Knowledge For Democracy In Myanmar
Final Evaluation

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Acronyms

AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
ANU	Australian National University
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CMU	Chiangmai University
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyithu Hluttaw
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
EHO	Ethnic Health Organization
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
Gen Z	Generation Z
HR	Human Resource
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
K4DM	Knowledge for Democracy
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NAC	National Advisory Committee
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
SAC	State Administrative Council
SNLD	Shan National League for Democracy
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TT	Think Tank
TTI	Think Tank Initiative
UMD	Understanding Myanmar Development
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

Executive Summary

The needs of research systems in fragile contexts like Myanmar are particular and varied, requiring relevant, appropriate, and innovative forms of support that contribute to the system overall and do not adversely affect its development.

The comprehensive, single country-focus, and longer term approach of the K4DM Initiative was a relevant and appropriate model for programming in Myanmar. Through its provision of capacity-strengthening support and mentorship to Myanmar individual researchers, universities, think tanks, networks, and certain state actors, K4DM substantively improved the enabling environment for research on gender, democratization, decentralization, environmentalism, and inclusive growth in a very challenging context.

An underestimation of existing capacities within the research input component of the Myanmar research system, coupled with an underestimation of the openness of the NLD government to evidence-based policy-making required adjustments to the original goals of the program to make them more realistic and reflective of the programming environment. It also required a degree of on the ground mentorship to solidify K4DM capacity-strengthening support that was very difficult to provide with no K4DM management in-country. **The lack of IDRC presence on the ground contributed to missed opportunities for internal networking and collaboration.**[1]

Though the design of K4DM was largely supply-driven and did not benefit from the advice of the NAC, **the Initiative demonstrated an adaptive and iterative style of management and programming that became increasingly demand-driven as**

feedback from partners was incorporated into decision-making (especially around capacity-strengthening training needs).

Of its modalities, the capacity-strengthening pillars and cross-cutting collaboration and engagement facet are particularly relevant to the transitional state of the Myanmar research system (pre-coup). These modalities responded to the evident needs of Myanmar researchers and the necessity of building a critical mass of research actors by contributing to their internal and external relationships. The gender research pillar was appropriate in the sense that the thematic subject matter is very relevant to Myanmar's development, yet less so in terms of the ability of Myanmar researchers to carry out specialized thematic research, and the state of the internal discourse on gender issues in the country. **Substantive capacity-strengthening to carry out gender sensitive research would have been a more appropriate approach at the beginning of the Initiative** (as was eventually implemented), along with the Initiative's support to their capacity-strengthening partners in the other pillars to apply a gender lens to their areas of expertise.

K4DM stakeholders recognize that the Initiative's original objectives of increasing gender equality and inclusive governance in Myanmar were very ambitious indeed. **Even though these objectives were not met to the extent originally anticipated, this evaluation stresses that very**

important outcomes were achieved given both the challenging characteristics of the Myanmar research system and the unprecedented challenges posed by the global pandemic and a brutal military coup. These outcomes include:

- **Strengthening the enabling environment for democratization research** generally;

- **Transformational support to individual researchers and think tanks** that contribute to their sustainability (especially in times of crisis);

- Contributing to **increasing uptake of gender-sensitive research methods and outputs;**

- Contributing to the production of **original research on gender and decentralization** that provides both data and analysis to the benefit of the wider research community;

- **Significant examples of policy influence,** despite an inhospitable environment for evidence-based policy-making;

- **Contributing to the capacities and resilience of Myanmar research actors to pivot and take proactive measures** to respond to the challenges of the differential impacts of Covid-19 and the assault on democracy by the military coup;

It may be tempting to take a cynical view and think that these outcomes will come to naught as a result of the military coup; however, K4DM interviewees expressed a more hopeful and determined vision for Myanmar where the research skills and growing expertise in democratization-related topics of K4DM partners inform critical ongoing political discourse. While it remains to be seen whether the military or the parallel National Unity Government (NUG) will prevail in the short, medium or long-term, it should be recognized that rather than being wasted, K4DM investment in democratization research and capacity-building in Myanmar may in fact have profound impacts downstream.

Recommendations

In the short term, IDRC is doing what is possible to protect K4DM partners and the gains of the Initiative by providing interim funding, mentoring, and dissemination and engagement opportunities for K4DM partners and their research.

The following recommendations are based primarily on learnings from K4DM prior to the military coup, and apply more directly to future programming with a democratic government in place (or programming with the parallel National Unity Government depending on political developments). It should be noted here that many of these recommendations rest on the necessity of IDRC having a much more robust presence on the ground in Myanmar, either in-country, or based at the Asia Regional office with significant in-country travel. The recommendations below are summarized here for the purposes of the Executive Summary. More detail for each recommendation is contained in the body of the report:

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  - Prior to the program design phase, **conduct robust research system analysis and conflict analysis** to buttress contextual knowledge of Myanmar and improve risk assessment and mitigation strategies.
  - Similarly, in the program design phase, **consult members of the NAC substantively** and leverage their expertise and networks for additional contextual intelligence to inform program design and potential partners;
- As with more substantive pre-project contextual analysis, **mainstream conflict sensitive programming** for better risk management and program adaptation.

- In capacity-strengthening programming, **plan for medium to long-term investment** (3-7 years).
- For future think tank core support, **make the accompaniment model more robust** by including organizational development and strategic advocacy training opportunities.
- Address research use during the program design phase by conducting research and **mapping out pathways to research uptake.**
- **Plan for communication of research to multiple audiences and at multiple points,** not just end-of-project dissemination.
- When granting directly to Myanmar organizations is not a possibility, **structure partnerships with Northern and regional institutions that integrate Myanmar research actors in a mindful and substantive way.**
- Ensure that resources are devoted to activities that **solicit input from Myanmar research actors in order to align programming with local demand.**
- If possible, **plan and budget for post-project evaluations to track outcomes over time** to evaluate sustainability of capacity-strengthening projects (such as longitudinal studies).

Evaluation Framework

Description of the Program:

K4DM is a $10.7 million dollar Initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). It is a complex five-year program (2017-2021) with the ultimate aim of enhancing the political and economic empowerment of men and women in Myanmar, including contributing to greater gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

The Initiative has 3 modalities:

- Building the individual capacity of young researchers, university academics, and policymakers through training and mentorship;
- Enhancing organizational capacity of independent think tanks by providing core funding;
- Research projects on gender equality and political decentralization.

These modalities are integrated via a cross-cutting program facet of "collaboration and engagement" designed to facilitate opportunities to convene dialogue and build relationships of trust within the Myanmar research community.[2]

Purpose of Evaluation and Its Intended Use

The Knowledge for Democracy in Myanmar (K4DM) Initiative will finish its first phase of programming in December 2021. This summative evaluation has been commissioned by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) to review the implementation and operation of the K4DM Initiative, including **the coherence of its modalities.** Additionally, the evaluation will seek to assess the **significance and relevance** of program outcomes (both intended and unintended), and the extent to

which K4DM responded to the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation conducted in 2019. The evaluation will examine how K4DM did or did not respond effectively to the challenges experienced in the last 2 years of the program, including the pandemic outbreak and military coup in February 2021. The findings will provide input for **lessons learned** from the first phase of implementation and **recommendations** to be considered for possible future programming by IDRC in Myanmar

Evaluation Context

The context for this summative evaluation is significantly affected by two major factors. The first is a global pandemic that wreaked havoc in Myanmar (as in so many other countries) starting in March 2020. A combination of an already compromised and unprepared health system, inability to conduct adequate testing, and continued fighting between the military and EAOs destabilized the country's response to the virus, leaving it susceptible to successive waves of infection and virus-related deaths. The government issued lockdowns and severe travel restrictions to try to contain the spread of Covid-19, which limited face-to-face research activities such as surveys, data collection, interviews, workshops, training, and meetings.

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[2]IDRC Annual Report to GAC 2021, p. 7.

With both the health and economic systems buckling under the weight of the pandemic, a brutal military coup and subsequent repression provided the second factor that has impacted the evaluation context. As nation-wide protests erupted against the coup, many healthcare workers left their positions to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM); this rendered the health system even more compromised, with military mismanagement leading to no ability to test, to quarantine, to treat, or to vaccinate the population effectively. Myanmar subsequently experienced a deadly third wave of the virus recently with the rapid spread of the Delta variant.

The CDM is composed of essential government workers from not just the health sector, but also education, banking, and transportation, thus essentially crippling the government in general.

K4DM partners reacted in different ways to the coup.[3] Several have left the country and now support the parallel National Unity Government (NUG). Others try to support the NUG from within Myanmar, but are in hiding, while others participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Several partners prefer to take on a low profile and not confront the military at this moment.

As a result of the reinforcing crisis of the pandemic and the military takeover, this evaluation has been undertaken with significant limitations. The evaluation team was not able to travel to Myanmar for data collection; no in-person interviews were conducted. While interviews were conducted virtually, for some K4DM partners currently in hiding it was simply too risky to participate in the evaluation process at all. Others were unable to participate because they were sick with COVID-19 themselves. The evaluators were unable to

interview any Myanmar policy-makers as a result of restrictions implemented after the coup.

Virtual interviews were often interrupted by unstable internet connections; despite these challenges, the evaluation team found that interviews with K4DM partners were very open, honest and insightful.

Evaluation Methodology

This evaluation employed qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews with K4DM grantees, partners, management and donors. Review of project documents and related grey literature was also undertaken.

Interview transcripts were coded and analysed with Atlas.ti. The safety and security of K4DM partners was the overriding priority throughout the evaluation process. All interviews with Myanmar research actors were confidential, and all quotes in this report are anonymous to protect their identities. Identifying details in quotes have been replaced with generic terms.

While not strictly a matter of methodology, it is important to note here that the evaluation assesses the implementation and outcomes of K4DM through a 'research systems' lens.[4] By doing so, the evaluation considers the interaction between K4DM programming and the interrelated components of Myanmar's research field.

Like many aspects of Myanmar society, the research system was severely compromised by decades of isolationism and military rule. With the opening up of Myanmar and the installation of a civilian government, the research system was undergoing a positive, incremental, and slow transition toward a more robust situation, including increased funding for the higher education system, the emergence

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[3] Immediately after the coup, K4DM moved to sever all links to the military government
[4] For the purposes of this evaluation, a research system has four components;
  1. Research Inputs (human capital and infrastructure; funding for research; higher ed system; diversity of research actors).
  2. Institutional Norms (Autonomy of researchers; incentive structure for research; types of knowledge that are valued; ethics of research).
  3. Research Outputs (Research production and diversity of products; networks and collaborations; presence of 'knowledge brokers' to facilitate knowledge diffusion and use).
  4. Research Outcomes (Relationships between research producers and users; nature of policy-making process; opportunities and constraints for research uptake by state actors and/or citizens).

of many varied think tanks, increased interaction between Myanmar and regional and international research actors, and growing interest among segments of the government in evidence-based policy-making.

