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# Assessing gender in resilience programming: Myanmar

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This case study is one of four commissioned by BRACED to assess the links between resilience and gender in partners' projects. It documents approaches used to promote gender equality within the BRACED Myanmar Alliance, as well as the latent challenges and opportunities in this process.



### KEY MESSAGES

- The BRACED Alliance in Myanmar aims to shift community-level power dynamics, by increasingly integrating women into decision-making structures, building their economic security and honoring their leadership abilities.
- The project will also inform and drive strategic policy interventions on women's empowerment within climate change and DRR narratives.
- However, gender transformation is a slow and dynamic process. Three years of resilience programming is not enough time to recast social norms that have crystallized over decades.
- Gender transformation requires us to redefine gender roles and identities and to assess the concurrent monitoring and evaluation of changing social, political and economic trends as well as how communities respond to this process.
- The Myanmar Alliance can set the foundation and pave the way to build climate-resilient communities where women equally drive sustainable development practices.



'I am not vulnerable. I am a widow, I have saved some money and can take care of five children.'  
WAT HMAE VILLAGE,  
SARLINGYI TOWNSHIP

# 1. INTRODUCTION

After more than 60 years of rule by the military junta, Myanmar has embarked on a path of democratisation, with the country's first free general elections

held in November 2015. The country's democratic posture has escorted change in the social, political and economic arenas, with increased private sector

## **BRACED and BRACED Myanmar project**

### **The programme: Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED)**

BRACED aims to improve the integration of disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation methods into development approaches.

BRACED is implemented by 15 consortia to build the resilience of sedentary and nomadic populations in 13 countries across Africa, South and South-East Asia.

### **The project: BRACED Myanmar Alliance**

The BRACED Myanmar Alliance is a 3-year initiative (January 2015–December 2017) implemented by a consortium comprised of Plan, ActionAid, World Vision, UN Habitat, BBC Media Action and the Myanmar Environmental Institute.

While spanning 3 geographical locations including hilly, coastal and dry regions, the project in Myanmar targets 20,196 community members from 9 ethnic groups and includes a multi-level approach in order to build resilience to climate shocks and stresses' (and which include cyclones, floods, storm surges, intense rains, extreme temperatures and droughts) so that:

1. Communities, especially women and children, are equipped with the knowledge and skills to mitigate

the risks of and recover from climate shocks and stresses,

2. Institutions are coordinated, responsive, accountable and inclusive in their management of climate risks, and
3. The evidence base is strengthened and knowledge pertaining to the management of climate extremes is disseminated to inform and influence the resilience related policy strategies and agenda at international, national and sub-national levels.

Women and children are often most affected by extreme climate induced shocks and stresses, and which impact their livelihood opportunities, access to quality public services (such as health care and education), physical security and their overall wellbeing. With an emphasis on women and children as vulnerable groups, the project in Myanmar has embedded gender transformative programming into its overall approach with the hope of challenging and shifting patriarchal power structures at multiple levels, and which have for decades been influenced by deeply rooted social and cultural norms, so that women are empowered, resilient and become equal stakeholders in the development of their communities.

### **Project partners**

Plan, ActionAid, World Vision, UN Habitat, BBC Media Action and the Myanmar Environmental Institute.

engagement, rapid urbanisation, a shift in livelihood patterns (from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors) and a more dynamic policy environment. In spite of these changes, internal conflict (documented as some of the world's longest ongoing civil wars) (PeaceDirect, 2015), the recurrence of devastating natural hazards and the adoption and enforcement of regressive laws (such as the 2015 Inter-Faith Marriage law which requires Buddhist woman's to seek approval from a community member

### **DFID's definition of resilience**

The ability of countries, governments, communities and households to manage change by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses, while continuing to develop and without compromising their long-term prospects.

before marrying a non-Buddhist partner) continue to obstruct the positive strides the country is taking towards change.

Myanmar is the second most vulnerable country to climate extremes globally (Kreft et al., 2015). Between 2005 and 2014, an average of almost 14,000 people lost their lives during disaster events mostly triggered by storms which also costed the economy \$406 USD million in losses (PreventionWeb, 2014). Most recently, in July 2015, Cyclone Komen caused heavy monsoon rains across the country's northern and western regions, which induced countrywide flash floods and landslides (12 out of 14 states and regions were affected while Chin and Rakhine states and the regions of Sagaing and Magwe were declared natural disaster zones by the president). Cyclone Komen affected over 1 million people with over 200,000 displaced (OCHA, 2015).

