CLAIMING SPACES: WOMEN MOBILISING FOR PEACE AND EQUALITY IN MYANMAR

A Paung Sie Facility Learning Brief
ABOUT THE COVER DESIGN:

The cover symbolises Tetris blocks falling together to create a firm foundation. This represents the impact the three pronged approach of the GPS Window had on the eighteen Implementing Partners. In the same way that a puzzle comes together, the GPS Window provided invaluable support to the Implementing Partners to further strengthen peace and equality in Myanmar.
THE IMPACT OF PAUNG SIE FACILITY’S GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY WINDOW

GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY WINDOW

CORE FUNDING

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

Overcame the challenge of overreliance on volunteer contributions
Acquired analytical skills and knowledge of GPS agenda
Improved networking capabilities and formed strategic coalitions
Women claimed their space

Strengthened organisational capacity
Enhanced confidence of organisations and their members
Long-term strategic-planning, agenda setting and locally driven problem identification
Increased voice, influence and visibility within communities

Partner visibility and credibility as frontline GBV responders increased

Increased organisational visibility contributed to gender equality being taken seriously by communities

Engaged in government decisions to assign female police officers to handle GBV cases
Legal and policy changes increased participation and access to national dialogue and peace process negotiations

INFLUENCE OF PARTNERS IN MYANMAR

Created spaces that enabled partners to provide temporary shelter, counselling and legal aid to GBV survivors

Advocated for 30% inclusion of women in peacebuilding structures

Social norm change: Elevated organisation’s status within community in order to engage with religious authority for gender equality

Engaged in government decisions to assign female police officers to handle GBV cases
Legal and policy changes increased participation and access to national dialogue and peace process negotiations
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 1  
Acronyms ................................................................................................................................. 2  
The GPS Window: More than a sum of its parts ........................................................................ 3  

1. Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 6  
   2. Overview of the global evidence on international support to women’s empowerment in contexts of transition from conflict ................................................................. 7  
   3. About the GPS window ........................................................................................................... 10  
      3.1 Gender politics in Myanmar ............................................................................................. 10  
      3.2 Key features the GPS window ......................................................................................... 12  
   4. What can we learn from the GPS window? .......................................................................... 14  
      4.1 The impact and relevance of the GPS window: ............................................................... 14  
      4.2 The effectiveness of the GPS window’s three-pronged approach .................................... 20  
   5. Recommendations: The future of the GPS window within PSF, and considerations for international support to gender, peace and security issues .................................... 21  
      5.1 Recommendations for the next phase of GPS window funding: .................................... 21  
      5.2 Considerations for the Gender, Peace and Security agenda ........................................... 22  

Endnotes ........................................................................................................................................ 24  
Bibliography ................................................................................................................................ 26  
Annex 1. Research Methodology ................................................................................................. 28  
   Tools ....................................................................................................................................... 28  
   Analytical approach ................................................................................................................ 29  
Annex 2. Interviews ...................................................................................................................... 30
Representatives from GPS implementing partners, researchers and PSF staff, Yangon, 2019
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# Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AWID</td>
<td>Association for Women in Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>FCAS</td>
<td>Fragile and conflict-affected settings</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender Based Violence</td>
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<td>GPS</td>
<td>Gender, Peace and Security</td>
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<td>IP</td>
<td>Implementation Partners</td>
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<td>IWD</td>
<td>International Women’s Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNU/KNLA</td>
<td>Karen National Union/ Karen National Liberation Army</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NMSP</td>
<td>New Mon State Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSPAW</td>
<td>National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women</td>
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<td>OD</td>
<td>Organisational Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>PSF</td>
<td>Paung Sie Facility</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCCPF</td>
<td>The Union Level Committee of CSOs Peace Forum</td>
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<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
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<td>UPC</td>
<td>Union Peace Conference</td>
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<td>UPDJC</td>
<td>Union Political Dialogue Joint Committee</td>
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<td>WPS</td>
<td>Women, Peace and Security</td>
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The GPS Window: More than the sum of its parts

Executive summary

The Gender Peace and Security window was established in 2016 within the Paung Sie Facility as a targeted funding mechanism to support sub-national organisations seeking to promote gender equality and women’s rights in Myanmar. The GPS window has applied a three-pronged approach, including:

- **Core funding** provided to the selected organisations, covering staff salaries, office rental, flexible transportation, child care support, office equipment and communications.
- **Organisational Development (OD)** and technical support, to enhance organisations’ ‘institutional strength’ to plan and engage more effectively in and towards the peace process.
- **Strategy development** aimed at helping partners define and develop their strategic orientation.

**Key findings of the GPS window**

- **The GPS approach of targeting women’s organisations** aligns with global evidence about the merits of investing directly in bottom-up empowerment and gender equality struggles. Sustained gains are secured through purposeful action over time by gender activists.

- **Core funding** to women’s groups reduces the dependency on project-based funding, enabling locally-driven agenda setting and long-term strategic planning. Office space and salaries further contribute to altering power imbalances in the community as they have become recognised interlocuters vis-à-vis government officials, religious and traditional leaders, other CSOs and international donors.

- **The integrated three-pronged approach is more than the sum of its parts** and takes account of the multi-dimensional challenges that grassroots women face. It has contributed to building partner’s internal organisational and strategic planning capabilities, as well as their self-confidence. It has also elevated their influence and visibility within their communities and beyond.

- **Focussing support on the sub-national and grassroots level** helps to distribute the reach of gender programming beyond the capital, reducing the risk of reinforcing vertical and horizontal inequalities based on class, ethnicity, religion, and geographic isolation.

- **Partners address a breadth of issues and activities, confirming that the overly siloed thematic approaches and predetermined agendas** about what matters at the sub-national level are misguided. Direct support to organisations facilitates locally-driven agendas that are relevant to their context and strategic priorities.

- **The GPS window has a low cost, high returns approach** to building up the mobilisation and strategic capabilities of women’s organisations to become change agents that shape and drive political and social outcomes—in this case, during a complex volatile transition process.
Impact of GPS implementing partners

The GPS window contributed to improving organisational capability, strategic planning, and elevating the influence and visibility of implementing partners, both within their communities and in the wider space of civil society mobilising for social change. With that, their capacity to advance both protection and participation goals of the GPS agenda was strengthened.

- **Strengthening organisational capacity and strategy** contributed to increased self-confidence and capacity for organisations to engage and influence decision-making spaces. It enabled long-term strategic planning and sustainability, agenda setting and locally driven problem-led actions, including acquiring new analytical skills and technical knowledge to support their work on GPS. Through this core support, becoming more established as organisations improved their networking capabilities, strategic coalitions and recognition in civil society, in communities and in their own households.

- **Increased voice and influence of GPS implementing partners** was evident in their work through peacebuilding activities, engaging with legal and policy change, engaging with government bodies and decision-makers, responding to GBV survivors in their communities, contributing to social norms change and increasing the visibility and status of implementing partners, which shifted their ability to influence.

What donors in Myanmar and globally can learn from the GPS window

The GPS window model puts the transformative punch back into GPS programming. The risk of ‘depoliticising’ the WPS and GPS agenda has been well-documented. The GPS window model, through its explicit targeting of gender-focused civil society, counters the prevailing trend of depolitised and technocratic approaches that do not engage with the political challenges of altering gender-based and other forms of inequality.

