INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN CENTRAL RAKHINE STATE: COLLABORATION AND PERSPECTIVES

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PDi-Kintha
Peace & Development Initiative
Education for Peace & Development

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

AA	Arakan Army
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
bar thar ye apwe	Religious organisation
CBO	Community-based organisation
CSO	Civil society organisation
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
FGD	Focus group discussion
GONGO	Government-organised non-governmental organisation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced persons
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
lu hmu ye apwe	Social organisation
LRC	Local Resource Centre
(L/N)NGO	(Local/national) non-governmental organisation
(UN) OCHA	(United Nations) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
parahita	Altruism/For the benefit of others[1]
PDI-Kintha	Peace and Development Initiative-Kintha
REC	Rakhine Ethnics Congress
Tatmadaw	Myanmar armed forces
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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[1] Griffiths translates the term *parahita* from its original Pali as "for the benefit of others" – reflecting the voluntarist and altruistic basis of social work. Griffith, M 2018, "Networks of Reciprocity: Precarity and Community Social Organisations in Rural Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, pp. 1-21.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report investigates the existing state of collaboration between national and international organisations in central Rakhine State, Myanmar. Researched between July and October 2019 with generous USAID funding, this project seeks to better understand perspectives and collaboration in order to make recommendations to all stakeholders.

The activity of various international humanitarian and development actors increased in central Rakhine State as a response to displacement of mostly Muslim communities in 2012. Since that time, public sentiment has often interpreted international actors as politically biased and as a contributor to the broader tensions. This has limited the space available for collaboration between international and national actors.

From late 2018 the escalating armed conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) against the Myanmar military (*Tatmadaw*) has changed the landscape for the humanitarian and service suppliers in Rakhine. Both international and national organisations have faced increased restrictions of movement and limited access to the areas affected by conflict.

This report is based on the responses of a significant number of organisational representatives working in Rakhine State, with 48 key informant interviews and five focus group discussions with staff from community-based organisations, civil society organisations, national and international non-governmental organisations, United Nations agencies and donor organisations.

KEY FINDINGS

- There is a severe and disabling lack of knowledge of and communication between national and international organisations working in Rakhine State which forms the basis for misunderstandings and mistrust. While collaboration has increased during 2018 and 2019, misperceptions and mistrust linger, and communication is rarely open. The worrying lack of awareness and the dynamic context means that improved relations may not be sustainable. Building relationships and trust now is essential. There are widespread presumptions among international agencies about Rakhine-based national organisations, including that they are unwilling to work with Muslim communities, are prejudiced or have low capacities are widespread. In many cases, these are based in unfamiliarity and hearsay rather than fact. This reflects and is driven by a lack of effective and shared mapping of national and international organisations.
- Between international and national organisations, the cultural gap and even the rationale for organisations' existence is a key barrier to collaboration. While international agencies cite humanitarian principles, many organisations in Rakhine were founded to support Rakhine communities and often have no knowledge of humanitarian principles.
- Unintentionally, the restrictive policies of government enable collaboration by forcing organisations to find new ways to access communities. While government stakeholders were not consulted during this research, respondents report different experiences with different levels and departments of government. While most government actors were perceived to be ambivalent about national-international collaboration, the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) was seen as most supportive despite little action to encourage collaboration to date.

- There is a surprising lack of knowledge regarding international agencies support to newly displaced communities. This reflects a lack of effective communication by international agencies.
- Organisational development is required for national organisations. International agencies can support this need. Efforts can look to local norms and best-practice of existing structures to ensure continued compatibility with the context, connectedness with communities, sustainability and effectiveness.
- Among international organisations, there is a lack of incentive structures to motivate localisation or the strengthening of civil society. Short-term contracts, financial interests and pressure to sustain the bureaucracy put the interest of international individuals and organisations before that of the community, deprioritising localisation and its long-term benefit to the community. In addition, the hierarchal nature of some international organisations and a sense of superiority among international staff identified by respondents means that localisation and interaction are not valued.
- While some donors clearly support localisation and actively engage and institute policies to strengthen civil society, others need to do a lot more to support national organisations in Rakhine.

ABOUT PDI–KINTHA

PDI-Kintha was founded in 2013 in response to outbreaks of communal violence in 2012 and the more organised anti-Muslim violence that followed. Initial projects and activities sought to address the deepening religious and ethnic divisions that followed.

Early on, we focused much of our energy on building trust not only between communities affected by conflict, but also between community members and our staff. Through sports, music, and art activities we sought to transform attitudes driving conflict, raise awareness of issues underlying the conflict, and build skills to transform conflict.

We work with conflict-affected populations from central and northern areas of Rakhine State; however, following military clearance operations in August 2017 that led to an exodus of over 740,000 people to Bangladesh and the subsequent barriers to access, we were forced to adjust the geographic focus area of some of our projects. We currently have over 50 staff members implementing peace building, education, and social cohesion activities in Sittwe, Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, and Mrauk Oo townships (of central and northern areas of Rakhine State) as of January 2019.

BACKGROUND

This report is interested in collaboration and perspectives between national and international civil society actors operating in central Rakhine State. It seeks to support a better understanding of current dynamics, to identify opportunities for meaningful and effective collaboration, and to raise issues for consideration.

The Rakhine State crisis represents a complex mix of entrenched issues. Strong perceptions of historical and contemporary marginalisation amongst all communities drive inter-communal tensions and armed insurgency. Multiple conflicts are taking place against a background of underdevelopment and high levels of poverty, evolving political factionalism as the 2020 elections approach, protracted displacement for Muslim communities, new displacement among Rakhine communities and ongoing human rights violations. The interaction of these long-standing and complex issues make the conflict environment multifaceted and strategic planning and programming difficult to understand and implement.

The presence of international humanitarian and development actors increased in central Rakhine State as a response to the displacement of mostly Muslim communities in 2012. Since then, public sentiment has often interpreted international actors as a conflict actor, politically biased and a contributor to the broader tensions. Organizations have struggled to understand, position themselves and communicate effectively relative to the range of conflict issues in Rakhine. This has limited the space available for collaboration between international and national actors.

From late 2018, the escalation of armed conflict between the Arakan Army (AA) against the Myanmar military (*Tatmadaw*) has changed the landscape for all national and international actors in Rakhine State. Both international and national organisations have responded to the needs of those displaced by this conflict – with the most recent figures from the Rakhine Ethnics Congress (REC) citing some 65,000 people currently displaced.[2] International and national actors alike have faced restricted access to the areas affected by conflict.

This research seeks to take a step back – to evaluate the state of collaboration between international agencies and national organisations and perspectives towards it against this rapidly changing context. A greater understanding of the context and dynamics between actors will support all stakeholders to identify opportunities for more effective programming for communities.

