

WINDS OF CHANGE IN MYANMAR? IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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Abstract

We are witnessing the beginnings of what could well be significant change in Myanmar. Elections in November 2010 were quickly followed by the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, then by the resignation of Senior-General Than Shwe, dissolution of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the opening of parliament, and the inauguration of Thein Sein as President on 30th March 2011. Thein Sein's inauguration speech called for national reconciliation and an end to corruption, promised a more market-oriented economy, and vowed to create employment opportunities. He also pledged to develop the health and education sectors in cooperation with international organisations, and to alleviate poverty. While some fear this may only be rhetoric, a growing number of indications suggest that major political and economic reform may indeed be getting underway. This paper traces these recent developments and the possibility of significantly improved international development cooperation in Myanmar, particularly as it affects the prospects of poverty alleviation efforts and cooperation with Western INGO and multilateral agencies. It analyses the implications of this reform on international development assistance and cooperation from the perspectives of humanitarian needs, international relations theory, development theory, and political philosophy.

Keywords: Myanmar, Politics, Reform, Poverty Alleviation

I think it would be fair to say that winds of change are clearly blowing through Burma. The extent of it is still unclear, but everyone who's gone there recognizes that there are changes.

- Kurt Campbell (2011)

US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs
October 2011, Yangon

It appears increasingly clear that we are witnessing the beginning of significant change in Myanmar. It has now been just over a year since the elections and release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and over seven months since the dissolution of the State Peace and Development Council and inauguration of President Thein Sein. As the world has watched anxiously, a bold reform agenda has been announced, and several concrete steps taken. While some fear this reform may not be genuine or sustainable, a growing number of indications suggest that the new government may in fact be instituting real reform.

This paper explores the possibility of significant improvement in international cooperation and partnership with the Myanmar government in extreme poverty alleviation as a result of this ongoing reform. It does so by tracing the major political developments of the past year, examining any increases in the opportunities current international development programs as a result of the reform to date and then analyses the implications reform should have on international policy drawing from the perspectives of development studies, international relations theory and contemporary political philosophy. This analysis notes the view of development practitioners inside Myanmar that the greatest obstacles to greater poverty alleviation efforts by Western-based INGO and multilateral agencies stem from the restrictions applied by the international community and draws the conclusion that a repositioning of international policy to expand the humanitarian space is overdue, including at least some select direct development cooperation and partnership with the government. The next step towards improved international cooperation in poverty alleviation in Myanmar lies with the international community.

Winds Of Change

Myanmar went to the polls for the first time in two decades on 7 November 2011, in elections widely criticised at the time as being neither free nor fair (e.g. ICG 2011a; Farrelly 2010; Zarni 2011). The greatest concern was that they were fundamentally flawed, given the 2008 constitution virtually guarantees continued effective control to the military plus the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party, allocating 25 percent of seats to military appointees while most of the democratic opposition were banned from running for office because they had a prior conviction even if they had been prisoners of conscience.

Expectations of major reform were therefore not high, even when Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest six days later. The new parliament convened in January without much fanfare. At the end of March 2011, Senior-General Than Shwe dissolved the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and the junta resigned allowing the formal opening parliament and the inauguration of President Thein Sein. The international community was still largely skeptical about change and the resignation of the former junta was widely held to be little more than cosmetic (e.g. Farrelly 2010; Wai Moe 2011; Zarni 2011). General Thein Sein had been Prime Minister in the old regime and simply removed his uniform to become the civilian President in what Holliday (2011a) termed a

“military dominated ersatz democracy” (p. 10). Fears were that no substantive change would be forthcoming.

Critics, however, have been pleasantly surprised. This transition has proven to be a real change of personnel in effective control over the country and significant policy change does appear to be occurring as a result (ICG 2011b).

Thein Sein's presidential inauguration speech, on 30 November 2011, called for sweeping political and economic reform, including things like: national reconciliation, an end to corruption, a market-oriented economy, foreign investment, development of the health and education sectors, and work to alleviate poverty in cooperation with international and local organisations (NLM, 2011a). Many initially labeled this as mere rhetoric (e.g. Kinnock, 2011; Zarni, 2011). Certainly, in the same address Thein Sein also declared that Myanmar needs to continue to build a strong, modern military to prevent bullying by other nations, and his oath to office involved pledging to uphold the *Three Main National Causes* of “non-disintegration of the Union, non-disintegration of national solidarity, and perpetuation of sovereignty,” the mantra used by the former regime to justify the 1988 coup and the dominant role of the military over the past two decades (Minye Kaungbon, 1994). Together with the dominance of the military and regime-backed Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP) in parliament, this is troubling. Nonetheless, there are a growing number of encouraging indications that President Thein Sein is in fact moving to institute much of this agenda as real reform.

