



URBAN SAFETY PROJECT
**URBAN SAFETY AND
SECURITY IN MYANMAR**

Jayde Roberts

June 2018



The Asia Foundation
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities

URBAN SAFETY PROJECT
**URBAN SAFETY AND
SECURITY IN MYANMAR**

Jayde Roberts

June 2018

About The Asia Foundation and the Urban Safety Brief Series

The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Informed by six decades of experience and deep local expertise, our programs address critical issues affecting Asia in the 21st century—governance and law, economic development, women’s empowerment, environment, and regional cooperation. In addition, our Books for Asia and professional exchanges are among the ways we encourage Asia’s continued development as a peaceful, just, and thriving region of the world. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.

The **Urban Safety Brief Series** aims to provide Myanmar policymakers at national and local levels, and other interested stakeholders, with analysis and examples of policies and practices, which potentially could be applied or adapted to enhance people’s safety in urban areas in Myanmar. The Asia Foundation has a wider policy research agenda looking at urban governance and public financial management and the Urban Safety Brief Series is a complimentary body of work. The Urban Safety Brief Series is supported by the Government of the United Kingdom (UK). The views expressed in the series are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the UK Government or The Asia Foundation.

About the author

Jayde Lin Roberts is an interdisciplinary scholar of the built environment and Myanmar Studies specialist. Her book, *Mapping Chinese Rangoon: Place and Nation among the Sino-Burmese*, was published by the University of Washington Press in June 2016. She is a tenured faculty member at the University of Tasmania and a 2016-18 Fulbright US Scholar in Myanmar. Her Fulbright-funded research examines discourses of development in Yangon during a period of rapid urbanization.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
WHAT IS URBAN SAFETY?	7
Defining urban safety	7
Urban safety standards	7
Principles for effective urban safety	8
URBAN SAFETY IN MYANMAR	11
The process of urbanization	11
Current urban safety challenges	11
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR URBAN SAFETY	13
The General Administration Department	14
Development Affairs Organization	15
The Myanmar Police Force	16
Supporting agencies	17
Interagency coordination	18
POLICY OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING URBAN SAFETY	19
Improving committees to enhance Interagency collaboration	19
Government–community interaction	19
Community organization	19
Developing an evidence-base	20
Lessons from international experience	20
CONCLUSION	23

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is the movement of people from rural to urban environments, and the associated changes in the built environment. As political reform and rapid urbanization drastically reshape Myanmar, new opportunities are arising for practical collaboration between government agencies, and between the government and the public, to improve the sense of safety and security of the country's growing urban population. In order to inform such collaboration, this policy brief provides an explanation of the concept of urban safety, provides examples of what urban safety can mean in the context of Myanmar's cities, and identifies key government departments with responsibilities for achieving urban safety. The paper also elaborates on international experiences in improving urban safety and offers a number of policy opportunities that Myanmar governance actors may act on.

Globally, there is a trend toward urbanization. By 2030, 96 percent of all urbanization will occur in the developing world. Within Myanmar, Yangon's rapid and poorly-planned urbanization has drastically changed the face of the city, while urban centers around the country are having to adjust to growing populations and demand for services. This shift toward greater concentrations of population is having profound implications for a wide range of issues that will make cities more or less livable, potentially increasing or diminishing the sense of wellbeing among urban populations.

The challenges facing urban management are numerous and complex, and there is a risk that urbanization will result in stratified, unsafe and poorly managed cities. Understanding how urbanization is happening in Myanmar is the first step towards planning for cities that will be environmentally and socially sustainable.

A sense of safety and security is a primary concern of individuals. People's collective perceptions of safety or insecurity can have a physical influence on the city's streets. In turn, the characteristics of urban spaces can create a sense in people's minds that a street, a neighborhood, or even an entire city is safe or unsafe.

A NOTE ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The field work underpinning the findings on Myanmar's urban safety institutions, challenges, and opportunities, was carried out across Hlaingtharyar and North Dagon townships in Yangon and in urban wards of Taunggyi and Hpa-An. The research included qualitative semi-structured key informant interviews conducted with selected civil servant personnel and members of the public.

Data collection was carried out in June and July 2017 by two teams of researchers comprising international and national, as well as male and female team members. A total of 112 semi-structured qualitative interviews including six focus group discussions were carried out with a total of 144 government staff, politicians, members of civil society organizations (CSOs), media workers, business people, and community members. Analysis of the data was made along the three focus areas for the Urban Safety Project: interagency collaboration, collective problem solving, and security sector - community interactions.

The data validation process included consultations with township management committees, after which the findings were presented to state and region cabinet members and chief ministers.

WHAT IS URBAN SAFETY?

DEFINING URBAN SAFETY

Urban Safety refers to the extent to which a city's inhabitants are able to live, work and participate in urban life without fear of bodily harm or intimidation.¹ It should be viewed as a complex set of ever-changing and interconnected problems related to:

- Physical built environment,
- Socioeconomic practices,
- Systems (governmental, service provision, environmental)

Efforts to promote urban safety should consider the needs of all of the population, and how different groups within the population such as women, children, and persons in non-typical situations face different vulnerabilities. These vulnerable groups are too often left out of the planning processes and decision-making structures that directly affect their lives. At the same time, some of the most marginal urban residents are those who are the most typical; poor, often migrant, workers who live in cities' outer areas and have little ability to have their voices and concerns heard by policy actors. Work to improve urban safety must seek to account of both vulnerable and marginalized populations.

URBAN SAFETY STANDARDS

For a city to be safe, its governance and security providers should fulfil at least four main requirements:

- Create conditions that promote the mental and physical health of its residents, such as preventing health risks that stem from polluted water, soil and air; delivering physical and mental health services and facilities; providing safe transport and mobility for all, and building green spaces and urban commons,
- Prepare for and respond to emergencies, including fire, flooding, and natural disasters,
- Prevent and respond to crime and reduce feelings of insecurity by proactively addressing residents' concerns and perceived needs,
- Promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence by developing a sense of community and, trust among a city's residents and working to reduce all forms of segregation within the city.

Some examples of common urban safety issues faced in cities around the world include (but are not limited to):

- Unsafe streets; no street lights, no sidewalks, holes in sidewalks, loose electrical wires, etc.
- Unsafe transportation; unenforced road rules, roads and intersections not designed, built, or monitored properly, buses in poor condition, bus network is limited and forces residents to walk on unsafe streets
- Unhygienic urban environments; rubbish, rats, mosquitoes, stray dogs, and other health hazards,
- Crime; theft, muggings, drug-related crime.

International experience shows that inadequate urban planning and local governance, as well as social and territorial exclusion patterns, all contribute to conditions that are conducive to crime and violence. Similarly, ingrained inequality, unclear laws, social exclusion, and lack of community support also lead to worsened

1. Based on the New Urban Agenda. United Nations (2016). Available at: <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/N1639668-English.pdf>

urban safety outcomes. On its own, poverty is not a cause of crime, but often sits alongside these factors that do contribute to low levels of urban safety.