LOCALISATION: A GLOBAL AGENDA

Localisation has become an increasingly important part of the humanitarian and development world since the Grand Bargain emerged from the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. Yet while the

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[2] The Rakhine State government cites 30,061 displaced people. The discrepancy is due to the REC counting people beyond those in the sites listed by the government, such as those who have left their place of origin and are staying with friends or relatives in areas outside of collective displacement sites.

Grand Bargain signatories sought for 25% of all funding to go "as directly as possible" to local actors by 2020 – this was measured at just 3.6% at the end of 2017.[3]

A lack of effective collaboration will lead to gaps, overlap, inefficiencies and even tensions between different organisations. Add to this environment the competition for funding, visibility and staff, and the result is often poor service delivery for affected communities.

The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP)'s 2015 study of collaboration between humanitarian responders identifies certain advantages of collaboration; coverage, effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and appropriateness, connectedness and coherence.[4]

However, there are also key challenges and risks. Difference in mandate, language, cultural barriers and the time and resources needed to commit to coordination are considerations.[5]

Others argue against the idea of collaboration altogether. Power disparities between national and international actors and the involvement of donors who may represent states party to combat or with political interests can drive actors to compromise on their objectives or principles.[6]

Relations between national and international actors in Rakhine are clearly subject to many of these concerns.

DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY IN MYANMAR

In Myanmar, civil society groups organise around a range of issues and involve people from various ethnic, religious, class, gender and ideological backgrounds. This diversity means that defining civil society is not straightforward. For the purpose of this project, ethnic armed groups, political parties, private business and government organised non-governmental associations (GONGOs) are excluded from our understanding of civil society.

While civil society is often thought to be progressive, the existence of 'uncivil' civil society should not be forgotten – including those groups who promote hate speech or discrimination.[7]

Although the distinction between international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies is straightforward, there is considerable fluidity between the terms community -based organisation (CBO), civil society organisation (CSO) and non-governmental organisation (NGO) – the latter as understood here being interchangeable with national NGO (NNGO) or local NGO (LNGO).

Drawing on previous research on civil society in Myanmar, this research understands the following terms as such:

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[3] Development Initiatives 2018, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2018*, available from: <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GHA-Report-2018.pdf>, p. 51. "As directly as possible" is understood as funding passing through one intermediator.

[4] ALNAP 2015, *Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response*, Berlin.

[5] ALNAP 2015, *Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response*, Berlin, p. 16.

[6] ALNAP 2015, *Working Together in the Field for Effective Humanitarian Response*, Berlin, p. 17.

[7] Paung Sie Facility 2018, *Unlocking Civil Society,* p.10.

National NGOs operate across Myanmar's stage and regional boundaries, often in collaboration with international actors.

CSOs are project-orientated organisations limited in geographic scope and at a lesser scale than national NGOs.

Community-Based Organisations – encompassing social organisations (*lu hmu ye* apwe) and *parahita* organisations[8] – are typically small, grassroots organisations run by volunteer members.[9] The donors are often those who benefit from projects themselves – community members. Usually CBOs are formed and respond to particular issues (issue-based).

While exact numbers are unattainable, it is estimated that there are over 100 CBO or CSOs in Sittwe, and while Mrauk U is home to some dozen active CSOs.[10] *Parahita* organisations are much more numerous

Engagement between these organisations and faith-based organisations is outside of the scope of this project. However, this should not be taken to discount the substantial interaction between social organisations (*lu hmu ye apwe*) and religious organisations (*bar thar ye apwe*) in Myanmar,[11] including shared membership, leadership and collaboration.

The emerging literature on organisations in Myanmar suggests that under military rule (1962-2011) informal organisations were widespread but operated under strict limitations from the state.[12] Cyclone Nargis in 2008 was a key milestone for civil society. Communities mobilised to provide support to communities affected by the disaster and organisations created networks which remain important parts of Myanmar's civil society infrastructure up to today.[13] The formalization of organisations rapidly gained pace after restrictions were removed following the 2010 elections.

In 2018, it was estimated that *parahita* groups existed in almost 40% of communities in Myanmar, where their presence was found to support higher rates of resilience.[14] The presence of *parahita* groups in communities was found to decrease inequality, lower rates of borrowing for consumption, and result

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[8] Griffiths translates the term *parahita* from its original Pali as "for the benefit of others" – reflecting the voluntarist and altruistic basis of social organisations. Griffith, M 2018, "Networks of Reciprocity: Precarity and Community Social Organisations in Rural Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, pp. 1-21.

[9] Transnational Institute 2011, *Civil Society Gaining Ground: Opportunities for Change and Development in Burma*, available from: < https://www.tni.org/files/download/tni-2011-civilsocietygainingground-web2.pdf>.

[10] Local Resource Centre (LRC) 2019, *Mapping of Civil Society in Sittwe and Mrauk U, Rakhine State*, p. 6.

[11] A Griffith, M 2018, "Networks of Reciprocity: Precarity and Community Social Organisations in Rural Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, p. 9.

[12] McCarthy 2016a, p. 316. Cited in Griffith, M 2018, "Networks of Reciprocity: Precarity and Community Social Organisations in Rural Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, p. 10.

[13] Paung Sie Facility 2018, *Unlocking Civil Society and Peace in Myanmar: Opportunities, Obstacles and Undercurrents*, Yangon, available from: <http://www.paungsiefacility.org/uploads/3/0/1/8/30181835/civilsocietyreport_18oct_lowres.pdf>, p. 13.

[14] Griffith, M 2018, "Networks of Reciprocity: Precarity and Community Social Organisations in Rural Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, p. 1.

in less healthcare-related spending and debt overall. [15] These horizontal informal social support practices illustrate the multiplicity of actors providing public goods and welfare outside of the state. [16]

It has been noted that one goal of working for community welfare in Myanmar is to make one's community visible to the state, to the possession of *"collective virtues and disciplines which make it worthy to receive State benefits and grants"*.[17] At the same time, however, social welfare work can be interpreted as an act of subversion or protest – mobilising for effective service provision fills a political space which the state cannot or perhaps will not fill.[18]

The activity of more formalised national organisations, NGOs and CSOs, have also increased in Rakhine State since 2010. Cyclone Giri and the devastation it brought to central Rakhine State in 2010 prompted community groups to organise in response. Some of the groups involved in the response have since formalised and registered with authorities at various administrative levels.

Another milestone in civil society development as relayed by respondents was in 2012, when international organisations and UN agencies scaled up their activities in central Rakhine State in response to the 2012 violence and displacement.[19] The perceived bias towards Muslim communities during the response was motivation for ethnic Rakhine to form organisations and undertake activities focusing on Rakhine communities.

Civil society among Muslim communities in central Rakhine State is heavily restricted and poorly understood by outsiders. Alongside restricted access to citizenship and freedom of movement, Muslim communities are also not permitted to form organisations – whether in internment camps or in villages.

Respondents from both national and international organisations noted that following violence against international agencies' offices in 2014, there was an increased awareness among international agencies of the grievances of Rakhine communities and of the need to work with national and Rakhine organisations. In many cases, collaboration grew from there.

OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of this study have been;

- To better understand existing collaboration and perspectives between national and international organisations.
- To make recommendations to stakeholders in Rakhine State regarding collaboration.

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[15] Griffith, M 2018, "Networks of Reciprocity: Precarity and Community Social Organisations in Rural Myanmar," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, pp. 14-15.

[16] Very little of the research regarding CBOs or social organisations in Myanmar has been conducted in Rakhine State, however, and there is a need for in-depth research to better understand the *parahita* and CBO landscape in Rakhine.

[17] Griffiths 2018, *Modern Welfare and Traditions of Reciprocity:* Parahita *Organisations and Emergent Ecologies of Redistribution in Rural Myanmar*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Hull, p. 254.

[18] Ibid. Griffith notes, however, that no social organisation would call what they do politics or protest (p. 255).

[19] Others international agencies entered to respond to Cyclone Giri with a small number present earlier.

METHODS

This research has followed a qualitative approach in order to understand in-depth different experiences and perspectives.

The research design was guided by a research design methods and data collection workshop with PDI staff, who collected the data in and took part in the analysis.

The key research questions are;

- What is the current state of collaboration between national and international actors in Rakhine State?
- What are the challenges and benefits of this collaboration?
- What are the opportunities for collaboration in the future?

Data collection methods include key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Research tools were developed through a participatory process with the research team in the research design workshop.

Respondents include international and national staff of INGOs, UN agencies and donor organisations, and leaders or members of NGOs, CSOs and CBOs. Organisations have been selected to take part in KIIs and FGDs on the basis of; a) involvement in collaboration, b) un-involvement in collaboration, c) organisations from various sectors including: education, livelihoods, protection, environment, social cohesion and peace-building, and d) ensuring the inclusion of women's organisations.

During the data collection period, 48 KIIs and five FGDs were conducted. Two KIIs had two respondents, making a total of 50 KII respondents, of whom 38% were women. Data collection took place in urban Sittwe and Mrauk U. All respondents were promised anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

Following data collection, the research team participated in two half-day data analysis workshops. The research team worked through the course of two weeks to produce analysis through the identification of key themes, sub-themes and nuance from the KII and FGD data with support from the research consultant. The outcomes of the analysis and workshops were then merged with the analysis conducted by the research consultant and structured into the final research report.

KII Respondents

	National	International	Total	Male	Female	Total
CBO	5	-	5	4	1	5
CSO	8	-	8	6	2	8
UN	4	7	11	8	3	11
NGO	2	-	2	1	1	2
INGO	2	16	18	9	9	18
Donor/Other	2	4	6	3	3	6
Total	23	27	50	31	19	50

FGD Respondents

(All respondents Myanmar nationals)

	Male	Female	Total
CBO	9	1	10
CSO	6	3	9
UN	3	1	4
INGO 1	3	5	8
INGO 2	7	-	7
Total	28	10	38

LIMITATIONS

The Rakhine context is rapidly evolving, and dynamics are in flux. As such, these findings represent a snapshot in time and place. Little can be done to overcome this, but questions have been designed to investigate the changes in perceptions the current context has driven, as well as to look at engagement over a longer time-frame.

Few UN agencies participated in FGDs despite repeated invitations by email, message and phone and the rescheduling of an initial FGD due to a lack of attendance. While we understand the UN in Rakhine State is busy and faces bureaucratic hurdles to participation, the lack of participation of some UN agencies reflects broader findings of this study concerning UN attitudes towards national organisations. We greatly appreciate the commitment of the four UN agencies who did attend FGDs.

In many cases during data collection there was some familiarity between respondent and interviewer, and in some cases were even ex-colleagues or members of two collaborating organisations. This may have introduced a small level of bias into the data. To overcome this bias, KII and FGD data have been revised by the research team as a whole.

For various reasons, certain stakeholders were not consulted during this process. Due to the restrictions on forming formal organisations, there are few organisations among the Muslim community of central Rakhine State which could be contacted during this study. A small number of camp-based Muslim staff from INGOs were interviewed via telephone. It was also beyond the scope of this study to approach government representatives, despite the often centrality of government to in this report.

Finally, the language barrier between the research consultant, the research team and respondents may have presented some limitations to the study.

CURRENT COLLABORATION

INCREASING COLLABORATION AND SHARED GROUND

Engagement and collaboration between national and international agencies have undoubtedly increased over the last 12 to 18 months.

For various reasons, engagement with national actors and localisations is in vogue internationally, nationally and locally in Rakhine State. Reflecting this, there is in general a recognition among international agencies that they have a mandate to strengthen civil society in Rakhine. This was frequently framed as the responsibility that international actors have 'to work ourselves out of a job.' Among international respondents, donors were often seen to be pushing the Grand Bargain and its prioritisation of localisation. Other international agency staff cited better contextual knowledge and networks, sustainability or a stronger commitment to communities among national organisations as reasons for collaboration. As discussed further below, other international agencies did not share these views, and had taken little action to collaborate.

Among national organisations, reasons for increased collaboration differed. Alongside a desire among many to acquire financial and technical resources from international agencies, the motivation to collaborate cited by respondents was often related to a shared mandate to support communities. "*We are just trying to hold some hands which can assist our community*," noted one CSO leader.

Familiarity was another reason cited for increased collaboration recently. The sheer extent of time that international agencies have been present in Rakhine State, increased interaction over that period of time, combined with the positive experiences of collaboration for both national and international organisations in recent years were seen to have encouraged more engagement. Conversely, one international agency new to Rakhine said they collaborated with CSOs more easily because they didn't have the historical baggage of arriving during the response in 2012.

One very pragmatic factor behind increased collaboration has been the need for access. As the government tightened access restrictions on international organisations in the aftermath of the August 2017 crisis, international agencies sought to develop better relationships with local civil society.

The escalation of armed conflict between the AA and the *Tatmadaw* from December 2018 and the need to respond to related displacement has been another motivation for collaboration. National organisations noted that they were increasingly willing to collaborate as they could see that international agencies were supporting Rakhine communities – reducing the perception of a pro-Muslim bias and raising perceptions that international and national agencies have found common ground on an issue.

One CSO leader noted that in previous years it was very risky to work together with international organisations – as the community would perceive his organisation as working with Muslim supporters. Now, he notes, he receives a lot of positive community feedback due to collaboration supporting Rakhine internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The CSO leader stated that for the past seven years international agencies were working with Muslim communities and only very few Rakhine communities – so local CSOs didn't want to work with them. However, "*in the current situation, international organizations are also supporting Rakhine community*

as much as they can. This changed the perceptions of local CSOs and motivated them to collaborate with international organizations."