When K4DM began programming in Myanmar, the enabling environment for research was still compromised by low capacity of researchers, a fractured higher education system, insufficient funding for universities or think tanks, and no tradition of collaboration or trust between research actors. On the demand side, policy-makers had no tradition of using research for policy-making, and lack of trust between researchers and government actors was significant. Policy-making processes remained untransparent, although this element of the research system was slowly improving.

Evaluation Findings

Key Evaluation Question #1

How has K4DM contributed to **stakeholder consultation, engagement, and collaboration on gender-responsive democratic transition and economic development,** while responding to existing risks?

- How has program design and cross-project activities been effective? Coherent? Relevant?

- How has the Initiative contributed to effective research being conducted?

- What can be learned from the use and promotion of communications (Research in Action, newsletters), support for research dissemination, training on communications and think tank support, knowledge fora and events supported and organized by K4DM?

- To what extent have K4DM projects contributed to progress toward gender equality in Myanmar? What needs to be improved for gender equality?

The enabling environment for research and policy uptake in Myanmar can be characterized as weak, with low capacity among research actors, insufficient funding for higher education, significant restrictions on academic freedom, and a culture of mistrust between researchers and decision-makers.[5] The demand for local research from Myanmar decision-makers is minimal; Myanmar officials prefer to go to international sources for data and analysis on important issues.[6] Combined with ethnic tensions, political divisions, and low social inclusion rates, the challenges of supporting research and a research system in such a weak enabling environment were significant.

In this respect, the decision to launch a single country-focused initiative had some distinct advantages in terms of relevance to Myanmar research actors. The country-focused strategy of K4DM:

- Allowed K4DM to provide meaningful support to a variety of research actors in Myanmar, including students, faculty, think tanks, networks and parliamentarians;

- Created opportunities for cross-program coordination and collaboration, both between K4DM components and between IDRC programs in Myanmar, building important internal relationships and networks;[7]

- Has the potential to be transformational for research actors (both individuals and organizations, especially with longer-term and core support).

These advantages will be discussed in more detail below, along with some issues that impacted project and program outcomes.

Capacity-Strengthening

Given the deterioration of Myanmar's system of higher education over the past decades of military rule, capacity-strengthening was, and remains, a

[5] GDN "Doing Research Myanmar" Summary and Conclusions; pg. 4.
[6] IDRC Annual Report to GAC 2019; pg.16.
[7] IDRC Annual Report to GAC 2020; p.7. Important examples are the annual Knowledge Hub that brought together a wide audience of different stakeholders, as well as capacity-strengthening workshops for think tank staff from several different research organizations, including on gender and development by a K4DM grantee.

clear priority for research support. In this respect, K4DM's emphasis on strengthening both individual researchers and institutions to carry out quality and policy-relevant research was very relevant to the context.

At the individual level, K4DM has successfully contributed to capacities for evidence-based research of dozens of faculty members, graduate students, researchers and law-makers. In addition to gaining new research skills, several partners described how they are now able to pass on these skills to students or junior researchers.

> **"Personally, I gained confidence and really know how to start and conduct research such as how to choose a research topic, how to do literature reviews, how to collect data, communicating with people during data collection, data analysis, and how to write a report. The skills that I gained from K4DM are useful for teaching students…. We also gained professional networks and learnt from each other. We are able to teach others basic research skills now."[8]**

> **"Personally, I learned a lot from K4DM. I am now a trainer to others, I am able to plan curriculum design, and share my knowledge with others." [9]**

> **"We are able to use our skills in many ways. We learned all systematically. We can adjust the teaching methods according to the subject we are teaching. We all know more about social science….We are able to know more about concepts in research. We are able to link our subjects with other subjects and issues such as politics and economy. We gained more confidence because we are in the habit of reading."[10]**

At the organizational level, K4DM was modeled after the Think Tank Initiative[11] and provided different levels of support to a variety of think tanks in Myanmar. Support was either core funding (3 organizations) or capacity-strengthening without core funding (8 organizations).

The decision to provide core-funding to several think tanks was relevant to the situation in which most Myanmar institutions were nascent or in early stages of development. The core funding allowed Myanmar think tanks to retain staff (reducing the brain drain towards international organizations that offer better salaries), to set up standard operating procedures, and to concentrate on their substantive work of research and policy influence rather than fundraising.

> **"Establishing our office and all the management set-up including HR, finance and operations were supported by K4DM with core funding. Within 3 years our organization has become very systematic with proper standard operating procedures, and policies with a good standard of financial control."[12]**

On the other hand, think tanks with core-funding did not receive organizational development assistance, which they identified as necessary for building capacity to engage in policy-relevant research and engagement.[13] In fact, staff from think tanks with core funding tried where possible to participate in organizational development opportunities that K4DM partner KIVU delivered to organizations

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[8]KII-14:P7
[9]KII-14:P9
[10]KII-14:P14
[11]The Think Tank Initiative (TTI) was dedicated to strengthening the capacity of independent policy research institutions in the developing world. The initiative was launched in 2008 and ended in 2019. TTi was supported by a partnership between five donors and was managed by IDRC.
[12]KII-14:P8
[13]It should be noted that K4DM's accompaniment model was very helpful to Myanmar think tanks in terms of connecting them to the larger cohort of Asian think tanks supported by IDRC. However, this mentorship model ended in 2019 with the departure of IDRC staff from the regional office in Delhi. Local consultants were then hired by K4DM management to take up this accompaniment role, but the pandemic precluded significant mentorship. Project Completion Report #108XX3, p.2.

without core funding.[14] Those think tanks that did receive training in organizational development but not core-funding were sometimes in the difficult position of diverting resources from research and policy influence towards projects funded by other donors, or towards seeking funds to stay afloat.

While the decision to offer organizational development support to 8 think tanks represents K4DM's desire to respond to the demonstrated need of local research organizations, two issues should be noted:

1. De-linking core support and organizational development support reduced the effectiveness of K4DM support to local think tanks, especially younger institutions, which has implications for their sustainability. K4DM management was aware of this gap, and provided small grants to several think tanks for research projects as compensation;

2. The original intent had been for K4DM to provide core support to approximately 10 think tanks, but ended up choosing just three.[15] The low number of institutions eligible for core support is a result of IDRC policies and practices regarding risk management. When evaluating support to think tanks in Myanmar, K4DM replicated the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) model of institutional assessment. However, the thresholds within the TTI model resulted in many Myanmar think tanks being disqualified because they are relatively new and 'unproven'. But given Myanmar's recent transition from an almost completely closed society to a slowly democratizing one, it should have been expected that many think tanks will be in early stages of development and may not have all of the organizational processes and structures in place to meet TTI thresholds.

Consequently, K4DM's organizational strengthening pillar suffered a degree of incoherence as

implemented. Nevertheless, K4DM supported think tanks were able to strategically position themselves on their issues of expertise by producing quality research and disseminating to key stakeholders with notable examples of policy influence (to be discussed below). Core support in particular is cited by think tank staff as being critical to their sustainability as independent organizations, and this is seconded by both K4DM management and donors.[16]

While the strategy of capacity-strengthening was of high relevance, other questions about the effectiveness of implementation were raised by interviewees. For many K4DM partners at both the individual researcher and organizational level, language posed a significant challenge to benefiting fully from the capacity-strengthening support offered by K4DM implementing partners who delivered training in English with an interpreter.

> **"Language barrier is an issue for the training. It is also difficult to have interaction with the trainers. We need to learn English more."[17]**

> **"The English language is our weakness. Even though I could attend the capacity-building workshop, I felt like I did not get it fully because of the language barrier. There was an interpreter in the workshop, but I would like to do direct discussions, not through the interpreter."[18]**

> **"I personally wanted to take the training all over again and I felt that I did not get much from it previously because of my weakness in English proficiency. I think it is the same for other Myanmar researchers. Most of us are weak in English."[19]**

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[14] Project Completion Report #108XX3, p.6
[15] KII IDRC Staff, 09/28/2021.
[16] KII GAC Staff, 08/18/2021.
[17] KII-11:P5
[18] KII-11:P7
[19] KII-18:P5

Although interpreters were often provided, trainees did not feel that they could engage with facilitators in a substantive way that would have enhanced their learning. K4DM did invest in the latter half of the program to provide additional materials in Burmese as well as English (primarily online, increasing trainer model between a Canadian lead partner and a access considerably).[20] Importantly, a train-the-local think tank enabled that think tank to deliver training and resources to others in local languages, contributing to important outcomes.[21] Similarly, training provided by a local gender network for leaders and researchers in gender analysis in local languages started after K4DM provided organizational strengthening support.[22]

University-Partnerships

As the mid-term evaluation of K4DM documented, K4DM partners continued to make important distinctions between their partnerships with Canadian institutions versus their partnerships with regional institutions such as Chiangmai University. Two factors were identified that affected project outcomes: 1) regular interaction between partners on the ground[23] and; 2) the contextual knowledge of the lead partner:

"It is important to choose a training institution that knows the Myanmar context well....The Chiangmai University (CMU) team was very eager to learn about Myanmar. They tried to improve their knowledge of Myanmar and applied them in teaching us, which is very much contextualized teaching. CMU is nearer to Myanmar so they could come more frequently to interact with us. For McGill University, they provided clear and well-organized training, but they did not learn from us that much....Also with McGill there was more online training and

Myanmar participants are not good at IT and had difficulty learning online....McGill is good but they did not know our context well. They should have a local resident representative of McGill to have more interaction with us and know the context."[24]

"It is important for northern university partners to know that there are things we can learn from each other....When designing partnerships, we need to think about sustainability. There should be an indicator on what specific skills northern universities are actually bringing."[25]

"The context of Thailand and a lot of issues there are quite similar to Myanmar (such as hydropower plant development). Chiangmai University has experience working with Myanmar students and therefore they are able to understand their needs and their way of learning and challenges faced by Myanmar students."[26]

It is also important to understand, however, that K4DM provided several Myanmar researchers and institutions with beneficial opportunities to expand their international and regional networks and forge relationships with Canadian and regional institutions. For a country that has been closed off for so many years, these international ties are extremely important to individual Myanmar research actors. They have provided additional training in more advanced research skills, opportunities to present their research to international peers, to jointly publish journal articles, and to engage in ongoing mentoring relationships.[27] Regional think tank meetings in Bangkok and Bangladesh provided opportunities for Myanmar think tank staff to trade

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[20]For example, training materials provided by Fulbright University of Vietnam on fiscal decentralization were all translated into Burmese.
[21]These include a Parliamentary Research Training Manual (in Myanmar language), as well as an Operational Plan for Strengthening Research Capacity in State Hluttaw (also in Myanmar language). See also Project Completion Report for #108XXX, p.2.
[22]IDRC Annual Report to GAC 2020, p.11.
[23]This is also documented in Project Completion Report #108XX9 pp. 6-7.
[24]KII-18:P14
[25]KII-18:PE
[26]KII-8:P3
[27]IDRC Annual Report to GAC 2019, p. 3.

experiences with colleagues and learn from more experienced think tank staff from other countries.[28]

Effectiveness of Research

In terms of contributing to the production of effective research, much depends on how one defines "effective": for the purposes of this

evaluation, the evaluation team defines "effective" as research that is perceived as credible and valuable by different audiences or research consumers. In this sense, K4DM has achieved important positive outcomes when evaluated within the context of Myanmar's particular research system.

