

Myan Ku Final Evaluation Report

September 2023



Project duration: April 2020 to December 2022
Evaluation conducted by Adventura Research Myanmar



EU Myan Ku Fund



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nexus Response Mechanism (NRM), in partnership with sequa gGmbH and Wave Money, and with funding from the European Union, set up the Myan Ku Workers Support Fund in April 2020. The project was created in response to garment factory closures in Myanmar caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the project scaled up due to the political and economic crisis that escalated factory closures. By the end of the project in December 2022, the project had transferred more than 8 billion MMK (3.8 million USD) to an estimated 100,000 unemployed and underemployed garment workers, mainly women, affected by factory shutdowns, along with other services and capacity building activities. Garment workers received monthly cash transfers averaging 75,000 MMK¹ (46 USD) for up to three months and in some cases food vouchers, as well as social and behavior change communication (SBCC), nutritional counselling, vocational and business start-up training, and telehealth services.

The NRM commissioned Aventura Research Myanmar (ARM) to conduct a final evaluation of the project from June to September 2023. The overall purpose of the evaluation was to provide NRM with an independent assessment of the project's performance across key evaluation criteria, highlighting its impact and achievements, the challenges faced, lessons learned and recommendations for future projects. Three data sources were used to triangulate the information: desk review, a quantitative survey of 181 project participants, and qualitative interviews with six project stakeholders and 13 project participants.

By the end of April 2020, 60,000 workers from 175 factories had lost their jobs due to COVID-19 and, by early 2021, 120 factories had permanently closed. Many of these workers were women who had migrated from different parts of the country to work in the factories to support their family.

The February 2021 military coup created a challenging environment for the project's second phase, including difficulties to transfer funds; reduction of operational efficiency and security; and cancelling project outputs, such as dialogue sessions with government stakeholders and technical support for the Social Security Board.

Swift adaptations were required to ensure the project's continued effectiveness and relevance, including:

- Shift to food vouchers
- Changes to communication and visibility strategies
- Changes to partnerships
- Adapting banking procedures
- Safety measures

Assessment Findings

Relevance

Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that the cash assistance provided by Myan Ku was highly relevant and well-suited to the participants' needs. The vocational training component was found to be highly relevant, since most garment workers possess specialized expertise in specific segments of garment production, rendering their skills less applicable to other jobs. The project's proactive refinement of SBCC training and nutrition counselling through behavioral and KAP survey feedback, and the flexibility to adjust session frequency, resulted in highly relevant training.

The rationale for the cash transfer value and duration was based on rapid research conducted by a local partner to ascertain the minimum amount required for accommodation and food, focusing on migrant workers. The transfer values were deemed sufficient by the stakeholders to cover participants' basic needs during the initial period of unemployment. The three-month duration was meant to strike a balance between providing the necessary support and encouraging participants to seek alternative opportunities for income generation.

¹ The rate of the MMK against the US dollar has been volatile since the military coup. In January 2020, when the project began, project participants received 75,000 MMK per month, which was then equivalent to 52 USD. Midway through the project, in July 2021, the same amount was equivalent to 46 USD. By the end of the project, the amount was equivalent to 42 USD. For consistency, this paper uses the 1 July 2021 rate of 1,622 MMK = 1 USD throughout. <https://www.google.com/finance/quote/USD-MMK>

Effectiveness

The majority of participants who received cash assistance reported that while the assistance contributed positively to their financial situation, it only partially helped them meet their basic needs. Ninety percent of participants indicated that the assistance positively affected their ability to acquire more nutritious food. It is evident that Myan Ku effectively cushioned the impact of external shocks, enabling participants to continue sending remittances to their families by extending support during periods of unemployment and financial distress.

The employment of Wave Money as a distribution method exhibited noteworthy effectiveness and the majority of participants expressed high levels of satisfaction. Limitations did occur, such as instances of extra fees for cash withdrawal and elderly individuals experiencing some difficulties in using digital payment methods.

Wave Money's efficiency as a cash delivery system for this project is evaluated positively due to the broad coverage across the country, particularly in rural areas, as well as its commitment to waive standard service fees. However, the cash transfer process did encounter disruptions due to the military coup, in which case food vouchers served as a viable alternative, albeit less efficient compared to digital money.