Rapid and significant change has taken place in Myanmar in recent months... Since taking up office less than six months ago, President Thein Sein has moved quickly to begin implementing his ambitious reform agenda. A series of important economic, political and human rights reforms are being made... The president has reached out to government critics, including Aung San Suu Kyi and the ethnic minorities. (ICG, 2011b, pp. 14-15)

This past year has seen many changes. For example, Thein Sein moved quickly to appoint a number of well-respected non-military advisors, on political, economic and social affairs. One of these is U Myint, long-time economic advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, now Chief of the Economic Advisory Unit. U Myint has long championed the needs of the rural poor, and moved quickly to hold a Rural Poverty Alleviation Workshop in May with a raft of recommendations apparently gaining Presidential approval. These include: acknowledging the extent of poverty, preparation of a *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* (PRSP), land and tax reform, pro-poor macroeconomic policies, and improving government transparency and accountability whilst tackling corruption and the vested interests of elites (U Myint, 2011). This was followed by a broader, National Workshop on Reforms for National Economic Development in August, with a number of reforms proposed by non-military participants being adopted into policy (NLM, 2011b).

Surprising many, there has been a level of democratic debate inside the new parliament with quite lively discussions on issues like political prisoners, taxation, mobile phone costs and registration of LNGOs (Horse, 2011), all published in the *New Light of Myanmar*. The fact that relevant ministers have been required to answer questions is significant and there have been some improvements as a direct result. Likewise, censorship of foreign news websites (Hseng, 2011a) and car importation restrictions were relaxed in September (Irrawaddy, 2011a)—the latter breaking the monopoly held by the top generals and their cronies. Market-rate money changers have been legalised (Hseng, 2011b), and the President has met directly with Suu Kyi who came away from the meeting optimistically saying, “We have reached a point where there is an opportunity for change” (Irrawaddy, 2011b). Most surprisingly, at the end of September the government bowed to civil society activism and suspended the controversial Myitsone Dam project, a move welcomed by Suu Kyi but provoking the ire of the Chinese, who have invested much of the US\$3.6 billion into the project (Hseng, 2011c; Ba Kaung, 2011). The government has legalised the registration of trade unions and is preparing legislation legalising street protests under strict condition of silence and non-violence.

Even more significant is the formation of a Myanmar National Human Rights Commission in September. This was followed by the release of 6,359 prisoners (including some 220 of the estimated 1,000 political prisoners), in part a response to the first report by the new Commission. Upon the release of political prisoners, the UN Special Reporter on Human Rights in Myanmar declared that this is “a key moment in Myanmar’s history,” and a real opportunity to deepen the commitment to democracy (Quintana, 2011). At the same time, he expressed concern that “gross and systematic violations of human rights” still exist in Myanmar, and that the new government’s express commitments to other human rights have largely not yet materialised as concrete action.

Nonetheless, any one of these changes would have been unimaginable a year ago. While it is likely that a key motivation behind these reforms has been to gain the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2014, which they requested and were awarded at the ASEAN meetings in Bali in November 2011, they still justify raised expectations. The demands of ASEAN chairmanship and the desire for the removal of international sanctions place continuing pressure on the government to maintain reform. Significant political and economic reform over the coming years is now quite plausible, even likely.

Former ILO representative to Myanmar, Richard Horse, argued in June 2011 that,

What we are witnessing now is more-or-less what we should expect to see if we are in the early stages of evolution away from authoritarian rule. This does not mean that is what is happening, but that we should not jump to the opposite conclusion. (Horse, 2011)

Vested interests and the inertia of post-colonial sensitivities suggest that change is only likely to be able to proceed incrementally. Certainly, to this point reform remains too recent and superficial to have made much tangible difference to the daily lives of most of the population, apart from a clear air of expectation amongst the people, and changed attitudes by some officials. Reform remains fragile, and potentially able to be wound back easily and with minimal notice (ICG, 2011b).

