

**THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR  
NATIONAL HOUSING POLICY WHITE PAPER**

**Prepared for  
Department of Urban and Housing Development,  
Ministry of Construction**

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## Executive Summary

In each country, the state of the housing sector is essential for the societal and economic welfare of the nation. Myanmar's housing sector is divided between a formal sector and a vast and swiftly growing informal sector, reflecting sharp disparities in household wealth. This paper presents an analysis of the main features of Myanmar's housing sector and a set of proposals for policy measures.

Key findings are:

- The number of dwelling units and the number of buildings containing dwelling units is not known.
- Both current total formal and informal annual output of dwelling units appear to be significantly below housing needs. It is estimated that the total number of dwelling units may range between around 9.3 and 10.3 million units, far less than the number of households enumerated by the census of 2014.
- Long-term structural undersupply of dwelling units affordable for the majority of the population arguably led to suppression and delay of household formation.
- The housing stock consists of a rural segment and an urban segment. Major distinguishing differences are building materials with which dwelling units are erected as well as widely varying levels of infrastructural services for dwelling units, and while the share of units built with durable materials is growing, the absolute majority of all buildings is still constructed with non-durable materials.
- A great majority of households do not have access to dwelling units supplied through formal channels, including the housing program of MoC/DUHD. As a result of formal units' cost structure, it is estimated that about fourteen percent of all households in Yangon can afford dwelling units provided by formal housing delivery systems.
- Macro-economic indicators signal increasing stability for the broader economy, and Myanmar's banking sector is modernizing. Yet housing finance schemes for broader groups of the population - which are critical for expanding formal output - only exist in initial stages. CHDB is leading the way for improved housing finance schemes with innovative savings-and-loans schemes designed to circumnavigate unresolved collateral and title issues.
- The wide-spread absence of secure titles for land and apartments is a major impediment for further expansion of housing supply as well as for bank lending for maintenance and modernization of stock. Ambiguous tenure arrangements curb investment in maintenance and incremental improvement in informal units and drive up financing costs in the formal sector. In addition, with regard to the rental housing stock, maintenance and modernization are impeded by the effects of rent control legislation, which drive cash flows to landlords down to levels which preclude accruing reserves for maintenance.
- Against these backgrounds, policies accepting informal settlements and aiming at improving them through incremental measures need to be seriously considered. Large-scale sites-and-services schemes on government-owned land may need to be re-introduced, yet may face major obstacles due to an apparent shortage of government-owned land.

- The lack of basic urban services creates increasing public health risks. A major public investment program is required including all informal settlements regardless of tenure issues.
- The preparation of the National Housing Policy needs to be closely aligned with MoC's envisaged National Urban Policy.

To address these challenges, a wide-ranging and inclusive policy dialogue involving all relevant stakeholders is warranted.

## **A. Context and Background**

### **A.I Introduction**

1. In 2014 the Ministry of Construction of the Union of Myanmar initiated the process of preparing a **National Housing Policy**. The new government formed in March 2016 indicated its intentions to further pursue devising a National Housing Policy in collaboration with UN-Habitat. Hence, it is the purpose of this Preliminary White Paper to support the government's efforts.

2. White Papers are **policy documents** that outline the **government's proposals** for future governmental activities with regard to legal and regulatory frameworks governing a certain functional sector. A White Paper provides a basis for further **consultation and discussion** with interested or affected groups of stakeholders, thus serving as an important tool of democratic policy making. The purpose of a White Paper is to launch a debate with the public, stakeholders, and the members of the National Parliament with a view on facilitating a political consensus. Since at present the amount of knowledge on Myanmar's housing sector is limited, this White Paper is of a preliminary nature.

3. The development of the housing sector is indissolubly intertwined with the urbanization process, as the lion's share of additional buildings in urban agglomerations is constructed for residential purposes. Hence, it is imperative to closely align the Ministry of Construction's National Housing Policy with its **National Urban Policy** (NUP), reflecting their pronounced functional interrelations.

4. The White Paper consists of nine sections plus annex. Section B contains a situation analysis, which consolidates information available on the housing sector of Myanmar. Data gaps are identified. Section C addresses incomes and affordability issues. Section D investigates governance of land as central input for housing, while section E outlines the state of housing finance as another central factor shaping the housing sector. Section F delineates main elements of the legal framework affecting the housing sector, while section G addresses the interrelations between the construction industry, its residential component, and the labor market. Section H contains a diagnostic summary. Policy recommendations are outlined in concluding section I. The annex contains some detailed data on various factors affecting the housing sector.

