



Resilient Futures

Supporting Partnerships and Resilience of Communities
(SPARC) in Northern Rakhine State

End-of-Project Evaluation December 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the CARE International in Myanmar management and staff for their time, patience and honesty in sharing their opinions, challenges and successes with the *Supporting Partnership and Resilience of Communities in Northern Rakhine State (SPARC)* project, funded by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Special thanks to Assistant Country Director, Pam Flowers and Information, Documentation, Monitoring and Evaluation Director, Zing Lian Cing for providing program oversight, technical insights and valuable feedback. Thanks also to Field Office Coordinator (Buthidaung), Aung Khant Kyaw, Field Office Coordinator (Maungdaw), Yin Tun and Senior Project Officer, Noor Islam for their contextual guidance and logistical support throughout the fieldwork and analysis.

Finally, many thanks to the communities that gave freely of their time to sit and explain their experiences. Without their generosity in welcoming us into their homes and sharing valuable information about their lives, this review could not have happened.

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ACRONYMS

BT	Buthidaung (Township of Rakhine State)
CBDRM	Community Based Disaster Risk Management
CDA	Collaborative for Development Action
CFMC	Community Forestry Management Committee
CFUG	Community Forestry User Group
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DNH	Do No Harm
EDC	Early Childhood Development Centre
FFS	Farmer Field School
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KII	Key Informant Interview
LBVD	Livestock, Breeding, and Veterinary Department
MD	Maungdaw (Township of Rakhine State; also Maungdaw District, composed of Maungdaw and Buthidaung Townships)
MM	Myanmar
NFI	Non-Food Item(s)
PHASE IN	Poverty and Hunger Alleviation Through Support, Empowerment and Increased Networking
PTA	Parent-Teacher Association
SPARC	Strengthening Partnerships and Resilience of Communities
VDC	Village Development Committee
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WASH	Water and Sanitation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The situation in Rakhine State represents many of the challenges that Myanmar faces during a period of transition. A widespread lack of access to capital, credit, land and agricultural inputs is compounded by high population density, weak or non-existent infrastructure, and vulnerability to natural disasters, rendering the common household extremely susceptible to food insecurity and chronic malnutrition. The area is comprised of several different ethnic groups, the two largest being the Buddhist Rakhine who constitute the majority within the State, and the Muslim Rohingya. Ethnically, linguistically, and religiously, the Rakhine and Rohingya are strikingly different, though they occupy the same physical environment and experience similar economic neglect, political isolation, and exploitation by authorities and security personnel. Additionally, however, the Rohingya suffer a significant predicament in that they are systematically discriminated against by the central government; they are considered as illegal Bengali migrants, and are thus, denied Myanmar citizenship and all civil and political rights. The lack of mobility, assembly, and freedom of speech, compounded by a deeply entrenched national rhetoric of ethnic division and mistrust has rendered access to and participation in basic social institutions such as education, health, justice, finance, and self-determination extremely difficult. Rohingya women are further marginalised by cultural and religious norms, often confined to the home, unable to complete a reasonable level of education, and restricted from engaging in social and economic activities.

Northern Rakhine State has experienced recurrent natural disasters and intercommunity-conflict. Ethnic and religious differences combined with other factors, have led to violent confrontations causing loss of life and destruction of farms and infrastructure. Floods, mudslides and cyclones combined with outbreaks of violence have displaced many households over the years. Those who remain in their villages face similar risks, with limited support. Intercommunity conflict has continued to escalate since 2012 and in August 2017, deadly attacks by the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army against police and army posts provoked a violent military and inter-communal response that culminated in the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya, into neighbouring Bangladesh.

Within this context, CARE International in Myanmar (CARE Myanmar) seeks to support short- and longer-term economic opportunities for diverse communities in Rakhine State alongside support for building inter-communal cohesion to ensure sustainability. The Supporting Partnerships and Resilience of Communities (SPARC) project, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), was implemented in Maungdaw District, northern Rakhine State between December 2011- December 2019.

SPARC's goal is to contribute to the sustainable reduction of poverty in communities through improving the social and economic position of poor, vulnerable households, and to strengthen household and community capacity to sustain such improvements. To achieve this goal, CARE implements integrated livelihood activities that improve food security and economic opportunities, including community forestry, crop productivity intensification, facilitating access to education and introducing financial services through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA).

Project Objectives include:

- **Objective 1:** To assist target communities to sustainably manage and enhance their livelihood productivity by improving access to and utilisation of resource appropriate technologies.
- **Objective 2:** To strengthen the technical, operational and management capacity of targeted community groups, local partners and service providers, and to increase women's participation in community-level groups.
- **Objective 3:** To enhance access to education for vulnerable households by decreasing institutional- and household-level barriers in northern Rakhine State.

- **Objective 4 (2019):** To strengthen GBV awareness raising and response mechanisms within target communities in northern Shan and Kayah states.

An end-of-project evaluation was recently commissioned *‘to determine if SPARC achieved its end of project outcomes of sustainable reduction of poverty in poor, vulnerable communities and strengthened household and community capacity to sustain such improvements’.*

The evaluation used a mixed method approach combining a literature review and quantitative data sets drawn primarily from the project monitoring system, together with qualitative data, collected using participatory approaches such as focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), and Stories of Change Interviews (SoCs).

Key Findings

Relevance

SPARC was originally designed in 2011 to address the livelihood needs of vulnerable households in northern Rakhine State. The project is based on promoting food security, access to economic opportunities and strengthened capacity of community-based structures for carrying out local development initiatives. Intercommunal conflict in 2012 and its gradual escalation through to the violent military and inter-communal responses of 2016/17, culminated in the mass exodus and displacement of Rohingya, into neighbouring Bangladesh. SPARC successfully adapted to the evolving context and revisions were made to project objectives in 2013 and 2015, strengthening the focus on livelihoods resilience (as opposed to the original more general wording of “contributing to the sustainable reduction of poverty”). Implementation from 2015-2018 focussed on delivery of strategic objectives referring to enhanced livelihoods productivity based on improved access to and utilisation of resources and appropriate technologies (SO1); the strengthening of targeted community committees/structures to improve community and household resources with a focus on strategies to increase women’s participation in these committees (SO2); and enhanced access to education for vulnerable households (SO3).

Although the context for implementation changed markedly since the initial outbreak of intercommunal conflict (2012), relevant to both Rakhine and Rohingya, SPARC’s project goal, strategic objectives and activities could not be more appropriate and relevant in an environment such as this, despite the considerable obstacles and risks to programming.

Effectiveness

Overall the evaluation found that despite the complex operating environment, SPARC has made a significant contribution to multi-sectoral long-term development as well as delivering effective humanitarian assistance in northern Rakhine State. SPARC made significant contributions under each of its strategic objectives, with the majority of progress made under SO1 (specifically in relation to community forestry, agriculture, home gardens vegetable production and livestock). Partial progress was made under SO2 (specifically in relation to VDC capacity development and the financial inclusion of women through VSLAs) and also under SO3 (specifically in relation to education). There are sound contextual reasons for partial progress under each objective and adaptations made to project approaches. Key contributions are as follows:

Objective 1: To assist target communities to sustainably manage and enhance their livelihood productivity by improving access to and utilisation of resource appropriate technologies.

Assets and income of vulnerable households have increased through community forestry: SPARC supported communities to maintain 47 existing community forestry plots (totalling 3,128 acres) and to establish 4 new community forestry plots (totalling 294 acres). SPARC successfully built the technical (weeding, thinning, in-fill planting, harvesting, fire management, nursery development) and

management capacity (reporting, book-keeping, conflict resolution, consensus decision-making and transparency) of 41 existing CFMCs and CFUGs to ensure long-term management and sustainability of plots. Over 3000 CFUG members benefitted from capacity-building and those managing existing CF plots reported that they had increased their income from forest products such as the sale of surplus wood for fuel and village-level construction.

Given the complex operating environment, SPARC's contribution to improved cooperation and coordination between CFUGs/CFMCs and the Forestry Department is particularly noteworthy. SPARC organised coordination meetings between FDs in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships and CFMCs, which included Muslim and Rakhine community forest users. By providing CFMC members and FD officials a platform to meet and discuss concerns and plans for future forestry management, SPARC was able to build and improve relations in a context where there was significant distrust between ethnic groups, and between communities and the local authorities. In southern Maungdaw, these efforts at facilitation were successful in allowing CFUG members to access their land despite high levels of sensitivity in the area.

Women and men have improved access to more productive income-generating opportunities: SPARC supported the improvement of rainy and summer paddy rice production and profitability through a combination of technical support and input provision. SPARC provided almost 6000 households with inputs (fertiliser, tools) and cash to support production costs (land rental, purchase of further inputs or labour costs). Distribution monitoring for summer paddy distribution revealed that whilst 99% of recipients felt that inputs provided were of good quality, 86% reported there were often delays in distribution, but that they were still able to use them in a timely manner. For those that received rain-fed paddy cultivation 98% felt the inputs were of good quality and 95% felt the inputs were provided on time. Where the project was able to distribute appropriate inputs at the right time, 67% of households reported an increase in production and household income.

Six farmer field schools strengthened their technical approaches in summer and rain-fed paddy. Qualitative data from focus group discussions following training indicates that farmers better understand the benefits of seed variety distribution how to use natural and/or chemical fertilisers more effectively, and how to identify and control pests. Farmers have also adopted a new seed variety following successful plot demonstrations.

Homestead crop and vegetable production and utilisation increased: Home gardening focused on women-headed households as it presented an acceptable means for women to improve their household food consumption and generate additional income. By mid-2019, the project reached almost 2000 women through the provision of seeds (cucumber, bitter melon, snake melon, spinach, moringa, and long bean) and cash grants to support cultivation in compounds (bamboo stands, manure). Qualitative data indicates that women home gardeners have increased the diversity and yields of their home gardens and in some cases have been able to sell or share the surplus.

Increased household incomes through improved small livestock production: SPARC reached 600 households through either direct livestock distribution (Maungdaw Township) and/or cash grants to purchase livestock and shelter materials (Buthidaung Township). SPARC also worked with village-based 'livestock volunteers' that assisted in the dissemination of key livestock management messages and provided a vaccination program to support households. Qualitative data indicates that women recipients of small livestock such as goats have developed their confidence in livestock handling and raising and have been able to increase their income and make longer-term productive investments including: expansion of their livelihood activities (purchase of chickens, lease of land); supporting the education of their children and improving their housing.

Objective 2: To strengthen the technical, operational and management capacity of targeted community groups, local partners and service providers, and to increase women's participation in community-level groups.

Village Development Committees organised and their capacity to effectively facilitate and manage community development activities built: SPARC supported 60 VDCs with capacity building in the areas of leadership and facilitation, budget management and bookkeeping, record keeping, and project management specifically developing and workplan and managing tenders and contractors. Outcome monitoring reported that 93% of households found VDCs either useful or very useful (32%; 61% respectively). 46 VDCs (26 in Maungdaw and 20 in Buthidaung) utilised VDF grants for a range of community development projects such as tube wells, jetties repairs, teacher accommodation, village roads and culverts, school fencing and small dam construction.

Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) plans developed and implemented: SPARC sought to improve local government capacity to respond to disasters through disaster-risk reduction awareness-raising and by project-end had trained 378 government officials from twelve departments in topics such as: vulnerability and capacity assessments/rapid needs assessments; flood disaster awareness; cyclone disaster awareness; early warning systems; linkages to climate change and linkages to damage and loss assessments under law. Learning from experience in responding to Cyclone Komen (July 2015), SPARC invested in and pre-positioned emergency shelter and hygiene kits to enable rapid local response in 2016. These pre-positioned emergency supplies proved critical to the project's effective and timely response to Cyclone Mora (May 2017). CARE worked in coordination with Maungdaw District Commissioners Office and supported the distribution of kits to the most effected households.

Women and men have increased access to financial services through VSLAs: Accessing credit/borrowing is the most common coping mechanism of households in northern Rakhine State, and providing access to affordable financial services is key to strengthening livelihood security for the most vulnerable households. SPARC established 40 VSLAs to increase the opportunities for women to participate and access financial services. Groups members utilised funds to purchase productive assets (small livestock such as pigs and goats, large livestock such as cattle and poultry) and non-productive assets (radios, cycles, mobile phones, supplies for petty trade and building materials for home renovations). Women also reported using them for health, education and household consumption. Women members considered the group a safe place to save and were satisfied with the access and amount of credit that could be borrowed from their group.

Objective 3: To enhance access to education for vulnerable households by decreasing institutional- and household-level barriers in northern Rakhine State.

Early childhood development (ECD) program increases number of pre-school children in kindergarten: SPARC was established 19 ECDs (the target was 20) and provided capacity development for 39 teachers. Teacher training was delivered through a month-long training course which covered a core curriculum in addition to topics such as children's rights, the role of parent education, report writing, daily, weekly, monthly planning, the practice and telling of stories and child protection. Teachers report that their skill-base has improved and their confidence to engage with students using participatory techniques has increased. Attendance rates at ECDs were found to be high in 2016, prior to the conflict – 1082 children were enrolled and regularly attending the centres (511 girls; 571 boys). Community feedback at that time, indicated that ECDs were having a positive impact with parents reporting increased support for education and intentions for their children to transition to primary school.

