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Civil Society in Myanmar's New Democracy

Conference Report | September 2017

WORLD LEARNING
World Learning, Myanmar
14, Taw Win Road, Yangon, Myanmar
Worldlearning.org



iPACE
INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The Civil Society in Myanmar's New Democracy conference was organized by World Learning through its Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE). iPACE is made possible by the generous support of the United States Embassy Rangoon, Burma. This report was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the speakers and authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Embassy Rangoon, Burma or the United States Department of State.

The principle author of this report was Mindy Walker who served as the conference rapporteur. Speakers and panelists provided their services on a voluntary basis.

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I. Introduction

Recent years have brought remarkable changes for civil society in Myanmar—from the level of openness in which it operates, to the sector's role within public life, its interaction with policymakers, and its sophistication. Some functions are getting easier, while some are becoming more difficult; some observers claim that the operating environment is improving, while others raise concern that it is backsliding. One thing is certain: as Myanmar continues to experience rapid and significant change in its government, economy, and society, the role and expectations for and by civil society are also changing.

World Learning's Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE) designed this conference to provide an opportunity for speakers and participants to pose and examine the biggest questions concerning civil society's role in Myanmar's ongoing democratic and economic transition. While we knew there was interest to have this discussion, we were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and support we received for this conference. More than 180 attendees joined the one-day event in Yangon.

In designing the program, we sought participation from some of the country's most prominent and engaged democracy advocates from varied fields: government officials, former political prisoners, activists, political party members, media, and international donors. While a broad range of interests, roles, and ideas were represented, common themes emerged throughout the day. These included the following:

- Civil society is a critical part of the democratization process, and this is certainly true in Myanmar.
- Civil society in Myanmar does not speak as a unified voice. While civil society will always represent diverse views, it would gain strength and influence if it worked together more systematically and with consensus on certain issues and principles.
- Myanmar is in the early stages of democracy, with a new government in the midst of a tremendous learning process. Roles and responsibilities are still being developed, as are mechanisms for government and civil society to communicate and collaborate. Working well together will also require a level of mutual trust that takes time to build. Given these challenges, it is unrealistic to expect everything to be in place and effective immediately.
- Being close to constituents, civil society can add valuable data and input into government decisions and policymaking through advocacy, collaboration, and dialogue. Recognition of that value and creation of effective channels of engagement still need to be developed, as it currently remains ad-hoc.
- Improving capacities in terms of communications, strategic thinking, organizational development, research skills, and topical expertise remains a significant need for both civil society and other stakeholders.
- While there are concerns about increased restrictions on civil society around the world, Myanmar's civil society remains strong, engaged, and inspirational.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who made this event successful—the distinguished speakers and panelists; the staff and consultants behind the scenes who ensured that everything was well organized and artfully interpreted into both Burmese and English; and, of course, the U.S. Embassy in Burma whose financial support makes iPACE possible.

-Gretchen Kunze, Country Representative, World Learning, Myanmar

II. Panelists and Speakers

(Listed in order of appearance.)

Gretchen Kunze, Country Representative and iPACE Director, World Learning Myanmar

Sakil Malik, Vice President, Global Development, World Learning

U Kyaw Win, Former Editor-in-Chief of *The Waves* and Former Member of Amyotha Hluttaw Political, Economic, and Legal Affairs Commission

Nyein Zarni Naing, Independent Analyst

Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo, Executive Director of Myanmar Institute of Peace and Security Studies

U Min Ko Naing, Leader from 88 Generation Peace and Open Society

U Myint Kyaw, Executive Member of the Myanmar Journalist Network and Member of the Myanmar Press Council

U Nay Phone Latt, Member of Parliament representing Thingangyun Township, Yangon, in the Yangon Regional Hluttaw

Daw Zin Mar Aung, Member of Parliament representing Yankin Township, Yangon, in the Pyithu Hluttaw

Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun, President of Myanmar Teachers' Federation; Lecturer of International Relations at University of Yangon

George Sibley, Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Burma

Jennifer Whatley, Senior Technical Advisor for Civic Engagement and Governance, World Learning

Teresa McGhie, Mission Director of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Gail Marzetti, Head of Department for International Development (DFID)

Kavi Chongkittavorn, Editor-in-Chief and Executive Director of *Myanmar Times*

III. Summaries of Remarks and Presentations

Welcoming Remarks Gretchen Kunze and Sakil Malik

Gretchen Kunze opened the conference by welcoming the full room of distinguished speakers and guests, followed by a brief introduction of the Institute for Political and Civic Engagement and World Learning, highlighting the more than 2,000 iPACE graduates who work in every state and division of Myanmar. She said that the conference was a rare opportunity to think about the role of civil society more broadly as a crucial component of a democratic government, and to consider the “fundamental questions of what civil society can and should contribute” to the democratic development of Myanmar and how to move forward from where we are today. “Civil society does not just spontaneously exist—it needs to be nurtured and continuously reexamined to be relevant and effective,” Kunze told the audience. “This conference is the forum to further this conversation and to help shape our thinking, and consequently the direction of Myanmar’s civil society in this dynamic period of democratic transition.”