As described above, Myanmar's research system contains several challenging characteristics that impinge on quality research production and research uptake, notably low capacity of researchers and lack of trust of citizens and policy-makers in local research. Several partners identified K4DM support as an important factor in their improved ability to produce research that is valued by local audiences (policy relevant research will be discussed in more detail below):

> "As an organization, we are able to establish a good branding in policy and political research because of K4DM. Our research papers are considered good quality and we gained trust from the public for our ability to provide a neutral third party perspective." [29]

> "A cumulative outcome is that we were able to produce conference proceedings (a tangible outcome) and that publication is respected in the Myanmar context." [30]

> "I learned that research is a bridge between the community and the government. As researchers, we should not just collect data and information from the community, but also we have to give back to the community through our research. With this understanding, I was able to obtain funding…for my village development after meeting with the respective Regional Prime Minister with my research findings.… Because of this, the villagers began to trust us, the researchers, because we are not only coming to get information, but also benefiting them through the research." [31]

> "The Tatmadaw (military) regularly requested our publications whenever we released any new publication…I think Tatmadaw wanted to know about what our ethnic people wanted, because our research and publications are based on Myanmar history and factual information." [32]

For research to be valued by different audiences, it must be disseminated and accessible to those audiences. In this respect, K4DM has had mixed outcomes.

On one hand, K4DM's think tank support contributed to their ability to both convene relevant stakeholders and disseminate their material widely throughout the country, including connections of K4DM-supported think tanks with key actors in Ministries of Agriculture, Labour, and Commerce, as well as important ethnic armed organizations (EAO)[33]:

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[28]Project Completion Report #1087XX, p.2.
[29]KII-14:P9
[30]KII-14:P2
[31]KII-19:P14
[32]KII-12:P8
[33]Project Completion Report #108XX3, p.6.

> "We promote and support federalism and peace building through providing knowledge. With the IDRC funding, we are able to engage other CSOs in stakeholders' dialogue and discussion ….We did research, literature reviews, and published several papers and disseminated them to the general public all over the country as well as on our website."[34]

> "[Our organization] learnt from the K4DM project, and we are able to share with others….Our research report is in both Myanmar and English languages, and we translated into local ethnic languages as well."[35]

Additionally, the annual Knowledge Forums provided substantive opportunities for K4DM partners to showcase their research to each other and to other Knowledge Forum participants. These events were important for building internal networks of researchers where few had existed before K4DM:

> "We have better networks including good relationships with the Embassy of Canada in Yangon and with many CSOs…we expand our network and are able to meet with other project partners and share knowledge."[36]

Think tank staff spoke of using social media extensively to disseminate IDRC-supported material, but other dissemination events such as symposia had to be cancelled due to Covid-19, negatively impacting public discussion of K4DM-supported research. Several online events were subsequently organized with moderate success due to technological capacities and language issues. The Myanmar Speakers series, organized by K4DM management in the wake of the pandemic shut-down, provided opportunities for K4DM-supported researchers to present their research virtually when in-person events were no longer possible.

In general, the majority of K4DM-supported outputs and dissemination activities were in English. Given the relatively weak English-language proficiency in Myanmar, among both ordinary citizens and government officials, research findings disseminated in English were not accessible to intended local audiences. Many interviewees expressed the need to publish research at least in Burmese, which is spoken by the majority of the population in Myanmar. While there is a plethora of indigenous languages spoken by Myanmar's many ethnic groups, publishing in Burmese would still significantly widen the accessibility of local audiences to K4DM-supported research findings relevant to them. It should be noted that in adapting to alternative digital and online dissemination avenues due to the pandemic, K4DM found opportunities to present supported research in Burmese such the Myanmar Speaker Series (via KUDO) and the TeaCircle blog at the University of Toronto that accepts and supports blogs in Burmese.

K4DM and Promoting Gender Equality

While there is no question that gender-responsive democratization and economic growth are relevant issues to Myanmar's development, the context for gender programming is extremely challenging. Gender inequality in Myanmar is deeply ingrained in the cultural and religious structures and practices of the country and is not considered an issue by the majority of the general population or policy-makers.[37] In a situation where gender awareness/sensitivity is minimal due to cultural and socio-religious norms, K4DM's decision to support thematic gender-based research was very ambitious, if not impractical as initially conceived. For example, recruitment of researchers with gender expertise proved to be very difficult for K4DM implementing partners in the third pillar of gender projects on gender equality and decentralization.[38]

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[34] KII-8:P8
[35] KII-14:P9
[36] KII-14:P6
[37] KII-6:P1
[38] KII-14:PE; Project Completion Report #108XX9, p.2

There is clearly a 'knowledge gap' when it comes to understanding the gender dimension of issues such as decentralization, labor markets and value chains, climate change and so on in Myanmar, and the gender research pillar of K4DM was designed to address this gap. Addressing knowledge gaps in a weak research system such as Myanmar's could be perceived as putting the cart in front of the horse in the sense that basic research capacities were lacking and gender awareness was negligible. This was evidenced in the results of the mid-term evaluation where 'learning by doing' was the method of capacity-strengthening identified by Myanmar researchers. That is to say, while contributing to internationally-led gender research, local researchers had insights into their own gender biases. Ultimately they became more 'gender aware' as researchers, not through training in basic gender research concepts, but through their involvement in gender-based research projects.

In terms of the effectiveness of K4DM gender and decentralization research, there were several important contributions made by the Initiative's partners, both to international and local audiences. These contributions include the production of a quality data set based on 2500 interviews in Myanmar that is now being used by many different researchers for further publications, demonstrating the data's credibility and value;[39] the first publications on gender budgeting in Myanmar based on 3400 survey responses from around the country[40] and; monthly newsletters published and disseminated in Burmese on gender and political participation.

In addition to the specific gender and decentralization research supported by K4DM, the Initiative also supported all project partners to apply a gender lens to their research and advocacy efforts. It is in this regard that K4DM achieved more significant outcomes in terms of increasing gender sensitivity, especially given the fact that this priority dovetailed with other donors who were also supporting their grantees to become more gender sensitive.

> **"K4DM made the project beneficiaries think about gender as a cross-cutting issue."[41]**

> **"Most academic staff are now aware and are highlighting gender issues in the last 5 years. There is more awareness and understanding about gender. This improvement is due to K4DM but it was a collaborative effort with other organizations working on gender in Myanmar."[42]**

> **"In general, there is more gender awareness within the community, especially the younger generations such as Gen Z."[43]**

Importantly, K4DM support contributed to the establishment of the first Gender and Development course in Myanmar higher education, offered by the Yangon University of Economics. Considering the low regard that gender issues are accorded in Myanmar generally, this example of institutionalization of gender issues is notable. Also notable is the establishment by a K4DM grantee of a Gender Resource Center that brings together many different gender resources under one roof and provides a convening space for gender researchers and activists. These are important achievements in the Myanmar context where discussions of gender are nascent and gender sensitization should be considered a significant outcome.

K4DM has been conscientious in its implementation to ensure that Myanmar women are represented equitably in Initiative-sponsored activities. And

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[39]KII-14:PE; Project Completion Report #108XX9, p.2
[40]Project Completion Report #108XX0, p.2
[41]KII-6:P10
[42]KII-6:P14
[43]KII-6:P5

while the Initiative has been very successful in this regard, it is necessary to go beyond the numbers to see what other factors may be contributing to these 'results.' As one interviewee noted:

> **"Most people would measure gender equality with sex disaggregated data which do not necessarily show the power dynamics. There is a gender imbalance in a different way in Myanmar. Around 90% of academic staff are women. Men are not interested in research or academics basically because of the modest salary which is not enough to support a family."** [44]

So while K4DM has been successful in supporting increasing gender awareness among research actors in Myanmar, this should not necessarily be attributed to the number of women reached in terms of training or capacity-strengthening. In fact, the number of men attending such project activities and demonstrating changed behavior as a result would be a more appropriate measure.

The complexity of gender issues in Myanmar raises the subject of how gender is discussed and researched within K4DM (and other donor-supported initiatives). Several interviewees cautioned that implementing Western notions of gender in Myanmar would not be effective for promoting gender equality in the local context:

> **"Western concepts of gender equality should not be directly put into the Myanmar context. More research should be conducted on gender issues from anthropological and cultural aspects."** [45]

> **"There were some odd receptions to the (gender) workshop discussions. I felt there was kind of a top-down research agenda and that it created some awkwardness.... Local women's organizations are talking about gender issues but in a very different way."** [46]

The importance of local research agendas and priorities and how donors like IDRC can support them will be discussed in more detail in the "Lessons Learned" section of the evaluation report.

Key Evaluation Question #2

- How has K4DM contributed to the use of research for evidence-based policy development despite risks and other constraints?

- How have capacity-building activities contributed to the development of policy-relevant research and responses by think tanks and universities?

- How has K4DM-supported research and research outputs contributed to the development of policies supporting democratic transition and economic development?How have research projects contributed to knowledge about gender equality in Myanmar?

- How have research projects increased inclusion of ethnic groups and decentralization?

K4DM and the Promotion of Policy-Relevant Research

K4DM's goal of promoting the use of evidence for policy development is recognized by K4DM's donors, partners, and advisors alike as very ambitious given the Myanmar context. Specific constraints to policy uptake of research will be discussed, followed by the positive examples of policy influence that K4DM contributed to despite these challenges.

A detailed discussion of Myanmar's political history is unnecessary here. The main point for

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[44]KII-6:P3
[45]KII-6:P11
[46]KII-6:PE

the purposes of the evaluation is to note that as a country in transition from strict military rule towards democratization, the programming context for policy influence (pre-coup) was dynamic, opaque, and inimical to evidence uptake. This is due to factors readily known to—but likely underestimated by—IDRC when designing the Initiative.[47]

From the 'demand' side, there is not a tradition of evidence-based policy-making in Myanmar, although a number of interviewees said that this was changing among younger technocrats and bureaucrats. With a substantial number of military personnel still in powerful positions within the civilian government who were used to working in secrecy, the pathways to policy influence were unclear at best, and non-existent at worst.

