**TDLG Case-Study:
Thaton Township, Mon State**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**What is TDLG at the Township level?**UNDP’s Township Democratic and Local Governance Project (TDLG) supports Participatory Township Planning across 15 townships in Bago Region and Mon State. Those invited to participate in the Township Planning Process include representatives from Ward/Village Tract Administrator (W/VTA), Regional and State Department personnel, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) Members of Parliament (MPs) and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs). During Township Planning Workshops, participants come to a consensus on priority projects to be implemented in villages throughout the township.

During the Thaton Township planning process, U Chit Aung, a VTA and father of 10, proposed the development of a road between Htin Pin, Aung Kan Thar and Thone Eain Su villages. Funded by UNDP and implemented by the Mon State Government, the road has since been completed and has had a substantial impact on the over 5,000 villagers living in the area.

**Why was a road selected as priority project in Thaton Township?**The health of villagers across the Township has suffered due to the poor infrastructure available and the resultant time it takes to access health commodities and facilities. Daw Myaing Myaing, a 44-year old resident of Aung Kan Thar Village, said she, “was both happy and sad at the same time” when she saw the road. Close to five years previous, her sister, Daw Ohn Than, then 35 years old, suffered severe post-natal bleeding. With the journey to Thaton Township Hospital taking four hours due to there being no road, Daw Ohn Than failed to reach the hospital in time and passed away. Three years late, Daw Myaing Myaing’s son in law, then 25, was bitten by a snake. Again delayed in reaching the hospital due to the poor infrastructure, her son in law also died.

Ensuring sustained agricultural output, including the cultivation of paddy fields, the main source of livelihoods in the areas, has also been challenging. During times of harvest, having no road between villages often meant labourers faced a two-hour trek before arriving at their work place. Lack of adequate transport to markets also resulted in farmers selling their surplus produce to brokers and traders, who pay a considerably lower price than those available at the market place. Without adequate infrastructure, fishermen also struggled to supply fresh produce to village markets.

Education too has suffered. While a nearby school offered high school education to students, the long, arduous journey on foot often involved students crossing snake invested terrain. As a result, school enrolment and completion levels remained low throughout the township.

**What has been the impact of the newly constructed road?**Traffic on the road is heavy throughout the day as villagers utilise their new commodity. Tri-bikes, motor bikes and trucks crowd the road from dawn to dusk. Transport to Thaton City now takes less than one hour with the cost of transport falling by over 80%. The price of vegetables and fruit has also fallen considerably with numerous street venders selling fresh produce on a daily basis. The impact on supply chains has reduced input costs for farmers and fishermen while also ensuring increased returns through selling direct to markets, rather than brokers and traders. Agricultural labourers also face shorter journeys, allowing for increased incomes.

In education, both students and teachers have seen their journey times to school cut dramatically. With the availability of bicycles and motor-bikes, students are no-longer faced with the prospect of crossing snake invested waters on their journey to school. As a result, more students are now enrolling in and completing their high-school education.

Increased access to health services is a key result of the newly constructed road. District and Township Hospitals can now be reached in between one and two hours with travel times to rural health centres taking no more than 15 minutes. Ambulances can also be accessed, reaching all villages in one hour.

**Has the newly constructed road helped to mitigate the impact of COVID-19?**
Where previously public information could take weeks to filter down to villages, awareness raising campaigns, and peer to peer information exchange, are now a regular occurrence in all villages. As a result, once the precautionary measures implemented to contain COVID-19 were announced, villagers were supplied with up-to-date information on sanitary practices and social distancing. Additionally, relief supplies, including rice, oil and beans, were easily transported to each village, meaning the economic impact of the pandemic has been reduced.

**What did the beneficiaries say about the project:**

“Due to there being no road, villagers in Thaton Township were excluded from development. Due to the lack of adequate transport, access to health services was limited with many women losing their lives during the delivery of their children. This newly developed road will have a positive impact on many sectors.” Daw Khaing Khaing Lleh, Mon State MP.

“In the past, if we wanted to procure goods to sell, the lack of access roads meant the costs were too high. Now, I can go by tractor and buy goods directly from the city market. The reduced transport costs and time savings have increased profits for my family.” U San Win, Shop Keeper, Aung Kan Thar Village.

“The new road has improved our lives because it now only takes a short time to reach the city. Every day, people from the city come to sell fruit, vegetables and clothes. Even the doll-house maker comes to our village! We also sell fresh fish to those from the city. Both sides have benefited.” U Tin Hla, Village Elder, Aung Kan Thar Village.

“Until the road was built, low-income families could not afford to send their children to school. Students would often finish their education in Grade 8 because they had no way to getting to high school. Now, students can attend high school in a nearby village 15 minutes away. I am glad that my children have the opportunity to receive a high school education.” U Soe Khin, Parent, Aung Kan Thar Village.

“Before the road was built, I worked as a seasonal labourer. While I earned between 5,000 and 6,000 Kyat per day, there would be many days where I had no work. As a result, I would often have to borrow money with very high interest rates to pay for food and services. When the road was built, I began to carry passengers and goods to local villages. As a result, my income has increased considerably. I now earn between 6,000 and 10,000 Kyat every day and I do not have to borrow money for food.” Ko Zaw Lwin, Tri-bike driver, Thone Eain Su Village.

“At present, there is no electricity in our village. With this road, there will be opportunities to access electricity in the future. Therefore, we must ensure the road is maintained.” U Chit Aung, VTA, Aung Kan Thar Village.