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# CHINLONE

**Connecting Higher Education Institutions for a New  
Leadership on National Education**

**External Evaluation**

**WP4 (*International Relation Platform*)**

## DISCLAIMER

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This evaluation is supported and guided by the University of Uppsala and Bologna and presented by Barbara Lilliu. The report does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the European Commission.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

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ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CG	Coimbra Group
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HES	Higher Education System
IROs	International Relation Offices
GoM	Government of Myanmar
IROs	International Relation Offices
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoE	Ministry of Education
MM	Myanmar
PMC	Project Management Cycle
UNIBO	University of Bologna
WPs	Work Packages

# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

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CHINLONE is a three-year project (2017-2020) funded by the European Union in the context of the Erasmus+ (Capacity Building Key Action 2). Coordinated by the University of Bologna, the CHINLONE project is a partnership between the Universities of Uppsala and Granada in addition to the Universities of Yangon, Mandalay, Dagon, the Yezin Agricultural University, the Yangon University of Economics as well as the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Coimbra Group (CG).

CHINLONE's general aim is to contribute to **the modernization and internationalization of Myanmar (MM)'s Higher Education System (HES), in order to facilitate the country's transition toward a knowledge economy**. Specific objectives focus on:

1. The modernization of MM's university management system and capability, especially in drafting academic programmatic documents according to innovative and internationally recognized Higher Education (HE) principles;
2. Reinforcement of capacity to design programs, teaching activities and produce innovative knowledge by local teaching staff;
3. Establishment or restructuring of International Relation Offices (IROs) in MM's partner universities;
4. Strengthening of collaborations between the European Union (EU) and MM's universities for the exchange of academic knowledge at different levels.

## KEY FINDINGS

The review of the project documentation, background information, and feedback from key informants shows the WP4 of the CHINLONE project to be relevant to target groups and country needs both at initial design and over time. The project was flexible and effectively adapted to the complexities linked to the Covid-19 pandemic and the changing context in which it operates.

The evaluation results have found that the WP 4 has been effective in attaining its outcomes, from increasing knowledge and capacity of MM partners on Internationalization process to fostering the development of tailor-made tools such as the IROs plans, as well as maximizing the spillover effect through cascade trainings directed to peer academics in MM universities and the organization of a final event for international stakeholders.

This evaluation findings confirmed that new capacities and skills have been acquired and internalized by target groups. However, given the current challenging situation in Myanmar what will be the effects of these achievements producing at the personal-level or on a broader systematic change within the universities remains to be seen.

In terms of institutional buy in, the project is worked well towards local ownership both at university and ministerial levels. It fostered an enabling environment for MM universities to strengthen their international relations and cooperation at the highest level.

The managerial and organizational set-up can be considered efficient. The working relationship between project partners appears to be satisfactory and based on mutual respect and common goals. Several strategies and modalities are in place to guarantee transparency, from regular meetings to publishing every relevant document on the CHINLONE-dedicated website hosted by the University of Bologna. Finally, the project produced useful tools and several publications, including papers

authored by Myanmar's researchers, that constitutes a wealth of knowledge from local and international stakeholders on the CHINLONE experience and its best practices. A good starting point for any future initiative fostering cooperation between international and national universities.

Reflections on a possible way forward are as follows:

### **1) Standardizing the methodology and sharing understanding and best practices:**

To capitalize on the experiences gained and the best practices established by this project it would be important to standardize its methodology. This will guarantee the availability of a tested step by step guide to work with universities in Myanmar ( and possibly other countries in post-conflict settings). CHINLONE innovative approach and positive achievements are indeed replicable and such methodological document could be useful to both national and international stakeholders.

### **2) Capturing processes, not only results:**

The M&E system in place for this project is results-based oriented and looking at achievements rather than tracking processes or user experiences. Therefore, it would be advisable, whenever the opportunity to continue the cooperation will arise, to include the use of tools such as the network mapping or similar to track dynamics of change at different levels.

### **3) Keeping the linkages with the MM universities**

Although challenging, given the current situation in Myanmar, it would be important to keep the linkages with the universities and the researchers. The aim would be twofold: firstly to support the local project partners and other universities through this difficult period and secondly to maintain the network that has been built through the project in view of future initiatives.

### **4) Advocating to keep Myanmar high on the European agenda**

Considering the very good feedback received by target groups on the tools developed by the project and its overall effectiveness, the evaluation would recommend working towards the adoption of these tools and methodologies nationwide. This will ease a replication of the CHINLONE's model and methodology in other universities and make sure that progress towards internationally recognized standards would be systemic and methodical for all the HEIs in the country.

### **5) The MoE should continue investing on the capacity building of the university's admin staff**

Considering the very good feedback received by target groups and its implication for future initiatives, the evaluation highlights the importance of continue strengthening the capacity building of the administrative staff. This reflection is mainly addressed to the local institutions in Myanmar, especially the MoE, that should be aware of the importance of having dedicated and specialized staff for the effective functioning of the IROs. This will ease future initiatives when international projects will resume.

# INTRODUCTION

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Myanmar's education system has been a key reform area since the 2015 elections. The government has put education at the heart of its reform agenda, recognizing its potential for lifting the country out of poverty, turning Myanmar's higher education system into one that provides graduates with workforce skills and develops research capabilities<sup>1</sup>.

This was essential for the country's future growth, independence, and stability, and five years ago the government released a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 1 (2016-2021). This plan detailed a complete overhaul of the education system, from pre-school to higher education. Specifically, it included strategies strengthening higher education governance and management capacity, improving the quality and relevance of higher education and expanding equitable access. It also included major changes to teacher training and new curricula that could be aligned with international pedagogies, facilitating scholarships and exchanges.

The NESP 2 (2021-2030) is currently being drafted, and international donors, such as the European Union, have supported extensive and wide-ranging foreign input into the sector. International support networks have developed and, in 2020, a select group of universities were granted autonomy and have been writing their own charters with assistance from international partners. A crucial step to support Myanmar's higher education sector improvement.

The hit of the COVID-19 pandemic changed things everywhere, including in Myanmar. To further exacerbate this, in February 2021, the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's Armed forces, staged a coup seizing power from the democratically elected and incumbent government, the National League for Democracy. This was followed by mass demonstrations on the streets, brutal suppressions, economic downturn and the redrawing of many long-held boundaries, be it social or political<sup>2</sup>.

Notably for higher education, the pandemic and the most recent coup have placed foreign engagement on hold at this critical juncture. The NESP 2 drafting was under review when the coup occurred and any expectations that these policy initiatives could keep moving forward have been disattended. Keeping links and relations between international and Myanmar's researchers and higher education institutions will be challenging at best, and funding for Myanmar projects will probably dry up in the short term, as it has before<sup>3</sup>.

Even with the coup as a barrier, the interest in participating in the international higher education landscape and strong demand for collaboration across all disciplines will probably remain. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Takao Kamibeppu & Roger Y. Chao Jr., "Higher Education and Myanmar's Economic and democratic Development", *International Higher Education Journal*, Number 88: Winter 2017, page 19-20

<sup>2</sup> "Social Sciences and Humanities and their Role in Fighting the Military Coup in Myanmar", available at: <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/en/brandtschool/media-events/media/news/newsdetail/social-sciences-and-humanities-and-their-role-in-fighting-the-military-coup-in-myanmar>

<sup>3</sup> "Fallout From Coup In Myanmar", available at: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/02/26/higher-education-fears-impact-coup-myanmar>

what will happen to the results achieved through international projects, such as the one under evaluation, remains to be seen.