The project's initial data management setup faced limitations due to its rapid deployment in response to needs brought on by COVID-19. Data management resources were inadequate throughout the project's course, with technical constraints in handling complex data analysis.

Impact

Both quantitative and qualitative insights highlight that the cash assistance from Myan Ku often blended with participants' existing resources, covering food expenditures, health expenses and remittance obligations. Participants who benefited from the cash assistance for a three-month period exhibited a more diverse allocation of funds.

SBCC impact on nutrition: SBCC efforts raised awareness about the negative effects of sweetened beverages on maternal health, and there was improvement in infant and child dietary diversity, meal frequency and acceptable diet. While there was an increase in continued breastfeeding for children aged 12–23 months, the lack of exclusive breastfeeding indicates a challenge in the project affecting change for this behavior.

Impact of financial literacy and business training: The project provided entrepreneurship training for 201 participants, with 25 participants successfully starting their own businesses. The primary challenge for starting businesses was the lack of initial capital.

Impact of vocational training: Almost all (94%) of workers successfully completed the training and approximately 60 percent of participants reported finding employment within 4–6 weeks of completing the training. The project's ability to provide market-relevant skills and facilitate employment opportunities highlighted its importance in enhancing participants' livelihoods and employability in a dynamic environment.

Sustainability

The period after the cash assistance was received by participants was extremely tumultuous, limiting the impact of the assistance. More than half of the participants reported that their financial situation had improved since the conclusion of the cash assistance, while 28 percent perceived their financial status to be unchanged and 20 percent felt it had deteriorated. Participants, particularly those who had received cash assistance for three months, reported a more enduring effect on their children's nutrition, suggesting that the sustained benefits of improved child nutrition were more pronounced among those who received more consistent financial support.

Communications

Only sixty percent of participants received detailed information about the specific assistance they were entitled to receive, and only a quarter of participants were informed about how to raise complaints or ask questions. This suggests a need for more effective communication about channels for addressing issues and sharing opinions. The challenges in effective communication seem to be associated with the high workload of the communication staff and limitations in the communication infrastructure.

Conclusion

The Myan Ku project demonstrated its significance and relevance by effectively addressing the urgent needs of vulnerable garment workers during times of economic uncertainty, political instability and a global pandemic. The project's design aligned with the context, offering a comprehensive package of financial assistance, SBCC, capacity building and livelihood initiatives. The project was implemented during a tumultuous political and economic period. This required ongoing flexibility and adaptation which, while challenging, proved ultimately successful. Overall, the Myan Ku project stands as a valuable initiative that addressed immediate needs and laid the foundation for improved livelihoods, nutrition and resilience among vulnerable garment workers. The lessons learned from its implementation can inform future projects in cash assistance, nutrition and social protection programming, contributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Recommendations

1. Enhance data management.
2. Invest in communication.
3. Diversify cash assistance modalities.
4. Extend vocational and business start-up training opportunities.
5. Tailor SBCC initiatives to the targeted group using different types of media and messaging.
6. Develop exit strategies.
7. Consideration for people with special needs

Myan Ku Final Evaluation Report

INTRODUCTION

The Nexus Response Mechanism (NRM), in partnership with sequa gGmbH and Wave Money, and with funding from the European Union, set up the Myan Ku Workers Support Fund in April 2020. The project was created in response to garment factory closures in Myanmar caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the project scaled up in response to the political and economic crisis that escalated factory closures and lay-offs as the country descended into a humanitarian crisis. By the end of the project in December 2022, more than 8 billion Myanmar Kyat (MMK) (3.8 million USD) had been transferred to an estimated 100,000 unemployed and underemployed garment workers, mainly women, affected by factory shutdowns, along with other services and capacity building. Garment workers received monthly cash transfers averaging 75,000 MMK² (46 USD) for up to three months and in some cases food vouchers, as well as social and behavior change communication (SBCC), nutritional counselling, vocational and business start-up training, and telehealth services.

The NRM commissioned Aventura Research Myanmar (ARM) to conduct a final evaluation of the project from June to September 2023. The overall purpose of the evaluation was to provide NRM with an independent assessment of the project's performance across key evaluation criteria, highlighting its impact and achievements, the challenges faced, lessons learned and recommendations for future programs.