In his remarks, Sakil Malik described the progression of a new democracy with an analogy to maturing: “Democracy is like a young child. When you are a child, you don’t know everything, and you are not able to do everything.” You can’t have the same expectations from a new democracy as you would for others that have had more years of experience. Not only can we not expect everything to be mature right away, he asserted, but we also can’t expect progress to happen as instantaneously as we may want it to happen. In the fast-paced modern world, people get anxious when things don’t get done immediately. He also spoke about how communication is essential for a vibrant civil society and that information needs to be available but also needs to be filtered to find what is relevant.

Keynote Presentation State of the Civil Society Sector in Myanmar: Where We Came From and Where We Are Now U Kyaw Win

U Kyaw Win’s presentation reflected on the history of civil society in state building, both in Myanmar and throughout the world, looking at scholarly definitions of civil society from Cicero to Payne to de Tocqueville. He spoke about social capital and its link to trust. To inform thinking on whether civil society can be built and nurtured or not, he talked about the history of civil society in Myanmar.

The new publicly elected government is operating in a populist manner and trying to connect directly to citizens. As a result, the role and strength of civil society in the past two years has been toned down and has not grown at all. The function of civil society as a driving force for democratization is very important.

Civil society needs space, support from the state, allies within the state, and an absence of suppression. Even dating back to the kingdom of Anawratha in 1144, there was a civil society in Myanmar, but it consisted of groups focused on community and mutual assistance and was not politically active. Under the socialist regime, there was a civil society made up of unions, but they were not what would be considered “independent” civil society. After 1962, civil

society, including groups like the student union, went underground and could not operate openly because of rigid suppression by the government. As international organizations and donors became

more interested in engaging in Myanmar, Myanmar citizens began to form exile organizations along the border in Thailand where they had space to openly work.

After Cyclone Nargis in 2008, and even more so during the Thein Sein government, the linkages between the state and civil society grew stronger and the space in which civil society could operate increased significantly. Since 2015, however, the new publicly elected government is operating in a populist manner and trying to connect directly to citizens. As a result, the role and strength of civil society in the past two years has been toned down and has not grown at all.

The function of civil society as a driving force for democratization is very important. Throughout world history, to have a successful democratic transition there needs to be economic development, an expanded middle class, and a civil society to mobilize them. "In Myanmar, it is sometimes difficult to know if civil society is the producer or the product," U Kyaw Win said. In conclusion, he cited an article written by Professor Larry Diamond that is useful to consider in Myanmar today: If a government wins by a landslide, it will have weak opposition in parliament, so in order to have checks and balances, there needs to be space for an independent media and civil society.

Panel Discussion: Civil Society's Role in Myanmar
Panelists: Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo, U Min Ko Naing, U Myint Kyaw
Moderator: Nyein Zarni Naing

This panel focused on how civil society is engaged in three priority challenges in Myanmar: peace (Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo), democratic consolidation (U Min Ko Naing), and media/freedom of expression (U Myint Kyaw).

In her introductory remarks, Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo discussed the role of civil society in the peace process, with a special focus on including women in those processes where they have been conspicuously absent. Civil society, she argued, is important in looking at the root causes of conflict and how to respond to it. For most of the conflicts in Myanmar, civil society also has a role to recommend specific policy reforms. As U Kyaw Win said, in a democratic transition, the role of civil society is obvious and undeniable. In the same way, civil society is essential to lead the peace process. Currently in the Myanmar peace process, civil society plays a key role in different sectors as technical advisors, assistants, and delegates of working committees. To maximize its impact, however, civil society needs to work more systematically so that it is prepared for civic engagement in the peace process. Civil society organizations need to develop priorities and specialize in order to write position papers. It shouldn't be the same organization working on every topic as is often the case now. There needs to be a mix of experts from civil society involved who are specialists in their own fields.

