

MFAT Management Response to the Evaluation of the Burma Young Community Leaders Programme and Myanmar Young Leaders Programme

Evaluation: Burma Young Community Leaders Programme (BYCLP) and Myanmar Young Leaders Programme (MYLP) Evaluation

Background: The Burma Young Community Leaders Programme (BYCLP; 2009-2012) and successor Myanmar Young Leaders Programme (MYLP; 2014-2021) have brought young civil society leaders from Myanmar to New Zealand (NZ), to develop a strong network of civil society alumni with the skills, knowledge and leadership capability to support peaceful development in Myanmar.

Since 2009, 84 young leaders have completed the programme (50% men and 50% women) of 19 different ethnicities. The programme is implemented by UnionAID and delivered over 25 weeks annually with input from Victoria University of Wellington (VUW). The programme comprises of:

- One day pre-departure Foundation Workshop held in Yangon (since 2016);
- Two-week orientation on arrival in Wellington;
- 13-week English Proficiency Programme in Wellington; and
- Nine-week course tailored for the Myanmar group on development, human rights, democratic processes, economics, conflict resolution, and research and proposal writing in Wellington.

As part of the curriculum, the young leaders prepare a proposal for a project to be implemented on their return to Myanmar. The project is informed by young leaders' learning during the programme, including a special interest topic chosen by each young leader, and support from mentors. Young leaders live with host families for the 25 weeks to improve their English language, and to learn about NZ culture and life.

BYCLP was succeeded by the first phase of MYLP (2014-2016) with eight students, which was renewed for another phase (2017-2021) with twelve students per year.

In October 2019, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) commissioned Miranda Cahn to undertake an evaluation of the programme to examine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of the programme, and identify areas for improvement. The findings of the evaluation will be used by MFAT to inform decision-making to potentially expand Young Leaders Programmes (YLPs) to other ASEAN countries, and inform any changes or improvements to be made to MYLP and other current or future YLPs. Field work took place in Myanmar in November 2019 to coincide with the programme's annual alumni conference, enabling focus groups and individual interviews with alumni.

Findings:

Key findings from the review:

1. The programme is relevant to the Myanmar and NZ governments, and to the alumni

The programme is relevant to the Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan and MFAT's 'Strategic Intentions 2019-2023'. The Joint Commitment for Development (JCfD) for Myanmar (2017-2021) identifies 'knowledge and skills' as one of four priority areas. Aspects of the programme that have been the most useful and relevant to alumni's work are English language training, critical thinking, special interest topics, and proposal writing.

2. The programme has been effective

Overall the programme has been effective in achieving intended results and objectives. Alumni are demonstrating leadership, skills and knowledge gained in the programme. The programme has strongly contributed to the alumni's advancement in their careers to positions where they can bring about change and development for Myanmar. The change in alumni's attributes (increased self-confidence, critical thinking, improved leadership), and values (e.g. respect for others) were a key reason for alumni's advancement in their careers. The links between programme personnel and the alumni are strong, and important in maintaining the Myanmar-NZ links. The programme has been very effective in contributing to peaceful development in Myanmar through projects that alumni undertake on their return to Myanmar, and alumni's ongoing development work. There is also a network of skilled leaders in Myanmar as a result of the programme that can be activated as

needed, and is often used by alumni for work and social interaction.

3. Management of the programme is efficient

The programme has been efficiently and well managed by UnionAID since its inception. The programme's intended outcomes have been achieved with minimal financial resources. The cost of human resources is minimised by extensive use of volunteers, and highly dedicated programme personnel.

4. The programme is impacting on Myanmar's peaceful transition to democracy

The programme has built the capacity of the young leaders, who have then developed capacity in communities in which they work. Alumni's development activities in Myanmar have empowered communities to collaborate, engage in their own development, and to influence political outcomes of their country, contributing to democracy in Myanmar.

5. The outcomes and benefits of the programme are sustainable

The knowledge, skills, attributes and values the alumni gained are sustainable, and have been used and further developed as alumni have progressed in their careers.