Methodology

The evaluation assessed the project against six evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and communication, covering both phases of the project from April 2020 to December 2022. Three data sources were used to triangulate the information: a thorough desk review, a quantitative survey of 181 project participants, and qualitative interviews with six project stakeholders as well as 13 in-depth interviews with project participants. Limitations to the evaluation include the low availability of local partners due to the political environment; limited ability to directly attribute outcomes solely to project interventions due to external contextual factors; lack of comparative benchmarks from similar contexts or projects; and self-reporting biases related to recall, since participants received the cash assistance and services from one to three years ago.

Context

By the end of April 2020, just a few months into the pandemic, 60,000 workers from 175 factories lost their jobs, and by early 2021, 120 factories had permanently closed. Many of these workers were women who had migrated from different parts of the country to work in the factories to support their family and their extended family before losing their employment with little recourse, some without their final payments or severance.

In February 2021, a significant turning point occurred in Myanmar's political landscape with the military takeover, which had repercussions on the Myan Ku project. This event unfolded as the project had already completed its initial phase from April 2020 to December 2020 and was beginning an extension of phase two.

The context introduced a challenging environment that impacted the project in several ways, including:

- **Impact on financial transactions:** The banking crisis and cash shortages rendered it impossible for UNOPS to transfer funds between local bank accounts, Wave Money and local partners for an extended period. In 2021, recipients were either unable to withdraw funds or needed to pay exorbitant agent fees.
- **Operational efficiency and security:** Approximately 20 percent of the project time was consumed with accessing and securely distributing project funds and payroll. Safety concerns impacted partner staff, and many had to relocate. Losing support from local partners led to a reduced number of applications for Myan Ku assistance, impacting the achievement of project targets.

² The rate of the MMK against the US dollar has been volatile since the military coup. In January 2020, when the project began, project participants received 75,000 MMK per month, which was then equivalent to 52 USD. Midway through the project, in July 2021, the same amount was equivalent to 46 USD. By the end of the project, the amount was equivalent to 42 USD. For consistency, this paper uses the 1 July 2021 rate of 1,622 MMK = 1 USD throughout. <https://www.google.com/finance/quote/USD-MMK>

- **Changes to project outputs:** The altered political landscape compelled adaptations of project outputs. Components focused on strengthening and expanding social protection mechanisms and policy dialogue were suspended as a result of political sensitivities in the context.

Swift adaptations were required to ensure the project's continued effectiveness and relevance, including:

- **Shift to food vouchers:** As a result of the intractable banking issues, food vouchers were provided instead of cash transfers. This adaptation allowed the project to continue providing essential support to participants.
- **Changes to communications and visibility strategies:** Recognizing the potential risks to both the project's work and staff safety, the Myan Ku project curtailed its visibility on social media platforms.
- **Changes to partnerships:** The Myan Ku project proactively suspended all communications with governance entities to maintain neutrality and uphold the safety and integrity of its operations.
- **Adapting banking procedures:** The project had to constantly adjust to bank withdrawal procedures, including opening additional bank accounts and shifting branch locations to access cash from banks.
- **Safety measures:** To ensure the safety of project staff and assets, the project undertook a series of measures, including defensive driving courses, consultations with EU security specialists, development of a security policy, contracting a security guard and installation of CCTV cameras.

ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Relevance

Relevance to the needs of project participants

Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that the financial assistance provided by Myan Ku was highly relevant and well-suited to the needs of the participants. The project supported at least 91,441 workers who were in dire need of help after being laid off, the majority of them struggling to secure new jobs. The quantitative survey highlighted that 34 percent were in a significant or extensive need of financial support and nearly 60 percent had no other income source and relied solely on Myan Ku's assistance. Furthermore, many participants explained that after losing their jobs, they faced difficulties in meeting immediate needs, such as food and rent, and relied on negative coping mechanisms to survive, such as accumulating debt, high interest borrowing and delaying essential (non-food) expenses, and participants were cutting back on remittances to their families.