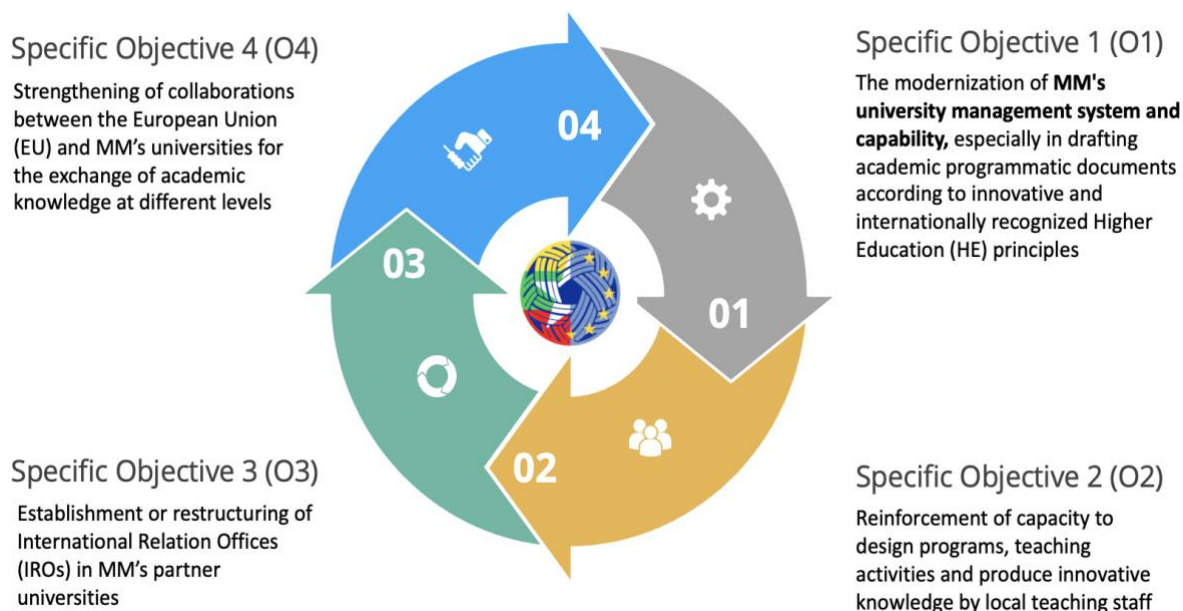
## SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

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The CHINLONE project has been sensibly operating within the context described above, addressing the needs of the Myanmar's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by leveraging the experience of the European universities and adapting lessons-learned to the country's specificities.

CHINLONE is a three-year project (2017-2020) funded by the European Union in the context of the Erasmus+ (Capacity Building Key Action 2). It was coordinated by the University of Bologna, in partnership with the Universities of Uppsala and Granada in addition to the Universities of Yangon, Mandalay, Dagon, the Yezin Agricultural University, the Yangon University of Economics as well as the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Coimbra Group (CG). All the partner universities were co-responsible for the implementation of specific Work Packages (WPs) according to their expertise (international universities) and needs (Myanmar universities). As a coordinator, the University of Bologna guaranteed overall supervision and adherence to the EU guidelines, standards and requirements.

CHINLONE's general aim is to contribute to the **modernization and internationalization of Myanmar (MM)'s Higher Education System (HES) in order to facilitate the country's transition toward a knowledge economy**. Specific objectives, as illustrated in the diagram below, focus on:



The project involves a broad spectrum of activities that are encompassed in eight work packages interrelated with each other. Activities related to work packages 2 to 4 are also grouped under three



thematic PLATFORMS that have been created to better address the needs of the target groups: academic leaders, teaching staff, and administrative staff. This structure is the result of a needs assessments and baseline studies carried out by the project coordinator both at the proposal and preparatory phases (WP1).

These platforms are:



The **MANAGEMENT platform** (WP2) was designed to target MM's academic leaders (rectors, deans, and heads of departments) through trainings on academic governance, such as the "Bologna process" experience.



The **EDUCATIONAL Platform** (WP3) encompasses three distinct task forces each focusing on the fields of: humanities and cultural heritage, economics of tourism, and agricultural sciences. Within this platform, staff mobility activities to Europe were envisaged, which aim to improve participant's skills in curriculum design, innovative teaching methods, and quality assurance processes with a student-centered approach.



The **INTERNATIONAL RELATION platform** (WP4), the MM's universities International Relations Offices (IROs) were re-organized to foster a more international approach to networking. Participants familiarized with different models of IR management, including the articulation of exchange programmes and mission statements for the establishing of the IROs.

CHINLONE also includes several communication and dissemination activities (WPs 5 &6) designed to maximize the spread of project outcomes and results on national and international levels, including: updating CHINLONE's website and social network profiles; creating innovative promotional materials for MM universities; upgrading MM university websites; participating in international conferences with the objective of sharing the CHINLONE methodology with a wide range of stakeholders. Finally, WPs 7&8 relate respectively to the project's quality assurance and management.

The International Relation Platform (WP 4) is the focus of this external evaluation study.

## **PURPOSE & APPROACH**

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This external evaluation is based on a previous evaluation study of the CHINLONE project focusing on WPs 1-3. Particularly, this evaluation has the objective to assess the outcomes produced by the implementation of the WP4, the International Relation Platform, which focused on the internationalization strategies of partner universities in Myanmar. The evaluation considers the effects produced by the implementation of the WP, and the methodology employed to achieve them as well as the anticipated results initially planned in the project proposal.

In detail, the evaluation aims to determine the extent to which the following activities have been effective in generating the expected results:

- I. Myanmar's Ministry of Education (MoE) endorsement on the implementation of the new IROs (International Relation Offices) and internationalization strategies in general;

- II. Strengthened capacity of Myanmar' partner on IR management, including the development of feasibility plans;
- III. Spillover effect through trainings and conferences.

## METHODOLOGY

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The final evaluation was conducted in the second quarter of 2021 and it comes as an additional and final step of an evaluation process that aligned with the overall project timeframe. In line with the OEDC/DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability as well as coherence and gender as cross-cutting issues, the evaluation methodology primarily draws from project-driven data. These data are supplemented by the employment of additional quantitative and qualitative methods designed to capture evidence, insights, views and inputs from diverse actors and stakeholders involved in the project. The final evaluation methodology rests on the following activities and steps:

- **Desk Review:** Review of the project's technical documentation, including project reports, research papers, and other relevant documents.
- **Consultation, Evidence Gathering and analysis:** Due to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic and challenging situation in Myanmar's universities dealing with the aftermaths of the coup, this evaluation conducted direct consultations with key informant through surveys. It sent ad hoc developed survey to key target groups such as representatives of the MM's universities, European universities and the MM's MoE. The evaluation employed Tableau Public to analyze the data gathered through the surveys .
- **Report Finalization:** The evaluation report, highlighting earning outcomes and approaches to inform future programming, was finalized and validated by the project coordinator.

### *Data Collection Methods*

**Online surveys.** In addition to analyzing existing data from project documentation, the evaluation targeted stakeholders with three different online surveys, specifically designed for MM partners, European partners, and MM's local authorities. To ensure participation, the developed surveys are relatively brief, and imply a commitment of maximum 15 minutes. In their deployment, the evaluation relied heavily on the support of UNIBO's implementation team, who distributed the surveys among the MM counterparts and ensured the necessary level of motivation and participation. The response to the survey is as follows:

- Total Respondents: 23 (12 from Myanmar Universities, 4 from the European Universities and 7 from MM's LA)
- Gender ratio: The majority (64%) of respondents were female
- Roles: The majority of the respondents were professors (50%) and the rest was distributed among: admin staff ( 20%), Head of department (12%), Dean (6%), Research Managers (6%) and Project

Managers (6%). Please see below a breakdown of the respondent's profile from the MM's universities survey.

