**Observation 16 Working with a 'compass not map' is not equal to 'no accountability'; it's important to open the black box of adaptive programming, even retrospectively.** An adaptive programme requires a more flexible approach to monitoring and analysis to help test decisions, confirm results and underpin and explain strategic choices throughout the programme lifecycle. This may be better achieved by peer review and issue-based case study reporting rather than formal monitoring mechanisms. However, Pyoe Pin has been externally reviewed virtually every year – which has led to the A++ scores 4 years running and A+ on its project completion report. Donors are interested in how Pyoe Pin understands power and influence, supports local inspiration, spots the right moment to convene and broker reform processes, injecting finance when actors are ready to receive it. The question for Pyoe Pin (and for any other adaptive project) is how to demonstrate the value of these processes convincingly, especially when working through 40-50 partners. This may not be as complicated as it may seem and Pyoe Pin could perhaps have done better from the start at recording evidence of contribution.

**Observation 17: Being a donor for an adaptive programme is a double-edged sword, since donors are invested in two quite different ways.** DFID has not only provided finance to Pyoe Pin but has paid close attention to Pyoe Pin's operations; key advisers have taken a personal interest in the programme. This hands-on rather than arms-length approach has enabled a more positive attitude to risk taking than might otherwise have been the case, allowing Pyoe Pin to pursue opportunities as they arose. Nevertheless, despite a commitment to work adaptively, there is as much pressure on DFID staff in-country to demonstrate results to their management team as there is on Pyoe Pin.

**Observation 18: Donor processes make it hard to support adaptive programming in the long term.** In the early days of Pyoe Pin, DFID staff played a pioneering role in creating a strong authorising environment, which enabled the programme to get started, test different approaches and build up momentum without getting pushed too early for results. It is fair to ask whether, 10 years on, today's DFID would be able to do so again. The current environment exhibits more of a procurement + compliance mindset, with numerous milestones and targets, resembling 'a road-building programme', in the words of one DFID insider, that is ill-suited to this kind of work. Issues include how much adviser time and how big an investment in relationships are required, in order to co-produce an innovative approach. In its first phase, Pyoe Pin benefited from not having too much money - £3m over 4 years, before ramping up into £16m in phase 2). Continuity of commitment and perspective by donors is almost impossible to guarantee and financial delays in particular erode trust between programme and partners.

For example, over the ten years of Pyoe Pin life, DFID has experienced multiple changes in UK Government, changes in Minister, changes in policy priorities and development language and changes in Myanmar-based DFID staff. This creates both a challenge for DFID – to remain committed to an established programme – and to Pyoe Pin in terms of responding to the latest pressures – for example to demonstrate results, present these in value for money terms or communicate in words and ways that will influence Ministers and others reviewing the programme’s performance. It is very easy for an initially active and open partnership to be eroded by mutual irritation – at having to explain the approach all over again to incoming staff and ministers; at the lack of a clear narrative to sell up the command chain within Whitehall. Even basic procurement procedures such as open tendering ignore the investment made by a programme team in building trust and extending relationships, while delays in extending programmes can lead to partner insecurity and staff losses.

The uncomfortable conclusion is that adaptive programming may have to face in two directions at once – be adaptive to the local context and to learning based on the intervention, as well as be adaptive to the changing political context in donors’ own countries.

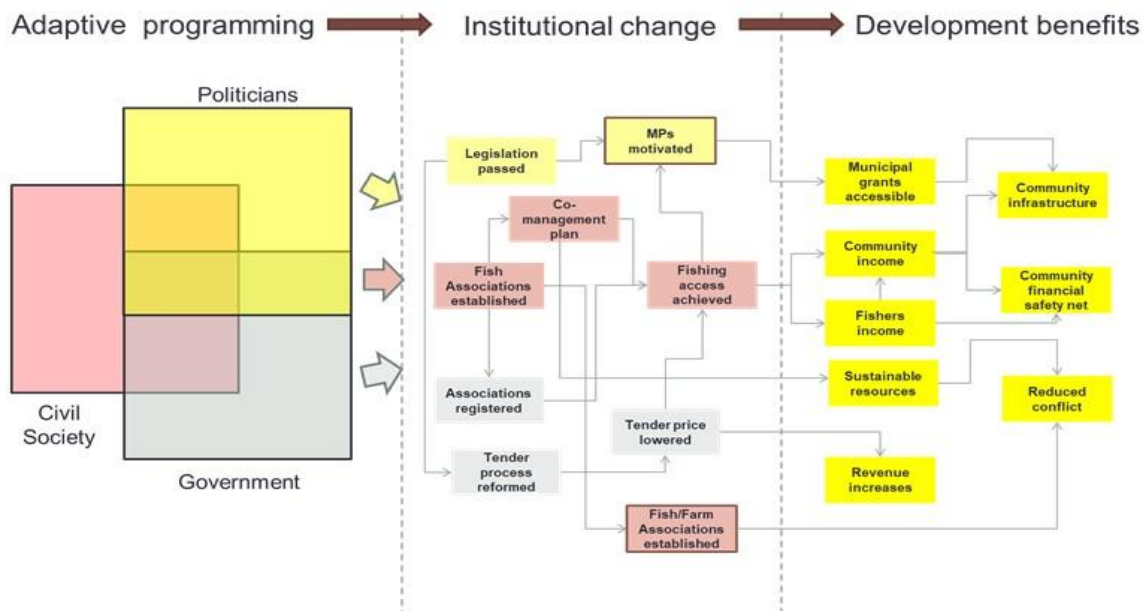
**What can be learned about Pyoe Pin’s approach to donor relationships?**