## **2. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY**

This case study documents the BRACED Alliance in Myanmar's gender-transformative approach to resilience-building. Conducted over a timeframe of three months (from May to July 2015), it draws on the project proposal, theory of change (ToC), women's empowerment framework, vulnerability analysis conducted during the project development phase, secondary sources (including research documents produced by Alliance partners) and interviews with project staff.

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) conducted field-level key informant interviews in Myanmar from 10 to 14 August 2015. Eight interviews with Alliance members and one with the

advisor from Myanmar's Gender Equality Network (GEN) informed the work. GEN emerged from the interagency Women's Protection Technical Working Group, which was formed in response to Cyclone Nargis in May 2008, to focus on multi-sectoral and crosscutting issues facing women in cyclone-affected areas. Since 2011, it has had a broader mandate to address gender equality and women's empowerment throughout Myanmar. GEN comprised of over 110 national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This case study investigates five questions with regard to BRACED in Myanmar, with the intent of discussing the project's gender-transformative approach and

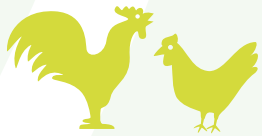
how this intersects with social and policy frameworks at the local, subnational and national levels.

- To what extent is vulnerability gendered in Myanmar?
- How does BRACED understand and address vulnerability and resilience?
- How does BRACED aim at achieving gender transformation?
- How does BRACED measure gender transformation?
- What are the factors that support gender transformation (drivers of change), and what are the limitations/challenges faced?

The process of gender transformation is slow and nuanced. Nurtured over

time, social and cultural norms embed unequal power dynamics and gender roles and exacerbate the vulnerability of certain groups in a community. Gender transformation requires communities to challenge these long-held views and requires a shift in attitudes and beliefs. In discussing the above questions, the scope of the present study is limited to understanding project approaches and frameworks; it does not draw on the experiential application of these approaches to project implementation sites and communities. At the time of drafting the study, grassroots interventions were at their initial stages, with primary emphasis on conducting community surveys and training of field staff.

### 3. TO WHAT EXTENT IS VULNERABILITY GENDERED IN MYANMAR?



'The sun doesn't rise with the hen's crowing; only when the rooster crows the sun will rise.'

BURMESE PROVERB

This well-known Burmese proverb illustrates the culturally endorsed dominant role of men as breadwinners and decision-makers at the household and community levels. Linked to this is the belief that women lack *phon*, an invisible measure of power, which makes them inherently inferior to men.

The Committee on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (2008) echoed the urgency to enforce legal and constitutional mechanisms to 'provide any guarantees of substantive equality' or 'temporary special measures or affirmative actions' that afford women the space, voice and liberty to participate in all realms of public life with an equal chance of success, especially in areas dominated by men, including in government.

Myanmar's National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) 2013–2022 identifies the need to strengthen systems, structures and practices to ensure women's meaningful participation in the management and safeguarding of natural resources and the environment and in adapting to climate change (DSW, 2013). With the formation of the NSPAW Operationalisation Working Group – which BRACED Alliance members contribute to – the government hopes to implement this policy through targeted multi-sectoral implementation plans.

Myanmar, however, is the only country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and one of a few countries globally where spending on health, education and social welfare combined is less than spending on defence (ADB, 2015).

Although the government's spending on education increased by 600% between financial years 2011/12 and 2014/15, budget allocations to the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) – tasked with promoting women's rights through its Women's Development Unit – is a dismal 0.1% (ActionAid et al., forthcoming).

The need to work with women and girls during disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness emerged as crucial in Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) efforts in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis of 2008, which claimed several thousand lives across Myanmar's densely populated Ayeyarwaddy Delta (ActionAid, 2009). Despite a lack of studies documenting communities' vulnerabilities to hazards in the country, assessments conducted after Nargis revealed disparate impacts according to people's gender and age (ActionAid, 2013). Around 61% of those killed were women (Tripartite Core Group, 2008).

An assessment conducted by the Women's Protection Technical Working Group – which was formed in response to Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 – reported that, of 600 respondents interviewed, 30% believed there had been an increase in the number of women engaging in sex work after Nargis as a result of limited livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, the assessment reported that the main protection concerns facing women and girls included rape, emotional abuse, increase in domestic violence and human trafficking (Women's Protection Technical Working Group, 2010). Similarly, the safety of women and girls was threatened during the most recent monsoon-induced floods of July 2015, during which a Protection Working Group was established to monitor this danger.