**The GPS window is a telling example of adaptive and flexible programming,** echoing recent lessons among OECD donors on ‘ways of working’ that are locally grounded, problem-driven, adaptive and politically smart. The experience confirms that a modality which empowers local actors to lead on ‘problem’ identification and developing context-relevant theories of change can result in strategic, effective modes of engagement across intended change processes. In this case, change agendas relate mostly to different protection and participation challenges associated with the gendered experience of conflict and long-term structural inequalities and injustices.

**Notably, ALL partner organisations found themselves addressing GBV,** providing shelter for victims of intimate partner and other forms of gender-based violence. This is not an accident; it happens elsewhere, too. This requires serious reflection from donors and speaks to a critical, unmet need for protection.
Recommendations for international actors

As the Women, Peace, and Security agenda has evolved, it is of considerable concern that there is reduced international funding for feminist and women’s groups, ignoring the evidence base on how gains in gender equality and women’s rights are achieved and sustained. The original spirit of the WPS agenda ensured that women be supported to participate in and influence all change processes addressing the gendered experience of conflict. This capacity for influence better serves the purpose of improving protection systems to prevent gender-based and other forms of violence. This requires that donors avoid working in siloed ways across WPS and other sectoral agendas.

- **Invest in targeted support for women’s organisations.** Sustained gains in gender equality and women’s empowerment are secured through bottom-up mobilisation and collective action by gender activists.

- **Provide core funding** to support enabling conditions for collective and individual voice and agency. Core funding reduces the dependency of women’s organisations on project-specific activities and funding. It contributes to their capacity to act as autonomous change agents and engage strategically in locally-defined ‘problem-definition’ agenda setting and strategic planning.

- **Focus support on the sub-national and grassroots level** better distributes the transformative reach of gender programming beyond the capital, ensuring that other inequalities based on class, ethnicity, religion, and geographic isolation are not reinforced—and that inequalities between and within national women’s organisations, grassroots activists and mobilisation efforts are not exacerbated.

- **Invest in documenting change and learning.** Embedded learning serves adaptive and flexible programming because it enables strategy re-orientation. It also serves a wider knowledge production purpose, beyond Myanmar both on pathways of women’s empowerment in these conflict-affected settings and on how donors should change their ‘ways of working’ and organisational constraints to better facilitate locally driven change processes.

- **Invest in learning from ‘gendered’ local knowledge.** The knowledge of frontline women and gender activists is valuable in unveiling often invisible power dynamics. This generates insights into the political economy of sub-national conflict and what opportunity structures are unfolding to negotiate change, not only regarding gender equality and women’s rights, but also across other inclusion, peacebuilding and social cohesion agendas.
1. Introduction

The Paung Sie Facility, formerly known as the Peace Support Fund (PSF), was established in 2014 as a flexible, responsive and demand-driven fund aimed at increasing the likelihood of sustainable peace in Myanmar. In November 2016, it started a Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) window with the objective of supporting sub-national civil society organisations to enhance their capacity for supporting the substantive participation of women and gender inclusion in peacebuilding. The window was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA). In two years, the window supported 18 sub-national civil society organisations across 10 states and regions.

This Learning Brief has the following objectives:

- To reflect on the experience of the GPS window as a modality to support emerging civil society organisations at the sub-national level to engage effectively on the GPS agenda and issues.
- To inform the PSF’s Phase III decisions regarding funding to partners from the GPS window, funding emerging organisations and the funding modality used.

Key research questions

The Learning Brief focuses on the following overarching questions:

- In terms of the relevance and impact of the GPS window, what did the GPS funding mechanism enable CSOs to achieve?
- What has been the effectiveness of the three-pronged approach of the GPS window (core support, organisational development and strategy development)?
- What can we learn from the GPS window to strengthen future efforts in Myanmar and globally, and what recommendations follow from this experience for the next phase of GPS funding?

Structure

The Learning Brief first situates the GPS window against wider global evidence on supporting women’s empowerment and gender equality in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Second, it describes the key features of the GPS window. Third, it reviews the experience of the GPS window and provides recommendations for next phase of the GPS and the PSF. Fourth, it offers wider reflections inspired by the GPS window, for the international community to support gender programming in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Box 1. GPS window: What you need to know before reading this Learning Brief

The GPS window was established in November 2016 within the PSF as a targeted funding mechanism for emerging, sub-national organisations that sought to advance the gender, peace and security agenda in Myanmar. During the implementation phase, between June 2017 and October 2018, the GPS window supported 18 organisations. During Round 1, eleven IPs received funding for 17 months (June 2017 to October 2018); during Round 2, seven IPs received funding for 13 months (October 2017 to October 2018).

The GPS Window applied a three-pronged approach that included the following components:

Core funding provided to the selected organisations, covered staff salaries, office rental, transportation, child care support, office equipment and communications.

Organisational Development (OD) and technical support, to enhance organisations’ ‘institutional strength’ to plan and engage more effectively in and towards the peace process.

Strategy development support, aimed at helping partners define and develop their strategic orientation.
2. Overview of the global evidence on international support to women’s empowerment in contexts of transition from conflict

Three bodies of knowledge are relevant for assessing the GPS window. In turn, the experience of the GPS window provides relevant learning for gender programming in transition settings.

Women’s political empowerment

A first body of global evidence on how advances in women’s empowerment and in gender equality take place over time identifies some key recurrent themes and findings.²

- Enduring gains rely on sustained feminist mobilisation and collective action contesting gender-based inequalities, often in the form of women’s movements mobilising to achieve women’s rights.
- Change takes the form of concrete institutional, legal and political reforms. This is the result of social and political mobilisation, women’s economic empowerment and long-term social norms transformation.
- In turn, the opportunities gained through these changes contribute to diminishing gender-based inequalities, increasing the chances of women’s access to decision-making roles. Measures aimed at compensating for women’s historical exclusion, such as gender quotas, are important.
- There is a strong correlation between having more women in political and public life, and advances in gender-friendly policies and legal change.
- At the same time, the presence of women in public office alone is insufficient. Investments in building capabilities, for instance, through education, health, economic empowerment, alleviating women’s unpaid work, and violence and harassment are crucial for altering structural gender-based barriers.
- As with all empowerment and rights agendas, the sustainability of gains can never be taken for granted, given the patriarchy’s resilience.

Women’s empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected settings

The global evidence finds that that conflict and fragility are experienced in highly gendered ways. This is now recognised in policy commitments, notably through the development of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, as reflected in UNSCR 1325 (from 2000) and other follow-up Security Council Resolutions.³

Conflict increases women’s exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, widens the gender gap in access to education, increases reproductive health problems, and it undermines what are often already limited opportunities for access to decision-making roles and low capabilities for voice and agency of women. At the same time, conflict and transition processes can disrupt gender roles and create opportunities for contestation and change in gender relations. There is a correlation between women’s participation in peacebuilding and transition politics, the sustainability over time of peace agreements, and the stabilisation of inclusive political bargains and enduring peace.⁴
As the WPS agenda has evolved, it has centred on two key issues. First, emphasis has been placed on securing women’s participation, presence and influence in transitions from conflict and any aspect of peacebuilding processes to ensure they take part in defining new political outcomes. Second, it focuses on addressing the protection of women and girls, including in ways that takes account of vulnerabilities to violence exacerbated by conflict and fragility (for instance, conflict-related sexual violence) and other gendered survival and well-being challenges in post-conflict recovery processes.

