Photo Credit: Benjamin Medam

PATHWAYS TO GOOD GOVERNANCE

Supporting Changes in Norms and Behaviors Among Local Decision-makers in Myanmar

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MERCY CORPS

Abstract

Social scientists and practitioners widely recognize that good governance is based in part on a core set of common **norms**—**a set of shared moral values and principles that collectively define how decision-makers and citizens should behave**. Despite this, little is known about how to change the norms held by decision-makers, including whether and how training programs instill these norms among decision-makers. These normative aspects of good governance are especially important during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as community decisions to comply with public health measures are driven in part by the extent to which government actions are perceived to be fair, transparent, and trustworthy.

We aim to start filling this gap through a process-tracing case study of PROSPER, a governance training program implemented by Mercy Corps in Myanmar's Kayah State in the wake of the country's landmark 2015 elections. Previously-collected evaluation data found that decision-makers who received training reported an improved understanding of the core normative principles associated with good governance and an increased willingness to implement these principles in their roles. **Our study builds on this finding by asking *how* training decision-makers in good governance can lead to new behaviors.** We find that changes in norms occur through two mechanisms: **role conceptualization** (internalization of norms in relation to their decision-making role) and increased **normative know-how** (technical knowledge used to better implement a set of values). These intermediate mechanisms support the emergence of a wide variety of new behaviors related to good governance, which we group into three broad categories: **supporting** (adaptation or improvement of existing activities), **protecting** (collective action to support rule of law and prevent democratic backsliding), and **pioneering** (experimentation with new practices that realize good governance principles). We then identify several individual-level and local-level factors that can mediate the relationship between governance trainings and the adoption of new norms and behaviors. We conclude by synthesizing these findings into a working theory of how governance training can lead to changes in normative principles and behaviors and by discussing recommendations for future research, programming, and donor practice.

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Introduction

Good governance has been an ever-present goal for the development community since the 1990s, when effective and accountable state institutions were identified as drivers of sustained economic development.[1] In the following decades, development agencies have poured billions of dollars into programming intended to promote 'good governance' in developing countries.[2] The promotion of good governance is thought to reduce corruption, improve public service delivery, and provide a stable, legitimate, and fair legal environment in which economic growth can take place. This emphasis on good governance has increasingly brought development aid and practice into alignment with the field of democracy assistance, which has a much longer history of promoting government accountability and responsiveness through supporting democratic institutions and practices, including elections, legislatures, and political parties.

As approaches to Democracy and Governance (D&G) programming have spread throughout the practice of the development space, both academics and practitioners have started to widely recognize that "good" governance in any given context relies on the operation of good governance **norms—a set of shared moral values and principles that collectively define how decision-makers and citizens should behave**. This emphasis on good governance principles can be seen in policy frameworks advanced by both

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[*] Photo Information: "a village that is called "Pan Pat". It is the place of Kayan tribe, Kayah State, Myanmar, Oct-2017", via ShutterStock.
[1] Grindle, M. (2012). Good governance: The inflation of an idea. *Planning ideas that matter*, 259-282.
[2] Ibid.

donors and governments. USAID's DRG Center, for example, articulated four key principles that demonstrate the integration of good governance into cross-sectoral development programming: participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability.[3] In the immediate wake of South Africa's post-apartheid transition to democracy, the Mandela government implemented the Batho Pele ("People First") program, which focused on transforming public service delivery by focusing on eight key principles of citizen-focused service delivery: consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, transparency, redress, and value for money.[4] The importance of normative principles has also been emphasized by scholars and practitioners focused on the consolidation and resilience of democracy in the face of resurgent authoritarianism.[5] These normative aspects of good governance are especially important during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as community decisions to comply with public health measures are driven in part by the extent to which government actions are perceived to be fair, transparent, and trustworthy.[6]

While the specific good governance norms in each of these examples differs, the overarching commonality is to draw attention to how values shape the behavior of governance actors on both the demand side—citizens and civil society —and on the supply side—politicians, bureaucrats, and informal governance actors such as traditional leaders and armed groups. Despite the importance of values in shaping governance outcomes, little is known about how to effectively change the normative principles held by either citizens or decision-makers. In the practice of governance and democracy promotion, **trainings and education** are one of the dominant modalities for promoting changes in norms and behaviors and for communicating good governance principles. On the demand side, a number of studies have shown that various education formats, such as information and media campaigns and direct trainings, can change citizens' norms and political behavior, for instance around conflict management, deference to authority, and civic engagement.[7]

Despite this expansion of the base of theory and evidence about how trainings and education can lead to the adoption of normative principles by citizens, much less is known about how such interventions shape the behaviors of public decision-makers. Multiple reviews of evidence on good governance have highlighted that gathering new evidence regarding the connection of training and education intervention with changes in decision-maker norms and behaviors is an urgent priority.[8] The pipeline of evidence on normative trainings for governance actors is in part constrained by gaps in the base of theory. There are no overarching accounts of the intermediate causal mechanisms by which normative governance interventions change the social norms held by decision-makers. These gaps in understanding exactly how governance trainings work make it difficult to select indicators that will help implementers and policymakers learn about whether their interventions are working.

[3] Waddington, H., Finetti, J., Gaarder, M., & Sonnenfeld, A. (2019). *Does incorporating participation and accountability improve development outcomes? Meta-analysis and framework synthesis* (No. Systematic Review 43). London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation.
[4] Nzimakwe, T. I., & Mpehle, Z. (2012). Key factors in the successful implementation of Batho Pele principles. *Journal of Public Administration*, *47*(Special issue 1), 279–290.
[5] Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2013). Lessons from Latin America: Democratic breakdown and survival. *Journal of Democracy*, *24*(2), 123-137. Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). How Democracies Die. Broadway Books.
[6] Fukuyama, F. (2020). The Thing that Determines a Country's Resistance to the Coronavirus. *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/thing-determines-how-well-countries-respond-coronavirus/609025/
[7] Blattman, C., Hartman, A. C., & Blair, R. A. (2014). How to promote order and property rights under weak rule of law? An experiment in changing dispute resolution behavior through community education. American Political Science Review, 108(1), 100-120.; Finkel, S. E., & Smith, A. E. (2011). Civic education, political discussion, and the social transmission of democratic knowledge and values in a new democracy: Kenya 2002. American Journal of Political Science, 55(2), 417-435. Paluck, E. L., & Green, D. P. (2009). Deference, Dissent, and Dispute Resolution: An Experimental Intervention Using Mass Media to Change Norms and Behavior in Rwanda. American Political Science Review, 103(4), 622–644.
[8] Phillips, D., Coffey, C., Gallagher, E., Fenton Villar, P., Stevenson, J., Tsoli, S., … Eyers, J. (2017). State-society relations in low-and middle-income countries: An evidence gap map. (No. Evidence Gap Map 7). London: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation.; Justino, P. (2019). Governance interventions in conflict-affected countries. The Journal of Development Studies, 55(7), 1364-1378.

This study starts to fill these gaps in theory and evidence by asking *how* training decision-makers in normative governance principles can lead to new behaviors. We address this question in the complex context of Myanmar, which experienced broad and partially democratizing political shifts in 2015 and recent ethnic violence and state persecution in its northwest region against the Rohingya minority group. In other areas of the country, longstanding ethnic cleavages persist, resulting in many Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), which contest the legitimacy of the central government and fight for stronger decentralization and federalism.

Within this context, our analysis focuses on a case study of a EU-funded governance intervention that was implemented by Mercy Corps in Myanmar's Kayah state from 2016 to 2018 called Promoting Sustainable Peace & Resiliency (PROSPER, or Paung Si Lett in Burmese). PROSPER engaged a broad range of governance actors in multi-day trainings designed to educate them on good governance principles and provide them with technical skills for carrying our activities commonly associated with these principles, such as community engagement, network-building, meeting facilitation, and issue prioritization.

Our study builds on program evaluation data and seeks to connect these findings to theoretical mechanisms. Both survey and interview evaluations from the PROSPER program indicate that the program influenced participants' understanding of good governance principles and their intention to apply them. Motivated by these results, our study asks how, and under what conditions, the diverse set of government and non-government decision-makers from PROSPER translated this intention into new behaviors. To accomplish this, we use a process tracing case study to build a theoretical framework which includes a set of hypothesized causal mechanisms and pathways.[9] The in-depth field interviews informing this approach took place after the completion of the PROSPER program, engaging actors from Mercy Corps, PROSPER participants, and related community decision-makers in both Kayah State and Yangon, Myanmar.

This report proceeds as follows. *Section 1* offers an overview of existing theory and evidence on governance training and norm change and articulates the key research questions and methodology. *Section 2* provides background on Myanmar, Kayah State, and the PROSPER program. *Section 3* focuses on presenting the key mechanisms for normative and behavior change identified through the case study. *Section 4* presents the key individual and local-level factors that can mediate these pathways. Finally, *Section 5* concludes by considering implications for future research, program design, and donor practice.

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[9] Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2019). *Process-tracing methods: Foundations and guidelines*. University of Michigan Press. Kaidesoja, T. J. (2018). Building middle-range theories from case studies. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*. Waldner, D. (2012). Process tracing and causal mechanisms. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Social Science*, 65–84.

Photo Credit: Benjamin Medam[*]

Concepts, Questions, and Methodology

Core Concepts: Good Governance and Normative Principles

Despite the longevity and scale of efforts to promote good governance through programming, major development actors use the term inconsistently, both between and within organizations.[10] Compounding this, good governance is a composite term, encompassing democracy, rule of law, human rights, and government effectiveness. Similarly, there is a high level of inconsistency in views of who counts as a governance actor. Many practitioners and researchers limit good governance to a focus on the state, while others increasingly recognize the role of a wide variety of non-state actors in providing governance functions, including traditional leaders, armed groups, businesses, and civil society organizations.[11]

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[*] Photo Information: Kawa, Bago Division, Myanmar. Mercy Corps team member Su Phyu Lwin conducts a training in Interest Based Negotiation for Ward and Village Tract Administrators.

[10] Gisselquist, R. M. (2012). Good governance as a concept, and why this matters for development policy (No. 2012/30). WIDER Working Paper.

[11] Risse, T. (Ed.). (2011). Governance Without a State?: Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood. New York: Columbia University Press.

For the purposes of this study, we adopt the broad working definition that good governance entails "exercising political, economic, and/or social authority for and on behalf of the public interest."[12] This definition is broad enough to include the full range of both government and non-state actors that can wield authority in any given context.

Our working definition of 'good governance' also posits that that good governance entails both **institutional** elements and **normative** elements. The institutional elements of governance concern the formal structures, rules, and processes that shape the ability of a government or informal authority to carry out the collective will effectively. In contrast, the normative elements of governance concern the shared internalized values and principles that people use to assess and engage with governments and informal authorities.[13] Both of these elements work together to produce the type of public-oriented use of authority that is the core of good governance. Institutions provide a set of structures that shape the incentives and expectations of actors on both the supply and demand side, while normative principles create the yardstick by which both governance processes and outcomes can be judged as "good" or not.