At the same time, countries with high levels of protracted violence, whether nationwide or concentrated to specific geographic regions on the periphery, see an estimated reduction in development of some 20 percent, as well as decades' worth of diminished economic growth.² Given this, if Myanmar's urban areas are to develop at a rate commensurate with their economic potential, urban safety must be ensured.

PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE URBAN SAFETY

Sustainably addressing urban safety problems requires holistic agile solutions that are based on systems analysis. It is crucial for governments and municipal bodies to focus on root causes and interconnections between problems, and how these can best be addressed. Addressing individual problems can lead to shallow approaches that are often ineffective and more expensive in the long run. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is key to ensuring effectiveness.

An effective urban safety strategy requires collaboration between communities, municipalities and government, responding to and adapted to the specific needs of the local context.

Myanmar faces the challenge of creating inclusive urban centers that are built with sufficient planning and foresight to enable growth, without exacerbating the social problems stemming from inequality, which can, in turn, become drivers of violence and other factors contributing to overall poor safety standards.

SAFER CITIES CAN BE DELIVERED VIA INCLUSIVE URBAN GOVERNANCE

How the government operates at all levels, from the national to the local, can affect urban safety and must be considered in any initiative to create safer cities. However, the way the government operates at the municipal level is key and can be the locus of change.

Urban governance:

- **How:** Is a process of interaction between different stakeholders within and outside of government in deciding social objectives and writing urban policies. In order to function, governance must strive for cooperation but must also include processes to constructively address differences and conflict.
- **Who:** Entails shared management of the planning processes within different government agencies and between the government and the people. This inclusive governance involves different stakeholders working simultaneously at different scales (neighborhood, ward, township, district and city).

SAFETY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED THROUGH POLICING OR ENFORCEMENT ALONE

Research shows:

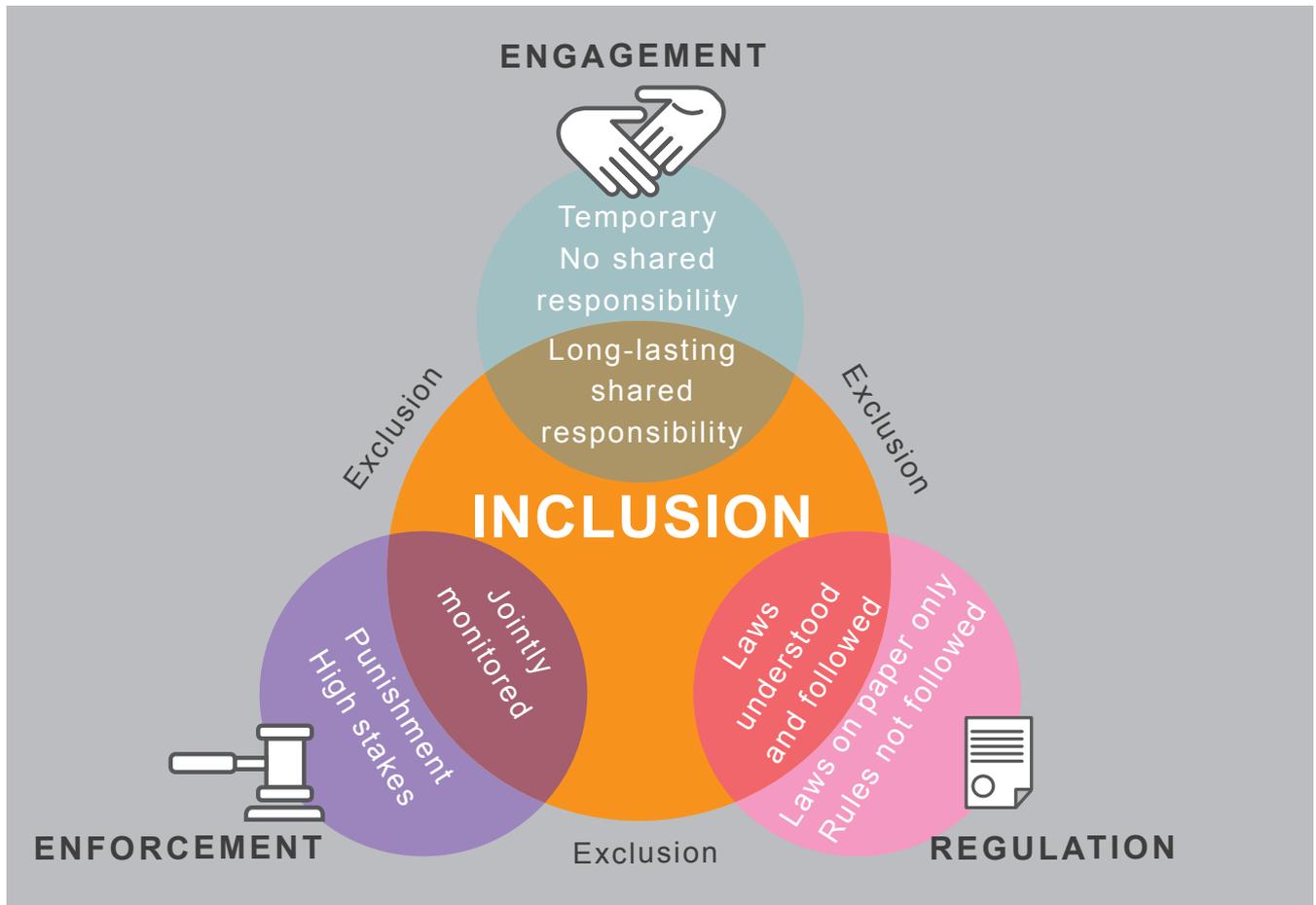
- An over-reliance on conventional, reactive policing strategies can worsen crime or merely move the problem somewhere else, rather than increase safety. Problem-oriented policing and situational crime prevention tend to be more effective.³
- National actions alone are not effective—local solutions must be tailored to local conditions.
- One size does not fit all, and no strategy will work on its own. A range of strategies, applied holistically, is the only effective way to create long-lasting safety.

2. World Bank Development Report 2011, xii

3. Otter, S. (2017). Urban Policing in Myanmar Background Paper--Draft. The Asia Foundation. Yangon.

THE INCLUSIVE URBAN SAFETY MANAGEMENT MODEL

Historically, all cities have tried to ensure safety for its residents through top-down regulation and enforcement. However, international experience has shown that when the people who are affected by unsafe conditions are excluded from the problem-solving process, this exclusion increases their feelings of insecurity and decreases the effectiveness of government and police action. Today, city governments and police forces recognize that including residents as fellow problem-solvers can lead to more effective and long-lasting solutions.