Over time the protection focus has attracted more donor support, mainly because violence against women is a serious national and international crime, unlike failures to ensure women’s participation across different peacebuilding and transition processes. A focus on women as victims ignores the fact that women need meaningful influence over conflict resolution and response mechanisms as agents of change to deliver the transformative punch expected of international support efforts. Gender-based vulnerabilities to violence and fragility undermine voice and agency; in turn, women’s meaningful participation in shaping protection measures is likely to result in more relevant and effective reform efforts. There is a need to better integrate the participation and protection components of the WPS/GPS agenda. They are commonly siloed.

In practice, transitions from conflict or authoritarian rule are rarely linear. Reform efforts do not lead to seamless cumulative processes of sequential change from peacebuilding, through statebuilding, to the establishment of socially cohesive and inclusive polities. Backlash and reversals are constant risks given the resilience of patriarchy. Gender-based vulnerabilities to different forms of GBV are sustained as political economies shift in relation to organised crime, drugs and people trafficking and other aspects of conflict-related violent social change. Such forms of social change resulting from uneven peacebuilding and statebuilding are likely to vary significantly at sub-national level, as is the case in Myanmar. Thus, attentiveness to sub-national variation and context-specificity remains key to any initiative to advance women’s empowerment or gender equality.
International support to women’s empowerment and gender equality in conflict-affected settings, and the evidence on ‘ways of working’

A third body of literature focuses on donors’ ability to consider the political economy of the context, to target locally-defined and locally-driven change processes, to adapt to changing conditions and to work in politically informed ways. Alongside this, there is a growing body of work that reflects on what this means for programming that focuses on gender equality and women’s empowerment agendas, and how such approaches benefit from integrating gender analysis to better understand the specifics of local politics that shape development, governance and opportunities for progressive change.

Some emerging lessons from these discussions on ‘ways of working’ that are relevant to the study of the GPS window include the following:

• Long-term core funding to diverse women’s organisations and movements contributes to building up collective voice and agency, and capacity for influence.

• Targeting groups and organisations enables them to work on locally defined problems and issues, rather than pre-set agendas that mirror donor agendas. This enables sustained activism across different areas of engagement that organisations choose to focus on, and more time to spend on strategy development and networking.

• Organisational support should also include investment in building political skills (networking) as well as technical knowledge about relevant political and conflict-related vulnerabilities, and capability gaps.

• Direct support to organisations can also help cushion them from the demands of over-bureaucratised donor reporting, and to translate positive stories of change into results-based narratives that meet the requirements of donors. Importantly, support should target grass-roots and sub-national hard-to-reach organisations.

• International actors are more effective when they have both deep knowledge of political realities of contexts and are organisationally equipped to work in politically agile, adaptive and strategic ways. This includes being able to learn from local knowledge, such as women’s organisations. Women’s organisations are best equipped to specify plausible theories of change that address relevant ‘problems’ and plans of action in fast-changing contexts. They can better identify opportunities for strategic alliances, networks and contestation possibilities. Adaptation and flexibility are especially important in fragile and conflict affected contexts (FCAS) given the fluidity and volatility of change processes.

• International support is also effective when donors or (I)NGOs use their position in strategic ways to support women’s groups and gender activists to navigate political and social norms.

• Finally, the dilemma of whether to focus on ‘gender-mainstreaming’ or invest in targeted gender programming continues to be seen as an either-or choice. The evidence signals the merits of investing in both gender-targeted programming and meaningful gender-mainstreaming across all sectors and thematic issues.
3. About the GPS window

3.1 Gender politics in Myanmar

Myanmar is undergoing a complex transition process towards a market economy, from military to civilian-led government, with a national peace process underway that addresses multiple sub-national armed conflicts and violence.

**Gender in national law, domestic policy framework and international norms**

At the domestic level there are nascent policy developments that represent opportunities for engagement on gender equality and women’s rights. This includes, since 2013, a ten-year National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) based on the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). NSPAW’s 12 priority areas mirror those in the BPfA, with the exception of the ‘women and conflict’ cluster, which was labelled as ‘women in emergencies’ to be contextually appropriate to Myanmar. At the 60th CSW (2016), Myanmar committed to implementing the BPfA through NSPAW (AGIPP, 2017). In the absence of a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, NSPAW is the most strategic policy platform for engagement by gender activists. There is also regular CEDAW reporting (last completed in 2016) in place, and an extraordinary reporting process on northern Rakhine. Finally, a Joint Communiqué signed in 2018 by the United Nations and the Government of Myanmar recognises the widespread nature of conflict-related sexual violence and commits to developing prevention and response measures.

At the same time, new progressive legislation has been slow to be approved. A comprehensive Law on Protection and Prevention of Violence against Women (PoVAW) has yet to be approved that includes provisions criminalising marital rape. Discriminatory legislation remains on the books, including the Four Race and Religion Protection Laws of 2015 (limiting the right to choose one’s religion and spouse) and the Population Control Healthcare Law which enforces reproductive health control measures. Policy and legislation do not yet fully support women’s participation or the rehabilitation of women who have experienced violence in conflict, or as a result of conflict.

As regards international norms, Myanmar is a signatory to the following on gender equality and women’s rights:

- Myanmar is a state party to CEDAW with reservations to Article 29, the Optional Protocol; the General Recommendations 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations (GR 30), the General Recommendation (GR 35) on GBV; and is updating General Recommendation 19 (GR 19).
- Myanmar is a state party to UNSCR 1325 since 2000 and to subsequent WPS UNSCRs.
- Myanmar agrees to a joint statement on promoting women, peace and security in ASEAN.
Low participation of women in decision-making roles

In the past three Union Peace Conferences (UPCs), more women participated in the peace process. In the first UPC in 2016, 7% of the delegates were women; in the second and third UPC in 2017 and 2018 this figure rose to 15% and 17% respectively. The number of women observers has increased from 22% to 32% among political party representatives, and from 17% to 19% among women’s representation in EAOs. Efforts to increase women’s representation is still a slow process, even in the formal peace process. Among the 5 thematic working groups, only the social sector working group has fulfilled its obligation of a 30% threshold. Women are more likely to have a role as facilitators and participate more fully in separate CSO fora than in leadership roles within the existing mechanisms of the peace process.

Overall, women’s participation in public life is low. They make up 14.5% of parliamentary seats at the Union-level and 9.7% of seats in regional legislatures. Three out of 14 States and Regional parliaments have no elected women legislators. At the subnational level 45 (or 0.25%) of 16,785 local level administrators were women in 2012. The Asian Foundation Survey in 2014 found that most Myanmar citizens perceived political leadership to be better suited to men than women. This male-leadership preference is a key barrier for women’s participation in politics. Women continue to face formidable barriers for meaningful participation in Myanmar’s transition process. Discriminatory social norms remain mostly unchanged. Patriarchy is prevalent in all areas of public and private life. Gender-based violence (GBV) is widespread and the risk of backlash for women deviating from prevailing social norms on gender is high, and intimate partner violence (IPV) is especially prevalent. Gender-based exclusion is exacerbated by diverse subnational and national forms of intersecting inequalities, in terms of economic inequalities and ethnicity-based patterns of exclusion.