Opportunities for boys and girl's education enhanced through improved infrastructure and increased community participation: SPARC supported 5 schools through construction/rehabilitation of infrastructure to contribute to security and sanitation for girls in school. 6 ECCD Parent Education

Trainings have been conducted at village-level in Buthidaung Township. These sessions focus on raising parent's awareness of the importance of home learning to maximise the impact of learning at ECD centres, as well as encouraging parents to actively transition their children to full-time primary education. Qualitative data from teachers indicates that parents and broader community attitudes were shifting towards being supportive of education, in particular girls' education.

Objective 4 (2019): To strengthen GBV awareness raising and response mechanisms within target communities in northern Shan and Kayah states.

Government services are strengthened to offer services to GBV survivors, as part of a multi-sectoral approach to prevent and respond to GBV: SPARC supported the completion of a newly constructed safe-house for survivors of GBV operated by the Kayah state Department of Social welfare and provided basic supplies for two additional safe houses. At a state and national level, the project supported various special events including 16 days of Activism and International Women's Day.

Capacity of CSOs and CBOs to prevent, identify and refer GBV cases is strengthened as part of a multi-stakeholder approach: In Kayah state SPARC conducted capacity-strengthening using social analysis and action training for 25 partner staff from women's organisations operating at community level (in all 3 target townships of Kayah). The project also provided direct financial support to eight women's organisations in Kayah state, both through the use of small grants to enable them to implement community-level GBV prevention and response initiatives, as well as direct support to a portion of their running costs. In Northern Shan state the project has built the capacity of women's CSOs participating in the GBV multi-stakeholder model emerging in northern Shan state. This includes capacity-building for 11 community-level women's organisations on financial management and administration of small grants, as well as technical training on GBV prevention and response (incl. refresher courses). The project has also delivered training to nine women's organisations on approaches to raise GBV awareness-raising and GBV dialogues at community levels in northern Shan.

Efficiency

The evaluation found project efficiency was significantly affected by complex operational constraints which caused delays in project activity implementation, and therefore a slower rate of expenditure than originally planned. Between 50-75% more time was required to process every aspect of programming ranging from selection and authorisation of village tracts, recruitment and staffing, procurement, activity implementation and the constant review and forward planning required for challenges in obtaining government authorisations.

Despite these challenges, the project sought efficiencies in implementation by remaining flexible and responding to changes in the context of Maungdaw District. Strategies to increased project efficiency included: additional staff positions and the removal or scaling-back of some activities for which gaining government approval was particularly challenging; sharing technical staff across two projects; clear coordination and networking with government line departments and other organisations. Experience with delayed authorisations led the project team to start planning and procurement processes early, though approvals remained lengthy and unpredictable.

Impact

SPARC impact has mainly been through contributions to household-level resilience through the transfer of knowledge, skills and technologies in areas such as forestry management, rain-fed and summer paddy production, homestead vegetable production; and livestock rearing. Utilising models such as FFS; focal-farmers or farmer-to-farmer extension; and community forestry user groups has resulted in increased income, confidence and resilience of direct project participants and their households. Such contributions are likely to be sustainable over time even though households may not

have opportunities to apply such knowledge and skills in the current context. The project has also made contributions to resilience through increased household savings and member-owned self-sustaining groups such as VSLAs – those groups that are enduring in protracted crisis are likely to be sustainable.

SPARC has also made contributions towards empowering the poor and landless and expanding safe spaces for dialogue and coordination with government particularly in the area of community forestry¹. The evidence suggests that before establishing CFUGs there were limited opportunities for landless poor to contribute their opinions or influence community governance and local development. However, after the CFUGs were established, landless poor were able to contribute to village community development projects (funded by the VDFs and managed by VDCs) through donating timber from their plots for construction – and in doing so community elders or village tract administrators acknowledged their contributions (often for the first time) and expanded the space for the landless poor to participate in community decision-making structures.

Sustainability

The evaluation found that SPARC pioneered ‘courageous development programming’ that reached into conflict-affected areas and aimed to hold on to previous development gains whilst also responding to and delivering humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, although many activities are sustainable in a technical sense, considering that the majority of project activities relied on inputs (e.g. distribution of agricultural inputs and materials or provision of stipends/salaries/cash-for-work contributions), continued external support is a precondition for the sustainability of most program outcomes. Therefore, sustainability is at risk despite some strong outcomes achieved at community-level. SPARC recognised this risk and was innovative in aiming to build strong and viable community-based organisations (CFUGs, CFMCs, VDCs, VSLAs, FFS) capable of organising community members, coordinating and advocating to township departments, and establishing relationships with traders and suppliers, in order to create sustainable livelihood opportunities and build resilience to a range of shocks. In this sense, sustainability was at the heart of project approaches with the theory being that communities could function and lay the foundation for developing more sustainable livelihoods in a context that is conflict-prone with extreme climatological and environmental conditions. The evaluation found that this approach is a sound way to achieve long-term sustainability through the empowerment of beneficiaries and communities with many of these community-based models (CFUGs, VSLAs, VDCs) continuing to function despite the escalation in conflict since 2016 and natural disasters such as Cyclone Komen (2015) and Mora (2017).

Ways Forward

SPARC has achieved a great deal across agricultural livelihoods, food security and nutrition, women’s economic empowerment, education and community governance, despite an evolving and increasingly complex operating environment. The project offers a positive example of working across the humanitarian-development divide and contributing to longer-term outcomes and community resilience. It is important to build on these experiences as a basis for continued focus and programming:

Maintain CARE’s presence in northern Rakhine State: in the context of northern Rakhine State’s sensitive social and political environment, CARE is one of only a handful of agencies that has established a solid partnership and cooperation with the government. Through its continuous engagement, CARE has played a leading role in supporting the government on agroforestry, agriculture, rural development and food security issues and as such is in a crucial position to influence

¹ Interview with Aung Khant Kyaw, Field Office Coordinator, Buthidaung. CARE International in Myanmar.

and help build the capacity of local government to provide much needed services. There are many advantages to maintaining a constant operational presence including: presence and hands on support to field operations; active decision-making at field level; stronger voice in local/regional coordination; consistent monitoring and evaluation and support to implementation quality and improved dialogue/joint implementation with government partners.

Research/Situation Analysis: whilst program/project activity may be currently constrained, there remains a need for nuanced analysis of the current situation in Rakhine and consideration for the differences and the changing dynamics even within Muslim or Rakhine communities across townships. Political sensitives may have discouraged a deeper analysis and engagement since 2012, but recent developments in Myanmar have opened opportunity for more dialogue around peace and reconciliation. Participatory Action Research could be a focus whilst maintaining a project office in northern Rakhine State.

Strengthen the resilience-building focus for future programming in Rakhine and Muslim agricultural communities: through a programmatic approach CARE could address immediate and medium-term needs around emergencies and shocks while addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability and contributing to social cohesion and peacebuilding over the long term. Building on the experiences of SPARC, areas of focus for activities/strategies could include:

- *Capacity-Development in climate-smart/disaster preparedness agriculture:* build on the experiences of SPARC farmer field schools and pilot-testing a combination of prevention and preparedness practices covering livestock, cropping, irrigation, land use and agriculture construction/infrastructure. The objective of such a pilot would be to develop a model of low-cost, easy-to-implement "disaster resilient" farming practices that can be utilised by other areas prone to natural and climate-related disasters and risks.
- *Selective inputs with potential to outlive recurring shocks:* the context of northern Rakhine State dictates a need for ongoing provision of materials and resources in supporting agricultural activities, however these should also be selected through a disaster-risk reduction lens.
- *Expand economic participation and empowerment for women:* future programming should seek to build on the minimalist VSLA model (focused purely on saving and lending activities) to deliver a more holistic model known as VSLA 'plus'. Under the VSLA 'plus' model, membership of a savings group provides women and men with the opportunity to also access trainings on financial literacy and small business skills development, exposure to agricultural technologies and information, linkages input/output markets, and life skills and information about their rights. Additionally, the VSLA 'plus' model leverages the social cohesion and capital within a standard savings group, to create a safe environment for engaging with women and men through discussions on social and cultural norms that may impede gender equality and women's empowerment. Savings groups have the potential to foster economic resilience in vulnerable households in ways that other mechanisms cannot. Importantly, this aspect of programming could potentially be started even in the current humanitarian context when combined with cash assistance.

Invest in remote community monitoring mechanisms and expertise: in the context of ongoing insecurity and inaccessibility in northern Rakhine State, there is an opportunity to invest in innovative remote, community-based monitoring mechanisms to ensure programme quality and accountability. Benefits of community-based monitoring include: improved understanding of long-term trends; reduced cost of research by leveraging existing infrastructure and skills of local monitors; and provision of timely and relevant information for local decision-making. Developing such systems also offers an opportunity to pilot approaches to increase the participation and perspectives of women (as the majority of community-based monitoring methodologies have led to the engagement of men as the majority).

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Humanitarian and development context

Myanmar's economic and political transition in recent years has created opportunities for rapid economic growth leading to significant poverty reduction. However, growth has not been as pro-poor and inclusive as needed to address entrenched issues of rural poverty and exclusion along geographic, ethnic, and religious lines. The economic transition has moved faster than the transition from conflict to peace, with many lingering armed conflicts and gradual progress in the peace process. While the transition has generated significant changes for many segments of the population, economic growth in recent years has also been accompanied by increased inequality.

The situation in Rakhine State represents many of the challenges that Myanmar faces during this period of transition. A widespread lack of access to capital, credit, land and agricultural inputs is compounded by high population density, weak or non-existent infrastructure, and vulnerability to natural disasters, rendering the common household extremely susceptible to food insecurity and chronic malnutrition. The area is comprised of several different ethnic groups, the two largest being the Buddhist Rakhine who constitute the majority within the State, and the Muslim Rohingya. In northern Rakhine State, where CARE International in Myanmar's projects are currently focused, prior to the 2015 crisis and the military crackdown in 2016 and 2017, the Rohingya constituted the vast majority in Maungdaw township (approximately 90%), with Rakhine communities dispersed among them. Moving East into Buthidaung Township, the Rohingya also represented the majority of the population (approximately 80%).²

Ethnically, linguistically, and religiously, the Rakhine and Rohingya are strikingly different, though they occupy the same physical environment and experience similar economic neglect, political isolation, and exploitation by authorities and security personnel. Additionally, however, the Rohingya suffer a significant predicament in that they are systematically discriminated against by the central government; they are considered as illegal Bengali migrants, and are thus, denied Myanmar citizenship and all civil and political rights. The lack of mobility, assembly, and freedom of speech, compounded by a deeply entrenched national rhetoric of ethnic division and mistrust has rendered access to and participation in basic social institutions such as education, health, justice, finance, and self-determination extremely difficult. Rohingya women are further marginalised by cultural and religious norms, often confined to the home, unable to complete a reasonable level of education, and restricted from engaging in social and economic activities. This is in spite of the reality that among the Rohingya, there is an unusually high proportion of female-headed households, largely due to desertion by their husbands or widowhood. The combination of poverty and discrimination has led to the Rohingya being disproportionately poorer and at greater disadvantage than their Rakhine neighbours.

Northern Rakhine State survives for the most part as a subsistence agriculture economy and, perhaps due to the high vulnerability of the entire population to food shortages and natural disasters, the Rakhine and Rohingya are economically interdependent. The majority Rohingya endeavour to maximise agricultural outputs, upon which many of the minority Rakhine rely. Simultaneously, securing access to land use, farming materials, transport and administrative permissions for the Rohingya to undertake the work is often anchored to their cooperation and agreements with the Rakhine who, despite being marginalised themselves, do possess a more desirable measure of legal and political legitimacy and access.

Northern Rakhine State has experienced recurrent natural disasters and intercommunity-conflict. Ethnic and religious differences combined with other factors, have led to violent confrontations intensifying in 2012, causing loss of life and destruction of farms and infrastructure. Floods, mudslides and cyclones combined with outbreaks of violence have displaced many households over the years.

² Andria Kenney, 2013. Do No Harm Analysis: Northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. CARE International in Myanmar.

Those who remain in their villages face similar risks, with limited support. Intercommunity conflict has continued to escalate since 2012 and in August 2017, deadly attacks by the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army against police and army posts provoked a violent military and inter-communal response that culminated in the forced displacement of more than 700,000 Rohingya, into neighbouring Bangladesh. The fallout from the ongoing crisis in Rakhine State could have significant consequences on the economy, the peace process, and the political transition in Myanmar.

Within this context, CARE International in Myanmar (CARE Myanmar) seeks to support short- and longer-term economic opportunities for diverse communities in Rakhine State alongside support for building inter-communal cohesion to ensure sustainability.

1.2 CARE's programming in Northern Rakhine State

The **Supporting Partnerships and Resilience of Communities (SPARC) project**, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), was implemented in Maungdaw District, northern Rakhine State between December 2011- December 2019. Prior to SPARC, CARE was present in northern Rakhine for 12 years, implementing humanitarian and development projects focusing on livelihood security of vulnerable households specifically through food security activities, economic initiatives and increased participation of women.

