Overview

The Joint Peace Fund* has been set up by 11 international donors to support the peace process in Myanmar in a coordinated and harmonized way. The JPF’s strategy reflects its core aim of supporting Myanmar’s current peace process, while ensuring that all its projects contribute to a broader vision of long term peace. It has one core objective: inclusive peace is reached through agreements and strengthened stakeholders, institutions, and processes. Beneath this there are three outcomes which reflect a holistic approach aimed at both strengthening conflict management mechanisms (Outcome 1); and dialogue and negotiations (Outcome 2); and building inclusivity into the process through support to broad participation (Outcome 3).

Two core principles shape the JPF’s approach: National Ownership and Inclusivity. The JPF’s strategy is designed to reinforce these defining characteristics of the peace process. From the outset, the JPF has been strategically focused on supporting an inclusive peace process involving Government, Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) (signatories and non-signatories), political actors, CSOs and the people of Myanmar. Ninety per cent of its projects are run by Myanmar organizations. It is a responsive, demand-led funding instrument, responding to the needs of Myanmar’s peace stakeholders, to enable them to shape and define their process, in line with their vision for peace. As Myanmar’s experience demonstrates, informal channels of communication are critical for a successful process, and so the JPF also funds informal initiatives that support the formal process.

The main agreements signed thus far (the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and the Framework for Political Dialogues) place an emphasis on inclusivity. Drawing on this and building on a global understanding that successful peace processes need to be inclusive, JPF’s overall strategy focuses on ensuring broad participation in the peace process. Inclusivity requires a strong focus on the groups whose voices are often not heard: women and youth. Peace processes in which women participate meaningfully have been found to lead to more sustainable peace agreements.†

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* It was formally established at the end of 2015, becoming operational in 2016, and is set to run until the end of 2021.
† When women are included in a peace process, the resulting peace agreement is 35 percent more likely to last for fifteen years. Quantitative Analysis of Women’s Participation in Peace Process; Laurel Stone, research associate for policy studies at University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.
Gender inclusion is central to the JPF’s approach in all its projects, demonstrated by its target of spending at least 15 per cent of its funds on this important goal. Strategically, the JPF seeks to amplify women’s active engagement at State/Region and Union level in the peace debate and discussion. JPF is also supporting a new generation of peace leaders to play a meaningful role in the peace process. Many of the JPF’s Civic Engagement projects focus on increasing the number of young people participating in the process, training youth peace leaders and building peace networks across and within different communities.

International best practice shows a successful peace process needs the support of the entire population, not only those whose lives have been directly impacted by the traumas of conflict. The people of Myanmar have suffered from the lost economic and social opportunities that instability produces and deserve the benefits that successful development brings to a peaceful country. To help build a nationwide consensus in support of the peace process, the JPF’s Public Awareness programme seeks to engage the general public in the importance of peace and the peace process, and help them understand how to participate in shaping their future. This requires engagement with communities in conflict areas, as well as the majority of the population whose lives are not directly affected by the upheaval and uncertainty that comes with conflict. This broad approach aims to increase the chances of the success of the current process, and help lay the foundations for a peaceful future, for all Myanmar’s people.

Outcome 1  Conflict Management Mechanisms
Formal and informal conflict management mechanisms are strengthened to amicably resolve and/or prevent conflict

Ceasefires form the foundation of Myanmar’s peace process and the mechanisms that these agreements have established are an essential insurance for sustaining peace on the ground. By 2013, some 14 bi-lateral agreements had been signed between the Government and many of the EAOs involved in the process. Building on these bi-lateral agreements the parties have worked to establish the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). In its opening paragraph, the NCA explicitly acknowledges the primacy of the bilateral agreements, recognizing, reinforcing, and reaffirming all previous agreements between the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar and the Ethnic Armed Organizations. In October 2015, the NCA was signed by 8 of the 16-armed groups involved in the negotiations, and in February 2018, two additional EAOs signed the NCA.

The JPF supports mechanisms established within both the NCA and bilateral ceasefire agreements. This includes the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), which resulted from the NCA, and Liaison Offices (LOs), established in the bilateral agreements. The JMC is a new multi-layered institution created under the NCA and offers a mechanism which operates at Union, State and Local level. It has established a space where Tatmadaw, EAOs and Civilian Representatives are
working side by side on monitoring the NCA, verifying reports of violations, and resolving disputes. Support to the JMC forms a core focus of JPF’s broader support to conflict management mechanisms in Myanmar.

The LOs, which are run by the EAOs, create a point of contact for EAO representatives, Tatmadaw commanders, and government representatives to peacefully raise ceasefire concerns as well as providing an avenue for advancing peace negotiations. In addition, they act as a focal point for local communities and State authorities to engage with EAOs more effectively.

In line with its core principle of inclusion, the JPF’s approach also includes community dispute resolution mechanisms established within conflict-affected areas. The JPF works closely with communities, CSOs, and other stakeholders who are allied around providing community peace support and conflict dispute resolution assistance. Through community owned mechanisms it is expected that formal conflict management mechanisms will be strengthened and more effectively utilized.