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In order to prepare effective policy recommendations and position papers, civil society needs more advanced skills. Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo argued that this is where INGOs can be helpful, by providing trainings on these skills. Obviously, effectiveness is important, so civil society organizations need to assess themselves as to how effective they are in their efforts. Consensus must be found so that civil society can present recommendations that reflect that consensus. But first it is important to study these subject matters and establish groups that prioritize those issues before giving guidance to policymakers.

Access to what is happening is also important. Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo noted, "It is not about you or your organization's access but the access for those affected by conflict." The information that is used when mobilizing the community needs to be accurate, easy to understand, relevant, and interesting. With that, there will be greater participation in achieving the goals.

In U Min Ko Naing's opening remarks, he talked about the struggles of having a strong civil society in a country with a history of military control. When foreigners talk to him about weak institutions in Myanmar, he said he generally replies, "We have a strong institution in Myanmar, but that institution is very problematic," in reference to the military which still controls 25 percent of the seats in parliament and powerful ministries in the cabinet.

When he was released from prison in 2013, he realized that people were living in fear and they didn't have the will to fight back because the education people received was designed to strengthen the role

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--U Min Ko Naing
88 Generation Peace and Open Society

of socialism and the military. To address this, his organization and others came up with an "anti-fear campaign." He felt the campaign was successful in getting people to stand up, but then they didn't know what to advocate for because they didn't know about their rights and responsibilities. Without having a solution, frustration can turn to violence, so they needed to find a way to react without getting into trouble or obstructing the government. Along with rights, accountability and responsibilities are important to talk about as well, and that is what many organizations are working on now.

In his comments about peace in Myanmar, he blamed lack of inclusion as a major barrier to progress. "Why are the weapon-bearers the ones talking about peace when it has been shown not to be successful? ... If only the generals are talking peace, there will not be peace. There needs to be representation of ethnic minorities in the peace process. If the generals can't find a solution, maybe the people will.

"Without genuine representation, how can there be genuine peace? The warlords talk and come up with a temporary solution and they decide who gets what... They are just dividing up their territory. We don't want permanent demarcation of our country. They've been doing this for decades and it only leads to future fighting."

He argued that with civil society involved in the process, there can be a better discussion of how the people who have been impacted think and feel, because civil society can give them a voice.

U Myint Kyaw recounted the experience of the Myanmar Journalism Network (MJN) that was established in 2011. That year, there were some signs of relaxing control of the media. The developments were not necessarily announced, but the government had stopped criticizing international media, there was access to websites that were previously banned, and exiled media were welcomed back. Later, other controls were relaxed, including the ability to secure a media license and the easing of oppressive censorship. MJN was established in a teashop around that time, started largely as a support group for journalists. In 2012, the licenses of two weekly journals were suspended because of their reporting on the shuffling of ministers. At the time, MJN was still a social organization, but it decided to get involved in advocacy for freedom of speech, staging a small rally with help from U Min Ko Naing, an ally and fellow panelist.

That small movement inspired their future work. In 2012, post-censorship, MJN assigned U Myint Kyaw to help draft a new media law, and the organization changed its focus to media rights and access to information. It was a major transitional time for journalism networks and organizations, which

started working for freedom of speech. Since that time, when something happens that impinges on those freedoms, the organizations have taken it on as their duty to band together and speak in unison.

As part of his work on the media law, U Myint Kyaw pushed hard for changes. “Were we successful? Not 100 percent. We can say we were 30 percent successful and 70 percent was in the government’s favor.” And of course, he said, there are still problems with journalists being detained unfairly. He said that one of the most important things he learned throughout the process is how media can be part of civil society and advocate for their own rights. While not getting the entirety of what they want, they are still making substantial changes to oppressive laws like 66(d) and the Telecommunications Act, and mobilizing allies from 22 different organizations to work together and make their voices louder.

The first question from the audience was: “The peace process doesn’t seem like it is moving forward. What can civil society do to be more effective?” Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo talked about how the early dialogues were very chaotic, with most participants ill-prepared to discuss policy, and one person even reciting poetry. “In one dialogue, they were discussing the different models of federalism for four hours. These policy dialogues are not the place to be teaching the basics. But after those initial talks, things improved,” she said. Ethnic armed organization (EAO) signatories and others started to prepare their own members to be ready to discuss these issues in a more systematic way which helped, yet there is still a need to have a process at the local committee level before getting to the national drafting committee.