Recent US official comment reflects this tension. The US State Department's Special Representative for Burma, Derek Mitchell, commented recently on the sense of expectation that "something is happening" in Myanmar (Mitchell, 2011), and the State Department recently called the new government "reformist" and "open-minded" (State Dept, 2011). However, a key demand remains the release of all political prisoners, and without that the US Congress renewed sanctions for another year in September 2011. The Senate Committee Chairman commented that,

Over the last year the Burmese regime has "severely restricted and frequently violated freedoms of assembly, expression, association, movement and religion." And in furthering its hold over Burmese society, the regime has committed crimes of murder, abduction, rape, torture, recruitment of child soldiers and forced labor – all with impunity. In recent months, however, we have seen some encouraging steps ... But it is far too soon to think that the walk to freedom has succeeded. (Baucus 2011)

US President Obama announced in November 2011 that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will shortly visit Myanmar, further adding to the credibility of reform.

ASEAN has taken quite a different position, giving far greater international credibility to these reforms, as highlighted by Myanmar being offered ASEAN chairmanship for 2014. The announcement on 18 November 2011, the day after ASEAN chairmanship was announced by Aung San Suu Kyi that the National League for Democracy will re-enter the political process is likewise highly significant. The NLD will accept the olive branch extended by the new government and re-register as a political party, contesting upcoming by-elections. This re-positioning effectively ends their boycott of the political process and previous demand for the 1990 election results to be honoured. It strongly implies confidence in the possibility of achieving incremental change within the existing system, and some confidence of fair and just outcomes over time.

The legitimacy this confers upon the President and Parliament, and Suu Kyi's endorsement of the incremental reform process, are significant markers for the international community. Major political and economic reform therefore does indeed appear to be getting underway. The only remaining obstacle for a major reassessment of international policy towards Myanmar is therefore the continued detention of an estimated 800 prisoners of conscience. If these reforms continue and are genuinely domesticated, this would bring significant change to the political

landscape within Myanmar. Continued reform does prompt, however, the need for immediate reappraisal of international policies regarding international development cooperation.

Reform to date has been more about policy announcement than tangible change. The impact of reform on the operation and projects of INGOs in Myanmar has therefore been minimal. However, based on recent history international responses that engage constructively with this reform, while demanding accountability and continued change, will be crucial for continued momentum. It is crucial, however, that accountability and pressure must be maintained in ways that minimise sensitivities rather than provoke fears of foreign interference, loss of sovereignty or of disunity and disorder. Increased development cooperation, particularly focused around rural poverty alleviation, and with the health and education sectors, therefore appears to offer great potential for such constructive engagement.

Reform Implications For Ongoing International Development

Under the SPDC, Myanmar was a difficult context for Western and multilateral agencies to operate within. Negotiating the suspicions of the Myanmar government and the deep reservations held by international donors and governments created a very complex environment for development, complicated further by the very significant humanitarian needs they sought to address with very limited resources and mandates. On the one hand, development organisations have faced restrictions from a government slow to negotiate the MOUs, equally slow to issue visas and then restrictive about the locations and sectors organisations may work within, and slow to issue travel permits for foreign personnel to visit project sites. These are serious access restrictions that the European Commission (EC, 2007) suggested threaten the whole humanitarian space in Myanmar. On the other hand, Western governments, international donors, organisational boards and the international community as a whole also restricted the humanitarian space, directly and indirectly, to put pressure on the regime. One anonymous in-country representative of a major bilateral donor pointed out that the greatest consideration for Western governments, which tempers humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, is that aid must “not keep the regime in power one day longer than would otherwise be the case” (Source 1).

Preliminary analysis of personal interviews with a large number of development professionals working in Myanmar in 2009 were presented at ICONSEA 2009, and found that, in contrasting these two sets restrictions on international poverty alleviation programs, international development staff working inside the country widely believe the greatest restriction came from the international community through sanctions, low levels of funding, and mandate restrictions (Ware, 2009). These, they suggest, restrict the humanitarian space more so than difficulties working with the Myanmar government. This contention has significant implications.

Prioritisation of Western political concerns over humanitarian concerns significantly restricted international development funding. For example, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG), in 2008, shortly before Cyclone Nargis, Myanmar received the least ODA of any of the UN's least developed countries, at just five percent of the average assistance given on a per capita basis. This restriction in development assistance appears highly disproportional, especially when contrasted with assistance given to other least developed countries with "similarly repressive governments" who receive substantially more aid: Laos 22 times more, Sudan 19 times more; and Zimbabwe 7 times more on a per capita basis (ICG, 2008, p. 15).