SPARC has been revised and amended over its duration in response to the complex operating environment present in northern Rakhine State (see 3.1 Relevance). The most recent revision (in 2018) included reprogramming within Kayah State and northern Shan State. CARE has existing field offices in Loikaw (Kayah) and Lashio (northern Shan) from which it is implementing projects that, like SPARC, fall under the CARE Myanmar Vulnerable Rural Women (VRW) program. These projects are focused on supporting gender equality, women's economic empowerment (WEE), and support to local civil society organisations (CSOs) and government actors to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV). The opportunity to reprogram a portion of funds to these projects enable CARE to complement and strengthen programming needs under the VRW program that align closely with SPARC's existing strategic objectives, specifically those focused on improved livelihoods, and building communities' and local capacities. One additional objective was also included (Objective 4) related to GBV prevention and response, and working with women's organizations to strengthen their participation in CSOs and community structures.

SPARC's goal is to contribute to the sustainable reduction of poverty in communities through improving the social and economic position of poor, vulnerable households, and to strengthen household and community capacity to sustain such improvements. To achieve this goal, CARE implements integrated livelihood activities that improve food security and economic opportunities, including community forestry, crop productivity intensification, facilitating access to education and introducing financial services through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA).

Project Objectives include:

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- **Objective 3:** To enhance access to education for vulnerable households by decreasing institutional- and household-level barriers in northern Rakhine State.
- **Objective 4 (2019):** To strengthen GBV awareness raising and response mechanisms within target communities in northern Shan and Kayah states.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Scope and Purpose

The purpose of the end-of-project evaluation was ‘to determine if SPARC achieved its end of project outcomes of sustainable reduction of poverty in poor, vulnerable communities and strengthened household and community capacity to sustain such improvements’. The evaluation reviewed the overall implementation of SPARC (with a primary focus on implementation in northern Rakhine State) and in doing so, also considered the influence of the socio-political context on program management and the outcomes and impact of project activities.

The evaluation focussed on the domains of Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. The evaluation also sought to identify effective approaches and future opportunities for programming along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in the context of northern Rakhine State.

2.2 Key Evaluation Questions

The key evaluation questions addressed during the review were taken from the terms of reference and are outlined in Table One below.

TABLE ONE: KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

CRITERIA	KEY EVALUATION QUESTION	SUB-EVALUATION QUESTION
RELEVANCE	The extent to which the project suited the priorities and needs of the target groups.	To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid?
		Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent within the overall goal and the attainment of the objectives?
		Are the activities and outputs of the project consistent with the intended impacts and effects?
EFFECTIVENESS	The extent to which the project achieved its planned outcomes and objectives.	To what extent were the objective achieved?
		What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the objectives?
EFFICIENCY	The extent to which project was managed to get value for money from inputs of funds, staff and other resources.	Were the activities cost efficient?
		Where the objectives achieved on time?
		Was the project implemented in the most efficient way compared to alternatives?
IMPACT	The extent to what lasting and significant changes have occurred and what the particular project’s contribution to these changes, positive and negative, including unexpected impacts.	What has happened as a result of the project?
		What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries?
		How many people have been affected?
SUSTAINABILITY	The extent to measuring whether an activity or an impact is likely to continue the programme has been withdrawn.	To what extent will the benefits of the project continue after project completion?
		What are the major factors which influenced achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of the project?

2.3 Evaluation Tools

The evaluation used a mixed method approach combining a literature review and quantitative data sets drawn primarily from the project monitoring system, together with qualitative data, collected

using participatory approaches such as focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), and Stories of Change Interviews (SoCs) with project participants and key project staff.

Literature review: the literature review included the analysis of more than 120 documents. Documents reviewed include a mix of project designs and redesigns, project reviews, donor reports, project budgets; project workplans; learning briefs and action research studies conducted as part of informing a flexible design that evolved over time. The material provided a solid foundation for understanding the contextual drivers of adapted project approaches, and progress and achievements against intended objectives. Material documenting the impact or sustainability of those approaches and learning from the humanitarian-development programming experience was more limited, and this gap informed the focus of the in-country qualitative data collection.

Key Informant Interviews: KII guides were developed to enable the evaluation team to gain an understanding of the perspectives, behaviour and motivations of project participants in order to identify the challenges and successes of activities and opportunities going forward. KIIs were held with the following categories of respondents: government representatives from the Forestry Department, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Breeding and Veterinary Department, and Education Department; Village Development Committee Members; Early Childhood Development Centre teachers; representatives from DFAT; peer agencies and CARE Myanmar program staff ensuring a diversity of informed perspectives.

Stories of Change: a SoC guide was developed to capture and demonstrate what is valued through the use of individual participant narratives. Structured with a beginning, middle and end, the guides focussed on the change that has taken place for individuals due to program activities and any unintended changes. The stories provided a way of sharing information that might otherwise be lost and a space to reflect on key lessons for the project. SoCs were conducted with women homestead farmers, women VSLA members, women village development committee members, and women livestock participants.

2.3 Sampling

Given the complex operating environment in northern Rakhine State including restrictions on movements and the requirement to obtain travel authorisations, the evaluation took a purposive sampling approach to the collection of qualitative data. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases in cases where there are constraints. The sample criteria used for each target group is outlined in Table Two below. In terms of sample sites, the townships, village tracts and villages selected for KIIs and SoCs were determined by existing travel approvals and logistics. FGDs were held in the town centre with participants invited to attend from different village tracts.

The table below reflects the final sample that was feasible within the complex operating environment.

TABLE TWO: SAMPLING CRITERIA, TARGETS AND SITES

TOOL	TARGET GROUP	PARTICIPANT CRITERIA	NUMBER	TOWNSHIP/VILLAGE TRACT
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	Community Forestry User Group	Male CFUG members from existing groups (RRHLSP) that received support from SPARC Year 2 onwards	2 focus group discussions	Buthidaung Township/Nga Kyi Tauk ButhidaungTownship/Ba Gone Nah

TOOL	TARGET GROUP	PARTICIPANT CRITERIA	NUMBER	TOWNSHIP/VILLAGE TRACT
	Village Savings and Loans Associations	Female members from savings groups that remained active beyond 2016 and have been through a share-out or about to go through a share-out. Participants were from groups that were in their second or more cycle.	2 focus group discussions	Buthidaung Township/Tha Yet Pyin Maungdaw Township/Aung Zeyar
	Paddy Farmers. Participants were either Farmer Field School or Focal farmers.	Male participants of paddy farming activities such as farmer field schools or focal farmers	2 focus group discussions	Maungdaw Township/Maw Ra Waddy Buthidaung Township/Tha Yet Pyin
STORIES OF CHANGE	Homestead Farmers	Female home gardening participants	2 stories of change	Buthidaung Township/Mee Chaung Gaung Swea Maungdaw Township/Du Chee Yar Dan
	VSLA members	Female VSLA member, from savings groups that remain active after 2016, and have been through a share-out.	2 stories of change	Buthidaung Township/Tha Yet Pyin Maungdaw Township/Aung Zeyar
	Village Development Committee Member	Female VDC member.	2 stories of change	Buthidaung Township/Zay Te Taung Maungdaw township/Aung Ze Ya
	Livestock Participants	Female recipient of livestock.	2 stories of change	Maungdaw Township/Yae Chan Pyin Maungdaw Township/Ta Yet Oke
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS	Field Office Coordinator, Buthidaung		Remote Skype Interview	Buthidaung Township
	Field Office Coordinator, Maungdaw		Remote Skype Interview	Maungdaw Township
	Senior Project Officer, VSLA		Remote Skype Interview	Maungdaw Township
	Head of Office Action Contre la Faim, Maungdaw		Remote Skype Interview	Maungdaw Township
	First Secretary, Australian Embassy		Remote Skype Interview	Yangon
	Department of Forestry	Program Officer, Department of Forestry		Interview in-country

TOOL	TARGET GROUP	PARTICIPANT CRITERIA	NUMBER	TOWNSHIP/VILLAGE TRACT
	Department of Agriculture	Assistant Officer, Department of Agriculture	Interview in-country	Buthidaung Township
	Livestock, Breeding and Veterinary Department	District Officer, Livestock, Breeding and Veterinary Department	Interview in-country	Maungdaw Township
	Early Childhood Development Centres	Female Teachers at Early Childhood Development Centres	2 Interviews in-country	Buthidaung Township/ Kyauk Yan
	Department of Education	Assistant Township Education Officer	Interview in-country	Buthidaung /Zedi Daung Maungdaw Township

2.4 Limitations

The CARE Myanmar team was very responsive and supportive throughout the evaluation process. Whilst there were challenges during the course of the evaluation, the extent to which they limit the ability to comprehensively address key evaluation questions is minimal. Challenges included:

ACCESSIBILITY	Sample sites selected were based on pre-existing travel and activity authorisations and therefore there were compromises made in generating a representative sample.
TIMEFRAME	Time constraints placed on field-level qualitative data collection due to pre-existing travel authorisations meant that the sample was necessarily small-scale, and that visits to village tracts and villages were shorter than anticipated.
LANGUAGE	Consultations and data collection were required to be translated through two to three languages, and as a result there were compromises in engagement and clarity of data responses.
TRAVEL	Due to security and operational constraints for the consultant only the township-level monitoring and reporting officers were able to travel to the communities surveyed and data collection and quality could only be monitored remotely. However, strong remote monitoring processes were put place, with Program Quality team members reviewing forms and data entry. In addition, two members of the Program Quality team supported data collection to provide guidance and monitor the process.

2.5 Structure of findings

An evaluation such as this provides an opportunity for project teams to reflect upon the implementation of activities, and ways of enhancing the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of project activities and management strategies. In the following sections, promising practices and achievements are highlighted. At the same time, the report points to areas where project effectiveness might be improved, where activities and implementation strategies could be revised, and where other innovations might be explored.

Section 3.0 presents evaluation findings using the over-arching criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

Section 4.0, presents lessons learned and recommendations for CARE Myanmar's consideration for possible future programming.

3.0 FINDINGS

Overall the evaluation found that despite the complex operating environment, SPARC has made a significant contribution to multi-sectoral long-term development as well as delivering effective humanitarian assistance in northern Rakhine State. **SPARC made significant contributions under each of its strategic objectives, with the majority of progress made under SO1 (specifically in relation to community forestry, agriculture, home gardens vegetable production and livestock). Partial progress was made under SO2 (specifically in relation to VDC capacity development and the financial inclusion of women through VSLAs) and also under SO3 (specifically in relation to education).** There are sound contextual reasons for partial progress under each objective and adaptations made to project approaches – the following sections expand on these in detail.

Key contributions of the SPARC project towards the livelihood resilience and sustainable reduction of poverty in vulnerable communities in northern Rakhine State are captured in Figure 1.³

³ All sectoral figures (with the exception of GBV Prevention and Response) are based on project monitoring data at the end of October 2016 prior to the escalation of intercommunal violence in 2016/2017.

SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIPS AND RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES IN NORTHERN RAKHINE STATE

Reached over 57 200 people

60%   40%



Community Governance

- Leadership and organisational **capacity-building** for 60 Village Development Committees
- Effective management of over 232,967,640 MMK in village development funds for small-scale community development projects benefitting over 39,600 people such as tube wells, bridge and jetty maintenance
- Over 90% of households report village development committees are useful and valued by the community
- Improved government capacity to respond to disasters through capacity-building for 378 government officials
- 30 community-based disaster risk management plans developed



Food and Nutrition Security

- Improved dietary diversity for 2000 women to manage kitchen gardens through seed provision and small cash grants
- Capacity-building on nutrition awareness for over 400 women
- Improved resilience and productivity for 6000 households with cash grants and agricultural inputs for rice paddy production



Livelihoods

- 41 Community Forestry Plots maintained (3,128 acres)
- 4 new community forestry plots established (294 acres)
- Technical and management capacity-building for over 3000 community forestry user group members
- Established 23 nurseries that grew over 900,000 seedlings
- Established 6 Farmer Field Schools and trained over 50 focal farmers in effective crop management
- Supported 450 households through direct livestock distribution or cash grants to purchase livestock in local markets
- Increased women's access to financial services through 40 village savings and loans associations



WASH

- 27 engine pump groups formed and trained
- Improved access to irrigated water during dry season for over 800 farmers supporting the cultivation of summer paddy and winter crops
- Over 2000 pre-positioned emergency hygiene kits to enable rapid local response



Shelter

- Non-food item (NFI) kits provided to over 10,000 internally displaced women and men
- Shelter support provided to over 2000 households
- Over 2000 pre-positioned emergency shelter kits to enable rapid local response



Education

- Established and supported 19 Early Childhood Development Centres to provide a gateway kindergarten and formal education
- Support and capacity-building for 39 teachers
- Parent education trainings on the importance and value of education for almost 300 parents
- Safe-learning environments through improved infrastructure and material resources for 5 schools



Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response

- Supported the completion of a new safe-house for survivors of gender-based violence
- Capacity-building in safe response to and prevention of gender-based violence and provision of small grants to 20 women's organisations
- Awareness-raising and gender-based violence prevention dialogue sessions almost 1000 community members

3.1 Relevance

SPARC was originally designed in 2011 to address the livelihood needs of vulnerable households in northern Rakhine State. The project is based on promoting food security, access to economic opportunities and strengthened capacity of community-based structures for carrying out local development initiatives. CARE had been active in northern Rakhine State for 12 years previously, implementing development projects focusing on livelihood security of vulnerable households specifically through food security activities, economic initiatives and increased participation of women.