The vocational training component was found to be highly relevant since most garment workers possess specialized expertise in specific segments of garment production, rendering their skills less applicable to other jobs. The project provided upgraded sewing skills and machine operation training as well as facilitated job placement, which helped 60 percent of participants secure jobs within 4-6 weeks of training completion.

The project's proactive refinement of SBCC training and nutrition counselling through behavioral research and KAP survey feedback, coupled with the flexibility to adjust session frequency, resulted in highly relevant training.

Relevance of participant selection criteria

The selection criteria for cash assistance underwent changes during the project to adapt to the evolving needs of the project participants. During phase one, the criteria focused on garment workers who had experienced termination, suspension or significant reductions in work hours. However, the workers' termination status was not always clear-cut. To address this issue, the project adjusted the criteria into four priorities:

- Pregnant workers and workers with young children who had been out of work in 2020 or 2021.
- Migrant workers who lost their jobs in 2020 or 2021
- Extreme hardship cases, including laid-off garment factory workers that were homeless, victims of domestic abuse, engaged in hazardous temporary work, etc.
- Unemployed workers willing to undergo vocational training (re-skilling) during their unemployment.

The shift in selection criteria was found to be relevant as it prioritized segments of the population that required immediate assistance. Similarly, focusing on migrant workers proved to be crucial as they faced unique challenges, especially concerning rent payments. However, the selection criteria for vocational support revealed

a lack of well-defined criteria for participant selection. For example, 396 female migrants participated in the sewing training to learn upgraded techniques and how to operate new types of machinery. The selection process was guided by the interest of the trainees and the availability of factories to provide locations for training. The lack of specific targeting criteria raised concerns about the transparency and fairness of the selection process as the process excluded individuals from other factories or those who were not connected to the garment industry, but still had a genuine interest in vocational training.

Rationale for transfer amount, frequency and duration

In early 2020, a local partner conducted rapid research to ascertain the minimum amount required for basic accommodation and food, focusing on the needs of migrant workers. Based on this data, the cash assistance value and duration were developed. During phase one, cash payments of 75,000 MMK for up to three months were provided to workers who were suspended without pay or terminated with low severance. Workers who were illegally terminated (with no severance pay) were eligible to receive a 125,000 MMK (77 USD)³ one-time payment, along with the possibility of 75,000 MMK for two additional months. Furthermore, the project sought feedback after the initial cash disbursements with various stakeholders, including the EU Delegation, Fair Wear Foundation and local partners. The cash assistance amounts were deemed sufficient by the stakeholders to cover participants' basic needs during the initial period of unemployment.

During phase two, pregnant women without employment and other support were eligible to receive the maximum transfer of 125,000 MMK for up to six months as they often faced additional financial burdens due to medical expenses and childcare needs. By offering an extended duration of assistance, the project sought to provide a more robust safety net for pregnant women, reducing their financial stress.

The duration of cash assistance was limited to avoid creating dependency. It was calibrated based on consultations with trade unions, business associations, the EU Delegation, sequa and UNOPS. The three-month duration, except for some special cases, was meant to strike a balance between providing the necessary support and encouraging participants to seek alternative opportunities for income generation.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness in meeting basic needs

The majority of participants who received cash assistance reported that while the assistance contributed positively to their financial situation, it only partially helped them to meet their basic needs. The ability to partially meet basic needs during the month the support was received was reported by 80 percent of people receiving one-time cash, by 69 percent receiving three or more months of cash and by 45 percent of participants receiving food vouchers.

Ninety percent of participants indicated that the assistance positively affected their ability to acquire more nutritious food. This finding underlines the project's positive influence on improving project participants' access to essential dietary elements. Almost all (98%) of people who received cash for three months or food vouchers felt that they were able to purchase more nutritious foods, while 92 percent of people who received one-time cash assistance felt the same. This variance might be attributed to several factors, for example that cash or food vouchers received over a longer duration may have a greater impact on the ability to purchase nutritious foods or it could be due to individual spending priorities.