Table 1, below, contrasts ODA levels with GDP for Myanmar with a number of regional and LDC reference countries.

Table 1: GDP and ODA indicators for Myanmar and reference Least Developed Countries

	GDP per capita(PPP US\$)		ODA per capita (US\$)	
	2005	2007	2005	2007
Singapore	29,663	40,907	Donor	donor
Thailand	8,677	8,135	Donor	donor
Indonesia	3,843	3,712	11.4	27
Viet Nam	3,071	2,600	23.0	29
Cambodia	2,727	1,802	38.2	46
Laos	2,039	2,165	49.9	68
Myanmar	1,027	904	2.9	4
Sudan	2,083	2,086	50.5	55
Zimbabwe	2,038	-	28.3	35
Congo	1,262	3,511	362.3	34
Ethiopia	1,055	779	27.2	29

(Source: UNDP 2007, 2009)

While ODA to Myanmar more than doubled in response to Cyclone Nargis, reaching US\$10.80 per capita in 2008 (UNDP, 2010), this was a temporary, emergency-response increase. The return to previous levels has been partially offset by small increases from a number of donor governments, but ODA to Myanmar still remains particularly low in comparison to other least developed countries, rising modestly to US\$5 per capita in 2010 (Buncombe, 2011). This time of increased activity has created, however, an improved environment of development cooperation within Myanmar (Sadandar, 2010).

Restricted aid has become one dimension of the international coercive pressure designed to compel a belligerent regime into adopting democratic and human rights reform. The unintended adverse humanitarian impact of such highly restricted aid has been widely observed. (See Badgley, 2004; Hadar, 1998; Holliday, 2005, 2008b, 2008a, 2009, 2011b; Horsey, 2009; ICG, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009,

2010, 2011a; James, 2004; Pedersen, 2008, 2009, 2010; Seekins, 2005; Taylor, 2004; Thant Myint-U, 2009.) It also reflects donor concerns that increasing humanitarian aid may send the wrong signals, inadvertently prolonging authoritarian rule and stymying political change (Source 1, 2009), and reflects donor concerns that the macro-economic context has not had the preconditions for growth, particularly issues like rule of law, administrative capacity and policy weakness such as a lack of property rights (Moore, 2009). Thus donors have implicitly questioned Myanmar's absorptive capacity and the probability of fungability.

The ongoing domestic political reform is rapidly addressing many of these concerns. This could prompt international policy change that could greatly expand the opportunity for international development cooperation. The next section therefore analyses the implications of this reform on international development assistance and cooperation from the perspectives of humanitarians' need, international relations theory, development theory, and political philosophy.

Analysis Of International Development Policy And Implications For Future Cooperation

Humanitarian Assistance

The major reason for a continuation of international restrictions on the humanitarian space are concerns that human rights abuses, excessive military expenditure and the suppression of democracy continue, and are not yet sufficiently dealt with. This next section will examine the current reforms from the perspectives of international relations theory, development theory and contemporary political philosophy.

The argument in favour of sanctions, from a humanitarian perspective, relies on the idea that the formal and informal economy are largely independent of each other, that the poor primarily derive their incomes from the informal sector, and that the informal sector is not dependent on foreign investment or markets (Burma Campaign, 2004; Asia Society, 2010). It therefore argues that sanctions targeted at the formal economy with minimal impact on the vast majority of Myanmar's people. Oehlers (2004) argues that these structural and institutional characteristics of the Burmese economy make sanctions an effective device against the military regime, without causing harm to the poor:

It may reasonably be presumed the negative consequences arising from sanctions will have greatest impact on the military and its closest associates. Far from the blunt and indiscriminate tool it is often accused of being, in the case of Burma at least, sanctions appear to be surprisingly well targeted and capable of exerting considerable pressure on the military regime. (Oehlers, 2004, p. 43)

It is significant to note that Oehlers recognises this is a presumption. Certainly, the majority of the poor are primarily connected to the informal economy, and it is domestic policy not economic sanctions that are the greatest immediate cause of the

economic difficulty faced by most of the poor. However, the level of poverty and the depth of multidimensional deprivation mean that even a marginal impact on the poor will have a significant effect on their wellbeing, and this assessment ignores the fact that many poor do also connect with the formal economy. World Vision, for example, found that the May 2003 US sanctions had the largest impact on factory workers in the textile industry (James, 2004). US and European sanctions have “significantly hampered growth in export sectors such as agriculture, fishery, and garments, as well as tourism, which are a crucial source of jobs and income for millions of impoverished families” (Pedersen, 2010, p. 116). Taylor (2004) argues that sanctions have created an economic malaise that has deepened the poverty of most people in the country, whilst weakening the prospects of sustainable democratisation and making resolution of the fundamental issues more difficult through postponement and polarisation.