Media can be part of civil society and advocate for their own rights. While not getting the entirety of what they want, they are still making substantial changes to oppressive laws like 66(d), and the Telecommunications Act, and mobilizing allies from 22 different organizations to work together and make their voices louder.

U Min Ko Naing was asked to rank the development of civil society in Myanmar from zero to five, and how civil society can better collaborate. He responded that he couldn’t give civil society high marks because there has not been effective collaboration and because sometimes civil society organizations are actually wings of political parties or the starting block for future parties. For example, when someone forms a CSO, they may begin with a single issue but then move to working on every issue, just like politicians. He explained that if you want political power and want to work on every issue, you should “change your hat and outfit” and become a politician instead.

He also highlighted the critical need for judiciary reform. There is a lot of focus on the executive and legislative branches, but civil society needs to focus on the judiciary because they have all been appointed and trained by the military for the past 50 years, he pointed out. “If you want real justice, you need to engage with the judiciary.”

U Myint Kyaw was asked about the limited collaboration between the media and civil society. He responded that 66(d) was a great example of the two working well together. He then spoke about how his role working for a media organization had shown him that there are a lot of growing pains while striving to form strong institutions. Trying to keep people focused and committed is a major challenge because members can react with emotion instead of logic, skipping from one popular issue to the next without truly addressing any of them. “I think the rest of civil society faces the same issues.”

The moderator summarized the discussion, saying that it is obvious that civil society plays a necessary role and that there is space in Myanmar for civil society. However, Myanmar society is very much divided and consequently, civil society is also divided. Therefore, are we just perpetuating the divide again and again in our efforts build civil society?

Panel Discussion: How Do We Work Together? How Government Sees Civil Society's Role in Myanmar's Future

Panelists: U Nay Phone Latt, Daw Zin Mar Aung, Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun

Moderator: Nyein Zarni Naing

Moderator Nyein Zarni Naing opened the panel by saying that with the new government there were both new challenges and new spaces. Based on those different experiences and challenges, there will be a lot of learning necessary, a common challenge for civil society as a whole. He asked each panelist to talk about how they saw the relationship between the government and civil society.

“As representatives, we need to hear from experts. Because civil society focuses on specific areas from gender to students to farmers, they know the issues well and can provide necessary input on legislation. ... To be frank, we haven't enacted a single law in our almost two years. It's embarrassing and obviously not working.”

— U Nay Phone Latt
Member of Parliament, Yangon Regional Hluttaw

U Nay Phone Latt said the relationship between civil society and the Yangon Regional Parliament was good and that they work a lot on capacity-building for parliament members. Having minimal facilities, staff, and resources, he said, civil society can contribute significantly to this training effort. But aside from training government staff and members, there is a real need for civil society to advocate for policy changes to the government. “As representatives, we need to hear from experts. Because civil society focuses on specific areas from gender to students to farmers, they know the issues well and can provide necessary input on legislation,” he said. In the current situation, he explained, there is a lot of information-sharing and many

workshops but very little in terms of advocacy for policy at the regional and central level. “To be frank, we haven't enacted a single law in our almost two years. It's embarrassing and obviously not working.” He welcomed and encouraged civil society to contact legislators regarding policy.

As a member of the People's Affairs Committee, Daw Zin Mar Aung sees that most work is done in committee and not during the floor debate that people see on television. When the NLD members took their seats, it was a trying time because everyone was new and even the Chairs were unclear about what their roles were. In comparison to the judiciary and executive, the parliament is a young institution, so it needed to learn from other countries' examples. The new members also realized that their campaign promises would not be fulfilled immediately because they had to work with the military and ministries and other minority parties to pass legislation. Knowing where they could actually have an impact was a learning process. “We had to learn how to work with the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is difficult. We invited members of parliament from previous governments so we could learn from them instead of starting from scratch.”

In addition to the challenge of meeting the public's expectations, the new MPs also faced rather strict expectations from their parties and reduced access to the media. Now that they have spent more time in their roles, those restrictions have been relaxed. There is still a question among the members about the agendas of certain civil society organizations and how competing interests are balanced. Civil society needs to understand the reality of the situation in parliament. Its members cannot pass whatever they want in whatever format they'd like; they need to figure out how to pass it and how it gets enforced. “Without a strong relationship with civil society, there can be misunderstandings on both sides. ... Since last year, the relationship between civil society and parliament is starting to warm. We just aren't there yet.”

Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun talked about some of the progress and opening of operational space that he has seen under the current government. He said that recognition by the government is one of the

most important things for civil society organizations or interest groups working for rights. Under the previous government, the Teachers' Federation was not invited to the table, so it had to crash the forums because "only when there is recognition, will there be partnerships." Under the new government the Teachers' Federation has had the opportunity to speak at length with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and is now being officially invited to participate in education reform discussions.

While retaliation against community-based organizations is less frequent than before, there is still fear that needs to fade in order to mobilize effectively. Progress has been made in opening space but there are still restrictions in terms of recognition. Because some of the people in the current government come from a civil society background, it should be easier to build relationships, but of course there are limitations. "The current government doesn't have a clear policy on how to engage with civil society," he said.

In the next round of questions, the moderator asked Daw Zin Mar Aung for guidance on how to engage with government since there is no policy. She responded that because there is no policy, it is the prerogative of the MP to decide how best to collaborate. "For example, in my role in the NLD women's wing, I have started involving civil society. The party didn't drive us to do that, but they didn't stop us either." Another good example of this is MP Susannah Hla Hla Soe, who serves on the Women and Child Welfare Committee. Because of her civil society background, she is able to use her connections effectively to advocate for women and children.

There is definitely friction between members of parliament and civil society, Daw Zin Mar Aung said. Many parliamentarians only see people working in civil society for their high salaries, so there needs to be education for MPs about the value of civil society. Civil society is not without blame, however; sometimes these organizations contradict what parliament is doing just for the sake of being opposition and then impede progress, she said.

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— Daw Zin Mar Aung
Member of Parliament, Pyithu Hluttaw

The conflict between civil society and government started as early as 2010 when there were cases where parties tried to co-opt civil society. Now the party has concerns that the tables will be turned and MPs will be heavily influenced by civil society. Overall, the space for civil society has grown and many organizations participated as independent election observers in order to ensure fair elections. "That and some of the research that civil society has done has also improved the party's perspective," she said.

Many civil society organizations have said that it is even more difficult now to work with the government than before. The moderator asked U Nay Phone Latt to comment on that. U Nay Phone Latt responded that, as Daw Zin Mar Aung said, it depends on the individual. Not everyone can be Hla Hla Soe and serve as a bridge, but for the long run, there should be better party policy to improve the relationship and engage more effectively with civil society because there are many gaps. "NGO means **non**-government organization. Even in the word we are focusing on the differences. Instead of diverging, we need to come together."

Some members of parliament are opposed to civil society because they consider civil society to be opportunists, and are unable to see the benefit of civil society input into the work of the government. They want to know where the funding comes from and what the agenda is, instead of focusing on how we can work together and how civil society can convey the voice of the people. There needs to be a better understanding of what each side does and an ability to see each other as working for the betterment of the country. Building understanding is the first priority; then we can build trust. In Yangon, MPs are reluctant to work with civil society and they need to be encouraged to connect, U Nay Phone Latt commented.

He continued by explaining that the new government is welcoming input but there are no clear channels to give input. “So, on an *ad hoc* basis we receive input. Many organizations don’t know how to reach us or what the process is. Sometimes it is easy but sometimes it is difficult to find the right channels if you want to help.” At the moment, many people are reaching out to MPs they know in order to navigate the system.

The moderator asked Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun, “What is the effect of having so many civil society organizations and what is the impact on the government?” He responded that having many CSOs is not the problem, but understanding their roles and mandates is important. That said, from the government perspective, it is more difficult to know who is who and who to trust, he said. It isn’t sustainable in the long run to not have a clear policy or channel to contact government. “We need to have rules of engagement to help both sides.”

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—Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun
President of Myanmar Teachers’ Federation

Daw Zin Mar Aung responded that there are two sides to understand. From the government perspective, it is confusing to know who to talk to and trust because there are many new CSOs being formed and none of them talk to each other. For example, the CSO forum at the Panlong Conference produced nothing of substance. “There is no input or paper coming out of the CSO discussion. The UPDJC is waiting for input from civil society but there hasn’t been anything submitted yet,” Daw Zin Mar Aung said.

Daw Zin Mar Aung asked how it is possible to reach a consensus when there are so many CSOs working on the same topic. Every organization has its own perspective, so it is difficult to find common ground. Therefore, the government gets confused as to who to trust and speak to. While there are structures in government and political parties, that doesn’t exist in civil society because the networks represent a huge group with no consolidation. Without consensus, it is tough for the government to work with civil society.

