



THE KACHIN DRUG EPIDEMIC: A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ADVANCING LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

A heroin epidemic is raging in Myanmar's Kachin State. Local people say there is one drug user in every household. Opium production and widespread drug availability, conflict and internal displacement, cyclical labor in mining areas, lack of rule of law, limited economic opportunities, cross-border issues, lack of awareness about the consequences of drug use, and other factors make this a highly complex problem. The negative health consequences from drug use, addiction, and associated diseases including HIV and Hepatitis C cause significant social and economic challenges for individuals, families, and communities.

Existing efforts have largely only addressed the health aspects of the crisis. As USAID/Myanmar staff engaged with drug users and community members in Kachin State through existing activities, they realized that a cross-sector, multi-stakeholder approach was required. In June 2018, USAID's Office of Local Sustainability in the Bureau of Economic Growth, Education and Environment (E3/LS) selected USAID/Myanmar for the [Local Works](#) program. USAID/Myanmar proposed taking a systems approach to the problem using the [System-wide Collaborative Action for Livelihoods and Environment \(SCALE+\)](#) methodology developed by FHI360 and USAID/E3. SCALE+ approaches complex development challenges through sustained multi-stakeholder engagement and collective action. It requires organizers to do significant work over several months to understand a system from the perspective of local actors, map the system, and integrate the system by forming a local advisory committee and holding a Whole System in the Room workshop (WSR). WSR is designed to be a locally led experience in which diverse actors with a shared problem go through a facilitated journey to understand the past, focus on the present, envision the future, find common ground, and convene around action plans to drive change in the system.

After significant time listening to local actors and forming a local advisory committee of well-respected leaders, USAID/Myanmar hosted a three-day WSR workshop, Kachin Uniting for a Future Without Drug Use, in May 2019 in Myitkyina. The workshop included 111 local stakeholders from religious organizations, youth organizations, women's groups, rehabilitation centers, health organizations, current and former drug users, and the private sector. During the workshop, participants identified common priorities in addressing the heroin epidemic and began forming a local network to lead implementation of solutions. The outcomes of WSR are informing USAID/Myanmar's plans to fund activities led by local actors in Kachin that will improve access to health services, support services, and vocational training for all drug users and promote healthy behaviors and raise awareness among non-drug users.



WHAT IS LOCAL WORKS?

Since 2015, the Local Works program has enhanced USAID's ability to empower local actors to lead their own development.

Local Works provides USAID Missions with resources, tools, and opportunities to try new development approaches that are more flexible, locally responsive, and sustainable.



This workshop provides no opportunities for participants to get bored. Things are always moving, and participants are always working. There are many opportunities for all participants to speak and lead the process.

- Local Facilitator

USAID/Myanmar's WSR approach embodied the principles of locally led development by:

- **Giving All Participants the Opportunity to Speak and Lead:** While traditional convenings in Kachin State involve presentations from leaders or experts and a significant amount of time sitting and listening, at WSR all participants had the opportunity to speak, lead, and work together towards shared goals. Working group sessions involved vibrant discussions of perspectives and ideas, and groups shared their ideas through speeches, visuals, and creative presentations. Excitement around local ownership of solutions built throughout the workshop.
- **Holding Sessions in the Local Language:** With the support of a local organization, Kachinland Research Centre, the workshop was conducted entirely in Burmese. This was a language that all participants spoke and understood. All materials were translated into Burmese before the workshop. Notes were recorded in Burmese and then translated to English for USAID's understanding, and USAID/Myanmar Foreign Service Nationals provided on the spot translation for the non-Burmese speaking USAID staff only at critical points. By keeping all of the proceedings in Burmese and not doing unwieldy

consecutive translation, the focus was on the participants understanding and leading the process themselves.

- **Limiting Formal Facilitation and Emphasizing Local Ownership:** WSR participants took on the roles of discussion leader, timekeeper, reporter, and recorder during working group discussions. This self-management empowered participants to take ownership of the priorities and strategies that they developed together. Emphasis on self-management continued after the workshop: Action plan groups were encouraged to further refine their ideas without USAID's involvement. On the last day of the workshop in Kachin, participants took the initiative to form their own Facebook group to continue conversations and made plans to self-organize meetings to follow through on next steps.

