

THE COLOMBO PLAN — PROJECT IMPRINT SERIES

Strengthening DDR Activities in Myanmar

This is a concise summary prepared for the Colombo Plan Project Imprint Series; the full report is available on the Colombo Plan website: [Publications – THE COLOMBO PLAN](#)

Project duration: 17 September 2023 – 28 January 2025

Implementing agency: Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme (CPDAP)

Funding from: Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), U.S. Embassy in Myanmar

Overview

Strengthening DDR Activities in Myanmar was designed to build the capacity of Myanmar's drug demand reduction (DDR) workforce at a time of acute need. The Covid-19 pandemic and the political upheaval since February 2021 sharply increased drug use and availability across the country, particularly among displaced populations and ethnic minority communities, and drove a rise in injecting drug use and associated HIV transmission. Building on capacity-building work CPDAP has carried out in Myanmar since 2015, the project set out to train addiction professionals from non-governmental, community-based, and civil society organisations, and to help establish Myanmar's first professional society for addiction professionals, in partnership with Alliance Myanmar (AM).

An online training methodology was adopted both to protect staff and participants amid ongoing conflict and conscription risk, and to enable professionals from hard-to-reach areas to attend.

The project's two-year design was cut short by the U.S. Government's stop-work order of 28 January 2025 and subsequent termination notice effective 28 February 2025, roughly midway through its planned implementation period.

Key Achievements

32 participants trained across three WISE training cycles	9 partner organisations engaged	94% of participants satisfied with the online training methodology	5 states/regions reached, including hard-to-access areas
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The full Women's Intervention for Substance Exposure (WISE) curriculum — Courses 1 through 4 — was delivered across three training cycles by Master Trainers from the Philippines, Ghana, and India, slightly exceeding the project's target of 30 participants. Trainees were drawn from organisations including the Myanmar Anti-Narcotics Association (MANA), the Substance Abuse Research Association (SARA), Alliance Myanmar, the Myanmar Youth Stars Network, and the Myanmar Positive Group, among others, and included professionals from hard-to-reach areas of Kachin, Sagaing, Mandalay, and Shan states as well as Yangon. Pre- and post-training assessments showed knowledge gains of 11 to 23 percentage points across the three cycles.

On the institutional strand, CPDAP and Alliance Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 2 December 2024 to formalise their partnership and began holding monthly internal meetings to lay the groundwork for an addiction professionals' society intended to become Myanmar's national chapter within an international network of substance-use professionals.

Project Closure

Several planned activities were left incomplete when funding ceased: the PEER (Peers Experiences Empower Recovery) training, translation of the remaining Universal Treatment Curriculum (UTC) Basic level into Burmese, attendance at the ISSUP international conference, and the drafting of the addiction society's Article of Association.

CPDAP judged that a strong foundation had been laid for the professional society, but that its development into a fully functioning, independent body would depend on continued funding.

Lessons Learned

The shift from an originally planned in-person format to an online one, while necessary for safety, made participant engagement harder to sustain, particularly for those in remote locations balancing the training against work and connectivity constraints. Recommendations for future programming include extending training duration or adding in-person days where feasible, building in more interactive elements such as case presentations and structured group discussion, and addressing language and connectivity barriers more deliberately in course design.

Impact: Reflections on Change

Participant feedback pointed to concrete gains in practical knowledge and confidence in addressing substance use disorders, with many citing the quality of facilitation and the value of peer discussion as the most valuable elements of the training. One participating doctor described the training as comprehensive and directly useful to his clinical work, while also echoing a broader theme in the feedback: that additional in-person sessions and more focused session lengths would deepen the learning experience further. Beyond individual skills, the project's most durable contribution may be the partnership foundation built with Alliance Myanmar — a starting point for a national professional body that, with renewed support, could continue to set standards for evidence-based drug demand reduction in Myanmar.