REGULATION

City governments have multiple regulatory powers related to crime prevention and control such as: traffic rules, zoning, licensing for businesses, fees for services such as rubbish collection, etc.

Exclusionary: If the government excludes people by failing to publicize or explain rules, residents will not understand or follow rules. There might be laws but those laws are only on paper.

Inclusionary: If rules (and the reasons behind them) are communicated clearly and consistently, they can be effective tools for shaping the urban environment and regulating behavior. When residents understand the rules and believe that they help achieve shared public goals, their sense of responsibility will likely increase.

In addition to the conventional regulations above, governments can also increase urban safety by address-

ing root causes through urban planning and other policies such as: incentive programs to encourage neighborhood-level projects, prioritizing funding for schools, or land use regulations that demand the provision of public facilities as a part of private property development.



ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement is the process of ensuring compliance with laws, rules and standards. In the context of urban safety, conventional methods have relied on policing and systems of punishment. In more progressive cities, law enforcement includes local communities and supports the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively increase public safety and decrease fear.

Exclusionary: When laws seem arbitrary, the police must increase their use of force in order to make people follow the rules.

Inclusionary: If people believe that the law is for their benefit, they will help enforce the law through mutual monitoring.



ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is an important tool to foster inclusive, resilient and law-abiding societies and can take place at many levels from minimal (informing the public) to maximal (shared ownership of problem and solution). Engagement can be challenging and time-consuming, and it is not possible to reduce processes of engagement to apolitical, neutral and technical discussions. The technocratic approach to safety has largely proven ineffective.

Exclusionary: When residents are excluded by the government, they do not feel responsible for the problem and must be coerced to implement the top-down solution. Without popular support, this approach is unsustainable because proposed solutions require costly and constant monitoring by the government.

Inclusionary: If people are included in the shaping of policies and given a chance to participate in the creation of safer cities, they feel a sense of shared ownership and become more proactive in maintaining safety.

URBAN SAFETY IN MYANMAR

THE PROCESS OF URBANIZATION

Significant rural-to-urban migration has occurred throughout Myanmar's history, particularly in the 1950s, 1990s and most recently following Cyclone Nargis in 2008, which uprooted huge populations – particularly from the Ayeyarwady Delta.

The commencement of a reform agenda by the transitional government in 2011 pushed the challenges of an urbanizing society to the forefront, and steps toward economic liberalization have meant greater opportunities have presented themselves in the cities in recent years.

Populations which were traditionally living in subsistence agricultural settings have seen significant outflow, as the younger members of the community seek opportunities further afield. In Myanmar, there has been little effort to plan for the future of cities, and only municipal bodies have provided basic urban services with little authority to regulate growth.

As political reform and rapid urbanization drastically reshape Myanmar, The Asia Foundation aims to support the country's transition to democracy and enhance the safety of the people living within its cities. To this end, The Asia Foundation conducted research in four townships across three cities (two townships in the commercial capital Yangon as well as in Taunggyi in Shan State, and Hpa-An in Kayin State)

CURRENT URBAN SAFETY CHALLENGES

Community safety concerns...

Safety and security concerns reported by urban residents and authorities in Myanmar include crime and drug use, traffic accidents, other issues related to the built environment, social inequality, and informal settlements as well as poor drainage, solid waste, street lighting, and crowd safety in large events. Women's specific concerns include harassment in public spaces and fears of sexual assault.

Across the townships where The Asia Foundation conducted research into urban safety dynamics, respondents reported a number of safety issues common to all locations, while other issues were more specific to individual townships. Some safety issues more emphasized in specific areas included prevention of youth drug use and crime associated with drugs in Hpa-An and Taunggyi and safety issues related to streetscapes and general crime prevention in Yangon. In Taunggyi, one of the town's most important urban safety issues is improving management of crowd safety at the city's annual fire balloon festival, where fatalities are unfortunately not uncommon. Waste management in Yangon and traffic safety in Hpa-An are also potential issue areas for city-specific interventions.

...and how government responds

Some issues reported by communities garner a proactive response from local security actors, while on others authorities have remained largely reactive. Respondents across the four townships reported a disconnect between security actors and the public when it comes to understanding and addressing safety concerns. At the same time, security actors often perceive that members of the public do not understand their role and responsibilities. As a result, there exists an opportunity to bring local security actors and urban communities together to improve understanding of local safety challenges and identify ways to address them.

While numerous areas for improvement exist, addressing certain issues already brings different departments together, providing models for interdepartmental cooperation and collaborative governance that can be expanded upon. The centrality of the General Administration Department (GAD) is often clear: interagency responses to flooding generally involve different agencies being directed by the GAD to carry out specific tasks. Cultural festivals provide a second example of local security actors working together. The GAD, police, development affairs organizations, and sometimes even ethnic armed groups come together to plan events and ensure public safety. Such events include the Taunggyi balloon festival mentioned above, Karen New Year in Hpa-An, and Thingyan celebrations.

Other issues such as addressing streetscape concerns or dealing with youth drug use offer opportunities to consult and involve a wide range of agencies and the public and implement solutions using pooled resources.

Policymaking to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls

Myanmar has a growing body of CSOs and non-government organizations (NGOs) working to raise awareness of gender-specific urban safety issues and advocating for governance authorities to develop specific strategies and policies that deal with violence against women and girls. However, to date there has been limited collaboration between these groups and the local authorities best placed to enact meaningful policy changes that would improve the experience of living urban areas for women and girls.