A women's vulnerability analysis conducted in 2015 during the BRACED project development phase, in Myanmar's dry zone area, confirmed that, with reduced access to information and resources and a lack of decision-making authority owing to their reproductive and unpaid care work responsibilities and social and cultural norms, women and girls are more vulnerable during times of disasters. Pervasive gender inequalities combined with women's low confidence and a lack of formal mechanisms to promote their leadership prevent them from participating and leading decision-making at all levels. Only 0.24% of village tract administrators are female (women hold 42 of a total number of 16,743 positions at the tract level are held (ActionAid et al., forthcoming).

Consequences of extreme climate events further impede household economic security (MNPED and UNICEF, 2012). Poor families and ethnic minorities face increases in infant mortality, malnutrition, permanent school dropout and exposure to child protection risks. Traditional gender roles in Myanmar also confine women to low-yielding and climate-vulnerable livelihood activities (ActionAid et al., 2012; ADB, 2012).

The impact of climate change and erratic weather patterns, coupled with Myanmar's growing urbanisation, has motivated an increase in migration from rural to urban settings. As men migrate to urban sites in search of more lucrative economic prospects, women's care-giving and domestic labour responsibilities expand. They are often thrust into a position of heading households and protecting community resources. Historically, women in these areas have used short-term solutions to assuage economic needs. They often sell assets including



jewellery and animals or borrow from members of their communities to meet urgent financial requirements. In 2007, the estimated earned annual income for women in Myanmar was \$640, in comparison with that for men, which was \$1,043 (ActionAid, 2012). Presently, almost 19% of all households are female-headed, with women working mostly as agricultural labourers, rearing livestock and as subsistence-level farmers (ibid.).

Immersed in this nuanced setting, the BRACED project adds crucial value to existing narratives on climate change and community resilience, specifically as they address the issue of gender inequality.

Driven by gendered social and cultural norms that undermine a woman's active agency as a leader in various social and economic spheres, resilience-building has to adopt a multi-level approach – first addressing gendered power dynamics at the community level by cultivating women's leadership through awareness-raising and participation in decision-making; and second creating a sustainable environment for women to thrive through policy frameworks that recognise females vulnerabilities to climate resilience differ from those of males and explore long-term tangible solutions to address these differing needs.

## 4. HOW DOES BRACED UNDERSTAND AND ADDRESS VULNERABILITY AND RESILIENCE?

Myanmar's increasing exposure and vulnerability to climate extremes owes to low capacity to manage risks, limited access to and understanding of climate information and lack of resources and mechanisms to design and apply policy (The Asia Foundation, 2013).

According to the BRACED Resilience Handbook (BRACED Alliance Myanmar, 2015) 'Vulnerability is affected by physical, social, economic, political and environmental factors and therefore vulnerability differs between individual people and contexts. Vulnerability is determined by exposure to a hazard, sensitivity to that hazard and capacity to anticipate, cope and respond to that hazard.'

The BRACED project development phase in Myanmar contributed to securing greater evidence of climate risks and

vulnerability/exposure factors affecting communities in different climatic zones in the country. With an emphasis on empowerment and strengthened leadership of women and children as the project outcome, BRACED in Myanmar has spearheaded specifically four interventions to address the root causes of vulnerability:

- ActionAid's women's rights approach combines targeted leadership training and decision-making training for women (in particular training women to lead Village Disaster Management Committees (VDMCs)), and awareness-raising sessions for men and boys to challenge gender norms.
- Plan and World Vision will engage children as agents of change by building community awareness on child-centred DRR.



Vulnerability is determined by exposure to a hazard, sensitivity to that hazard and capacity to anticipate, cope and respond to that hazard.

- World Vision's microfinance approach focuses on economic empowerment of women and ethnic minorities.
- Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) targeting primarily women, to support asset creation and protection, will be mainstreamed throughout the project. Linking VSLAs and microfinance credit officers to DRR interventions will raise awareness on the protection of livestock, small businesses and diversification of livelihoods.