6. Opportunities were identified

There is an opportunity to benefit other ASEAN countries through similar programmes. Mixing with young leaders from other ASEAN countries would also benefit Myanmar young leaders. Some alumni also offered suggestions to improve the programme

Link to evaluation [BYCLP and MYLP Evaluation Report](#)

**Date of Steering Group
sign-off** April 2020

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
1.	<p>Relevance and crosscutting issues</p> <p>The review team makes the following recommendations concerning relevance and cross cutting issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MYLP is continued to the end of the 2021 (current phase) and beyond. The MYLP is relevant to the Myanmar government's recent policy priorities, and is aligned with policy and strategic interests of the New Zealand government. The course has remained largely valid and relevant to the young leaders. 	<p>Partially Agree. Further phases of the programme will be assessed through a Business Case process.</p>	<p>MFAT to develop a business case/s for any further phases.</p>	<p>2021</p>	
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The MYLP curriculum be reviewed and adapted to ensure continued relevance. In the short term (2017-2021 phase of MYLP), this would be to consider increasing gender, environment and youth, and decreasing human rights content (particularly theoretical aspects of human rights). Visits should be reviewed to ensure they are relevant, and that the speakers are fully aware of the objective of the visit. The contact hours for the tailored course should be reduced if possible, and not increased. The curriculum should be fully reviewed for a new phase of MYLP beyond 2021. 	<p>Agree. Feedback from participants is sought on all modules of the course so that continuous improvements can be made to content and structure to ensure it remains relevant and effective. The human rights content supports a fundamental learning outcome of the programme.</p>	<p>UnionAID to seek and analyse feedback and review curriculum.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