This positive development came with the qualifier, however, that "*there are still some misunderstanding from CSOs towards international organizations, which are running on the donations from countries which Rakhine people dislike.*" Echoing this, another CSO member cited difficulties they experienced in a more rural location after foreigners visited their office – arising concerns among the community who then began to watch them with suspicion. As discussed further below, there was a surprisingly high number of respondents from national organisations who did not see international agencies responding to new displacement in any meaningful way – suggesting that the communication strategies of international agencies remain inadequate.

The importance of collaboration was stressed by one CBO respondent who noted that without interaction and familiarity, two groups of people (in this case national and international actors) are susceptible to being played by a third party. He noted that while there would be difficulties in a relationship there is a need to build understanding and continue working together.

Similarly, others noted that underlying this recent improved engagement there remains mistrust and other issues where interests do not always align. One INGO staff member noted that while the current context of responding to displaced Rakhine communities is highly conducive to improved relations between international and national groups, the context is dynamic. Events such as the return of Muslims from Bangladesh could change dynamics considerably.

Previously, a major barrier to collaboration was the insistence that donors or international agencies often made for national partners to be willing to work with Muslim communities. In the current context of restricted access and response to mostly Rakhine IDPs, this insistence has been replaced by pragmatism.

Finally, there are evidently several different modes of collaboration currently in place in Rakhine State. Some international organisations tend to sub-contract to a national organisation for certain activities such as distributions to IDPs. This involves capacity building the CSO to complete the tasks required but little broader input such as organisational development or long-term investment in that organisation. This model gives the international organisation greater control of implementation and finances. At the other end of the spectrum are partnerships in which the international and national organisation work on the project together from the initial planning stage. This means that the national organisation has more responsibility, autonomy and independent funding. This usually means more capacity building and support is needed from the international agency, but the outcome is a more sustainable and long-term impact.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

The role of government in collaboration between national and international actors is often dependent on the department or level of government, complicating assumptions of the government as a cohesive whole. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) was clearly identified as the most encouraging of collaboration, although there has been little practical support for collaboration actually given by that department or any other. The township level was often seen as easier to work with than the state level – although this is also dependent on individual staff or leadership.

Government policies requiring the approval of Travel Authorisation (TA) for all activities were seen by some as a barrier to effective engagement. CSOs who may not need to apply for permission for activities implemented independently are required to apply for permission for any activity done in collaboration with an international agency. It was also noted that restrictions on CSOs had tightened during 2019, although some are able to obtain permission through contacts.

Treatment by government often differs between organisations and their activities. There was a perception among respondents that suspected association with the AA often meant permission was not granted – something widely perceived to be due to a fear of aid being diverted to the armed group. Similarly, there were perceptions that criticism of the government or a political agenda could affect the relationship. There was a perception among both national and international respondents that NGOs from Yangon or elsewhere in the country were perceived by government to be more politically neutral, and thus were favoured for permissions.

A willingness to work with Muslim communities was also seen as something which could create difficulties in relationships between national organisations and government. Conversely, however, in the FGD with CBO members it was heard that the government had a bias towards Muslims – as the government had permitted full access to organisations supporting displaced people in 2012, but was now restricting access to the mostly ethnic Rakhine IDPs.

Others understood the restrictive practices of government as the enabler of collaboration – motivating organisations to collaborate to manage restrictions on international agencies.

To illustrate this, a number of international respondents recalled how a CSO leader implored a visiting high-level UN dignitary to pressure the government to allow international organisations access to the new displacement sites. This was seen as unprecedented, given the history of antagonism between national and international organisations.

More broadly, there was a shared sense across respondents that the government was unable, or unwilling, to provide adequate support for communities. For many, collaboration was seen as one way to fill this space.

DONOR ENGAGEMENT

The increased availability of small grants and technical support provided by donor organisations or facilities with offices in Sittwe has propelled very positive engagement between national and international actors. Positively, some have begun accepting proposals in Burmese language – something highly valued by national organisations and reflecting a deep commitment to the context.

However, this represents a very small fraction of the funding in Rakhine State. Most funding is through humanitarian rather than development donors, and as such is not designed for civil society strengthening. While some donors do encourage collaboration, others are uninterested or were perceived to only give localisation lip-service.

Rather than directly working with CSOs, some donors are increasingly supporting INGO partners to collaborate with CSOs. In part this is due to a lack of donor presence in Rakhine to work closely with CSOs in Rakhine State. National and international organisations interpret this drive to also be due to risk mitigation. There is a perception that donors are not comfortable identifying CSO partners with

'acceptable' politics and financial management capacity and would rather outsource the risk to INGOs. One respondent from a donor organisation noted that they do not have the capacity to work directly with CSOs, and that INGOs can have the benefit of access through collaboration anyway.

CSOs voiced frustrations about the many requirements they had to fill to work with international donors – with one respondent stating that their organisation is starting to look more like a 'donor-based organisation' than a community-based organisation. As discussed in sections below, this comment reflects the differences in perspectives and operating modes between national and international organisations, including different understandings of key concepts such as accountability.

INGOs are in some cases frustrated that donors push them to work with CSOs without understanding the time and resources that this demands. If CSO-partnering does become heavily encouraged by a multitude of donors, there are clear risks of overloading CSOs with funds and activities that both INGOs and CSOs will struggle to manage effectively. Alternatively, international agencies will include collaboration with CSOs in their projects, but this will represent nothing more than tokenism – which can be equally damaging.

Some respondents saw a broad difference between Asian and Western donors. They suggested that donors from Asian countries put priorities such as trade and strategic ties above localisation or strengthening civil society – perhaps reflecting the strategic importance of Rakhine and Myanmar in the region.

Among CBOs consulted – most of whom did not have a history of interaction with international donors – the attitude towards international donors was negative. There was a perception that donors did not trust smaller organisations, or that donors only wanted to support Muslim communities and were not interested in supporting the more recent IDPs.

NO COLLABORATION

There were various reasons stated for non-collaboration. Neutrality was one concern – one international agency would not partner with Rakhine CSOs because of the restrictions on Muslims forming similar organisations.

Other respondents cited a lack of organisation within their agency, previous negative experiences of collaboration or a lack of knowledge of local organisations. This was sometimes reported to be due to a discord between Sittwe and Yangon offices – with the former reporting a lack of contextual knowledge among the latter. One organisation has a policy of hiring staff from Rakhine State at their Yangon office to counter this.

Among national organisations, some wished to collaborate but did not have knowledge of suitable partners or the networks to establish relations. Others cited different mandates or future plans, a lack of trust, or different organisational types. Many organisations work solely with unpaid volunteer members and this was seen inconducive to collaboration.

In one sector, multiple sources reported that one international agency employed its influence over other agencies to lobby donors against collaboration in that sector – despite the existence of numerous national groups with sufficient capacity. Other respondents interpreted this as a cynical play designed to maximise their own funding and maintain their control of the sector.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

From the point of view of international organisations, the benefits of collaboration were clear.

