

CIVIC EDUCATION IN MYANMAR: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

*OBSERVATIONS FROM GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN SHAN,
KAYAH AND RAKHINE STATES*

December 2013



INTRODUCTION

My top priority is for people to understand that they have the power to change the things themselves"

Aung San Suu Kyi

This report is published as part of the „**Together for Burma: Civic Education**“ project carried out by the Other Space Foundation in Burma/Myanmar between April – November 2013. The activities carried out within the framework of this project took place mainly in Shan, Kayah and Rakhine states.

The project has been co-financed by the Polish development cooperation programme 2013 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, Programme “Support for Democracy”.

We have been working in Burma/Myanmar since 2012. The goal of this report is to identify the biggest challenges and opportunities for civic education in Rakhaine and Shan regions based on our experience and observations.

People of Rakhaine State, second poorest state after Chin, both Muslims and Buddhist, are suffering from the effects of current religious and ethnic clashes which erupted also as a result of government discriminatory policies, exploitative human and natural resources practice and manipulation stimulating religious hatred.

In September 2012 we have organised one month human rights school for over 20 Rakhine youth activists. In October 2012, we offered a conflict resolution training to more experienced Rakhine activists. During this workshop they identified the poor education system and absolute lack of participatory methods of teaching as some of the root causes of violence in Rakhine state.

In 2013 we decided to continue our work in Rakhine. Drawing from the past experience, this time we focused on working with government and monastic school teachers, civil society educators. We introduced them to modern, participatory methods of education, which they are now implementing.

Shan State is home to more than 20 ethnic groups, with many mountainous parts, which are hard to reach. For decades it has been an arena for fights between ethnic armed groups and Burmese Army (*Tatmadaw*). Civilians were and continue to be affected by exploitation by both sides and have often become a target for human trafficking, forced labour and displacement.

In September 2012, Polish-Burma Solidarity has organised a one-month human rights school for youth activists from Pa-Oh ethnic group, which took place in Taunggyi.

Its participants stated that similar education initiatives should be accessible to other ethnic minorities. During our work in the region we have learnt that most local civil society groups rarely cooperate with each other. They are often distrustful of other ethnic minorities and there is no space and platform for them to

change this. Recognising the importance of 2015 Election and Myanmar Census in 2014 we decided to bring together pro-democracy activists and educators representing 7 ethnic groups working in different parts of Shan and Kayah states who participated in the “TOT and Electoral Education” training.

The results of the activities briefly described above are discussed further in this report. It has been prepared by Martyna Gacek and Aleksandra Kłosińska. In case of any questions or comments please contact us on birma@przestrzen.art.pl

The Other Space Foundation Is a Polish NGO founded in 2006 as a continuation of activities realised by a group of social activists. Our mission is to support democracy, human rights, multicultural and tolerance. We aim at opening unconventional spheres of social life to cultural and artistic initiatives and social projects generating real changes in different regions of the world.

We carry on our struggle for the respect for human rights focused mainly on the situation in Tibet and China but also in Russia, Myanmar or North Africa. The common characteristic of our activities for human rights is involvement of ordinary people in their implementation. We are deeply convinced that everyone can contribute to gain higher levels of human rights observance, even in remote countries.

We run all of our projects with a direct involvement of local partners in every phase of planning: from the idea, through implementation, to evaluation. Our goal is a genuine cooperation, jointly conceived response to real needs of specific communities, rather than transmitting Polish experiences often inadequate to local conditions.



The Project is co-financed by the Polish development cooperation programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland
Programme “Support for Democracy”



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SECTION 1

PROMOTING PARTICIPATIVE EDUCATION IN RAKHINE STATE

Rakhine state (Arakan) is the second poorest region in Myanmar (UNDP). Since the sectarian violence erupted in June 2012, the access to education amongst communities living in Rakhine state has decreased and in many cases, children have no chance to study. According to UNHCR the illiteracy rate in Maungdaw in Northern Rakhine state is 83.8% and amongst women it is as high as 90%. This report is not dedicated to analyse the situation as a whole but rather to share the observations that the Other Space Foundation has gathered since June

Despite the immense increase in interest of international organisations and non-governmental organizations in the region, provoked by the escalation of conflict, most of the efforts are understandably focused on humanitarian aid. However, there is an immense need to address the educational needs of local communities (both in the IDP camps as well as outside), which has to be a part of long-term strategy to address the root causes of the conflict. As one of the local activists involved in civic education put it:

The aim of this section is to share the experience of activists, teachers and educators whose voice to a large extent remains unheard 2012 when it started to operate in Rakhine state as well as to share

the experience of activists, teachers and educators whose voice to a large extent remains unheard. The motto of Myanmar education is *“Building a modern developed nation through education”* – but in places like Rakhine state this seems like wishful thinking that could not be further from the truth.

“There’s so much resources and financial aid being poured here, but no one really asks us or consults us on what’s the most effective way of spending it”.

In his 2012 speech President Thein Sein pledged support for education and promised to seek foreign expertise to lift its standards to international levels. The government has increased the country’s education budget from \$340 million to \$740 million this year, and has begun to implement wide-ranging reforms.

However, in poorest areas, especially in ethnic states there has been virtually no change and such pledges are perceived more as a show-off for international community before 2015 elections.

“There’s no healthcare here, no school, no education and no future”

Resident of Bawdupah IDP camp near Sittwe



In our work with communities living in Rakhine state, one of the common views shared by representatives of all communities we talked to, was to underline the lack of access to education as one of the root causes of the conflict. Moreover, even in cases where educational institutions are present; their quality is extremely low.

The knowledge about pedagogy is virtually non-existent and the teaching methods are very out-dated.