There was a slight decline over time of participants being able to send remittances, with 62 percent of participants sending remittances before the Myan Ku project, 59 percent during the project and 54 percent after the support ended. This decline can be attributed to reduced incomes and the challenging economic conditions. In this context, and combined with the qualitative findings, Myan Ku's intervention appears to have played a pivotal role in mitigating the decline in participants' ability to send remittances. It is evident that Myan Ku effectively

³ Exchange rates fluctuated throughout the project. This rate taken from 1 July 2021: <https://www.google.com/finance/quote/USD-MMK>

cushioned the impact of external shocks, enabling participants to continue sending remittances to their families by extending support during periods of unemployment and financial distress.

Effectiveness of Wave Money as a distribution method

The employment of Wave Money as a distribution method exhibited noteworthy effectiveness, as indicated by both quantitative and qualitative data. A majority of participants expressed high levels of satisfaction, with 94 percent reporting being “satisfied” or “very satisfied” and 93 percent found that accessing the cash assistance was “very easy” or “easy”. Moreover, 97 percent acknowledged Wave Money as a secure and safe channel for receiving cash transfers. No specific complaints were mentioned, and challenges associated with using Wave Money were minimal. Seven percent reported facing issues and they predominantly sought assistance from friends or family to resolve these.

The effectiveness of Wave Money did face certain limitations. Instances of extra fees of 1.5%–3% were reported for cash withdrawal during times of cash shortage following the coup. Additionally, participants in remote areas encountered transportation challenges for cashing out or accessing transferred funds. Finally, qualitative data revealed that elderly individuals experienced some difficulties in using digital payment methods.

Safety

Nearly all (99%) participants reported feeling safe collecting the cash assistance, underscoring a significant level of trust and confidence in the project. Qualitative interviews further corroborate this positive trend, with all participants expressing no major safety concerns apart from a singular instance of a participant expressing uncertainty due to a lack of understanding about the funding source.

Efficiency of Wave Money as a distribution method

Wave Money’s efficiency as a delivery system was evaluated with considerations of broad coverage across the country, particularly in rural areas, as well as its commitment to waive standard service fees, which overall contributed to its efficiency. However, the cash transfer process encountered disruptions in functioning during the latter part of 2021 and the initial half of 2022 due to the context. During this period, food vouchers served as a viable alternative, albeit less efficient compared to digital money.

On average, the entire process, spanning from application submission to cash collection, was 20–25 days. Unemployed participants, many of whom went back to their hometown during COVID-19, faced a longer waiting time, averaging around 24 days. In contrast, individuals who were employed in either their previous factories or in new jobs experienced shorter wait times of 21–23 days.

Cost of accessing the cash assistance

Wave Money did not charge standard service fees at the outset, however, during the period of the banking crisis, there were challenges with cash withdrawal fees. Transportation charges were a challenge for participants residing in remote areas. For cash assistance recipients, about one-third (34%) paid between 1,000–5,000 MMK (0.62–3.08 USD)⁴ to receive cash assistance. Similarly, 31 percent of food voucher recipients reported incurring transportation fees to receive the vouchers and 46 percent reported transportation fees for using them. Most spent between 1,000–5,000 MMK, but a small percentage (4%) reported paying 10,001 (6.17 USD)⁵ or above. The qualitative data revealed instances where participants needed to allocate significant sums to travel to access Wave Money agents or shopping malls for voucher usage. This finding points to the importance of recognizing and addressing potential financial barriers that participants might encounter beyond direct assistance.

Project participant data management

The project’s initial data management setup faced limitations due to its rapid deployment in response to needs brought on by COVID-19. The project opted for pragmatic action over delayed implementation to have a timely response to the crisis. While subsequent years witnessed efforts to clean and organize the data, the 2020 data

⁴ Exchange rates fluctuated throughout the project. This rate taken from 1 July 2021: <https://www.google.com/finance/quote/USD-MMK>

⁵ Exchange rates fluctuated throughout the project. This rate taken from 1 July 2021: <https://www.google.com/finance/quote/USD-MMK>

remained imprecise due to these early challenges. Notably, data management resources appeared inadequate throughout the project's course, with technical constraints in handling complex data analysis.