As Moore (2011) suggests, the crucial questions are: “How do we make the welfare of the people our main priority? And, would an increase in international assistance lend too much legitimacy to the regime?”

International Relations Theory: Sanctions as Socialisation to International Norms

Risse & Sikkink (1999) offer an international relations theory of the role of sanctions in socialising norm-violating states to international norms that fits closely with the Western response to Myanmar. They illustrate their model with a discussion of socialisation to human rights norms.

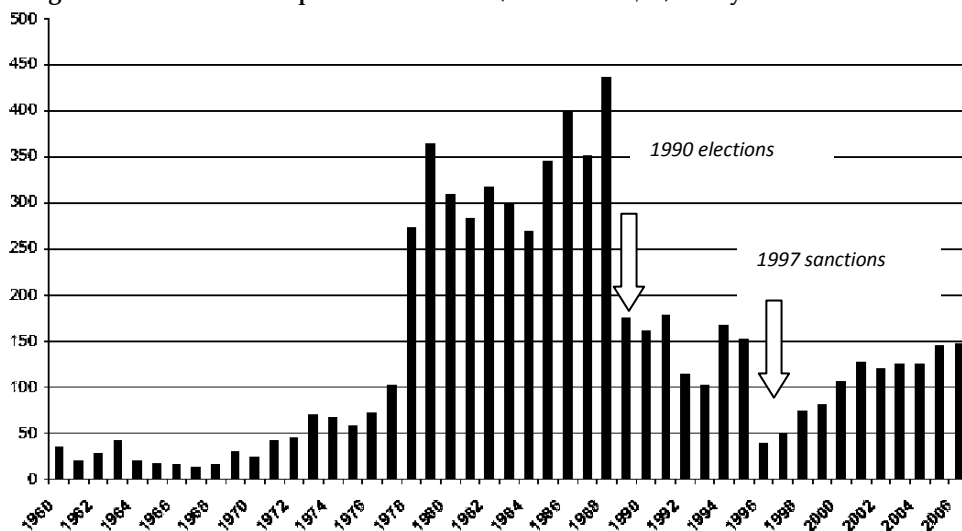
According to their model, socialisation pressure is triggered when a particularly flagrant violation of an international norm activates a transnational advocacy network that succeeds in putting the norm-violating state on the international agenda. Such a transnational advocacy network, they suggest, will typically attempt to shame the norm-violating state by labeling it as a “pariah” state that does not belong to the community of civilised nations, then begin documenting and publicising human rights violations. Such transnational advocacy network began to coalesce in Myanmar after the brutal crackdown on demonstrations in 1988, and the arrest of Suu Kyi in 1989. It was solidified when the NLD won the 1990 elections but power was not transferred.

According to Risse & Sikkink, the initial reaction of most norm-violating states to such overt confrontation is to refuse to accept the applicability of international human rights norms and challenge international jurisdiction. In response, transnational advocacy networks almost always advocate material pressure, from targeting the key interests of regime officials to making aid conditional on human rights performance. Regimes vary greatly in their vulnerability to this sort of pressure, based largely on the strength of their desire to maintain good standing with the states applying the pressure. Such a response fits closely with Risse & Sikkink’s model well with the political pressure against Myanmar.