Another problem she highlighted is with the government’s messaging. Even though the government may create a policy, it doesn’t share it with the people. “It is important to set clear channels with messaging for policy as well.” Also at issue is the relationship between the bureaucracy and the new government. Bureaucracy in particular doesn’t understand how civil society works; the two have never had to work together. Both sides get defensive about small issues and then the problem grows bigger and ruins relationships. Without a real relationship or policy, there will be no trust and that requires starting to work together. “Members of parliament should lead the way because they can connect directly with constituents,” she said.

The moderator then brought the conversation to the executive branch and asked how the ministries view civil society. U Nay Phone Latt responded that it is easier for the legislature to work with civil society because they are closer to the people than the executive. The executive branch is more suspicious of civil society because CSOs have, at times, been aligned with political parties. Because of this lack of trust, previous administrations set up government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) in order to have allies working with them at the community level. Organizations, led by the wives of government officials, working on women’s affairs, health, and education are then linked with the General Administrative Department (GAD). This way, they can say they do not need CSOs because they are taking care of social welfare issues at the community level.

In U Nay Phone Latt’s opinion, GONGOs should be dismantled. But if they cannot be dismantled, then there must be an attempt to collaborate with them. “We have one GONGO and one CSO in my constituency that are working on religious tolerance,” he said. “We made them work together and they learned about each other and the context of the community. This is the best solution to find a

way forward and have a genuine organization that represents the people. This is the only way to help GONGOs become more independent.”

In his final question, the moderator asked how civil society should engage to achieve its goals in the current political landscape. Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun started by addressing the challenges that need to be overcome. At the moment the paths to connect with the government are unsatisfactory and they need to be improved. The challenges stem from the administrative culture. While the goal may be to delegate more power to the state level and increase space for civil society, first they need to find a way to work together. Oftentimes, government sees civil society organizations as a rival because they have been politicized in the past. It is important to change that rivalry into a partnership. To do that, we need mutual understanding. “We can’t say democratic changes are finished,” he said. “We have a lot more in our transition to do. It will take time.”

Civil society—especially the CSOs and unions that are based on membership—must also be democratic, he continued. Even civil society organizations are very top-down. Often the same people are at the head of the organizations for a long time. But it is important to have a democratic structure in a rights-based organization. Without embodying democracy in civil society organizations, there will be no opportunity to add to the democratic mechanism.

Daw Zin Mar Aung said there are many recommendations to be made because there are still many weaknesses. It is quite normal, she said, that weak institutions have emerged from weak society, but it must start somewhere and be built from there. “It’s the nature of the organizational culture and the times we have gone through. How do we overcome what we’ve been influenced by since birth?” As a founder of an organization herself, Daw Zin Mar Aung highlighted the importance of organizational development. It is easy to forget the details of establishing structure amid the chaos.

Organizations should not just follow donors; they should be leading donors since they are the native experts and know best. For government to rely on civil society, CSOs need to set their priorities and have their own areas in which they work.

She echoed others, saying that CSOs need to focus on their own issues, instead of tackling all issues. CSOs need to become more professional, have a better picture of what they want to achieve, and develop specialized technical expertise and insight. Organizations should not just follow donors; they should be leading donors since they are the native experts and know best. For government to rely on civil society, CSOs need to set their priorities and have their own areas in which they work.

U Nay Phone Latt added that he appreciates when CSOs work in networks because they are more effective. From the network level, they can form coalitions and have a stronger voice and more success. When working with the government, he said, it is important to know your organization’s agenda but also to listen and engage fully with the government. A good example is 66(d): 22 organizations were working on repealing it but when they started talking to parliament it became clear that full repeal was not an option. Since it would be counterproductive to push for repeal, their goals needed to change.

Another example is a coal plant in Yangon that has become a hot issue. While some groups oppose it on every level due to environmental concerns, there needs to be a middle ground in order to continue development. “Our government is trying to find a solution that works for the interests of everyone,” he said. “But it may not be perfect.”

The moderator summed up the panel by saying that there are definitely difficulties on the side of the government and the side of CSOs but that there needs to be more collaboration with a path toward working together. Otherwise problems will be perpetuated. He also observed that the two legislators on the panel can be seen as two champions of civil society in government.

Remarks from the U.S. Embassy George Sibley

George Sibley, Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Burma, said that of foremost interest to the U.S. government is the prospect, progress, and process of this new democracy. “The end of the road for democracy does not exist,” he said. “You will never have a day when you’ve suddenly finished working on democracy. It is a never-ending quest and there is always room for improvement in any country. Looking at all of you in this room though, I am optimistic.”