**Outcome 2  Negotiations and Dialogues**

Peace process stakeholders’ capacity is enhanced to participate in formal and informal consultations, dialogues and negotiations.

**Negotiations**

From the outset, the JPF put in place projects that provide requested support to Government via the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC), EAO NCA-Signatory groups, non NCA-Signatory group engaged with the peace process, and other stakeholders.

The core characteristic of these compatible projects, which are designed to enable continued negotiation and increased trust among all parties, is flexibility. All projects cover a broad scope of activity: supporting meetings between the parties; negotiations between EAOs and the Peace Commission, and capacity building for constructive engagements in all parts of the peace process.

Providing direct technical support, as requested by the negotiating parties, is a core element of the JPF’s strategy in support of the negotiations. This is done through JPF specialist staff and embedded technical advisors. The JPF also harnesses a significant network of national and international experts and mobilizes them upon request to provide specific specialized peace support to the various stakeholders in the peace process.
Dialogues

The purpose of the dialogue process, as stated in the Framework for Political Dialogue, is to “peacefully seek solutions to political, economic, and security reforms...with the objective of building a democratic federal union.” The dialogue is specifically intended to create an inclusive platform to agree on political, economic, security, society, and land and environment reforms that will be carried out through the “amendment, addition and repeal of laws including the constitution”, in order to “establish a union based on federalism fully ensuring the rights to national equality and self-determination.”

The architecture of the national dialogue process includes periodic Union Peace Conferences (UPCs), with inputs to the UPCs via the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC) from three kinds of national dialogue processes: State and Regional dialogues, led by State/Regional governments; ethnic-based dialogues led by EAOs and political parties; and issue-based dialogues, led by CSOs. Permission for formal dialogue events must be given by the UPDJC, although EAO-led informal events and public consultations are provided for in their bilateral agreements.

The National Dialogue process is a platform for peaceful transformation set out in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, Bilateral Ceasefire agreements and the Framework for Political Dialogue. This encourages the enabling of a broad range of stakeholders to overcome internal rifts and to build relations between the state and different ethnic groups in order to reach a new political settlement and a new social contract. This process include many different stakeholders coming together in forums, workshops, and trainings to discuss the core issues of the peace process and to gather key points of agreement in advocacy documents that can be fed into the Union level process. The JPF supports all types of peaceful dialogues in order to ensure that all the parties to the process are well informed and prepared for discussions and negotiations around the complex issues needing resolution. The JPF also has programmes to support improved knowledge and understanding around Federalism; Security; and Land and Natural Resources. These consist of a range of approaches, including supporting technical advisors, assisting with option papers, workshops and research initiatives that cover these themes.

Outcome 3

Civic engagement, public awareness and confidence in the peace process is increased at the Union and Sub-Union levels

Supporting increased participation in Myanmar’s peace process is a cornerstone of the JPF’s Strategic approach. Studies have found that peace agreements are 64 per cent less likely to fail

when civil society representatives participate.\(^5\) Two programmes support this objective: Civic Engagement and Public Awareness.

**Civic Engagement**

Supporting the engagement of Myanmar’s civil society in the process is key to deepening and democratizing the peace process itself. A well informed and engaged civil society improves the inclusiveness of the process and increases the likelihood of Myanmar reaching a durable peace agreement. The JPF supports programmes that seek to connect and engage a broad range of Region/State-level civil society groups in the peace process, helping them embed their voices in the formal process. Throughout this basket of programmes, the JPF seeks to focus particularly on organizations that will enhance the voices of women and youth. JPF support allows a potential broad spectrum of civil society to work together to understand and advocate for the core issues around the peace process, such as federalism, security, and land and natural resources. These projects help forge new initiatives between networks of stakeholders – State government; EAOs; CSO; political parties; women’s groups; youth groups and community organizations - with the aim of supporting the higher-level peace process, and thus increasing its chances of achieving its core goal of sustainable peace within Myanmar.

**Public Awareness**

For peace processes to be successful, there needs to be buy-in from more than just those affected by the conflict. Peace processes need the support of the wider population. Experiences in other peace processes such as the rejection at referendum of proposed peace agreements as in Cyprus (2004) and Columbia (2017), reveal the dangers of focusing only on selling the peace to those who already know they want to buy it. Therefore, it is important for all the people of Myanmar to understand the current peace process. They need basic information about the phases of the process (e.g. NCA signed then political dialogue); the fundamental principles; opportunities for citizens or their representatives to provide input; and how any changes are likely to affect them etc.

The JPF’s strategy in this area combines support for rigorous research with an initial portfolio of projects. These provide information Union-wide through broadcast, social and print media; and tailor information at the sub-Union level through direct community information sharing, as well as broadcast and social media. Research is underway to develop a valid, up-to-date, representative baseline of people’s knowledge of, attitudes towards, and expectations of the peace process; to determine the people’s needs for information and learning about the process; and to analyse where important gaps exist in people’s awareness and understanding. Findings will be used to inform a peace process public awareness strategy to meet these needs.

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