Intercommunal conflict in 2012 and its gradual escalation through to the violent military and inter-communal responses of 2016/17, culminated in the mass exodus and displacement of Rohingya, into neighbouring Bangladesh. Repercussions for SPARC programming included: curfews; lengthy travel authorisation and approval processes limiting staff mobility; lengthy approval processes for procurement and transport of inputs; continued security incidents further restricting mobility; restrictions on gatherings of groups; continued inter-community tension; and suspicion of INGO activities by communities.

SPARC successfully adapted to the evolving context and revisions were made to project objectives in 2013 and 2015, strengthening the focus on livelihoods resilience (as opposed to the original more general wording of “contributing to the sustainable reduction of poverty”). **Implementation from 2015-2018 focussed on delivery of strategic objectives referring to enhanced livelihoods productivity based on improved access to and utilisation of resources and appropriate technologies (SO1); the strengthening of targeted community committees/structures to improve community and household resources with a focus on strategies to increase women’s participation in these committees (SO2); and enhanced access to education for vulnerable households (SO3).** Table Three outlines how SPARC adapted and remained relevant over its duration.

SPARC’s flexibility ensured project objectives remained focused on improving human conditions through livelihoods productivity; improving the enabling environment through supporting community-based groups to be responsive and inclusive of their communities’ needs and priorities; and improving social positions through promoting enhanced access to education, particularly for girls from marginalised households. **Although the context for implementation has changed markedly since the initial outbreak of intercommunal conflict (2012), these objectives are still relevant to the livelihood needs and priorities of poor and vulnerable households and for the long-term development of northern Rakhine State.** As highlighted in the context analysis for the SPARC project design⁴, a range of factors which include governance failures, the inequitable distribution of resources (particularly land and capital), low education and literacy levels, poor access to information, poor infrastructure and a wide range of discriminatory practices curtailing mobility and access to resources, means that very limited economic opportunities are available to poor households. Food insecurity and malnutrition are widespread as a result of inadequate levels of household income and poor households’ inability to produce sufficient food for their own consumption, which for many households result in high levels of indebtedness. All these factors combine to undermine household livelihood security and exacerbate household vulnerability to the impacts of the natural disasters to which northern Rakhine State is prone, as well as to conflict. Therefore, **relevant to both Rakhine and Rohingya, SPARC’s project goal, strategic objectives and activities could not be more appropriate and relevant in an environment such as this, despite the considerable obstacles and risks to programming.**

⁴ CARE International in Myanmar. September, 2011. Strengthening Partnerships and Resilience of Communities (SPARC) in Northern Rakhine State. Project Design Document Version 3.

TABLE THREE: RELEVANCE OF SPARC PROJECT OVER TIME

IMPACT AND ADAPTATION OF SPARC PROJECT	YEAR	CONTEXTUAL EVENTS IN RAKHINE STATE 2012-2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project implementation began in December 2011. Original project design focussed on integrated livelihood opportunities through improving food security and economic opportunities. Key models: Farmer Field Schools and agricultural inputs for paddy production, winter veg production, homestead gardening & livestock husbandry; capacity-building for community-based organisations (CFUGs, VDCs VSLAs); promoting educational opportunities. 	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slow government authorisation for programming leading to challenges in obtaining timely government support for planned activities. This remained a challenge through to 2014. Delays were most commonly related to perceived problems with choice of target villages, involving claims of “unbalanced” village selection in favour of Muslim communities, and choice of planned activities. Close scrutiny of memorandums of understanding (MOUs) agreed between CARE and line departments often led to delays when the proposed activities were deemed by the local authorities in Maungdaw or Buthidaung townships (or by officials at Rakhine State level) to fall outside the scope of the MOUs. Time-consuming exchanges the government around selection of target villages - due to sensitivities around distribution of project resources between Muslim and Rakhine villages and the authorities’ demand for a 50/50 balance - were a particular driver of authorisation delays in the early stages of programming.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All SPARC activities were suspended for 6 months from June 2012, in which time project focussed on providing humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected people. 	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outbreak of intercommunal conflict between Rakhine and Rohingya ethnic groups in June and October 2012, leading to a declared state of emergency and the introduction of martial law and a total displacement of 115,000 people. Heightened tensions between Rohingya and Rakhine communities and between communities and authorities. Slow government authorisation and timely support for planned activities continues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do No Harm consultancy was conducted to guide the planned resumption of project activities in the post-conflict context. Re-design of SPARC project: goal, purpose, objectives and most activities unchanged but project approaches modified in response to changed post-conflict environment. A key modification of the project approach was the adjusted selection of project locations to include whole village tracts while keeping the total number of targeted villages at 53. Targeting approach was to include whole village tracts (VT) (often a mix of Rakhine and Rohingya villages) rather than individual villages as units to be targeted, with the aim of creating a more inclusive and theoretically less controversial method of selection. This was done on an ‘exchange’ basis with CARE’s PHASE IN project. Benefits included reducing travel and management 	2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significant changes in post-conflict operational context: curfews and travel permission for all staff more stringent – for Muslim staff limited to one week; curfew imposed and night-stays at villages not allowed; lengthy process for approval of activities at township level; lengthy approval processes for procurement and transport of inputs; close monitoring of INGO activities – if not explicitly identified in Govt/ INGO MOUs then activities not approved; gatherings of more than 5 people forbidden. Continued tensions between Rohingya and Rakhine communities and between communities and authorities

IMPACT AND ADAPTATION OF SPARC PROJECT	YEAR	CONTEXTUAL EVENTS IN RAKHINE STATE 2012-2018
<p>burden of field staff, minimising the perception that CARE is targeting any one ethnic group over the other by ensuring ‘blanket coverage’ at VT level, and promoting a sense of community at village tract level to ease post-conflict tensions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other adaptations included: initially only recommending those activities in mixed villages that did not require interaction between Rakhine and Rohingya; working closely with village leaders on both sides of the conflict to determine ‘readiness’ for engaging groups in joint activities; providing theoretical trainings only (with no travel requirement) to community groups in mixed villages; the decision to provide inputs directly to vulnerable individuals rather than by establishing Self Help Groups; and ensuring an ethnically balanced local work force by lowering education requirements for some project positions to enable the accessibility of those opportunities to Rohingya applicants. • Request for one-year No Cost Extension until Nov 2016. • CARE applied for new MOU with Ministry of Social Welfare, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (MSWRR) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal project review undertaken in November 2014. • Revisions to project goal, outcomes and activities and changes in project staffing structure to ensure additional management and technical support. • Changes to the project framework included: i) inclusion of a particular focus on increasing women’s participation as part of the strategic objective for building the capacity of community groups; and ii) reformulating the project’s strategic objective for enhancing social position of poor and vulnerable households to focus on enhanced access to education with the addition of support for the establishment of Early Childhood Development centres as a new output. • In response to implementation delays and the ongoing challenges of the implementation context, the 2014 project re-design also involved the simplification or removal of some activities (e.g. direct delivery of agricultural production rather than the establishment of self-help groups; taking a small-scale approach to irrigation activities to avoid the risk of inter-communal conflict over access to water; removal of originally planned aquaculture activities; and the removal of the establishment of Community Service Centres to avoid contentious infrastructure development). • Request for one-year costed extension (additional budget of USD 1.5 million). 	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myanmar conducts first census in more than three decades but Rohingya are excluded. • Township level verification of family lists and other information gathering exercises contributed to tensions between the Rohingya population and local authorities. • Deterioration/strains in relations between UN/INGOs, and segments of local communities and the government driven perceptions that the international community favours the Rohingya over the Rakhine communities. In the post-2012 context, it was challenging to reconcile the objective to continue to support the most vulnerable and affected population (i.e. the Rohingya) with the authorities' demands for a 'balanced' (i.e. 50/50 Rakhine/Rohingya) approach that ignores the demographics of NRS. In the post-2012 operating environment, SPARC sees an increased focus on addressing needs in both communities. • Government’s Action Plan for Peace, Stability and Development in Rakhine state under review at end of reporting period. • Introduction of the ‘Coordination Committee’ at state and district levels leads to further complications around approval processes

IMPACT AND ADAPTATION OF SPARC PROJECT	YEAR	CONTEXTUAL EVENTS IN RAKHINE STATE 2012-2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project completion date revised to Nov 2017 with approval of costed extension. Project response to relief and early recovery needs in SPARC villages involved support for shelter, livelihoods, food security and WASH. Additional funding of AUD 500,000 from DFAT for CARE’s emergency response. Outcome Monitoring survey of 456 beneficiary households across 19 villages. 	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizen verification process for Rohingya in March 2015 Flooding and strong winds from June to August 2015, together with Cyclone Komen on 30 July caused widespread displacement and damage to farmland and crops. Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships were severely affected. Rakhine State declared as a Natural Disaster Affected Area. Safety and security concerns in lead up to national elections in November 2015. First democratic elections since end of military rule (November 2015), Rohingya aren't allowed to participate as candidates, nor as voters. The NLD party wins the election and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi becomes State Counsellor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcome Monitoring curtailed due to security restrictions after Oct 2016 attacks. Access to villages limited due to ongoing security interventions by military. Turnover of key staff from project team. 	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military began security operations in Maungdaw District following armed attacks on Border Guard Police Posts (October 2016). Exodus of estimated 65,000 people from Maungdaw to refugee camps in Bangladesh. Pre-existing humanitarian and development activities suspended due to denied access to villages and increased movement restrictions. Unexpected household list updating exercise began in November for Muslim villages.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CARE maintains a curtailed but continued operational presence in northern Rakhine state, post August 2017. Low profile programming approach based on collaboration with established community committees and/or village-based focal points. 	2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cyclone Mora on May 28 causes widespread devastation and flooding. Military begins ‘security clearance operations’ in response to armed attacks on police outposts and army bases (August 2017). Large-scale exodus of Rohingya population from northern Rakhine state.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concept note for 13 month No Cost Extension submitted (Oct 2018). Activities proposed for NCE in Rakhine state framed under previously revised SPARC project goal and objectives, with a focus on those most likely to be able to be implemented (namely support for agricultural production and livestock husbandry, CBDRM planning, the establishment of VSLAs, support for the ECD programme, improvements in school infrastructure and material support to encourage school attendance by vulnerable school children). 	2018 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing armed conflict between Myanmar military and Arakan Army forces. State Government imposed restrictions on access for humanitarian and development agencies in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships in Rakhine state. People living in conflict-affected project areas are no longer able to access basic essential services of health, clean water and education. Suspension of agricultural support is impacting food security and well-being.

IMPACT AND ADAPTATION OF SPARC PROJECT	YEAR	CONTEXTUAL EVENTS IN RAKHINE STATE 2012-2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-programming of portion of budget balance to Kayah and northern Shan states. • Addition of one new strategic objective relating to GBV prevention and response and working with women's organisations in those states. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CARE project staff not permitted regular access to communities, and in 2019 limited access on short term basis.

3.2 Effectiveness

Objective 1: To assist target communities to sustainably manage and enhance their livelihood productivity by improving access to and utilisation of resource appropriate technologies.

Assets and income of vulnerable households have increased through community forestry

Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships feature low hills or outcrops of land that, although unsuitable for cultivation, are eminently suitable for agro-forestry. Under **previous programming (RRHLSP), groups of vulnerable, usually landless, households were supported to form Community Forestry User Groups (CFUG) and establish Community Forestry plots (CF plots) in partnership with the Forestry Department (FD)**. Each CFUG elects a Community Forestry Committee (CFMC) which is responsible for ensuring the CFUG follows all associated regulations. CFUGs receive a land-use certificate that endows them with users' rights over their plot and its products (firewood, timber poles, cash and food crops intercropped with saplings) for a period of 30 years.

Intercommunal violence in 2012 followed by the escalation in violence and military operations in 2016 and 2017 impacted programming and necessitated the adaptation of community forestry project activities. Mistrust between Rohingya and Rakhine communities and their reluctance to meet and work together, impacted mixed-ethnicity CFUGs established prior to the conflict. Increased sensitivity around land use and allocation meant the FD also moved to suspend the creation and certification of new CF plots for Muslim communities as planned under SPARC. At the same time, reduced mobility associated with the post-conflict context prevented some Muslim and Rakhine communities from accessing their existing CF plots. SPARC adapted by maintaining CF implementation in existing CF plots (for both Muslim and Rakhine villages) and by establishing new plots in Rakhine villages *only* with the hope that open communication channels with the FD would enable the project to resume new CF plot activities with Muslim forest users in the future. **Despite these challenges, SPARC made significant progress in increasing the assets and income of vulnerable households through community forestry.**

SPARC supported communities to maintain 47 existing community forestry plots (totalling 3,128 acres) and to establish 4 new community forestry plots (totalling 294 acres). SPARC successfully built the **technical (weeding, thinning, in-fill planting, harvesting, fire management, nursery development) and management capacity (reporting, book-keeping, conflict resolution, consensus decision-making and transparency) of 41 existing CFMCs and CFUGs** to ensure long-term management and sustainability of plots. Annual reviews found that **CFUGs were generally satisfied with trainings and felt they were better able to manage their plots following training.**⁵

Support for weeding and intercropping amongst saplings was provided to CFUGs in the form of cash inputs/cash-for-work payments in order to offset the additional work burden of managing immature community forestry plots (that are yet to deliver an income). By 2016, prior to the security operations and conflict, **over 3000 CFUG members (90% male; 10% female⁶) had benefitted from capacity-building and those managing existing CF plots reported that they had increased their income from forest products** such as the sale of surplus wood for fuel and village-level construction. Notably materials used for village-level construction included the renovations of bridges, jetties, religious monuments, school and administrator offices.