> "Research information and data are rarely used for policy-making….Even though the Executive Committee (managed by the Director General of the respective Ministry) is supposed to make policy, there is no clear policy-making process in the government."[48]

> "Not sure how K4DM could promote policy dialogue as the tradition of policy making in the military is very top-down. The policy maker level is Director General and 50% of all the Director Generals are ex-military personnel. It is usually difficult to make policy dialogue with the military."[49]

> "We have done a study of ex-military parliament members who occupied 25% of the parliament. We conducted research on whether they had a progressive mindset and were willing to contribute to the democratization process of Myanmar and the barriers and challenges for them….For that paper we tried to engage with those

> members of the parliament and discuss these issues. They were not allowed to meet with us. The military themselves put barriers between [parliamentarians] and the people."[50]

> "We tried to engage as much as we can for the reform and to promote evidence-based policy-making, but the leadership level was too embedded in the old system and they are not willing to change at all. I felt it was a waste to invest in them for change."[51]

Additionally, from the supply side, Myanmar researchers had little to no experience producing policy-relevant research or engaging with decision-makers. In this respect, K4DM achieved important outcomes in improving the capacity of individual researchers to produce better quality findings relevant to policy-makers, although the actual uptake of K4DM-supported research was minimal (think tanks will be discussed next):

> "We were not trying to influence policy students get the opportunity to conduct research useful to the country, and to increase their research capacity. These students did not previously have this kind of opportunity to do real research for the community."[52]

> "There is no link between researchers/academia and policy-makers. The policy research conducted by academics did not reach these policy-makers and there is no intention to link either. There is a big gap. We should do more 'ice-breaker' type of meetings and workshops which are intended by both researchers and policy-makers before starting intense policy dialogue and debate."[53]

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[47]KII-20:P1; KII-19:P10; KII-18:P1; KII-15:P1; KII-5:P11
[48]KII-19:P11
[49]KII-16:P11
[50]KII-12:P9
[51]KII-15:P9
[52]KII-19:P4
[53]KII-16:P7

This last comment points to larger issues of collaboration and engagement relevant to increasing evidence-based policy-making in Myanmar, which will be discussed in more detail below. First, however, it is necessary to discuss the experience of K4DM-supported think tanks with policy-maker uptake of findings. Here there were mixed results, including some unintended positive outcomes.

In general, K4DM-supported think tanks had both more experience and more success in engaging policy-makers and having some policy influence than academic researchers. K4DM provided assistance via KIVU to think tanks in how to engage in strategic advocacy with policy-makers with positive results in terms of capacity-strengthening:

> **"The advocacy capacity of my team has improved with this K4DM project. They are able to do policy analysis and write policy analysis reports without close supervision. The funding from IDRC was quite flexible in the sense that we were able to support our staff who have potential to be trained in advocacy with longer term funding (3 years) instead of short-term project-based funding."[54]**

> **"We conducted community development/ rural development, humanitarian relief projects, and environmental conservation. From there we wanted to move towards advocacy but we did not have enough capacity in advocacy. We got support from IDRC to build our capacity in advocacy. Now we are a "Do-Tank," not only a "Think-Tank."[55]**

Other K4DM-supported think tanks were able to demonstrate specific examples of policy influence (pre-coup) with Myanmar policy-makers on a number of different issues, including climate change and rural development, ethnic issues, and peace-building.

> **"We tried to reach with our publication to the highest national level such as the union peace conference. Our publication reflected the outcome of the peace process in a practical way based on the peace-building discussion. Many EAOs made reference to our publication when responding to issues and questions."[56]**

> **"Before the February coup, we aimed to work with the democratic government to identify policy gaps and institution gap analysis. We were able to provide policy input to the NLD government on climate change and rural development. The concept of a "Land Bank" was introduced to the NLD government and this became part of the NLD manifesto for the 2020 election."[57]**

> **"The Tatmadaw (military) regularly requested our publications whenever we released new publications. Tatmadaw is the institution that studied our publications the most. I think Tatmadaw wanted to know what our ethnic people wanted because our research is based on Myanmar history and factual information."[58]**

Importantly, K4DM did not only target national level policy-makers for capacity-strengthening or research uptake. One of K4DM's projects targeted sub-national parliamentarians to build their acceptance of, and capacity to undertake, research to inform their decision-making. This project was able to achieve important policy outcomes, including the development of a five-year

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[54]KII-14:P12
[55]KII-8:P12
[56]KII-12:P8
[57]KII-19:P12
[58]KII-12:P8

Operational Plan for the Strengthening of Research Capacity for the State Hluttaw (Parliament). According to K4DM management, this plan is unprecedented for a sub-national government in Myanmar, and has the potential to serve as a model for the promotion of evidence-based policy-making in other Myanmar sub-national parliaments (pre-coup).[59] A qualifying view from the Myanmar partner will be presented below in a discussion of the importance of selecting the right partners for policy influence.

While most K4DM partners reported having completed their research and data collection prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, there is little question that first the pandemic and then the November 2020 election and subsequent coup negatively impacted K4DM partners in terms of dissemination and policy engagement. Online dissemination activities provided partners with opportunities to share their research with different audiences and host discussions, but the coup rapidly stopped all such activities locally. Most K4DM partners do not recognize the military as the legitimate government, and refuse to engage with the military in any way:[60]

> **"It is impossible to do advocacy with the military."[61]**

> **"It is not easy to change the mindset of the military. They will not change."[62]**

> **"I don't think they (the military) would change; a mango tree will not bear papaya fruit."[63]**

> **"We do not recognize them and we will not work with them."[64]**

While the coup has severely hindered the democratization process in Myanmar, it has also provided interesting opportunities for K4DM partners in terms of policy influence with the parallel government (National Unity Government) and associated bodies. Partners see collaboration and engagement with the NUG as an extension of their work on behalf of gender responsive democratization and economic growth, with an eye to the future:

> **"We consider this military coup as a temporary situation, and we are going to win. The research findings are still very useful for the new constitution and federal charter that are being developed by the NUG and the CRPH. We were able to provide inputs from the research findings to them."[65]**

> **"But we can work in some spaces that are still open like the National Ceasefire Agreement and the 21st century Panglong Conference. We still need to use this space to provide inputs to the policy process. We need to train more people on democratization."[66]**

> **"We are continuing to do research activities with the experience that we learnt from the K4DM project...we are in one way or another communicating with NUG and CRPH to provide our inputs. Also the participants who finish training overseas will be working with NUG also. They will be able to continue doing much research."[67]**

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[59]IDRC Project Completion Report for # 108XXX; pg 2.
[60]K4DM does not engage with the post-coup military government in any capacity.
[61]KII-12:P6
[62]KII-12:P9
[63]KII-12:P12
[64]KII-12:P6
[65]KII-12:P6
[66]KII-12:P12
[67]KII-14:P6. It is important to mention that K4DM does not directly engage or have activities with the NUG, at the request of Global Affairs Canada.

> **"There are a lot of media awareness campaigns on democracy online such as online journals, Spring's Universities and talks etc. The research findings could be fed into the NUG in their policy-making..."**[68]

The silver lining in the military coup and its disruption of K4DM activities is (at least) two-fold. First, the coup happened near the end of K4DM's 5-year cycle, when most research and capacity-strengthening activities had been completed. Secondly, the coup initiated a series of events and dynamics that threw K4DM-supported priorities of gender responsive democratization, decentralization, and inclusive economic growth into sharp relief against the backdrop of military repression. At the moment when significant data gathering, analysis, capacity-strengthening, collaboration and engagement had taken place on these dimensions of democratization, K4DM grantees and other beneficiaries (of training, of workshops, of presentations etc) found themselves in a situation where all gains were seemingly reversed, and future prospects for progress were dimmed.

However, the persistence of the civil disobedience movement, and the determination of exiled NLD and allied ethnic politicians and representatives and civil society activists to counter the military junta with a parallel government has provided an unexpected window of opportunity for K4DM and its partners. The NUG, as currently constituted, is the most representative and inclusive 'governing' body in Myanmar. It has brought in key actors from a multiplicity of ethnic groups, including the Rohingya,[69] and declares that it is committed to a federal model of governing. K4DM-supported partners and their research/analysis are well-placed to potentially influence the policies of NUG. While it remains to be seen whether the military or the NUG will prevail in the short, medium or long-term, it should be recognized that rather than being wasted, K4DM investment in democratization research and capacity-building in Myanmar may in fact have profound impacts downstream.

K4DM and Promoting Ethnic Inclusion

In terms of inclusion of ethnic groups in research projects, K4DM emphasized ethnic equality issues through encouraging research projects to operate in ethnic areas or by asking Myanmar universities to select participants for training from different ethnic groups. There was a deliberate and genuine attempt by the Initiative to engage with different ethnic groups. However, difficulties were encountered in obtaining approval for those who are in ethnic remote areas to join project activities.[70]

K4DM partners and advisors cautioned that it is the majority Bamar ethnic group that needs the most capacity strengthening in federalism/decentralization:[71]

> **"K4DM emphasized democratization, and reached out to ethnic areas, thereby in a way promoting ethnic participation in the democratization process. On the other hand, the real need to understand federalism is more for the Burman ethnic group. Almost all the ethnic groups understand federalism more than the Burman. We need to work more with Burman ethnic people on federalism. If you see the NUG, the educated people from non-Burman ethnic groups were chosen by the government."**[72]

[68]KII-19:P9

[69]Opponents of Myanmar coup form unity government, aim for 'federal democracy'

[70]KII-5:P2

[71]It should be noted that Bamar or Burman, even though they are the majority, are also an ethnic group. There has been a long standing "trust deficit" between the Bamar and the rest of the ethnic group. A distinction between the hills (frontier areas) and the plains (mainland) also developed that evolved during the arduous annexation process and became formalised into Ministerial Burma, formerly Burma Proper, and the Frontier Areas when the division started. (Smith, Martin (1991). Burma - Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity. London and New Jersey: Zed Books)

[72]KII-5:P9

As noted in the project completion report for a project on public service delivery in ethnic minority states, decentralization has been and remains a significant development challenge in a political union with a dominant Bamar majority.[73]

Interestingly, as a result of the coup, several respondents pointed to an increasing level of empathy being expressed by mainland Bamar people for ethnic groups and their plight, with the military becoming a common enemy to draw them together. While this cannot be attributed to K4DM, it is an interesting dynamic that could be

explored for future programming. The inclusion of particularly well-connected K4DM partners in the NUG responsible for ethnic-related issues and commerce may result in more impactful outcomes in terms of moving the needle on ethnic diversity and inclusion (and federalism) than was possible under the NLD government.

Key Evaluation Question #3

What lessons can be drawn from K4DM program implementation and management arrangements that could benefit future IDRC programming on democratization in Myanmar?

- What worked and what could be improved in the 24 projects under K4DM?