Current trends in women’s mobilisation

Simultaneously, there is a growing presence of gender activists and women’s organisations in Myanmar. Women’s groups and gender focused organisations have been active since at least the 1990s in representing diverse approaches to women’s rights, gender equality and strategic views on how and when to engage in Myanmar’s transition politics. New organisations are forming, and border-based ethnic minority women’s organisations, which originally emerged while exiled, are returning to the country. Women’s CSOs are working on women’s rights and gender equality at different scales and through diverse strategic approaches. At the sub-national, the alignment of agendas, priorities and interests vary depending on their affiliation to national women’s networks, their political stance and the ethnic groups to which they belong. Across the board they are contributing to raising awareness on gender and women’s rights as relevant to all aspects of social, political and private life. However, access to funding and resources for collective action among women’s organisations remains a major challenge. This is more acutely felt by sub-national level organisations who rely on funding for small projects that trickle down from urban based INGOs and national NGOs, and where they have limited say in agenda-setting. This limits their capacity to drive locally-grounded pathways for mobilisation and change. Community based organisations’ access to funding is further limited by weak financial systems and limited organisational capabilities.

International actors in Myanmar face their own challenges in supporting grass-roots organisations including some constraints arising from their conventional funding modalities that limit their ability to be responsive to subnational needs, particularly for organisations in the conflict-affected areas. These include difficulties of working in hard-to-reach areas; acquiring sufficient understanding of the complexities of sub-national dynamics of conflict, peacebuilding and reform processes and how this affects gender-based discrimination and patterns of intersecting inequalities. Finally, some international organisations cannot directly fund unregistered organisations.
3.2 Key features the GPS window

The GPS window was established in 2016 within the PSF as a targeted funding mechanism for sub-national organisations in Myanmar. The window sought to counter the global trend towards low levels of funding to small women’s organisations. Between June 2017 and October 2018, it funded 18 Myanmar organisations, eleven of these over a period of 17 months, and seven over a period of 13 months. The GPS window adopted a three-pronged approach from the start.

**Underlying theory of change**

The GPS window is based on the understanding that building up the organisational capabilities of organic, grassroots organisations is valuable because they are best equipped to represent marginalised women. They understand their needs and know how to navigate their political, institutional and socio-normative context. The window recognises that women’s organisations are constrained in their capacity to deploy their full mobilisation potential due to entrenched structural inequalities and patterns of exclusion, as well as financial constraints and organisational capability gaps. This undermines their ability for long-term planning and strategic engagement with political change processes currently underway in Myanmar.

From this (GPS window Log frame) is derived the following:

- That ‘core institutional financial support enables groups to step back from their day-to-day activities, reflect on the strategies needed and start to develop their organisations accordingly to be able to deliver and evolve in a highly dynamic environment.’
- That ‘direct financial support is insufficient’ (…) but must go hand in hand with technical organisational development support’ in order to enable ‘…. strategic organising, coalition building, and advocacy of women’s organisations for their GPS interventions.’

Thus, the three-pronged approach seeks to ‘…enable civil society and women to increase the effectiveness of their engagement with each other and with peace process leaders, decision-makers, structures, processes, and agreements’ [enabling organisations]) ‘to engage more effectively in and towards formal processes and adapt their strategies to a rapidly evolving peace process.’

**Box 2: The three-pronged approach of the GPS window: key features**

1. **Core funding** (direct financial assistance), covering staff salaries, office rental, flexible transportation, office equipment and communications. This has further allowed for a budget line for childcare.

2. **Organisational Development (OD) and technical support**, aimed at enhancing organisational capabilities to plan and engage more effectively with the peace process. OD activities included: organisational capacity assessment, supporting the development of OD plans, providing OD and technical support to partners through several roving OD experts, convening joint partner meetings to enable peer exchange.

3. **Strategy development support**, supporting partners define and develop their strategic orientation, and to more purposefully engage with locally relevant opportunity structures for change. This has involved working with IPs to develop organisation specific theories of change in keeping with the context specific conditions at the sub-national level, and their own capabilities and skills.

A ‘Gender, Peace, and Security’ rather than ‘Women, Peace and Security’ framing was adopted to facilitate working with men and boys, and to account for a wider understanding of the gendered experience of conflict. In practice, GPS window partners have developed their activities in response to wider gender and other issues and context-specific needs. The flexibility enabled by core-funding allowed organisations to work beyond peacebuilding, and across the artificial ‘participation’ and ‘protection’ silos of the WPS agenda.
Funding

The GPS window pilot was supported by DFID, DFAT and SIDA, as core funders of PSF, and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA).

As the GPS window reached the end of its pilot phase, there was a decision to integrate it into the PSF as part of the facility’s third phase of operations, which commenced in January 2019. As the PSF moves into Phase III, the next iteration of the GPS window will be integrated into broader prioritisation of gender-dedicated programming. PSF will continue to fund nine of the original 18 organisations, and a new application process will be carried out in the second half of 2019. In keeping with PSF’s thematic consolidation, the partners from the GPS window that transition into Phase III will focus on the implementation of their GPS strategies and contributing to social cohesion outcomes. However, organisations that currently focus more explicitly on the formal peace process are being introduced to other donors and funding mechanisms.

The three criteria that informed which organisations remained IPs were: (1) a thematic focus that privileges social cohesion and broader peacebuilding activities (but not a focus on the formal peace process); (2) criteria which reward progress on organisational capabilities, while also ensuring that IPs with less access to funding are retained; (3) levels of systems compliance in the initial GPS window phase.

Three concerns have been expressed in relation to this transition process and moving to a soft-earmarking model:

- As the PSF made explicit its commitment to mainstreaming gender and social inclusion across all its programmes, there was a concern voiced by IPs and donors that the GPS window may lose its distinctive focus on women’s organisations and gender issues, and that over time its funding will diminish. In contrast to the evidence base on the merits of targeted funding, any move towards diluting the targeted approach would weaken the transformative potential of PSF support to women’s empowerment and gender equality.

- There is a concern that other donors and funding mechanisms will not support core funding or the granular organisational and strategic support that characterised the GPS window.

- Many of the IPs work on a range of issues (and in most cases not exclusively on peacebuilding). The reduction in the number of IPs as the PSF moves into the next phase of its work appears to have created confusion on how criteria were being applied in assessing which organisations focus on social cohesion versus peacebuilding. An important clarification has been that as the PSF has moved its focus to social cohesion, the intention of the criteria has been to continue working with GPS partners that focus on local problems rather than the formal peace process.

In practice, achieving sustainable peace and social cohesion are co-constitutive and interconnected with peace processes. How donors label the different activities within the complex medley of peacebuilding and social cohesion may more accurately reflect the donor’s efforts to agree on their division of labour and resource allocation priorities across different thematic criteria. This risks reinforcing donor-driven thematic silos, rather than a strategic approach to setting locally-defined agendas.