In addition to working with CFUGs/CFMCs, SPARC provided material and financial support to **establish 23 nurseries to support the sustainable management of established CF plots. The nurseries grew**

⁵ CARE International in Myanmar. April 2016. CFUG Annual Review.

⁶ Community Forestry is a male dominated activity because it is difficult for women to access plots given distance and locations outside of the village. See notes of on gender for more details.

approximately 927,238 seedlings⁷ which were allocated among CFUGs for refill planting after completion of annual harvest. Nurseries were established in collaboration with the FD. **Eleven nurseries in Buthidaung and 12 nurseries in Maungdaw townships are now operated independently by CFUGs together with township-level FDs** and have proved critical in supporting community forestry plots damaged by natural disasters such as Cyclone Mora (May 2017).

Qualitative data supports these results with CFUG members and FD representatives all noting that participating households had been able to improve their knowledge and capacity and increase their income:

‘Before we did not know that this way of working – community forestry – was possible. After joining the group, we have learnt many technical things about infilling, nursery development, weeding, roads for fire management. Because of the training we have been able to take care of our community forestry plots – for example, because we used the correct planting for our Acacia, Burmese Ironwood, Mahogany and Eucalypt leaving a space of two yards – because of that they can withstand the weather changes and storms. Our committee members are hardworking and they have shared their learnings from the training with others in the community – now they (non-members) are also planting very small-scale community forestry themselves’. Male CFUG member, Nga Kyi Tauk Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

‘We started community forestry together with CARE and the Forestry Department – we will continue our group and management because we have children and we have grandchildren and we want the next generation to understand how and why they should manage the forest. Growing trees is like saving money – you cannot save money from any other job you do – but as the tree grows so do your savings – we will have the income later when we sell the wood at harvest time. The community forestry also protects us from natural disasters and without forest you cannot have water. We would like to see less degradation and more community forestry – so we can protect the environment for the future’. Male CFUG member, Nga Kyi Tauk Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

Given the complex operating environment, SPARC’s contribution to **improved cooperation and coordination between CFUGs/CFMCs and the Forestry Department is particularly noteworthy**. SPARC organised coordination meetings between FDs in Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships and CFMCs, which included Muslim and Rakhine community forest users. By providing CFMC members and FD officials a platform to meet and discuss concerns and plans for future forestry management, **SPARC was able to build and improve relations in a context where there was significant distrust between ethnic groups, and between communities and the local authorities**. In southern Maungdaw, **these efforts at facilitation were successful in allowing CFUG members to access their land despite high levels of sensitivity in the area**.

The **positive working relationship between CFUGs/CFMCs and FD was also critical in securing local government permission to harvest and sell forest products**. Estimates of **CFUG earnings from market activities over the project duration reached AUD288,000 in 2016⁸ prior to the crisis**. CFMCs and FDs also took a joint approach to problem-solving. For example, in order to address illegal logging, animal grazing and encroachment of both Muslim and Rakhine non-users onto CF plots, CFMCs and the FD worked together to implement signpost and boundary pillar demarcation to prevent such incidents⁹.

‘CARE has coordinated with the Forestry Department on every stage in establishing, maintaining and utilising the community forest. This has been a very useful relationship – we have seen that CARE is good at increasing the local community’s interest in community forestry and even in areas where the Department failed to gather enough support CARE has been able to establish

⁷ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2014–November 2015. SPARC Year 4 Annual Report.

⁸ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015–November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

⁹ Ibid.

community plots. Together the Department and CARE provide technical, material and management capacities that are beyond the capacity of the local community at the beginning – this is why the FD/CARE plots are more successful than other plots established independently. The review meetings held with CARE and community forest groups have been very useful in discussing challenges and successes and for identifying ideas for improvement. Today there are other villages which are showing interest in establishing community forest and to cooperate with the forestry department on land availability – however we have only technical resources and no funds for community forestry activities – so we would like to see CARE continue working in this area and supporting communities’ Forestry Department Officer, Buthidaung Township.

‘Before the forestry department came to our village every year, but since people have left to Bangladesh, it has been almost two years since they came. Before we had a good relationship with the Forestry Department and did not have any difficulties – they provided us with training on how to manage the community forestry plots. They taught us how to cut the trees and to sell the wood. Committee members went to training at the township level twice. We did not have any difficulties accessing the forestry department. Although we are able to continue the community forestry management by ourselves, if CARE has left, we may have difficulties in contacting the forestry department’. Male CFUG member, Nga Kyi Tauk Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

Whilst SPARC had intended to **establish new CFUGs and CF plots (representing 2000 acres) from Year 3 onwards, following the 2012 intercommunal conflict, this was no longer possible** due to ongoing inter-communal tensions and township authorities concerns and sensitivities around granting land permissions for Rohingya communities¹⁰. The **project responded by continuing to support previously established CFUGs with Rohingya communities, and revising the target to 550 acres¹¹ and working to identify potential CF sites in Rakhine villages, alongside continued advocacy to authorities in the hope of re-opening negotiation for new plots in Rohingya villages in the future¹².** Whilst that did not eventuate, by **Year 5 SPARC was able to gain approval from township authorities for the establishment of 4 new CF plots in Rakhine villages covering 294 acres¹³.** These new plots were able to leverage the established nurseries and saplings were able to serve the in-fill needs of these plots¹⁴.

The project **had intended to support CF in mangrove areas and natural forests, however following the 2012 conflict and the consequent focus on sustained support to existing CFUG/CFMCs and plots, the project was amended** and these activities were discontinued.

Women and men have improved access to more productive income-generating opportunities

Considerable potential existed in target areas to increase rice production, particularly of summer (dry season) paddy through the use of rain-fed paddy land that would otherwise lie idle. For poor households, the main constraints of taking up summer paddy cultivation were a lack of land, lack of available water for irrigation, and a lack of capital with which to purchase necessary inputs and land rental fees. Summer paddy cultivation is of particular importance for landless farmers who are often able to rent land during summer, producing staple crops and boosting their household food security.

The outbreak of violence in 2012 followed by the escalation in violence and military operations in 2016 and 2017 impacted programming and necessitated the adaptation of agricultural activities. Technical capacity building activities for farmers, such as farmer field schools (FFS), presented a challenge as travel authorisations were required for local farmers to travel to training sites and to gather in groups. Local farmers were reluctant to participate in group activities in such a volatile context, priority was given to activities which met their immediate needs rather than activities that

¹⁰ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2012 to November 2013. SPARC Year 2 Annual Progress Report.

¹¹ CARE International in Myanmar. November 2014. Annex A SPARC Project Review.

¹² CARE International in Myanmar. December 2013 to November 2014. SPARC Year 3 Annual Progress Report.

¹³ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2014–November 2015. SPARC Year 4 Annual Progress Report.

¹⁴ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015–November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

yield results over the medium to long-term. Government restrictions on larger meetings meant that agricultural inputs (fertiliser, seeds, livestock) had to be distributed to farmers directly rather than through collective mechanisms such as self-help/farmer interest groups. **Despite these challenges, SPARC adapted and was able to bring about collaboration between farmers and to significantly increase rain-fed and summer paddy production.**

SPARC supported the improvement of rainy and summer paddy rice production and profitability through a combination of technical support and input provision. Farmers improved crop yields through 1) improved farming inputs such as seed availability, fertiliser and affordable production costs and 2) strengthened knowledge on effective farming techniques including seed multiplication, pest control and post-harvest management. Prior to 2016, **SPARC provided almost 6000 households with inputs (fertiliser, tools) and cash to support production costs (land rental, purchase of further inputs or labour costs).**¹⁵ Distribution monitoring for summer paddy distribution revealed that whilst **99% of recipients felt that inputs provided were of good quality, 86% reported there were often delays in distribution, but that they were still able to use them in a timely manner.** For those that received rain-fed paddy cultivation **98% felt the inputs were of good quality and 95% felt the inputs were provided on time.**¹⁶ Delays in distribution were often related to factors outside SPARC's control such as severe flooding following Cyclone Komen (2015) and restricted mobility of staff and complex procurement following the conflict. Additionally, the seasonal nature of agricultural activities meant that timely government approvals for activities were critical – following the inter-communal conflict in 2012 significant negotiation was required to obtain approval to transport summer paddy inputs as there was a greater focus on Rohingya communities vs Rakhine communities given CARE's targeting strategy of allocating support based on needs and priorities (as cultivation of summer paddy was often done on rented land by landless farmers). **Where the project was able to distribute appropriate inputs at the right time, households reported an increase in production and household income. Outcome monitoring found that 73% of summer paddy farmers reported an increase in productivity and 67% of them reported an increase in income.**¹⁷

Qualitative data supports this with paddy farmers reporting improvements in both quantity and quality:

'We attended a number of trainings and we have applied the technical skills we learnt on soil management, line sowing, transplanting and fertiliser application. We also learnt about new varieties and we decided to adopt these after the training. Growing with this new variety has given us much better yields than the traditional ones – before we used to get 45 baskets of rice from 1 karni (0.5 acres) but now we get 70 baskets. Growing with the new techniques has improved the quality the grain we produce because we have less pest destruction – for example, before when we pounded one basketful of grain, we would have 6 bags of rice, now we can have 7 bags of rice from one basketful'. Male paddy farmer, Maw Ra Waddy Village Tract, Maungdaw Township.

'Before we did not have these modern techniques and we used the traditional way – now we are growing the new variety with much better yield and we are growing the right way which has improved the quality of the rice and reduced the amount that is crushed and goes to waste. For example, before we got 50 baskets of rice from pounding 100 baskets of grain, but now we can get 60 baskets of rice from pounding 100 baskets of grain. In terms of yield before from 1 karni (0.5 acres) we would get 1,320kg of grain but now with the new variety we get 2,640kg'. Male paddy farmer, Tha Yet Pyin Village tract, Buthidaung Township.

'There have been many changes in households as a result of the good yield – we can sell the new variety of seed with a good price compare to the traditional variety. Rice quality has also

¹⁵ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015–November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2014–November 2015. SPARC Year 4 Annual Progress Report.

improved which means we can store the seeds longer and also store the surplus for longer so our family has more secure food. Because of the extra income we have from selling the new variety paddy seed we can also buy chickens, pigs and cows and expand our agricultural work'. Male paddy farmer, Tha Yet Pyin Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

Originally the project intended to improve the knowledge and skills of farmers through self-help groups and farmer field schools rather than individuals. However, following intercommunal conflict in 2012, restrictions on large gatherings meant self-help groups (which were intended to have 30 or more members) were no longer possible¹⁸. The project was however **successful in achieving its target of six farmer field schools across Maungdaw and Buthidaung (30 members in Buthidaung; 24 in Maungdaw), and all of these groups strengthened their technical approaches in summer and rain-fed paddy**¹⁹. Qualitative data from focus group discussions following training indicates that **farmers better understand the benefits of seed variety distribution how to use natural and/or chemical fertilisers more effectively, and how to identify and control pests. Farmers have also adopted a new seed variety following successful plot demonstrations**²⁰.

Government restrictions on gatherings of more than five people, led SPARC to **move away from planned village-level trainings on rice production, to utilising 'focal farmers' for 'multiplier' trainings and dissemination of improved agricultural practices**. 24 focal farmers were selected from FFS and trained on crop management including purification of seeds, transplanting, fertilization, pest management and proper pesticide use. **Focal farmers went on to replicate trainings with farmers in their communities (416 men; 138 women)**²¹ and act as a local resource for agricultural advice. **As a result, on average, paddy farmers were able to grow between 20-25 more baskets of rice than previous years**. Focal point farmers were also important in supporting winter cropping (field vegetables such as potatoes, chillies, beans).

'We have shared new techniques and seeds to other farmers in our village – we share the information in different places such as the mosque and market during the growing season. There also farmers who see our farms and they are impressed and they also adopt the new techniques and seed varieties. We can see that other farmers are taking our advice by looking in their paddy fields - you can see they are buying the new variety on their own and then planting as we explained'. Male Paddy Farmer, Tha Yet Pyin Village tract, Buthidaung Township.

'We have shared the new knowledge and techniques with other farmers – we invited them to our farms and showed them what to do and we also shared information at village meetings. The majority of farmers have accepted the suggestions we have given because they understand that by using the new techniques, they will have good yields, secure food and income from selling better quality rice. The most popular questions are about how to prevent pests and apply fertiliser'. Male Paddy Farmer, Maw Ra Waddy Village Tract, Maungdaw Township.