“Teaching is understood as making students repeat the same thing over and over, there is no space for creativity”

participant of the “Modern Education” workshop in May 2013

No access to education

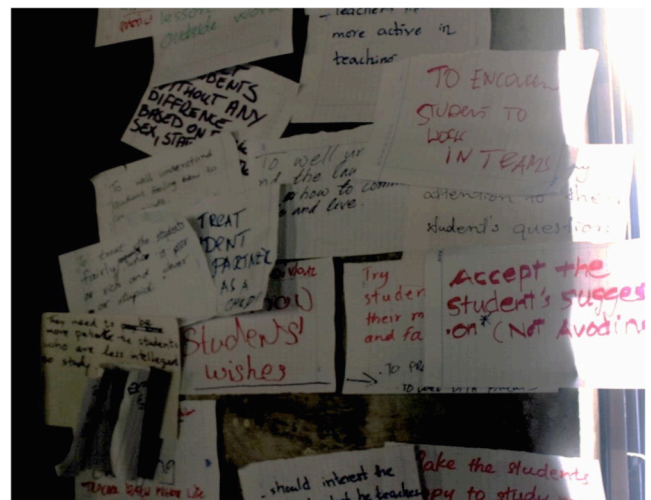
Lack of quality education

Following the “Anatomy of Conflict” training conducted for a group of Rakhine activists in October 2012 when **lack of access to quality education** was identified as one of the crucial problems in the region, “Modern Education” programme was designed.

During the “Modern Education” workshop conducted in May 2013, the participants have defined the biggest structural problems in Rakhine state as well as challenges they face as teachers/educators in their work.

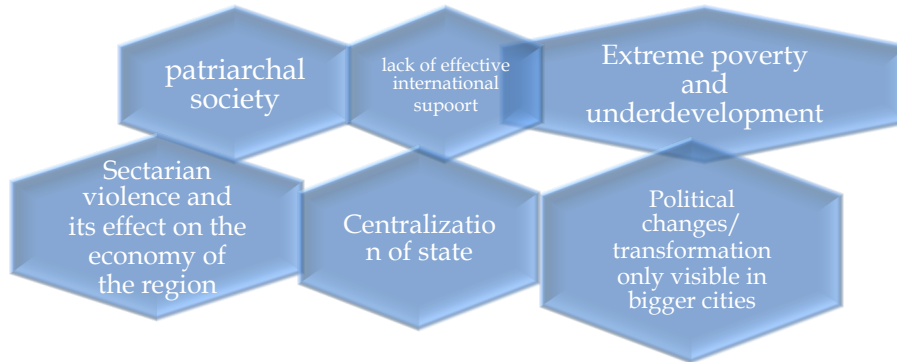
The main purposes of “Modern Education” were:

- ❖ **Increase student participation** through providing a group of Rakhine teachers/educators with tools to improve their methodology
- ❖ **Provide teachers/educators with access to materials / expertise** of the “Educational Board for Rakhine” composed of a group of 8 professionals from Poland and Azerbaijan who were involved in reforming educational practices in their countries
- ❖ Support a group of teachers/ educators from Rakhine state in creating their own **educational initiative** based on the principles of student participation for the local community.

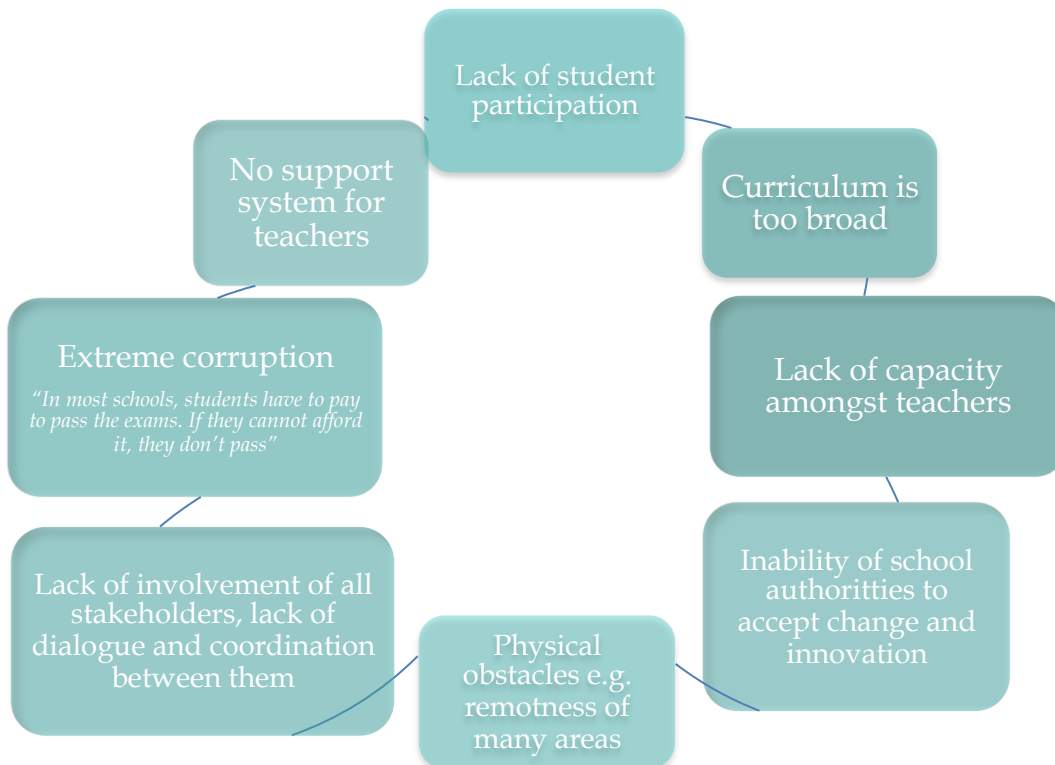


Photos: Working together to create “Rakhine Educator’s” Principles. Full list of Principles available on <http://projektbirma.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/manifesto2.pdf>

MAIN STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED BY “MODERN EDUCATION” WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS



MAIN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN RAKHINE IDENTIFIED BY “MODERN EDUCATION” WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS



Below few of the problems faced by the educators /teachers in Rakhine state are discussed in more detail



Lack of creativity and innovation

"I try to engage students because for me creativity is very important. In Myanmar, kids are taught to learn everything by heart. During the exam they don't actually know what they are writing, they just write the answer they have learnt by heart. In one of the exams they are usually asked to describe their family. Once, I wanted to make them little bit more creative, so I changed the question to "describe your day". I can do it because it was in a private English school, the teachers from government schools wouldn't even be able to change the exam question. I got 30 answer sheets with "My family is....."