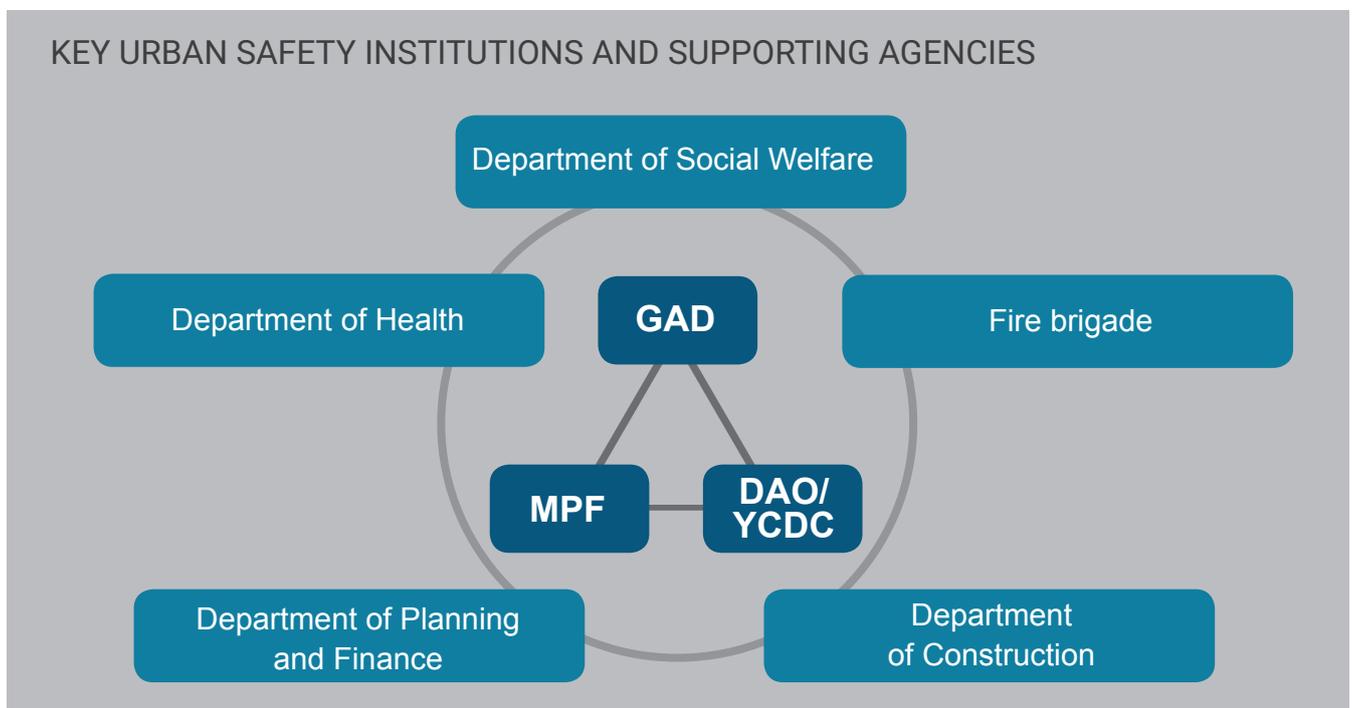
The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Settlement was found to be an exception, and regularly engaging with activists, CSOs and international (INGOs) on women's rights and child protection issues. However, the Ministry, and the Department of Social Welfare below it, has a comparatively limited reach, budget, and mandate compared to the GAD and other township actors. Nonetheless, its role and voice are increasingly important.

The Myanmar Women's Affairs Federations and the Maternal and Child Affairs Associations (which exist in all townships and are composed of the wives of township department heads as well as some members of the community) also reported having regular interactions with CSOs and INGOs. However, this mechanism varies significantly in popular legitimacy, effectiveness, and levels of activity from township to township.

Women generally report that police have not been responsive to cases of violence against women and girls that were brought to their attention. This inactivity, attributed primarily to underlying social norms that trivialize and normalize gender-based violence, meant that the mostly male, police officers are reported not to take cases seriously and to be insensitive to the trauma experienced by survivors of violence.

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES RESPONSIBLE FOR URBAN SAFETY

Both Myanmar's long history of military government structures and the current transition toward a more democratic polity underlies the country's urban safety context. As part of the transition, the establishment of structures to effectively shape policy formation and implementation will be extremely important as Myanmar's urban areas grow. Also key to cities' success is the promotion, among government authorities, of the understanding that authorities have a responsibility to urban communities—and to develop proactive measures addressing those communities' concerns in a cooperative and joined-up manner.



The emergence of a stronger civil society and media in Myanmar has also led to a push for somewhat more accountability and effectiveness in the political system. This shift is a critical first step towards empowering civilian engagement with administration, but there are numerous other opportunities for administrative bodies to engage proactively with Myanmar's urban citizenry.

The Asia Foundation has identified three key primary administrative actors in urban settings, as well as a number of supporting government bodies that have important roles in specific sectors. These main government stakeholders are:

- The General Administrative Department (GAD)
- Municipal bodies of the Development Affairs Office (DAO)/ Yangon City Development Committee
- Myanmar Police Force (MPF)

The supporting government actors include line ministries with local offices that engage on specific urban challenges, such as the health, social welfare, and planning and finance departments, as well as more traditional safety-focused organizations like the fire department.

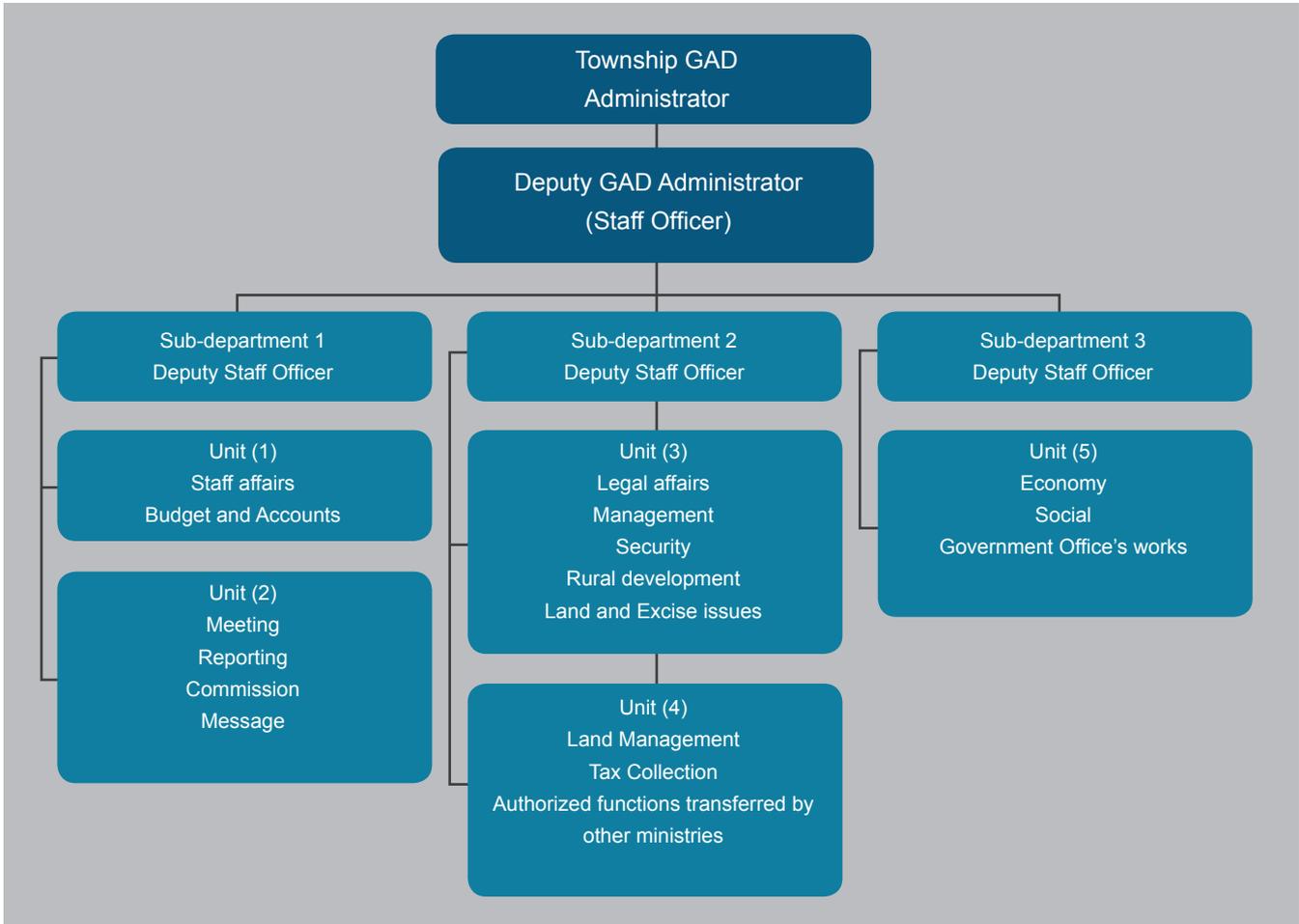
Both the police force and the GAD exist under the authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs (itself one of three ministries directly controlled by the Myanmar military). As such, both organizations have historically been centrally focused with an emphasis on maintaining order and state security rather than citizen safety. Both have taken steps to become more oriented toward service delivery; changes to institutional culture, however, take time. Following reforms since 2012, the Development Affairs Organizations are now independent of ministry control at the national level and report to their state or region government. Nonetheless, they also have a history of military control, having formerly existed under the authority of the Ministry of Border Affairs.