Strengthening civil society as part of the localization agenda and building capacity to eventually take over from international organisations was seen as a key benefit of collaboration. Many respondents noted that localisation should also link government and even private business to civil society.

A greater understanding of the local context was one benefit of collaboration. Respondents noted that CSOs had detailed historical knowledge, cultural knowledge and established trust and networks with villages, government and other stakeholders. Local organisations were seen by many as having more of a commitment to the community and a better understanding of community needs.

Clearly, a benefit to international organisations is increased access to their project locations or the new IDP sites under increasing restrictions from government. However, CSOs also face increased restrictions on their access to rural areas and IDP sites.

From the point of view of national organisations, funding and technical support were key benefits of collaboration. Upskilling in financial management, rules and regulations of international organisations and donors, organisational development, and report and proposal writing were frequently mentioned. These were understood as supporting greater job opportunities for youth in Rakhine.

Overall, local organisations were seen as more effective due to their access, cost, trust and networks.

An INGO head of office also noted that staff from their organisation increased their skills and confidence after attending trainings at a local CSO.

CSOs could also see the advantages that collaboration could provide for international organisations, including how the perceptions of the Rakhine community towards international organisations

improved due to collaboration. Similarly, through collaboration, one CSO said they changed their own perspectives on INGOs as they learnt new processes of working for community development.

Aside from this, collaboration for effective support for the community was cited as a key benefit. "*At the end of the day they will leave, and we will be here,*" noted one respondent, making collaboration a '*no-brainer*'.

While these benefits do clearly exist, there are also key challenges experienced during collaboration. In this report, these fall under two broad themes: difficulties related to socio-cultural issues, and difficulties related to policies and procedures. Finally, security concerns of collaboration are considered.

SOCIO-CULTURAL CHALLENGES

COMMUNITY WELFARE AND HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES

Cultural differences in organisational life, extending to fundamentally different understandings of the work done by national and international organisations is at the heart of many of the challenges faced in collaboration.

A barrier to collaboration prioritised by respondents from international organisations was that national organisations did not understand the humanitarian principles. This is not surprising, given that organisations in Rakhine stem from a completely different starting point than international agencies. As one UN staff member noted, it is a case of ones' "*own values versus international standards*" in a context of strong ethnic nationalism. A camp-based INGO staff member noted that national organisations don't work for the Muslim community – they work for other communities.

In a conflict or post-conflict context of highly-politicised ethnicity, where the state can or will not provide any sort of security for your community, organisations seek to provide for their own community before others. The polarisation over these issues must of course be placed in the context of the increased presence of international agencies in 2012 – almost all of which arrived with a mandate to work predominantly with Muslim communities.

The failure of international agencies to communicate effectively amid the perception of bias and impartiality that emerged during the response to displacement in 2012 has also contributed negatively to perceptions of stated impartiality on behalf of international organisations. In the FGD with CSO members it was noted that CSOs often did not want to collaborate with INGOs because the target group for CSOs was their own Rakhine communities – rather than the Muslim community. CBOs remarked that NGOs and INGOs had many biases towards Muslims and were not transparent.

For some national respondents, the practice of any international or national organisation paying salaries to their staff was seen as overall detrimental for the community. This reflects a belief held in Buddhist Rakhine society that work done for the community is more meaningful if it is done on an unpaid basis.

Some respondents felt that international actors should avoid working with smaller volunteer-based membership organisations or *parahita* groups, as these were seen as fundamentally different types of organisations. There was a concern that volunteer-based groups would be transformed into 'livelihood'

groups if they entered collaboration with international agencies. Similar concerns that this may undermine local 'self-help' practices in villages have also been found by other studies.[20]

Others took a middle line. One CSO leader noted that

> "*Collaboration between the two parties has increased. But on the other hand, as a negative consequence of it, in my opinion, the mind-set of people from Rakhine has been damaged. People come to determine everything in money. I don't mean you have to work as a* parahita *volunteer, I accept the fact that you can benefit [financially] what you deserve, but I am worried that a lot of young people will have mind-set like they will work only for the money*."

Another national organisation noted that their organisational structure is like a CSO, but they focus on *parahita*. They are happy to partner to get resources while international agencies are in Rakhine. They cite their focus on *parahita* as the reason why they would not become the same as international organisations.

Across this cultural divide shared understanding of key concepts are lacking. Understandings of accountability to donors have little in common – in the Myanmar/Rakhine context, once a donation is given the donor has no right to demand to know how the money was spent, and the recipient has no responsibility to explain. One CBO who had just started working with an international donor noted that they will collaborate only with donors who will have trust and confidence in their transparency, even if this means they cannot provide a project report for the donor when required.

The tendency for CSOs to claim expenses only by word of mouth does not fit well with the standards of international agencies and is seen to undermine accountability. Some CSOs receive funding from international philanthropist foundations or charities which require little or no financial accountability, allowing for a valued flexibility. Other international donors or partners, meanwhile, must report to stricter controls and are concerned with corruption risks.

There remains little widespread knowledge of who is financing international agencies in Rakhine and this is fostering distrust and perceptions of limited transparency. This is counter to local methods among smaller organisations. Local donors are publicly listed with donation amounts next to the names.

Finally, a different culture of building collaborative relationships was noted. Many international agencies make little effort to build personal relationships with national partners outside of office hours. This presents difficulties in Rakhine, as working relationships are often strengthened through socialising and growing familiarity outside formal office settings.

IDEOLOGY AND UNFAMILIARITY

Reflecting the above, **differences in values and ideology – combined with unfamiliarity – remains a key barrier to collaboration**.

Unstated agendas can be a risk during collaboration. International actors are hesitant to work with CSOs due to the potential for unknown political or ethnic nationalist agendas, with one INGO staff member seeing some CSOs as 'propaganda machines.'

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[20] Local Resource Centre (LRC) 2019, *Mapping of Civil Society in Sittwe and Mrauk U, Rakhine State*, p. 13.

National actors similarly are unsure of potential hidden agendas amongst international agencies – whether this be a bias towards Muslim communities or potential unstated missionary objectives. CSOs do need to be familiar with the mandates of international organisations and of what may happen if those organisations leave Rakhine at short notice should their mandate be filled.

While some organisations do have political affiliations or lean towards brands of ethnic nationalism deemed problematic by international organisations, this does not represent all national organisations. Furthermore, several respondents cited instances in which the attitudes of organisations changed through collaboration. The concerns of international actors reflect a lack of familiarity of civil society in Rakhine State, which itself perpetuates mistrust and a lack of collaboration – with negative consequences for all stakeholders and communities themselves.

CONTINUING MISPERCEPTIONS

Although relationships between international agencies and communities have evidently improved in 2018 and 2019, it is clear that perceptions still have some way to travel.