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3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current focus on adult learning through new experiences, and development of attributes and values (in addition to developing skills and knowledge) continues in the MYLP, and for any new young leaders' programmes that are developed, should be an intended outcome in the Results Framework. The change in alumni's attributes (for example, increased self- confidence, being able to think critically, improved leadership), and values (for example changed personal values including respect for others, and the way they treat others) were particularly important for their development work. 	<p>Agree. The Results Framework will be reviewed across all programmes as the design process for the new Young Leaders programmes from Cambodia/Laos is undertaken.</p>	<p>UnionAID to review Results Framework. MFAT to provide input and endorse.</p>	<p>Late 2020 and ongoing</p>	
4.	<p>Effectiveness The review team makes the following recommendations about the effectiveness of the MYLP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong links continue between MYLP staff and alumni – funding for MYLP should take into account the time involved to keep up contact with, and mentor, alumni, and travel costs for visits and further informal mentoring of alumni. The links between programme personnel and the alumni are very strong, and important in maintaining the Myanmar-NZ links (medium-term outcome). Travel to Myanmar is important for this in addition to emails and social media. The NZ Embassy in Myanmar also has strong links with alumni (particularly those in Yangon). 	<p>Agree. UnionAID provides a costed budget against outputs to achieve intended outcomes, including maintaining links between alumni and New Zealand.</p>	<p>UnionAID to review budget. MFAT to approve any budget updates.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
5.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further and stronger links between host families, MYLP mentors and volunteers, and alumni, are encouraged. The links between alumni and other New Zealanders (e.g. host families, volunteers, and mentors) were tenuous and inconsistent. This could be facilitated perhaps through competitive programme funding for New Zealander(s) annually to travel to Myanmar for the annual MYLP conference, or to support alumni in their work. 	<p>Partially Agree. It is important to maintain links between alumni and New Zealand to achieve the outcomes of the programme. This can be achieved through various mechanisms, without funding New Zealanders to travel to the region.</p>	<p>UnionAID to investigate mechanisms for maintaining ongoing links.</p> <p>MFAT to consider any related budget proposals.</p>	Ongoing	
6.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 'cloud-based' database be set up that can be updated by alumni themselves. This data base would be accessible by password, perhaps on a website. Reminders be sent regularly by email for alumni to update the data base, and it is also be updated after each conference. It is a challenge to keep up with changes in alumni's details (current work, location, phone numbers and emails) and this is likely to become even more challenging as the number of alumni increases. The main way of keeping up to date is by UnionAID updating a spreadsheet from conference registrations, but the percentage of alumni attending conferences has been decreasing. 	<p>Agree. Improvements to the alumni database are being considered.</p>	<p>UnionAID to review options for database management systems.</p> <p>MFAT to consider any related budget proposals and advise on any potential links to existing database systems.</p>	Late 2020	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
7.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal writing continues as a key topic in MYLP, and funding for the field work projects is maintained or increased to ensure the alumni continue to be sufficiently supported. The project work completed by the alumni on their return to Myanmar is extremely important to the contribution to Myanmar development, and to providing confidence to the alumni to initiate other development work. Alumni feel ready, and well prepared to implement the projects using learning from NZ. 	<p>Agree. Field work projects are key to the sustainability of programme outcomes and will continue to be an important part of the programme design.</p>	<p>UnionAID to continue to deliver project development modules in course content.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	
8.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The annual BYCLP and MYLP alumni conference is maintained, and funded sufficiently. Organising committees give consideration to the location of the conference being in Yangon or Nay Pyi Taw to ensure alumni from remote areas can attend with reasonable travel times. More information on the conferences be provided for those that could not attend perhaps by having a 'login' website for the conference with conference papers, photos and videos of presentations (if this is not already in place). The annual conference is very important for networking of alumni between batches, as well as for upskilling and informing alumni. It is important as many alumni come to the conference as possible. 	<p>Agree. The alumni conferences will continue to be delivered as an important contribution to the sustainability of the outcomes of the programme.</p>	<p>UnionAID to investigate options for increasing engagement with alumni conferences.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
9.	<p>Efficiency</p> <p>The review team makes the following recommendations concerning efficiency of the MYLP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assuming the same very effective methods of implementing the MYLP are retained in the future, more resources (more funding) should be provided if levels of volunteering decrease, and/or staff needs change. The programme's intended outcomes have been achieved with minimum cost for human resources by having highly dedicated programme staff and volunteers. Should the programme personnel change and/or there is less volunteering, it would cost more to achieve the same outcomes. UnionAID's capacity to deliver MYLP alongside the other existing young leaders' programmes may not be sustainable on the current level of resourcing. 	<p>Agree. MFAT strongly recommends UnionAID review programme staffing levels. MFAT will consider reasonable supplementation.</p>	<p>UnionAID to provide MFAT with a review of staffing requirements.</p> <p>MFAT to review any related changes to programme budgets.</p>	Ongoing	
10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Programme budget should be sufficient to allow for the role of Manager of the MYLP (currently a volunteer) to be a paid position in case the current volunteer wishes to reduce their workload. The role of Manager of MYLP is currently the responsibility of a volunteer, which poses a risk should the volunteer wish to reduce their workload. 	<p>Agree. MFAT recommends UnionAID consider succession planning and sustainability of all programme management roles. These should be appropriately resourced to ensure ongoing professional delivery of the programme's outputs and outcomes.</p>	<p>UnionAID to review staffing plan.</p> <p>MFAT to review any related changes to programme budgets.</p>	Ongoing	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
11.	<p>Other areas for improvement</p> <p>The review team makes the following recommendations concerning other areas for improvement of the MYLP:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the Results Framework (Results Diagram and Results Measurement Table) to better reflect the reality of the programme, and provide better guidance (indicators and targets) for monitoring and evaluation. The Results Framework could be improved to assist with assessing results particularly at the medium and long-term outcomes level. The indicators and targets at the output and short-term outcome level are useful for monitoring. However, for the higher-level outcomes, the outcomes themselves, and the indicators and the targets could be better defined. 	<p>Agree. The results framework will be reviewed as part of the design work for the new Cambodia and Laos programmes, which will be applicable across all programmes, and any further phases. MFAT provides feedback on annual reporting that UnionAID takes into account to ensure ongoing relevance of data collection and reporting.</p>	<p>UnionAID to review Results Framework.</p> <p>MFAT to provide input and endorse.</p>	<p>Late 2020 and ongoing</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progre
12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young leaders continue to be hosted by families. Monitoring the host family situation continues but with an independent person doing interviews with the young leaders about their host family situation (not an alumni or programme staff member) in order that issues are identified early. Young leaders are given the option to find accommodation (for example in a hostel) if they wish after 3 months. While there are clearly significant benefits of host families (young leaders' improved English language and understanding of NZ, and host families learning about NZ and remaining in touch with the alumni), if the situation is tense or the alumni are unhappy then the benefits will not occur. Inevitably there will be cultural or personality differences which cause issues. However, if these issues can be identified early then they can usually be resolved. 	<p>Partially Agree. The feedback on host families is overwhelmingly positive across all of the programmes and young leaders will continue to be hosted by families. The purpose of host families is to provide an opportunity for young leaders to learn about New Zealand culture, which can be a new experience for many. UnionAID has the existing relationships and contextual understanding to be able to effectively work with young leaders and host families to ensure there is a good 'fit', to navigate any cultural differences, and to facilitate any issues where required.</p>	<p>UnionAID to continue to engage with host families and young leaders to manage any issues.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progre
13.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection of young leaders in the future specifically targets more different ethnicities and young people from remote areas. If necessary, specific English language training be offered to upskill such candidates for future selection. 	<p>Agree. The programme purposely aims to engage a wide range of ethnicities in programme promotion and selection, and to date has had participants from all the main ethic groups in Myanmar. English can be a barrier for participants from remote locations; further options for English language training will be considered in the design process for the new programmes and any further phases.</p>	<p>UnionAID to investigate English language support options.</p> <p>MFAT to review any related budget proposals.</p>	<p>Late 2020 and ongoing</p>	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
14.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration be given to including a small number of government young leaders in MYLP from 2020 as a trial. If successful MYLP include a small number each year. This would benefit young government leaders and would enhance cooperation and collaboration between government and CSOs. 	<p>Reject. There may be other ways that various government partners can be engaged with the programme, but MFAT does not agree that involving government young leaders as participants will be conducive to achieving the desired learning and networking outcomes. In addition, this would not align with the programme's main objective to build capacity of civil society young leaders. Government officials from Myanmar can participate in other short term training in New Zealand, and often the cohorts overlap to create networking opportunities.</p>	<p>MFAT to advise UnionAID of any overlap between short term training for officials and young leader cohorts from Myanmar and identify networking opportunities where appropriate.</p>	Ongoing	