### **A.II Components of a National Policy**

5. Many terms used in the area of policy drafting and policy formulation are not conclusively defined. Even the term 'policy' merits clarification. A policy is typically described as a set of principles to guide subsequent decisions and achieve rational outcomes. A national policy may be considered to be a statement of political intent or a commitment to pursue a certain course of future action. A key function of a national policy therefore is to serve as an instrument for future decision-making, stating broad principles yet also laying the groundwork for more concrete directives and guidelines. In the form of clear and concise policy statements, a national policy should formulate near-term goals and long-term goals for the thematic sector it addresses. A policy should include initial actions to kick-start

the policy, a set of priorities, an overview on of both human and financial resources necessary, and the general distribution of responsibilities among public, private, and other civil society actors.

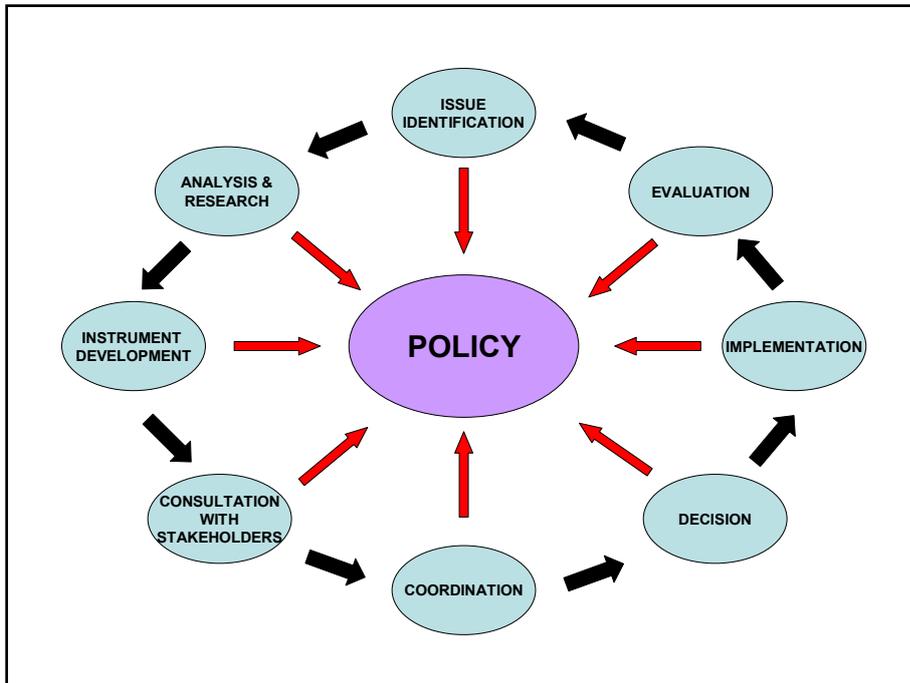
6. Finalized policy documents usually contain certain standard components including:

- A **purpose statement**, outlining why the Government is issuing the policy, and what the desired effect or outcome of the policy should be.
- A **background section**, indicating reasons, history, and motivating factors that led to the creation of the policy.
- An **applicability and scope statement**, describing whom the policy affects and which actions are impacted by the policy. The applicability and scope statement is used to focus the policy on its desired goals and objectives.
- Policy statements on **goals and objectives** of the policy, indicating the subsequent **specific strategies**<sup>1</sup> to implement the policy.
- A **responsibilities section**, indicating which **organizations and entities are responsible** for carrying out individual strategies. The responsibilities section often includes identification of relevant oversight and control structures.

7. Due to significance and quantity of interrelated components, in most countries - both developed and developing - the housing sector and the housing markets are subject to enduring governmental interventions in a multitude of ways. With regard to housing, the new Government of Myanmar finds itself at the **onset of a challenging long-term task spanning decades**. Against this backdrop, an outline of the generic policy cycle is presented.

8. The **policy cycle** is a **conceptual** tool for analyzing the development of a policy. It encompasses **eight distinct stages** as Exhibit I displays:

**EXHIBIT I: THE EIGHT STAGES OF THE POLICY CYCLE**



9. Three stages of the policy cycle are of a particular significance: (1) **instrument development**, (2) **implementation**, and (3) **evaluation**. In phase **instrument development**, the goals and objectives of the policy statement need to be outlined. In addition, envisaged future core strategies based on the policy document need to be identified. At this stage, it is fully sufficient to name the later strategies, which by necessity will be theme-based or sector-based.

10. The **implementation stage** needs to be split into two periods. Period No. 1 will include the preparation of the **strategies**. The subsequent Period No. 2 will be dedicated to carrying out the strategies through programs and projects, and it is this implementation which constitutes the majority of the policy cycle work. The **evaluation** stage merits special attention: The real outcomes and

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