THE GENERAL ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

The GAD is the most influential of the township governance structures, as it coordinates the majority of township governance and exerts influence over almost all departments, including the township police.

There is a GAD office in every township in Myanmar, rural or urban, and the township-level GAD is perceived by citizens and government agencies alike as the primary building block of Myanmar governance.

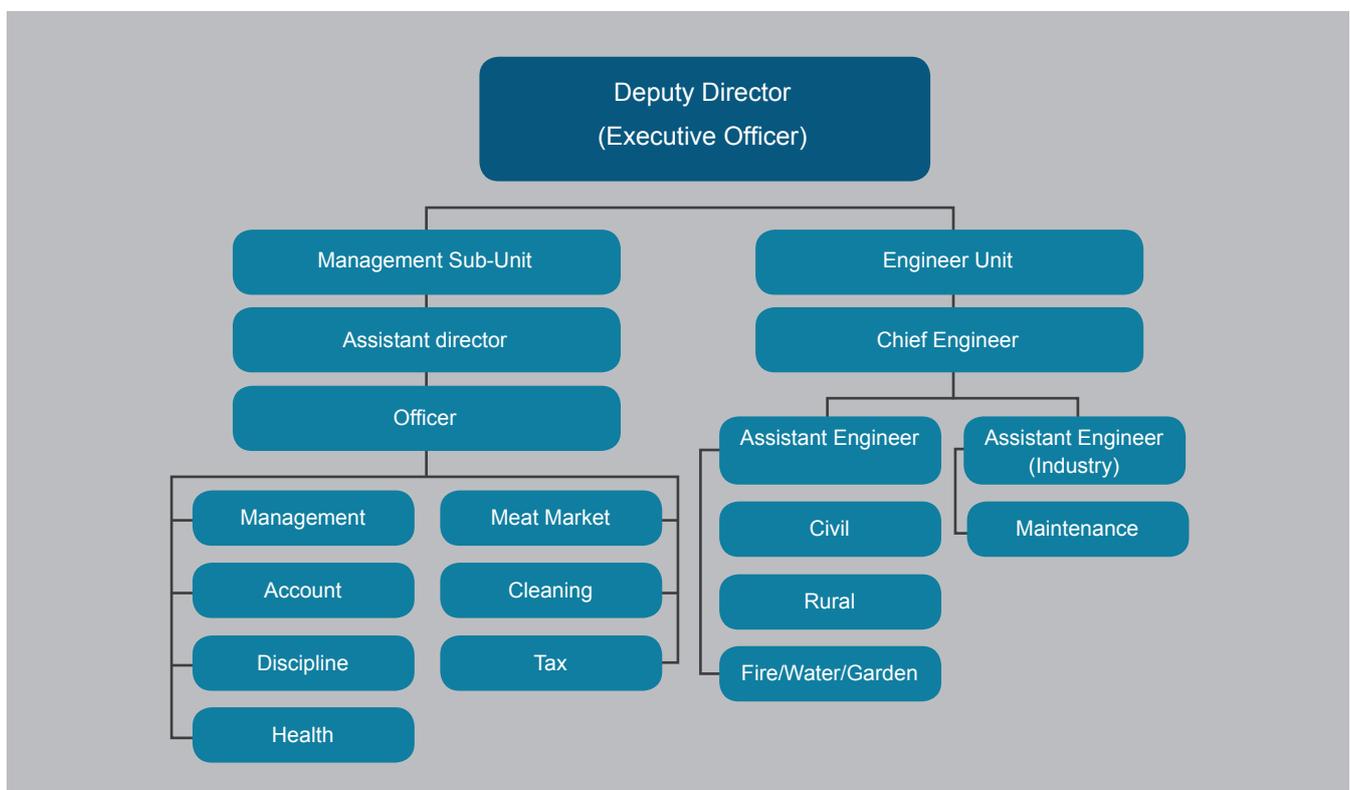
Across the townships, GAD township administrators appeared less focused on direct service delivery for the public. Instead, they perceived their role as one of coordination and management, organizing the other main departments and maintaining an understanding of the issues and activities undertaken by other agencies within their townships.



DEVELOPMENT AFFAIRS ORGANIZATION

DAO's formal role involves provision of 31 specific municipal duties and functions that range from sanitation and street lighting town planning and disaster preparedness. Further, the body is involved in economic governance via its role as license provider for local businesses, including restaurants. However, in practice the organizations appear to deliver only a handful of the services—namely those related to road construction and provision of solid waste management service. Planning, a particularly important component to strategic approaches to urban safety was notably absent, likely a reflection of the fact that while DAOs are mandated to undertake urban planning, it is the GAD that has control over land administration.

Nonetheless, the DAO's mandate to provide public services make it a security-related actor: a built physical space and the extent of water, waste-management, and other municipal needs help define an urban area's security context.



During the research, DAOs were found to be the urban safety administrative body most likely to view their role as being that of a service provider. However, given the extent to which their mandate is specifically tied to the provision of urban services, this is perhaps unsurprising. DAO civil servants indicated a wide range in the level of motivation toward service provision, and it appears the quality and proactive problem-solving attitudes of different DAO departments was a reflection of individual officials rather than institutional structure or culture. Department heads take the lead, and lower-ranking staff tend to perform their duties but not go above and beyond this. Heads of departments and staff alike reported finding themselves constrained by insufficient resources across a range of public services.