Donor strategy and coordination challenges aside, as the PSF moves into Phase III, lessons learned from the GPS window will be important to inform the current organisational transition process, and how PSF should continue to work with organisations that focus on gender issues.
4. What can we learn from the GPS window?

4.1 The impact and relevance of the GPS window: Informants highlighted several areas where the GPS window strengthened their capacity and opportunity for agency. It is significant that all IPs existed previously. The GPS window, while also supporting in many cases nascent groups, focused on organic and locally grounded organisations. The combined effect of the window’s three-pronged approach contributed to a number of changes within the IPs, in their relationship with stakeholders and their capacity for influence. Overall, the window contributed to addressing organisational capability and strategic planning gaps, and, crucially, to elevating their influence and visibility within their communities and in the wider space of CSO politics—and with that, their capacity to advance both protection and participation goals of the GPS agenda.

Impact on internal capabilities of partner organisations.

- **Enhanced self-confidence of organisations and their members**, contributing to their capacity for voice and agency at the individual and collective level. Both IPs that recently relocated to Myanmar from border areas, and other nascent or grassroots women’s organisations, possess an entrenched belief that their work is insignificant. The impact of core funding and salaried work altered their volunteer status.

- **Improved capacity for voice of IPs** is connected with acquiring office space and salaries. The physical presence of office space has raised the visibility and recognition of IPs in their community, and with it, their status and authority. Office space has provided meeting venues for IPs to host government officials, ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), other CSOs and INGOs. It has altered their bargaining power, contributing to their standing as valid interlocutors on both public matters and family life.

- **Capacity for long-term strategic-planning, agenda setting and locally driven problem identification** has improved. As IPs are released from the pressures of constant fundraising, they can map out long-term goals and theories of change, and engage in short-term tactical opportunities to affect change. This enhanced capacity for problem identification and agenda setting is strengthened by strategy development support of the GPS window. IPs demonstrated an improved ability to take up cases and issues in line with their organisation’s goals, reflected in their GPS strategic planning sessions. This was described as ‘empowering.’ Previously, activities were defined by their national network’s secretariat or external collaborating partners and funders. One IP member stated, “We can now work on the issues of political urgency that are arising specifically in our state – trafficking of women and girls, drugs, cash crops, hydro-power plants...” This is made possible with the three-pronged support, “...if we were working as an implementation partner for some INGOs’/IOs’ work plan [...], we would be constrained by their agenda and plan of action.”

- **The GPS window enabled them to acquire analytical skills and thematic knowledge regarding the GPS agenda.** Some IPs highlighted that the window enhanced their understanding of the wider GPS agenda, and linkages between protection and participation objectives. For instance, this has informed their work on the ground to identify intimate partner violence (IPV) as part of a more complex continuum of conflict-related violence and adapt their activities accordingly. Relatedly, exposure during GPS window strategy development to analytical tools such as conflict and power analysis enabled IPs to identify stakeholders whose buy-in is necessary for progress on priority issues. This included purposeful strategising on how to engage with religious authorities and institutions, traditional authorities and other community-based gatekeepers of social norms.
• **Enhanced organisational capacities of IPs** reportedly improved because of OD support and core funding. For the network organisations (five of the IPs), working as organised networks helped IPs overcome certain individual capability gaps. They all signal improved financial, organisational and human resources systems owing to the window’s OD support.

• **IPs were able to overcome challenges of overreliance on volunteer contributions** in terms of time and human resources. Core funding and salaries paid to IP members meant they are able to move some volunteers into paid staff. This contributed to building the reliability of services, such as providing shelter and protection for GBV survivors.

• **Improved networking capabilities and strategic coalitions** resulted from the combined effect of core funding, flexible transport and office space. This enabled travel and access to events and networking opportunities at national and state levels.
  - The possibility of travel enabled IPs to attend the UPC in 2018, so that 21% of women attending the UPC came from GPS window IPs.34
  - IPs reported that travel funds and sustained resourcing helped them work more effectively with women administrators at the village tract level and with members of state parliaments. This enabled stronger connections with and between women in governance structures and gender activists, and helped information sharing between them.
  - Office space increased opportunities to host meetings with stakeholders and build more regular interactions and dialogue – including government officials, other CSOs, and local community authorities.

• The learning events organised by the GPS window enabled peer exchange and information sharing among IPs, facilitating new linkages, alliances and networks. One IP reported, “Although we were from the same state, we rarely worked together. Our relationship strengthened once we met in Yangon for learning events. We will be inviting one IP from our state to be the resource person in our organisation’s workshop.”

• And finally, greater visibility has given IPs **new access to international actors** and wider networks. This includes through more opportunities to travel to Yangon. In addition, connections made at GPS window learning events have resulted in donors and INGOs visiting IPs in their home territory.

IPs signal that they are **better equipped to act strategically regarding their future organisational sustainability** as a result of the space afforded by core funding and OD support. All IPs are planning for life after the GPS core funding ends. Some IPs have started social enterprises; others are raising funds for livelihood projects. The IPs’ ability to plan for and act strategically on sustainability was strengthened by the OD and GPS planning process.

“We can work on the issues of political urgency that are arising specifically in Kachin state – trafficking of women and girls, drugs, cash crops, hydro-power plants […] if we were working as an implementation partner for some INGOs’ and IOs’ work plan in the Kachin areas, we would be constraint by their agenda and pre-determined plan of action.”

*Member of a Kachin women’s organisation*
Impact on partners’ capacity for voice and influence in Myanmar

The window has contributed to enhancing IPs’ voice and influence across several domains:

- **Peacebuilding**: Some IPs have been involved in peacebuilding activities and signal that the window provided them with greater lobbying and influence capacity in various peace committees. This included advocating for a 30% inclusion of women in the different levels of peacebuilding structures, and to push for gender sensitive language in outcome documents. For instance, the improved networking capabilities resulting from GPS support enabled them to secure a 50% gender quota in the CSO Coordination Committee in northern Shan State. Examples include securing 30% gender quotas in most state level CSO Forums for Peace; 30% of women present in some of the working committees for National Dialogue. In Kachin and Shan states, 30% gender quotas were secured for the decision-making bodies of the CSO forums that feed into the Union-level CSO Forum process. In Kayin state, one IP lobbied the KNU/KNLA Peace Council to increase women’s participation at the third UPC, resulting in three women from KNU/KNLA participating as delegates; IPs are working to secure a 30% gender quota in other community and state level forums critical for social cohesion, such as cultural committees, community development programmes, and the transparency and accountability steering committees that are developing at the state level.

- **Legal or policy change**: IPs insist that core funding has contributed to strengthening their visibility and bargaining power, as well as their capacity to advocate for policy change at the sub-national and national levels. The focus has been mostly on advancing increased participation, through objectives like securing quotas and access to national dialogue and negotiating spaces in the peace process, at different sub-national levels.

IPs underline that core-funding and flexible transport budgets have contributed to enabling these achievements, allowing IP members to travel and focus on agenda setting and strategic engagement.

“During the Preparatory Meeting for the CSO Forum for Peace in Kachin, an implementation partner from a male-led organisation fully supported the women’s organisation’s proposal of having a clause in the terms of reference for a guaranteed 30% minimum participation of women in the decision-making body of the Kachin CSO forum. This support demonstrated how gender sensitive some male-led groups have become and the GPS partners’ solidarity action for the gender agenda was apparent.”