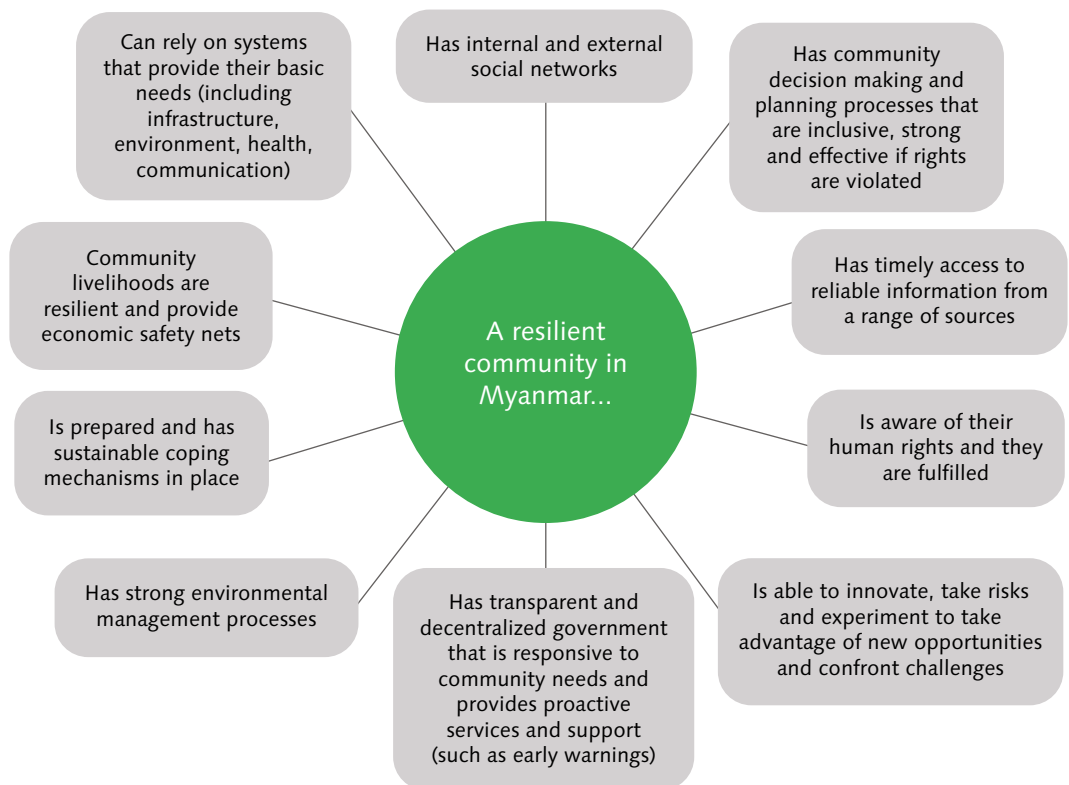
### Differential vulnerabilities and women as agents of change

While males and females experience different kinds of vulnerabilities in the context of natural disasters, to include women in the 'vulnerable' category along with children, the elderly and persons with disabilities would be misleading, since this purports to impose a singular solution to the vulnerabilities

of different marginalised groups. In many instances, this limits change to the activity and outcome levels (such as equal participation of males and females in trainings) without addressing the nuances in gendered vulnerability. The women's empowerment framework (discussed in the subsequent section) allows partners to address the differential vulnerabilities of females, which may occur as a result of the intersectionality of class, religion, age, geographical location, marital status, disability, employment and other factors and may be influenced by the intimate (personal/self), private (household and community) and public (subnational, national and international) contexts.

Exploring the opportunity to work with women as community leaders in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, ActionAid has trained over 1,200 community volunteers, or fellows, of whom 65% are female. Presently, 300 female fellows serve in areas prone to climate change shocks and stresses. As witnessed in

**Figure 1: BRACED Myanmar's Beda Resilience Framework**



the most recent floods of July 2015, these women have successfully led task forces, undertaken needs assessments and managed and distributed emergency materials in flood-affected areas.

In keeping with gendered differential vulnerabilities, the project's ToC and log frame were built on partners' agreed definition of resilience for the Myanmar context, which prioritises four components:

saving lives; addressing the root causes of vulnerability; protecting livelihoods and the natural environment; and enabling sustainable development gains.

Through a workshop process, Alliance partners developed the Myanmar Community Resilience Framework, or the Beda Framework, to set a guiding vision for programmatic intervention (BRACED Alliance Myanmar, 2015).

## 5. HOW DOES BRACED AIM AT ACHIEVING GENDER TRANSFORMATION?

ActionAid's feminist ideology advocates for the transformation of all social relations of power that oppress, exploit or marginalise any set of people (on the basis of their gender identity, age, ability, race, religion, nationality, location, class, caste or ethnicity).