### Profile of the respondents MM's Universities

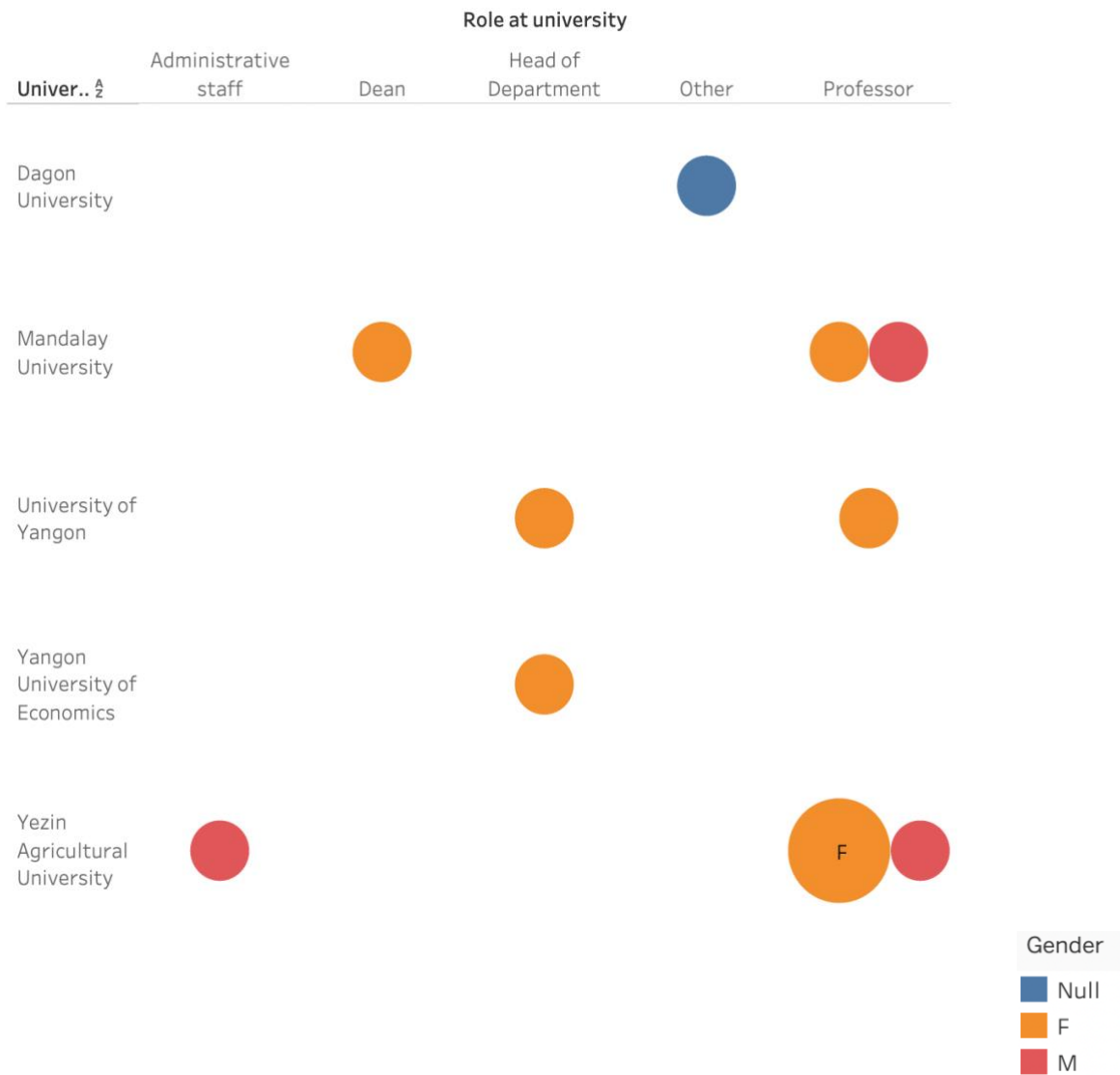
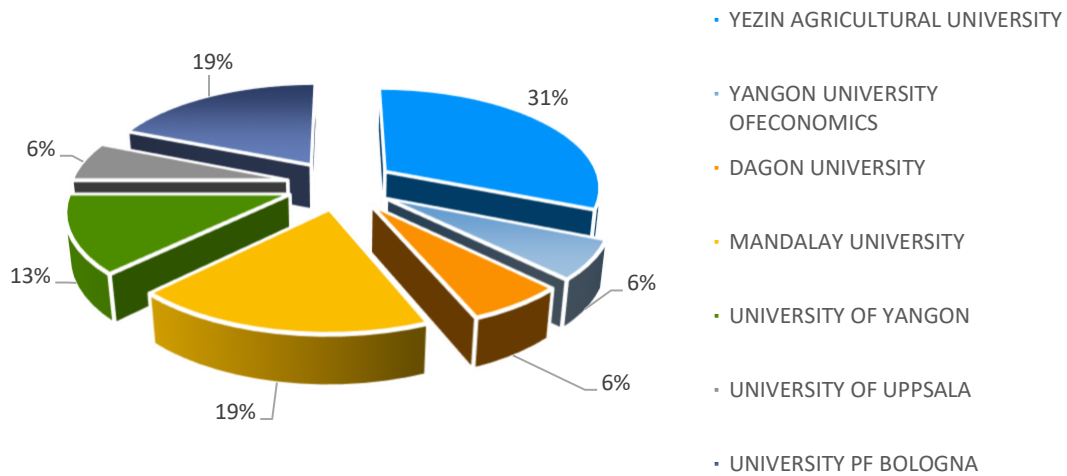


FIGURE 1: THE GENDER RATIO OF PARTICIPANTS PER UNIVERSITY AND PROFESSION OF MYANMAR PARTNERS WITHIN THIS EVALUATION

The survey asked for anonymous feedback from respondents. Data collected via Typeform ([www.typeform.com](http://www.typeform.com)) was then automatically imported into an Excel file and used for analysis utilizing the Tableau Public software. Open questions from the survey were organized into thematic codes and were progressively aggregated into parent codes reflecting the five OECD-DAC evaluation criteria.

The below chart illustrates the percentage of respondents who took part in this evaluation per partner university.



## LIMITATIONS

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The limited sample size was due to the fact that the evaluation was carried out remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic and in the aftermaths of the military coup in Myanmar. Target groups in MM, as well as in European countries, were staying at home in respect of governmental-imposed regulations. Some of professors/academic staff in MM were responding from home due to the unstable situation in the country. Some of them are based in remote locations where internet connections were unavailable or unstable. It was therefore difficult to reach them or to organize direct interviews.

# 3. KEY FINDINGS

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As highlighted in the previous evaluation (WP1-3) CHINLONE aligns with the national policies on education, specifically the NESP goal on Higher Education<sup>4</sup>, as well as international policies such as the European Union’s Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020, which indicates education as one of the priorities to be supported through strengthening teaching quality and curriculum updates that will generate “employment ready”<sup>5</sup> graduates. The project also closely aligns to the needs and priorities of target groups whom, through the previous evaluation, confirmed that the project is responding to the needs of the HEIs and therefore continued to be **relevant** over time.

As already highlighted in the previous WP1-3’s evaluation, the project proved capable of adapting to emerging needs by engaging in continuous adaptation and tuning of the WPs’ activities. Moreover, the project adapted to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic rescheduling activities and changing to online implementation. Initially, the project has had to suspend its activities in MM since the country experienced a lockdown in April and May 2020 and there was a lot of uncertainty on when semesters at the MM universities will resume, which complicated the identification of a detailed work plan for the implementation of the activities. In the interim, online operational meetings were carried out and an ask for a 6 months no-cost extension was placed to the donor. After the granting of the extension, activities resumed in the Autumn of 2020. However, the lack of technological capacity—both generally in MM and specifically in the universities- posed significant challenges to the reshaping of the methodology.