It is ironic that as the regime seeks once more to disengage from the rest of the world that the world considers disengagement in the form of sanctions as a weapon for change in Burma. (Perry, 2007, p. 175)

Increased pressure from the transnational advocacy network is aimed at enlarging the space for domestic civil and political groups, amplifying their demands in the international arena. This can result in a backlash and further repression against activists. Where further repression occurs, Risse & Sikink suggest, transnational advocacy will increasingly call for donor countries to make foreign aid contingent on human rights, exactly as happened in Myanmar. After Suu Kyi was released from house arrest in 1995 but defied a travel ban, provoking confrontation, advocacy stepped up pressure. By 1997 aid budgets were slashed, and the US Congress and the European Union (EU) implemented economic sanctions. The impact of the initial 1998 crackdown and the abortive election of 1990 on aid flows to Myanmar, and then the further impact of the 1997 bans by the US and EU, were immediate and dramatic, as shown clearly in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Official Development Assistance (ODA in US\$m) to Myanmar 1960 – 2006



Adapted from Banki (2009)

Returning to Risse & Sikink's model, their most important contribution is the observation that, as international pressures escalate, the first steps towards institutionalising international norms into domestic practice are usually only intended as cosmetic tactical concessions to pacify criticism, rather than steps to institute real reform. However, by changing their discursive practice they unintentionally open greater space for the domestic opposition and begin the change process. The first aim of transnational socialisation pressure should

therefore be to force the target regime to offer concessions which may initially only be tactical, rather than sincere reforms.

Many argue that sanctions lack coercive force, not being universally adopted (e.g. Holliday, 2005; Pedersen, 2008; Steinberg, 2010; Taylor, 2004; Thant Myint-U, 2009; Thant Myint-U in McDermid 2009). The significant contribution of Risse & Sikkink is recognition that the role of sanctions should not be coercion, but socialisation and that the indicators of success should initially be tactical concessions and incremental change, not radical reform.

Klotz (1996) elaborates this distinction between coercion and socialisation, arguing that coercion relies on threatening state survival. Since sanctions are generally incapable of inflicting that high a cost on the target state, sanctions are almost always an ineffective instrument of coercion. Socialisation, on the other hand, seeks to promote the desire for acceptance within the international community. Sanctions, he argues, can sometimes do this well. What is essential is not that pressure be applied comprehensively, but that it is both targeted against key interests and that it quickly adjusts in response to even tactical concessions.

Applying Risse & Sikkink's model, it is hard to see how poverty alleviation interventions constitute key regime interests. Aid given to UN agencies and INGOs, that bypasses government officials to deliver assistance directly to the extremely should ever have been included within such socialisation pressure. This aside, decades of international pressure has now resulted in major concessions, which may have began as only tactical measures to deflect pressure, but now do constitute real reform. Risse & Sikkink's model therefore insists that socialisation pressure must re-adjust quickly in response to the ongoing reforms in the country. Expansion of humanitarian space through increased development assistance and wider mandates that facilitate development cooperation with the new-government would seem to be the minimum appropriate response to current reform.

Development Theory: Competing Political and Apolitical Approaches

Switching to analyse this issue through development theory rather than international relations, the same debate emerges. Underlying this analysis is an altercation between contrasting political and apolitical approaches to international development, encapsulated in the difference between an MDG-motivated approach and a Rights Based Approach (RBA) to development (Nelson, 2007).

The MDGs mobilize the classic development sector tools... The MDGs are a careful restatement of poverty-related development challenges, in language that avoids reference to rights... The RBA rests... on internationally recognized human rights standards and principles, to which governments and donors are obliged to adhere... Rights-based approaches... tie development to the rhetorical and legal power of internationally recognized human rights. (Nelson, 2007)

It is this clash of understandings of the nature and resolution of poverty that lies at the heart of the disagreement between international development

approaches to Myanmar, accentuated by the highly strained and politicised context.

The RBA has been termed “empowerment through external pressure” (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). It seeks “to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress” (OHCHR, 2006, p. 15). When applied, it enables people to recognise their rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, works to build their capacity to claim these rights, and works with the state, as the primary duty-bearer, to strengthen state capacity to respond and be accountable in fulfilling these human rights (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). The RBA uses recourse to international law to guarantee, “a protected space where the elite cannot monopolize development processes, policies and programmes” (OHCHR, 2006), and as such is explicitly political, putting politics at the heart of development (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004).

