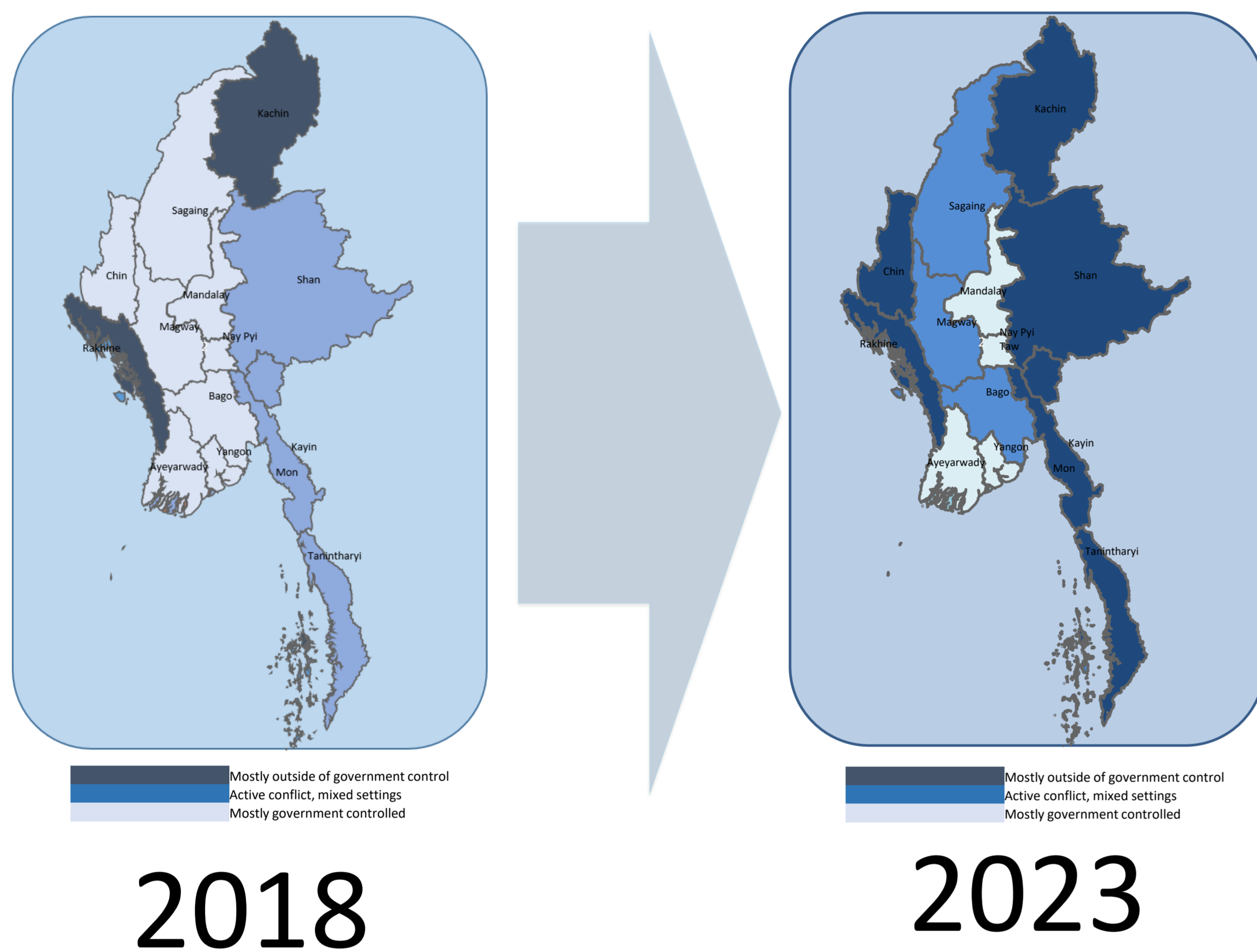


The Limits of Multilateralism:

Myanmar as a case study of the need to go local

Background: A devastating increase in conflict, shrinking military control



- Since the 2021 coup, conflict has spread out of previously stable areas to cover almost the whole country
- Estimate from Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, currently 17% of the country (72 of 330 townships, as of 30/11/2023) under stable SAC control
- As of end November 2023, over 2m internally displaced people, mostly in the NW (>1m) and Southeast (>500k); growing in NE.
- Traditional multilateral humanitarian and development approaches focus on funding and operational support through official government channels/Yangon-Naypyitaw
- This approach has only effectively covered the rapidly shrinking light blue area. In order to reach the (often higher needs) darker areas, working with local partners is essential.

Objectives and Methodology

Objectives

- Provide recommendations for improvements in humanitarian and development work in Myanmar
- Identify lessons for donors aiming to improve health and humanitarian project implementation in significantly conflict affected/divided states more broadly
- Examine the links or disjuncts between multilateralism and localization in conflict settings

Methodology

The authors based this paper on personal experiences and program data for one of the largest health and humanitarian actors in the country

- Health and humanitarian work through partners in different parts of the country
- Work with partners facing decisions of whether or not to work with large multilateral agencies, as well as whether to register with *de facto* and untrusted government
- Informal data collection and summary of key findings

Results and Recommendations

Multilateral institutions

- Most multilateral institutions have continued to function more or less as usual – working with the *de facto* authorities to request humanitarian access
- Increasing isolation between local organizations who see UN institutions as either aligned with, or used by, the SAC.
- No effective way shown to avoid *business as usual* model

Local organizations

In a growing share of the country, the only actors with the ability to deliver services
Historic community trust enables access, trust, etc.

Often remain ignored by international donors more focused on traditional approaches
Risk shifting/ risk sharing where such models are set up

Flexible, adaptable, more effective
At least as a part of the response, the only way to equitably respond to a crisis (without aligning oneself to the side with power over a capital).

The need for localization

- Humanitarian situation likely to be prolonged. Supporting local institutions the only way to build a multipolar, inclusive future country
- UN institutions work can only include be done in partnership (in some way) with government
- ***Vital to give a growing portion of funds and power to local institutions to cover the growing share of the country that relies on them; means decreasing share for others***
- Explicit recognition of limits of traditional UN model in conflict settings vital