Nevertheless, the project effectively concluded the implementation of the activities related to WP4, which run in parallel with the activities of the other WPs, from December 2019 ( during which the new equipment for the IROs was purchased) to January 2021 (during which the cascade trainings were delivered in the MM universities). Please see the table below for a chronological depiction of the activities:



#### **International relations offices established (Dec.2019- Jan. 2020)**

This activity related to the purchasing of new equipment for the establishment of the IROs started between December 2019 and January 2020. The IROs were fully equipped and operational by the time the activities related to WP4 started.



#### **Ministry of Education endorsement to the implementation of new IROs (Jan 2020)**

Good working relationships has been established with MM’s national authorities throughout the implementation of the CHINLONE project. These were consolidated during the workshop "A GLOBAL OUTLOOK FOR MYANMAR UNIVERSITIES" held in Yangon in January 2020. The aim of the workshop was to highlight the strategic role of IROs in fostering and managing international cooperation and to define their mission and tasks. More importantly the workshop aimed at officially obtain the support of the

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<sup>4</sup> Priorities/strategies set out by the NESP on higher education are: 1) Strengthen higher education governance and management capacity; 2) Improve the quality and relevance on higher education; 3) Expand equitable access to higher education.

<sup>5</sup> Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014-2020, page 7

Ministry of Education on the mission and definition of the IROs' tasks . The workshop fostered a fruitful exchange between EU partners, that described how their universities' international strategy, and the Myanmar partner, that discussed of the challenges and opportunities for the establishment of IROs in MM HEIs. The active involvement of the Ministry of Education in the workshop was pivotal for the implementation of the WP activities and the achievement of institutional buy in.



#### **Mobility to EU International relation offices (October 2020)**

This activity was initially planned to be implemented during the first quarter of 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the related states mandated lockdown in various countries and travel limitations, the activity was rescheduled and its implementation modalities redesigned. Therefore, the online training ( renamed Virtual Mobility) took place on 14-21-28 October 2020 through Zoom.



#### **Training MM Home Universities (Dec.2020-Jan 2021)**

According to the capacity building strategy implemented by CHINLONE, each training delivered by international experts has to be followed up by cascade trainings in the MM universities to foster a spillover effect. The cascade trainings were carried out in the MM universities between December 2020 and January 2021.



#### **Planning of the IROs (Oct.2020-Jan 2021)**

The IRO's feasibility plans were drafted between the end of the training on international relations ( Virtual Mobility) and the end of the project ( January 2021). The feasibility plans identify the IROs' mission, in accordance with the universities' own mission, and its roll out phases. The feasibility plans are detailed and also illustrate staff requirements and budget needs and constraints. The plans are critical in understanding needs and requirements in each university to further encourage international exchanges and cooperation.

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## **INSTITUTIONAL BUY-IN**

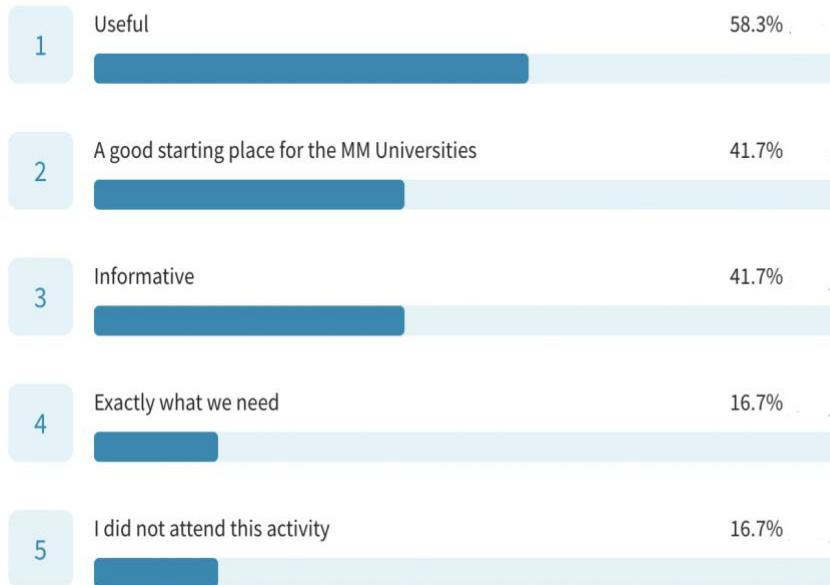
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As mentioned, the project strengthened its relationships with key authorities, particularly with the Ministry of Education—also a partner of the project- and with the Rector's Committee—which refers on the Education Reform progress (namely the drafting of NESP 2) directly to the Parliament. This is a crucial feature towards the project's potential long lasting effects, despite the challenges and uncertainties related to the coup and the reform process on hold. If and when international cooperation projects will resume, established linkages with the authorities and acquired methodologies could be capitalized upon.

WP4's activities specifically sought the support of the MoE for the identification of the missions and tasks of the IROs. To this end, as illustrated in the table above, the workshop "A *GLOBAL OUTLOOK FOR MYANMAR UNIVERSITIES*" organized in January 2020, was pivotal in officially reiterating the Ministry's support to the project and its activities.

The surveys investigated the perception of participants regarding this specific activity. Comments were generally positive, as demonstrated by the following chart where more than 58% of respondents affirmed it was useful, followed by the statement that it was a good starting place for the MM's universities (41.7%) as well as informative (41.7%).

Could you please tell us if the joint conference Chinlone and Toolkit on international relations was...



Comments substantiates the choices in the chart, such as: *“For MM Universities particularly, all activities and benefits we gain by attending and learning from activities provided by the CHINLONE Project are very useful. For us such like QA and Internationalization are great experience”* and *“Learned a lot how to develop the internationalization”* and also *“ important for learning about internationalization and other initiatives in Asia”*.

The online survey dedicated to the authorities further investigates their perception and point of views on the CHINLONE project and on the needs of the HEIs in Myanmar as well as their expectations for the future. Considering the current situation in Myanmar and the related power cuts and issues with the Internet access, the number of respondents was not too high. Seven representatives of the Department of Higher Education, with positions ranging from Director General to Deputy Direct General and Associate professors, completed the survey.

When asked to define the CHINLONE project using three word, most of them used the following: capacity building, higher education, excellent and innovative, as can be seen in the word cloud below.



This shows that the project was mainly identified for its capacity building component but also recognized as innovative and delivering on high standards, as reiterated by several additional comments in the survey.

In terms of effectiveness of the project, and specifically on WP4, the survey asked: **“How do you think the CHINLONE project supported the Internationalization of the universities in Myanmar?”**

Replies ranged from: *“It was a great opportunity for universities in Myanmar because they need global knowledge for the Higher Education sector. CHINLONE project helped them to promote their internationalization spirit and I believe they have got good training and experience by participating in the project”* to *“This project promoted a bridge between Myanmar Universities and International Universities for the Sustainable Educational Development especially in Higher Education”* and *“It was the best chance to promote the international collaboration for Myanmar Universities”*.