YANGON CITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (YCDC)

Yangon and Mandalay have differing and unique systems in place for municipal management. In Yangon, the YCDC has administrative functions under the authority of the Yangon Region Government; it is not, however, an autonomous local government. Currently, the YCDC is managed by five regional government

appointees who oversee 20 departments. In practice, responsibility for each department falls under one of the four committee members most knowledgeable in that field; for example, the member of the committee who has a background in engineering supervises the engineering departments. The Mayor of the YCDC or committee member 1 simultaneously functions as the Minister of Development Affairs for Yangon Region. The appointee also do not have any direct reporting lines from the 20 departments.

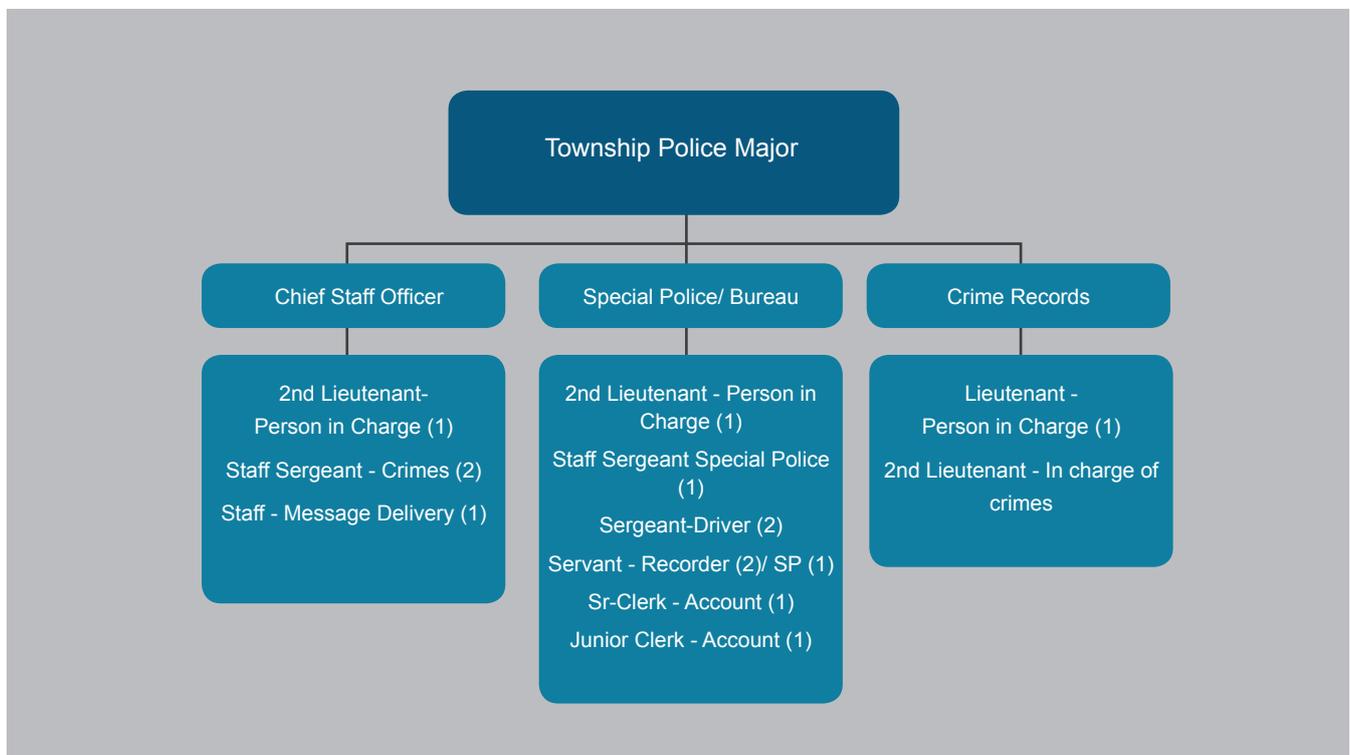
The YCDC manages 33 of the 45 townships which make up the Yangon Region and consists of 20 departments focused on municipal service provision. The functions most directly involved in urban safety include:

- Water management through the Department of Engineering (Water and Sanitation),
- Waste collection through the Pollution Control and Cleansing Department,
- Land use planning thorough the Department of Engineering (Buildings),
- Land Administration through the Department of Urban Planning and Land Administration.

Within Yangon City, township-level services are managed at the Township Development Committee Office (Township YCDC) under the YCDC Administration Department. This is headed by the Township executive officer reporting to the Assistant Head of Department in the district. In practice, the EO reports to the Head of the Administration Department at the YCDC.

THE MYANMAR POLICE FORCE

Operating under the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Myanmar Police Force (MPF) has clear and self-evident role to play in improving urban safety. The most significant police forces nationwide are the state and region police forces, under which each township police management office operates. Township police forces are commanded by a Police Major with three constituent branches as shown in figure.



The core duties and responsibilities of the township police office are:

- Preventing crime,
- Investigating crime,
- Maintaining law and order,
- Maintaining public security,
- Preventing and eliminating the narcotics trade,
- Assisting with general public affairs.

Alongside the township police office, there are a 14 specialized MPF units including Traffic Police, Tourism Police, Forestry Police, and the Border Guard Police and the Drug Enforcement Division (DED), Criminal Investigation Division (CID), and Special Branch. Study of these units has found that there are major opportunities to improve these units' training as well as the provision of improved resources such as transport, computers, and English language skills.

Of these specialized units, the Traffic Police are an especially relevant actor in urban safety, responsible for preventing accidents and congestion, enforcing road rules, investigating traffic crimes and incidents, conducting public awareness on road safety, and enforcing regulations on licensing. This requires collaboration with other MPF forces, as well as select township government offices. However, this unit suffers a poor reputation in the eyes of the public due to corruption perceptions. Technical resources and equipment that could support traffic police is reported to be lacking.

For Yangon, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Taw there are also City Development Police Forces (CDPF). The CDPF are considered a part of the MPF but operate separately and are funded by the City Mayors. As with the state/region, the CDPF mandate includes crime prevention and ensuring law and order, but also includes maintaining urban infrastructure, including parks and markets, as well as deterring vagrancy.

SUPPORTING AGENCIES

There are other key actors from government ministries, such as Social Welfare, Relief and Settlement or Health, and groups like the Fire Services. However, these groups are always acting in coordination with, or at the request or permission of the aforementioned three bodies. They include:

- **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE (DSW):** The DSW, which sits under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, is a focal point for providing social welfare services. It does not have a township-level representative and is instead led by the State Director who undertakes township-level responsibilities. The DSW operates independently from the GAD and is not included under GAD oversight, resulting in relatively more autonomy to work with different actors, which has resulted in the DSW's strong links to CSOs, INGOs and UN bodies.
- **FIRE BRIGADE:** The Fire Services Department is an integral part of the township safety network. It has clearly stated security objectives such as the prevention of fire and natural disasters and protection of people's lives, properties, and state-owned capital investments. At the township level there is a chief of staff and three assistant directors (deputy chiefs of staff) responsible for firefighting, rescue, and fire protection and prevention. The township fire departments provide awareness-training in schools and may work with the police to provide manpower and support for specific events such as festivals or natural disasters.
- **DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING & FINANCE:** The Township Planning Department is under the overall direction of the State Planning Department and has a relatively broad reach due to its responsibility

consolidating the budgets of all township departments. This makes them a natural convener and lynchpin for coordination with the other, more directly safety-relevant departments. The Township Planning Department is managed by a deputy director who reports to the state director of planning.