Aung, 27, English teacher

Teachers are often uneducated themselves. Frequently, student participation is virtually non-existent. In many cases, school authorities are scared to contradict 'the system' and innovation is perceived as something pejorative and *Innovation is perceived as something pejorative* change is unwelcomed, which is a problem for younger teachers. Introducing creativity-stimulating methods as basic as *working in groups, brainstorming* is often a huge



"I tried to stimulate students' creativity. I asked them to work in groups, play some educational games during class. I was told off by the principal, because it was perceived as a waste of time. Students are just supposed to read the curriculum over and over and learn it by heart. Often not only they don't understand a word of what they are reading but also the teachers don't understand it"

Nang, 28,
teacher at a government school.



Broad Curriculum / Conservative selection of taught subjects

Broad and inflexible design of the curriculum is just one of the factors constraining creativity amongst both teachers and students. Another culprit is the selection of subjects. The range subjects taught at school does not provide any space for inspiration. In many schools, there are virtually no classes, which facilitate co-operation and interaction between students such as sport, art or music classes.

"I heard that in other countries many schools have their own sport teams. I thought I should try to organise a team at our school too. It went great, I can really see how that stimulates team work. We normally play football in an unorganized way, but if you organise it as an extra-curricular exercise for students, it's really great for teamwork and you can see the effects in the class. The only reason I could do it, is because I have my own English school. In a governmental school there's no such opportunities.

Aung, English school owner

"It's really cool that we can be part of a team. All of the kids in Sittwe normally play football but this is like being part of a real team

Zaw, 17, student



LOCAL EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE “LEARN ENGLISH - PARTICIPATE”

As a result of the “*Modern Education*” workshop carried out in May 2013, a group of local teachers/educators have established a educational initiative for local community “Learn English – Participate”

Every month, 7 teachers who participated in the “*Modern Education*” workshop go to a local monastic school to:

- ✚ Teach a group of kids using participative methods
- ✚ Spread the participative methods of teaching through allowing the local teachers to observe the classes



“ I really like to see the way these teachers are working. The kids seem really happy. I want to learn more about that way of teaching, it’s the first time I see it”.

Soe, 28, Mon monastic school teacher, Sittwe

“It’s great because we get a chance to practice participative methods of teaching. In the government school I work at, I’m not allowed to use games and other creative methods. Here, I see kids really love it and they want to have more classes”.

Nang, 27, teacher at a government school



CHALLENGES FOR OPERATING IN RAKHINE STATE

Attempting to list all challenges encountered when operating in Rakhine state would be an immense task.

Moreover, we believe that often they depend not only on the area (*e.g. cities versus villages, Northern Rakhine versus the South etc.*) and scope of operation (*e.g. humanitarian aid versus development aid*)

but also on the organisational and individual approach.

Consequently, rather than presenting a comprehensive list of challenges that might be encountered, we decided to include a subjective list based on our experience and divided into two sections: operational and psychological.

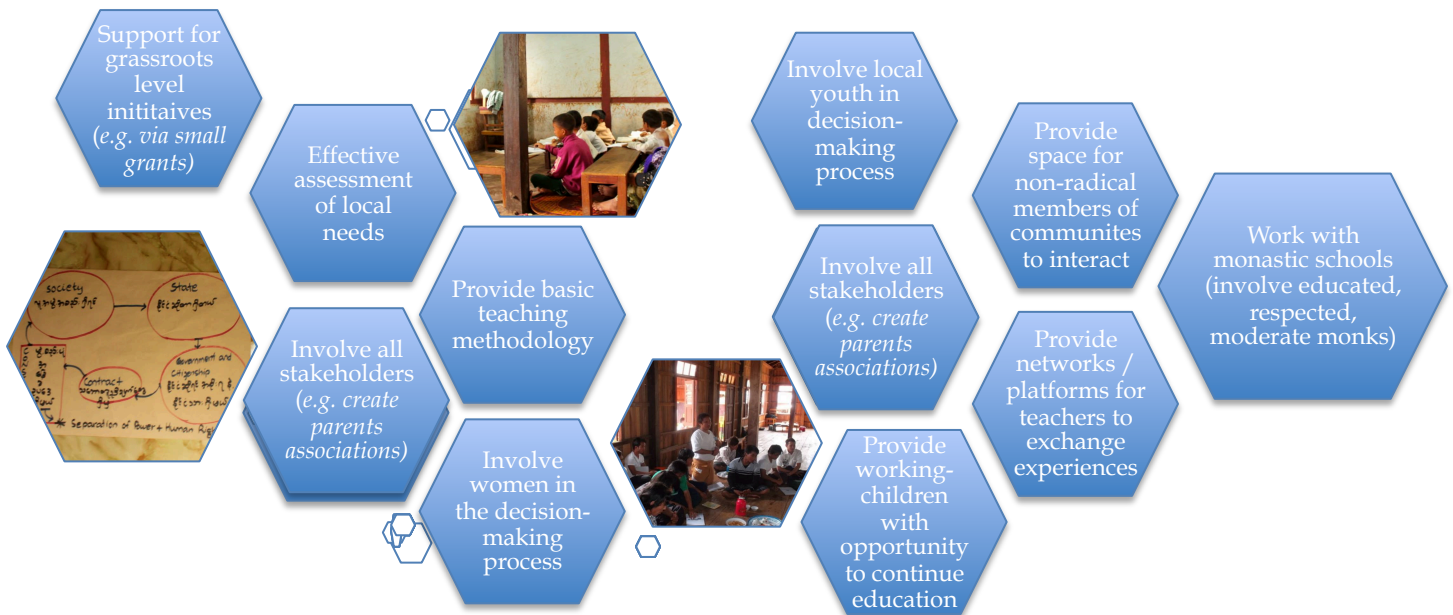
Operational / technical
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transportation• Security• Lack of co-operation of the local authorities• Chronic underdevelopment

Psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sensitivity about history and sense of social injustice• Lack of capacity• Distrust against outsiders aggravated by years of '<i>Burmanisation</i>'• Growing radicalisation• Growing '<i>dehumanization</i>' of Muslims due to the separation of communities• Defensiveness and fear of being manipulated• Pejorative perception of human rights seen as the "<i>terror of international organisations</i>"• Fear of ostracism/ exclusion (<i>e.g. for promoting dialogue between communities</i>)• International actors perceived as taking sides• Lack of space for dialogue between communities

OPPORTUNITIES/ RECCOMENDATIONS FOR OPERATING IN RAKHINE STATE

The list of recommendations for reforming educational system in Myanmar as a whole (which also applies to Rakhine) and is immense and has been proposed in many publications.