By contrast, the MDG-approach insists on political neutrality, with a focus on poverty alleviation on a needs basis, targeting assistance to the most poor and vulnerable. Nelson observes that the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs were deliberately constituted in apolitical terms. An expectation that humanitarian poverty alleviation be apolitical is likewise brought out by many others. For example the Brazilian ambassador to the UN noted to the General Assembly in 1991,

Humanitarian activities... must by definition be disassociated from all shades of political consideration. They are, by definition, neutral and impartial.... the secret of effectiveness in the humanitarian field is that even when nations disagree on everything else, even when they clash, they can still agree that ... suffering must be relieved. (cited in Minear & Weiss, 1993, p. 24)

Baulch (2006) argues donors should allocate aid based on the level of poverty and the ability to make an impact “in accordance with the priorities set out by the MDGs,” (p.933) rather than on political considerations. Alesina & Dollar (2000) express similar concern that too often aid is not given in response “to the variables that make aid effective in reducing poverty... [but] is dictated as much by political and strategic considerations as by the economic needs and policy performance of the recipients”(p.33).

While some argue the two approaches are entirely consistent (ACFID, 2009; OHCHR, 2006; UNDP, 2003:29), others recognise only a “limited convergence between the two agendas” (Alston, 2005, p. 761). To Nelson (2007), the inherent conflict is between the key agents mobilised and policy recommendations espoused by the two approaches. The MDGs were couched in strictly humanitarian terms that seek to make developing country governments, donors, UN agencies and INGOs mutually accountable, with a focus on international cooperation to address the issues created by poverty, and without any inherent reference to cause

or blame. The RBA, by contrast, focuses on national governments as primary duty-bearers, seeks to empower populations to make substantive claims against these governments, and is couched in international legal terms. The MDGs want the best equipped actor to address specific poverty needs, drawing on best practice international development to meet the most severe needs as a priority, and call for international cooperation and partnership. The RBA seeks to reform systemic causes of poverty by demanding change of political power structures.

Given political power structures are undergoing reform in Myanmar, even an RBA-approach should now be considering adjustments and development cooperation in areas the new government has shown willingness to address. "Poverty has emerged as the most acutely felt constraint on human rights for the majority of people across the country" (Pedersen, 2009, p. 2), while "aid has, arguably, emerged as our best tool for promoting better governance and human rights in Burma" (Pedersen, 2009, p. 1).

Policies restricting cooperation with the regime in areas of reform that international advocacy has been demanding for years only endangers the efficacy of reform.

However, Duffield (2008) argues that the way in which international development agencies create space to operate in Myanmar is through constant reassurances to all sides that they are adhering strictly to humanitarian principles of apolitical assistance for those in extreme need. This finding is strongly borne out by these fieldwork responses, where deviation from apolitical neutrality could threaten the operating space granted by the Myanmar government. With neutrality, however, aid agencies are confident they could deliver substantially more aid to effectively alleviate more of the suffering they see. They thus argue the greatest restriction on the humanitarian space is caused by the international community and therefore that humanitarian funding (and mandates) should be significantly increased. The on-going reform only strengthens their case.

Political Philosophy: The Demands of Global Justice

Holliday (2011a) observes that since the end of the Cold War a new idea of humanitarianism has emerged that denies the old principles of impartiality, apoliticality and neutrality, and is instead ambitious to engage politically to redress the root causes of injustice.

In a post-Cold-War era of humanitarian engagement driven by generic notions of global justice, [Myanmar] has for years looked to be a prime candidate for political reform, and the main task facing the rest of the world has long seemed crystal clear: helping to make it happen. (Holliday, 2011a, p. 2)

Holliday therefore explores theories of contemporary political philosophy and global justice in relation to Myanmar, concluding that "a *prima facie* case for external engagement with Myanmar is readily made" based on the obligations of our shared humanity (Holliday, 2011a, p. 145). However, he finds it far less clear

exactly how such engagement should be undertaken and what issues specifically it needs to address.

To analyse any such foreign intervention, Holliday (2011a) proposes a typology of possible interventions by various actors, suggesting they may involve expressive or aggressive pressure, and consensual or belligerent engagement, by either state or civil actors. These possibilities are summarised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Holliday's (2011a) proposed typology of engagement options for external actors

	State Actors	Civil Actors
Expressive Pressure	<i>Diplomacy</i>	<i>advocacy</i>
Aggressive Pressure	<i>Sanctions</i>	<i>boycotts</i>
Consensual Engagement	<i>bilateral assistance</i>	<i>INGO/corporate engagement</i>
Belligerent Engagement	<i>military intervention</i>	<i>cross-border terrorism</i>

Since 1988, Western state and civil actors have primarily responded to the Myanmar regime with a range of both expressive and aggressive pressure (diplomacy, advocacy, sanctions and boycotts), with restricted consensual engagement through limited bilateral assistance and INGO engagement. Asian regional neighbours, on the other hand, have primarily acted through consensual corporate engagement, and (in some cases) bilateral assistance and limited expressive diplomatic pressure.