As seen above, there remains concerns about the honesty and transparency of international agencies. CBO respondents were unsure about the agendas of international agencies working in Rakhine State. They referred to the background of the 2012 violence in which international agencies arrived, and the fact that international organisations were not transparent about their donors. Perceptions that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) funded international agencies persist.[21]

While most respondents from national organisations were aware international agencies were responding to recent displacement of mostly ethnic Rakhine communities, several were not. Clearly, this indicates that many **community members further removed from organisational life would be similarly unaware of the response to IDPs**. Others were not satisfied with the response from international agencies. One CSO representative noted:

> "*To be honest, international organizations are taking sides even though they are humanitarian organisations. In the case of 2012, international organizations were very active in assistance provision to the Muslim community. They are discriminating based on what kind of community they are assisting.*"

Other respondents argued that international agencies were hindered by their own complicated policies and procedures and thus could not respond effectively to new IDPs. While CSOs were able to respond to fill immediate needs, they saw international agencies as tied up in bureaucracy and working on long-term plans while ignoring immediate concerns. Some noted that they only saw the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) responding and criticized a lack of transparency of that agency. There was some recognition that government restrictions may have been behind the lack of response.

Strikingly, some international respondents cited an unavoidably strained relationship between international organisations and Rakhine communities. This was due to the mandate that they arrived within 2012 – to work with Muslim communities. Other international respondents cited their own

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[21] One UN international staff member suggested that these perceptions stem in part from the OIC's assistance in constructing camps in 2012.

frustration with colleagues who failed to realise that the context had changed, and that mandates were changing with it.

SELF, ORGANISATIONAL, AND COMMUNITY INTEREST

The problem with the mantra of 'working ourselves out of a job' among international agencies, is that the ideal can run counter to the significant incentives that exist to sustain the status-quo, both at an individual and organisational level. One former UN staff member noted that staff were often presented a choice between 'short-term individual benefit over the long-term benefit of Rakhine'.

These obviously reflects a systemic issue that international agencies struggle with across various contexts – and there are of course individuals within international agencies pushing back and fighting for structural change. As noted by humanitarians elsewhere;

> "satisfying "the system" has become increasingly important and in some cases an end in itself, while the space for more contextualized, nuanced human decision-making and creativity has shrunk".[22]

On UN staff member noted that jobs and funds were the priorities for the UN – not fast solutions. This is obviously a barrier to a localisation agenda which seeks substantial change in how humanitarian and development aid works.

The high rotation of international management staff is a barrier to changing how things work in Rakhine. During one-year cycles, managers with little familiarity or investment in the Rakhine context focus on complying with administration and reporting tasks, sustaining the organisational bureaucracy before being promoted to another posting. There are few incentives to alter how organisations work. This serves to further strain relationships and frustrates CSOs, as individuals with limited understanding of the context must constantly re-establish relationships with CSO staff and leadership – making an expansion of that relationship very difficult.

The desire for organisational headquarters to receive ever-increasing amounts of funds annually is another factor demotivating for collaboration. Although over the longer-term CSOs and partnerships are cost-effective, hiring a large number of national staff increases the organisational budget, meaning more overheads and more money for headquarters. Having a high number of national staff means contributing to individual capacities, but is not as useful as strengthening broader civil society structures.

LANGUAGE, ISOLATION AND DISCRIMINATION

A language barrier between international management staff and national organisations is a barrier. English skills are often limited to a small number of individuals within many national organisations, while local languages are spoken by far fewer internationals. Difficulties in finding experienced translators,

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[22] Eldebo, J, Zamore, L 2018, "Dangerous Decisions: On the Ideals and Incentives that Guide Humanitarian Decision-Making," *Pathfinders,* available from: https://medium.com/sdg16plus/dangerous-decisions-on-the-ideals-and-incentives-that-guide-humanitarian-decision-making-ad18f5586135.

the lack of standardised terms languages spoken in Rakhine,[23] and the sheer time it takes for translation disrupt engagement.

A lack of informal mixing between international staff of international agencies and members of national organisations was seen by many as one reason for the lack of trust which impedes collaboration. Government restrictions since 2014 on where international agencies can open offices and where international staff can live clearly limits interactions to some extent.

Prejudice and discrimination were other barriers noted. At times, national staff do not feel respected by their international (often managerial) colleagues, with this disrespect extending to CSO members. Heads of offices were perceived as frustrated and impatient with the language barrier – a perception not conducive to meaningful relationships. In other cases, international staff were seen as arrogant, fake in their commitment to work with CSOs, top-down, or unable to understand the perspectives of their staff. One CSO reported that some international organisations did not want to work with Rakhine women's groups, due to perceptions that women were illiterate or difficult to work with.

Shockingly, the revelation was made by a number of UN staff that discrimination and racism exist within that institution. Among international UN staff, problematic attitudes, stereotypes and prejudice towards Asians and Africans were identified. "*I get sick of being about Bollywood and yoga,*" one respondent noted. The UN culture of hierarchy, not only between different pay scales but also between national and international staff was noted as an issue affecting how international staff relate to communities and thereby engagement with CSOs. An apparent assumption within the UN that CSOs are corrupt was noted by one international staff as racist in itself.

INTER-COMMUNAL RELATIONS

That Muslim communities – alongside other serious restrictions – are not permitted to form organisations remains a key barrier to the integration of that community with the nation. It is also a barrier to some international organisations' collaboration with existing national organisations – due to a policy of strict impartiality, one respondent noted that his organisation would not partner with CSOs on principle – because of restrictions on Muslims forming organisations.

Recent conflict dynamics appear to have improved relations between Rakhine and Muslim communities in central Rakhine as traditional understandings of the 2012 violence are re-evaluated. This is affecting organizational life. Some CSOs are beginning to work with Muslim communities when they previously did not. Other CSOs have for an extended period worked with diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Muslims.

Organisations' work with Muslim communities is often done quietly, however, and may not be publicised on Facebook pages. While relations have improved during this re-interpretation, empathy remains low and community pressures are strong. In an FGD, a staff member of an international agency noted that they continue to be perceived as 'traitors' by communities because they work with Muslims.

A camp-based respondent noted that while there may be a raised risk of discrimination against Muslim communities, national organisations should work in camps with Muslim communities. This would send

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[23] Translators Without Borders (TWB) are doing valuable work to build common vocabularies.

an important message and show that not only the international community is supporting Muslims in Rakhine State.

Concerns exist among CBOs that they will be branded as Muslim supporters if they collaborate with international agencies – but there was a confidence that these perceptions would be diminished by a strong international response to recently displaced communities. Simultaneously, international agencies are increasingly collaborating with national organisations which do not work with Muslim communities.

The continued view among many in the international community that organisations from Rakhine communities will not work with Muslim communities persists.

Some international staff of international agencies argued that increased collaboration between national and international groups held the potential for improved social cohesion between Rakhine and Muslim communities – either through greater understandings of diverse views on the conflict, or through the need for national organisations to work with Muslim communities when entering into collaboration.