Consequently, we have decided to focus on the list of recommendations particularly emphasized by the teachers/ educators who have participated in “Modern Education”.



SECTION 2

WORKING TOGETHER FOR ELECTORAL EDUCATION IN SHAN STATE

For decades, ethnic minorities of Shan State have been affected by internal armed conflicts between opposition non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the government's forces. Shan State, the biggest region of Myanmar is located in the central- eastern part of the country. It is a home to many ethnicities including Shan, Pa-oh, Danu , Intha, Taung Yoo, Lahu, Kachin, Wa. The region is primarily rural with the urban capital in Taunggyi.

For decades, it has been an arena of fights between Tatmadaw (Myanmar Armed Forces)and NSAGs, and in areas outside the central government's control between different NSAGs themselves; their headquarters are often located in mountain areas close to the border, which makes them hard to reach.

Despite recent signature of ceasefire agreements by President's Thein Sein government, many civilians of Shan State continue to be affected by oppression and violence. Moreover, most ethnic groups are divided between themselves (e.g. White and Red Pa-Oh). Moreover, local communities are affected by economic effects of development (e.g. land grabbing and unsustainable extraction of resources).

Many tribes are isolated in villages tucked away in the hills, where they are susceptible to violence from various armed groups that want to maintain their power and control over natural resources. Years of civil war and specific geographical setting continue to contribute to displacement, corruption, human and drug trafficking and reinforce the pathology of political and armed leaders such as sexual exploitation and slavery.

Civil society does not *fell represented* by their ethnic leaders. Moreover, years of 'divide and rule' policies implemented by military junta in ethnic areas with the aim of segregation and division contributed to the aggravation of *prejudices and nationalism among ethnicities*.

'We, ethnic people are divided and there's no common understanding even in our own Pa-Oh community. Every ethnicity have their own interests but even if we cannot be united, we should try work together for a better future'

Khit , 25, youth activist

“There is a disagreement between the political party and the community. We are now discussing the issues. It is essential to negotiate to get [agreement] from both sides.

U Tin Hlaing and Daw Yu Hlaing, Justice Movement for Community.

Quotes from the article “Acrimony Over Intha Day” written as part of the journalist trip conducted within the framework of this project. Full article available on <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/8122-acrimony-ahead-of-intha-day.html>.

‘Other groups make fun of the Intha, saying we can only plant tomatoes and beans, and sleep so much that our heads are flat. It is high time that all Intha work together for the development of the community. We want other ethnic groups to see that the Intha are united ‘

YOUTH ACTIVISM IN SHAN STATE

According to UNESCO nearly 90% people in the region between the age of 15 and 26, had less than two years of formal schooling.

Distance, lack of qualified teachers, language barrier (teachers usually cannot speak in ethnic languages), and high education cost are the main reasons for low school attendance. Taunggyi University is the main academic institution in the region. Despite the low quality education and no social offer for students, Taunggyi is the center of youth activism. Many students set up organisations involved in community work in their ethnic areas, which provide free education service and are dedicated

to protecting local culture and tradition.

So far one of the few initiatives, which serves as an integration and experience exchange platform for members of youth from different ethnic groups is the International Youth Day in Taunggyi.



Many youth leaders have received critical thinking, human rights and democracy trainings at Thai-Burma border. However, despite their skills and strong desire to participate in political transition, they are often **ignored by ethnic leaders or local authorities**.

Losing valuable social capital

The need to provide civic education to local community seems to be a gap gradually and to a large extent successfully filled by youth organisations that undertake the task of educating and 'test' how much they can challenge the system.

During our first project carried out in Taunggyi, thirty young Pa-Oh pro-democracy activists from different parts of Shan state participated in a month-long democracy and human rights training "Civic College", which until now has been the only longer term human rights school that took place in Taunggyi.

As demonstrated in the evaluation of the project, for over 80 % of participants it was the first time to hear about civic education, human rights and Myanmar political system. Most of them expressed their willingness to share knowledge with their community. At the same time they expressed the desire for more theoretical and practical knowledge about TOT (Training of Trainers) and civic education.

The victory of the opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD) in 2012 by-elections gave hope for change. But the real test of government's commitment to democratic reforms will take place during 2015 elections. In the country where last free and fair elections took place in 1990, for the civil society, especially in the remote areas the link between free and fair elections, political participation, human rights and democracy is often blurred. Many are still afraid to engage in any political activity including electoral education. Moreover, many people in rural areas have no awareness of the fact that there is upcoming elections, which will be held in 2015.

I didn't know we have any rights. We are not taught any social science and we are not allowed to study politics.

This was the first time, I heard anything about civic education"

Win, "Civic College" student

The need to raise electoral awareness is particularly indispensable in ethnically diverse Shan State where there is a big risk of lack of representation of smaller ethnic minorities

WHAT WE DID?

→ Following consultations with grassroots level organisations from Taunggyi, Aung Pan, Nyaung Shwe and Loikaw, 11-days **TOT and Electoral Education** training was organised for activists representing 7 ethnic groups. The aim was to provide them with knowledge, skills and encourage them to implement electoral education trainings in their local communities as part of Citizen Committees

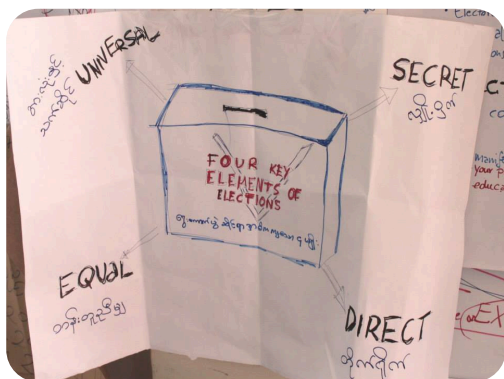
TOT and Electoral Education training for local civic educators representing 7 minorities

→ 7 local **"Citizen Committees"** representing 7 ethnic minorities (Pa-O, Shan, Danu, Intha, Kayan, Kayo, Thaug Yoo) have been formed and have conducted workshops concerning free and fair elections for their communities in Shan and Kayan States between June and October 2013.

7 "Citizen Committees"

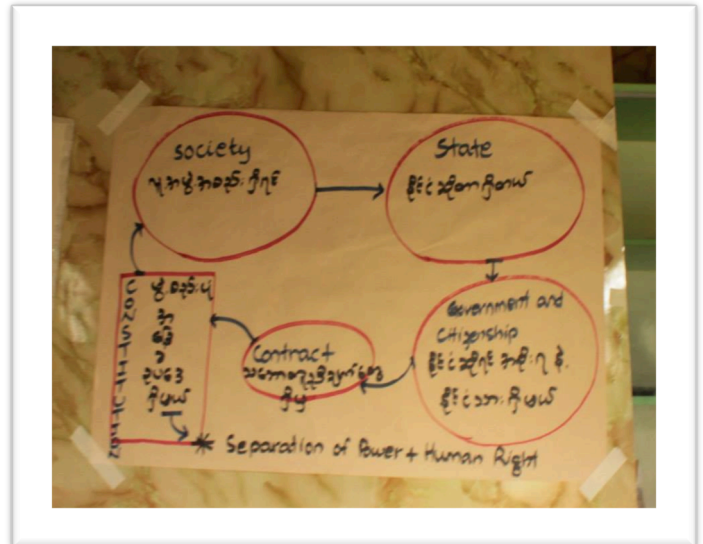
→ Working together towards the goal of promoting electoral awareness, participants have created one of the *first electoral pamphlets before 2015 elections*. **"Why is your vote important"** is available in four different languages.

"Why is your vote important" electoral education pamphlet available in four different languages



MAIN OBJECTIVES OF “TOT AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION” TRAINING

- 1 Begin the process of preparation for 2015 Elections and promoting democratic change in Shan and Kayah States through the electoral involvement of CBOs representing 7 ethnic groups
- 2 Strengthen participants’ public speaking skills and improve their capacity as trainers and community leaders
- 3 Provide space for dialogue between minorities and opportunity to get to know each other
- 4 Raise knowledge about different ethnicities in Shan and Kayah State and reduce mutual prejudice and fear of each other
- 5 Establish the network of electoral and civic monitoring committees with the aim of co-operation and providing the platform for sharing experience in electoral education (all participants actively involved in the design of “Why is your vote important”) pamphlet)



MAIN CHALLENGES FOR CIVIC AND ELECTORAL EDUCATION IN SHAN AND KAYAH STATES

General challenges for civic education

- Isolation and lack of space for a dialogue
- Fear of politics
- Lack of capacity and knowledge amongst many CBO members
- Lack of sustainability in the activities carried out by INGOs
- Lack of women participation
- Ongoing violence and lack of sustainable peace agreements

Challenges for electoral education

- Lack of electoral awareness
- Lack of clear electoral legislation
- Doubts surrounding the preparation and implementation of 2014 nationwide Census
- Post-conflict areas continue to be affected by violence
- Influence of cronies

✚ **ISOLATION AND LACK OF SPACE FOR DIALOGUE**

Decades of violence, abuse of power, extreme population diversification, geographically difficult travel obstacles and 'rule and divide' policy discourage ethnic groups from common position towards the government, but also from dialogue with each other.

"People in the same township tend to live in ethnically isolated communities and often don't know too much about their neighbours from different ethnic minorities" Arkar, 24 years old Bamar from Inlay region.

** Note from the TOT training: during the training Intha participants from Inlay, met people from Taung Yoo and Kayo ethnic minorities for the first time. Lack of interaction with other minorities causes distrust and hampers cooperation*

“For local CBOs, one of the biggest challenges is the lack of cooperation between organisations and the fact that sadly they don’t understand why cooperation is important.”
Sai Bo Bo, Yoma Ahlinn organisation, Taunggyi

“At the beginning of 2014 we will open ‘Network and Information Center’ in Taunggyi . It will provide safe space for cooperation and dialogue between CBOs from different ethnicities and regions of Shan State.”

Ko So, Yoma Ahlinn organisation, Taunggyi

“A major challenge for our work is the lack of cooperation between local pro-democratic groups, local authorities, and political parties representing the interests of ethnic people”

Khun Win Oo, Kaung Rwai Social Action Network organisation, Taunggyi

✚ FEAR OF POLITICS

Many people continue to be extremely scared to talk about politics and politicians. In the past, no longer than 2 years ago, the slightest sign of civil activism such as possession of books written by Aung Aan Suu Kyi could be a cause for punishment and imprisonment. As a result, many people, especially in remote areas, continue to perceive participation in civic education initiatives as a potentially dangerous activity.

“ Many of people here, in the province, are still deeply afraid. Situation in Yangon or Mandalay is changing, but in Shan state we still don’t feel secure. Even despite the fact, that in bigger cities like Taunggyi there’s no ongoing fights but still the same people who have oppressed us in the past are here. For us, their presence is like a message ‘be careful, I am watching you’. We are afraid but we don’t even know of what. Personally, I also have fear, which I don’t entirely understand - maybe I’m afraid that transformation fails? We need to break free from the fear and work for the development of our community”

activist and a respected member of local community

✚ **LACK OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION**

Despite the fact that the leader of the opposition in Myanmar is a woman, it is rare for women to be leaders of CBOs in Shan State. Moreover, it can be challenging to encourage women to participate in trainings that last longer than a day. Often a man will recruit other men instead of women. Nevertheless, gender-related issues should not be automatically qualified as discrimination but should be analysed on a case-to-case basis taking into account socio-cultural factors.

✚ **POST-CONFLICT AREAS CONTINUE TO BE AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE & INFLUENCE OF CRONIES**

As it was mentioned above, many parts of Shan State are post-conflict areas where for decades justice had been administered by guns. There is an ongoing presence of armed groups and influential cronies, often engaged in drugs trade, human and gun trafficking. As a result, today militia and ethnic party leaders are often in opposition to members of local communities struggling for social justice and democracy. For instance, in May 2013, members of Pa-Oh National Army (PNA) had more than 50 National League for Democracy (NLD) members at gunpoint following a land dispute in the area that locals claim was illegally grabbed by militia (more info: <http://www.dvb.no/news/armed-militia-forces-nld-members-to-resign-over-land-row/28345>).

“We should also start to work with armed groups such as Shan State Army South and North. They need to understand that they cannot decide on behalf of the people any longer. People have to decide their own fate without guns.”

Sai Bo Bo, Yoma Ahlinn organisation, Taunggyi

CHALLENGES FOR ELECTORAL EDUCATION

✚ LACK OF ELECTORAL AWARENESS

According to a survey conducted in Taunggyi by the participants of the “TOT and Electoral Education Workshop” out of 179 people, 45% of people do not know how to vote. Moreover, they are not aware of what is the main goal of the elections and how are they related to their lives.

During open interviews carried out by the evaluator with six out of seven Civic Committees, all of them admitted that majority of the participants of their workshops, including activists, did not know that next elections will take place in 2015.

“We were shocked to see how low the knowledge about good governance and elections is. Most people could not find any link between election results and their everyday live. They thought that as the ethnic people they have no influence for election results”

Sai Win, Colorless Zone organisation, Aung Pan. Sai shared his observations with the evaluator following an electoral workshop organised by Aung Pan Civic Committee

When we conducted the electoral survey in Taunggyi, it was noticeable that many people are still afraid of discussing politics. I have plan to organise a workshop to deal with this fear of politics.

Participant of Tot and Electoral Workshop, quote from an anonymous evaluation questionnaire.

Full results of the electoral survey are available on : http://projektbirma.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/survey_results.jpg

✚ LACK OF CLEAR ELECTORAL LEGISLATION

“I don’t want to have the bitter experience like that of the 2010 elections. I will make my commission members skillful and will educate the people ahead of the 2015 elections” Union Electoral Commission Chairman Tin Aye about the lack of decision by Parliament about the electoral system

(<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/election-10112013181409.html>)

So far, there is a lack of clear legislation concerning upcoming 2015 elections including party registration law. Moreover, the Parliament is still debating Myanmar's future electoral system between 'electoral system, under which candidates who receive the highest number of votes are elected, and the proportional representation system, in which the number of seats won by a party is proportional to the number of votes received. Arguably, proportional voting system would allow for a fairer representation of smaller ethnic parties.

However, ruling Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP) together with opposition the National League for Democracy (NLD) party are against any changes of current first-past-the-post system prior to the 2015 general elections.

Most of the participants of TOT and Electoral Education training found the lesson about two electoral systems as one of the most substantial and interesting to them. Almost all of them stated that they will prefer a form of proportional system, which would be designed to protect smaller ethnic parties from manipulation by bigger ones.

I want to understand differences between two electoral systems to know which one is better for us, ethnic people. We are in the minority so I hope that our civilian government will remember that small ethnic group should have chance to be represented among majority.

Aung Kyaw, 29, TOT and Electoral Education workshop participant

2014 CENSUS

A nation-wide population census will take place between 30 March and 10 April 2014. It will use 100,000 school teachers as census takers. No official population count has been held since 1983 census. The 2014 census is deemed as an important step in preparation for the 2015 general elections. Key challenges for census includes little awareness about the population about the census,

difficulty in reaching areas in remote mountains or areas where active fighting is taking place (Northern Shan State), lack of involvement of local organisations , lack of ability to speak ethnic languages.

(http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/2013/09/27/8051/unfpa_staff_to_rally_public_support_for_2014_myanmar_census/)

RESULTS



1. CIVIC COMMITTEES

As a result of the “TOT and Electoral Education” training carried out in May 2013, after returning to their communities, the participants have formed “Civic Committees”, which represented 7 ethnic minorities (Pa-Oh, Shan, Danu, Intha, Kayan, Kayo, Taung Yoo). Between June and October 2013 the Committees have conducted workshops in different areas of Shan and Kayah State, with the aim of educating local community about basic principles of democracy, free and fair elections as well as parliamentary systems. Moreover, due to the very high interest of local community, the activists plan to expand their activities in the coming months in order to raise awareness about the upcoming 2015 elections.



“My initial plan after attending this TOT was to give training back to others. Our community has very little experience in voting. I was very happy to share the knowledge we got with the local people who do not know too much about voting”

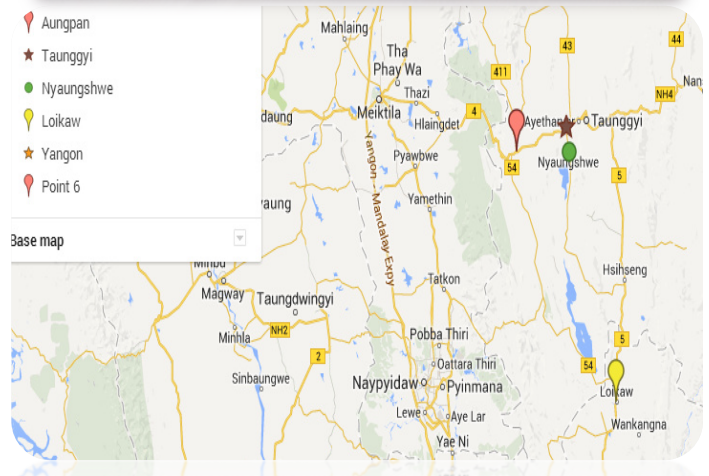
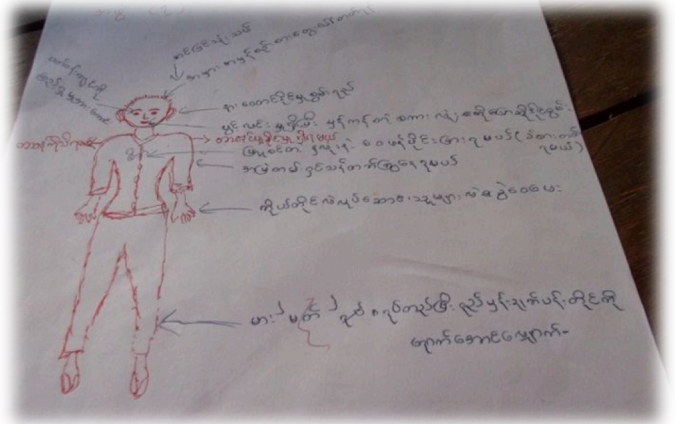
Mu Alice, Kayan New Generation Youth

“There’s many reasons why I want to share this knowledge. Because of the government, in our community, people were forced to be blind and deaf. I would like to share the knowledge I gained to open their eyes and ears so they can grasp the truth”

Yu Hlaing Thin,
Justice Movement for
Community, Innlay Region

Students were our main target group. Our main goal was not only to provide them with electoral education but also with TOT skills, so they could later educate others. First part of our workshops was about how to be a good trainer. Later we focus on the definition of democracy, good citizenship, our Constitution, elections and electoral system. We based our agenda on "Why is your vote important" handbook. The hardest part was when students asked us for whom they should we vote in 2015. We explained that as educators we cannot give them answers and we have to remain impartial.

Khun Thun Kyi, Kaung Rwai Social Action Network, Taunggyi



Areas where "Civic Committees" have worked. Map generated from Google Maps.

2. CIVIC NETWORK

After "Civic Committees" have finished their work, some of them decided to create "Civic Network"- a monitoring group formed in order to scrutinise the activities of current MPs in their townships in Shan State. Members of the network will monitor and prepare profiles of MPs and share their observations with local community.

"We plan to work with Intha, Pa-Oh, Kayan and Shan committees. Aung Pan is under Kalaw Township administration which is represented by four MPs, 3 from ruling party USDP and one from NLD. We want to monitor their work and share information with our network. During the campaign in 2015 we will prepare politicians' profiles and distribute them together with "Why is your vote important" pamphlet in villages, pagodas, tea shops. We hope that our Citizens Network will cover five districts in Shan and one in Kayah State". Eain Da, Danu Civic Committee



3. “WHY IS YOUR VOTE IMPORTANT” PAMPHLET

During the “TOT and Electoral Education” workshop, the participants have created electoral pamphlets in preparation for the 2015 elections (expected to be the first free general election since 1990). The aim of the small handbook is to educate the voters regarding their duties and responsibilities of good citizen, why and how to vote, how to monitor elections in order to defend from vote-rigging and what are the basic differences between First-Past-the-Post and Proportional electoral systems. Handbooks were translated from Burmese to Pa-Oh, Kayan and Shan languages. “Civic Committees” have used the pamphlet in order to conduct a series of electoral education workshops in their local communities.



“During our workshop we used the handbooks and they were very helpful. We distributed 100 copies but we ask for more. In our opinion everybody should have access to this book”

Rose Kyaw, Kayan Committee

*The Burmese version of the “Why is your vote important” handbook is available here
<http://projektbirma.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/why-your-vote-is-important.pdf>*

OPPORTUNITIES/ RECCOMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING CIVIC EDUCATION ACTIVITIES IN SHAN STATE

The goal of this section is to draw a short picture of multiple challenges that might appear when operating in civic education sector in Shan State on the basis of the experience gained during the implementation of “Electoral Education”

programme. Furthermore, we would like to provide a concise list of recommendations for local, national and international organisations operating in the region.



SECTION 3 VOICE OF SOCIAL CHANGE



“Voice of Social Change” was an educational forum, carried out within the framework of “Together for Burma: Civic Education” project. It was designed as an experience- exchange platform for 30 representatives of CBOs from Shan, Kayah, Rakhine state and Yangon (the selection of participants was based on the regions where Other Space Foundation (FIP) has conducted its activities). The aim of VoSC was to give the activists and educators an opportunity to meet each other, discuss challenges they face and the



they way they deal with them and to make their voice heard in Myanmar’s biggest city. Over 10 ethnic groups representing more than 10 organisations have participated in the event that took place at Yangon’s Pansodan Scene between 10-12 October 2013.

“Voice of Social Change” was divided into 3 main parts:

- *General facilitation session*, overseen by Polish specialists, Elzbieta and Zbigniew Czwartosz from the University of Warsaw, who have over 20 -years of experience in conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation who have shared their methodology with local facilitators, together discussed **collaborative facilitation method** and later assisted them in the facilitation process
- *Three thematic sessions*, lead by local facilitators who were working using the **collaborative facilitation method**.

- Participants were divided into 3 thematic groups, which had the aim of developing specific 'plans of action' concerning education in the local context.
 - a. "Women Empowerment" led by Zin Mar Aung
 - b. "Civic Education" led by Kyaw Hsan Hlaing
 - c. "Media Literacy" led by Shunn Lei and ChamTha Kyaw
- *Presentation of Accomplishments*: open presentation of "plans of action" presented by the working groups for various stakeholders (NGOs, INGOs, media, academic researchers, politicians, civil society).

Main working method used during the VoSC was "Collaborative facilitation method" designed and introduced by Ela& Zbyszek Czwartosz.

Method includes three main stages:

STAGE I Facilitators asked the participants to brainstorm on the problems concerning the theme of their group. In this phase participants offered their ideas, opinions or information. Later, facilitators together with the participants organised the information and narrow down the problems to three main ones. In the last phase of Stage I, facilitators had selected portions of information that people agreed on and closed this stage with diagnose of one problem.

STAGE II First, facilitators helped participants to reach agreement in finding solution for a chosen problem by listing all the solutions applicable to a particular problem. Later she/he asked them to narrow down solutions to three. At the last stage, all needed to agree on one solution and brainstorm together about the implementation (**STAGE III**).

Elzbieta Czwartosz - professor of Social Psychology at the University of Warsaw. In the period 1990-1993, coordinator of educational programs "Partners for Democratic Change" in Central and Eastern Europe. Founding member of the European Network for Conflict Resolution in Education. Expert in restorative justice and mediation. Has been conducting conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation trainings for over 20 years.

Zbigniew Czwartosz - psychologist, mediator and negotiator. Director of the Centre of Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at the University of Warsaw (Institute of Applied Social Sciences) and member of the Civic Council for Alternative Dispute Resolution at the Ministry of Justice of Poland. Together with his wife Elzbieta has trained over 1000 mediators around the world including officials, judges, representatives of international organisations, NGOs, business etc.

RESULTS OF GROUP WORK DURING “VOICE OF SOCIAL CHANGE”

→ WOMEN EMPOWEREMENT GROUP

‘What are the obstacles for women in Myanmar to lead the society?’

STAGE I: Participants diagnosed over 30 challenges and narrowed them down to three main problems: Custom /Culture, Education, Lack of law to protect women’s rights and equality. Later they agreed to focus on the main problem: *“Women do not have access to education and opportunities to develop their capacities and skills”*



STAGE II: Participants listed a number of solutions and narrowed them down to three:

- Advocacy on women rights and equality
- Educational initiatives for women
- Building women network in different parts of the country.

IMPLEMENTATION:

Organise and implement **“Women Empowerment Programme”**

Duration: 1 year (2014)

Activities:

- Development of Curriculum: *finished by February 2014*
- TOT trainings for women leaders in Shan, Kayah and Rakhine states : *March-May 2014*
- Women Empowerment Trainings in Shan, Kayah and Rakhine states: *June – October 2014*
- Evaluation, Follow up: *November-December 2014*

→ MEDIA GROUP

‘Why media are not informative for rural people?’

STAGE I: The group has diagnosed 26 challenges and narrowed them to three main problems: Biased media stimulates recent conflicts, People in rural areas do not have

access to information because it is expensive, People do not trust media. The group agreed to focus on the main problem: *“People in rural areas do not trust the media and they do not have access to information”*.

SOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION:

Organise and implement **“Education Programme for civil society and local media”**

Duration : 1 year (2014)

Activities:

- Media awareness trainings for civil society (for people in rural areas)
- Media skills trainings to civil society members who would like to become involved in media and disseminating reliable information in the region (local journalists, CBOs, students, authorities)



→ CIVIC EDUCATION GROUP

‘Why is civic education absent from the curriculum in government schools?’

STAGE I: The group has diagnosed more than 50 challenges and narrowed them down to three main problems: Lack of creativity in curriculum and lack of support for teachers who want to be creative; Lack of parents’ participation in children’s education; Poverty – schools, teachers, students, parents are too poor to become more engaged in educational activities

STAGE II: Participants listed a number of solutions and narrowed them down to:

- Training of teachers
- Vocational and livelihood training for youth

IMPLEMENTATION:

Organise and implement **“Educators Empowerment Programme”**

Duration: January ‘14 – December ‘15

Project areas: Rakhine state, Shan state , Yangon

Target group: students, teachers, parents, youth out of school

Objectives:

- Strengthen the quality of education for teachers and students
- Support education reform in Myanmar
- Narrow the gap between rural and urban education



Activities:

- Teacher capacity building training
- Vocational training for youth out of school
- Awareness raising for parents
- Student enrolment assistance
- Government advocacy

Future plan /sustainability:

regular monitoring, evaluation, transfer of responsibility to communities

“It’s crucial for the development of Myanmar that people from different groups have a chance to get to know each other but so far there’s very few opportunities for them to meet. For many of them Voice of Social Change’ was the first chance to work together and see that many of their problems are similar. International organisations and NGOs need to listen to local communities to know what they really want and what is their reality”

Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, Civic Education group facilitator

OVERALL RESULTS

- ❖ *Implementation of “Women’s Empowerment Programme” initiative.* Ms Zin Mar Aung, facilitator of women’s empowerment group is a former political prisoner and head of **the Rainfall group**, which encourages greater women’s participation in public life. Rainfall has established a network of women’s empowerment initiatives across the country. Participants of “Voice of Social Change” women’s empowerment group had been invited by Rainfall to participate and expand the network in their communities. Moreover, they will start to jointly work on the development of curriculum for the Women

"We plan to stay in touch with some of the participants and Zin Mar Aung who facilitated our work has given us the opportunity to become part of their network. We already know we will try to implement locally the series of trainings that we have designed during the meeting. It's a great chance for us",

Rose Kyaw from Loikaw



- ❖ ***Working together.*** Successful cooperation and dialogue despite the differences between the participants coming from various regions, **Reduce prejudices, both ethnical and gender.**

"As we are from different places, we have different ideas, perceptions, we operate in different conditions. But in the end we can communicate"

Quote from an evaluation questionnaire

- ❖ ***Strengthening presentation skills as well as participative and collaborative methods of work.***
- ❖ ***Women empowerment.*** All three groups have addressed problem of women discrimination and gender equality
- ❖ ***Establishing trust between different groups.*** Distrust and lack of confidence visible at the first day decrease during brainstorming session where voice of all where listen as the result of collaborative method technique.

"Voice of social change was a great opportunity for people from the countryside. In the future we need more events like this "

Quote from an evaluation questionnaire

SPECIAL THANKS TO

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Pandita Development
Institute

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Yaw Ying

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