KII respondent from male-led IP
• **Enhanced opportunities for meaningful engagement and influence in decision making, including government bodies** has been signalled by IPs as a relevant impact of the window. For instance, greater engagement with the township level Police Station in Kalay Myo, Sagaing, led to female police officers being assigned to handle GBV cases. In Kachin State, one IP engaged more effectively with state level government bodies and other CSOs to demand greater scrutiny and accountability of power holders on the social and environmental impacts of cash-crop plantations. This is important to advancing gender equality in post-conflict recovery processes.

• **All IPs have become frontline responders to GBV cases in their communities (even when not originally planned).** Working on GBV issues related to the conflict, and other drivers of violence (for instance, human trafficking, drug trafficking, social norms) has been core work for many of the IPs. The majority of IPs were already working on GBV issues and are well placed to deploy their understanding of gender roles and social norms, and the political economy of conflict related GBV to develop locally relevant and politically smart approaches. However, the GPS window improved their ability to navigate issues of backlash, customary norms and religious leaders. They underlined that the space for manoeuvre afforded by core funding has enabled IPs to focus their attention on creative, context-specific responses to GBV. Having office space, it is reported, enabled them to provide temporary shelter, counselling, legal aid, information on referral pathways, and to receive the cases while survivors are transferred to safehouses. It also provides public recognition of the extensiveness of GBV, an important gain in itself. And significantly, some IPs underlined the importance of better situating their GBV response capabilities within the wider GPS protection agenda making visible the gravity of the issue, and the ongoing risks and insecurity for women and IPs working in this space.

• **Increased visibility, acceptance and bargaining power among civil society, community and among national level decision-makers:** Gaining office space and signage raised the IP’s profile and the prestige in relation to other CSOs and the wider community, strengthening their bargaining power, an entitlement to take part as active players in community development and peacebuilding processes. Embedded in Myanmar’s social norms is a belief that women’s groups and mobilisation for women’s rights should be free of charge and volunteer work. One partner mentioned... “people see women’s organisations’ work as Paraheetha for other women, charitable work in Burmese. This type of work is largely associated with women’s role in society and the general assumption is charitable work should not be financially compensated. It is a natural duty of women nonetheless to be the carers and givers of society.”

• **Social norm change** takes place at multiple levels. Some IPs worked with social norm gatekeepers, notably Buddhist monks and Christian priests, to discuss beliefs about gender roles and relations. The cover provided by the window, some IPs noted, by elevating their status and standing, gives them space and some de facto protection to do so in a context where people, especially women, rarely challenge religious authority, given the weight of hierarchy and religious tradition. Faith leaders and community members noted that the engagement of GPS window IPs in their community contributed to opening up the discussion on contentious social norms and the role they have in upholding them, that would otherwise not have taken place. This has been a base for ongoing engagement. At the household level, it was reported that core funding covering staff salaries altered gender relations and decision-making voice for activists within the family.
**The increased visibility and status of IPs contributed to impact on reshaping community relations and raising awareness of gender issues.** Community members underlined that the establishment of a gender equality organisation in their neighbourhood had an impact on awareness about GBV, and the belief that reporting cases could inhibit the escalation of violence by perpetrators. Neighbours underlined that in cases of domestic and intimate partner violence, the neighbours claimed increased credibility in the message that perpetrators of violence would be reported. In their view, the mere existence of a women’s organisation was potentially deterring the escalation of violence by perpetrators.

**Relevance of the GPS window**

The capacity of the GPS window to support locally driven agenda setting and problem solving by IPs across a range of GPS agenda issues is intrinsic to the three-pronged approach. By enabling IPs to set their own agendas, the GPS window operated in ways that maximise relevance to context. Furthermore, the window has been able to work with different types of sub-national IPs, which vary in terms of experience and thematic expertise; thus, adapting to varying levels of capabilities and strengths.

Several IPs already have political skills, are well-versed in navigating the complexities of gender and other inequalities, and can interact strategically with the range of formal, informal and customary institutions and rules that characterise de facto power relations and decision-making at national and sub-national levels. For these IPs, the window created better conditions to continue their work on different GPS agenda and women’s empowerment issues. As elsewhere where gender activism has been effective, they deployed their tactical skills to exercise influence in ways that take account of the wider context of limited political and civil space and widespread gender-discrimination. For instance, arguments used to persuade male counterparts in other CSOs on the merits of quotas have been adapted as their own strategic interests. EAOs were persuaded that integrating quotas and being gender-sensitive is politically smart and enhances their political capital. Different approaches are used with different interlocutors, like lobbying influential village monks to support and endorsing women’s candidates (or candidates who might be an ally to gender equality activists).
More nascent or less experienced IPs benefited from tools they gained from the GPS strategic planning process, such as power, SWOT and PEST analyses, advocacy workshop, resulting in more strategic and self-aware planning and agenda setting, including making the most of their existing capabilities and knowledge. In doing these exercises, the need to work with monks in the village and pastors in the local churches became vividly apparent. One IP member noted: “as a result of Learning Events’ skills building activities and the GPS strategy development sessions, we know how best to strategically leverage different power sources and connections we already have.” This included more explicitly considering how they can work in politically smart ways. For instance, they could more purposefully use their work in basic needs and service delivery to engage in mobilisation and activism on different gender and peacebuilding issues. They could also engage in grassroots level consultation and participation.

Thus, some IPs already work in politically sophisticated ways and they benefitted from the enabling conditions created by the GPS window support. Other IPs benefitted more directly from the capabilities and technical skills supported by the window. The key point is that the GPS window has been able to adapt to these different capabilities, making its work more relevant to context.

Significantly, the relevance of the work of the GPS window is defined by its capacity to adapt to context. In this respect its capacity for adaptive and flexible engagement with IPs should be noted:

- The window allows the submission of funding proposals and reports in Burmese, so IPs can work in the language they are comfortable in. This way, they can express themselves clearly and reduce the cost of English translation.

- Prior to launching the GPS window, the GPS window team visited the States and Regions to introduce to CSOs the window’s arrival and focus, with the view of reaching sub-national CSOs that have limited access to internet.

- IPs noted the GPS window was skilful in the selection of roving OD and GPS advisers who have in-depth knowledge and expertise on women’s organisations’ situations, OD and GPS subject matter. Thus, the window was reportedly relevant to the local needs of the IPs.
4.2 The effectiveness of the GPS window’s three-pronged approach

It is the combined effect of the three prongs in the GPS window approach (core support, OD, strategy development) that amplifies the window’s effectiveness.

Core Funding

A key feature of the window has been its focus on supporting sub-national groups that face multiple barriers to funding because they are far from access to national networks and strategic activities. In all cases, core funding was described as transforming their capacity to engage strategically across the range of issues on which they work. All of the IPs were first-time recipients of core funding. In addition to salaries, the other components of core funding, notably office rental, flexible transportation budgets, office equipment and communications, made a difference at the individual and group level to enable sustained activism. Notably, childcare allowed mothers to take part in social mobilisation activities.

Most IPs in the GPS window benefitted from the responsive travel financial support, enabling some to participate in and have influence in Union Peace Conferences, other meetings and network activities on short notice.