Furthermore, it was asked: **“What more should be done to improve the internationalization of Higher Education in Myanmar?”**

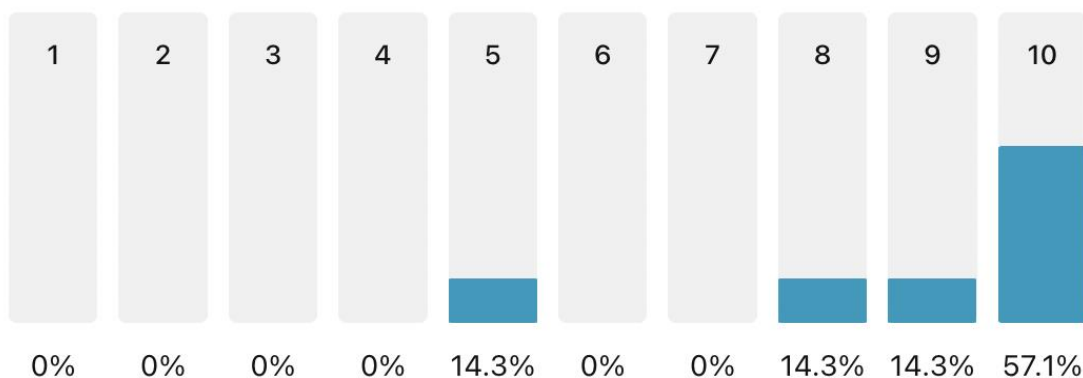
Most respondents pointed out that: *“More exchange programmes not only for teaching staff but also for students should be offered, because the exposition of students, faculty members and staff to abroad, including Europe, consolidates practices toward internationalization”* and that *“It is necessary to develop the International Relation Departments in Every Myanmar Universities and link the International Education Organizations such as Erasmus and other European and Non-European Institutions for the Development of Higher Education sectors mainly based on the International Training Programs for the Teaching/Academic Staff in every Faculties/Departments in Myanmar Universities. Moreover, scholarships and exchange or Internship/training programs for the Science Department/Faculties will promote the Development of Myanmar Higher Education which should be done to improve Internationalization in Myanmar”*. All these answers show that the widespread perception is that a lot still need to be done to improve the internationalization practices, including exchange programmes for both students and professors, and that the CHINLONE project was a first step in a long process.



Further, it was also highlighted that: *“It is necessary to nurture the capacity of International Relations in handling the day-to-day work of the IR Office as international cooperation is now significantly increasing. Besides, the labor-market-oriented curricula and disciplines should be sustained after the project with the implementation of internship training”* and that *“more collaboration, training and supporting with international universities is needed”*. Besides the training and exchanging opportunities for faculty and students, it would be also important to continue training the administrative staff. CHINLONE provided such opportunity. This component was highly praised during the previous evaluation and reiterated during this one through the exchanges with the project staff. The admin staff is pivotal to efficient IROs, a concept that Universities and the MoE successfully acquired, as demonstrated by the statement above.

Few other respondents also highlighted that to further improve the internationalization of HE: *“We have to improve our four pivotal dimensions of current transition as academic governance, teaching activities, research and international relations”* and that *“Capacity building in curriculum review, revise and upgrading is the most essential area in academic governance so that CBEH is requested to focus on that area. More university governance with the involvement of student in university institutions”*. Also these statements show that authorities representatives identified a number of areas that still needs support and that can constitute the focus of future interventions when the situation in the country will allow it.

### How likely is your institution to continue its cooperation on similar projects in the future?



Not likely

When asked if their institution was likely to continue cooperating in similar projects in the future, the majority of the respondents (57%), as shown in the chart above, stated that this was a likely scenario (the scale ranged from 1- not likely- to 10 -most likely-). This denotes a general positive attitude and continued interests toward international cooperation projects, probably due to the positive

experience in the CHNILONE project, but also towards the possibility that projects might resume in the near future notwithstanding the current situation in the country.

This observation is also supported by the replies to the question: **Where do you see the Higher Education sector 2 years from now in your country?**

Most statements were positive, highlighting hypothetical further improvements, such as “ *In the coming 2 years, the Higher Education Sector will have more university- industry linkage for employability*” and “ *I believe the higher education sector is shaping around a new teaching and learning culture able to empower both teachers and students*”. As already observed the interest and positive attitude are evident, however, it is too early to understand if these are concrete possibilities and if the country, with the coup as a roadblock, will be able to continue to develop and resist a return to isolationism.

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## CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

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The capacity-strengthening path, developed by the University of Bologna and its partners for the CHINLONE project, envisaged several activities that were interlinked and consequential in supporting the transformational process through which MM universities were undergoing. This tailor-made approach is well explained in the in the box and it consists on the identification/creation of the task forces, in this specific case that would be the International Relation Platform. Then it envisaged trainings and workshops organized by the European partners, and subsequent cascade trainings, organized by the MM partners to foster a spillover effect.

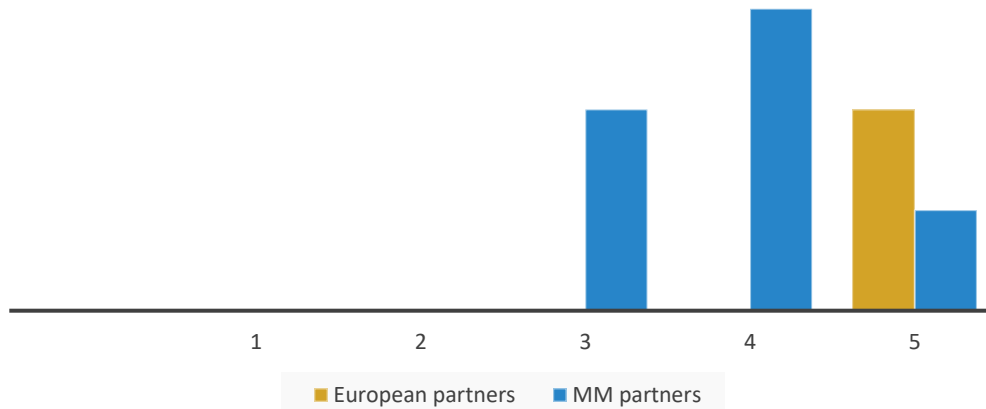


For the WP4, coordinated by the University of Uppsala, a workshop on International Relations was organized for task force members and subsequent cascade trainings were delivered on each MM partner university.

### *Virtual Mobility to the EU International relation Offices*

As stated above, this activity was initially planned to be implemented during the first quarter of 2020 and then rescheduled and redesigned due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The online training (renamed Virtual Mobility) took place on 14-21-28 October 2020 through Zoom. As shown in the chart below, the general rating of the activity, by both European and MM partners was generally positive.

## Rating the online training on internationalization



Noticeably, there is a slight difference in perception between the consortium partners. The European partners have, evidently, a more homogenous perspective on the training that they have all rated 5 (in a scale from 1 to 5). In the comment section the training was described as: *“ Excellent participation and discussion of all activities in the WP”* and *“ I think the colleagues of Uppsala have done a great work in planning a very accessible online training. Moreover, the speakers tackled a variety of issues”*. Further another comment respondent described the training as: *“[...] well organized, good time management, enough interaction among participants in spite of the difficulties of the online delivery. Complete contents easy to follow and understand I believe that all the aims of the training were achieved with quite high quality”*.

Whereas, the ratings provided by the MM respondents were more heterogeneous, as it is shown in the chart. When asked to provide one example on how they used the newly acquired knowledge in their daily jobs respondents explained: *“ I took curriculum development training courses of the Chinlone project and now I applied to revise the existing curriculum in our department this year, according to an approach based on students’ learning outcomes. In addition, we try to create a new program that meets the job market demand in Myanmar.”* Few more stated that this training helped with the *“Communication with other International Universities”* and that *“Based on experience and skills I gained by participating and attending Chinlone Project locally or internationally, I was capable in raising a new master program like MMM ( Master of Marketing Management Program) initiated in my department to fulfil our Myanmar local needs for youths who are working at the private sectors!”*. Evidently, these answers refer to the general capacity strengthening component and not only, or specifically, to the International Relations workshop. Nonetheless, this confirms that the trainings were useful and contributed to raise the quality of the academic offer of the MM partners.