As with the broader definition of good governance, the consensus about the importance of normative governance principles masks a deeper disagreement about precisely which principles matter. Within the broad range of principles identified by donors and governments, most lists converge on five principles: accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, openness and transparency, participation, and rule of law.[14]

Governance Programming and Norm Change: Existing Research and Core Questions

This study builds on two strands of existing research concerning governance norms. At the micro level, a handful of high-quality of studies have shown that governance interventions can change the behavior of political actors. Though the literature is mixed, recent studies have shown that normative interventions can increase the number of individuals with high motivation to engage in public service or become candidates for election.[15] Another pair of studies has shown that training workshops for political decision-makers can results in behavioral change, such as changing dispute resolution norms, and improving horizontal accountability among traditional leaders.[16]

At the macro level, a recent cross-country study has strongly suggested that the normative preference for democracy of national political *decision-makers* is a substantial determinate of democratic resilience for the country.[17] This is an obvious underlying assumption for governance programming aimed at local decision-makers

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[12] Haruna, P. F., & Kannae, L. A. (2013). Connecting good governance principles to the public affairs curriculum: The case of Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *19*(3), 493–514. Van Doeveren, V. (2011). Rethinking good governance: Identifying common principles. *Public Integrity*, *13*(4), 301–318.

[13] This definition of good governance norms applies the core components of Elinor Ostrom's definition of norms—shared, internalized, and moral prescriptions—to the domain of governance. Ostrom, E. (2005). Understanding Institutional Diversity. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[14] Van Doeveren, V. (2011). In practice, approaches to the normative component of governance vary with respect to how closely those principles are tied to a specific type of institutions. Some approaches to governance programming focus on promoting the adoption and use of good governance practices that can be deployed without explicit reference to the formal institutional environment. In contrast, other approaches to governance programming explicitly focus on building democratic norms that link the general principles and values associated with good governance to the specific institutional forms of democracy, including elections, political parties, the separation of powers between multiple branches of government, and the protection of civil and political rights.

[15] Ravanilla, N. (2016). Attracting good people into public service: Evidence from a field experiment in the Philippines.; Gulzar, S., & Khan, M. Y. (2018). *Motivating Political Candidacy and Performance: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan*. Technical report.

[16] Baldwin, K., & Muyengwa, S. (2014). Impact evaluation of supporting traditional leaders and local structures to mitigate community-level conflict in Zimbabwe. *Final report USAID*.

[17] Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2013). Lessons from Latin America: Democratic breakdown and survival. *Journal of Democracy*, *24*(2), 123-137.

as well, but there are few studies about how *shifting* the normative preferences of local leaders impacts the evolution and resilience of democratic institutions, much less the underlying causal pathways by which this effect occurs.

Our core research questions add to both of these bodies of research by asking:

1. How do normative governance interventions directed at local and state decision-makers work?

2. What types of behavior changes could potentially be caused by normative governance interventions?

3. What are the intermediate causal pathways by which changes in behavior occur?

Research Design and Methodology

Our study uses **process tracing** to build **a grounded, working theory for future research and programming**. To accomplish this, the research team 1) conducted a review of background documents related to the PROSPER program, Kayah state, and related academic literature related to governance and conflict, 2) carried out interviews of PROSPER participants in two interview phases, the first phase of which selected interviewees based on diversity of participants and representativeness of the sample, using a semi-structured approach for all participants, while the second phase deployed targeted interviews and integrated a "snow-ball" approach to interviewee selection, concentrating on case studies and incipient hypotheses, 3) following fieldwork, all interviews were systematically coded with a common codebook, allowing for patterns and competing hypotheses to be detected.

Document Review

The research team reviewed available background documents concerning the governance arm of the PROSPER program implemented by Mercy Corps and external evaluators. These included program descriptions, descriptive statistics, post-session reflections by primary facilitators, and monitoring and evaluation documents. The team also reviewed literature on Myanmar and Kayah's history of development, government, and ethnic conflict, all of which have transformed rapidly over the past decade. Finally, the team performed a review of relevant academic literature related to the training of decision-makers (politicians and leaders) in development contexts, studies on motivation in public positions, and those related to promoting 'good governance' principles internationally.

Interview Protocol and Selection

Our interview data was collected over five weeks. This included two weeks of remote interviews via phone with Mercy Corps team members and just over three weeks of intensive field interviews in Yangon and Kayah, Myanmar. Field interviews constitute the primary data used in this report, and the selection process and interview protocol for field interviews were as follows.

The first phase of field interviews was primarily exploratory, searching for patterns between participants' experiences at the trainings and the outcomes following the training. During this phase, a semi-structured interview protocol was used for all participant interviews. While this provided a common pool of questions, given the wide diversity of participants the actual questions asked differed substantially based on relevance to their position and background. The selection process for the first interview phase aimed to maximize the

diversity and representativeness of interviewees based on governance role sub-type and demographics such as ethnicity, gender, and age.

The second phase of interviews was targeted towards developing potential case studies and exploring incipient patterns identified during the first phase. The research team developed a tracker for the four most prominent or theoretically interesting patterns identified, mapping them onto 17 potential case studies or instances (with overlap between the four pattern areas). Field interviews were scheduled and prioritized using this tool. During this phase, adherence to the interview protocol questions was further relaxed, and interviews were largely unstructured. Instead, the interviews tended to focus on a particular case or pattern of normative action.

The decision to participate in interviews was voluntary for all interviewees, and the selection process likely resulted in a positive bias towards the PROSPER program. This research was carried out under the auspices of the PROSPER program and was not considered a separate project by the Myanmar government. This allowed relative freedom to contact participants but did not entail any internal government mandate for them to participate. Therefore, some participants, especially government employees, declined to be interviewed, citing a lack of internal directive to do so. Of the government staff who did agree to be interviewed, many came as a favor to the PROSPER program team, with whom they had a personal relationship. As a result, our sample is likely positively biased towards the PROSPER program and Mercy Corps, disproportionately representing those participants who agreed to give up their time to be interviewed about the program. Finally, we can assume that people are relatively more likely to agree to an interview if they feel they have something valuable to say, especially if they had since taken normatively aligned action related to the training.

Most interview questions were translated from English to Myanmar by Mercy Corps team members, and the responses were translated back to English. Interviews were not recorded due to privacy and security concerns, but at least two sets of notes were taken during most interviews. For the same reason, while we could not credibly offer the interviewees anonymity due to government reporting requirements (NGOs are closely monitored in Kayah State), we still avoided using easily identifiable information in the report. To ensure the accuracy of translated notes, the final version of notes was reviewed by all three members of the research team, two of whom also served as translators. Face-to-face field interviews in Myanmar largely took place in Loikaw and Demoso, with one being carried out in Yangon. A handful of interviews were also done remotely with participants from rural areas of Kayah State such as Mese and Hpasawng. Interviews with Mercy Corps team members took place in Yangon and Loikaw.

Qualitative Analysis and Theory-Building

Though ongoing informal analysis guided the research team during data collection, formal and systematic analysis of the qualitative data took place after data collection was completed. Data analysis consisted of first coding all interviews, then carrying out an intermediate analysis and finally producing the themes and working theory presented in this document.

Using the NVivo software, a standard codebook was devised from an open coding exercise on a representative subset of interviews (n=8). All interview data was then (re)coded using this codebook (n=35). Coding aimed to understand how decision-makers incorporated normative ideas into their behavior and looked for patterns that might explain variation between groups (mediating factors).

Following the initial coding, an intermediate summary analysis was done on all nodes. The purpose of this exercise was to explicitly synthesize the emergent patterns for each topic between interviews. The most convincing and common patterns were selected for inclusion in the report, and became the working theory presented here.

Limitations: Causality and Generalization

The purpose of our study is to inform a grounded, working theory for understanding the behavioral effects of normative governance interventions based on retrospective observation of the PROSPER program. In doing so, we do not attempt to evaluate the causal impact of the PROSPER program but rather to map out the potential pathways by which governance actors undertook new behaviors following participation in the normative governance intervention. Furthermore, we note that interviewees were not randomly selected, but came directly through the PROSPER program team's contacts or follow-up contacts from Kayah locals, introducing an obvious selection effect.

Due to these factors, throughout the report we avoid directly quantifying a number or ratio of interviews where a certain idea was presented, to avoid giving the sense of statistical validity. However, we aim to give a general sense of magnitude in most cases (a few, many, most, etc.).

Despite these limitations, this study lays out an initial framework for understanding the behavioral mechanisms behind the PROSPER governance trainings, which can provide a starting place for further theory building and program evaluation about normative governance interventions in other contexts. This framework will generalize most easily to contexts characterized by rapid political change, high ethno-linguistic diversity, and protracted intra-state conflicts.

Photo Credit: Kantabon[*]

Background and Context

Contextualizing Myanmar and Kayah State

Kayah State is the smallest state in Myanmar both geographically and by population (est. 228,000 in 2014). It sits on the border of Myanmar and Thailand in the southeast of the country. Despite its small size, it is home to a variety of ethnic groups and religions.

Ethnicity is a primary cleavage in Kayah (also known as Karenni State), in which ethnic groups have violently contested the legitimacy of the central government for decades, either fighting for full ethnic sovereignty or a stronger federal system.[18] Though many EAOs in Kayah have signed the National Ceasefire Agreement with the government, the largest EAO, the Karenni National Progressive Party, has yet to sign, and still claims sovereignty for significant 'control areas' of Kayah State, particularly in rural areas.

Kayah State (red), Situated within Myanmar**

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[*] A central bridge in Loikaw, capital of Kayah State. "Baluchaung Bridge" by Kantabon, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.
** TUBS (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kayah_State_in_Myanmar.svg), "Kayah State in Myanmar", distributed under a CC-BY 3.0 license.
[18] EAOs are relatively common throughout Myanmar, and while Kayah has a significant number of strong and active EAOs, it is by no means an outlier.

The 2015 elections were considered a turning point for the historically hermitic and autocratic government, which the National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide. Being the first openly contested elections since 1990, they were accompanied by a mixture of exuberant and cautious optimism that Myanmar was moving towards a more democratic and economically prosperous future. Moreover, the country has experienced significant economic growth over the past decade (propelled by economic liberalization in 2011), lending it an air of possibility and change.[19]

In the years since, the realities of incremental change have tempered, but not extinguished, hope for continued deepening of democracy. Most notably, the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State concerning persecution and violence against the Muslim Rohingyas has drawn the country into global controversy.[20] Additionally, the constitution continues to grant the military–which is not controlled by the elected government–control over 25% all representation in the bicameral legislature and a veto on all constitutional amendments.

In Kayah, many ethnic groups and EAOs supported NLD in the 2015 election. [21] And though the relationship between ethnic groups and the central NLD-led government are better than with the previous army-led government, we found that ethnic associations, ethnic political parties, and EAOs expressed disillusionment with NLD's ethnic policies and impatience with the lack of political decentralization and federalism in the country. Some accused NLD of acting pseudo-democratically, by using the form of democratic processes as a cover for imposing their will (such as through insincere public consultation).

In February 2019, a few months before our field research, the major ethnic and political flashpoint in Kayah was the installation of a statue of General Aung San (NLD Leader, Aung San Suu Kyi's Father) in Loikaw, the capital of Kayah State. The statue was extremely poorly received by the ethnic population, who considered it an effort to supplant the Karenni ethnic identity in the region with Burmese identity and history.[22] Moreover, the statue was erected suddenly, with no discussion or sensitization. The resulting protests broke out into violence, where ethnic youth were injured and many arrested. At the time of our visit months later, the statue was surrounded by armed guards, barricades, and wire.