It should be noted that concerns exist among CSOs that international agencies sometimes want to do activities with Rakhine and Muslim communities too quickly – before building trust and managing expectations in a post-conflict situation. One CSO leader noted that;

> *"sometimes international organizations just take what they want from us without taking local context into consideration… Sometimes we felt like we were being used. As a risk, they want to do some activities which are risky, which local people are not ready to collaborate. For example, they want to mix the two conflicting communities. So, this is very risky for us. They are in a rush busy trying to meet their work plan. Sometimes, all they need is to listen carefully to what we are saying".*

POLICY AND PROCEDURAL CHALLENGES

CONTRACTING, CAPACITY AND OVERLOADING

There is an overall shared perception that many national organisations do not have sufficient capacity to operate as effectively as they require. A key benefit identified by national organisations, however, is the opportunity for them to learn new skills through collaboration.

Despite this, as mentioned elsewhere in this report some respondents felt that international agencies were engaging national organisations simply to fill their own workplans, or to meet the goals of international agencies – rather than truly trying to strengthen national groups. Poorly-focused trainings, the contracting of CSOs to do 'simpleton' work, or a failure to listen to CSOs' advice were all common complaints. These reflect concerns that international agencies are in some cases 'using' national organisations to serve their own goals – with little resultant benefit for the CSO.

There is little opposition to international agencies contracting national agencies to implement their activities. However, some risks were clearly identified. A key risk noted is the incentives for CSOs to follow contracts with different international organisations, even when these opportunities do not reflect the expertise or stated mandate of the CSO. As well as the risks of poor quality of

implementation, the incentives to accept funding for various activities and broaden the organisation's portfolio can risk the overloading of an organisation or damaging its image – the 'donor trap'. Some CSOs will only partner with international groups on issues where their organisational expertise and experience align.

There is also space to be creative. In a space where no local organisation was present, one international organisation asked communities to set up CBOs to implement infrastructure projects and then contracted them to implement the project with some technical support – allowing the transfer of skills and more funds directly to the community.

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Organisational development as a need for national organisations was identified by respondents from CSO and international groups. Smaller, volunteer-based groups did not identify organisational development gaps. Local Resource Centre (LRC) also previously found that organisational development was a priority among CSOs in Sittwe and Mrauk U.[24] In particular, a lack of organisational policies and procedures, safeguards related to protection, and financial management capacities are evident.

A key concern identified was the centralised, person-based, nature of many national organisations and the difficulties which occur when that leader is away or if they are no longer able to lead the organisation. One international organisation faced substantial delays in their project implementation because a CSO director was out of town and the organisation could not make any decision without him for more than two months. That most senior or leadership positions in national organisations are occupied by men has influenced perceptions of low levels of gender awareness.

While organisational development is required, the propensity for international actors to push national organisations to develop in a certain way was noted as a key risk of collaboration. Many respondents noted that national organisations were being encouraged to develop along the lines of INGOs, rather than developing 'organically', in a manner more suitable to the context.

An international INGO staff member noted that, as Rakhine organisations, CSOs will not be the same as international organisations – they will have different views, and this may include some prejudice and capacity issues. Another international INGO staff member was concerned that by professionalising the work CSOs are doing, it would turn into a livelihood rather than a 'passion'.

One UN head of office made the point that international agencies are forcing national organisations to adopt accountability frameworks which had been developed over decades and designed for agencies completely different from the average CSO in Sittwe.

While these frameworks may have been simplified somewhat before being introduced to CSOs, this research indicates that this remains a point of contention. One CSO staff member noted that their priorities were skilful staff, community acceptance and need time to accomplish these; rather than spending resources on meeting the standards and policies of international organisations.

Another CSO representative noted that there are organisational structure differences between CSOs and INGOs – yet they were being pushed by international partners to structure their project design and job responsibilities like an INGO. CBOs with little experience working with INGOs also noted that

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[24] Local Resource Centre (LRC) 2019, *Mapping of Civil Society in Sittwe and Mrauk U, Rakhine State*, p. 9.

implementation differed between national and international organisations. There were negative perceptions around how INGOs focused solely on their workplans, and that INGOs' project-based objectives made collaboration difficult for smaller organisations who value flexibility.

The 'professionalisation' of CSOs and their increased closeness to INGOs and donors was also perceived to pull CSOs away from their own communities, and to reduce the flexibility and pragmatism which CSOs would otherwise have.

These findings echo those of the Paung Sie Facility, who recently reported perceptions among CSOs in Shan State that working with INGOs 'broke' the unity between CSOs, make CSOs project-orientated and forced to follow funding, and facilitated divisions between CSOs and communities.[25]

Rather than co-opting organisations into an INGO mindset and attitude, there is a need to let organisations identify how peace and development will best be fostered.

COORDINATION

While partner organisations cited good coordination between themselves, there is clearly a lack of collaboration between national and international actors operating in Rakhine State.

Good examples of information exchange and coordination were noted – including the TVET working group, the work of Local Resource Centre (LRC), the Inter-Agency National Staff Advisory Group (INSAG) meetings, and the 'Kintha Talks' which featured international agency staff meeting and discussing with Kintha PDI Akyab Institute students.

In general, however, national organisations are not invited or do not attend cluster working groups or coordination groups – and are not invited to even working groups on CSO collaboration. The fact that national organisations already responding to new displacement were not brought into the coordination mechanisms of the international community was noted as a missed opportunity by several international respondents.

ALL TALK, NO ACTION

Among national organisations there is a clear frustration with international agencies approaching them for meetings, taking information and then never following-up. National organisations have expectations of opportunities of growing relationships or even potential collaboration from these encounters, but rarely hear anything back.

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[25] Paung Sie Facility 2018, *Unlocking Civil Society and Peace in Myanmar: Opportunities, Obstacles and Undercurrents*, Yangon, available from: <http://www.paungsiefacility.org/uploads/3/0/1/8/30181835/civilsocietyreport_18oct_lowres.pdf>, p. 23.

Other frustrating occasions were mentioned of international agencies holding workshops with CSOs with the goal of identifying a project partner, only for CSOs to later discover that the partner was apparently pre-determined.

Similarly, it was mentioned by some respondents from national organisations that they are approached regularly by consultants or others doing assessments or analysis for international agencies, but that they never receive follow-up or copies of reports which come out of these processes – leading to a suspicion that such visits and assessments are box-ticking exercises, with pre-determined outcomes or recommendations left unfilled.

SECURITY

Importantly, a number of CSOs working in collaboration with international agencies felt that their international partner was pushing them to operate in unsafe or insecure conditions. They cited occasions when they were traveling to rural locations and explosions occurred nearby. One donor organisation staff member remarked; '*If it is not safe us for to go there why is it safe for CSOs?*'

In contrast one INGO respondent noted that CSOs were not following suitable security regulations and were taking risks that put both themselves and communities they were supporting in danger. However, some CSOs viewed INGOs as risk adverse – perhaps reflecting a more activist mentality among national organisations and desire to respond quickly. Another respondent from a donor organisation relayed concerns brought up by CSOs he works with regarding pressure to respond to insecure areas and stressed the need for more open communication and information sharing between partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

1. Jointly between national and international organisations, develop a shared, sustainable and long-term strategy for strengthening civil society in Rakhine State.