- **DEPARTMENT OF CONSTRUCTION (DOC):** The Township DOC has an urban safety function through its responsibility for construction and maintenance of infrastructure, including roads and bridges. The township director reports to the state director of construction.
- **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH (DOH):** The Township DOH has an important public health role. It is led by the township medical officer (TMO), who takes on both medical and administrative roles as well as collection of health baseline data. At the same level is the township health officer (THO), in charge of all public health matters and the provision of medical supplies.

Given the increased probability of success of holistic responses to address complex urban safety issues, depending on the safety issue in question, other departments may also be relevant e.g education, electricity and justice.

INTERAGENCY COORDINATION

Since Myanmar's reform period began, how local government bodies work together in urban areas has begun to evolve. These steps towards interagency coordination are positive steps but must be built on, expanded to include additional stakeholders, deepened to improve collaboration, and strengthened institutionally if Myanmar's urban areas are to meet the needs of the future.

At the township level, the primary interagency coordination mechanism is the township committee, the most senior of which is the Township Management Committee. Standing bodies and working groups or emergency committees also exist for specific challenges. However, there are barriers to their effectiveness, such as the often-bewildering number of committees that have to coordinate with each other. Often representatives from different committees sit on other committees, further increasing the risk of confusion over roles and responsibilities, not to mention the demand on committee members' time. Budget constraints – for committees, their individual members, and their constituent organizations – provide further challenges. Committee meetings take place on a regular basis, often monthly, while heads of department and the Township Management Committees also meet regularly.

Overall, while field research found such interagency coordination was broadly functional, in that committees met and decisions were made, interviews with civil servants indicated that the processes could be improved to reduce the formulaic structure of meetings to improve efficiency and to open them to new ideas where dynamic solutions could be introduced from a variety of sources.

POLICY OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING URBAN SAFETY

Myanmar's current structures for addressing urban safety provide solid foundations on which to build. Below are some suggestions about ways that urban safety and coordination mechanisms can be improved on, for the benefit of all – citizens and administrators alike.

IMPROVING COMMITTEES TO ENHANCE INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

The existing committee structures are useful but currently under-utilized mechanisms for bringing together a range of actors working on urban-safety related issues. Committees provide a forum for acknowledging safety challenges faced by urban spaces and, at their best, can offer the public a means to engage with a diverse set of government actors on safety issues. To date, research suggests that there are a number of areas where committees and their operation can be improved to better serve the safety needs of urban residents. Such improvements may include reducing the number of committees within each township and creating clear mandates (that do not overlap or leave gaps) for those that are determined to provide the best service to communities. A smaller number of committees with mandates clearly expressed will also assist in improving public participation, with communities better able to understand what body they should approach with specific safety concerns.

At the same time, broadening the scope of a smaller number of committees will give them the ability to tackle urban safety problems in a more strategic fashion, addressing underlying drivers of insecurity rather than, as is sometimes now the case, seeking a 'quick fix'. Consolidation of committees would mean larger budgets for those that remained, although reshaping how township committees are funded requires broader engagement with government at the state and region, and the national levels.

Finally, a more functional and efficient committee structure can help build trust between agencies as responsibilities are clearly delineated and confidence in working together grows through repetition.

GOVERNMENT – COMMUNITY INTERACTION

One notably positive finding from the research is the clear improvements in community engagement from government and the perceptions among urban residents that the government is becoming more responsive to public needs. There are clear examples, particularly revolving around social media usage, of the GAD and DAOs working to expand engagement with the urban public. There remains room to improve, however, as existing cooperation is generally conducted on an ad hoc basis generated by the needs of a specific event or issue. Developing a more structured approach that defines regular and routine interaction between government and communities, possibly through regularly scheduled hearings or town hall meetings is an important next step for government to take.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Myanmar's urban areas continue to have few formal community responsive mechanisms or interest groups advocating to local government. At the street or ward level, communities do frequently galvanize to address specific problems, but there are few city-wide or defined representative community groups. Examples of such groups from other contexts include neighborhood watch or home-owners associations. Structured

organizations with routine meetings that allow for communities to jointly raise safety concerns, provides a forum for collective action when engaging with government, and offers government an easily accessible entry point for direct coordination with urban residents.

DEVELOPING AN EVIDENCE BASE

Across townships, most key authorities have the potential to make better use of evidence to solve township safety and security issues. Inter-agency dialogue could facilitate a stronger collective evidence base. The weak evidence base, lack of shared information, and gap between civil servant and community perspectives on safety issues are contributing to low levels of collective analysis and problem solving. The opportunity to develop a shared evidence base and using data-driven decision-making mechanisms would also enhance coordination between governance actors, as those who use the data and those who collect it develop closer working relations.

LESSONS FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The need to improve urban safety is a global challenge and Myanmar has an opportunity to learn from international experiences—both positive and negative. Urban safety is increasingly understood as an important component of development necessitating strong working relationships between relevant governance structures and communities.

Globally, it is clear that not only is safety a necessary pre-condition for sustainable urban development, but that safety is not an outcome that can be achieved through policing or enforcement alone. Relying overly on policing strategies and other hard security-focused policies merely displaces, and sometimes exacerbates, crime problems rather than increasing safety for communities.

A review of experiences from across the world indicates that there are four key factors that influence the level of urban safety experienced by a city's residents

- **Degree of Social Cohesion** – Strength or weakness of the network of personal, familial, professional and neighborly relationships.
- **Extent of Urban Inequalities** – Disparities between social groups and between neighborhood's can cause the frustration that influences the level of crime.
- **Risks in the Built Environment** – A deleterious environment, characterized by insufficient lighting, the destruction of public space and other attributes, increases the possibility of crime.
- **Inclusiveness in Urban Governance** – The extent to which political management of a city is a process that involves numerous actors with different views and constituencies.

Global experiences also suggest that new ways of thinking through urban safety issues offer a way for policymakers, governance actors, and others to help improve Myanmar's urban safety. These include:

- **SYSTEMS ANALYSIS:** Cities are systems of interrelated and interacting processes, tying together risk factors, resilience factors, data and outcomes. To properly diagnose problems, a systems-based approach that examines how different factors interact, and how safety and development are interrelated in a holistic manner is necessary.
- **RESILIENCE:** Once a city is understood as a constellation of systems, governance actors can begin to assess, and build, their resilience. A resilient system can reduce the harmful effects of disruption through prevention and adaptation. A well-designed system becomes stronger after each disruption and in the context of urban safety; a resilient system becomes safer after each incidence of crime or harm.