Despite this partial disillusionment and active conflict, the effects of the 2015 election were apparent during our fieldwork. Besides electing state and national parliaments in 2015, January 2016 the country held its second ever widespread election for local representatives in wards and villages across the country in which roughly 100,000 candidates contested 16,785 seats in secret ballot elections. In Kayah, and the rest of Myanmar, this generated a dense network of locally elected Ward and Village Tract Administrators, operating in urban and rural areas respectively.[23] These local administrators are the ground-level

[19] World Bank. (2018). *GDP per capita (current US$)*. The World Bank Group.
[20] Human Rights Watch. (2018). *Rohingya Crisis. Conflict Tracker*. Retrieved from Human Rights Watch website: https://www.hrw.org/tag/rohingya-crisis
[21] Transnational Institute. (2015). *The 2015 General Election in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?*(Myanmar Policy Briefing Report No. 17). Retrieved from Transnational Institute website: https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/bpb17_web_def.pdf; Kramer, T., Russell, O., & Smith M. Transnational Institute. (2018). *From War to Peace in Kayah (Karenni) State: A Land at the Crossroads in Myanmar*. Retrieved from Transnational Institute website: https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tni-2018_karenni_eng_web_def.pdf
[22] Zin, T. M. (2019, February 12). *Radio Free Asia*. Retrieved from https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/21-injured-during-protest-02122019161201.html
[23] These elections were generally considered free and fair, but unlike the national general elections, were indirect, with ten-household clusters electing a common representative know as a '10 household leader', who elects the Ward or Village Tract Administrator. Kempel, S. (2016) *Myanmar's forgotten local elections.* Retrieved from Myanmar Times: https://www.mmtimes.com/opinion/19009-myanmar-s-forgotten-local-elections.html

government actors throughout Myanmar, and they are the main connection between their constituents and centrally appointed government bureaucrats which operate at the township level in Kayah. Having previously worked with an unelected, army-controlled government, these positions were rapidly learning how to express the desires of their local constituents upwards and how to navigate interacting with the NLD-led government and newly elected parliamentary bodies. We also found a broad, though gradual, shift in gender norms where international actors had sufficiently promoted the participation of women in governance and community meetings.

Finally, we note that Myanmar's government, at least in parts, is itself is aware of the need to continue reforming its bureaucracy, and besides efforts by external agencies, is reportedly undergoing in the process of reforming its General Administration Department (GAD), which is the dominant bureaucratic arm of the government, operating in all states and townships in Myanmar under government control.

Though Kayah State represents a complex political situation, it shares many underlying similarities to other contexts where good governance interventions are often implemented: it is a contested area with major ethnic cleavages, is undergoing both rapid and uncertain political transformation, and promising democratic movements are threatened by conflict and long-standing cleavages.

The PROSPER Program

The "Promoting Sustainable Peace & Resiliency in Kayah State" program, was a large, multi-stakeholder program designed to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development in Kayah State, beginning in 2015. Several organizations were involved in implementing the PROSPER program: International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Border Consortium (TBC), Nyein Foundation (Shalom), Karuna Mission Social Solidarity-Loikaw (KMSS Loikaw), and Association of Volunteers in International Service Foundation (AVSI).

However, in this report, we only consider one component of this larger project, the governance program within PROSPER, which was operated by Mercy Corps in Kayah State from 2016-2018. All use of the acronym 'PROSPER' within this report refer only to the governance component of the program and causal explanations related to this aspect of the program.
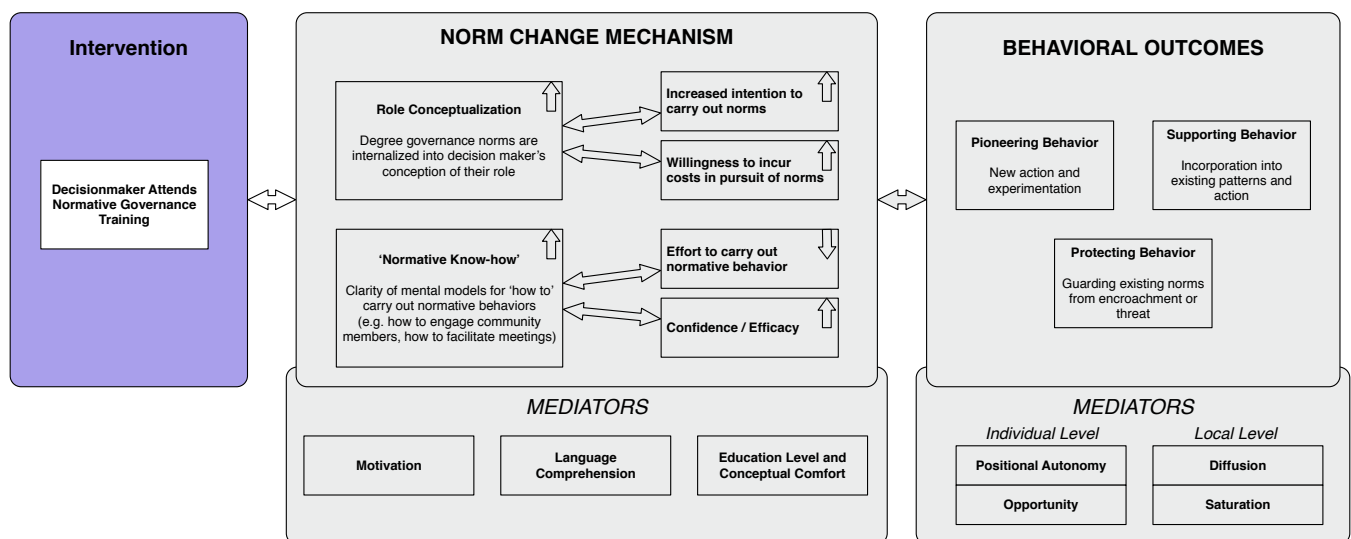
Program Elements

Between 2016 and 2018, the PROSPER program trained six cohorts of decision-makers in Kayah State. These cohorts were largely divided by category of governance actor: Union government-level officials, political party members, elected local leaders, Members of Kayah State Parliament (MPs) and related staff, and ethnic armed groups (EAOs). [24] The Mercy Corps-Myanmar team decided to independently offer two additional trainings to civic society organizations (CSOs) and participants in a related program. These differed from the trainings for the main six cohorts in that they were entirely run by the local team members, rather than the international trainers. These sessions provide a useful comparison group for analysis.

Governance Actor Type	# of Participants
Village Tract and Ward Administrators	26
Central Government Officials and Staff (various departments)	63
Ethnic Armed Organizations	55
Political Party Officials	21
State Parliamentarians and Staff	6
Total:	*171*

What was the format of the trainings?

For the initial three cohorts the trainings were six days long and were broken into two three-day sections, with a break in between. However, this format was shifted for the last three cohorts due to attrition in the follow-up session. For cohorts 4 to 6, the trainings were condensed into a four-day format with a single-day follow-up session.

What was the content?

The PROSPER workshop aimed to introduce participants to normative good governance principles, help them deeply understand and internalize the principles through activities, provide them with tools for carrying out these principles, and finally, assist them to plan for a specific instance of implementation.

The workshop began by introducing the basic concepts of government (structure) and governance (process) and by introducing the idea of *good* governance. The concept of good governance was largely normative, constituting principles such as accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness. The core message was that governance actors were responsible for upholding these principles in their respective roles. In addition to the principles, the workshop also presented case examples where other countries worked to achieve democratic good governance outcomes, even when faced with high ethnic diversity and tension (e.g. Indonesia).

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[24] Members of Parliament and political party officials were combined into one session.

After introducing these concepts, PROSPER interspersed interactive games and activities which reinforced the concepts and sought to help participants internalize them. For example, the 'New World' exercise had participants imagine how they would design a society from scratch, what they might consider to be good systems and principles. Another exercise, the 'communication game', showed the challenges of communicating in different modes, reinforcing the need to listen and understand different viewpoints.

Interviews with program participants indicate that these interactive games and activities were crucial for the long-term stickiness of training concepts. Though some participants struggled to retain specific definitions and concept recall, practically every participant could recount both the process and inherent 'lesson' that the activities were intended to highlight. This was the case even for participants who had completed the training more than a year before the interview.

PROSPER also provided participants with step-by-step frameworks, meant to increase their capacity to implement the normative governance principles, such as strategies for engaging communities, facilitation training, network-building, prioritization, and project management.

Though not included in the original design, the PROSPER program team decided to add an action planning element to the training curriculum. For the action plan, participants, working alone or in teams, were encouraged to plan for how they were going to incorporate the principles of the training into their own work, either through integration with existing projects or the generation of new activities. Given that this component was added towards the end of the planning process, there was generally weak follow-up with these action plans. Nonetheless, we describe below how they proved to be a powerful component of the training.

Evaluation and Perception

Overall, the midline and end-line evaluations of PROSPER indicate that participating decision-makers benefited from the workshops and intended to incorporate normative principles into their work. In both reports, PROSPER participants reported gaining knowledge and skills related to normative goals. In the midterm, 86% of sampled participants reported that it was important to "consult with communities or civic society organizations" to effectively carry out their roles, 69% felt that the governance training program had "responded" to their learning needs, indicating they took away new knowledge, and 77% were confident that they could "apply the knowledge and skills acquired through the workshop". End line data corroborated these reports; 93% of community respondents surveyed indicated that "EAOs, government representatives, and MPs improved relationships with communities."

Quality and Legitimacy of PROSPER and Mercy Corps

In the interviews conducted for this study, respondents felt that the PROSPER workshop was of high quality, and they had a positive impression of Mercy Corps as an NGO. Comparing the workshop to other trainings, respondents reported that those offered by Mercy Corps were more engaging and enjoyable, and they particularly thought the quality of facilitation was high. Participants also saw Mercy Corps as a fair actor, stressing that they seemed neutral regarding ongoing political tensions, such as those between ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the government. This was demonstrated, for example, through engaging both groups in the same program, which was described as a rarity for governance programs. According to participants, this neutrality gave some legitimacy to Mercy Corps.

Photo Credit: Sanjay Gurung[*]

Mechanisms Shaping Norms and Behavior

In this section, we outline the core working parts of our explanation of how good governance trainings contribute to behavior change. First, we identify the two key pathways through which trainings shape the ability of participants to act on good governance norms: role conceptualization and normative know-how. Next, we identify and explain the three types of behavior change that can be motivated by these pathways: pioneering, supporting, and protecting.