In addition to the BRACED Alliance ToC to build resilience, ActionAid, as the women's empowerment lead for the consortium, prepared a women's empowerment framework while applying a feminist lens in consultation with consortium staff, which explicitly links the components of resilience-building with the objective to (i) increase knowledge and access to information, (ii) change attitudes and beliefs by shifting power dynamics and (iii) create an enabling environment to allow for women's empowerment and ultimately gender equality.

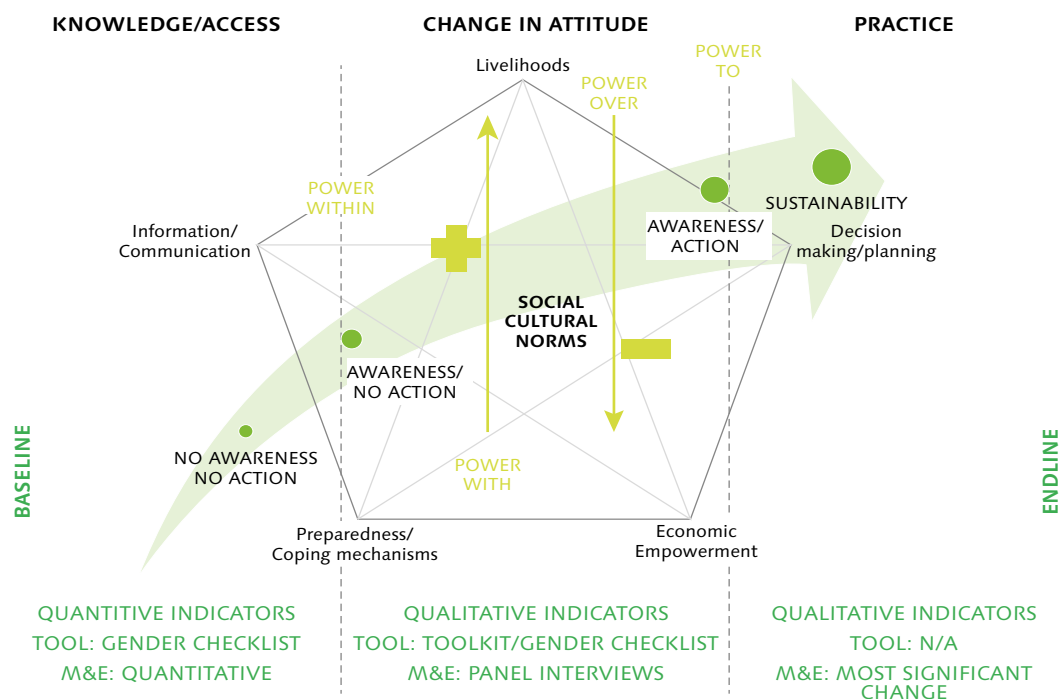
The assumption underpinning the women's empowerment framework is that social and cultural norms (as detailed in Section 2) reinforce patriarchal 'power'

dynamics and structures at the community level that allocate decision-making authority primarily to men and male-led groups. Consequently, this undermines women's overall resilience as it limits access to information, natural resources, economic and alternative livelihood opportunities and decision-making. The framework follows a linear process of change comprising four stages (based on Prochaska et al., 1993's Stages of Change).

First, it is considered that awareness at community and programming levels on gender inequalities is low. In order to address this, the BRACED Alliance developed several activities during the first year of implementation to promote better access to knowledge. Lack of access to climate and weather information and awareness was identified as a common issue across Myanmar, according to the project proposal, thus activities including BBC Media Action's public service announcement and the regional 'monsoon forums' that will take place in seven townships have been designed to complement targeted community resilience work and increase



**Figure 2: Four stages of empowerment of BRACED Myanmar's women's empowerment framework**



### Teashop culture

Myanmar's ubiquitous teashops sprawl across urban and rural settings. For years, these have been 'no go' zones for women, where men congregate to ponder on news events and politics and access information, including on climate change. While teashops have become increasingly accepting of female patrons in urban settings, in rural areas these spots remain exclusively for men. Women in these areas have few avenues to access information on the weather and rely primarily on radio programming. While mobile phone technology is becoming easily available, network outreach is limited to urban and peri-urban sites.

the outreach of climate change awareness and dissemination of climate information specifically to women.