Gender, Peace and Strategy Development

The strategy development support added value to the capabilities of IPs in two ways. Firstly, GPS IPs were able to devote time and resources to reflecting on their organisation’s purpose and strategic direction. Prior to this, participation in different activities was more ad hoc and often lacked a long-term view, analysis of priorities or a clear theory of change. Second, the GPS strategy development enabled a sharper focus on setting objectives and prioritisation of activities in line with their goals and capabilities. Strategic plans have become a basis of discussion with other potential donors, and most IPs underlined that the plan enhanced their fund-raising potential. In fact, fifteen IPs have already used their GPS strategy to diversify funding sources.

“...Inevitably if we want to carry on as a CSO, we will have to learn to do better in our financial reporting. That requirement will never go away [...] all funders will require that as part of accountability. Now, we have got the training from the GPS window experience.”

FGD with Finance Officers

More than half of the organisations planned to share their draft GPS strategies with their communities both to communicate their work and vision, as well as give communities a chance to add or object to parts of the plans. The aim is to gain legitimacy and visibility in their respective communities, to practice inclusion for community members to contribute to the IP’s strategic direction, and to be transparent.

Organisational Development

Prior to the window’s OD support, organisations operated in an informal, sometimes family-based style, with unclear division of tasks and responsibilities. OD reportedly helped establish HR and administrative policies and procedures that defined roles, responsibilities and mechanisms of accountability. Moreover, these are perceived as helpful in challenging hierarchical cultures embedded in civil society practiced more broadly in Myanmar.

Financial management system support was identified as necessary to help IPs improve their financial organisational capacity. Demonstrating financial capacity and management skills enhanced their eligibility for other funding opportunities. While the financial reporting system with the window was considered as challenging and onerous, IPs signalled the value of learning how to report on core funding and regular cash transfers, in contrast to activity-based budgets. This was especially important for smaller IPs who only had experience with small amounts of activity-based funding.
5. Recommendations: The future of the GPS window within PSF, and considerations for international support to gender, peace and security issues

The GPS window is a strong example of impactful support to subnational level women’s and gender equality groups in Myanmar. It represents a low cost, high returns approach to building up mobilisation and strategic capabilities of women’s organisations to become change agents in shaping and driving political and social outcomes, in this case, in a complex and volatile transition process.

5.1 Recommendations for the next phase of GPS window funding:

- **Continue investment in the GPS window.** Findings from the Learning Brief support the continuation of the window with the same number of IPs or scaling up the window (subject to an increase in human resources allocated) and its ‘three-pronged’ approach, even as it is subsumed within PSF’s Phase III. To build on the gains made during the pilot, it is recommended that three years of core funding are provided to organisations. This proposed timeframe aligns with the timeframe of the strategic plan life cycle of GPS window partners.

- **Keep a targeted approach on women and gender issues as a key feature of the GPS window.** There is a perceived risk that the GPS focus will be diluted as the window is integrated into the PSF. Donors should secure a commitment by PSF to the targeted approach of the GPS window, including conditionality on funding to ensure that long-term core support to the window is ring-fenced. As the PSF strengthens gender mainstreaming across its other work, it should not diminish support to the GPS window’s funding, in keeping with the current commitment in PSF. This combined approach is a strength of PSF.

- **Deepen the window’s focus on learning.** Embedded learning, including supporting GPS organisations with strategy and theory of change development should be integrated in the current MEL strategy. This has a wider knowledge production purpose beyond Myanmar, both on pathways of women’s empowerment in these settings and on ways of working by international actors that facilitate change through investing in locally driven change processes.

- **Invest in the necessary human resources to address the capacity needs.** This is comparatively low cost and likely to continue to yield high returns.

- **Showcase the GPS window globally.** The GPS window is an example of international support investing in locally led, adaptive and politically informed approaches to the GPS agenda. This requires investing in research to document how the window has operated to capture the diversity of subnational experiences and increased capabilities among women’s organisations from receiving this kind of support.

- **Continue long-term core funding.** This offers dividends beyond the sum of its activities. Core funding elevates the legitimacy of organisations, increases their bargaining power vis-à-vis gatekeepers, challenges norms, elevates women as change agents in their communities, promotes the gendered experience of conflict. Long-term core funding to women’s organisations should remain a distinctive feature of funding to these organisations going forward.
5.2 Considerations for the Gender, Peace and Security agenda

As the GPS agenda has evolved, it is concerning that there is reduced international funding for feminist and women’s groups, ignoring the evidence base on how gains in gender equality and women’s rights are achieved and sustained over time, and in conflict-affected settings. The original spirit of the GPS agenda ensured that women must be supported to participate in and influence all change processes addressing the gendered experience of conflict. This includes taking part in shaping new arrangements regarding political, social and economic exchange. It also includes improving protection systems to prevent gender-based and other forms of violence, and any other aspect of social, economic, and governance changes to accelerate recovery and build social cohesion to prevent future conflict.

How the GPS window confirms global evidence on international support to GPS and women’s empowerment

- The GPS approach of targeting women’s organisations aligns with the evidence on investing in focused support to women’s empowerment and gender equality struggles. Sustained gains in gender quality and women’s empowerment are consistently secured through bottom-up mobilisation and collective action by gender activists.

- Providing core funding to diverse women’s organisations and movements contributes to building up collective voice and agency, and capacity for influence, as organisations are able to focus more purposefully on agenda setting and strategic planning. Core funding reduces the dependency of women’s organisations on project specific activities and funding, contributing to their capacity to act as autonomous change agents.

- Targeted women’s organisations resources for organisational development enhance capacities for mobilisation and to engage strategically in ‘problem-identification and problem-solving’ across GPS issues of participation, protection, conflict prevention and recovery in response to Myanmar-specific challenges of conflict, fragility and violence, and wider structural inequalities.

- Focussing support on the sub-national and grassroots level helps to distribute the transformative reach of gender programming beyond the capital, thus ensuring that other inequalities based on class, ethnicity, religion, and geographic isolation are not reinforced. It also ensures that inequalities between and within national women’s organisations, grassroots activists and mobilisation efforts are not exacerbated.

- Learning from ‘gendered’ local knowledge is valuable for international support to peacebuilding and social cohesion. As demonstrated by the GPS window’s work, the knowledge of frontline women/gender activists can help to unveil the often-invisible power dynamics in place, generating insights into the political economy of sub-national conflict and what opportunity structures are unfolding to negotiate change not only regarding gender equality and women’s rights, but also across other inclusion, peacebuilding and social cohesion agendas.

- The need to break downs silos remains a major challenge as donors continue to replicate the protection / participation divide. The experience of the window allowing IPs to set their own agenda highlights the need for problem-solving not to be constrained by artificial thematic silos.
Additional insights from the GPS window for the WPS/GPS agenda:

- The three-pronged approach has in all the states contributed to transforming organisational and individual capacities for influence in local power relations. IPs and their individual members have become recognised interlocuters vis-à-vis social norm gatekeepers, decision-makers in local governance across different peacebuilding and other change processes, and in the family space.