'We had our paddy farms destroyed because of heavy rain and floods and at that time our grains were destroyed. However, because we were already connected with the relevant departments through previous training, we were able to contact the relevant departments and ask for help. We have become outspoken and have more self-confidence when we need to speak with the relevant departments. Male paddy farmer, Tha Yet Pyin Village tract, Buthidaung Township.

From 2013-2016 the project continued to collect a percentage (usually 30%) of the cost of distributed inputs after harvests from households. The **repayments were deposited in savings accounts under the name of each community for secure keeping until the Village Development Committees were ready (security and capacity-wise) to use the funds as a Village Development Fund (VDF). By project**

¹⁸ SPARC Re-design and No Cost Extension 2013

¹⁹ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015-November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

²⁰ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2014-November 2015. SPARC Year 4 Annual Progress Report.

²¹ Ibid.

end 232,967,640 MMK had been deposited and used to undertake community development projects (see Objective 2 for further detail).

Homestead crop and vegetable production and utilisation increased

The security and cultural context of northern Rakhine State made engaging women particularly challenging. Traditional gender roles presented barriers to women's participation in project activities, as did the lack of safe formal meeting spaces for women and husbands' reluctance for women to participate in project activities outside of their domestic responsibilities. Women's participation in activities that are traditionally male-dominated (e.g. paddy production and community forestry) and those that required participants to travel (e.g. Farmer Field School) was low. **SPARC adapted by encouraging women's participation in activities considered less sensitive, such as village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) and home garden activities, whilst continuing to support women's participation in public forums through VDCs.**

Home gardening provides households with additional food for consumption, improves dietary diversity by increasing the amount and number of vegetables available and generates additional income through the sale of surplus crops. **Home gardening focused on women-headed households as it presented an acceptable means for women to improve their household food consumption and generate additional income.** By mid-2019, the project reached almost 2000 women through the provision of seeds (cucumber, bitter melon, snake melon, spinach, moringa, and long bean) and cash grants to support cultivation in compounds (bamboo stands, manure).²²

In response to the widespread low nutritional status of households, SPARC was amended to complement the focus on vegetable production with a focus on utilisation through nutrition awareness training (2015). Nutrition training sessions were delivered alongside input distribution and separate sessions were also held for women on breast-feeding. Due to operational challenges including recruiting technical staff to project office locations, this activity was initially delayed and only commenced in 2016. However, it was successful in reaching over 400 women that year.

Notably SPARC shifted its approach from providing home gardening support to individual households to instead supporting communal plots through established VSLAs in 2019 based on emerging evidence from 2016 (prior to the humanitarian crisis) of increased smallholding and vegetable production and consumption. This approach provides an additional benefit in that in addition to learning valuable new skills, participating women also have opportunity to interact regularly with a group of their peers, thereby strengthening their social network security as well as that of their household.

Qualitative data indicates that women home gardeners have increased the diversity and yields of their home gardens and in some cases have been able to sell or share the surplus:

'I was already planting but I was following the old ways and did not have any goals. Since I started working with CARE, I have been able to increase the types and amount of vegetables I grow – now I am growing beans, gourds, pumpkins, corn, potatoes, cucumbers and chillies in my garden. We are mainly eating the vegetables from the garden – in fact we only have to buy meat now, never vegetables. Sometimes I do sell cucumbers. Our health has improved because we are eating more vegetables and we also know to use natural pesticides and how to prepare the food safely. In the old days we did not have goals like this – we did less and gained less. I have been able to send my two oldest children to higher education. Now I don't need to ask others for help. I can do more. I can earn more. Other people come to me and ask advice on rainy season and winter crops – no one asked me anything before. Today the situation here is not good – although CARE can no longer come to our village because of the poor political situation, we can and will

²² CARE International in Myanmar. December 2018-May 2019. SPARC six-monthly progress report.

continue. CARE has educated our minds'. Female Home Gardener, Du Chee Yar Dan Village Tract, Maungdaw Township.

SPARC had **originally intended to support aquaculture activities, however following the 2012 conflict, these activities were discontinued due to the multiple partnerships and technical expertise required.**

Increased household incomes through improved small livestock production

Small livestock raising represents a viable livelihood strategy for households and the project sought to work with both existing goat farmers and interested households to start-up through 1) building capacity for improved practices (shelter, herding, vaccination) and 2) the distribution of livestock. However, this activity **was significantly delayed due longer than expected timeframes for government approvals and procurement processes, such that activities only commenced in Year 5.**

By late 2016, **prior to the crisis, SPARC had reached 450 households (276 female; 24 male) through either direct livestock distribution (Maungdaw Township) and/or cash grants to purchase livestock and shelter materials (Buthidaung Township).**²³ Whilst cash grants had benefits in terms of efficiency and supporting local economies, 15% of respondents felt the animals available in the markets were not of good or sufficient quality. Following the crisis in October 2016, **restricted access to markets and the limited availability of suitable livestock led SPARC to work closely with the Livestock Veterinarian and Breeding Department (LVBD) to select and distribute livestock animal to 150 households (all women-headed households) bringing it close to the project target of 600 households by mid-2019.**

SPARC also worked with village-based 'livestock volunteers' that assisted in the dissemination of key livestock management messages and provided a vaccination program to support households.²⁴ 76 volunteers (74 male and 2 female) attended livestock management and vaccination training.

'There have been many benefits of working together with CARE. Previously, a farmer would not know where to go or who to consult to get help in case his/her goat or pig got sick. Now, the farmers in each village are aware about our department and ask for our help. The department did not achieve this level of familiarity with the farmers before. This happened because of the support provided by CARE Myanmar. Now the department can provide adequate support by communicating with voluntary workers (from the village). I'm happy to see that as the farmers were provided with goat vaccinations, the mortality rate of each herd has dropped increasing farmer income'. District Officer, Livestock, Breeding and Veterinary Department, Maungdaw Township.

Whilst it was initially envisaged that livestock recipients would repay 50 percent of the value of the inputs to the Village Development Funds (VDF), this did not eventuate. Considering the socio-economic circumstances surrounding the humanitarian crisis in northern Rakhine state and the apparent lack of affordability of the program participants to make repayments, agreements were instead made between the VDCs and program participants to contribute (in-kind) to their communities. For example, the selected livestock-raising households who received 2 nanny goats, after a year of raising their livestock, agreed to repay 1 nanny goat (at age 5 months) to another eligible woman-headed household from the community.

Qualitative data indicates that women recipients of small livestock such as goats have developed their confidence in livestock handling and raising and have been able to increase their income and make longer-term productive investments including: expansion of their livelihood activities (purchase of chickens, lease of land); supporting the education of their children and improving their housing:

²³ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015-November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

²⁴ CARE International in Myanmar. SPARC Year 2,3,4 Annual Progress Reports.

'My husband has passed away and I have two daughters I need to support – I wanted to work and I wanted to learn but I had no capital to begin. I started with two goats and I carefully followed the training – I built a goat shed and cleaned it properly, I watch the goats on the grass and I vaccinate and worm them. Soon I had 5 goats but I recently sold two goats to the butcher so now I have three left. I want to build up my business as a goat owner – I have hired a field from a landowner paying him with 2 visses of chilli as rental fees...but he has now gone away to Bangladesh. I have used the money from selling the goats to plant additional crops and also to buy some chickens – now I also sell chickens and we eat and sell the eggs. I used to work as labour in the fields of others but I don't need to do this anymore. I also am able to buy more food – I used to struggle to buy food for one week – now I can buy enough for three months. I dare to speak in public now...I am the owner of goats...I have my own business' Female livestock recipient, Tha Yet Oke Village Tract, Maungdaw Township.

'My husband passed away and I have three daughters to support – participating in livestock business is how I can support our lives. I started with 2 goats and now I own 8 goats as they have been breeding. My goats provide us with milk regularly and my main income is from the sale of goats...but currently the situation is not peaceful and we cannot travel and sell the goats to other villages – so we must keep back the goats and keep back the money. From the goats I have already sold we used the money to buy food, clothes and improve our house. I also bought some chickens which I raise and eat and sell the eggs. Only if I face more difficulties will I sell the goats, for now I must focus on breeding them'. Female Livestock recipient, Tha Yet Pyin Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

Objective 2: To strengthen the technical, operational and management capacity of targeted community groups, local partners and service providers, and to increase women's participation in community-level groups.

Village Development Committees organised and their capacity to effectively facilitate and manage community development activities built

Despite government restrictions on gatherings and limited access to communities, Village Development Committees (VDCs) remained a core component of SPARC. VDCs worked closely with project teams and contributed to beneficiary selection, verifying targeting criteria and monitoring practices. VDCs were also responsible for managing and allocating Village Development Funds (VDFs) generated through re-payment mechanisms (30% of input costs under community forestry and agricultural activities) which were intended for Village Development Grants (VDGs).

Following intercommunal conflict (2012), SPARC **focussed on VDC capacity development and by 2016 prior to the crisis, had supported 60 VDCs with capacity building in the areas of leadership and facilitation, budget management and bookkeeping, record keeping, and project management specifically developing and workplan and managing tenders and contractors**²⁵.

Outcome monitoring reported that **93% of households found VDCs either useful or very useful (32%; 61% respectively).**²⁶ **Given disruption to project activities and the extremely difficult context following the violence of October 2016, the 52% of VDCs that are presently still functioning, must be viewed as a significant achievement and reflective of the continuous capacity-building previously provided.**

Recruiting women to VDCs remained difficult throughout implementation. Despite promoting the women's representation, both membership and active participation by women within VDCs, remained restricted by traditional and conservative social norms and attitudes regarding the role of women held

²⁵ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015-November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

²⁶ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2014-November 2015. SPARC Year 4 Annual Progress Report.

by men and village elders. **Nevertheless, women’s membership on VDCs maintained an average of 20% over the duration of the project, including in Rohingya communities.**

Village development planning and the distribution of village development grants was slow to make progress hampered by Cyclone Komen (July 2015) and Cyclone Mora (May 2017), severe flooding and conflict. Despite these challenges, communities continued to make repayments and funds were deposited into savings accounts under the name of each community and by project-end, the total funds raised amounted to 232,967,640 MMK. Utilisation of VDFs gained momentum from Year 6 and **by project-end 46 VDCs (26 in Maungdaw and 20 in Buthidaung) had utilised grants for a range of community development projects such as tube wells, jetties repairs, teacher accommodation, village roads and culverts, school fencing and small dam construction.**²⁷ **These community development projects are estimated to have benefitted over 39,600 people (46% men; 54% women).**²⁸

‘Both men and women are responsible for the development of their communities. On our committee there were two women working for the peace of our region. Our committee managed the community funds and projects – there were benefits with development of our roads, fences and a water tank. I came to the meetings to keep up with community news and social occasions of joy and grief. After I divorced, I had to become self-reliant and earn my own income and I came to believe that it is important for women to be part of the development of a village. I was afraid of people in the old days but after time I dared to speak in public and stand on my own feet. Our committee was active before but now the majority of members have fled away to Bangladesh... if our region becomes more stable then I will try again for the development. Peace is important for the development of villages and of families. Female VDC member, Zedi Taung Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

‘I decided to become a member because I would like to try for the development of the village and the development of my life. I have been the chairperson of our committee from 2013 to now. Our committee manages the community fund, we assist with distribution and selection and prioritise who will get supported by CARE. Being part of the committee has made me more social and I am able to connect with other easily – people know who I am and will come to ask questions and I explain to them how decisions are made. Our community has benefitted from the development funds and projects – the streets of the village were not easy to pass through during the rainy season, but now the roads are in good condition thanks to the village funds. In the old days we could not travel to the city but now you see people waiting for the bus which uses the good road. There are two women members of our committee and they mostly exchange with each other. Women committee members can do well and there are many women who admire them – although I would increase the number of women on the committee that would require CARE to explain well to the members of religious groups’. Male VDC Member, Aung Zay Ya Village Tract, Maungdaw Township.

Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) plans developed and implemented

SPARC sought to improve local government capacity to respond to disasters through disaster-risk reduction awareness-raising and by project-end the project had trained 378²⁹ government officials from twelve departments in topics such as: vulnerability and capacity assessments/rapid needs assessments; flood disaster awareness; cyclone disaster awareness; early warning systems; linkages to climate change and linkages to damage and loss assessments under law.³⁰

²⁷ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2013-November 2014. SPARC Annex A Year 3 Annual Progress Report.

²⁸ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2016-November 2017. SPARC Year 6 Annual Progress Report.

²⁹ CARE International in Myanmar. SPARC Year 2,3,4,5,6 Annual Progress Reports.

³⁰ CARE International in Myanmar. SPARC Year 4,5 Annual Progress Reports.

Learning from experience in responding to Cyclone Komen (July 2015), SPARC invested in and pre-positioned emergency shelter and hygiene kits to enable rapid local response in 2016. Poor transportation and access issues means it is often difficult to procure emergency provisions in a timely manner; having pre-positioned shelter and hygiene stocks enables the project to respond in a timely way in the event of a disaster. The following was pre-positioned: 2,100 hygiene kits (including laundry and body soap, plastic bucket, jerry can, dipping cup, strainer, cloth, nail clippers, and female sanitary supplies) and 2,100 emergency shelter kits (including tarpaulin, rope, mosquito net, sleeping mat, candles and basic tools). **These pre-positioned emergency supplies proved critical to the project's effective and timely response to Cyclone Mora (May 2017).** CARE worked in coordination with Maungdaw District Commissioners Office and supported the distribution of kits to the most effected households.