- What lessons and best practices can be drawn from K4DM responses (programmatic and management level) to unforeseen circumstances such as the Rohingya Crisis of 2017, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the 2021 military coup?

- How effectively did K4DM work in Myanmar, given the unique and fragile context and recent developments

How has K4DM supported the research ecosystem in Myanmar to date? Based on interviews with IDRC staff, the mid-term evaluation, project documents, and extensive interviews with K4DM grantees as part of this summative evaluation, there are lessons that can be drawn that could usefully inform future IDRC programming in Myanmar.[74] A discussion of K4DM's program design will be followed by a discussion of lessons from each of K4DM's programming modalities. The section will conclude with a discussion of IDRC policies and practices as they affected K4DM's implementation in the fragile context of Myanmar, as well as a discussion of K4DM management and adaptation to the various crises that impacted the programming environment.

K4DM Design: Improving the Enabling Environment for Research

As an externally funded project with GAC, K4DM was largely designed in Ottawa with some input from the Asia regional office and some exploratory work done in-country. This has made the first phase of K4DM primarily a supply-side initiative -- in other words, not a modality that substantively supported locally-led co-creation of research agendas. With several years of programming now completed and good relationships with Myanmar research actors established, K4DM in the last two years has made several adaptations to be more responsive to the local needs and priorities of Myanmar researchers and think tanks.[75]

An important lesson lies in the decision to design K4DM as a country-wide initiative with capacity-strengthening at its center and collaboration and engagement as a cross-cutting modality. Primarily, this design allowed K4DM to take a more systemic approach to grant-making in Myanmar. As such, K4DM had multiple entry points for programming that positively affected multiple elements of Myanmar's research system:

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[73]PCR #108XX9, p.3.

[74]This section under KEQ #3 contains an important caveat. It assumes that IDRC will be able to resume programming eventually within Myanmar at some point in the future. Currently, the military coup and attendant political crises necessitate interim measures that respond directly and immediately to the danger that democracy activists and many K4DM grantees are facing. IDRC support in the near-term should be focused on facilitating the survival and sustainability of Myanmar research actors to continue their important work of policy research and democracy promotion both within and without the country.

[75]Such as the Think Tank needs assessment conducted in 2018, the onboarding of KIVU to provide advocacy and soft skills training requested by partners, and assisting in resource mobilization with other donors to support think tank activities in additional states.

Research producers:

- capacity strengthening of individual researchers (faculty and students) with diffusion to other researchers, especially within university settings;
- Long-term core support to several think tanks and capacity-strengthening of other organizations;
- Support to an important gender network that brings together key gender research actors and consumers;

Research Users:

- By contributing to policy research capacities of think tanks and their ability to conduct strategic advocacy with target policy-makers;
- Uptake of the importance of evidence-based policy-making among sectoral technical staff in government ministries;[76]
- Engaging different audiences for K4DM-supported research (regional, Canadian, international media, academic and policy circles);

Research Outputs:

- In addition to papers, briefs, articles, K4DM created opportunities for researchers to meet together, to share resources and findings, and to collaborate domestically (which is new to Myanmar researchers);
- Support to returning researchers and policy actors who can have a positive influence on the system by sharing their experiences, skills, and connections with local researchers and who can bridge the gap between the 'old guard' and the 'new guard' in Myanmar;
- Inserting Myanmar think tanks into regional think tank networks;

Research Outcomes:

- Bringing together policy-makers and researchers at dissemination events;
- Addressing constraints to the uptake of research (on the producer side) by strengthening policy-relevant research capacities;
- Improving the knowledge to policy interface (if not to the extent originally desired);

The capacity-strengthening focus of K4DM allowed for more localized, country-focussed programming that contributed to more transformational grant-making (rather than transactional grant-making).[77] It was able to do so through longer term core support, tailored training, facilitating domestic, regional and international connections and networks for Myanmar research actors, and adapting to a changing programming context and partner needs to continue providing meaningful support to partners.

Thus K4DM's comprehensive approach, coupled with its capacity-strengthening focus, contributed significantly to improving the enabling environment for research among primarily think tanks, but also universities in Myanmar. This is an important and relevant outcome for K4DM that has been cut short by the military coup.

Partner Selection

The issue of partner selection was raised as an area of program design that needs improvement by several K4DM stakeholders.[78] Perhaps more than most programming environments in which IDRC works, Myanmar is exceedingly complex with not only ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, but also significant internal conflicts and an unstable political situation. The country was closed off to

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[76]KII-14:P10

[77]In short, transactional grant-making for IDRC has been to research individuals and organizations to carry out thematic research designed to advance policy and academic debates on important development problems. The traditional project cycle involves the production of research outputs and their subsequent dissemination. Transformational grant-making, on the other hand, is more outcome-based than out-put based, and is demand-driven, based on needs assessments of local partners, a shared strategic vision, and the expectation of long-term engagement. This description is drawn from a paper by Emma Naughton for IDRC on strengthening research systems for peace and democracy in high-risk contexts (2020).

[78]These comments were primarily in relation to the choice of think tanks for K4DM support (both core-funding and organizational development). While these think tanks were selected through an open call process, having individuals with deep contextual knowledge as part of the selection process was cited as necessary for optimal program design and policy influence.

the outside world for the better part of the last 60 years, with little opportunity to study the country until 2011.

> "Myanmar is always complicated in how the country works, the social networks, and all the things that don't get said or written down."[79]

While the evaluators appreciate the desire of K4DM to work with a variety of different research actors, there are two factors that would have improved the selection process:

1. Deeper contextual knowledge of Myanmar in general, and the contours of the Myanmar research system and its components more specifically;[80]

2. Establishing the NAC prior to selecting partners, and mobilizing NAC members in the selection process.

It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to get into the specifics of the internal politics of Myanmar's think tanks; however, one case does provide an interesting example of the complex trade-offs that donors like IDRC face when balancing between programming priorities and the complexities of programming contexts in fragile environments.

Diversity and Inclusion vs.Research Uptake

In the case of a K4DM project with the objective of building parliamentary members' capacity to use research and evidence for policy-making, important outcomes were verified. Yet interviews with grantees suggested that these results could have been amplified if different partners had been chosen:

> "Initially, we wanted the project in XX state. After a discussion, XXX state was considered because of the diversity of ethnic groups and the diversity of political parties in the Parliament. The difficulty was that the chairman of the parliament was from [a military-backed political party] and had a dictatorship style....We tried to engage as much as we can for reform and to have them accept evidence-based policy-making, but the leadership was too embedded in the old system that they were not willing to change at all. I felt it was a waste to invest in them for change. The lesson learned is that we need to choose people who are progressive, not the bureaucrats from the old dictatorship system. With hindsight, we should have done a proper needs assessment and mapping of the people to see who is progressive or not." [81]

While the Canadian lead partner's criteria for selecting a particular state for implementation is valid and makes sense in theory given K4DM's objectives, the configuration of actual actors on the ground limited the ability of the project to achieve its desired outcomes. Again, the importance of deep contextual knowledge (that goes beyond high-level 'scoping' missions) appears critical to programmatic success.

Additional lessons learned will be outlined below in the discussion of each of K4DM's programming modalities.

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[79]KII-17:P2
[80]"K4DM focused too much on the "what" and the "how" but not dealt with "why". K4DM was intentionally to start with democratization but need to see the context. The context was very fragile and very sensitive when K4DM started, and this was not taken into account when the project started. The project did not start with WHY and the consideration of the political nature of the context but started with a very credible aim of democratization." KII 4-P1.
[81]KII-15:P9

K4DM Programming Modalities

Individual capacity strengthening:

Given the deterioration of Myanmar's system of higher education over the past decades, capacity-strengthening is clearly a priority for research support. K4DM has successfully contributed to capacities for evidence-based research of several faculty members, graduate students and law-makers. The key elements in this success were:

1) consistent engagement of the lead partner;[82]

2) contextual knowledge (including language) of the lead partner (Myanmar and Asia specific).

According to IDRC program staff, the research environment in Myanmar is characterized by little collaboration between researchers and little experience dealing with regional or international partners. Given the low levels of trust among research actors and regarding 'outsiders', both **consistent engagement** and **south-south partnerships** were particularly appropriate for the context. Similarly, important outcomes coming from interactions between a local think tank and parliamentary research units in XXX State were attributed to a **train-the trainer model** that facilitated the transfer of knowledge and skills between Myanmar researchers in local languages. Plans to support parliamentary research internships with local universities is an important recognition that **internal relationships** are as important, if not more so, as developing relationships between Myanmar research actors and regional and international networks. **Supporting these internal relationships will strengthen the research output component of the research system, which consists not just of research products, but also the networks and collaborations among research producers.**

While the relationships and connections of individual researchers with regional and international partners are clearly beneficial for them, it is unclear how these actually support the **sustainability of the research ecosystem.**[83] While scholarships, training, and opportunities to publish with international authors are important assets for researchers, the research products are pitched toward international and primarily academic audiences and less for consumption by local researchers and policy-makers. Collaborations are outward facing, rather than domestic, which could hinder the development of a **critical mass**[84] of research actors within Myanmar based on **domestic networking and collaborations.** Additionally, the outward-facing nature of most K4DM outputs may have decreased the ability of domestic policy-makers to use the research for their own purposes given low levels of English proficiency generally within Myanmar.[85]

Organizational Strengthening:

Building on the Think Tank Initiative (TTI) model, K4DM provided different levels of support to a variety of think tanks in Myanmar. Think tank support was implemented via Canadian and international partners. Support was either **core funding** or **capacity-strengthening** without core funding.

Core funding provided an important opportunity for Myanmar think tanks to **retain staff**, thereby reducing staff turnover and 'brain drain' towards international organizations that pay better salaries. On the other hand, think tanks with core funding did not receive organizational strengthening assistance, which they identified as necessary for building capacity to engage in policy relevant research and engagement. Those think tanks that did receive training in organizational development were often in the difficult position of **diverting resources** from research and policy influence towards seeking funds to stay afloat.

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[82]According to the mid-term evaluation of K4DM, individual capacity was strengthened when "lead partners committed to local interactions with beneficiaries." Mid-term Formative Evaluation of K4DM, Amaltas 2019, p.10.

[83]Helms, Robin Matross. International Higher Education Partnerships: A Global Review of Standards and Practices. Occasional Paper. American Council on Education, 2015.

[84]The notion of a 'critical mass' of research actors who produce, value, and use research comes from the Global Development Network's "Doing Research Assessment" Framework. http://www.gdn.int/doing-research-assessment.