No	Recommendation	Response and Action (Agree, Partially Agree, Reject)	Responsibility	When	12 month progress
15.	<p>Opportunities to expand the programme to other ASEAN countries</p> <p>The review team makes the following recommendations concerning expanding the programme to other ASEAN countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MFAT introduces programme(s) for young leaders from other selected ASEAN countries (eg Cambodia and Laos) similar to MYLP, but tailored for the individual countries. If MFAT chooses to develop a further young leader programme or programmes, the implementing organisation must be adequately resourced to provide the level of experience that the Myanmar young leaders currently receive, and to ensure that the MYLP is not disadvantaged in any way by the introduction or expansion of programme(s) for young leaders from other ASEAN countries. 	<p>Agree. A design mission for the programme to be expanded to Cambodia and Laos has already been undertaken.</p>	<p>UnionAID to lead design mission.</p> <p>MFAT to progress Business Case process for new programme.</p>	<p>Late 2020</p>	
16.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UnionAID be the preferred implementing organisation for ASEAN young leader programme(s) given their experience, and organisational knowledge of the programme. Funding should be sufficient to cover an overall director for the YLPs, financial and administration support, as well as individual managers for each country's YLP, and staff for managing host families and accommodation, providing mentoring support for young leaders for special interest topics, proposal development and implementation, and other requirements if volunteer support is not available. 	<p>N/A. Procurement and contracting matters are governed by the New Zealand Government Procurement Rules that MFAT is obliged to follow.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>	