- The work of the window shows that core funding is relatively low cost but generates high returns. The transformative stories of change are valuable for donors’ need to respond to results-based and value for money requirements. Significantly, the average investment in each organisation is low, but the staff resourcing to support these organisations is high (in accordance with findings from the internal interim evaluation). However, even accounting for this and addressing the GPS window/PSF capacity to meet resource-intensive demands, this approach seems still relatively low-cost within the wider architecture of donor spending on peacebuilding.

- The stark call on IP’s time and resourcing to address GBV is a powerful message to international donors of the extreme gravity of GBV incidence and vulnerability. This is a call for urgent action.

The GPS window as an example of adaptive and politically informed programming

The experience of GPS window echoes a number of lessons emerging among OECD donors on ‘ways of working’ that are locally grounded, problem-driven, adaptive and politically smart. The window is an example of applying experimental approaches of direct support to civil society organisations, in the spirit of investing in capabilities for locally-owned and locally-driven change. The experience confirms the following:

- Combined with support on strategy development, the GPS window approach reinforces organisational capacity to lead on ‘problem’ identification that is relevant to the realities of conflict at the sub-national level. This enables more strategic engagement across different protection and participation challenges associated with the gendered experience of conflict and long-term structural inequalities and injustices (gender-based and other).

- Targeting gender-oriented and women’s groups and organisations recognises that ‘problem identification/definition’ is gendered, as will be emerging views about solutions. The gender-targeted approach, therefore, keeps visible the fact that all change processes are politically contested and affect structurally disadvantaged or excluded groups in different ways; and that opportunities for meaningful participation and influence in FCAS face powerful barriers and entrenched political interests and power imbalances. For instance, in a regional based CSO Forum for Peace, when the question of how gender is relevant to land grabbing arose, one IP described how the problem itself, and any solution, would affect different groups in different ways – and the question then is how to watch out for interests of gender or other based forms of exclusion or vulnerability.

- There is a need to invest in documenting of ‘stories of change’ resulting from this adaptive approach. The ‘success stories’ that accompany the experience of different IPs supported through the window are useful for donor requirements of responding to (for now) bolder policy commitments to feminist foreign policy and spending requirements on gender targeting programming.

- The effectiveness of the GPS window in enabling locally-driven problem definition and agenda setting by women’s groups has relied on PSF capacity to be flexible in how the three-pronged approach was applied, adapting to IPs capabilities, language and socio-political context. It’s purposeful resourcing of roving gender-advisors with deep knowledge of sub-national political economy variation has contributed to the window’s capacity to support – rather than lead – the analysis of local needs and the strategising of IPs’ agendas.
Endnotes

1 Funding included: DFID = USD 25,085.24; DFAT = USD 25,085.24; SIDA USD 501,704.77; Canada USD 250,852.39; Norway USD 506,721.82. DFID, DFAT and SIDA are the core donors to the PSF, and Canada and Norway contributed funds specifically to the GPS window in addition to the existing PSF donors.


14 The full text of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW.


Findings from key informant interviews.

Ibid.


Some donors cannot fund non-registered organisations whilst some already have their implementation partners who they continue to work with in their service delivery at the subnational level.

PSF, 2016. GPS window Logframe.


PSF, 2016. GPS window Logframe.

Ibid.

Funding included: DFID = USD 25,085.24; DFAT = USD 25,085.24; SIDA USD 501,704.77; Canada USD 250,852.39; Norway USD 506,721.82

This classification is that of the researchers’, drawing on PSF and GPS window resources on the transition to Phase III.


Findings draw on fieldwork and on GPS window documents, including the GPS Final report and interim evaluation.


One of the IPs is a member of the UPDJC’s Social Sector Working Group who advocated for the inclusion of women and gender provisions in the social sector principles, and that resulted in inclusion of gender sensitive language into the principles coming out of the latest UPC (July 2018). PSF final report. 2019. Gender, Peace and Security window. Yangon: PSF. (Unpublished).

The importance of rapid/responsive funding has been underlined as a critical factor in alleviating inaccessibility of women’s organisations to peace and security processes. UN Women. 2018. The Expert Group Meeting on Women’s Meaningful Participation in Negotiating Peace and the Implementation of Peace Agreements, New York: UN Women.

The learning brief recognises that some partners are ready to mobilise resources on their own to capitalise on new and emerging interests from other development partners. But not all IPs appear to have secured such a commitment.
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Annex 1. Research Methodology

This learning brief drew largely on global evidence, PSF and GPS window documents and primary data sources derived from the sample size of nearly 90 respondents who are community members, implementation partners, PSF staff, donors, GPS advisers, and OD experts. The most important thing that the learning brief gathered is the experiences and voices from the ground who were the direct users of IPs’ services/programmes and the IPs themselves.

The research methodology for the learning brief was based on a qualitative approach aimed at teasing out the dynamics of change enabled by the GPS window in its support to CSOs and their capacity for substantive participation, as well as documenting influence achieved by women in different decision-making processes/spheres.

While the learning brief is a review and not an evaluation, it engaged in a critical assessment of the Window’s three-pronged approach. Drawing on an earlier review and evaluation documents of the Window, and through the KII and FGDs conducted by the consultancy team, it captured the process aspects of how the GPS has worked in practice, its relevance, and impacts.

Tools

- The Learning Brief used the utilisation focused evaluation approach. The main goal of this approach is to ensure that the Learning Brief has maximum utility for its intended users: both the PSF team, and CSOs and community members. This ensures that the findings, analysis and key insights in the Learning Brief are directly oriented to developing recommendations to inform future phases of the GPS programmes.

- Findings should be helpful for the wider donor community/international community and other stakeholders engaged in both gender programming related to the GPS agenda and to integrating gender more effectively in other peace and security interventions.

- A Participatory data collection approach was used in the research process including small breakout sessions organised during FGDs. These breakouts were for the participants to discuss a given topic and then they came back to the larger group to report. Informed consent was sought, and if granted, the interview was recorded. There were also frank off-the-record discussions. Everyone was promised anonymity to encourage openness during the interviews.

- The interviews were transcribed to ensure data quality. Results were analysed using Nvivo, a qualitative analysis programme. A process of coding and analytical categorisation was used to identify key trends and recurring patterns from the data.
Analytical approach

- The Learning Brief drew on analytical insights from feminist political economy and feminist institutional analysis and its application to the study of: (1) how change happens in pursuit of women’s substantive participation in decision-making processes; and (2) the role of international actors and support mechanisms to more effectively support this.

- The brief also drew on recent thinking in development practice on ‘thinking and working politically’ (TWP) and ‘problem-driven, iterative and adaptive approaches’ (PDIA) to development and governance support programming (O’Neil 2016; GADN 2018). Key underlying principles of this thinking include: starting with context-specificity; focusing on the political economy features of the ‘problem’ which is a change process intended to address moving away from ‘solution’ driven approaches that prevail in international development and governance support practice; identifying politically plausible change objectives, working in strategic ways to accommodate the political economy challenges and opportunities of context; examining capacity to be adaptive and flexible in changing needs and context conditions, and to learning from what works and what doesn’t.
Annex 2. Interviews

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews were carried out in May 2019 by the research consultants, Dr. Pilar Domingo and Kay Soe. These were done in person in Yangon and in some regions, with implementing partner organisations, PSF staff, donors to the GPS window, organisational support consultant and gender specialists who supported the window.

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