[85]From the mid-term evaluation: "At this mid-point, the pathways of bringing research to policy have remained under-explored. Future effort is needed to ensure the research produced is communicated to government officials and policy

After several years of programming in Myanmar, IDRC staff agree that a combination of **core-funding with training** and possibly small grant funding is the most appropriate modality to contribute to the sustainability of independent think tanks in Myanmar. Strong independent think tanks engaged in policy-relevant research are an important element of a critical mass of research actors, and are an indicator of a **research system's robustness.**

Additionally, K4DM management identified that **returning Myanmar academics and policy actors** were the positive forces behind the more active, inclusive, and progressive think tanks within the Initiative. These returnees could be key to strengthening an endogenous research ecosystem of the transitional improving type, and **bridging the gap** between the Myanmar 'old guard' and 'young guard' (thereby increasing levels of trust and sharing of data/information).

The K4DM mid-term evaluation noted that in addition to core funding, sustainability of think tanks also depends on assisting them to engage in **strategic advocacy with policy-makers** for research uptake. In K4DM's first phase, it seems that think tanks engaged in research on a variety of policy-relevant issues, and then sought to disseminate the research to policy-makers via publications, conferences and forums. Given the low levels of trust and the **preference for Myanmar policy-makers to get information from international organizations** (the UN, WB for example), the traditional process of 'research, publication, then dissemination' is not robust enough to contribute substantively to the **knowledge to policy interface.** In a fragile context like Myanmar where policy-makers have not been a traditional source of **demand for research,** a different kind of engagement between think tanks and policy actors is needed, where **co-creation of research agendas** and continual engagement of policy stakeholders happens throughout the research cycle, not just at

the end. The dual outcome of increasing demand for local research and increasing the capacity of policy-makers to **use research** could be attainable if intentional engagement of policy actors and policy debates by researchers occurs starting with the research development phase.[86]

Similarly, IDRC support to think tanks could be used to strengthen **institutional norms of sharing research findings with citizens** who are likely to be impacted by the issue at hand, (whether decentralization, climate change, or inclusive growth), or from whom data was collected (such as with the MIID project).[87] From a research ecosystem perspective, this is an important element of a strong research system, **where citizens are informed** and can use evidence to push for appropriate solutions to problems that affect their well-being. It is also ethical to share findings with communities who participated in the research process.

Gender Research

Of all the K4DM pillars, this one clearly reflects the priorities of the Canadian government. Supporting thematic research in a very weakened research system should be considered carefully. Myanmar is a programming context in which raising questions about gender creates awareness.[88] **Gauging local capacities for specialized research** in the early stages of research development is advised, and **remedial training** may be necessary before substantive research on thematic issues is carried out. The risk otherwise is that local researchers are limited to data collection in an extractive manner. This is another point in favour of supporting specific policy programs at universities that can serve as a training ground for young researchers, such as the Gender and Development course at Yangon University of Economics.

From a research ecosystem's perspective, K4DM-supported gender and decentralization research

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[86]Clearly engagement with the SAC/military is not a possibility at this moment. However, this point is relevant for engagement with the NUG and future civilian governments in Myanmar.
[87]"MIID promotes the use of "integrated approaches to development" that pay attention to everyday constraints faced by women and incorporate them into the community reflections about development." Project Completion Report for # 108XX8, p.2
[88]KII-6:PE

appeared primarily outward facing, and l**ess on either influencing Myanmar policy or informing local citizens.**[89] To reinforce a research system's dual feedback loops and contribute to both **evidence-based policy and informed (empowered) citizens,** K4DM is well-placed in the next phase to design research projects with local partners that intentionally lay out **impact pathways of planned research** with both decision-makers and Myanmar citizens who provide the local knowledge.

The Gender Research pillar also has important lessons for **collaboration** which will be discussed in more detail below. But it bears mentioning here that the opportunities for local partners to share their research, methodologies, and experiences with each other is a valuable output that contributes to building the internal relationships between research actors that overcome barriers of mistrust.

Collaboration and Engagement:

The desired outcomes for both collaboration and engagement need to be carefully calibrated to the exigencies of any particular research system. In Myanmar, the research system is beset by a lack of trust between research producers and consumers, or at the very least, a lack of a tradition of sharing data or collaborating on research pursuits for the public good. Similarly, there are only nascent capacities among policy-makers to productively use evidence in decision-making, which in the past has been subject to political forces.

What does this mean for actual programming? Recognizing that 'collaboration' and 'engagement' are distinct but related activities, the first phase of K4DM has some important cross-cutting lessons:

- On the side of Collaboration: Who is collaborating is an important consideration depending on desired outcomes: North-South; South-South; or 'domestic'. Each modality has pros and cons, but for a fragile country emerging from tight state control and years

of isolation and deterioration, it appears that south-south and domestic collaborations (such as the Knowledge Forums) yield benefits for the incremental strengthening of a country's research system. This is due to factors of contextual and linguistic familiarity (which play a larger role in the early stages of transition, where ties to the outside world have been minimal). These domestic collaborations include relationship-building between researchers and policy-makers, and researchers and private sector actors. North-South collaborations yield important outcomes for individual researchers, although it could be argued that training abroad for a postgraduate degree could produce more sustainable outcomes for the research system if returnees assume leadership roles in universities, think tanks, or policy units.[90] The evaluators recognize that relationships with Canadian institutions provide IDRC with value added in terms of risk management and 'Canadian brand awareness'. They can also provide value added to local actors in terms of expertise (on federalism, for example), and linkages to outside networks. The question is whether regional institutions can provide the same level of low risk partnership for IDRC and more culturally appropriate support to Myanmar organizations.

- **On the side of Engagement:** Strong efforts have been made in K4DM to engage different audiences, including regional, Canadian, and international media, academic and policy circles. Some efforts have been made to **engage domestic media and policy actors,** but these efforts have been primarily in English (with plans to start producing some communications in Burmese, which have been stalled by the coup) and will likely have had an impact in small, urban, and relatively elite circles. Deploying resources to disseminate research and engage policy actors after the fact will have some influence, given what K4DM staff say is readiness and **eagerness on the part of policy-makers to**

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[89]This finding is supported by the mid-term evaluation.
[90]For example, the conditions for a Fulbright Scholarship for developing country nationals is that they return to their home country once conditions improve.

absorb evidence.[91] But if building substantive relationships between decision-makers and local research actors to strengthen the research system is the goal, then 'engagement and collaboration' need to be reconceptualized to achieve more ambitious outcomes for IDRC-supported research. And, as the mid-term evaluation pointed out, engagement also needs to occur with Myanmar citizens. As mentioned previously, this **knowledge-to-citizen interface** is an important outcome within a research system because it demonstrates a healthy feedback loop where findings are translated and validated with citizens who are seen as more than 'research subjects'.

IDRC Policies and Practices

Myanmar is on a list of 'high risk' countries for IDRC programming. The determination of whether a country is included on this list depends on a number of criteria that are both objective and subjective

(for example: the presence of GoC sanctions vs IDRC's ability to monitor, or knowledge (presumably of the responsible program officer) of the context. The inclusion of risk assessments and proposed risk mitigation strategies sections in the project approval document are a step in the right direction. But these assessments and risk mitigation strategies should be based to the extent possible on a comprehensive analysis of the programming context (such as a political economy analysis), an assessment of characteristics of the research system's components and their interaction, as well as input from potential research partners. **Effort at the front end to gain this kind of contextual knowledge will enable program staff to better identify risk factors and their appropriate mitigation.**[92]

According to interviews with IDRC staff, the Centre's traditionally 'ambiguity averse' approach

to risk management will be stress tested if more programming dollars are devoted to fragile and/or conflict affected environments like Myanmar where business as usual (in non-fragile contexts) does not exist.[93] An illustrative example: When evaluating support to think tanks in Myanmar, K4DM replicated the TTI model of institutional assessment. However, the thresholds within the TTI model resulted in many Myanmar think tanks being disqualified because they were relatively new and were not 'proven'. But given Myanmar's recent transition from an almost completely closed society to a slowly democratizing one, it should be expected that many think tanks will be in early stages of development. Consequently, K4DM may have missed the opportunity to work with a variety of research actors that better represent the spectrum of socio-political and ethnic interests within Myanmar. Adjusting models and risk assessments to reflect the realities of the research system in each context will be an important improvement on current practices, and should be based on conflict-sensitive principles that go beyond the adage of 'do no harm'.

Fiduciary risk is important in all cases when programming in developing countries; however, both contextual and programmatic risk are also important, especially in fragile contexts such as Myanmar. The Government of Canada sanctions restricted IDRC from interacting directly with the military faction and some political actors; K4DM staff and partners found some acceptable work-arounds (mainly with strategically connected think tanks) that kept them within the loop on certain issues. It should be acknowledged that K4DM staff engage in a 'risk management' type of thinking and acting on an ongoing basis independent of any formal risk assessment that is conducted. Within fragile contexts, risk assessments should be incorporated into on-going program decision-making; these risk assessments would benefit from a more comprehensive approach such as the OECD's

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[91]To clarify, this was relevant to the pre-coup situation, although there is discussion among K4DM partners about the potential readiness of some in the military to receive support on gender and ethnic issues as a means of accruing 'legitimacy' with the international community.
[92]Ideally this contextual knowledge will be based on-ground-information gathering and networking that is more nuanced than official scoping visits.
[93]Ambiguity (uncertainty) aversion is the "tendency to favor the known over the unknown, including known risks over unknown risks."

Copenhagen Circles that take a multidimensional approach to risk management.[94]

In terms of governance, it is understood and documented that a country initiative of this scope requires significant IDRC engagement and

oversight; the delays in moving K4DM management to the regional office has been unfortunate, but perhaps unavoidable, given the onset of the global pandemic. What is clear is the fact that risk management will be better informed and more robust if there are more eyes and ears on the ground and in general more country knowledge and engagement with partners.

Adaptation

K4DM has been faced with serious programmatic challenges in this first phase. The pandemic affected Myanmar severely, eliminating most opportunities for local in-person dissemination and engagement at the point where K4DM research was ready to be shared with audiences.

> "Our selected outreach face-to-face activities were postponed after the COVID travel restrictions. Some activities could not be done virtually, so we had to stop outreach activities."[95]

The military coup of February 1st, in the midst of the pandemic, threw the country into chaos. The military's violent reaction to the civil disobedience movement caused thousands of deaths and injuries. Many K4DM partners either fled the country, went into hiding, or joined the CDM.

> "Our office was investigated by the SAC. No one was arrested in the Yangon office,

> but one was arrested in the XX office in XX state. We had to send our staff to safe places, some are in India and some in Thailand."[96]

Other K4DM-supported think tanks remain in Myanmar and have adopted a low profile and apolitical language to avoid unwanted attention from the military government:

> "In rural development we can change our talk about participation instead of democratization. We will continue to promote governance issues in village committees and forest users' groups....When we work for environmental sustainability, it will benefit democratization. But we need to change our political language and tone."[97]

Both K4DM's donors and partners praised K4DM management for efforts in the wake of the pandemic to adapt programming to online formats, some of which had been in use (such as the e-platform) prior to the outbreak of Covid-19. Intense online follow-up practices and creative virtual events at the individual project level helped to keep projects on track despite the disruption of the pandemic. The virtual Myanmar speakers series contributed to research communication when conferences and workshops were cancelled.

