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SUCCESS STORY

Connecting Public Voices with Government Ears



A member of Parliament discussed the draft National Land Use Policy with villagers in his constituency in Kayin State during a grassroots level public consultation event.

“We have heard the voice of the people and the Government has listened to this voice.”

-Tin Maung Than, Deputy Director of the Forest Department’s Land Information Unit

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As the Government of Burma opens up its political process and undertakes democratic reforms, USAID has been actively supporting a meaningful public consultation process on the draft National Land Use Policy in Burma. As stated by U Shwe Thein, Chairman of the Land Core Group, the “process of conducting public consultation on a policy such as this is unprecedented and most welcome.” While the government of Burma conducted 17 public consultations in every state and region of the country, an equally meaningful process of grassroots consultation on the draft policy has been taking place, with civil society organizations across the country leading over 60 local-level events. These forums have included farmer associations, retired government officials, local politicians, members of monastic organizations and representatives from various unions, allowing the public to delve deeply into the substance, purpose and meaning of the draft National Land Use Policy.

One of the clearest responses coming out of the national consultations and the parallel civil society process was the need for more time for the public consultation process. USAID and other donors helped give voice to these concerns. Ultimately, the government made the welcomed decision in late December to extend the process through March 2015. As Tin Maung Than, Deputy Director of the Land Information Unit within the Forest Department stated, “we have heard the voice of the people and the Government has listened to this voice.”

Another consistent message has been the need to strengthen land administration and governance at township and village levels. There is a common perception that township administrators are inefficient, corrupt, high-handed and uncaring. According to Dr. Kin Zaw Win from the Tampadipa Institute, “This is where the state’s weakness lies and there is no remedy in the near term. This is the main reef upon which the Government’s reforms have foundered.” USAID is supporting local land administration through a pilot program to document traditional land rights in and around townships and village tracts.

The public consultation process continues into 2015 as the government consolidates and responds to feedback with technical support from USAID. As Dr. Kin Zaw Win further stated on the public consultations, “the government encouraged the process and facilitated this process, which is good for the people of Burma so their voices may be heard.”