SPARC intended to improve the capacity of communities to prepare for and manage the effects of disasters through the development of CBRDM plans interlinked with allocation of village development grants. Activities commenced with capacity-building with VDC members willing to take on the specific responsibilities of overseeing CBRDM initiatives (and assisted by other members of the community), followed by participatory hazard mapping leading to the development of CBRDM plans. **Given restrictions on large gatherings and limited access, this activity was slow to gain momentum, and by project-end only 11 villages had participated in DRR awareness-raising and carried out a Participatory Disaster Risk Assessments (PDRA) for their village.**

Women and men have increased access to financial services through VSLAs

Accessing credit/borrowing is the most common coping mechanism of households in northern Rakhine State, and providing access to affordable financial services is key to strengthening livelihood security for the most vulnerable households. Given the cultural and security context which followed and persisted after 2012, actively attempting to increase women's participation in non-traditional activities was considered unrealistic and at risk of doing harm. SPARC adapted by encouraging women's participation in less sensitive activities, such as village savings and loans associations (VSLAs). **The initial project target was to establish 24 VSLAs, however this was increased to 40 VSLAs to increase the opportunities for women to participate and access financial services.**

The project **initially faced challenges in terms of acceptance at the community-level across both Rohingya and Rakhine communities.** The main reason was related to the expectation that groups would receive seed capital – communities had previous exposure to other savings group models that relied on an injection of capital during group development. However, a core principle of the VSLA methodology, is that groups must be member-owned with no introduced external capital (research shows this can lead to decreased group motivation and self-determination with subsequent disintegration). Through intensive community mobilisation and socialisation of the VSLA model this challenge was overcome. There were also delays in gaining government approval and building the technical capacity of staff in the VSLA model. Following recruitment of technical staff and intensive training for field officers, activities then gained momentum and **by the end of 2016, prior to the conflict, the project had established 40 VSLAs (1007 women; 54 men members) 15 of which matured and successfully held in their first share-outs and proceeded into their second cycle.**³¹

Groups members **utilised funds to purchase productive assets (small livestock such as pigs and goats, large livestock such as cattle and poultry) and non-productive assets** (radios, cycles, mobile phones, supplies for petty trade and building materials for home renovations). Women also reported using them for health, education and household consumption.³² An evaluation of the VSLA model in northern Rakhine State in 2016 found 60.8% of women reported investing in livestock, followed by gold (6.3%) and household goods (5.9%). Furthermore, **100% of women members considered the**

³¹ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015-November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

³² Coady International. September 2016. Comparative Evaluation on Community-Managed Savings-Led Approaches in the Mekong.

group a safe place to save and over 90% were satisfied with the access and amount of credit that could be borrowed from their group.³³

‘Before we were unable access small loans that we could afford to repay – the interest rates from money lenders was very high. We also didn’t have physical materials like gold, paddy land or cattle that we could use to raise collateral to get a loan. Now we are able to take a small loan that we feel we are capable of repaying and we are able to make decisions about that loan because we too are supporting the daily family cash flow. We’ve learnt many skills such as numeracy and bookkeeping – these skills have been useful in reducing disagreements and being transparent. Our group has used their share-out money and loans for so many different activities – women have purchased small-scale rice crushing machines, expanded family small business such as vegetable production, small grocery shops, poultry-raising’. Women VSLA Focus Group Discussion, Tha Yet Pyin Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

SPARC successfully adapted the VSLA model for Muslim Rakhine communities where paying interest is forbidden under Shari’a. The project adapted its approach to ensure **savings groups were seen as a valuable and acceptable model to local mullahs and communities. Rather than pay interest on any loans taken, women pay a fee called a service charge, which is returned at the share out along with their savings.** In similar contexts, such as Egypt, where VSLAs have been formed in large numbers, the ‘fee’ becomes surplus for the group and disbursed among all members in proportion to their individual savings. However, in Muslim Rakhine communities, during the share-out, the borrowers recuperate all the money they pay to the group, including the ‘fee’ paid, if they took a loan. If a woman did not take a loan and only contributed in savings, she receives only her savings that she contributed.

Whilst women’s leadership was promoted and encouraged across all 40 groups, **the low literacy numeracy skills of women in both Muslim and Rakhine communities, meant that, although men represented a far smaller number of members (5%), they often held key positions** such as chairperson and recordkeeper.

Following the 2016 security operations, conflict and displacement of people, 26 VSLA groups remain active (21 Buthidaung and 5 in Maungdaw) and are continuing their savings and loans activities, these groups are now entering their third or fourth cycle³⁴ with minimal support from CARE. This demonstrates both the quality of implementation in establishing these groups and the sustainability of the model in the most challenging of contexts. Continuing groups face a number of challenges including adequate shelter for meeting and limited access to materials needed for operation – **the project has provided the remaining 26 savings groups with identified essential materials such as tarpaulin, passbooks, ledgers, bowls for money collection, pens and stamps. The project has also provided savings group refresher training to all of the remaining VSLAs** to ensure continued ownership and understanding of members.³⁵

‘This our fourth-cycle and we will continue into the next cycle and beyond because we are all members and as women we know that having a strong VSLA group in the village is the one of the only and most fruitful ways for poor women to save safely and access small amounts of money for what they need and to address the emergencies that families face. We have great confidence that our group will continue in the long-term because we have learnt and developed our independence and there is no need for external funds’. Women VSLA Focus Group Discussion, Tha Yet Pyin Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

‘We believe we will stay active in the long-run because we have gained the respect and honour from other villagers and the village leaders, we have worked hard to solve financial hardships of families with the social fund and all our members have been active members in the previous

³³ Coady International. September 2016. Comparative Evaluation on Community-Managed Savings-Led Approaches in the Mekong.

³⁴ Interview, Noor Islam, SPARC, Senior VSLA Program Officer, CARE International in Myanmar.

³⁵ CARE International in Myanmar. SPARC Year 6 six monthly- progress report.

three cycles of our group. We can continue because we know how to solve the problems and we share what we know with each other – we have a team spirit’. Women VSLA Focus Group Discussion, Aung Zeyar Village Tract, Maungdaw Township.

Objective 3: To enhance access to education for vulnerable households by decreasing institutional- and household-level barriers in northern Rakhine State.

Early childhood development (ECD) program increases number of pre-school children in kindergarten

The Early Childhood Development program aimed to provide access to early childhood education and engage with families to establish the importance of education from an early stage. Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDs) were established to service a number of surrounding villages, with teachers recruited and trained by the project. **Attending an Early Childhood Development Centre (ECD Centres) was intended to provide a gateway to kindergarten and formal education.**

SPARC was successful in establishing 19 ECDs (the target was 20) and building the capacity of 39 teachers (37 female; 2 male). Teacher training was delivered through a month-long training course which covered a core curriculum in addition to topics such as children’s rights, the role of parent education, report writing, daily, weekly, monthly planning, the practice and telling of stories and child protection. **Teachers report that their skill-base has improved and their confidence to engage with students using participatory techniques has increased³⁶**

‘I attended the one-month intensive training provided by CARE – I learnt about classroom management, stages of childhood development, methods of storytelling and reading poetry and developing a weekly schedule. The training was very valuable for me – the training actually taught me how to teach - especially the information about developing a curriculum and a schedule. I now feel that it is not possible to teach without developing a curriculum for the student and a schedule for the teacher. Before I would just teach on the day but with no plan – after graduating I now plan and have a schedule. I feel more confident in class and parents and community members respect me as the preschool teacher.’ Female Teacher, EDC, Zedi Daung Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

‘I am the assistant teacher and I moved here to teach because of my experience in teaching basic Burmese. I attended the one-month intensive training provided by CARE and my skills and confidence improved greatly – in particular in how to engage the students – especially in storytelling and poetry and bringing joy and happiness through bodily movements. I feel like I have the support of the parents in this village and we often talk on the street, in the store and at charity feasts. I am treated with respect. I can see the difference – older women will show interest when the students are learning and they see that when government or NGOs visit the village, students are better able to converse in Burmese fearlessly. These older women confess they face difficulties in speaking, writing and reading in Burmese but that they now realise the value of education and that they wish to learn if they can.’ Female Teacher, EDC, Hteik Te Pauk Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

Attendance rates at ECDs were found to be high in 2016, prior to the conflict – 1082 children were enrolled and regularly attending the centres (511 girls; 571 boys). Community feedback at that time, indicated that ECDs were having a positive impact with parents reporting increased support for education and intentions for their children to transition to primary school.³⁷

Following the 2016 conflict, the project was able to continue supporting the operation of eight ECD centres through provision of teacher’s salaries and nutritional feeding.

³⁶ CARE International in Myanmar. SPARC Year 4,5 Annual Progress Reports.

³⁷ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2014-November 2015. SPARC Year 4 Annual Progress Report.

Opportunities for boys and girl's education enhanced through improved infrastructure and increased community participation

SPARC intended to support 35 schools through construction/rehabilitation of infrastructure to contribute to security and sanitation for girls in school. Subsequently 11 of these schools were supported by local government and other INGOs to complete the construction/rehabilitation works. SPARC planned the renovation of the remaining eight centres, but faced significant delays in recruiting the required engineering expertise and disruption to implementation following the escalation in violence in 2016/17, meant **five schools (out of eight) have been renovated.**

'The cooperation with CARE has been good – CARE is providing benefits to schools and students, especially poorer students, such as school furniture, stationary supplies and equipment, that the Department does not have the resources to provide. The construction and development of school buildings has been especially beneficial and can be considered an all-round success.' Assistant Township Education Officer, Department of Education, Maungdaw Township.

6 ECCD Parent Education Trainings have been conducted at village-level in Buthidaung Township. These sessions focus on raising parent's awareness of the importance of home learning to maximise the impact of learning at ECD centres, as well as encouraging parents to actively transition their children to full-time primary education. Trainings were not possible in Maungdaw Township due to restrictions on group gatherings, and although the project planned to adapt by holding the training at township level where there are fewer restrictions on groups gatherings, the escalation in violence meant this was suspended.

Qualitative data from teachers indicates that parents and broader community attitudes were shifting towards being supportive of education, in particular girls' education:

'Previously boys were prioritised over girls when it came to education – attitudes are changing and parents are now more willing to support their daughters to attend school rather than staying within the home while they grow up. The community feels that girls who have attended school are educated and better at speaking Burmese which means they have access to employment opportunities'. Female Teacher, EDC, Hteik Te Pauk Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

'Attitudes have changes – every parent now encourages the education of both girls and boys – every parent wants their children to become educated because uneducated individuals have no choice but to depend on manual labour. Uneducated girls are also seen as less capable and therefore they are less favoured by their in-laws. It has been helpful that most of the teachers are female – female teachers can teach both girls and boys and can push for improvement in the education of girls at school meetings and with parents'. Female Teacher, EDC, Zedi Taung Village Tract, Buthidaung Township.

Material support for students from vulnerable household encourages more children to attend school

Back-to-school activities contributed to inclusiveness and equality in access to local education. Children from the poorest and most vulnerable households and families with multiple children of middle school age were targeted. These students received cash and inputs to support their continued or re-entry to formal schooling. Cash was generally used to cover transportation costs and contributions towards community teacher fees. Back-to-school activities included awareness raising for parents on importance of education. Staff sought approval from local and religious leaders to facilitate discussions with parents who do not currently send their children to school. This activity was intended to target parents of Muslim girls in particular to highlight the benefits of education and

encourage them not to withdraw their daughters from school. **The project exceeded its planned target reaching 523 students, however the majority were male (70% male; 30% female)³⁸.**

The project had **provided school stipends to 50 girls by mid-2019** including material inputs including umbrella, backpack, school uniform, text books, exercise books, pens were provided and financial support, including school tuition fee, school register fee and a monthly payment for each selected student.

Objective 4 (2019): To strengthen GBV awareness raising and response mechanisms within target communities in northern Shan and Kayah states.

The project design was amended to include the addition of this objective in 2019 (see Section 3.1 on Relevance for further information).

Government services are strengthened to offer services to GBV survivors, as part of a multi-sectoral approach to prevent and respond to GBV.

CARE Myanmar has **supported the completion of a newly constructed safe-house for survivors of GBV** operated by the Kayah state Department of Social welfare (DSW) under another program, and the project has **supported the construction of a fence wall with blades, security gates, laneway, drain and a retaining wall**. The project has also **provided basic supplies for two additional safe houses** including books, kitchen equipment, bedding, toiletries, child friendly spaces, counselling room facilities and furniture and IT equipment.

At a state and national level, the project **supported various special events including 16 days of Activism and International Women's Day**. For example, in Shan State the project held an IWD event attended by other 300 stakeholders including Government, UN, INGO and COSO representatives.

Capacity of CSOs and CBOs to prevent, identify and refer GBV cases is strengthened as part of a multi-stakeholder approach.

In Kayah state **the project has conducted capacity-strengthening using social analysis and action training for 25 partner staff from women's organisations operating at community level** (in all 3 target townships of Kayah). The project has also **provided direct financial support to eight women's organisations in Kayah state, both through the use of small grants to enable them to implement community-level GBV prevention and response initiatives, as well as direct support to a portion of their running costs**.