LEARNING FROM USAID/MYANMAR'S APPROACH

Lessons and good practices from Kachin WSR can inform development actors who are interested in applying this approach to advance locally led development:

- **Determine Whether WSR is the Right Approach:** Development actors who are interested in a WSR approach should first evaluate whether the challenge at hand impacts diverse stakeholders from across a system, touches multiple sectors, and has more than one cause and/or solution. If the answer to each of those questions is yes, WSR may be a good fit.
- **Do Initial Analysis and Listening to Understand the Challenge:** Development actors should have a preliminary understanding of the problem before starting to implement a WSR approach. Developing this baseline understanding could involve systems analysis and/or network analysis. It should also involve extensive consultations with local stakeholders, perhaps through a dedicated "listening tour" of the communities affected by the challenge.
- **Get the Whole System in the Room:** Prior to WSR, organizers should work with a local advisory committee to identify diverse local actors from across sectors with a stake in the problem. This includes actors who are benefiting from the problem, and organizers should thoughtfully consider whether and how to involve these voices in the conversation.
- **Work With Local Facilitators and Hold WSR in the Local Language:** To be locally led and productive, WSR must allow participants to understand one another and share their perspectives freely. Therefore, WSR



Through self-facilitated discussions in cross-sector groups, WSR participants found common ground on what solutions they want to see implemented in Kachin State.

should be held in the predominant local language(s) and limit “outsiders,” those without a direct stake in the problem. Organizers should engage a local facilitation partner who speaks the local language(s) as early in the planning process as possible.

- **Maintain Momentum:** WSR creates multi-stakeholder excitement and community around local leadership of solutions. Maintaining momentum after the workshop is critical and likely requires the involvement of a locally based backbone organization to lead ongoing communications with participants and organize reconvenings. Organizers should also consider what technical assistance and co-creation may be needed after the workshop to strengthen plans, link resources, and ensure local stakeholders are able to respond to funding opportunities.



WSR participants presented their desired futures for Kachin State in creative, high energy skits.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR DEVELOPMENT ACTORS INTERESTED IN HOLDING A WSR WORKSHOP:

Development actors interested in following the SCALE+ methodology and holding a WSR workshop should typically plan for at least six months of preparation time. This includes:

1. Think Systems by:

- Stepping back from a narrow perspective on a single issue, sector, or actor to see the interdependent forces and structures that influence a complex development challenge.

2. Map the System by:

- Developing a preliminary understanding of the system and complex development challenge through systems analysis, network analysis or other research. If quality analysis does not already exist, organizers may need to commission a study or plan to conduct their own analysis.
- Holding extensive consultations with local stakeholders, perhaps through a dedicated “listening tour” of the communities affected by the challenge.
- Forming a local advisory committee to advise on the WSR agenda and invitees and holding 2-3 advisory committee meetings leading up to WSR. The advisory committee should include well-respected social influencers from diverse organizations. The advisory committee is organized in a way that is essentially a mini-WSR – a microcosm of the wider system organizers seek to engage in addressing the development challenge.

3. Integrate the System by:

- Engaging a local organization at least three months before WSR to provide logistics and facilitation support. Ideally, this organization should also serve as the backbone organization following WSR to maintain momentum of locally led action plans.
- Inviting local actors to join WSR. The advisory committee should advise on a diverse invitation list representing the different types of actors with a stake in a problem. Typically, WSR has between 60-120 attendees.
- Training the local organization to facilitate WSR, preparing the meeting venue, logistics, and materials, and translating workshop materials into the local language(s).
- Holding WSR over two to three days and documenting the action plans that emerge from multi-stakeholder working groups.
- Sharing a workshop report including the action plans with participants.

4. Transform the System by:

- Engaging the backbone organization to hold the center on collective action following WSR. This includes regularly checking in with the working groups on progress, sharing updates and resources, managing a listserv and online community, and hosting reconvenings at defined points for participants to reconnect and share progress on action plans.
- Providing funding and technical assistance to action plans, as possible.