The second stage of the framework considers that there is an increased

awareness among community members, and particularly women, about their rights. However, given the lack of an enabling environment to propel women to leadership roles, women are unable to act on this awareness. The BRACED project in Myanmar focuses on addressing this gap in order to achieve a situation where there is increased awareness as well as action from community members to foster women's empowerment in resilience-building (third stage). For instance, through access to microfinance credit facilities (through World Vision's village savings and loan programming) in tandem with exploring climate-resilient technology employed in improving agricultural methods and techniques (spearheaded by the Myanmar Environmental Institute), women will be equal stakeholders in accessing resources, including land.

The fourth and final stage translates changes in attitude into institutional

shifts within communities where space is created to enable women to grow and thrive in multiple ways. Although the framework considers that such changes will occur over a longer period

of time – longer than the three-year timeframe of the BRACED project – the sustainable empowerment of women remains a driving goal for the activities of the Alliance.

## 6. HOW DOES BRACED MEASURE GENDER TRANSFORMATION?

The overall evaluation plan for the BRACED project in Myanmar will use household surveys to be undertaken at the baseline stage in Year 1, and in Year 3. These will compare project-driven change with comparator village groups in order to quantify changes at the outcome level. Households will be randomly selected and only one respondent per household will be surveyed. The survey will target an equal number of females and males in order to undertake a gender analysis of data collected.

The consortium in Myanmar has specified five dimensions of change, of which 52% of targeted beneficiaries are female (of a total of 20,000 target beneficiaries, 8,600 are women and 6,000 children).

Using a binary approach to resilience-building – 'downstream', or community-level, indicators and 'upstream', or policy-level, indicators – the BRACED project in Myanmar hopes to create a shift in attitudes and beliefs that will allow women and girls to participate in decision-making, all the while institutionalising this change through engaging various stakeholders and contributing to policy frameworks that sustain gender transformation.

Downstream indicators that impact the resilience and adaptive capacities

of communities and individuals aim at creating change by (i) increasing preparedness and coping mechanisms to enable communities to cope with more immediate disaster events as well as longer-term adaptation needs; (ii) increasing the resilience of systems and livelihoods to support communities to manage livelihoods in the face of climate uncertainty, including management of core systems such as food, water, energy and ecosystems, targeted skills and the introduction of new practices such as livelihood diversification; and (iii) establishing safety nets to improve access to community support mechanisms through financial services and better institutional support management.

Upstream indicators of change aimed at institutionalising resilience through relevant institutions and service providers include (i) improving communication of, access to and use of information by supporting key service providers and institutions to access, interpret and disseminate reliable environment, early warning, weather and climate data and information; and (ii) improving decision-making and planning processes to be more inclusive by creating space for vulnerable groups to participate at various community- and national-level forums.

More specifically, and in order to capture women's empowerment, ActionAid and partners have identified a set of interventions under each broad indicator, located at various stages of the four-stage women's empowerment framework (as discussed in the previous section).

Women's empowerment will be measured throughout the project cycle and through panel interviews, focus group discussions and broader Alliance-level monitoring and evaluation techniques.

## Why panel interviews?

Women's empowerment is a slow, nuanced and often hidden process. Panel interviews, where the same person will be interviewed every six-months of the project, will achieve two goals: (i) measuring the nuanced changes that lead to empowerment; and (ii) measuring differential or most significant change – that is, measuring personal change of interviewees against their own previous status, rather than identifying a broad benchmark for change that will qualify women as 'empowered'.

## 7. WHAT ARE THE DRIVERS OF CHANGE AND LIMITATIONS IN IMPLEMENTING GENDER TRANSFORMATION?

### **An illustration of the nexus between the BRACED indicators and women's empowerment interventions that will lead to transformation:**

Indicator 4: Number of people with better access to communications and access to and use of information.

**STAGE 1** Number of communication materials developed specifically for women and that identify the importance of and access to information on weather.

**STAGE 2** Number of women who know where and how to access information on climate change and early warning systems.

**STAGE 3** Number of women who access this information.

**STAGE 4** Number of women who report that they have used available climate and weather information in addressing economic vulnerabilities owing to climate change.

The approaches of ActionAid, World Vision, UN-Habitat, BBC Media Action, Myanmar Environmental Initiative and Plan all follow basic principles of inclusion of women and men in the implementation of their work. While the project's overall approach fosters gender transformation,

several factors, including the project's limited timeframe and scope – the project does not address issues of sexual violence, which has been documented as a threat to women's safety, especially subsequent to natural disasters – change the project hopes to achieve.