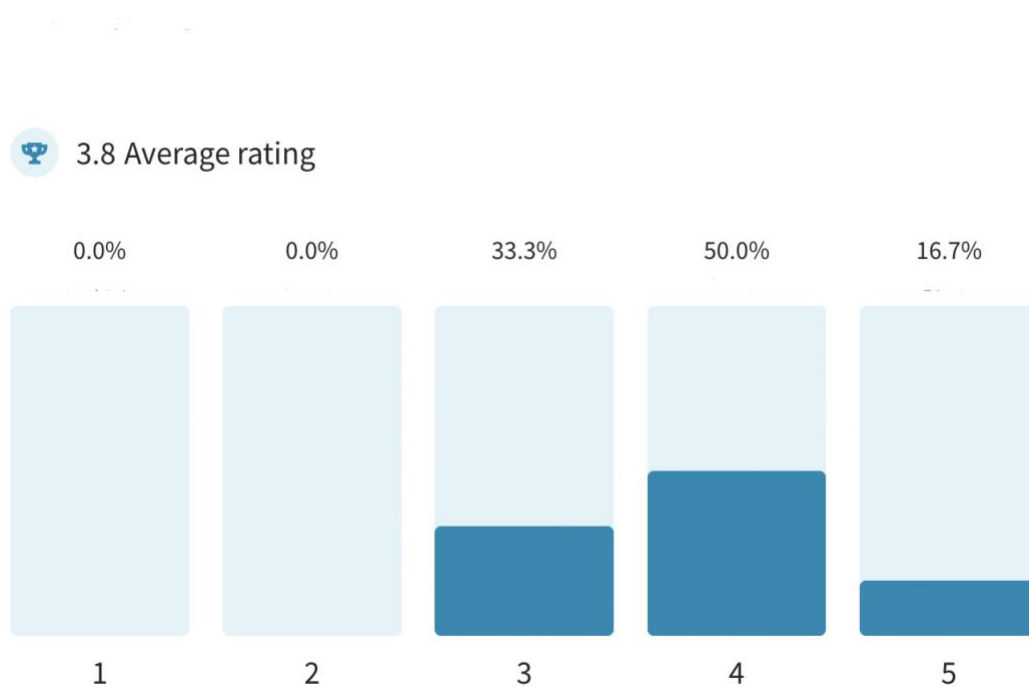
### *Cascade Trainings*

The cascade trainings, organized after the virtual mobility training, aimed to foster a spillover effect into the MM universities. The cascade trainings focused on effective mobility flows, outreach and promotion and governance of international relations, the same topics of the virtual mobility training.

The cascade trainings targeted local academic staff involved with the work of the IROs. Trainings were organized in all the partners' universities: the University of Yangon, Dagon University, Yangon University of Economics, Yezin Agricultural University and the University of Mandalay.

The survey asked participants to rate the cascade training they had delivered and, as can be seen from the chart below. The majority of them (almost 67%) felt that the trainings went well, rating the experience between 4 and 5. A few rated the experience 3, and clarified in the comments section that they should have added more practical exercises, "make it more empirical" and more in line with the practical challenges faced by the MM Universities on international relations.

## How would you rate the cascade training you delivered?



When asked to further elaborate on the outcomes of the trainings, respondents' answers varied from "trainees were very interested on the training" to "we shared the knowledge and the experiences of IRO from Upsala university" and "some teaching staff are willing to initiate in the promotion of the internationalization" and "appropriate trainees selection from each major department and good arrangement during training periods and honest evaluation of their skills and experiences after the cascade training in my University". These few samples summarize the range of answers obtained from the survey that reiterated the general interest on the topic of international relations, and the willingness of the MM universities to improve. Furthermore, the European partners shared their perspective on the cascade training that they thought were successful. Comments ranged from "I think they were absolutely successful; all the participants seemed to have perfectly understood the purpose of cascade training and the contents" and "all the reports I have seen were really informative. I have also better understood which points we have raised that are more fitting to the Myanmar context" as well as "in this case the online modality allowed the participation of more staff to be trained".

The above confirms that WP4's strategic implementation choices were effective. The shift to the online modalities worked well and, in this case, allowed for more participants to attend. Participants praised the importance of the experience to improve their skills and the possibility to link with more international universities in the future. The spillover effect was achieved through the cascade trainings, with some improvements in their structure to take into consideration for future initiatives.

According to the CHINLONE project methodology, a report illustrating this WP's main achievements was finalized and distributed to a wide array of stakeholders, including European Universities (see more details on the spillover effect paragraph).

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## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE IROs

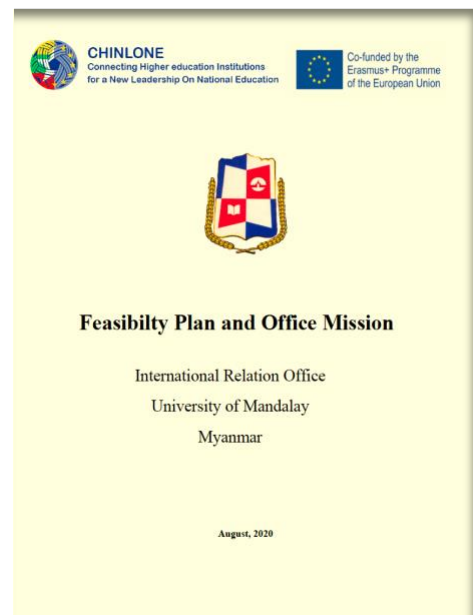
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In parallel with other activities the Myanmar partners drafted their IRO's feasibility plans. These are programmatic documents outlining strategy and decision making processes withing the universities' international relations departments. The plans illustrate the definition of the IRO's mission, in alignment with universities' owns mission and strategic plan, organigrams and division of tasks. In addition the feasibility plan tackle budget constraints, human resources required for a functional and efficient IRO.

According to the EU partners that closely followed up the feasibility plans development these are: *"in line with what Universities in that country can do, at least for the time being. Therefore, I think they were absolutely appropriate to the conditions of the country"* and *"IRO Functions and activities are well organized. Awareness of the need to appoint full time staff to the office for the implementation of the tasks related to the internationalization activities is there. Plans could be improved including more detailed*

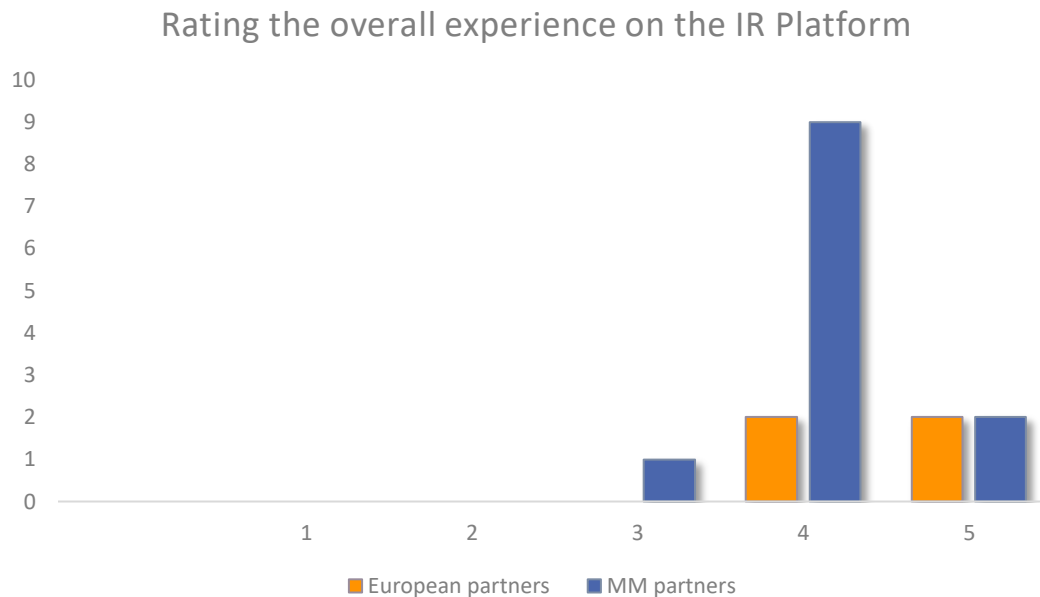
*information on the tasks to be performed by the different divisions of the office and a tentative plan of the budget needed to implement them"*. Moreover it was affirmed that *"a great thing is that this is their own view on how their IRO should be organized. I think that the main thing is that they should be implemented. No need for further improvement"*.