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[*] Photo Information: Mercy Corps team members conduct a good governance training in Kayah State.
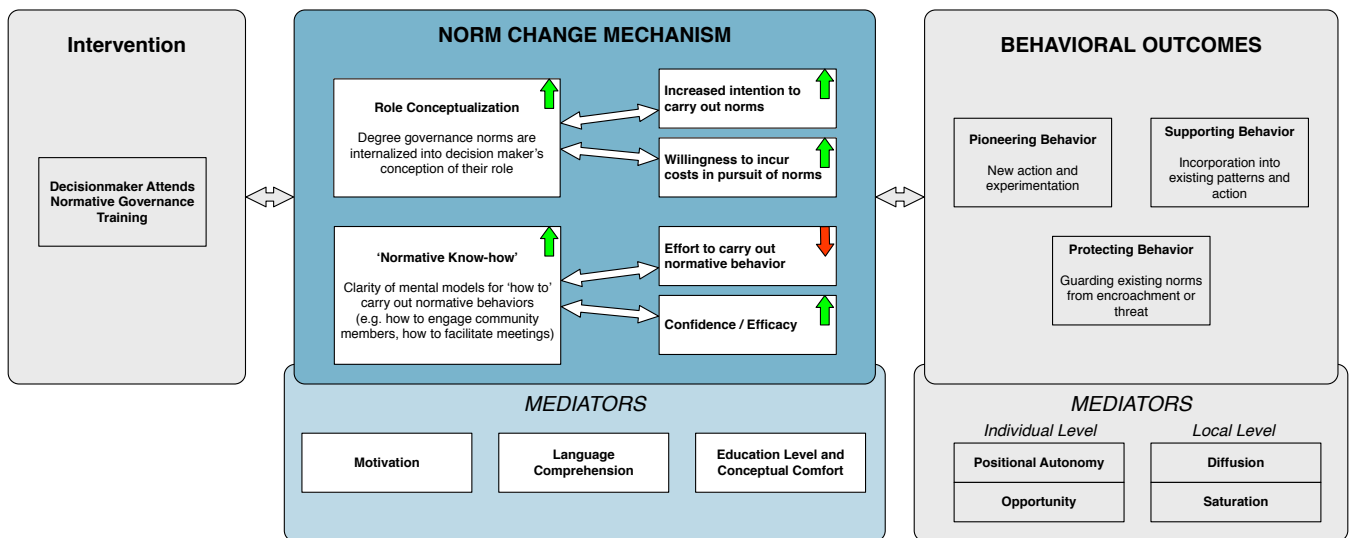
Role Conceptualization and Normative Know-how
Role Conceptualization

Normative role conceptualization is the extent to which governance actors understand and have internalized normative values of inclusive governance in relation to their personal governance role (either within government or adjacent to it). This can be defined as the extent to which they intrinsically believe their role is meant to enact or protect normative governance values. The PROSPER workshop aimed to shift the normative role conceptualization towards these values by systematically introducing the concepts of accountability, responsiveness, transparency, and inclusivity as the normative basis for 'good governance' and by clearly implying that it was participant's responsibility to implement these values. Our findings suggest that as normative role conceptualization strengthened, the participant's *intention* to support good governance increases, alongside their *willingness to incur costs* in pursuit of norms (often demonstrated through the degree of effort or risk).

Our interviews indicated that the normative content of PROSPER trainings influenced governance actors' understanding of government and their role as a governance actor, both by providing conceptual frameworks for understanding their role (e.g. through providing definitions and democratic principles of governance) but also by helping them internalize the principles through interactive components, in which they critically engaged with the concepts. This was evident during interviews and conversations with participants. For instance, while discussing local events, interviewees were conversant with the topics, and would often point out when decisions were being made with a 'top-down' approach,[25] and were sensitive to the inclusion of minorities, such as women and youth. [26] This would often happen even after they failed to explicitly list the concepts from the program, indicating that their functional knowledge of the concepts exceeds their ability to recall the specific concepts at will.

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[26] *Interview 15*, EAO Official, Loikaw; *Interview 23*, Women's group official, Demoso; *Interview 24*, Village Tract Administrator, Demoso; *Interview 13*, Ward Administrator, Loikaw

As governance actors incorporated these norms into their role conceptualization, some also used them as an additional basis of governmental legitimacy; this was especially the case for elected actors. For instance, a group of local leaders who participated in the PROSPER trainings took collective action against a central-government bureaucrat who was not respecting their role as elected leaders; they stated that they were prompted to do so because they were elected and he was not. There was no evidence that this normative basis for legitimacy competed with previously existing notions of legitimacy based on ethnicity or being a local. In fact, many interviewees implied that shared ethnicity and local familiarity increased the likelihood that governance actors would act democratically and inclusively. However, it does seem that the trainings led to additional process sensitivity around inclusion, accountability, and transparency.

PROSPER participants were at least nominally aware of democratic principles prior to the program, yet experience showed that basic awareness was often insufficient for implementing the principles.[27] A poignant example of this was a government official who had facilitated regular community consultations for some time. During the workshop, he realized his previous attempts at being inclusive and listening to the community had failed to meet his newfound, deeper understanding of what a community consultation should be.[28] Though he had used the inclusive governance terms for years, the workshop extended his understanding what it meant to be democratic. We found this experience to be representative of many governance actors' understanding of good governance norms. Many understood what it meant to be inclusive or transparent in a general sense, but the depth of internalized understanding varied widely.

We emphasize the importance of increasing the *degree* of normative role conceptualization because interviewees also discussed competing interests for why they or other actors forego effortful and sometimes risky good governance behavior. We observed three categories of competing interests that governance actors wrestled with when weighing whether to take a normatively motivated action: 1) effort, 2) retribution, and 3) competing development priorities. The most commonly mentioned of these is low motivation to carry out effortful good governance behavior; decision-makers are often busy and receive little reward for normative actions.[29] Beyond effort, some governance actors also feared retribution for working to mobilize the community and challenge entrenched political actors, which in this context was often the powerful Myanmar military.[30] The final competing factor—other development priorities—often took the form of pressures of economic development. Many interviewees reported approving of democratic principles, but felt that economic development was more practical and pressing and thus should take precedence over improving political processes in Myanmar.[31] Further interviews found that this preference reflected a wider societal preference for tangible development goals, such as in infrastructure or education.

For new behaviors to emerge, they must overcome these competing interests and priorities. Thus, a relevant factor for realizing behavior change in governance actors is the *degree of internalization.* The level of internalization of a norm must be sufficient to overcome the competing interests and resulting risks that are inevitable in pursuing and protecting good governance. As a result, an observable measure of the degree of

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[27] This is unsurprising given the ruling party is named "National League for Democracy", and the introduction of openly contested election in 2015 looms large in the national conscious.

[28] Interview #8, recounted by PROSPER team. This same participant reportedly arrived at the second training with the governance principles printed on his notebook.

[29] Low motivation was referenced as a barrier to good governance implementation in 12 interviews, representing all categories of governance actors.

[30] Interview 26, Women's Group, Loikaw; FGD 34, Ethnic Youth Group Leaders, Loikaw

[31] Interview 20, Women's Group Leader; Hapasawng, Interview 10, Kayah Planning Department; FGD 19, Youth CSO, Loikaw; FGD 34 Ethnic Youth Group, Loikaw

normative role conceptualization is the cost that decision-makers are willing to incur in order to carry out a normatively aligned action.[32]

This behavioral explanation is roughly analogous to Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán's (2013) insight that strong normative preference for democracy allows leaders to accept legislative losses and turnover of power, but goes one step further to predict forward-looking behavior towards strengthening and protecting democracy.[33]

Normative Know-how

Our study suggests that *normative know-how* (the set of skills needed to act on good governance principles) acted to amplify the relationship between internalized values and behavioral outcomes. By this, we mean that the degree of normative know-how was strongly related to new behavior, though this was only the case once the actor had the intention to pursue good governance goals. Normative know-how can be thought of as the element that bridges the gap between intention and action. By increasing the clarity of mental models for normative action, it lowers the practical effort required to carry them out and increases an actor's confidence.

In the PROSPER workshops, normative know-how was provided through step-by-step instructions for carrying out basic building blocks of good governance, such as how to engage community members, facilitate meetings, and network effectively. Though the technical knowledge included in the workshops were related to relatively simple activities and could not confer deep expertise, even the simple mental models imparted by the trainings were sufficient to spur implementation attempts. The know-how imparted through the trainings lowered the effort required for carrying out certain actions and increased participants' confidence that they could carry out normative governance roles. Resulting implementation attempts, especially if successful, then generated further know-how and confidence for implementation.

Participants cited PROSPER's technical focus on how to go about "doing democracy" (normative know-how) as being important for their confidence in carrying out normatively-inspired behavior, and they indicated such practical knowledge was a widespread gap in the governance sector. This is not surprising, given that the country was run for decades by a relatively non-responsive military government, which gave few opportunities for collective consultation and sincere community empowerment. And the election of NLD did not sweep democratic reformists into the state's bureaucracy. Most government administrative staff today have continued in their positions from the past government. EAOs historically offered no sandbox for developing democratic institutions either and had similar internal governance hierarchies, some even mirroring military hierarchy.[34]

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[32] Khan, A. Q., Khwaja, A. I., & Olken, B. A. (2015). Tax farming redux: Experimental evidence on performance pay for tax collectors. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *131*(1), 219-271. Alternatively, this could be characterized as the preferential 'cost' a decision-maker incurs by *not* acting democratically. A similar parameter has been included in corruption models from political economics. For instance, Khan, Khwaja, and Olken (2015) include the preference for *not* acting corruptly in their model for predicting corruption among tax collectors in Pakistan, which is equivalent to the degree that a bribe is less valuable than money. This implicitly includes any normative preference against acting corruptly. This work treats normative preference as endogenous, while our theory asks how these preferences are arrived at.

[33] Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2013). Lessons from Latin America: Democratic breakdown and survival. *Journal of Democracy*, *24*(2), 123-137.

[34] A fact noticed by the government, which recently announced an effort to reform the General Administration Department more accountable and responsive.

Counterintuitively, the normative know-how of elected officials was particularly weak compared to non-elected administrative officials. This is because elements off normative know-how are transferrable from general, operational know-how. The administrative officials had gained these transferrable elements of normative know-how—for instance, organizing meetings, handling contentious governance cases, applying laws, presenting to audiences, dealing with multiple stakeholders—while serving under the military government.[35] By contrast, many elected officials had never been meaningfully called on to organize the community, often came from areas were rule of law was weakly applied, and had little experience relaying community needs to a government bureaucracy.[36] Some interviewees pointed out that many officials were elected by virtue of support by local elders, other social capital, or through allegiance to NLD (the dominant party in the 2015 election), and not for their practical skills or experience.

Mechanism Interactions

We observed that the comparative impact of these two mechanisms—role conceptualization and normative know-how—on any attendee depended on the pre-existing gaps in each of these areas, which varied clearly between types of governance actors. In particular, we found that the specific pathway through which the training worked depended on the relative needs of each group and that the most benefit came from addressing the larger gap rather than adding incrementally to the stronger factor. This could be because the training is designed to create a base level of normative internalization and know-how, and not to impart deeper expertise.

Thus, governance actors previously involved in democratic activism or advocacy (largely CSOs and political parties) reported little benefit from the *conceptual* elements of PROSPER, which did little more than refresh their existing knowledge. This was particularly true for officers of larger and more sophisticated organizations, who tended to be well-educated and more connected to global events and norms. Conversely, more professionalized governance actors tended to have less use for the know-how components of PROSPER, as they had already developed the practical elements of normative governance, such as how to convene the community, prioritize projects, and facilitate discussion.

In the Kayah context, however, few participants were highly adept at both elements focused on in the PROSPER governance training: having preexisting strong normative role conceptualization and normative know-how. The primary exception to this was a member of a long-standing CSO who himself had provided governance training to local officials. Besides this participant, attendees tended to benefit from at least one element of the program, and some benefited from both elements. The group that benefited the most from both the norms and know-how tended to be local elected officials and women who recently entered the governance sphere; these groups had the least experience with formal governance and exposure to the normative concepts underlying democratic governance.[37]

Establishing these as primary mechanisms through which the PROSPER workshop resulted in behavior change, the next section describes the three types of behaviors which resulted from increased intention and confidence of governance actors.

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[35] Another unintuitive finding was that community meeting participation *fell* once the more democratic government came into power, because the community no longer attended out of fear. Though the remaining attendance was seen as more sincere.

[36] Interview 32, 100 HH leader, Demoso; Interview 33, FGD, Village Tract Administrator, Demoso; Interview 29, Parliament Staff, Loikaw; Interview 8, FGD, PROSPER Team Member, Loikaw.

[37] Interview 24, Village Tract Administrator, Demoso; Interview 25, Village Administrator, Hpasawng

Resulting Behaviors: Pioneering, Supporting, and Protecting

The qualitative analysis uncovered a wide array of new behaviors, both large and small, that may be attributable to role conceptualization and normative know-how. As is discussed below, the variety of these behaviors is magnified by the significant diversity of participants in relation to hierarchical position, sector, age, gender, education, economic status, previous experience, geographic level, and ethnicity. Out of this wide array, this section is meant to offer simple categories for understanding the *type* of actions that may result from the two core mechanisms described above.