In Northern Shan state the project has built the capacity of women's CSOs participating in the GBV multi-stakeholder model emerging in northern Shan state. This includes **capacity-building for 11 community-level women's organisations on financial management and administration of small grants, as well as technical training on GBV prevention and response (incl. refresher courses)**. The project has also delivered **training to nine women's organisations on approaches to raise GBV awareness-raising and GBV dialogues at community levels in northern Shan**. The training aims to support these organisations to improve the quality of their engagement with communities (incl. with men) on GBV by supporting them to gain permission from local authorities to conduct GBV awareness-raising sessions; and conducting refreshers on the methodology for GBV dialogue sessions. **Eight Women's organisations have gone on to conduct GBV dialogue sessions in their existing target villages covering topics such as power, GBV, service mapping and psychological first aid for a total**

³⁸ CARE International in Myanmar. December 2015-November 2016. SPARC Year 5 Annual Progress Report.

of 313 participants (214 women and 99 men). In parallel, the project conducted GBV for 621 (444 women; 177 men) members of existing VSLAs.

3.3 Efficiency

SPARC had a total budget of AUD 9,251,981 over six years (AUD 7,728,649 over five years original budget, plus AUD 1,523,332 costed extension and revised project completion date of December 2019). The evaluation found **project efficiency was significantly affected by complex operational constraints which caused delays in project activity implementation, and therefore a slower rate of expenditure than originally planned.** The evaluation found between **50-75% more time was required to process every aspect of programming ranging from selection and authorisation of village tracts, recruitment and staffing, procurement, activity implementation and the constant review and forward planning required for challenges in obtaining government authorisations**³⁹. The slower rate of expenditure was addressed through two no-cost extensions, and most recently, reprogramming a portion of funds to projects in Kayah and northern Shan state. Re-programmed activities aligned closely with existing SPARC strategic objectives specifically those focused on improved livelihoods, and building communities' and CSOs' capacities.

Despite these challenges, **the project sought efficiencies in implementation by remaining flexible and responding to changes in the context of Maungdaw District.** Strategies to increase project efficiency included: **additional staff positions and the removal or scaling-back of some activities for which gaining government approval was particularly challenging; sharing technical staff across two projects (PHASE IN/SPARC); clear coordination and networking with government line departments and other organisations.** Many project activities required procurement, transportation and construction for village-level activities. **Efficient project scheduling was required across all components to utilise the narrow window in the seasonal calendar for moving resources and construction (November – March) before rain limited movement on unsealed roads. Experience with delayed authorisations led the project team to start planning and procurement processes early,** though approvals remained lengthy and unpredictable.

Following **the events in October 2016 when access to villages and staff movements became heavily restricted, the project continued to negotiate with relevant authorities and gain approval for a limited number of project activities,** however, the process was lengthy and limited to villages not subject to ongoing security interventions by the military.

3.4 Impact

It should be noted that although the original MEL plan proposed a baseline, mid-term and end-line measurement of indicators, this was not possible due to security restrictions and limited mobility of staff and delayed implementation. **Making comparison over time of like with like is challenging and therefore it is difficult to make a conclusive assessment of impact.** However, the commitment to routine project tracking within such a complex operating environment is an achievement and the data offers some insights into project impact.

One impact of the project has been **contributions to household-level resilience through the transfer of knowledge, skills and technologies** in areas such as forestry management, rain-fed and summer paddy production, homestead vegetable production; and livestock rearing. Utilising **models such as FFS; focal-farmers or farmer-to-farmer extension; and community forestry user groups has resulted in increased income, confidence and resilience of direct project participants and their households.** Such contributions are likely to be sustainable over time even though households may not have opportunities to apply such knowledge and skills in the current context. The project has also made

³⁹ EC evaluator under PHASEIN

contributions to resilience through increased household savings and member-owned self-sustaining groups such as VSLAs – those groups that are enduring in protracted crisis are likely to be sustainable.

Another impact of the project would seem to be in **preventing households from spiralling into further debt as each shock or crisis has occurred. Agricultural inputs and saplings and seedlings, when provided at timely points in the seasonal calendar, and strong functioning VSLAs, have supported recovery and resilience** and households who were able to pay off debts/loans after a good harvest also had better ability to invest in agricultural inputs for next cropping cycle meaning they are more stable/self-reliant following shocks through drawing on knowledge, skills and savings.

Finally, a notable impact of SPARC has been contributions towards empowering the poor and landless and expanding safe spaces for dialogue and coordination with government particularly in the area of community forestry⁴⁰. The evidence suggests that before establishing CFUGs there were limited opportunities for landless poor to contribute their opinions or influence community governance and local development. However, findings from FGDs indicate that after the CFUGs were established, landless poor were able to contribute to village community development projects (funded by the VDFs and managed by VDCs) through donating timber from their plots for construction – and in doing so community elders or village tract administrators acknowledged their contributions (often for the first time) and expanded the space for the landless poor to participate in community decision-making structures.

3.5 Sustainability

The context of northern Rakhine state is such that **the underlying cause of poverty is the denial of civil and political rights for much of the population, and development programming and projects like SPARC operate within the reality of a very narrow political space.** The evaluation found that within this complex operating environment, **SPARC pioneered ‘courageous development programming’** that reached into conflict-affected areas and aimed to hold on to previous development gains whilst also responding to and delivering humanitarian assistance. Nevertheless, **although many activities are sustainable in a technical sense, considering that the majority of project activities relied on inputs (e.g. distribution of agricultural inputs and materials or provision of stipends/salaries/cash-for-work contributions), continued external support is a precondition for the sustainability** of most program outcomes. Therefore, sustainability is at risk despite some strong outcomes achieved at community-level.

SPARC recognised this risk and was innovative in aiming to build strong and viable community-based organisations (CFUGs, CFMCs, VDCs, VSLAs, FFS) capable of organising community members, coordinating and advocating to township departments, and establishing relationships with traders and suppliers, in order to create sustainable livelihood opportunities and build resilience to a range of shocks. **In this sense, sustainability was at the heart of project approaches with the theory being that communities could function and lay the foundation for developing more sustainable livelihoods in a context that is conflict-prone with extreme climatological and environmental conditions.** The evaluation found that this approach is a sound way to achieve long-term sustainability through the empowerment of beneficiaries and communities with many of these community-based models (CFUGs, VSLAs, VDCs) continuing to function despite the escalation in conflict since 2016 and natural disasters such as Cyclone Komen (2015) and Mora (2017). Other community-based models such as FFS as an approach for capacity development, were less suitable for the context given that FFS is meant to work under a specific framework, as a learning platform that works with minimum input distribution; however in the context of northern Rakhine FFS necessarily came to be highly subsidized and the farmer-to-farmer technical learning component was challenging.

⁴⁰ Interview with Aung Khant Kyaw, Field Office Coordinator, Buthidaung. CARE International in Myanmar.

SPARC also **implemented a number of notable strategies to facilitate participant ownership of project activities, increase individual and group capacity within target communities to better address their needs, and create linkages between communities and local government.** SPARC encouraged ownership of project initiatives by project participants, for example, through **the use of repayment funds (generated from agricultural input support activities) as the basis to establish village development funds thereby providing ownership and future opportunities for communities to implement their own development projects.** The **capacity building training provided to VDC members** supports this strategy and **Village Development Grants** are important process in establishing village level responsibility for projects including participatory assessments, project identification, design, implementation and monitoring. **Building skills and knowledge of good agricultural practices through FFS and water management through Engine Pump Groups helped ensure farmers manage their land and crops in more sustainable ways. As VSLAs reached the end of their first savings cycle, they became increasingly capable of managing themselves independently** as evidenced by the fact that more than half are entering their third or fourth cycle. Facilitating linkages between local groups, authorities, and line departments through regular meetings between Community Forestry Management Committees and the Forest Department has also contributed towards villages managing activities more independently of CARE.

4.0 WAYS FORWARD

SPARC has achieved a great deal across agricultural livelihoods, food security and nutrition, women's economic empowerment, education and community governance, despite an evolving and increasingly complex operating environment. The project offers a positive example of working across the humanitarian-development divide and contributing to longer-term outcomes and community resilience. It is important to build on these experiences as a basis for continued focus and programming:

Maintain CARE's presence in northern Rakhine State: in the context of northern Rakhine State's sensitive social and political environment, CARE is one of only a handful of agencies that has established a solid partnership and cooperation with the government. Through its continuous engagement, CARE has played a leading role in supporting the government on agroforestry, agriculture, rural development and food security issues and as such is in a crucial position to influence and help build the capacity of local government to provide much needed services. There is a need for constant presence of a CARE Myanmar program (or project) office in northern Rakhine State, with staff who are able to make programmatic decisions for the region. Currently CARE Myanmar has developed a skilled and committed team that offers flexibility in a dynamic context – for example, the team is comprised of both Rakhine and Muslim staff proficient in English, Rakhine and Myanmar languages, and capable of travelling to either Rakhine or Muslim areas enabling the timely and effective delivery of activities or emergency responses. There are many advantages to maintaining a constant operational presence including: presence and hands on support to field operations; active decision-making at field level; stronger voice in local/regional coordination; consistent monitoring and evaluation and support to implementation quality and improved dialogue/joint implementation with government partners.

Research/Situation Analysis: whilst program/project activity may be currently constrained, there remains a need for nuanced analysis of the current situation in Rakhine and consideration for the differences and the changing dynamics even within Muslim or Rakhine communities across townships. Political sensitives may have discouraged a deeper analysis and engagement since 2012, but recent developments in Myanmar have opened opportunity for more dialogue around peace and reconciliation. Participatory Action Research could be a focus whilst maintaining a project office in northern Rakhine State.

Strengthen the resilience-building focus for future programming in Rakhine and Muslim agricultural communities: the nature of chronic food insecurity, recurring natural disasters and violent intercommunity conflict could classify Rakhine as a protracted crisis. Protracted crisis and resilience-building are relevant to the context and an opportunity for programming under the Vulnerable Rural Women Program Strategy component. Through a programmatic approach (based on updated action research/situation analysis), CARE could address immediate and medium-term needs around emergencies and shocks while addressing the underlying causes of vulnerability and contributing to social cohesion and peacebuilding over the long term. Building on the experiences of SPARC, areas of focus for activities/strategies could include:

- **Capacity-Development in climate-smart/disaster preparedness agriculture:** build on the experiences of SPARC farmer field schools and pilot-testing a combination of prevention and preparedness practices covering livestock, cropping, irrigation, land use and agriculture construction/infrastructure. The objective of such a pilot would be to develop a model of low-cost, easy-to-implement "disaster resilient" farming practices that can be utilised by other areas prone to natural and climate-related disasters and risks. Farm-level disaster risk reduction good practices are often 'no-regret' measures proving effective in providing benefits even in the absence of hazards. Poor farmers usually obtain significant economic gains by implementing modified farming practices aimed at boosting their ability to cope with disasters and shocks.

- **Selective inputs with potential to outlive recurring shocks:** the context of northern Rakhine State dictates a need for ongoing provision of materials and resources in supporting agricultural activities, however these should also be selected through a disaster-risk reduction lens such as small-scale dams and water harvesting infrastructure.
- **Expand economic participation and empowerment for women:** SPARC's program experience has shown that women-led savings groups are an effective platform for promoting women's economic empowerment, women's voices and gender equality. Future programming should seek to build on the minimalist VSLA model (focused purely on saving and lending activities) to deliver a more holistic model known as VSLA 'plus'. Under the VSLA 'plus' model, membership of a savings group provides women and men with the opportunity to also access trainings on financial literacy and small business skills development, exposure to agricultural technologies and information, linkages input/output markets, and life skills and information about their rights. Additionally, the VSLA 'plus' model leverages the social cohesion and capital within a standard savings group, to create a safe environment for engaging with women and men through discussions on social and cultural norms that may impede gender equality and women's empowerment. Savings groups have the potential to foster economic resilience in vulnerable households in ways that other mechanisms cannot. Incorporating savings groups into livelihoods programming builds capacity in good money management practices and allows women to save what little they have and eventually take loans—putting them in a better position to manage shocks and invest in their future. Experience has also demonstrated that protection outcomes can be delivered through savings groups by reducing negative economic coping mechanisms and providing psychosocial benefits. Importantly, this aspect of programming could potentially be started even in the current humanitarian context when combined with cash assistance. CARE International has experience in this space from Niger, Yemen and Syria which could be adapted.

Invest in remote community monitoring mechanisms and expertise: in the context of ongoing insecurity and inaccessibility in northern Rakhine State, there is an opportunity to invest in innovative remote, community-based monitoring mechanisms to ensure programme quality and accountability. Benefits of community-based monitoring include: improved understanding of long-term trends; reduced cost of research by leveraging existing infrastructure and skills of local monitors; and provision of timely and relevant information for local decision-making. CARE International has experience in complementary methodologies for remote, community-based monitoring from programming in Somalia, Afghanistan and Papua New Guinea which could be adapted. Developing such systems also offers an opportunity to pilot approaches to increase the participation and perspectives of women (as the majority of community-based monitoring methodologies have led to the engagement of men as the majority).

ANNEX 1 (STORIES OF CHANGE) REDACTED FOR PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY