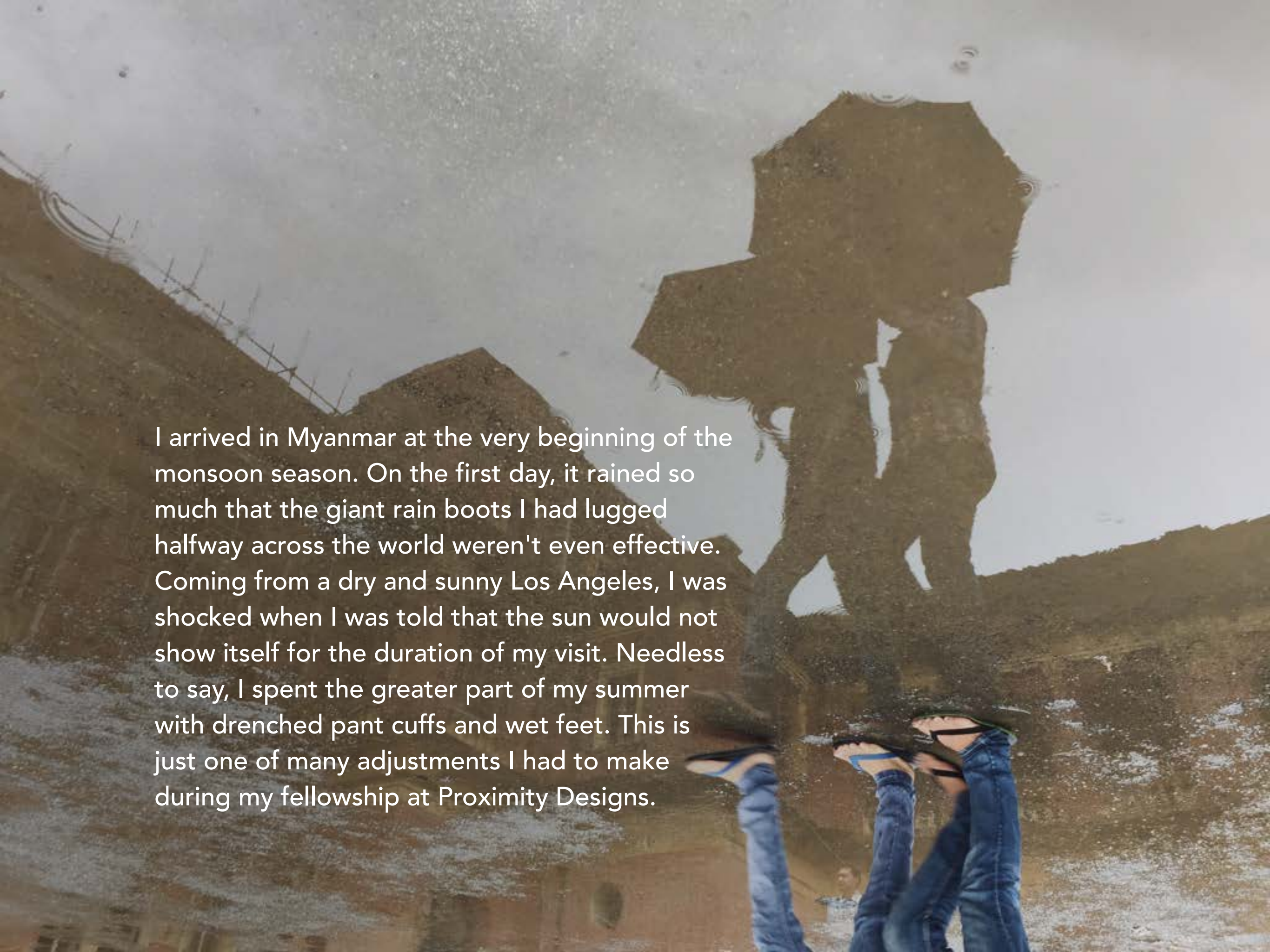


A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a purple t-shirt and a patterned backpack, is smiling and looking down at a camera she is holding. She is wearing several colorful bracelets on her left wrist. To her right, an older man wearing a light green short-sleeved shirt, a blue and white checkered sarong, and a green cap is looking towards her. They are standing in front of a structure made of woven bamboo or wood. Two white plastic containers with small plants are hanging from the top of the structure. The background is dark and appears to be the interior of a building.

DESIGNMATTERS FELLOWSHIP

**PROXIMITY DESIGNS, MYANMAR
SUMMER 2016**

**ANJULI SETHI
MDP/FIELD MFA CANDIDATE**

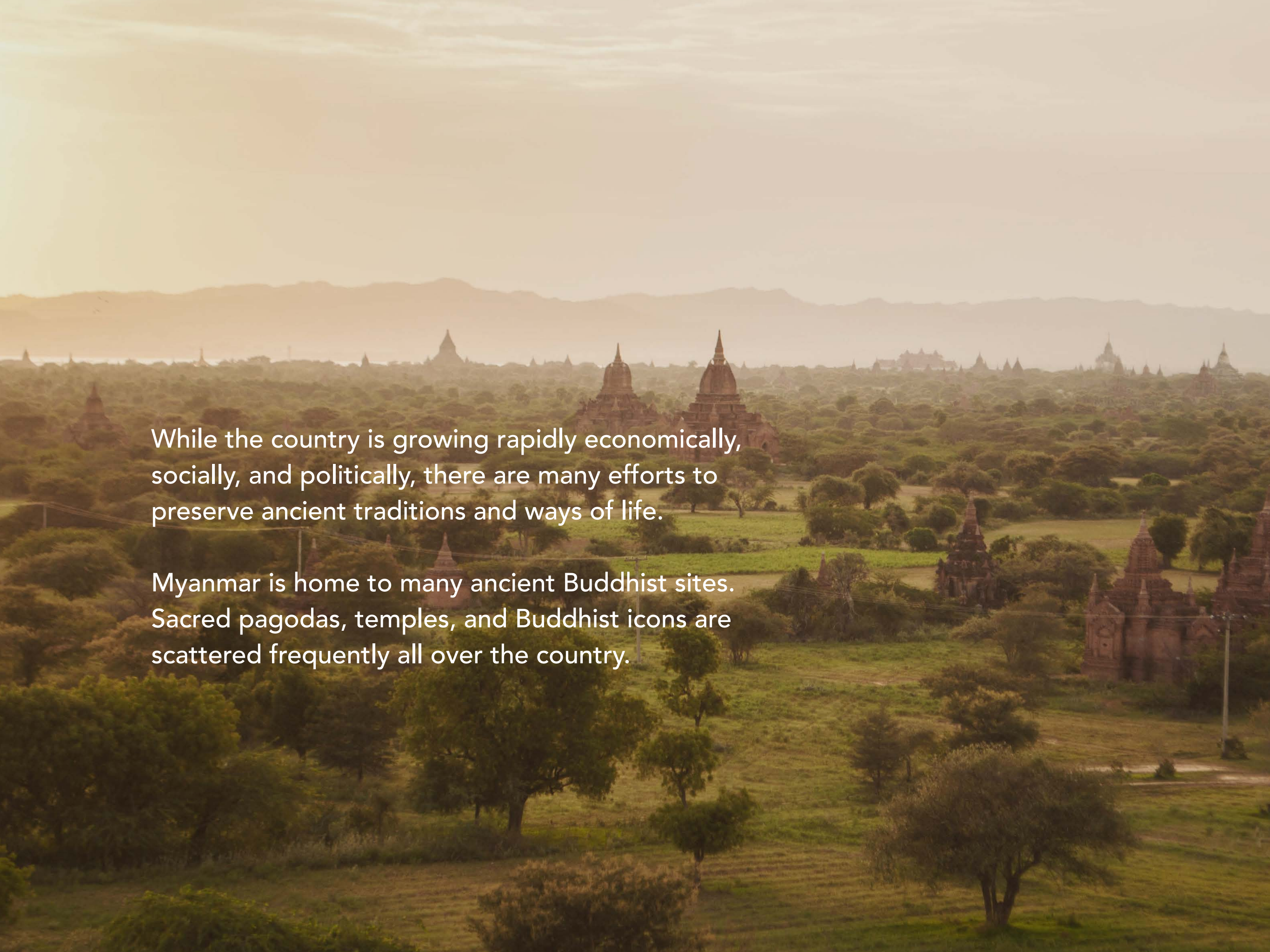


I arrived in Myanmar at the very beginning of the monsoon season. On the first day, it rained so much that the giant rain boots I had lugged halfway across the world weren't even effective. Coming from a dry and sunny Los Angeles, I was shocked when I was told that the sun would not show itself for the duration of my visit. Needless to say, I spent the greater part of my summer with drenched pant cuffs and wet feet. This is just one of many adjustments I had to make during my fellowship at Proximity Designs.

MYANMAR

Myanmar is a country in Southeast Asia bordered by Thailand, Laos, Bangladesh, India and China. For over half a century, Myanmar was under a military regime and therefore isolated from the rest of the world. In 2015 they had their first democratic election, and sanctions that previously hindered growth and development were lifted.



An aerial photograph of a vast landscape in Myanmar, featuring numerous ancient pagodas and stupas scattered across a green, hilly terrain. The scene is captured during the golden hour of sunset, with a warm, orange glow over the sky and distant mountains. The pagodas vary in size and style, some with prominent spires and others more integrated into the natural surroundings. The overall atmosphere is serene and historical.

While the country is growing rapidly economically, socially, and politically, there are many efforts to preserve ancient traditions and ways of life.

Myanmar is home to many ancient Buddhist sites. Sacred pagodas, temples, and Buddhist icons are scattered frequently all over the country.

YANGON

I lived in Yangon, which is the cultural capital of Myanmar. As the country's largest city, the development is quite palpable. This is where Proximity Headquarters are located.




PROXIMITY

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a maroon t-shirt and a black and white patterned skirt, is looking at a green smartphone held by a man in a dark blue button-down shirt. They are standing in a modern office or co-working space with red and yellow walls. In the background, other people are working at desks, and there are whiteboards and office furniture.

Proximity is a social enterprise that designs and delivers products and services that meet the needs of Burmese farmers.

The company has four distinct business ventures including low-cost irrigation products, farm advisory services, microfinance, and policy.



When I first arrived at Proximity, I was a bit overwhelmed. I was still adjusting to living in a new country where I didn't speak the language, and I also had to familiarize myself with a new company and workplace. My team, the Creative Services team, welcomed me with open arms. I felt right at home and eager to start working.

THE BROKERS

Brokers work directly for the mills either purchasing the paddy supply or selling the milled rice at a profit from the middle of the value chain. They have the network and relationships to leverage on price and margin. However, they are often subject to low market prices and poor...

Subscribe

mill to buy paddy

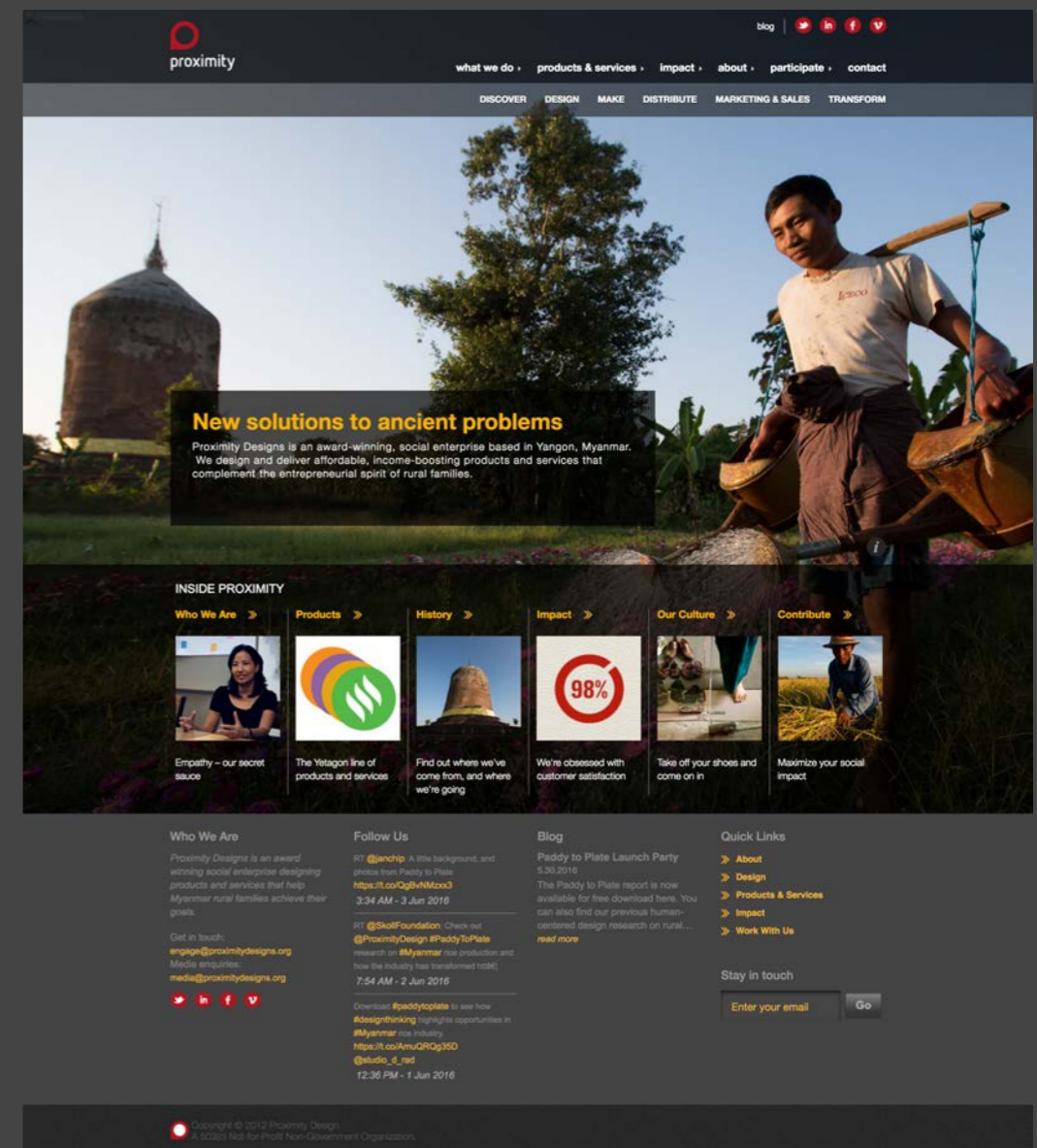
50 milled rice

seasonal

PROJECT

My main task was to redesign Proximity's dated website. As a MDP/Field student, I know how incredibly difficult it is to authentically and responsibly depict impactful design, especially to an audience who might not even know where Myanmar is.

There are so many preconceived notions about what design for development looks like. Typically, NGO's present themselves in a way that involves images of western ideas being used to solve issues in a developing context. It is difficult to break that mold, even if the company is doing something different.



PROCESS

A woman with long dark hair is shown in profile, looking down. The background is blurred, showing another person's face and a green wall.

I began conducting user research with people representing the target audience of the website, including Doers & Makers, Investors, and Do Gooders.

I held quick interviews to better understand what the audience found problematic on the old website, then synthesized the responses to start teasing out what changes needed to be made.

DOERS & MAKERS

Very Dark

Waste Of Mobile Data

Intimidating

Overwhelming

Doesn't Stand Out

All Over The Place

No Clear Flow

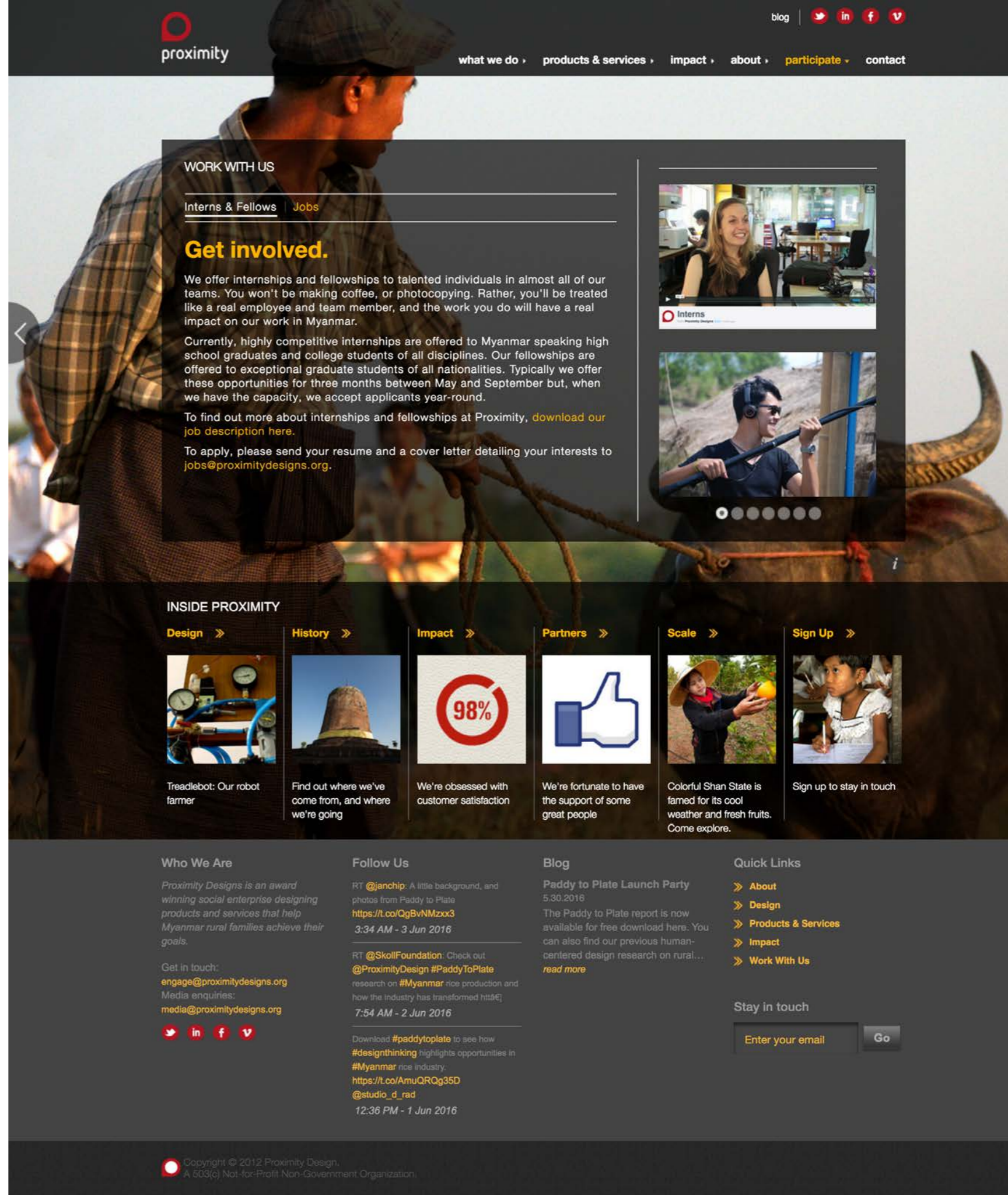
Doesn't Represent Experience

Inconsistent Imagery

Confusing Verbiage

Cluttered

Redundant



WORK WITH US

Interns & Fellows Jobs

Get involved.

We offer internships and fellowships to talented individuals in almost all of our teams. You won't be making coffee, or photocopying. Rather, you'll be treated like a real employee and team member, and the work you do will have a real impact on our work in Myanmar.

Currently, highly competitive internships are offered to Myanmar speaking high school graduates and college students of all disciplines. Our fellowships are offered to exceptional graduate students of all nationalities. Typically we offer these opportunities for three months between May and September but, when we have the capacity, we accept applicants year-round.

To find out more about internships and fellowships at Proximity, [download our job description here](#).

To apply, please send your resume and a cover letter detailing your interests to jobs@proximitydesigns.org.



INSIDE PROXIMITY

Design >>



Treadlebot: Our robot farmer

History >>



Find out where we've come from, and where we're going

Impact >>



We're obsessed with customer satisfaction

Partners >>



We're fortunate to have the support of some great people

Scale >>



Colorful Shan State is famed for its cool weather and fresh fruits. Come explore.

Sign Up >>

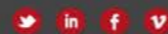


Sign up to stay in touch

Who We Are

Proximity Designs is an award winning social enterprise designing products and services that help Myanmar rural families achieve their goals.

Get in touch:
engage@proximitydesigns.org
Media enquiries:
media@proximitydesigns.org



Follow Us

RT @janchip: A little background, and photos from Paddy to Plate
<https://t.co/QgBvNMzxx3>
3:34 AM - 3 Jun 2016

RT @SkollFoundation: Check out @ProximityDesign #PaddyToPlate research on #Myanmar rice production and how the industry has transformed <https://t.co/AmuQRQg35D>
7:54 AM - 2 Jun 2016

Download #paddytoplate to see how #designthinking highlights opportunities in #Myanmar rice industry.
<https://t.co/AmuQRQg35D>
@studio_d_rad
12:36 PM - 1 Jun 2016

Blog

Paddy to Plate Launch Party
5.30.2016
The Paddy to Plate report is now available for free download here. You can also find our previous human-centered design research on rural...
[read more](#)

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- >> Design
- >> Products & Services
- >> Impact
- >> Work With Us

Stay in touch

Enter your email

Go

INVESTORS

No Clear Path or Flow

Confusing

Info Spread Out Across Site

Harsh Contrast

Generic

Hard to read

Too Much Copy

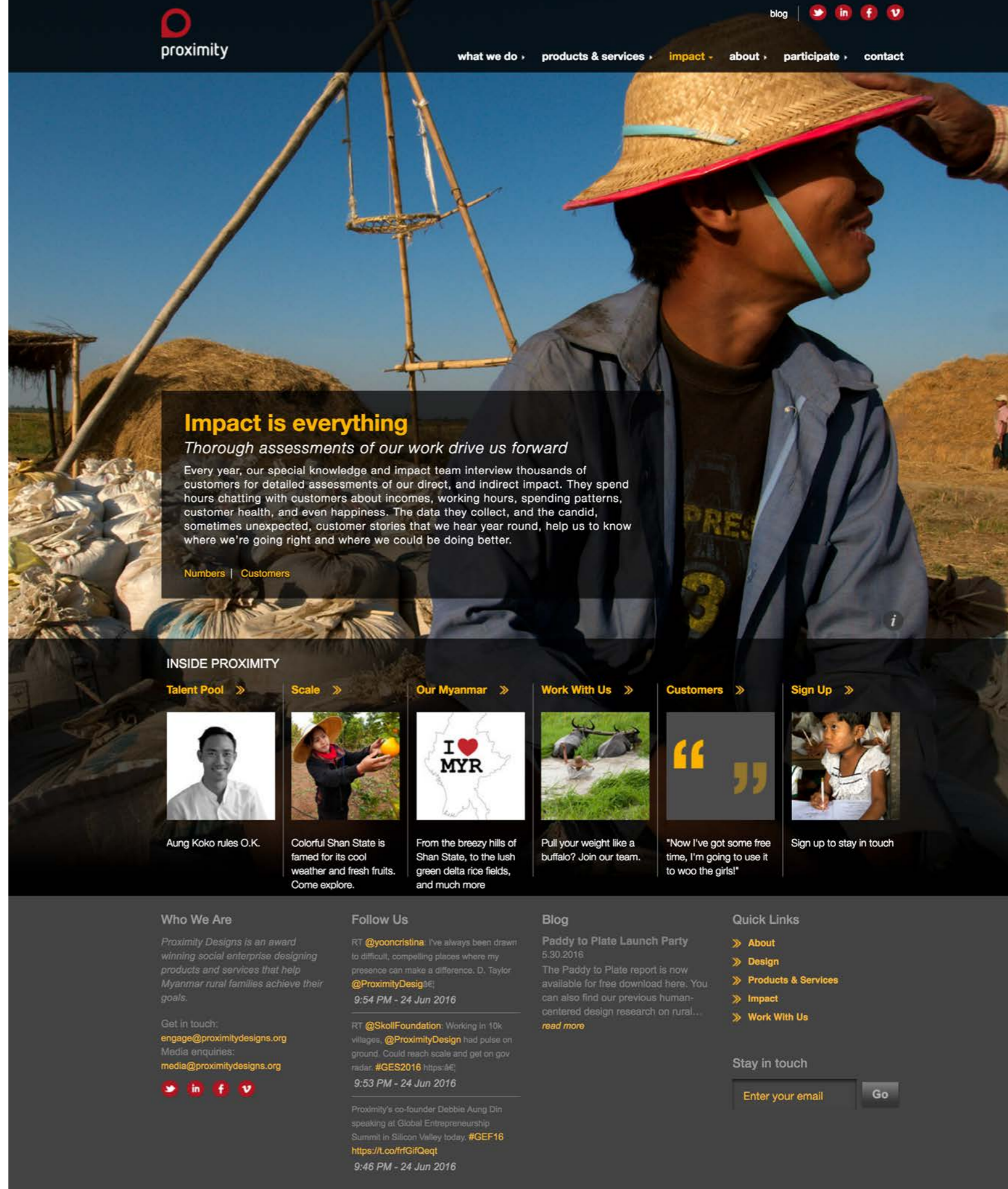
Not Communicative of Ventures

Redundant

Donate Button Is Not Useful

Numbers Are Outdated

Doesn't Show Process



DO GOODERS

Unclear

Navigation is cluttered