### **Gender mainstreaming tools used in the BRACED project in Myanmar**

- Plan has developed a handbook to assess community-based resilience mechanisms that reflect the diversity of community members' identities and realities.
- ActionAid has developed a guiding 13-point gender checklist (drawing on the organisation's international Participatory Vulnerability Analysis tool).
- ActionAid's gender and resilience toolkit includes a variety of interactive and symbolic approaches with the intention of creating discussions at the community level surrounding gendered norms and to increase knowledge and awareness on existing policies. The toolkit will be placed in communities and used by community volunteers to continue and reinforce gender training beyond the life of the existing project.

### **Drivers**

#### **The Alliance's overall approach and identification of a lead agency to mainstream women's empowerment:**

With women identified as a target group, their inclusion in activities is realised across BRACED implementation (e.g. conducting inclusive assessments, involving women in village meetings, employing female staff members). The project, however, has greatly benefited from identifying a lead agency, ActionAid, to ensure gender mainstreaming. ActionAid provides training and mentorship for each Alliance partner on designing project activities, has conducted two gender trainings for project staff and has developed leadership training modules that have been contextualised for Myanmar and were thoroughly tested during the project development phase. Furthermore, ActionAid's gender and resilience toolkit, which includes a variety of interactive and symbolic approaches and games, will be used by community women in all project sites to discuss social and cultural norms and issues of sexual and gender-based violence, all the while sharpening their leadership and economic empowerment abilities (including building knowledge on savings, asset generation and livelihood diversification).

In addition to the partners' experience, the mainstreaming of gender is greatly facilitated by individuals within these organisations who work specifically on implementing gender-sensitive activities and driving the women's empowerment objective.

#### **Building on existing practices:**

The BRACED project builds on existing inclusive practices that aim to reduce social inequalities. For instance, women's empowerment is already a standalone objective of ActionAid's country programme. The training of community volunteers, fellows, to facilitate village development plans through the use of participatory tools identified in the 'village book'\* aims to demonstrate first-hand the potential of women as leaders. Additionally, World Vision's microfinance work, which aims to translate asset ownership into increased decision-making, will be scaled up in areas targeted by BRACED.

Furthermore, and in order to cultivate lateral sharing of knowledge across partners, the Alliance has set up several learning groups, including one on women's empowerment.

\* The village book is a comprehensive village monograph; using participatory tools, fellows facilitate communities to undertake various analyses and develop a 'dream map'. ActionAid has produced over 1,250 village books in Myanmar, which define the organisation's interventions at the community, subnational and national level.

**External drivers:** In interviewing partner staff, several respondents felt the UK Department for International Development's (DFID's) commitment to supporting the resilience of women and girls was a key driver of their project integrating a component on women's empowerment. Without the donor's requirement in the proposal form, the BRACED Alliance in Myanmar might have taken a more gender-neutral approach – asserting that project activities would target the most vulnerable groups identified by risk and resilience assessments rather than supporting women and girls *de facto*.

## Challenges

**What about men's rights?** A great deal of resistance to gender equality stems from the belief that men will be excluded. During interviews for this case study, some staff asked, 'What about men's right? Women in Myanmar are very empowered.'

The BRACED project does not exclude men, and in many ways identifies them as a vulnerable group (fishermen, who were the most affected during Cyclone Nargis, are considered a vulnerable group under the existing project). However, recognising that we come from the societies that we work in, social and cultural norms tend to permeate the mind-sets of project staff as well. As noted during the gender trainings delivered by ActionAid, when partner staff were asked if they felt comfortable discussing the differences between sex and gender, as well as social and cultural norms, with their families, many men and women declared that they would not.

Directly related to lack of understanding of what a gendered approach is, and

what feminism aims to promote, is the consequence that practitioners do not see gender differences as important in DRR and climate change adaptation activities, particularly during emergency operations. 'We are talking about life saving matters, why are we talking about women!' is a typical response the director of GEN in Myanmar regrets hearing too often when discussing DRR and women with various stakeholders. Lack of understanding combined with a reluctance to adopt a gender lens means organisations are not clear on how to integrate attention to gender and consider this process difficult as well as time- and resource-consuming.