The survey further sought to understand what support the MM universities still need to improve the effectiveness of the IROs. Answers ranged from *"MM universities cannot stand alone. International cooperation is actually needed. Consequently, the role of IRO is very important and efficient establishment of IRO in the MM universities is urgently needed. The policy and decision makers' awareness on it is also very important for the establishment of effective and efficient IROs"* to *"staff will need continuous training for internal and international dealing affairs"* and *"official set up department with infrastructure and good internet access"* and also *"qualty staffs and strategies"*. These answers are just a sample but all respondents highlighted that future initiatives/ investments should focus on:



- staff training
- further financial allocation,
- improvement of digital infrastructures.

The triangulation of the data gathered by the evaluation evidenced a general satisfaction in relation to the overall experience of the WP4, as depicted in the chart below.



Hence, it can be concluded that WP4 was effective in achieving its objectives of strengthening the knowledge of the MM partners on IR and in reaching institutional support, besides supporting the setup of the IROs in the universities.

As mentioned, however, how these gains will be retained and further capitalized on in the future is impossible to say, given the current challenging situation in Myanmar. What remains is the enthusiasm of the participants and their hope that international cooperation projects will continue in the future, as also expressed by the statements of the Institutional Representatives reported above.

These statements are further reiterated by the MM partner universities, that when asked **Where do you see the IROs and your university 2 years from now?** replied that: *“We can stand as fully autonomous university and carry out internationalization process better than ever”* and *“hopefully, after becoming an autonomous university, strong and effective IRO of my University will be actively working for wider internationalization and upgrading of the university's world ranking”*

It is evident that the project provided effective tools to better tackle the international relations activities of the MM’s universities. It strengthened the know how to develop strategies and priorities to deal with the increasing number of foreign actors contacting them, as well as the internal set up and resources of the IROs.

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## SPILLOVER EFFECT

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The project has invested significant resources in increasing networking opportunities and in fostering the spillover effect through several events. Two of those events took place in 2021 during the last months of the implementation of the project. Both events aimed at presenting the development of Myanmar Higher Education to a wider audience.

“Navigating the Evolution of Myanmar Higher Education: Reflections of the 2011-2021 Timeframe” was the project online final event. It offered participants the possibility to share their perspectives on the changes universities in Myanmar underwent in the last ten years. It also fostered reflections on future evolutions of the country’s higher education sector. The event was organized in cooperation with the Coimbra Group ( partner of the project) and attracted many international stakeholders.

Initially, this conference was designed to be a big final event which included the presentation of selected papers from both Myanmar and European researchers. This set up had to be reviewed due to the pandemic limitations and instead of presenting the papers during the event it was decided to publish them. The publication, available on the project’s website, include six papers analysing the evolution of the higher education in Myanmar. One of the most interesting features of this publication, from this evaluation perspective, are the papers describing and analysing their direct experience with International Relations tools. Specifically, one of the papers, written by researchers at the University of Mandalay, provides a complete review of the 36 memoranda of understandings agreed upon and signed with foreign universities. It is a review of the internationalization process from the perspective of a Myanmar institution, highlighting positive aspects and areas of concerns successes stemming from their direct experience. Another interesting paper is the one, authored by two researchers from the University of Cologne, exploring the experience of their university with five universities in Myanmar through an international cooperation project called CYM+. The paper illustrates the experience through a case study and discusses the implementation and sustainability of projects aimed at the internationalization of Higher Education Institutions in Myanmar from a European perspective. This publication, through representing the different perspectives of the stakeholders involved in the internationalization process in Myanmar, constitutes another important tools produced by the project.

The credibility gained by the CHINLONE project within Myanmar’s stakeholders was evidenced by the official invitation to participate to the National Education Policy Commission’s (NEPC)<sup>6</sup> conference “*Enhancing the International Dimension of Myanmar Universities: Chinlone policy suggestions*”. The event saw the Participation of Myanmar Rector’s Committee, the members of the NEPC, several other Rectors from MM’s Universities and the Consortium Partners. This event provided the opportunity to present the policy paper “ Shaping the University’s International Relation in Myanmar” produced by the project. This product, according to the initial plan, was supposed to be divulged by the Myanmar

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<sup>6</sup> The National Education Policy Commission (NEPC) is a statutory body established by the National Education Law (2014) and the National Education Law Amendment (2015) to provide policies on education for the promotion of national development

partners in other universities not directly involved in the project to foster the spillover effect. Unfortunately, due to the military coup this could not be done.

Indeed the project, through the organization of this reach out events and latest publications, further disseminated its methodology and lessons-learned and generated momentum and interests from peer universities and other stakeholders that are working, or planning to work, in Myanmar. Therefore, it is safe to affirm that the CHINLONE project's experience on international relations has become a point of reference for many European and international Universities and the tools and publications produced can be used as important reference for future initiatives.

Survey's respondents reflecting on the internationalization process, and networking opportunities offered by the project, affirmed that: *"CHINLONE, and the WP4 in particular, has (successfully) tried to enhance the internationalization of Myanmar universities. Indeed, an important component of this attempt was the creation of more opportunities for the creation of a network in which not only Myanmar universities can find their roles, but also in which they can play their roles as protagonists"*.

The survey investigated further to understand what, according to respondents, could be short and medium effects of the projects, given the challenging circumstances. It was stated that: *"we really hope Myanmar universities, through CHINLONE and other projects like that, can understand how and why they need to improve their "internationalization". One of the most important things was the fact that they need to find a way to "express" themselves in a global scenario, and of course this means that in the future they will have to "build" projects like CHINLONE by themselves, not as partners but as leaders"* and also *"it is really difficult to predict the impact on Myanmar Universities both in short, medium and long term at the moment. The hope is that with the knowledge acquired applied to the Myanmar Universities context and needs the partner institutions will be able to enlarge their international networks and collaborations"*. And finally: *"I hope that WP4 activities provided inspiration and encouragement to our partners to set up/improve their IRO work. This could in future contribute to their universities doing more internationalization activities, and getting all the benefits that come with it (students doing exchange, broadening their life views; teachers doing more exchange, improving their teaching, collaborating in field of research etc)"*. Needless to say that in the wake of the military takeover, it is very difficult to predict what will happen. However, when the situations stabilizes all the tools and publications developed by the project will be public and available to the universities that would like to continue or start their internationalization process according to widely recognized standards.

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## CONSORTIUM DYNAMICS AND COOPERATION

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The previous evaluation addressed CHINLONE's WP1-3 efficiency by looking specifically at the project's managerial aspects and coordination mechanisms. It was highlighted that the working relationship between project partners appeared to be satisfactory and based on mutual respect and common goals. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions this trend continued also during the implementation of the WP4.