There is a famous quote about democracy being the worst form of government except every other one. It can be difficult, messy, and hard work, but it is the only way we have found to allow the expression of the will of the people in how they are governed, he said. The role that civil society can play is to reflect that will, which is enormously important. The United States is proud of the small contribution it has made in that effort: Sibley said the embassy’s role is to help, applaud, and facilitate the democratic transition but all the hard work is done by the people of Myanmar.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” Sibley pointed out that it doesn’t bend automatically but bends because of joint effort and joint toil. The good news is that civil society can help to bend it, despite many barriers. “We may take two steps back, but we can take three steps forward the next day,” he said. There is no one answer to how we should bend the arc but it takes hard work.

Sibley recounted his time working as the Director of the U.S. Department of State Office of Environmental Quality and Transboundary Issues in 2011. The office was working on mercury regulations in order to balance the legitimate uses of mercury and the health effects of mercury on the population. After hearing from stakeholders—companies, civil society, and citizens—the Department of State needed to decide what to do. “It was very enlightening to see how civil society could work with government to give a voice to the people,” he said.

Panel Discussion: An International View of Myanmar’s Civil Society: Why Is Civil Society a Priority for Donors?

Panelists: Gail Marzetti and Teresa McGhie

Moderator: Jennifer Whatley

Panel moderator Jennifer Whatley, World Learning Senior Technical Advisor for Civic Engagement and Governance, recapped the morning’s discussions and introduced the panelists from USAID and DFID. In her opening remarks, Teresa McGhie from USAID said that at their very core, democracies depend

“[Aid to civil society is] a big investment, but we believe in it. People should participate in the decision-making processes. Elections play a big role, but civil society plays a big role once that government is in place.”

—Teresa McGhie
Mission Director, USAID

on a vibrant society. It is a compact between the governing and the governed and civil society serves as the grassroots source of holding governments accountable and demanding transparency.

She recalled her first trip to Myanmar in 2006 when she was an attorney for USAID in Bangkok, and she discussed the informal way in which USAID worked with Myanmar civil society. USAID trained people on the Thailand border because they were not permitted to conduct programs in Myanmar. When she came to Myanmar, she was only allowed to travel within Yangon and met with many local and international organizations to figure out how to work inside the

country. Since USAID was granted access to operate inside the country in 2012, support for civil society has been a big part of the work that USAID does. USAID recognizes that civil society and media are important for fostering political change and democracy.

Aid can come in many different forms from financial to technical to capacity-building, and that is important for civil society and media, McGhie said. Even now with a government that allows international aid, donations are still focused on civil society, not only supporting government programs. "It's a big investment, but we believe in it. People should participate in the decision-making processes. Elections play a big role, but civil society plays a big role once that government is in place," she said. USAID supports organizations in every state and region, focusing on organizational capacity, civic engagement, access to information, inclusiveness, and equal rights. Some examples of the organizations USAID funds are Equality Myanmar, the Green Peasant Institute, Pa-O Women's Union, and Pyi Gyi Khin.

After spending many years in Africa where the space for civil society was being eroded through new laws, McGhie was surprised that the Myanmar government was cooperating with civil society on crafting the association law. That may be what makes Myanmar different. In Africa, civil society organizations were often not organic and they didn't have relationships or the desire to work with government in the way that Myanmar civil society does. Civil society in Myanmar, on the other hand, developed independently before there was donor support. Now that donor support is available, the next challenge is to find a way to build the organizational capacity of civil society to enable these groups to fully access and use this resource.

As far as USAID's future of support in Myanmar, it will clearly continue to focus on civil society. While the sectors that are funded and their funding levels may change, core support will remain.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Gail Marzetti noted that just having a conference like this is a testament to the space that has been formed in Myanmar. She highlighted three main reasons why DFID supports civil society. The first is that civil society provides the demand and the government supplies the services. Civil society asks for things with the expectation that the government will provide them, so it is important to always have civil society pushing forward and identifying new areas on which they need to work. The second is to improve transparency and accountability. A mature government continues to support NGOs even when NGOs criticize them, which shows a true commitment to accountability. Third, civil society generally can reach the places that the government cannot. Sometimes that means in a geographic sense, but it can also mean engagement in sectors like minority rights or media.

Strengthening civil society is a big part of DFID's goals in part because many times the next generation of political leaders are born in the civil society arena.