Impact

Use of cash assistance

Both quantitative and qualitative insights highlight that the cash assistance from Myan Ku often blended with participants' existing resources, serving various purposes such as covering food expenditures, health expenses and remittance obligations. Two-thirds (66%) of participants reported their intent to continue remittances, indicating the assistance's significance in maintaining support networks and family connections. The distribution of responses across categories, such as rent, utilities, phone bills and transportation, underscores the broad coverage of basic necessities facilitated by the cash assistance.

Notably, participants who benefited from the cash assistance for a three-month period exhibited a more diverse allocation of funds. This trend suggests that the extended duration of assistance enabled participants to address a wider array of financial obligations and aspirations beyond immediate sustenance. In contrast, participants who received one-time cash assistance demonstrated a more pronounced focus on household food expenditure.

Impact of SBCC, financial and vocational training

SBCC impact on nutrition: The consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages decreased for mothers, indicating that SBCC efforts likely raised awareness about the negative effects of such beverages on maternal health and influenced behavior change. In addition, zero consumption of vegetables or fruits decreased and there was a large increase in supplement intake containing iron during the last months of pregnancy.

In the case of infant and child nutrition, there was an improvement in minimum dietary diversity, meal frequency and acceptable diet. Similar to the maternal indicator, the reduction in zero vegetable and fruit consumption also points to the effectiveness of SBCC in influencing caregivers to introduce healthier foods.

The impact of SBCC on breastfeeding habits showed mixed results. While there was an increase in continued breastfeeding for infants aged 12–23 months, the lack of exclusive breastfeeding indicates challenges to change this behavior. Furthermore, the increase in unhealthy food consumption among young children suggests that SBCC might need to address these aspects more effectively to counteract negative dietary habits.

Impact of financial literacy and business training: The project provided entrepreneurship training for 201 participants interested in starting micro-sized businesses, with 25 participants successfully starting their own businesses. In addition, it is worth noting that:

- The primary challenge for starting businesses was the lack of initial capital, indicating that while the training provided skills, financial constraints still limited implementation.
- Some participants chose to return to employment rather than start their own businesses.
- Qualitative interviews with participants who received financial literacy training highlighted improvements in personal and small business financial management skills.
- The training provider expressed concerns about the commitment of trainees, with approximately half of them not committing to complete the training.

Impact of vocational training: The majority (94%) of workers successfully completed this training. Job placement outcomes were more complex due to the context and the garment industry's seasonality. Approximately 60 percent of participants reported finding employment within 4–6 weeks of completing the training. The project's ability to provide market-relevant skills and facilitate employment opportunities highlighted its importance in enhancing participants' livelihoods and employability in a dynamic environment.

Sustainability

Sustained effect on the participants' financial situation

Qualitative insights highlight that participants' financial statuses were closely tied to their employment circumstances: those who secured employment reported an improvement in their financial conditions. More than

half of the participants reported that their financial situations had improved since the conclusion of the cash assistance, while 28 percent perceived their financial statuses to be unchanged and 20 percent said their financial situations had deteriorated.

Sustained effect of child nutrition

Participants, particularly those who had received three months of cash assistance, reported a more enduring effect on their children's nutrition. Specifically, around 57 percent of participants in the three-month group indicated that their children continued to consume more nutritious foods even after the support from Myan Ku had ended. This figure exceeded the corresponding percentages of 47 percent and 44 percent observed in the other two participant groups, one-time cash assistance and food vouchers respectively.

The proportion of participants reporting that their children were consuming less nutritious food was notably lower in the group that received three months of cash assistance, suggesting that the sustained benefits of improved child nutrition was more pronounced amongst those who received more consistent financial support.

Sustainability of the project approach

Aspects of the project have demonstrated efforts to establish a sustainable model:

- **Capacity building:** Vocational training aimed at enhancing participants' long-term employability by equipping them with skills that align with market demands. The entrepreneurship training exemplifies this approach, as it empowers workers to establish micro-sized businesses, fostering self-sufficiency.
- **Partnerships and collaboration:** Successful collaborations with Wave Money and private sector partners, such as City Mart, H&M, Bestseller Foundation, etc. underscore the potential for sustainability. The establishment of partnerships opens avenues for future cash assistance initiatives and in-kind support.
- **Knowledge dissemination:** The project's commitment to producing knowledge products and publications benefits not only the immediate project participants but also the broader garment sector in Myanmar. By sharing experiences and lessons learned, the project contributes to improved practices in future initiatives.