*In terms of the characteristics of the Pyoe Pin approach set out in section 2 above, more thinking is needed about how the approach can be refined to make the needs of adaptive delivery compatible with those of adaptive programming teams as well as DFID and other donors.*

## A Reflection on Fisheries

Figure 3 below attempts to capture some of Pyoe Pin’s reported achievements in relation to the fisheries case story described above. It presents some of the institutional changes to which Pyoe Pin has contributed and demonstrates how these relate to development benefits. What it fails to show is *if and how* these changes were achieved in terms of adaptive programming and delivery and casts question marks over the results and Pyoe Pin’s contribution to them.

**Figure 3: A simplification of Pyoe Pin’s role in the fisheries sector**



In particular, much of the magic of adaptive management takes place in and between the ‘black boxes’ on the left-hand side, which scarcely registers on the radar of standard M&E procedures. Comparing our overall observations with the story of the fisheries IBP, we find:

- On Observation 1: Snakes and Ladders is an apt description of the work: the ability to identify and capitalize on sudden and short-lived windows of opportunity (and avoid windows of threat) was an essential part of Pyoe Pin's repertoire
- On Observation 5: Politicians, senior officials and CSO partners all stressed the importance of technical assistance, exchanges and demonstration effects, especially in the early days of new administrations.
- On Observation 6: Small scale fishers constituted the target for Pyoe Pin's efforts to increase economic inclusion, but we saw no sign of other faultlines such as gender, being seriously considered – almost everyone we talked to was a man, and we came away with no inkling of the role of women in the fisheries sector.
- On Observations 7: We saw plentiful examples of highly capable adaptive delivery, but the more strategic adaptive programming skills, and the ability to convey Pyoe Pin's model to donors, seem possibly weaker.
- On Observation 10: Trust comes from personal networks but also acknowledged expertise – Pyoe Pin's hiring of an international fisheries specialist, also greatly increased its credibility with decision-makers.
- On Observation 14: One of the most striking impressions from talking to dozens of politicians, officials and CSOs engaged in fisheries reform was the pride they took in their achievements. Pyoe Pin seems to have played an important role in convincing them of the feasibility and necessity of widespread and inclusive reforms to the fisheries sector, and the individuals involved were deeply affected by the experience, which transformed their understanding of the possibilities of power.

## Section 6: Conclusions and Next Steps

Our overall conclusion is that the kinds of **adaptive approaches pursued by Pyoe Pin can work in FCVAS**, and indeed may be particularly well suited to the volatile, unpredictable nature of such places. However, to succeed, they need to be informed by a nuanced understanding of the people and processes required to make adaptive approaches work. Moreover, to prosper, they must sometimes be prepared to swim against the tide of institutions, ideas and interests in the aid sector. Thinking about what this means in practice leads us to two main conclusions – and possible next steps for this research:

First and perhaps the most important insight from this research is that **there is a need to distinguish clearly between adaptive delivery ('everyday PEA') and adaptive programming (a longer-term process)**, and ensuring that the two are both present and mutually supportive. This is not easy to achieve within one team.

We are sceptical that staff steeped in linear thinking and compliance mentalities can be transformed into risk-taking, politically savvy entrepreneurs through a few workshops or a tweak in incentives. Good dancers are born, not made. Much more attention (and perhaps more research) is needed to how to recruit, incentivise and retain entrepreneurial spirits of the kind we saw in Pyoe Pin – born networkers, with a deep power analysis and grasp of the shifting landscape of opportunities and threats, and the patience and stamina required to get results. That power analysis needs also to be directed inwards, asking which individuals or groups are slipping through the cracks of adaptive approaches – not just along the faultline of gender, although that is often a good place to start.

Adaptive approaches also need to guard against the risk of sclerosis, as investments in acquiring knowledge, experience and relationships generate their own inertia and unwillingness to pivot towards new opportunities. Perhaps they need to consider consciously introducing mechanisms to guard against thickening arteries, such as regularly spinning off new initiatives that enjoy the agility and innovation of start-ups.

Our second main conclusion is that **the aid industry – the constellation of donors, consultants, implementing organizations, NGOs etc, struggles with the requirements of adaptive approaches**.

At a crude level, there is little compatibility with the pressure for results (often in the short term), predictability and risk minimisation that dominate donor agendas, especially in FCVAS. But even if donors 'get it', as was the case of DFID with Pyoe Pin, their own internal volatility (of personnel and priorities) makes it hard for them to maintain the commitment over the timescale necessary to achieve real change in FCVAS. That may be an argument for seeking ways to minimise the impact of donor volatility, for example by using a new funding or

reporting mechanism to provide adaptive approaches with a bulwark against the shifting tides of the aid business.

However, it should be emphasized that these insights stem from a relatively brief visit, and more research would undoubtedly shed further light on questions such as *'what is required for adaptive delivery and adaptive programming to work better together?'*, and *'what shifts in the way aid is financed and reported would make the most meaningful contribution to enabling adaptive programming, without losing the requirements of accountability?'*. Clear examples of 'getting it right' and the factors that lead to such success would be particularly helpful.



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