   Collaboration on a long-term basis is preferable to short-term projects, in order to allow for stable and sustainable organisational development, staff and skills retainment and trust building.

2. A greater inclusion of women in both international and national organisations and in senior positions is needed for real and sustainable development.

3. Support organisational development priorities among CSOs while not enforcing a certain 'type' of organisation. Existing organisational models which exist among Rakhine community groups may be more sustainable and work better in this context.

   Engagement with different points of view is the first step to finding common ground and even broadening ones' understanding of a situation and changing ones' mind. Actors working in Rakhine will not have lasting impact if they do not engage with diverse and widespread points of view.

4. Build meaningful partnerships. Ensure even input into programme design. Even if on a contracting basis, allow input into programme design or re-design, identify capacity needs and priorities and seek to build these. Both national and international partners should manage budgets and make decisions about activities and finances. Include national organisations in meetings with partner organisations from the start of the project.

5. Involve national organisations in clusters, working groups and coordination meetings. Include CSOs in setting meeting agenda and the facilitation of meetings. CSOs responding to new displacement in 2019 should be involved in coordination groups with international organisations.

6. Conduct a comprehensive mapping of both national and international actors and keep it regularly updated. This should include sectors, affiliations, current and previous collaboration partners, strengths and weaknesses, vision, mission and objectives.

7. Trust and the potential for meaningful partnerships can be built through informal interactions such as sporting events, social interactions or a fair to display organisations' work. Involving national organisations in the 'Sittwe Games' and extending the 'Kintha Talks' to a greater number of CSOs and students in Bu May or camp areas are easy ways to do this. Internationals should attend local cultural events and arrange joint cultural and sports events. Interact.

FOR NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN RAKHINE STATE

8. One or more national organisations in collaboration should organise induction sessions to the Rakhine State context for new international and national staff with little Rakhine experience. This must include components on the historical and socio-economic context as well as recent developments. This may be extended to regular seminar updates on context for international organisations.

9. Set up a CSO Coordinator, to intermediate between international and national organisations and to disseminate information.

10. Share responsibility with staff and encourage women to take senior positions. Build capacity of staff, hire more women and do not rely on one leader.

11. An introductory Burmese or Rakhine language course for international staff would support greater interactions. This may be facilitated by a CSO, funded by a pool of international agencies/donors and run by a private language school.

12. Decide and be clear on your organisational mandate, expertise and experience and follow it, rather than following funding opportunities and risking poor quality of implementation.

13. Identify and articulate capacity needs to international agencies. Be open to new ideas and learning.

FOR INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES AND DONORS IN RAKHINE STATE

14. Engage with smaller organisations outside of the usual CSO partners in Rakhine. It is more sustainable to work with existing groups in a village than establishing new bodies. Depending on the activity, this may include monastic or other religious organisations.

15. Invest in the capacity of national organisations. Assess and ask national organisations where they need capacity to endeavour to meet their priorities. Capacity training should go beyond trainings – to coaching, mentoring and frequent exchanges between international and national partners' offices. Shared offices should be considered. Have joint trainings with CSO and national staff from international organisations. Where possible have CSOs conduct the training. Maintain relationships even after projects end.

16. Reduce reporting requirements for smaller organisations to the minimum possible to facilitate a focus on implementation while supporting organisations to develop in ways most suitable to the context.

17. Manage expectations and be clear about objectives for meetings, assessments and research papers. Follow-up with stakeholders after consultations. Verify findings before publication.

18. Designate a CSO focal point in your organisation.

19. As much as possible, key criterion for hiring both international and national staff should be cultural sensitivity and empathy – with preference given to individuals with previous experience in conflict settings in Rakhine State or Myanmar. For international and national staff new to Rakhine, provide an introductory context and language seminar facilitated by CSOs. To facilitate better community relations, staff with Rakhine or Muslim language skills should be prioritised. Hire national staff for senior and managerial positions.

20. Be patient, flexible and expect collaboration and civil society strengthening to take time and consume resources. Have this built into the project design as an integral component of the project with shared understandings between agencies and donors of the time and risks involved. Capacity building takes time. Be open to new ideas and learning.

21. International agencies should have exit strategies in place in order to prioritise strengthening civil society, government and the private sector. This should be a requirement of donors.

22. Have a Rakhine communication strategy. Communicate openly and transparently to both national organisations and communities. In the current context of response to IDPs there should be few risks of transparent communication. Facebook Messenger 'question and answer' pages are a good example of existing open communication which work well in Myanmar. A monthly newsletter in Myanmar language regarding activities of international organisations disseminated to national organisations, or the re-institution of the OCHA monthly CSO coordination meeting are other ways to communicate effectively. Also engage with local media and have a media liaison person at Sittwe level to deal quickly with any misunderstandings and to keep communities informed.

23. Recognise that the context has changed and that the mandate that many agencies arrived with in 2012 has developed.

FOR INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES IN RAKHINE STATE

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24. Facilitate government-CSO interactions. Sensitise government to the constructive role that civil society can play. Involve CSOs in government-international agency coordination meetings, involve government staff in capacity building exercise with CSOs and work with government for a civil society development framework. This work requires sensitivity to the propensity that CSOs may have greater capacity than government staff and the potential political difficulties.

25. Reflecting No Do Harm principles, be aware of security issues and foster relationships in which national partners can be frank about security concerns.

FOR DONOR ORGANISATIONS

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26. Make grants accessible to national organisations. Increase the availability of small grants, accept proposals and reports in Burmese language and simplify procedures and reporting

requirements. Donor organisations should raise their physical presence with offices in Sittwe or other towns in Rakhine State to greater facilitate interactions with direct support.

27. **Allow national organisations to identify needs** and decide how to spend funds, rather than letting donor priorities determine CSOs' activities. Adopt a bottom up approach.

28. **Encourage localisation in sustainable manner**. This will mean slow progress and incremental strengthening. Avoid the overloading of national organisations which could be harmful.

29. **Fund the establishment of translations services in Sittwe**. This may be a more formalised or a network of translators with shared resources and shared understandings of terms.

FOR GOVERNMENT

30. **Allow Muslim communities in Rakhine State to form organisations**.

31. **Remove restrictions** on access to vulnerable populations and complicated procedures for permissions to support collaboration between national and international actors.

32. **Set up an NGO coordination focal person**, most likely under DSW, to share information among and between international and national organisations.

33. Allow **international agencies to establish offices in any location of urban Sittwe** to reduce isolation between agencies and communities.

34. **Make a local partner compulsory for international organisations** in all projects and establish constructive links between government and with national organisations for joint community development.