Replicability and scalability

Strengths:

- **Adaptive implementation:** The project demonstrated its ability to adapt swiftly to emerging crises indicating that the project's structure and approach can be replicated in response to future emergencies.
- **Partnerships:** The project's successful collaborations with stakeholders, including Wave Money, private sector partners and local organizations, has established a network that could be leveraged in future emergencies.
- **Capacity building:** The vocational training components of the project provide a valuable framework for replication. These training modules can be adapted and scaled up to address different emergencies and sectors, ensuring participants acquire skills that enhance their employability.

Challenges:

- **The garment sector:** The uniqueness of the garment industry indicates a specific challenge for replication in other sectors because the industry is usually concentrated in one area, which facilitates participant identification and recruitment, aided by existing networks like sequa's. This advantage is harder to replicate in industries with dispersed workplaces and less established networks.
- **Political and contextual sensitivity:** The project's efficacy hinged on its adaptability to the unique sociopolitical context of Myanmar. Replicating the project in other regions or countries would require careful consideration of the local context, regulations and political dynamics, which may differ significantly.
- **Logistical complexity:** The project's implementation involved intricate logistics, including digital platforms, data management and participant outreach. Replicating these processes in different contexts could present challenges related to technology infrastructure, data management systems and communication.

Communications

Communication about project entitlements and rights

- Sixty percent of participants felt they received detailed information about the assistance they were entitled to receive, suggesting room for improvement in effectively communicating entitlement details.
- Eighty-five percent of participants reported being informed about the reasons behind their selection, indicating that a stronger effort is needed to communicate the basis for participant involvement.
- Only 17 percent reported being well informed about how long they would receive assistance. The qualitative data reinforces this gap, indicating that many participants lacked clarity about the duration of their involvement.
- Only a quarter of participants felt they were informed about how to raise complaints or ask questions. A similar percentage (23%) were aware of feedback mechanisms. This suggests a need for more effective communication about channels for addressing issues and sharing opinions.

Convenience, language and cost of communication

- The main communication channels with participants were phone calls and text messages. Eighty-three percent found the communication methods to be convenient, with an additional 13 percent considering them very convenient.
- Ninety-four percent of participants understood the language used in communications.
- Almost all (99%) reported that they did not incur any cost for communication, and only 1 percent incurred phone bills.

The challenges in effective communication seem to be associated with the high workload of the communication staff and limitations in communication infrastructure. The qualitative data indicates that the high volume of calls from participants overwhelmed the communication staff, leading to delays in responding to inquiries.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Early adoption of a data management system:** Adequate planning for participant data management is essential to ensure the accurate tracking of participant information and outcomes.
2. **Investment in communication with participants:** Large participant numbers and limited human resources can impact a project's ability to convey clear and effective communication, especially about entitlements and assistance duration, which are crucial to avoid confusion and maintain transparency.
3. **Develop an exit strategy:** A well-defined exit strategy is essential for sustaining positive outcomes beyond project duration, ensuring that participants continue to benefit even after project conclusion.
4. **Digital money works well as a transfer method for most people,** despite challenges such as technical difficulties for older generations and transportation issues for remote individuals.
5. **Adaptability as a key asset:** The project's adaptability to changing contexts demonstrates its resilience and effectiveness in addressing unforeseen challenges, which are important for future programs in Myanmar.
6. **Empowerment through vocational training:** Vocational training and business support empower participants with the skills needed for sustainable livelihoods, addressing a key root cause of poverty.
7. **Collaborative approaches:** Collaborations with local partners, trade unions and industry stakeholders can amplify the project's impact by addressing broader systemic issues within the garment industry.
8. **Context-sensitive interventions:** Acknowledging socio-political factors and adapting interventions accordingly ensure that projects remain relevant and effective in diverse and changing environments.