Holliday argues that in determining an appropriate response to the global justice demands of contemporary political philosophy, insiders must play a leading role and the dismissal of the views of regional neighbours such as China, India and ASEAN, is “worrying”; their voice should be an essential moral and practical precondition for external engagement with Myanmar” (Holliday, 2011a, p. 142).

The conclusion of his extensive analysis of the demands of contemporary political philosophy and global justice is a call for increased expressive pressure (diplomacy and advocacy), a readjustment and evaluation of the extensive repertoire of aggressive pressures applied by Western powers against Myanmar (sanctions and boycotts), and an increase in consensual engagement by the West, in terms of both bilateral assistance and INGO engagements. He expresses great concern at the imbalance in which so little Western consensual engagement has been attempted. He advocates a major increase in effort be given to such intervention, “led from the grassroots through civic action, undertaken... by UN agencies and INGOs... a recasting of major power engagement” (Holliday, 2011a, p. 172). Evidence from INGOs and UN agencies in Myanmar makes it clear that despite serious restrictions applied by the Myanmar government, there is considerable scope for increased bilateral assistance and INGO consensual engagement to be effective.

First Steps of Repositioning

A wealth of scholarly research has thus arisen to suggest that humanitarian aid to Myanmar should be significantly expanded in response to the current reforms within Myanmar, and that international development assistance should be recommenced. From a sanctions perspective, the range of tactical concessions made by the regime requires a repositioned response, and humanitarian assistance offers the best option to do that in a manner that supports reform without otherwise strengthening the regime. From a humanitarian perspective, whether one ascribes to an apolitical or politically active humanitarianism, development theory and contemporary political philosophy both call for increased intervention in the form of assistance delivered via the UN and INGOs to help alleviate the impacts of poverty.

The opportunity now exists, therefore, to acknowledge and encourage domestic political reform by increasing assistance to the poor and vulnerable, in a way that reduces conflict in the international political relationships and builds international development cooperation.

It would be a massive wasted opportunity if the West failed to engage with this new government, to assess their willingness to take the country in a different direction, and to convince them that improved relations are possible if they do so. (TNI, 2010, p. 10)

Such repositioning has commenced. The Obama administration has responded by increasing humanitarian aid to Myanmar and adding additional diplomatic 'practical engagement' to the pressure of economic sanctions (Steinberg, 2010). This has the full endorsement of the NLD, and has involved a doubling in humanitarian funding from US\$17 million in 2009 to US\$37 million in 2010 and 2011 (USAID, 2011). This is positive first step towards the major increase and "recasting of major power engagement" (Holliday, 2011a, p. 172) and others call for. Capacity building of the technical skills of civil servants, particularly in ministries involved in poverty reduction, health and education is also appropriate (Asia Society, 2010).

Australia and the UK have likewise responded to reform by announcing increases in humanitarian funding. In February 2010, in anticipation of the 2010 elections, Australia announced an increase in aid from \$30 million in 2009/10 to \$50 million in 2012/13 (Smith, 2010). The UK followed suit in February 2011, announcing the largest increase, from £32 million in 2010/11 to £185 million in 2014/15 (Buncombe, 2011). Australia has also already announced a broadening of the mandate according to which the aid budget can be allocated, indicating that aid projects must begin engaging lower-level officials (Moore, 2011).

At some stage into the future, Burma will have a civilian Government, which will face great challenges. At some stage into the future, the regional and international community will be asked to help in the rebuilding of Burma's economic and social structures. Australia's view

therefore is that the international community must help prepare Burma for the future. Burma's capacity cannot be allowed to completely atrophy to the ultimate disadvantage and cost of its people. The international community needs to start the rebuilding now. Ministerial Statement on Burma (Stephen Smith MP, 2010)

Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD position on aid has always been nuanced enough to reject aid for the government while supporting strictly humanitarian aid (ICG, 2002). The NLD has never opposed humanitarian aid (Suu Kyi, 2010).

These moves constitute solid first-steps towards the major increase and "recasting of major power engagement" (Holliday 2011a, p. 172) the current reforms call for, whether considered from the perspective of development professionals working within the country, or from development studies, international relations theory or political philosophy.

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