Hard to find information

Busy

No focal point

Job listings are confusing

Too many links

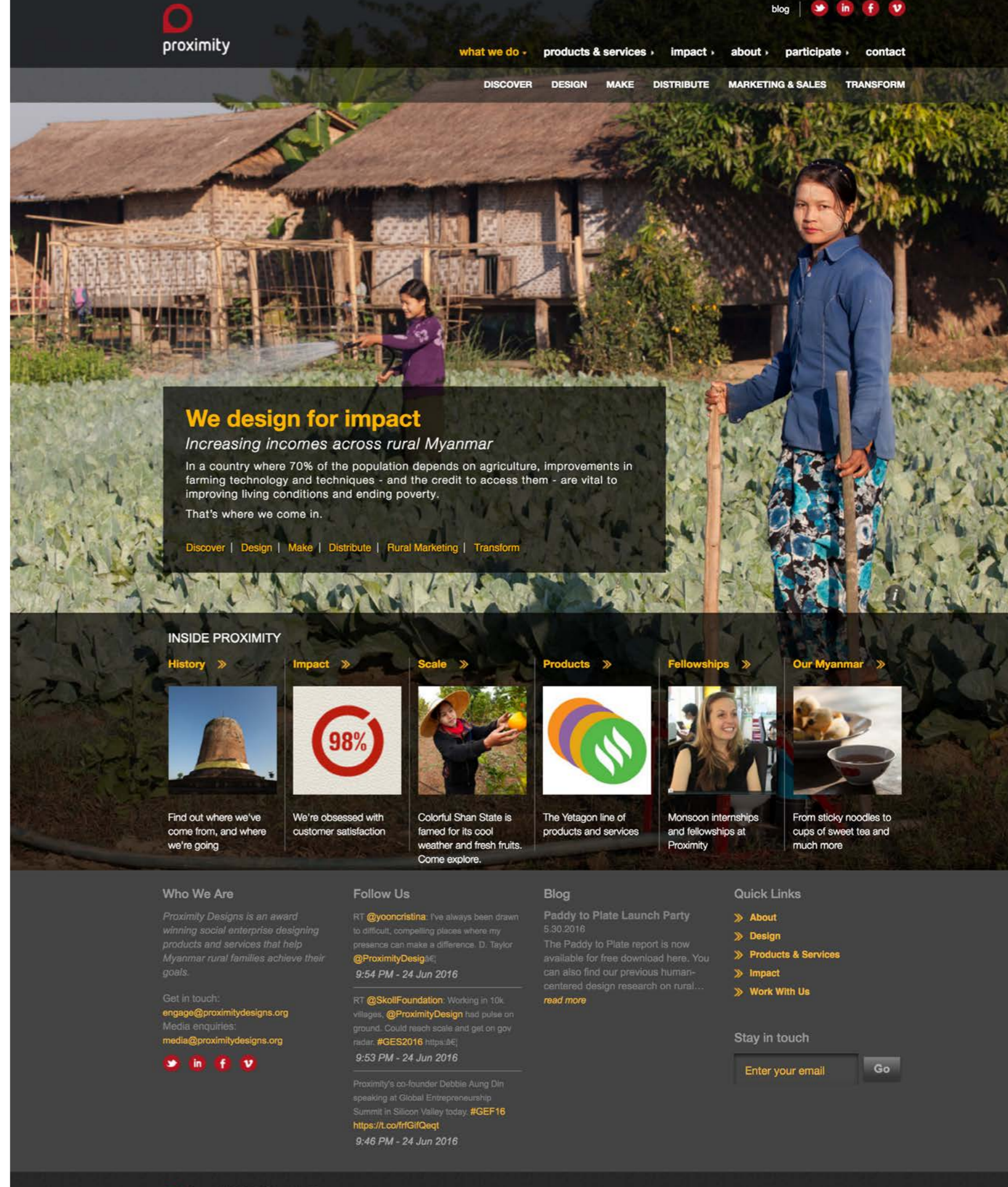
Dated

No CTA

Uninteresting images

Repetition

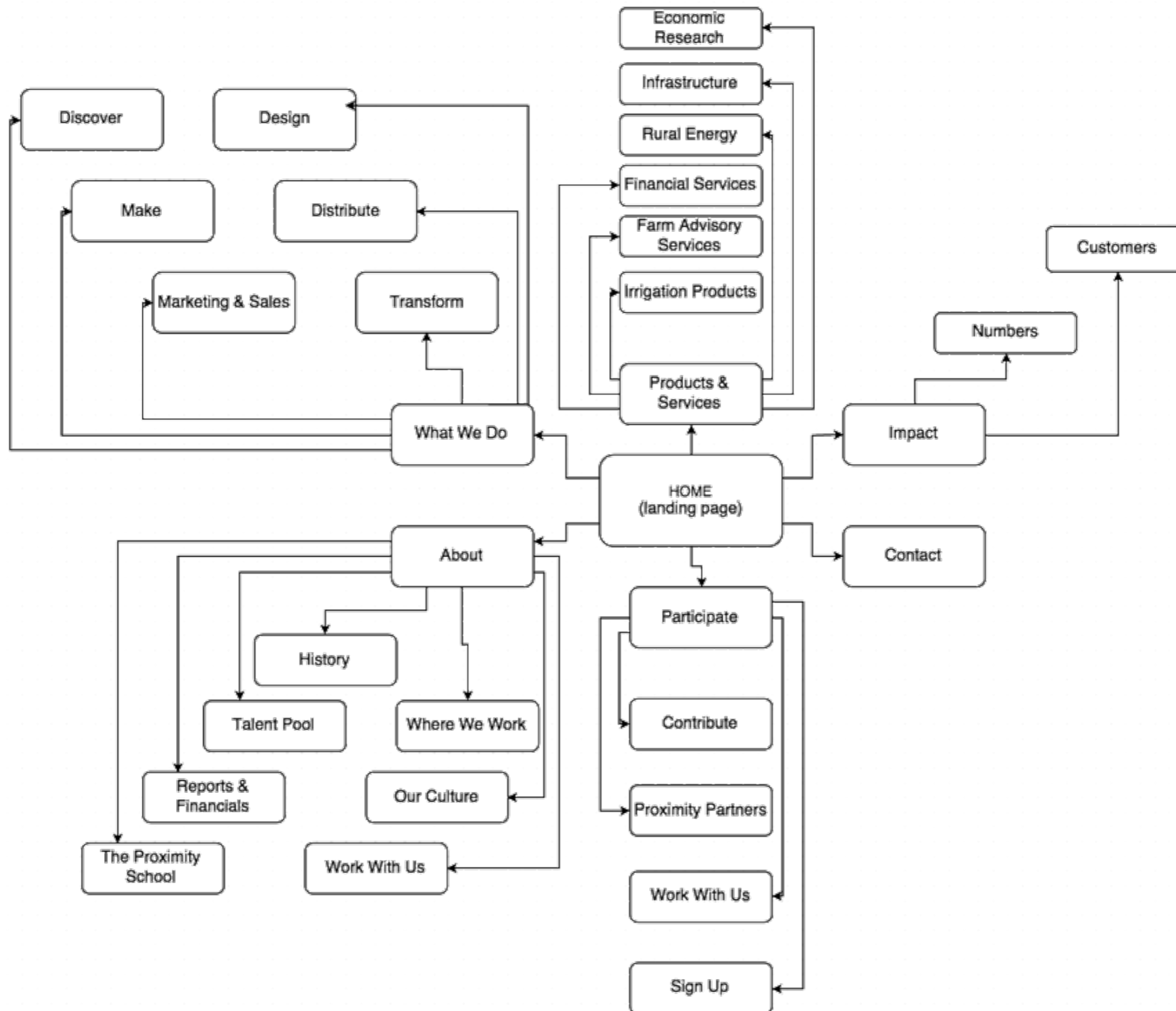
Many un-needed elements



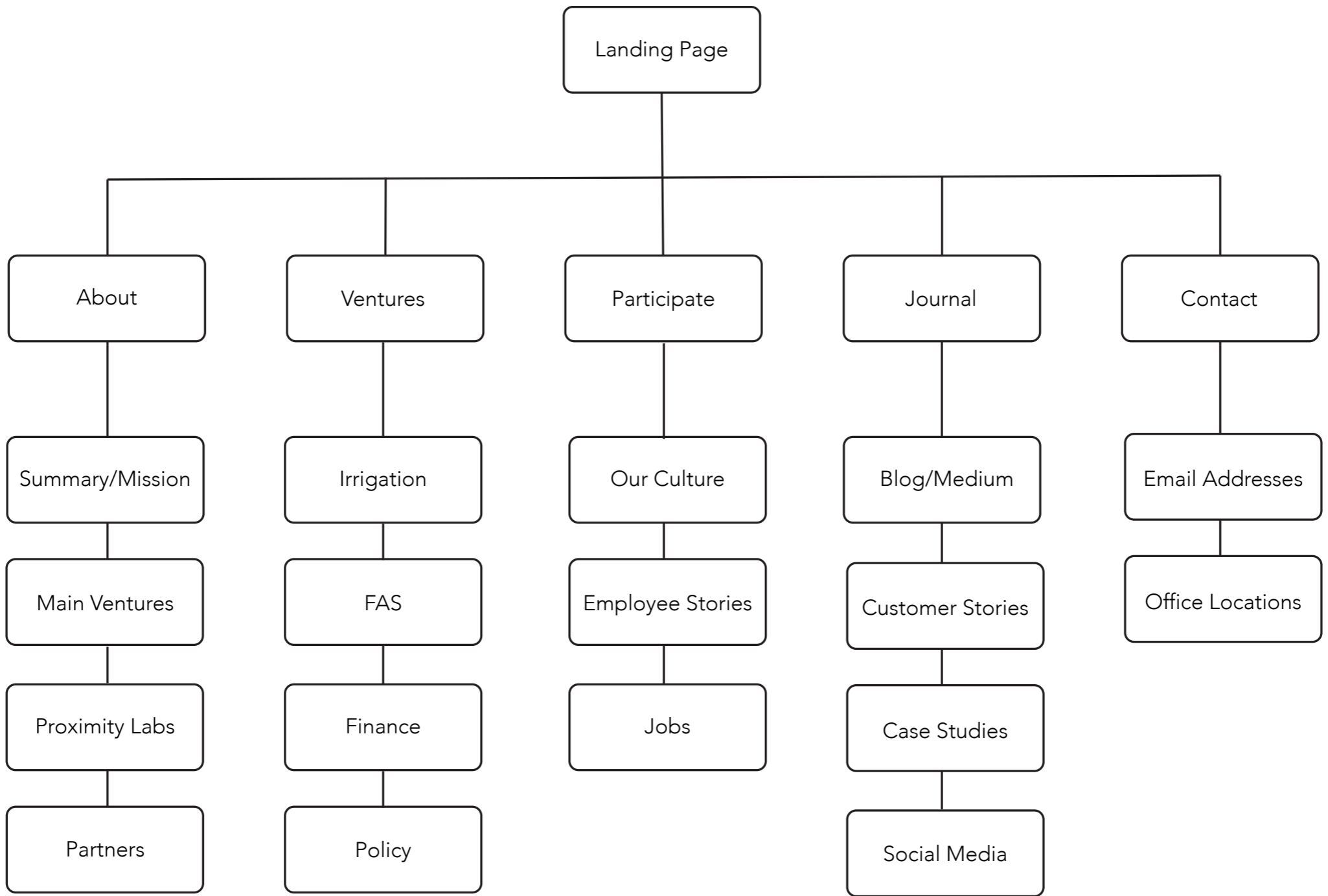
STRATEGY

From the user research, I discovered that the main issue of the website was that people couldn't find what page they were looking for through all the clutter. There were no clear call-to-actions. As a result, I cleaned up the information architecture and went into a deeper analysis of what elements needed to be changed and why.