The reports produced by the Myan Ku project significantly contributed to expanding the evidence base and fostering learning across several crucial areas, including cash assistance, nutrition, employee rights and related topics. Some specific ways in which these reports have made valuable contributions are:

- a) **Enhanced understanding of cash assistance and food vouchers**
- b) **Informed nutrition interventions** by assessing the impact of SBCC initiatives on nutrition outcomes
- c) **Insights into employee rights and labor practices**
- d) **Adaptive learning** in response to changing contexts, such as the political situation and COVID-19
- e) **Lessons on effective partnership models through** engagement with various stakeholders, including Wave Money, factories and local partner organizations
- f) **Contribution to poverty alleviation** through its multifaceted interventions, including cash assistance, vocational training and financial literacy, offering viable pathways to enhance economic resilience.

CONCLUSION

The Myan Ku project demonstrated its significance and relevance by effectively addressing the urgent needs of vulnerable garment workers during times of economic uncertainty, political instability and a global pandemic. The project's design aligned with the context, offering a comprehensive package of financial assistance, SBCC, capacity-building and livelihood initiatives. The project's implementation was during a tumultuous political and economic period and required ongoing flexibility and adaptation which, while challenging, were ultimately successful. The project's immediate impact was clearly demonstrated as the financial assistance provided much-needed support for project participants, aiding them in covering various expenses, including remittances. While vocational training and business startup training improved employability and entrepreneurship opportunities for some participants, these activities had a limited scope, and evidence of substantial, long-term impact remains limited. While sustainability prospects have been identified through capacity building and partnerships, it is important to enhance the project's exit strategy and explore mechanisms for continued support and engagement. Finally, communication efforts were commendable, using various channels effectively to engage stakeholders and donors. However, there was a gap in informing participants about their entitlements and how they could complain or ask questions.

Overall, the Myan Ku project stands as a valuable initiative that has addressed immediate needs and laid the foundation for improved livelihoods, nutrition and resilience among vulnerable garment workers. The lessons learned from its implementation can inform future projects in cash assistance, nutrition and social protection programming, contributing to sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance data management:** Future projects should address the need for robust data management infrastructure from the start, including investment in technology and training to ensure accurate, safe and comprehensive participant data collection and analysis.
2. **Invest in communication:** The project should put more resources into developing a more streamlined communication strategy to manage the challenges of engaging with a large number of participants.
3. **Diversify cash assistance modalities:** Consider giving participants the agency to select the most suitable delivery mechanism depending on their circumstances. Alternative options in addition to Wave Money transfers can be provided, for example by using K-pay, to reduce the need to withdraw cash.
4. **Extend vocational and business start-up training opportunities:** The vocational training was well received by participants and helped many participants return to employment, but the number of participants was relatively small. Placing more emphasis on spreading information about training opportunities, establishing clear selection criteria and prioritizing candidates who are committed to starting a business would help engage more relevant participants. Coordinate with local partners such as ONOW, who specialize in entrepreneurial empowerment, to provide ongoing support and mentorship to help navigate challenges in the early days of business start-ups.
5. **Tailor SBCC initiatives to the targeted group using different types of media and messaging:** The project should facilitate peer-to-peer discussions and knowledge sharing as well as involve partners, family members and other caregivers. Regarding the consumption of unhealthy food and sugar-sweetened

beverages, the project should develop interactive and engaging educational materials for caregivers. The project can consider utilizing visual aids, videos and demonstrations to convey the messages effectively.

- 6. Develop exit strategies:** The project should have a clear exit strategy as part of the overall road map to improve sustainability and long-term impact. The exit strategy should explicitly state the action points that all the project staff can refer back to, such as:
 - Build the capacity of local partners to manage and implement similar programs.
 - Develop local networks made up of garment workers, employers, labor unions and other relevant stakeholders to share labor market information and provide assistance, ensuring local ownership.
- 7. Consideration for people with special needs:** The project demonstrated the significant impact of assistance on vulnerable populations such as pregnant women, migrant workers and sex workers. The project should expand assistance to child workers by collaborating with local educational institutions. In addition, developing an inclusive system within the M&E framework to identify persons with disabilities would enable tailored assistance, promoting their well-being more effectively. This comprehensive approach aligns with the project's commitment to addressing diverse vulnerabilities.

For more information about the Myan Ku Workers Fund or about cash and social protection at The Nexus Response Mechanism, please contact Rachel Eichholz, Programme Advisor, Cash & Social Protection