According to IDRC reporting, K4DM-supported researchers sought ways to have their research influence the Myanmar government's COVID -19 response[98] to be more contextually appropriate among Myanmar's different communities. This could not be verified because of the limitations to the evaluation described above, but K4DM researchers did collaborate with Canadian researchers to

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[94] https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/2014-10-30%20Approaches%20to%20Risk%20FINAL.pdf
[95] KII-1:P8
[96] KII-1:P8
[97] KII-1:P12
[98] "In recent months, these partners investigated and raised awareness about issues related to COVID-19, such as returning migrant workers, the slowdown in the garment industry, an increase in domestic violence, and impacts on democratic reform and the peacebuilding process. This rapid and nationally relevant research is essential for effective policy responses to external shocks, such as the pandemic." "Meeting the Challenges of the Covid 19 Pandemic in Myanmar" July 8, 2020. https://www.idrc.ca/es/node/39736 Accessed October 14, 2021.

produce several publications addressing COVID-19 responses in Asia, including two peer-reviewed journal articles.[99] The ability of K4DM partners to pivot and respond to both local domestic policy needs and regional and international COVID-19 discussions is a testament to the effectiveness of the Initiative's capacity-strengthening support and the increasing confidence, ability, and resources of Myanmar researchers to contribute to quality policy-relevant research and engagement.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, IDRC ceased payments to Myanmar and directed all implementation and dissemination activities outside of the country with researchers and CSO staff outside of Myanmar. Both individual researchers and organizations have received emergency support, and K4DM programming has turned, rightly, towards trying to sustain organizations that continue to exist and be active in democratization efforts. According to partners, IDRC has been flexible and creative in finding solutions to the challenges of transferring payments for deliverables.

Much literature about adaptation in international development programming is about implementing social learning processes and feedback loops to integrate data into decision-making on an ongoing basis. The twin crises of a global pandemic and a military coup require a different kind of adaptation, however, to ensure the safety of grantees (to the extent possible) and shift to an emergency footing. IDRC's response to the pandemic was appropriate and ensured that K4DM research to policy efforts continued despite restrictions on gatherings and travel. IDRC's response to the military coup was based on principles of do-no-harm and conflict sensitivity (adherence to which increased with increasing contextual knowledge of Myanmar's many divisions); as such, K4DM management should be commended for their flexibility and commitment to their relationships with grantees in a very difficult situation.

[99]IDRC Annual Report to GAC 2021, p.5.

Conclusions

The needs of research systems in fragile contexts like Myanmar are particular and varied, requiring relevant, appropriate, and innovative forms of support that contribute to the system overall and do not adversely affect its development.

The comprehensive, single country-focus, and longer term approach of the K4DM Initiative was a relevant and appropriate model for programming in Myanmar. Through its provision of capacity-strengthening support and mentorship to Myanmar individual researchers, universities, think tanks, networks, and certain state actors, K4DM substantively improved the enabling environment for research on gender, democratization, decentralization,environmentalism and inclusive growth in a very challenging context.

An underestimation of existing capacities within the research input component of the Myanmar research system, coupled with an underestimation of the openness of the NLD government to evidence-based policy-making required adjustments to the original goals of the program to make them more realistic and reflective of the programming environment. It also required a degree of on the ground mentorship to solidify K4DM capacity-strengthening support that was very difficult to provide with no K4DM management in-country. The lack of IDRC presence on the ground contributed to missed opportunities for internal networking and collaboration.[1]

Though the design of K4DM was largely supply-driven and did not benefit from the advice of the NAC, the Initiative demonstrated an adaptive and iterative style of management and programming that became increasingly demand-driven as feedback from partners was incorporated into

decision-making (especially around capacity-strengthening training needs).

Of its modalities, the capacity-strengthening pillars and cross-cutting collaboration and engagement facet are particularly relevant to the transitional state of the Myanmar research system (pre-coup). These modalities responded to the evident needs of Myanmar researchers and the necessity of building a critical mass of research actors by contributing to their internal and external relationships. The gender research pillar was appropriate in the sense that the thematic subject matter is very relevant to Myanmar's development, yet less so in terms of the ability of Myanmar researchers to carry out specialized thematic research, and the state of the internal discourse on gender issues in the country. Substantive capacity-strengthening to carry out gender sensitive research would have been a more appropriate approach at the beginning (as was eventually implemented), along with the Initiative's support to their capacity-strengthening partners in the other pillars to apply a gender lens to their areas of expertise.

As written above, K4DM stakeholders recognize that the Initiative's original objectives of increasing gender equality and inclusive governance in Myanmar were very ambitious indeed. Even though these objectives were not met to the extent originally anticipated, this evaluation stresses that very important outcomes were achieved given both the challenging characteristics of the Myanmar

[1]KII GAC, August 18, 2021

research system and the unprecedented challenges posed by the global pandemic and a brutal military coup. These outcomes include:

- Strengthening the enabling environment for democratization research generally;

- Transformational support to individual researchers and think tanks that contribute to their sustainability (especially in times of crisis);

- Contributing to increasing uptake of gender-sensitive research methods and outputs;

- Contributing to the production of original research on gender and decentralization that provides both data and analysis to the benefit of the wider research community;

- Significant examples of policy influence, despite an inhospitable environment for evidence-based policy-making;

- Contributing to the capacities and resilience of Myanmar research actors to pivot and take proactive measures to respond to the challenges of the differential impacts of Covid-19 and the assault on democracy by the military coup;

While it may be tempting to take a cynical view and think that these outcomes will come to naught as a result of the military coup, K4DM interviewees expressed a more hopeful and determined vision for Myanmar researchers:

> **"There are challenges but the vision and knowledge will remain with them (K4DM partners). K4DM was not a useless exercise. It was appropriate and necessary."[2]**

> **"It will pay off in the long run. It is all dark at the moment and it is hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But the appetite for learning is still growing strong and even stronger than before the coup. We need to continue the training and research."[3]**

> **"The investment of IDRC/GAC is not wasted because of the coup. The research findings cannot be utilized during this military regime, but the findings are still useful for any democratic government. On the other hand, the military regime could be challenged with the findings regarding violation of women's rights and other atrocities they are committing against the people."[4]**

> **"The effort of K4DM is not wasted but the benefit has been cut by around 75% but the benefit remains with the 25% who have been trained and the international networks under the K4DM program. They have seen what is possible and they have been encouraged to think freely....We cannot take away people's knowledge."[5]**

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[2]KII 17:P1
[3]KII 17:P3
[4]KII 9:P6
[5]KII 9:P2

Recommendations

In the short term, IDRC is doing what is possible to protect K4DM partners and the gains of the Initiative by providing interim funding, mentoring, and dissemination and engagement opportunities for K4DM partners and their research. The following recommendations are based primarily on learnings from K4DM prior to the military coup, and apply more directly to future programming with a democratic government in place (or programming with the parallel National Unity Government depending on political developments).

It should be noted here that many of these recommendations rest on the necessity of IDRC having a much more robust presence on the ground in Myanmar, either in-country, or based at the Asia Regional office with significant in-country travel.

1. Prior to the program design phase, **conduct robust research system analysis and conflict analysis** to buttress contextual knowledge of Myanmar and improve risk assessment and mitigation strategies. These analyses could be done in-house (for example, by the Democratic and Inclusive Governance team, or by the Asia Regional Office) or commissioned and conducted by external experts.

2. Similarly, in the program design phase, **consult members of the NAC substantively** and leverage their expertise and networks for additional contextual intelligence to inform program design and potential partners;

3. As with more substantive pre-project contextual analysis, **mainstream conflict sensitive programming** for better risk management and program adaptation. Ensure that implementing partners provide their own conflict analysis and commit to conflict sensitive principles in their K4DM-supported work;

4. In capacity-strengthening programming, **plan for medium to long-term investment** (3-7

years). It will be important to weigh the long-term benefits of individual versus organizational support. Ensure that capacity strengthening activities are relevant and appropriate to trainees; conduct robust capacity needs assessment in early stages of project design and build in feedback mechanisms to get input on training materials and their appropriateness for the target audience. This is especially important for strengthening 'online' and digital forms of capacity-strengthening that are likely to remain a feature of programming for the foreseeable future;

5. For future think tank core support, **make the accompaniment model more robust** by including organizational development and strategic advocacy training opportunities. Additionally, include funding for policy research by think tanks with core support to facilitate application of new skills;

6. Address research use during the program design phase by conducting research and **mapping out pathways to research uptake.** Integrate and engage with potential research users throughout the project cycle to increase uptake and build capacities of Myanmar decision-makers and Myanmar citizens to use research for local policy and advocacy processes;

7. **Plan for communication of research to multiple audiences and at multiple points,** not just end-of-project dissemination. Ensure that program/project budgets have sufficient resources to implement knowledge translation and at the local level, including in local languages;

8. When granting directly to Myanmar organizations is not a possibility, **structure partnerships with Northern and regional institutions that integrate Myanmar research actors** in a mindful and substantive way. For example, choose regional and northern partners that embrace and demonstrate a commitment to demand-driven research and principles of inclusiveness and equitable research collaborations;

9. Ensure that resources are devoted to activities that **solicit input from Myanmar research actors in order to align programming with local demand.** For example, build into grant agreements a project design phase that will involve comprehensive contextual analysis, substantive consultations with Myanmar research actors, and a validation process of project design to ensure relevance and appropriateness;

10. If possible, **plan and budget for post-project evaluations to track outcomes over time** to evaluate sustainability of capacity-strengthening projects (such as longitudinal studies).

Annex I

Evaluation Team

Emma Naughton is the founder of Lucid Collaborative. She is an international development and human rights specialist with more than 20 years of experience in conflict-affected environments in the Middle East and Africa. Emma has extensive experience in program development and management, monitoring and evaluation, and research analysis in the areas of governance, democratization, security, transitional justice and gender equality. Prior to consulting, she also worked at the International Development Research Center, Human Rights First, and Oxfam. She has a Master's degree in Sociology from New York University, and a Master's in Arab Studies from Georgetown University. For this evaluation, Emma is team lead and is responsible for quality assurance.[100]

Dr Kyi Minn is a Senior Consultant. He is a physician and public health specialist with more than twenty years of experience working in development and global health. He formerly worked at World Vision International and the Nossal Institute for Global Health, the University of Melbourne. He has served as a member of the Civil Society Consultative Group for Health Nutrition and Population at the World Bank Group in Washington D.C. He is currently working as a Health Adviser and Global Health Consultant for the Myanmar Health & Development Consortium, and also serving as an advisory board member for local NGOs in Myanmar. Dr. Minn was a member of the team that conducted the mid-term evaluation of K4DM.