When asked to describe the challenges faced during this last phase the EU partners reported that even if it was not possible to complete the activities as originally planned due to the travel restrictions

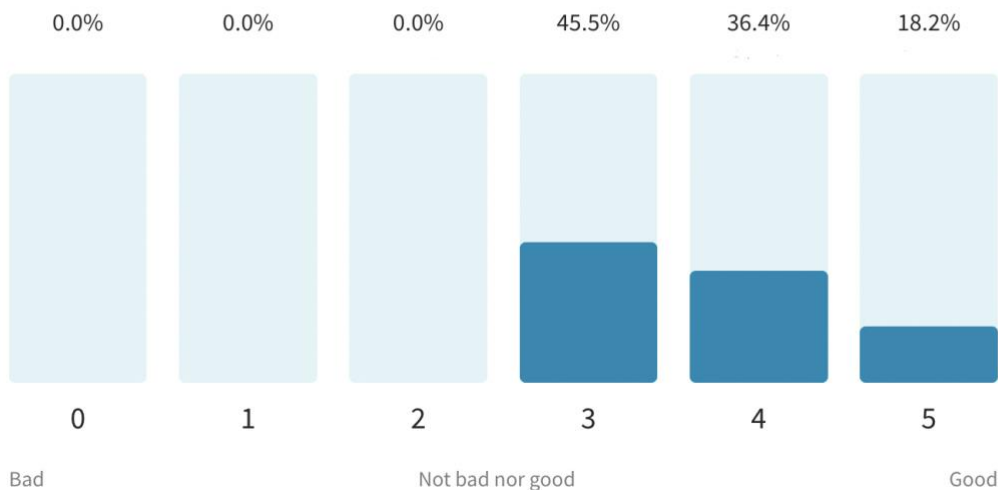


*“it must be recognized that - despite the initial distrust - switching to an online-based plan was, in the end, a positive move. In any case, direct interaction, in the case of projects like CHINLONE, cannot be “replaced”. Other EU partners stated that “The restrictions related to the outbreak of COVID pandemic mainly affected the delivery of the training since it was meant to be delivered in person in Europe. Even if the organization and delivery of online training was great and successful some of the aspects of the interactions between participants and exposure to the international context were lost”. Making the most of an exceptional situation, such as that of the pandemic, the activities were completed and in some cases moving the activities online favored participation, as already stated, and the overall impact on quality was not negative.*

The MM partners when asked to rate their experience with the online settings generally rated the experience from 3 to 5, on a scale from 1 to 5, as shown the chart below.

### How was your overall experience with the online setting?

#### 3.7 Average rating

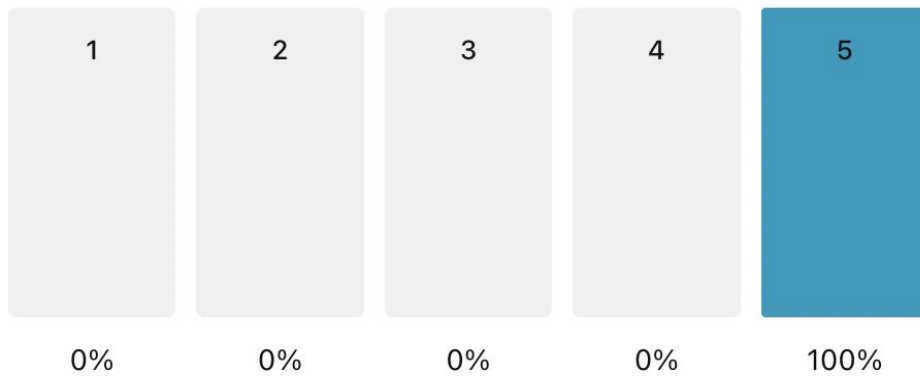


The survey explored some collaboration aspects by asking respondents to rate the working relationship and cooperation between EU partners and between EU and MM partners, as illustrated below. Most respondents rated the cooperation between EU partners positively (between 4 and 5 on a scale from 1 to 5). Respondents further explained that the *“cooperation with the EU partners was good with a great commitment mainly from the WP4 leader Uppsala University. The communication has always been clear and all the efforts made to grant a good quality in the implementation of the activities in spite of all the difficulties related to the current situation has been really appreciated”* and that *“The communication with the Unibo team was really easy and pleasant. They are straightforward, and they do good work”*.

As the chart below illustrates, the cooperation with the Myanmar partners was rated 5 by all the respondents. It was explained that they *“have been fully committed to the tasks to be accomplished.*

*Participated actively to the training and delivered in a timely manner the cascade trainings involving as much people as they could at their own institutions”.*

### How would you rate your cooperation with the Myanmar partners?



As already stated in the previous evaluation, also in regard to WP4 It is safe to affirm that the project partners are satisfied by the participatory bottom-up approach employed by the project.

It is also worth noting this WP has seen the a more strategic involvement of the Coimbra Group’s extensive network to disseminate the project outcomes. As suggested in the previous report, the Coimbra Group could have been more involved in the outreach activities—especially at the European level. A suggestion that was considered by the implementers though the organization of the online final conference.

# 4. REFLECTIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

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The evaluation findings show that the CHINLONE project has managed to consistently be effective through the successful identification of MM's university's needs, in the field of International Relations, and the efficient engagement of national institutions and other relevant stakeholders.

The project has also been very effective in developing tools, strengthening knowledge and provide general support, through a tailored methodology based on the bottom-up, participatory approach, to the internationalization process of the MM universities.

The findings of this evaluation also show that project has built momentum towards increasing networking opportunities for the MM universities. However, given the current context capitalize on these progresses and achievements and keeping links and relations between international and Myanmar's universities and higher education institutions will be challenging at best.

Based on the findings of the evaluation and on the conclusions in the previous sections, the following reflections on a few strategic areas have been formulated:

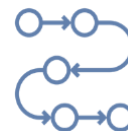
## **Standardizing the methodology and sharing understanding and best practices**

To capitalize on the experiences gained and the best practices established by this project it would be important to standardize its methodology. This will guarantee the availability of a tested step by step guide to work with universities in Myanmar ( and possibly other countries in post-conflict settings). CHINLONE innovative approach and positive achievements are indeed replicable and such methodological document could be useful to both national and international stakeholders.



## **Capturing processes, not only results**

The M&E system in place for this project is results-based oriented and looking at achievements rather than tracking processes or user experiences. Therefore, it would be advisable, whenever the opportunity to continue the cooperation will arise, to include the use of tools such as the network mapping or similar to track dynamics of change at different levels.



## **Keeping the linkages with the MM universities**

Although challenging, given the current situation in Myanmar, it would be important to keep the linkages with the universities and the researchers. The aim would be twofold: firstly to support the local project partners



and other universities through this difficult period and secondly to maintain the network that has been built through the project in view of future initiatives.

### **Advocating to keep Myanmar high on the European agenda**

To further sustain the local partners, UNIBO and the other European partners should consider the hypothesis to sustain a coordinated advocacy action towards the EU institutions, including the donor. The aim should be to highlight the importance of keeping Myanmar high in the European agenda and open a discussion on finding alternative approaches to continue the dialogue on Higher Education and beyond.



### **The MoE should continue investing on the capacity building of the university's admin staff**

Considering the very good feedback received by target groups and its implication for future initiatives, the evaluation highlights the importance of continue strengthening the capacity building of the administrative staff. This reflection is mainly addressed to the local institutions in Myanmar, especially the MoE, that should be aware of the importance of having dedicated and specialized staff for the effective functioning of the IROs. This will ease future initiatives when international projects will resume.

