

**STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES
(SPARC)
IN NORTHERN RAKHINE STATE, MYANMAR**

**Project Design Document
Version 3**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Project Design Document (PDD) proposes Strengthening Partnerships and Resilience of Communities (SPARC) project in Northern Rakhine State to be implemented by CARE with support from AusAID. CARE has been supporting these communities over the past seven years through an AusAID funded project, Rakhine Rural Household Livelihood Security Project (RRHLSP). SPARC will build on the achievements of RRHLSP. The project addresses livelihood insecurities of vulnerable households in Northern Rakhine State (NRS) through integrated activities targeted at improving food security and economic opportunities. By working with local partners to strengthen community-based structures with improved technical and capacity building support, CARE will be able to scale up successful initiatives, notably the establishment of Community Forestry plots, while placing greater emphasis on women's empowerment and Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) activities to improve rural livelihoods. This five year Project uses proven models to address livelihood needs as previously implemented by CARE in NRS and elsewhere in Myanmar, through projects supported by AusAID and by other donors. Although in its early stages, this Project will contribute to a larger program approach in NRS envisaged by CARE that includes implementation of a complementary women's empowerment project to be funded by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).¹

Background

CARE has worked for eleven years with AusAID's support to assist vulnerable and marginalised communities in NRS, the majority of which are from the Rohingya ethnic group. The fundamental underlying cause of poverty in NRS is the denial of civil and political rights, which manifests itself in a lack of freedom of speech, assembly and movement, poor economic and environmental governance, inequitable distribution of resources, and low educational and literacy levels.

Household food insecurity and malnutrition are widespread, as a result of inadequate household income and poor households' inability to produce sufficient food for their own consumption. This undermines household livelihood security and exacerbates household vulnerability to the impacts of the natural disasters to which NRS is prone.

The livelihood situation of Rohingya women is the most difficult. Cultural practices confine Rohingya women, severely constraining their personal mobility and decision-making power. Women primarily engage in activities in and around the home such as child-rearing and homestead farming.

A review conducted by an independent consultant in February 2010 concluded that the current RRHLSP project has recorded some significant achievements (Community Forestry - CF), as well as areas in need of improvement (Savings Mobilisation and Income Generation - SMIG). The findings of this review, as well as subsequent and extensive assessments and consultations through workshops and interviews with staff and key stakeholders from community, government, and NGOs, have largely informed the SPARC project design.

Description

The SPARC project will continue to operate in the same 105 villages in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships as RRHLSP, targeting approximately 9,500 poor, vulnerable households (61,750 people) in a range of project activities.

Design Framework

¹ See Annex 9 for WEBHLOOM Executive Summary.

Goal: To contribute to the sustainable reduction of poverty in poor, vulnerable communities in Myanmar.

Purpose: To improve the social and economic position of poor, vulnerable households in Northern Rakhine State, and strengthen household and community capacity to independently sustain such improvements.

Strategic Objective 1 (Human Condition)

To enhance the livelihood security of poor, vulnerable households by improving access to and utilisation of resources, markets and appropriate technologies.

This objective aims to improve target households' livelihood security through income, food production and asset holdings by addressing inequitable access to land; lack of technical knowledge; lack of capital; environmental degradation, and differential impacts of climate change. The involvement of women in all activities will be strongly encouraged as part of the project's cross-cutting strategy to address gender inequality and advance women's empowerment. Project activities will be analysed for climate resilience. The resulting improvements in household income and food production will address the problems of indebtedness and food insecurity.

Strategic Objective 2 (Enabling Environment)

To strengthen the technical, operational and management capacity of targeted community groups, local partners and service providers.

This objective aims to create and/or strengthen Community Based Organisations (CBO) that can advance the interests of poor, vulnerable households (and particularly their female members) along with those of their communities. The mobilisation of community members will be stimulated through activities such as the participatory vulnerability assessments, development of Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) plans and the implementation of Village Development Grant (VDG) schemes. This objective will also focus on the capacity building of local partners and service providers, both government and non-government to improve service provision for communities.

Strategic Objective 3 (Social Position)

To enhance the social position of poor, vulnerable households by building their capacity to represent their own interests in community decision-making and development initiatives.

This objective focuses on four key areas: strengthening women and men's negotiating positions both at household and community level, enhancing access to and quality of basic primary education, delivering targeted vocational training, and building the social capital of target communities. The project will support households to develop the necessary skills to: build links with individuals and organisations within and outside their communities, access information that can improve their quality of life, and negotiate more effectively with individuals or agencies making discriminatory demands. Women's capacity to negotiate more effectively within their own household will be enhanced including through vocational training to develop practical off-farm vocational skills that can contribute to the improvement of their quality of life as well as build their self-confidence and self-esteem. Using a community-centred approach, the project aims to strengthen parent's involvement in school management and improve infrastructure and resources to enhance educational outcomes with a particular focus on girls.

Cross Cutting Objective 4: (Performance Management)

Enhanced project flexibility and responsiveness through purposeful monitoring, learning and evaluation.

Under this objective, a participatory monitoring, learning and evaluation process will be key to ensuring the project is flexible and responsive to timely information on quality and performance. This information will also inform coordination and advocacy activities with a range of stakeholders including multilaterals, INGOs and government agencies. This component will involve regular structured learning and reflection opportunities for project staff, beneficiaries and partners to strengthen the project's accountability to beneficiaries.

Transition from RRHSLP to SPARC Project

CARE is currently undertaking transition activities to phase out certain components (SMIG, Community Health) while maintaining and strengthening other components (CF, DRM) and setting up partnerships with various organisations to support new initiatives, such as rice banks and livestock raising, and the establishment of Village Savings & Loan Associations (VSLA) and Village Development Committees (VDC). CARE is also providing emergency and rehabilitation assistance to communities affected by the severe floods that engulfed Rakhine State in June and again in October 2010, which have delayed some project activities and resulted in the loss of assets.

Benefits and Risks

The main benefit of the SPARC project will be the active participation of 61,750 community members located in 105 villages in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships, and the subsequent ownership of project achievements that contribute to the improvement of their social and economic position.

Active community participation will be achieved through participatory planning processes used to develop the project design and project activities; engagement in participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E), as well as in regular structured learning and reflection opportunities; and, securing community contributions to activities wherever possible.

Participating men and women community members will be positively affected by increased agriculture and agro-forestry productivity levels of new income sources. Strengthened community groups will enable enhanced ownership and sustainability. Communities will also directly benefit from improved relations and services with local government, while partner organisation staff and government counterparts will also benefit from training and collaboration with CARE.

While the main risks are largely drawn from the Government's policies and actions towards the population in NRS, CARE's renewed and reinvigorated focus on relationship building, coordination and communication will attempt to mitigate the negative impacts of such actions onto the project. Specific risks for this project include political risks that may affect CARE's access to target areas, cultural factors that may limit the participation of women, and extreme weather events and insufficient water sources that may affect the results of agriculture inputs and restrict timely access to target villages.