We found that normatively-inspired governance behavior could generally be categorized in three dominant categories: 1) pioneering behavior, in which governance actors expand their role into new activities, 2) supporting behavior, in which the actors support existing activities by integrating democratic norms, and 3) protecting behavior, in which governance actors protect nascent or established democratic norms and institutions from encroachment or threats.
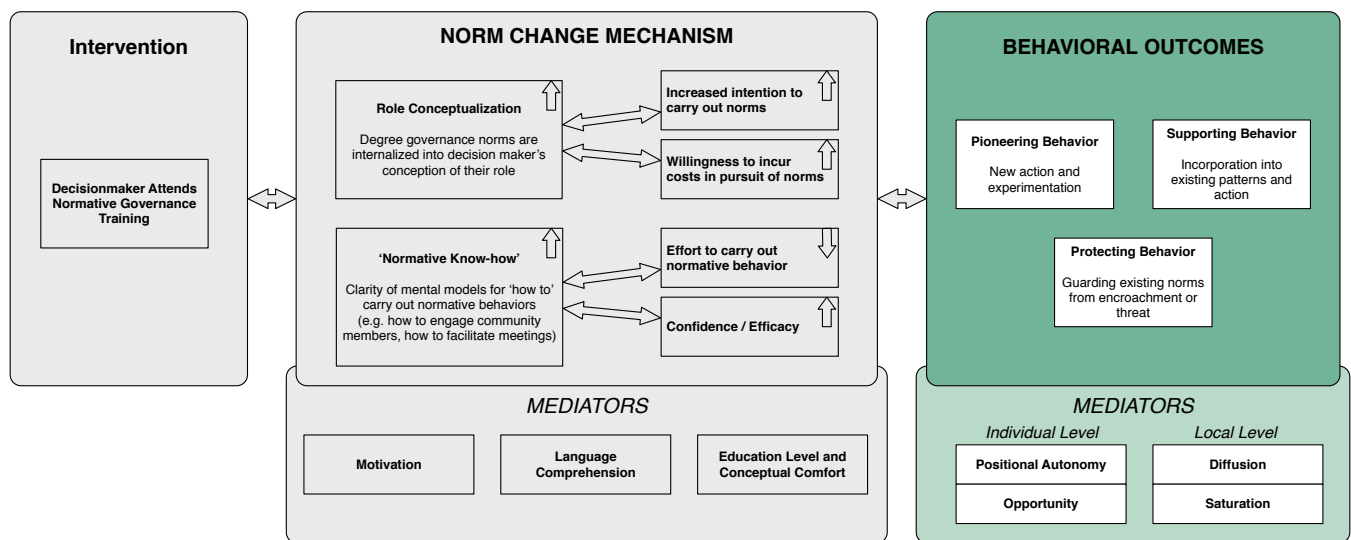
Pioneering Behavior

Pioneering behavior occurs when governance actors engage in *new* lines of action in order to realize good governance norms to a greater degree within their organizations or roles. In the context of PROSPER, pioneering behavior included both the implementation of skills learned in the training workshop and actions that were prompted by the confidence or level of intention fostered by PROSPER but were not directly described in the training. An example of the former is a minority political party using community engagement know-how to approach a new village and start youth and women's groups (Box 1, Case 1). An example of the latter is an elected leader working with community members to test a law which, in theory, allows for the seizure of unused land for public use, with the intention of building a new youth center (Box 1, Case 2). Both examples illustrate pioneering behavior because the governance actors undertook new activities through utilization of using skills taught in the PROSPER program—namely, networking skills and the ability to navigate bureaucratic systems needed to use the law for community benefit.

Echo trainings—follow-up community trainings led by participants themselves—were the most common pioneering behavior that was directly prompted by the PROSPER program. This was a result of the training team using echo trainings as an illustrative example during action plan brainstorming sessions, which prompted many participants to plan such trainings themselves. Most local administrators reported having never previously offering a training to their community on governance, but by doing so local administrators reported they were more likely to provide echo trainings in the future.

Pioneering activities tended to expand the scope of what governance actors saw as their roles and generated a high degree of institutional learning. While sometimes they fail, even the attempts potentially generate long-lasting knowledge (Box 1, Case 2). Especially in Myanmar's rapidly changing institutional landscape, many actors reported being uncertain about the scope and relative power of their respective roles. In this time of institutional flux, as the country attempts a democratic transition, these pioneering activities may arguably have a higher likelihood of impacting future institutional arrangements.

Box 1. Examples of Pioneering Behavior[10]

Case 1: Pioneering Behavior: Direct Implementation of Content
– Political Party Officer, Loikaw Township, Kayah State, Myanmar[38]

The secretary of a small political party in Kayah gained the confidence and skills to initiate a youth group and women's group in a new village by directly utilizing the network-building and community engagement models encountered during the PROSPER training. Historically, the small party struggled to extend past their minority ethnic group and were hemmed in by a rigid, national-level party structure. However, the attendee felt the PROSPER training reinforced the normative importance of political engagement and provided clear steps for how she could independently start new activities. The conceptual clarity she gained on prompted the political party officer to approach new communities, something she had previously wished to do but felt ill-equipped for.

Using skills from the training, the party representative connected to a new village by networking with other PROSPER participants. This allowed her access to a village the political party had never worked with before. She then followed the community engagement model presented in PROSPER, first approaching the village heads to get buy-in before contacting the wider community. She contacted women and youth in the village using this snowball technique, establishing groups for both after a few months. She noted that the facilitation module from PROSPER was helpful in sustaining this ongoing work.

Though her political party is small, the governance actor signaled interest in continuing to use these methods in order to expand to more neighborhoods and expressed special interest in mobilizing ethnic minorities in Myanmar's politics.

Case 2: Pioneering Behavior: Increased Confidence and Experimentation

– Ward Administrator Loikaw Township, Kayah State, Myanmar[39]

Growing confidence and know-how may lead to self-directed experimentation by governance actors. An illustrative example is a ward administrator in Loikaw, Kayah's capital, who reported a process of experimentation within his role as he gained confidence, tested the power of his office, and learned to engage the community in decision-making.

This ward administrator had 38 years of working as an education official and thus was comfortable navigating the government bureaucracy. However, he had never served in government before being elected in 2015. He reported learning the 'bottom-up' approach from the PROSPER workshop and was learning to apply it in his role.

This administrator reported a number of pioneering activities during his relatively brief tenure, through a process of trial and error. In the past couple of years, he learned how to request a budget from Parliament to help with basic development, such as building or repairing roads. This was a new process for his community, which previously self-funded many of the local repairs while under the military government. This ward administrator had learned that for larger projects he could ask for money from the municipal budget, while smaller projects could be directed to the state parliament.

A less successful experiment in this ward was prompted by the Ward Administrator learning of a women's group that had successfully gained a plot of land by utilizing a land law allowing the seizure of unused land for public use. Hearing of this, the Ward Administrator called a public consultation with the community, asking how it wanted to use a vacant plot nearby. The community decided it wanted a dual use pre-kindergarten and youth center building. Months later, they submitted the application to assume ownership of the land. In this case, the government appears to have denied the initial application. Frustrated but undeterred, the administrator plans to continue testing existing laws and regulations for the benefit of his community.

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[38] Interview 4, Political Party Secretary for Kayah, Loikaw
[39] Interview 11, Ward Administrator, Loikaw

Supporting Behavior

Supporting behavior is the integration of normative principles and know-how into *existing* activities. Across the diversity of decision-makers, participants reported that the workshops affected how they went about their work. The most common change was that people began seeing community consultation as an important antecedent to decision-making and action. For example, a women's group leader in the Hpasawng township reported that using the community engagement principles in consultations allowed her group to more effectively fundraise for infrastructure projects, which was a past difficulty. In another case, a village administrator shifted his attitude in community meetings due to the norms encountered in the workshop, being mindful to shift away from a directive attitude and to consciously listen to the community and including them in the planning and implementation of development projects.

The integration of more community engagement in existing governance activities was the most commonly reported supporting behavior. This was driven both by increased appreciation of its importance and increased know-how. This community engagement was expressed differently by the diverse types of decision-makers that participated in the training, as described below.

- Ward and village administrators emphasized that they were learning to shift away from directive-based leadership and to rely more instead on consultation with the community or majority voting to solve issues. In meetings, they were also more conscious of bringing in minority voices (such as women), better facilitating discussion, and being more transparent about decision-making processes.[40]
- Political parties would visit many different villages, wards, cities, and townships, using local intermediaries to gather community members to discuss local issues in addition to presenting their political platforms. These meetings often have elements of listening sessions, problem solving, and political mobilization.[41]
- Central government officials at the township level rarely spoke directly to the community at all, but instead typically gathered ward and village tract administrators regularly as representatives of their various communities and used engagement and facilitation principles in this setting.[42]
- EAO members stated that they knew about the governance norms before the training and acknowledging a dramatic cultural shift within their organizations since the elections towards being more inclusive and accountable to communities. This indicates that democratic norms are influencing the organizational culture of EAOs. For example, an EAO-affiliated health program reported that the training helped them engage and mobilize community members to provide health services to outlying communities.[43] This change in internal norms is potentially due to an uncomfortable new situation, in which the state government was more democratic and accountable through elections than the EAOs.

Unlike pioneering activities, supporting actions rarely expand the role of governance actors, but they alter the nature of existing activities and establish informal norms and expectations around community inclusion and voice.

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[40] Interview 11, Ward Administrator, Loikaw; Interview 13, Ward Administrator, Loikaw; Interview 25, Village Administrator, Hpasawng
[41] Interview 4, Political Party Representative, Loikaw; FGD 7, Political Parties Representatives, Demoso; Interview 16, Political Party Representative, Loikaw.
[42] Interview 9, GAD Official, Demoso
[43] Interview 1, EAO Officer, Loikaw; Interview 15, EAO Officer, Loikaw and Hpasawng;

Protecting Behavior

Protecting behavior involves actions to protect good governance norms from attempts to undermine key democratic values once they are established or are beginning to emerge. Unlike pioneering or supporting behavior, protecting behavior occurs when governance actors use their institutional positions to preserve an element of good governance from a perceived attack. In an era where democratic backsliding is becoming more common, even in long-established democracies, understanding how this impulse is expressed by local and state governance actors takes on increasing importance.[44]

Though the PROSPER training did not offer any technical training around how to protect democratic gains once achieved, the impulse to protect these gains is arguably intertwined with the impulse to pursue them, and the technical aspects of community engagement, network-building, and facilitation can easily be repurposed for this use.

This protecting impulse was often demonstrated through anger at governance actors who failed to uphold rule of law, such as the misuse of the court system or favoritism within it, or when political decisions lacked transparency and accountability, for example with the placement of the Aung San statue in Loikaw. While there is some ambiguity around whether such protests are protecting established democratic norms or fighting for their establishment, the 2015 elections did marginally shift the country in a democratic direction. Thus, they can be interpreted in part as attempts to hold the government to its professed beliefs in democratic governance norms and to protect whatever democratic gains have been achieved.