For this evaluation, both team members collaborated in the construction of interview guides, conducting interviews with K4DM stakeholders, document analysis, interview data analysis, and report writing.

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[100] Emma Naughton left IDRC several years prior to K4DM implementation.

Annex II

**Final Evaluation-Knowledge for Democracy (K4D)
Myanmar Initiative**

TERMS OF REFERENCE / STATEMENT OF WORK

1.1 Summary

International Development Research Centre (IDRC) requires the **Consultant(s)**
to perform the final evaluation of Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM)
Initiative, co-funded by IDRC and Global Affairs Canada GAC (2017-2021). The
Initiative's main objective is to nurture a new generation of young actors – university
faculty and students, civil society leaders, think tank researchers, and public
officials-, bringing them together to improve collaboration and to increase the use
of research for evidence-based gender responsive economic and democratic policy
development. To achieve this, the Initiative is structured around four modalities:
(i) capacity development for individuals, (ii) organizational development and (iii)
research projects – which are linked through a fourth, cross-cutting modality of
active engagement and collaboration.

The final evaluation will assess the effectiveness of program implementation and the
significance and relevance of program outcomes including how they correspond to
expectations of the initiative, despite the implementation challenges imposed by
the COVID pandemic (2020) and the recent political turmoil (February 2021). The
expected outcomes of the K4DM initiative are clearly stated in the donor agreement
with Global Affairs Canada, reflected in the **Logical Framework and the Performance
Monitoring Framework.** The evaluation is also expected to highlight lessons, best
practices and recommendations for any future programming.

The primary users of this evaluation are IDRC and GAC management (K4DM
Executive Committee) who will use the final evaluation to ensure accountability for
the implementation of the initiative and delivery of expected results as well as an
early identification of future areas of work.

1.2 Scope

The final evaluation's **main goals** are to:

1) Review the **implementation and operation of the K4DM Initiative,** including the
coherence of its modalities, as well as the effectiveness of program adaptation to
respond to unforeseen challenges and/or opportunities faced in 2020-21.

2) Evaluate the significance and relevance of program outcomes. This will include

how they correspond to expectations of the initiative, and also unintended outcomes.

3) Assess the extent to which the K4DM Initiative has been able to appropriately respond to **the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation** (2019).

4) Identify **lessons and recommendations** in collaboration with the K4DM team for possible future IDRC programing in Myanmar (2022 – onwards).

1.4 Evaluation Questions. More specifically, the final evaluation will be designed to answer the following questions:

Delivery of outcomes

1) How has K4DM contributed to stakeholder **consultation, engagement and collaboration** on issues related to gender responsive democratic transition, and economic development while responding to existing risks?

    a. How has **program design** and cross-project activities been effective, coherent and relevant[1]?
    b. How has **effective research** been conducted thanks to the initiative?
    c. What can be learned from the use and promotion of **communications** such as Research in Action and newsletters, support for research dissemination, training on communications and think-tank support, knowledge events and fora supported and organized by K4DM?
    d. To what extent have K4DM projects enabled progress towards gender equality in Myanmar? What needs to be improved to enable **gender equality?**

2) How has K4DM contributed to the **use of research** for evidence-based **policy development,** despite risks and other constraints?

    a. How have **capacity building** activities contributed to the development of policy relevant research and responses by think-tanks and universities?
    b. How has K4DM **supported research and research outputs** contributed to the development of policies supporting democratic transition and economic development?
    c. How have **research projects** increased knowledge about **gender equality in Myanmar?**
    d. How have **research projects** increased inclusion of **ethnic minorities and decentralization?**

Lessons for a democratic future. What lessons can be drawn from K4DM Initiative program implementation and management arrangements that could benefit future programing on democratization in Myanmar? What worked and what could be improved in the 24 projects under K4DM? What lessons and best practices can be drawn from K4DM responses (programmatic or management level) to unforeseen circumstances such as the Rohingya Crisis (2017) or the COVID-19 pandemic (2020)? To what extent did K4DM effectively work in Myanmar, given the unique and fragile context of Myanmar?

1.3 Methodology

The Consultant(s)/evaluation team will propose a methodology based on the following information. Additional methods of conducting the evaluation can be considered as long as they are guided by principles of utility, quality, collaboration and knowledge sharing and transparency[3]

- **Document Review:** Perform an in-depth document review of the K4DM Initiative and the 241 projects to be provided by K4DM program management in readable format for the consultant:

- K4DM core **project documents** (including documentation on calls for proposals, trip reports, project completion/monitoring reports, project approval documents, and final project reports for those projects that have concluded),

- K4DM core **management/operation documents** (proposals, minutes of executive committees; national advisory committee; work plans 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21; comms strategy;

- **IDRC-GAC proposal** including **the Logic Model and the Performance Measure Framework)**

- **Evaluation-related materials** (Study on knowledge/research systems in Myanmar by the Global Development Network; Mid-term evaluation conducted during the summer of 2019; and Annual reports 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21- draft)

- **Communications materials** (newsletters, blogs, event summaries, etc).

- **Quantitative data collection and analysis:** The Consultants will have access to K4DM databases compiling information gathered from the Technical Reports (IDRC's Trackify)

- Qualitative data collection and analysis: The Consultants will conduct in-depth interviews to solicit perspectives from K4DM grantees, K4DM management team and other relevant IDRC staff, and GAC focal points in Yangon and Ottawa (and others as specified), and other key external stakeholders.

1.4 Criteria for consultant selection, Process and Outputs

1. Selection of consultant or team (May **2021**) based on:

    a. A senior consultant or team lead, either based in or with necessary ground support in Myanmar or the region (Asia-Pacific) commensurate with budget. Diversity in the team is an asset.

    b. Expertise in international development and higher education with proven experience in program evaluation and research assessment in South-East Asia. Familiarity with the Myanmar context is a must. Expertise in gender-sensitive research is essential.

    c. Ability to travel, if possible and necessary, to meet in-person or on-lineK4DM staff and grantees in Myanmar or the region as well as capacity to conduct intensive on-line communications[4]

2. After selection, IDRC will facilitate an on-line inception workshop with the Consultant(s) and K4DM team, including an IDRC senior evaluation officer. The

workshop will discuss the evaluation's scope of work, based on the initial proposal submitted by the evaluation team. The evaluation approach should promote engagement with intended users of the evaluation to support learning **(June 2021)**

3. Following the inception workshop, the Consultant(s) will finalize an evaluation design plan for approval by K4DM and GAC **(July 2021)**. This plan will include: the evaluation questions to be addressed; the proposed methodology; a work plan including a timeline for key outputs; an outline of proposed evaluation team members, including their expertise and roles; a list of needs and expectations of K4DM staff to support the stated activities; and a description of limitations with a risk mitigation strategy where appropriate. **(Mid-July 2021)**

4. Tentative field visit or online engagement with K4DM grantee **(August 2021)**

5. Presentation of preliminary findings in draft report to the K4DM team to discuss finding and lessons and map out feasible recommendations **(September 2021)**

6. Final evaluation report of about 20-25 pages **(October 2021),** that incorporates feedback obtained on the draft report, will be made **public** by IDRC, as is the case with all external evaluations. The evaluation team will include, together with the report:

a. An executive summary of evaluation findings and recommendations no more than 2 pages

b. An appendix with details on methodology, informants and data collection on each project.

1.5 Evaluation Budget and period of contract. The estimated budget for this project is CAD 65-75,000 (plus travel if feasible). A resulting Contract is expected to commence on June 1st, 2021 and conclude by Nov 1st, 2021.

1.6 Roles, responsibilities, support and representatives. The K4DM Initiative (Edgard Rodriguez) will be the Project Authority to whom the successful consultant will report during the period of the Contract. The Project Authority will be responsible for coordinating the overall delivery of service, providing as required direction and guidance to the consultant, monitoring consultants' performance and accepting and approving the consultant deliverables on behalf of IDRC. The Project Authority will ensure that appropriate subject matter experts from within IDRC are available to the consultant to discuss and provide content material, as well as facilitate cooperation with regional IDRC staff and other stakeholders, as required.

Global Affairs Canada will be consulted throughout the selection process of the consultant and the evaluation process, as IDRCs partner in the initiative and one of the main beneficiaries. The successful consultant will coordinate consultations with GAC through the Project Authority.

Procurement (Lindsay Empey) will be the Contracting Authority, who will oversee a resulting Contract throughout its lifecycle, in conjunction with the Project Authority

and the consultant, create amendments for any changes to a resulting Contract, and answer questions on terms and conditions.

1.7 Location of work and potential travel. Work is expected to take place primarily at the consultants' site. If travel occurs, and depending on COVID-19 restriction, it will be coordinated with IDRC's designated project authority. Possible travel plans (locations, objectives, budgets and timelines) should be included in the proposal submitted to IDRC.

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[1] Effectiveness – what is the progress toward expected outcomes (including immediate, intermediate and ultimate outcomes) with reference to program design? What is the link and contribution of outputs to outcomes under each of the 21 projects in the initiative?

Coherence of implementation – taking into consideration the fragile context, risks, and expectations involved, how well the initiative-wide strategy has been implemented (choices made and priorities set and/or evolved). How has the strategy adaptations to address challenges and exploit emerging opportunities? How has resource utilization contributed to the production of outputs and progress toward expected and unexpected outcomes?

Relevance – How has each of the projects addressed a demonstrable need and is responsive to the needs of Myanmar relevant stakeholders? What are the linkages between K4DM objectives and IDRC/GAC priorities? How adequate is the Initiative's design or mix of activities or modalities to address the challenge of supporting knowledge systems to the service of an emerging inclusive democracy in Myanmar?

[3] Utility: evaluation are designed to meet the needs of its intended users. Evaluations should produce actionable findings to help us test theories of change, learn from successes and failures, and improve strategy and results. Users' participation in evaluation processes helps ensure relevance and ownership of the evaluation findings.

Quality: Evaluation should meet high quality standards. Quality includes the utility of evaluation, the use of rigorous methods, and safeguarding ethical standards. Evaluation is not value-neutral, and specific attention needs to be paid to including diverse perspectives and addressing inequalities in the evaluation process. Collaboration and shared benefit: Evaluation should be designed to meet collective needs and be an asset for those being evaluated. IDRC will negotiate the purpose, design and governance of evaluation with funding partners to avoid duplication, and to ensure utility for all parties.

Knowledge sharing and transparency: Learning about the findings and practice of evaluation should be documented and shared. Knowledge sharing helps build evaluation capacity and ensures evaluation remains relevant to the issues and priorities for development and development research. Evaluations should be publicly accessible. Evaluations commissioned IDRC are available through the Centre's public digital library

[4] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, travel to Myanmar and in-country mobility might continue to be restricted or difficult, appropriate contingency plans and timelines accounting for possible delays or alternative arrangements are expected to be presented by consultant