- **CO-PRODUCTION OF URBAN SAFETY:** As has been reiterated throughout this brief, for a city to successfully improve urban safety, active and continued participation from all stakeholders is vital. With increasing participation, local actors become “agents of change” rather than passive “beneficiaries”. Research also shows that good governance and safe cities are reciprocal – interactions and collaboration among people, groups and public institutions become more likely when inhabitants are free from fear and where safety is improved for citizens and neighborhoods. Different levels of engagement are possible. All of them can encourage participation and build a shared sense of civic responsibility if implemented sensitively according to the social, political and economic context.

Finally, international experience has demonstrated the importance of emphasizing inclusion when promoting safer cities. Effective urban safety actions will require Myanmar governance actors to recognize the value to city development of:

- **Neighborhoods:** Neighborhoods are spaces and places of identity and belonging that can encourage mutual aid and tolerance and help create safer cities.
- **Community Ownership:** Local security and safety conditions critically depend on developing sustainable community ownership of public spaces and service infrastructure.
- **Root Causes:** Safety and crime prevention strategies, policies and programs should be based on a broad and multidisciplinary foundation of knowledge about root causes.
- **Holistic Approach:** Initiatives to increase safety must take a citywide approach to crime, violence and insecurity that covers the local government’s whole jurisdiction.

CO-PRODUCTION OF URBAN SAFETY

Cities that have successfully improved urban safety show that active and continued participation between different government departments and from the general public is key. With increasing participation, there is a corresponding shift where local actors become ‘agents of change’ rather than passive ‘beneficiaries’.

Different levels of engagement are possible. All levels can encourage participation and build a shared sense of civic responsibility if implemented sensitively according to the social, political and economic circumstances. In addition, all levels can be used at all stages of a project from data gathering, data analysis, identification of problems, prioritization, planning, implementation, evaluation and adjustments.

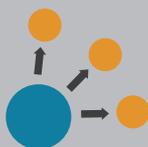
INFORM

- Benefits:** Quick, clear communication when the information is simple or based on established framework.
- Example:** Road maintenance schedule: When is a street being upgraded? What will happen? When will it be finished?
- Interdepartmental:** How will this project affect other city projects and timelines?

CONSULT

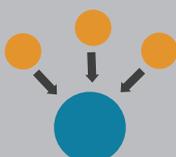
- Benefits:** Quickly gain input from stakeholders, provides an easy way for other departments and the public to contribute to projects.
- Example:** Street issues: Where are the potholes? Where is the traffic bad? Where are the dangerous places for pedestrians?
- Interdepartmental:** Which other departments have useful information that will impact road project? What other projects are planned on this street?

INFORM



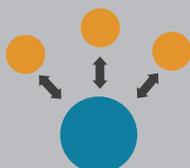
Providing balanced and objective feedback in a timely manner

CONSULT



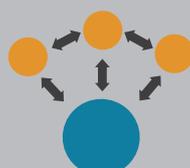
Obtaining feedback on analysis, issues and decisions

INVOLVE



Working with the public to ensure concerns and aspirations are considered

COLLABORATE



Partnering with the public in each aspect of decision-making

EMPOWER



Placing final decision-making in the hands of the public

INVOLVE

Benefits:

Identify viable strategies, establish action priorities. Bring local knowledge and expertise together for centralized decision-making.

Example:

Typical design or engineering process. Neighborhood groups established to provide input on street upgrades – where are sidewalks needed? Where is a traffic signal helpful? Where do vendors operate morning markets? What else does the design team need to consider? Final decisions made by engineering team and local government.

Interdepartmental:

How can we coordinate schedules to find win-win opportunities for overlapping projects?

COLLABORATE

Benefits:

Recognition of stakeholders and other government agencies as full participants in planning and/or implementation of projects. Work can be shared by stakeholder groups or other departments.

Example:

New transit infrastructure triggers road redesign – departments such as Roads and Bridges, Land Administration, Transport Authority, Urban Planning, and PCCD collaborate on shared objectives, design, budget, and timeline.

EMPOWER

Benefits:

Some decision making can happen without central control. Work can be undertaken by community groups, thereby reducing government workload.

Example:

Green Streets initiative to plan and implement landscaped rainwater swales – neighborhood groups take responsibility for planting and maintenance of swales, following guidelines set by local government.

*Adaptation of Public Participation Spectrum, IAP2 International Federation, 2014
(https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf)*

CONCLUSION

The lessons above suggest that Myanmar's urban areas require a broader approach to urban safety, one that does not rely on traditional security actors alone to deal with issues of criminality. Instead, local governance stakeholders could look to innovative crime prevention techniques that have been used in other environments. New initiatives that emphasize a problem-solving approach and an effort to increase public cooperation to reduce crime are likely to meet with more success, while improving the dialogue between state actors and civilians and creating partnerships between and among government agencies can help crime prevention efforts adapt to a context of change and uncertainty.

Beyond the specific issue of crime prevention, as Myanmar's urban areas continue to grow, the challenges of ensuring safety will become more pressing and complex. Because of this, it is vital that community and local government stakeholders work together to address the concerns of urban residents and bring to bear the necessary resources and institutions to make Myanmar's cities safe for all people. As shown throughout this policy brief, there are three broad themes that both international experience and analysis of Myanmar's urban residents' concerns suggest should be the building blocks of improved urban safety.

First, there must be interagency collaboration to ensure governance actors are able to address the complex causes and effects of local safety issues. Most issues are not able to be resolved by one agency alone. Cooperation across different branches of government must include, at a minimum, the General Administration Department, municipal authorities, police, and other departments such as social welfare, health and education. In specific areas or for specific issues, other agencies may need to be included. This cooperation also helps enhance relationships between municipal institutions under civilian control and more traditional security-related actors.

Second, public participation at the ward, township, and municipal levels needs to be expanded as it is vital to both understanding the safety issues that exist within urban spaces as well as ensuring initiatives have the public understanding and acceptance required to succeed. Without public support, new policies are unlikely to have the desired effects. More fundamentally, public participation is necessary to ensure that safety and security initiatives of the government respond to people's own priorities.

Finally, the third building block, in some ways tying together the previous two, should be the development of a collaborative problem-solving process that brings different government agencies and the public together. Collaborative problem-solving emphasizes the sharing of perspectives to build mutual understanding, trust, and cooperation while also encouraging evidence-based policymaking (to both define urban safety issues and determine proposed solutions). It values the complexity of safety issues, in turn allowing the development of initiatives that address root causes, and it privileges continuous review, learning, and adaption so that problem-solving strategies are always improving.



The Asia Foundation
Improving Lives, Expanding Opportunities