Beyond expressions of discontent and anger, other examples of protecting behavior feature local governance actors confronting larger and powerful institutions to protect democratic norms in Kayah. The first is an instance of collective action by elected village leaders against a government official who was attempting to roll back the democratic norms instilled by the outgoing leader. The collective action was a mass threat to resign by local elected leaders around the area, and it was legitimized by the internalized conception that elections bestowed some degree of legitimacy for local representatives, who must be respected as representatives of the community, especially by non-elected (appointed) officials (Box 2).[45] The second example is of a CSO leader who partnered with a newly elected MP to ensure that the rule of law applied when the military attempted to wrongly seize land from five village households (Box 4).[46] The CSO leader stepped in because the local village administrator was afraid to oppose the military, for fear of retribution.

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[44] Waldner, D., & Lust, E. (2018). Unwelcome change: Coming to terms with democratic backsliding. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *21*, 93-113.

[45] Interview 24, Village Tract Administrator, Demoso; FGD 33, Village Tract Administrators, Demoso; Interview 23, Women's Group Leader, Demoso

[46] FGD 18, Women's Civil Society Organization, Loikaw

Box 2. Example of Protecting Behavior: Collective Action Affirming the Legitimacy of Elected Leaders[47]

– *Village Tract Administrators, Kayah State, Myanmar*

In 2018, a senior government leader was replaced by a long-time bureaucrat who, by all accounts, had much less respect for democratic norms in the locality.[48] Though the previous leader had been highly sensitive to the opinions of local elected leaders, the newly-appointed official seemed unwilling to give them a voice, and he attempted to rein in the autonomy of elected leaders and implement a more top-down, hierarchical relationship between higher administration and local leaders, such as village tract administrators (WVTAs). Their response to this attempt—which can be interpreted as a micro-level example of democratic backsliding—illustrates an instance of protecting behavior, in which the local elected leaders drew on their legitimacy–partially gained through being elected–to challenge this shift.

According to multiple corroborating interviewees, the outgoing government leader was widely known to be empowering and consultative with the WVTAs in the township. Though they reported to him, he often consulted with them on issues and allowed them wide latitude to pursue projects with their community. He was also known to be a vocal supporter of democratic governance norms both during and after the 2015 election. And attending the PROSPER training, he helped organize a training for all local community leaders throughout his area, diffusing these principles to local leaders across the township.

The incoming government official had a very different style. He reportedly came from a military background and expected obedience and a high degree of control over the local elected leaders. When he arrived, the contrast became clear. A recently installed statue in Kayah became an ethnic flashpoint for the relationship between the new official and the WVTAs. The new official was reportedly extremely rude to the local leaders in their next meeting, insulting them and telling them they should resign if they did not follow his orders.

In response, the WVTAs did just that—they threatened to resign to protect the democratic norms implemented by the previous leader. The WVTAs throughout the area published a collective letter, threatening to resign *en masse* if the government official was not removed, notably claiming that he was not respecting their positions as legitimately and elected leaders.[49] This strategy proved effective. Though the government official was not removed, the WVTAs were assured that he would not treat them so disrespectfully again and that he would be removed if did so again.

The ultimate persistence of the democratic norms encouraged by the previous government leader remains to be seen, but such protective behaviors represent a degree of resilience of democratic norms, especially when they are shared within a geographic area.

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[47] Interview 24, Village Tract Administrator; FGD 33, Village Tract Administrators; Interview 23, Women's Group Leader
[48] While local leaders are elected in Myanmar, higher state administrators are appointed by the national government.
[49] Reportedly, this is a somewhat common tactic among WVTAs in other parts of Myanmar.

Photo Credit: Benny Manser[*]

Mediating Individual and Local Factors

In the preceding section, we outline the theorized mechanisms by which a normative governance training translates to behavior change and introduce a categorization for the types of normative behaviors governance actors exhibit. In this section, we identify factors which enable or inhibit the emergence of new behaviors, distinguishing between individual level and local-level factors.

[*] Photo Information: Community Mobilization Training Conducted by Mercy Corps.
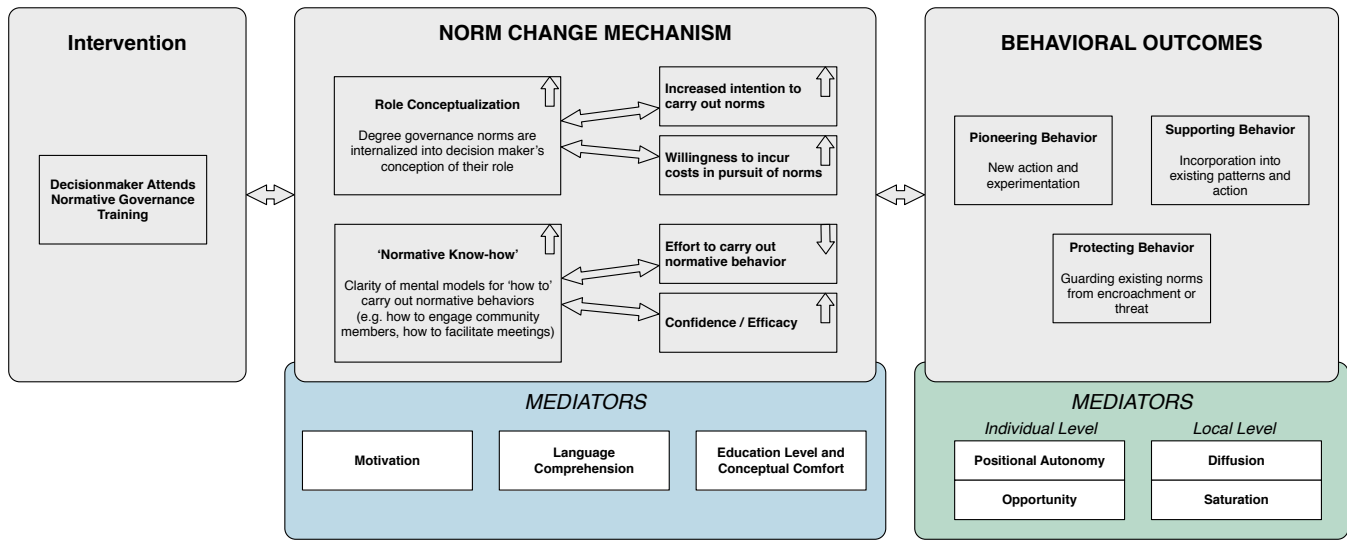
Individual-level Factors

Pre-existing individual-level factors, either internal to the person or inherent in their position, affect a governance actor's ability to internalize the norms and know-how from the training to implement them in practice.

Education and Language

Low education and fluency levels in Myanmar are common limiting factors for the ability of participants to internalize and understand the training content, as well as for their capacity and motivation to implement it.

During the training, participants with lower Burmese language fluency sometimes had to have the content translated twice, first from English into Burmese and then from Burmese into their ethnic language. This was both inefficient and inevitably created some confusion, as translation is a complex process that in this instance was happening in real-time.

Moreover, participants with less formal education reported more difficulty with understanding and navigating complex bureaucratic processes and engaging with Burmese-speaking actors and groups outside of their own organization. This inhibited their capacity to carry out the principles in practice.

Motivation

The most commonly reported barrier for behavior change was a lack of sufficient motivation among the participants.[50] Interviewees consistently reported low levels of motivation in governance positions, especially elected positions such as village tract and ward administrators and state parliamentarians. This lack of motivation led to poor governance outcomes. This likely operated both at the training, when governance actors may not have been motivated to pay attention or engage fully with the material, as well as when they

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[50] Interview 1, EAO, Loikaw; Interview 3, EAO, Loikaw; FGD 6, CSO, Loikaw; FGD 7, Political Parties, Demoso Interview 17, Youth Group, Loikaw; Interview 14, Planning Department, Loikaw; Interview 18, Women's Group, Loikaw; Interven 23, Women's Group, Loikaw; Interview 26, Community Elder, Loikaw; Interview 25, Village Leader, Hpasawng; Interview 30, PROSPER Team Member, Loikaw; Interview 29, State Parliament Staff, Loikaw; FGD 33, WVTA, Demoso

returned to their community unmotivated to implement the norms or know-how from the training in their day-to-day activities.

Though PROSPER was designed to increase the motivation of governance actors to pursue good governance goals, it is unsurprising that it would not fully succeed in overcoming a more general lack of public service motivation, especially due to its relatively short period of interaction with participants.

Additionally, even if trainings and workshops do increase motivation, it is unclear that workshops are the most effective intervention for addressing low underlying motivation. Multiple actors pointed out that the election process was ineffective at selecting the most motivated and high-capacity candidates, relying instead on other factors such as ethnicity or party affiliation. Election interventions, then, may be more effective for increasing the underlying public service orientation of elected leaders; in a study conducted in Pakistan indicated that simply providing more information about becoming a candidate and placing greater emphasis on public service resulted in more public-minded candidates and elected officials.[51]

Level of Autonomy and Opportunity for Community Engagement

Another mediating factor that surfaced during the qualitative analysis was the level of autonomy associated with a participant's governance role. Individuals in low autonomy positions often attended the PROSPER trainings because those in higher positions could pass off the non-specific invitation to lower-status employees who could not refuse.[52] This dynamic played out disproportionately in larger organizations, particularly the government. This avoidance is at least partially due to training fatigue within key organizations, who receive many invitations to trainings and workshops but have little information about the quality and relevance of the trainings beforehand.

Participants with little autonomy in their position struggled to implement the norms or know-how from the PROSPER workshop.[53] These participants mainly consisted of low-to-middle tier bureaucrats who did not have the necessary authorization to set policy and who rarely engaged directly with community members in their positions. We found this pattern in multiple hierarchical organizations, but it was most apparent in government roles, and specifically within the planning department.

This does not suggest that bureaucratic positions should not be invited to governance trainings, but that the invitations should be targeted to either upper level management, who can help set policy at some level of the organization, or should focus on the lowest-level administrators who have a clear community engagement role, such as deputy township administrators, and who interface regularly with WVTAs. Additionally, it points to the importance of clearly communicating the quality and relevance of trainings to potential participants who occupy higher positions within their organizations.

Local-level Factors

Beyond the individual level factors, our study suggests that factors in the local environment enable or inhibit the emergence of new behaviors. Higher levels of diffusion and opportunities for reinforcement (including from external development programs) increase "normative saturation" among formal and informal decision-makers within a given locality. Diffusion and saturation of norms over geographic space leads to greater

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[51] Gulzar, S., & Khan, M. Y. (2018). Motivating Political Candidacy and Performance: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan. Technical report.
[52] Interview 5, Planning Department, Loikaw; FGD 34, Ethnic Youth Group, Loikaw
[53] Interview 4, Political Party, Loikaw; Interview 5, Planning Department, Loikaw; FGD 8, PROSPER Team Member, Loikaw; Interview 9, General Administration Department, Demoso; Interview 14, Planning Department, Loikaw; FGD 34, Ethnic Youth Group, Loikaw

and more complex outcomes, and a certain degree of saturation may protect against anti-democratic shocks. Other civic actors—both formally organized civil society organizations and more loosely organized civic groups—also play a role in facilitating normative diffusion and governance change at the local level. Throughout this section, we use the Demoso township as a case study of local-level factors impacting normative saturation, while also referencing other townships as supporting evidence.

Diffusion

The diffusion of normative principles among governance actors within a local area leads to the spread of pioneering, supporting, and protecting behaviors. In addition, the existence of shared norms between a larger set of governance actors enables behaviors that requires coordination between groups or authorization within groups. For example, a participant from the nationally centralized planning department emphasized that she found the most success dealing with peers who also attended the training, as they shared a common basis of understanding.[54] A rural women's group leader stressed the need for vertical integration of norms in communities and organizations, stating that it allowed multiple hierarchical levels to work together and decreased the work of implementation overall.[55] The qualitative analysis revealed several cases in which shared understandings of democratic norms led to coordination between government actors. For instance, the head of the Public Relations department in Demoso appointed an NGO staff to lead an internal government Women's Club, since he trusted that they shared the same goal of female empowerment and greater coordination between NGOs and the government.[56]

Intentionally diffusing the PROSPER workshop's curriculum through echo trainings was an effective and efficient strategy for extending the program's influence to a broader set of community-level actors (Box 3). In the absence of echo trainings, only low levels of sharing were reported, and this mostly occurred through informal conversation. We encountered only one organization that built in a "report out" function for those attending trainings and workshops.