Old Information Architecture





Current images convey “results”, products and techniques, but no process



It is difficult for an outside audience to differentiate between the Staff and the Customers

Images show Proximity products used by farmers without any evidence that it is what they want, what they need, or that they were involved heavily in the process



Images only tell one part of the Proximity story. Don't at all convey experience at Yangon office





Images should portray and reflect authentic interactions



Process emphasized

Updated product images with new logo




Large images to create immersive experience




FIELDWORK

As part of the design process, I thought it would be important to gain a perspective from the farmers to see how they experience Proximity products and agriculture in Myanmar. To do this, I proposed a field trip to rural Hindatha, Myanmar.



A close-up photograph of a middle-aged man with short dark hair, wearing a grey and white plaid button-down shirt. He is holding a clear glass cup filled with a golden-brown liquid, likely tea, and looking off to the side with a slight smile. The background is a rustic wooden wall with a green fan and a pink object hanging on it.

Throughout the trip, we visited several farmers houses and conducted interviews over copious amounts of green tea.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a green t-shirt, is sitting on a blue plastic chair and showing a 3D printed model to a man. The man, wearing a white tank top and blue checkered pants, is sitting on a similar chair and looking at the model with interest. The setting is a room with green walls and a window looking out onto a green landscape. A large blue and brown electric fan is visible in the background. Another person is partially visible on the left side of the frame.

I used Google Cardboard and 3D panoramas as a design research tool to learn more about what farmers thought would be interesting for an international audience to see.





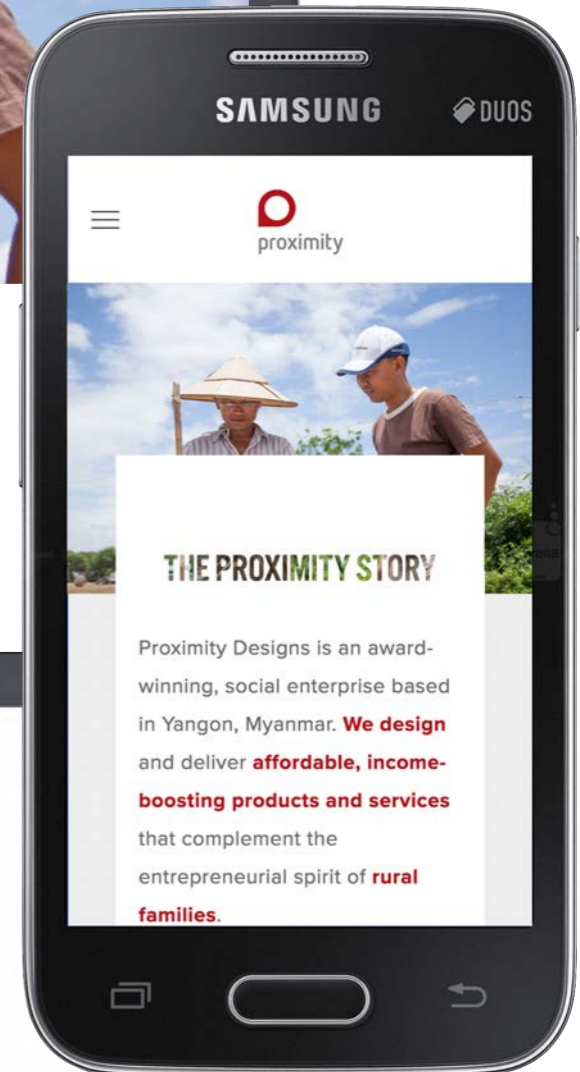
Images by Ko Than Naing, Hinthada, Myanmar

Usually, it was us coming in with the big cameras and fancy equipment, and I wanted to flip that dynamic. I wanted to give agency to the farmer and encourage them to capture images of things they thought an international audience would be interested in. These are some images captured by Ko Than Naing as he gave us a tour of his property.



THE PROXIMITY STORY

Proximity Designs is an award-winning, social enterprise based in Yangon, Myanmar. **We design** and deliver **affordable, income-boosting products and services** that complement the entrepreneurial spirit of **rural families**.



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THANK YOU

From working in the office with Burmese natives, repats, and expats, to hopping on the back of motorcycles to visit remote farms, the fellowship at Proximity was truly an incredible experience. Getting the opportunity to engage with methods that prioritize immersion, field work, and design research was worthwhile and something I will definitely take forward with me in my practice as a designer. In my work, I always look forward to the exchange of knowledge, and I hope I left the team with as many valuable insights about design for development as they left me.

DESIGNMATTERS

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Jennifer May
Susannah Ramshaw
Stephanie Sigg

PROXIMITY

Jim Taylor
Debbie Aung Din
Geoffrey Brewerton
NgeOo Mon
Lin Thet Naung
Khine Min Tun