**Discussions on women's rights can create tensions at the community level:** Some respondents interviewed for this case study also highlighted the challenging fact that to promote women's empowerment means to increase people's awareness of their rights. This act encourages community members (especially women) to raise their voices about their needs, their concerns and their aspirations and could therefore create social tensions between those who hold power and those who advocate a more equal share of power. While training of trainers is crucial to address and mitigate this challenge, through equipping trainers with the gender technical and mediation skills they will require to balance social disturbances, some practitioners considered this to be a risk as the gender dimension of development projects is a sensitive topic.

**Measuring women's empowerment during project cycle:** Another challenge relates to the difficulties involved in defining a common understanding of women's empowerment and ways of measuring any achievement. This is particularly challenging when working over the course of three years, whereas



To promote women's empowerment means to increase people's awareness of their rights.



certain changes of attitude will need generations to occur, particularly when addressing social norms. Even the development of a village book (i.e. a community-based assessment of risk, vulnerabilities, capacities and social inequalities) can take up to one year.

**Little emphasis on sexual violence:**

The normalisation of sexual and domestic violence against women and girls is also highlighted as a significant problem in Myanmar. A total of 654 rape cases were reported in 2012, making it the most frequently reported crime after murder (which was reported as being at 1,323 cases) (Win, 2014). Partners' views, however, differ as to whether the BRACED

project should tackle sexual violence as part of resilience-building or not. For ActionAid and GEN, sexual violence is one manifestation of entrenched social norms that institutionalise the oppression of women and therefore impact on people's resilience. Practitioners also consider that human trafficking increased post-Cyclone Nargis (although data are missing) and has been a key concern during the recent floods. Although ActionAid hopes to mitigate this by including components of sexual violence within the resilience toolkit games, violence against women and girls relate to entrenched discriminatory norms which will need significant efforts to address through the BRACED project in order to support women's resilience.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Gender transformation is a slow and dynamic process that demands the concurrent monitoring and evaluation of changing social, political and economic trends and how communities respond to this process by redefining gendered roles and identities.

In Myanmar, the country's democratic transition process, which has modified people's access to markets, communication and other resources, constantly shifts the locus of gender equality. Access to greater information, new employment opportunities (including in the non-agricultural and service

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sectors), movement of populations from rural to urban and peri-urban settings and a dynamic policy framework (such as the new minimum wage law that sets the minimum wage at 3,000 Kyat, or roughly \$3 per day) continue to shape the contours of transformation.

Immediate concerted action is essential to ensure development gains from Myanmar's transition. Through its multi-level approach, BRACED will shift community-level power dynamics, to increasingly integrate women into decision-making structures, by building their economic security and honing their leadership abilities. Furthermore, the project will inform and drive strategic policy interventions on women's empowerment within climate change and DRR narratives.

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Building on the project, future initiatives can include (i) studies on the impact of sexual violence on DRR and climate resilience for women; (ii) robust gender budgeting research and advocacy to strengthen gender-responsive public service delivery that impacts women's resilience; and (iii) the development of a women's resilience index for Myanmar.

While single-handedly achieving gender transformation through the BRACED project may not be realistic – three years is not enough time to recast norms that have incubated for and crystallised over decades – the project sets the foundation and paves the way for future endeavours to build climate-resilient communities rendering women equal participants and drivers of change.

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## KEY INFORMANTS

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Yee Mon Maung, Project Coordinator, ActionAid Myanmar. 13 August 2015

Jeremy Stone, BRACED Programme Coordinator. 14 August 2015

Bhushan Shrestha, M&E Coordinator, Plan. More informal discussions and follow up emails

Lea Acallar, Inspirator, ActionAid Myanmar. 11 August 2015

Prem Lall, Project Manager, World Vision Myanmar. 11 August 2015

Zar Chie Tun, M&E coordinator, World Vision Myanmar. 11 August 2015

Jaiganesh Murugesan, Myat Lynn and Yati Oo, UN-Habitat. 14 August 2015

May Sabe Phyu, Director of the Gender Equality Network, Myanmar. 13 August 2015

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The BRACED Knowledge Manager generates evidence and learning on resilience and adaptation in partnership with the BRACED projects and the wider resilience community. It gathers robust evidence of what works to strengthen resilience to climate extremes and disasters, and initiates and supports processes to ensure that evidence is put into use in policy and programmes. The Knowledge Manager also fosters partnerships to amplify the impact of new evidence and learning, in order to significantly improve levels of resilience in poor and vulnerable countries and communities around the world.

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