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[54] Interview 10, Planning Department, Loikaw.
[55] Interview 19, Women's Group, Hpasawng
[56] Interview 23, Women's Group, Demoso.

Box 3. Normative Diffusion Through Echo Trainings[57]

Echo trainings were the most common and impactful of the action plans carried out by PROSPER participants. Echo trainings are participant initiated content delivery events, where principles from the training were shared with a wider body of decision-makers and community makers in their home localities. These were versatile events, carried out by EAOs, political parties, CSOs, a government administrator, and local village leaders in at least four of Kayah's seven townships. Echo trainings were given as an example of an action plan during the workshops, which unintentionally prompted participants to organize them.

The quality of these echo trainings varied widely depending on the quality of facilitation; the most variation was found between trainings led by a participant themselves or those in which a PROSPER team member assisted with facilitation. However, there is a trade-off between effectiveness of diffusion (in sessions supported by members of the PROSPER team) and a greater degree of capacity building for the participant (in sessions in which participants led).

Despite this variation, it was found that participants of echo training retained an understanding of many good governance concepts. In some cases, these echo trainings were among the few trainings community governance actors receive. For example, a newly appointed Village Leader in Hpasawng (which is under EAO control) reported that it functioned as his main training and was crucial for how he understands and carries out his role.[58]

In contrast to the centralized trainings in Loikaw, echo trainings were successful in spreading normative governance concepts to both rural and peri-urban contexts, and they included more community-level governance actors who carry out day-to-day governance functions but are rarely invited to formal trainings. These include women's leaders, local youth, health program officers, and general community members. The broad geographic diffusion stands in marked contrast from the original trainings centralized at the Kayah state's capital (Loikaw).

Behavioral change was also reported as resulting from echo trainings. A supervisor stated that an echo-training participant was better able to cope with his/her public service duties (especially community engagement), and a women's leader felt that the training gave local women greater confidence to carry out governance activities and speak up[59].

By providing trainings on these principles to constituents, local governance actors publicly bind themselves to democratic norms, which is likely to increase their communities' expectations of them. The qualitative analysis reveals some evidence of local accountability to norms through voting, and this would likely strengthen this. [60]

Finally, echo trainings were remarkably cost effective, especially when led by participants. One VTA-led training in Demoso cost 200,000 kyat, or roughly $200 USD, apart from some modest assistance from local PROSPER team members.

Opportunities for application

Natural opportunities for applying good governance principles within a participant's locale and role seem associated with sustained behavior change. Those involved with ongoing development projects that make a point to engage local institutions, such as Community Driven Development (CDD) programs, reported having many opportunities to use the principles from PROSPER in practice, which allowed them to build new habits and gain a deeper understanding of implications for implementation. Naturally, more complex community projects usually offered more opportunities for application and reinforcement, but even one-off

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[57] Interview 24, Village Tract Administrator, Demoso; FGD 33, Village Tract Administrators, Demoso; Interview 23, Women's Group Leader, Demoso.
[58] Interview 25, Village Administrator, Hpasawng. This Village Leader was also elected as a 10-100 Household Leader under Myanmar's government system, so he interacts with overlapping government structures.
[59] Interview 20, Women's Group, Hapasawng.
[60] Interview 25, Village Administrator, Hpasawng.

development initiatives were reportedly useful. Additionally, development programs that included normative components, such as CDD, doubly reinforced PROSPER's content.

This could imply that it would be beneficial to intentionally overlap community-based infrastructure projects with normative governance interventions, in order to ensure that participants have natural opportunities to apply good governance principles and know-how.

Normative Saturation and Resilience

An experience in Demoso indicates that high levels of diffusion and normative saturation in a geographic area may lead to greater democratic resilience. A long-time local leader in Kayah had fostered the ascendency of democratic norms. Additionally, this same leader hosted three echo trainings following the PROSPER workshop, two at the village level and one for all the village tract administrators throughout the area. This level of activity is notably higher from the other areas that participated in the trainings.

As detailed in a previous section, when the incoming government leader attempted to undercut the authority and status of elected officials and democratic norms of inclusive consultation, there was successful institutional pushback from elected officials. Moreover, a variety of institutions, including CSOs and women's groups, supported the collective action of their elected representatives, indicating that the resilience against democratic backsliding may rely on a wide network of governance actors, including civic groups.

This case suggests that a shared normative understanding among governance actors in a geographic area may lend itself to normative resilience in the face of an anti-democratic shock.

Civil Society as Unseen Governance Actors

The qualitative analysis also revealed that civic organizations and groups are crucial but largely unrecognized governance actors. In the initial program design, PROSPER did not engage any of these groups; they were only included in two later "add-on" trainings implemented by local PROSPER team members. This exclusion was potentially due to the political realities of Kayah, in which civic groups are often at odds with the central government, and as such, are difficult to include in program plans that are under intense government scrutiny. In our interviews, we found that civic groups were often pivotal for solving community problems and were primary change agents in the governance space, partnering with other governance actors to address conflict.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSOs often played a dual governance role as both service providers and advocates for solving community problems. They were also more formal organizations for interest groups compared to civic groups, which are unincorporated and have fewer formal internal processes and structures.

At the highest level of organization, CSOs partner with international NGOs to improve governance within Kayah as well as throughout Myanmar. This is the case for the Local Development Network (LDN), a Kayah-based CSO whose staff attended the "add-on" PROSPER training and is now an implementation partner with Mercy Corps and CARDNO for a good-governance program aimed at increasing the capacity of village administrators in Demoso. In this role, CSOs directly work to improve governance outcomes.

However, the qualitative analysis also revealed that CSOs are themselves primary governance actors in many instances. In these cases, CSOs act to fill in governance gaps where formal government institutions or

EAOs were unable to carry out their function. For example, in a village near Loikaw, a CSO advocated on behalf of the community in a land use issue when the village tract administrator was unwilling to confront the army (Box 4). The case demonstrates how the CSO leveraged a member of parliament and related institutional structures to combat a common community problem—alleged land-grabbing by the military. This was also an instance of pioneering behavior for the CSO member, as she had never involved a member of parliament in a dispute.

Box 4. CSOs as Important Stakeholders for Bridging Governance Gaps

– Civil Society Organization, Kayah State, Myanmar[61]

Land disputes were the most commonly reported sources of low-level conflict in Kayah. These land disputes have different power dimensions based on the identities of the disputants. However, the largest power gap in Kayah's context is between the army (historically the post powerful institution in the country) and villagers. Many institutions fear confronting the army and reportedly struggle to challenge the army through the courts, both because the courts favor the army and because many are reluctant to oppose the army for fear of retaliation.

Fifteen households in a village near Loikaw received a letter from the Myanmar military in which it claimed to own 350 acres of land (in addition to the 400 adjoining acres it already occupied). The next day, a military representative came to their houses asking for signatures acknowledging military ownership and agreeing to leave, and threatening arrest if they refused to sign.

A local village head then approached a local CSO that worked on women's issues and had some experience with legal advice. A member of the CSO then came to the meetings to assist the villagers and elected village tract administrator (VTA). In meetings to plan the response, the VTA declared himself powerless to address this issue, as the military was too powerful. He felt unable to stand against the military, and he was reportedly also fearful to act himself. However, he did agree to let the CSO member try to address the situation, if he was not involved.

The CSO member had never worked on a land issue or been in a similar dispute, but had experienced violence at the hands of the military in the past and was not willing to let them improperly take land from villagers in this case. The CSO member first contacted larger women's CSO group to ask for advice and was connected with a Member of Parliament(MP) from another region who was sympathetic to the villager's situation. This MP assisted in writing a letter to the state government, bringing it to their attention. This triggered a larger investigation that involved the Land Department and General Administration Department. In resulting meetings, the village administrator and village tract administrator declined to take part because they continued to fear repercussions from the government and military. As a result, the CSO member attended the meetings as the community's representative. Ultimately, it was found that the villagers' claims to the land pre-dated the military's. Despite this initial ruling, the military did not relinquish its claim on the land, and it seemed that the rule of law would not be applied to it. The military began building a fence over the disputed land and bulldozing portions of the interior.

Despite it being the VTA's role to advocate for villagers in this scenario, the VTA refused to assist in this case, and even claimed to be unaware of the ruling or the ensuing demolition. When pressed, he was also reluctant to give the CSO member information he had received about a Ministerial Land Committee that might help. He reported being afraid of retaliation, either directed at himself or the village, from the army. After significant "cajoling", the CSO member convinced the VTA to give her the contact for the land committee. The CSO member contacted the parliament members on the Land Committee, who stated that they had ruled in favor of the villagers. A ranking member of Kayah's Parliament then called the military and again instructed them to stop their construction and turn the land over to the villagers.

For now, the land is fully under the villager's ownership. However, the CSO leader and others involved report being wary of repercussion from either the government or military, especially as their names are on official government documents (in place of the elected leaders, as would be expected).

Civic Groups: Women, Youth, Elders

Civic groups (elders, women, and youth groups), in contrast to CSOs, are usually only loosely incorporated, if at all. Despite this, they have longstanding specific roles in local governance. Elders especially wield strong, broad influence over decision-making at the local level, whereas the influence of women and youth is

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[61] Interview 26, Women's Group; FGD 34, Ethnic Youth Group Leaders; FGD 18, Women's Civil Society Organization

much narrower. Nevertheless, the qualitative analysis reveals that both women's groups and youth groups serve as interest groups and provide direct public services, often in close coordination or partnership with more formal governance structures.

Youth and Women

Youth and women's groups are extremely common across Kayah, but the terms include very different organizations that played a diversity of roles. For political parties, these youth and women's groups are used as an organizing tool to promote their political platform at the community level, and most political parties we interviewed reported having their own youth and women's groups in village across Kayah.

Separate youth and women's groups existed in most villages and wards. Usually the women's groups were tasked with making decisions regarding what were considered women's issues; however they often were highly mobilized to help with other general community issues, such as those related to health. Additionally, women were historically used as intermediaries between the government and EAOs, ostensibly because they were considered more diplomatic.

Village-based youth groups, on the other hand, are fully subordinate to their respective WVTA and elders, and they provided public services related to combatting crime, staffing cultural events, organizing youth recreation, and providing manpower to community-wide service events such as river clean-up or infrastructure projects. Other youth groups are larger, statewide organizations, with informal membership but established structures. These groups tend to focus on activism related to ethnic rights, specifically organizing protests such as those against the Kayah Statue in February 2019.

Influence of Elders

Community elders are not formally identifiable, but WVTAs, youth groups, and CSOs all recognize their immense influence over decision-making in communities.

Elders are consulted by WVTAs in making the most serious decisions. For instance, in planning an infrastructure project in Loikaw, the ward administrator only consulted the elders, not the wider community, in the planning process. When WVTAs do consult an elder, the elder's advice usually directly determines the decision's outcome. A small group of WVTAs reported that they follow the advice of the consulted elder a stunning 80% of the time. Moreover, when consulting WVTAs and village youth leaders about how they were elected, both pointed to support from the elders as being a primary cause of their success. This can help to explain why both WVTAs and youth groups seem subordinate to the elders, despite being formally autonomous, with the elders wielding no formal authority.

Civil Society Implications

We find that civil society plays an important, though liminal, role in the governance space. Especially in areas where formal governance is weak, empowering CSOs and informal civic groups to act as supporting governance actors may bridge the transition to more effective and legitimate government institutions. Civil society often makes up the "thick", more traditional connections in a governance space and play surprisingly powerful, if informal roles. CSOs especially are often standard bearers for democratic ideals and functionally also assist government entities to carry out their public services.

Photo Credit: Benjamin Medam[*]

Conclusion and Implications

This report presents a working theory for understanding how trainings in normative principles of good governance can lead to behavior change among local decision-makers. This theory, grounded in a process-tracing case study from the PROSPER program in Myanmar's Kayah State, has three parts. First, it outlines a set of mechanisms through which good governance programming shifts the behavior of governance actors. The first mechanism is role conceptualization, in which the actors are persuaded of the correctness of democratic principles and through this deepened understanding, incorporate those principles into how they view their own identity as a governance actor. The second core mechanism is normative know-how, which is the suite of technical capabilities needed to act on normative principles in practice, such as how to engage community members inclusively, effectively facilitate a community meeting, or carry out collective action. The second theoretical contribution is a classification of governance behaviors that follow from shifted role conceptualization and expanded normative know-how. These core behaviors include supporting (adaptation or improvement of existing activities), protecting (collective action to support rule of law and prevent democratic backsliding), and pioneering (new experimentation). Finally, we identified several

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[*] Photo Information: Kawa, Bago Division, Myanmar. Ward and Village Tract Administrators participate in a training in Interest Based Negotiation.

individual-level and local-level factors that can mediate the relationship between governance trainings and the adoption of new norms and behaviors.

| Intervention | NORM CHANGE MECHANISM | | BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES |
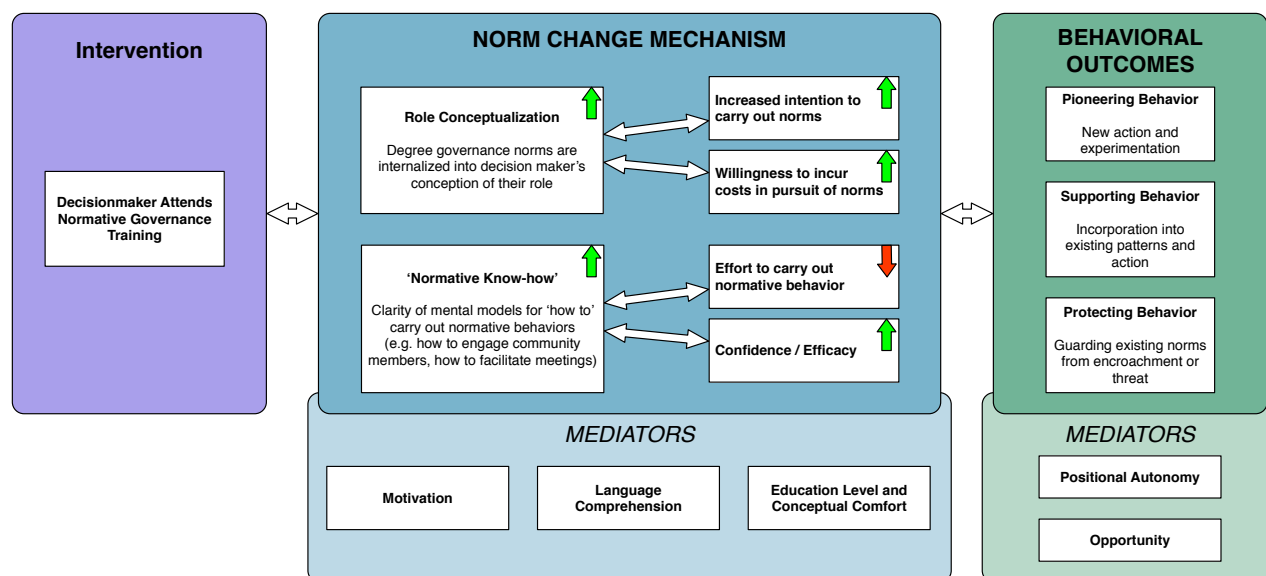
Implications for Researchers: Theoretical Contributions and Questions for Further Investigation

This research contributes to ongoing literatures on democratic consolidation, institutional change, and political behavior. It addresses a gap in the literature, which has not clearly conceptualized how normative governance interventions, such as trainings, can influence the behavior of leaders. Though there are a handful of empirical studies on the impact of governance programs on the decision-makers' decisions, to our knowledge, none provide a theory focused on the mechanisms linking normative interventions to behavioral change.[62] Overall, this gap stands in contrast to the comparatively rich literature which asks how *citizens* and *communities* are mobilized to pursue democratic outcomes and hold governance actors accountable.[63]

This study started to fill this gap by using a focused analysis of the case of PROSPER to start constructing a theoretical framework for how this specific governance training program worked in practice and how individual and local-level factors shaped efforts of participants to apply the workshop material in their roles. While the focused qualitative analysis of this single case has made it possible to start identifying the main components of a more general theory linking trainings to changes in norms and behavior, additional theory-building and empirical testing will be necessary to develop a more general theory that extends to contexts

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[62] The closest is Blattman et al.'s paper, which details a mechanism focused on shifting conflict resolution norms, yet this differs substantially from programs directed at broader governance principles. See Blattman, C., Hartman, A. C., & Blair, R. A. (2014). How to promote order and property rights under weak rule of law? An experiment in changing dispute resolution behavior through community education. *American Political Science Review*, *108*(1), 100-120.; Baldwin, K., & Muyengwa, S. (2014). Impact evaluation of supporting traditional leaders and local structures to mitigate community-level conflict in Zimbabwe. *Final report USAID*.; Nichols-Barrer, I., Protik, A., Berman, J., & Sloan, M. (2015). Impacts of Supporting Civic Participation in Local Governance: Experimental Evidence from Rwanda. *Mathematica Policy Research*.;
[63] Solhaug, T. (2006). Knowledge and self-efficacy as predictors of political participation and civic attitudes: with relevance for educational practice. *Policy futures in education*, *4*(3), 265-278.; Doherty, K. L., & Webler, T. N. (2016). Social norms and efficacy beliefs drive the Alarmed segment's public-sphere climate actions. *Nature Climate Change*, *6*(9), 879.; Finkel, S. E., Horowitz, J., & Rojo-Mendoza, R. T. (2012). Civic education and democratic backsliding in the wake of Kenya's post-2007 election violence. *The Journal of politics*, *74*(1), 52-65.; Boas, T. C., Hidalgo, F. D., & Melo, M. A. (2019). Norms versus action: Why voters fail to sanction malfeasance in Brazil. *American Journal of Political Science*, *63*(2), 385-400.

outside of Kayah State, Myanmar. This kind of broader theory development and testing is viable given the large number of normative good governance programs taking place in countries across the world. Future research on normative governance trainings will ideally deploy a multi-method approach which uses process tracing of hypothesized mechanisms and experimental or quasi-experimental methods of program evaluation.

Besides further validation and refinement of the preliminary theory sketched out here, there are numerous theoretical and empirical questions raised by this study that can be explored in future research. One promising area for future inquiry is the link between individual-level behavior change and changes in local governance systems. The case study in Demoso indicates that saturation of good governance training may lead to municipal-wide democratic resilience. There are many questions about how norms spread, and their aggregate effects across various levels of geographic scope (local, state, and national). Similarly, understanding the interaction between good governance and citizen mobilization, upward accountability, and local capacity building is a key area of future inquiry. Finally, normative interventions are placed atop a complex array of existing locally-specific norms within a given community. Understanding how democratic norms and good governance norms more broadly interact with different pre-existing beliefs within individual leaders and communities has important implications for the design and implementation of interventions.

Implications for Practitioners: Theory and Governance Programming

> **"There is nothing so practical as a good theory"**
>
> **- Kurt Lewin**[64]

Our findings are also relevant to international partners delivering good governance trainings worldwide. At the level of language, it offers a more nuanced typology for discussing how normative training programs shape governance behavior, which may add specificity to program design and evaluation. For instance, a program designer or monitoring and evaluation team might consider indicators that capture the two intermediate mechanisms identified: role conceptualization and normative know-how. Similarly, organizations may ask what *type* of behaviors their programs are looking to engender in decision-makers: supporting, protecting, or pioneering, which may differ by context. Protecting behavior may be a priority in countries with recent and significant democratic gains, such as Myanmar in 2019. However, other countries may be looking to re-establish democratic momentum; trainings in such contexts may focus instead on supporting or pioneering behavior.

Besides informing the design of specific programs, this report points to the need for common 'working theories' throughout the democracy and governance space. These working theories should be thought of as living conceptual frameworks, which can be collaboratively built, tested, and refined by donors,

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[64] Marrow, A. J. (1977). *The practical theorist: The life and work of Kurt Lewin.* Teachers College Press.

implementers, governments, and communities themselves. All too often, theories of change are idiosyncratic or proprietary to the implementing organization or program.[65] In this approach, little attention is given to the larger theoretical framework, which might be considered a public good within the broader community of practice. As a result, key questions and evidence about theories of change and programming approaches are largely unknown, both to implementers and funders. This can create a cumulative inefficiency as implementing organizations are forced to either 're-invent the wheel' or 'innovate', without a shared process of rejecting ineffective programs and elevating effective ones within a commonly understood theoretical framework.

Implications for Donors and Policymakers: Creating an Enabling Environment for Normative Governance Interventions

Finally, the results of this study lead to recommendations for bilateral and multilateral donors who fund programs in Myanmar and other countries in the midst of political transformations.

First, donors should make further investments in rigorously evaluating training programs focused on changing the norms and behaviors of decision-makers. This study begins to build an empirically-grounded theory of how governance trainings can lead to changes in how leaders view their roles and their skills for engaging with citizens. It also serves as a proof of concept for further testing that quantifies the size of impacts of normative interventions, measures the cost of operating these types of programs at scale, and benchmarks them against (and assesses their interactions with) other kinds of common governance interventions, such as social accountability interventions and community-driven development.

Second, the case study and working theory presented here highlight that political transformation is a process rather than a single event. This perspective has major implications for how donors support countries in the midst of democratic transitions. Tracing the pathways by which PROSPER did and didn't change the norms and behaviors of governance in Kayah State reveals that while the 2015 elections were a watershed opportunity for the spread of democratic norms and behaviors, additional ongoing support was needed to ensure that interest in good governance was coupled with the self-conceptualization and know-how needed to put these principles into action. Changes in norms that are needed to support and deepen good governance take time to develop and can be eroded without ongoing efforts to ensure the spread of new values and supportive behaviors within and across organizations. As a result, donors should provide ongoing support for transforming governance norms, rather than focusing solely on single moments, such as elections or political transitions.

This kind of ongoing support is necessary develop democratic institutions and norms which are both deeply internalized and resilient to unexpected shocks and crises. This linkage is on display during the current global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Good governance norms are intimately tied to the development of public trust in governance institutions, which is a key factor when implementing public health measures, including dramatic restrictions on the movement and behavior of a national population. Donors should continue to support good governance programing throughout the COVID-19 response and should devote resources to piloting programming that supports and strengthens good governance norms amidst the pandemic response.

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[65] Valters, C. (2014). Theories of change in international development: Communication, learning, or accountability. *JSRP Paper, 17.*

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