DFID supports Myanmar for reasons similar to USAID's. DFID started working in Myanmar in 2004 and grew its presence in 2007. DFID often works with government, but strengthening civil society is a big part of its goals, in part because the next generation of political leaders is often born from the civil society arena. Furthermore, DFID's work with providers like LIFT and Pyoe Pin allows a pilot stage for projects that can then become government policy.

DFID's future plans involve continuing to work substantially with civil society. The way of working most likely will not change but there will probably be more of a focus on civic engagement. DFID is keen on starting to work at the subnational level and start focusing on more regional areas. In her conclusion, Marzetti said that an important part of advocacy is to protect civil society's operating space, especially when the world is seeing it contract in many areas.

Whatley, the moderator, asked both panelists what their organizations look for when they are trying to find a partner and where the opportunities are. McGhie responded that USAID is looking to support

ideas that come from organizations themselves. That being said, USAID's difficult financial management requirements make it challenging for local organizations to get grants directly, so USAID works with larger organizations to in turn conduct small grants programs. Through that mechanism, they have supported 16 media outlets. Those grants can be used for core support and organizational capacity building for a broad range of organizations. The hope is that maybe some of these smaller organizations will merge and become able to manage larger grants and build a larger organization.

DFID has two paths to supporting civil society. One is that the embassy issues a call for proposals on various different themes, looks at the bids, and assesses where the small grants will go. The second way is through the big programs DFID supports which then work directly with CSOs, often through a call for proposals in certain sectors. Generally, DFID is looking for partners who can work in a region in which they are already well established or in a sector in which they have expertise.

With the next question from the audience, the panelists were asked how they choose the areas on which they work. McGhie responded that it comes down to how success is defined. USAID looks at organizational capacity, what it is the organization expects to accomplish, and if the organization has some way to evaluate and determine if it was successful. It is often difficult to measure success, but it is important to know whether the organization can accomplish what it sets out to do and manage its finances. If there are challenges, USAID can help with capacity-building.

Marzetti explained that it is not very straightforward at DFID because the programs are large and complex. There is a first tier of partners DFID works with to develop ideas. Those initial partners know how to manage larger grants and then they work with a host of other partners. Each tier gets smaller and more regional. In terms of how the first tier is selected, it is a complicated chain with competitive bidding and strict rules.

The next question was that if democracy is the goal of aid, what has been the return on investment so far? DFID has a mandate to use taxpayer money to alleviate poverty in the 21st century. For example, no child should go to bed hungry, no curable illness should go untreated, and terrible situations across the world should be prevented. One of the ways that can be accomplished is through democracy. For USAID, democracy is not the final result of the efforts, it is only a path to peace, stability, prosperity, and security for Myanmar. As far as return on its investment, USAID has seen obvious returns for civil society in the last 10 years. Increasing civil society's participation is never a bad investment, McGhie said. "There may be setbacks and it may take longer than expected but it is so important to make sure the will of the people is reflected in government."

Then the panelists discussed how to keep the space open for civil society, especially in fragile democracies. The world over, there are increasing restrictions on civil society, but when democracies start to mature, the voices of civil society become stronger. That can be seen in Myanmar as well, where many people from civil society ran for office and are now part of the NLD government. Hopefully, this increasing civic engagement will continue, but there needs to be constant pressure to keep the environment open.

When asked about the top three challenges they face, Marzetti responded that building capacity for organizations is really difficult, especially for vibrant and emerging organizations that do not know how to navigate the system yet. Another challenge is that DFID can't support as many people as it wants. Thirdly, organizations need to have transparency and accountability, which can be difficult to build.

McGhie agreed and added that one of the challenges is keeping the American people focused, especially when there are setbacks like in Rakhine: because the funding comes from American taxpayers, Americans need to believe in the job USAID is doing. Getting that message back to America is difficult because they don't have as nuanced a view as the people on the ground. You also see huge spikes in funding for fresh democracies and after a while, she said, people lose interest and think help is no longer needed.

The final question from the audience was about challenges in achieving greater inclusiveness. Marzetti underlined the importance of civil society in achieving greater inclusion and working in cooperation with the government to involve those in hard-to-reach sectors and geographic areas. She congratulated the participants in the room for continuing to hold government accountable so that the budget is spent based on the people's desires. She expressed that the country's diverse and vibrant civil society really shows the strength of the Myanmar people.

McGhie concluded her remarks by saying how inspired she was by the people she had met in civil society in Myanmar. She suggested that they work across organizational and topical sectors and find ways to engage youth. It is very important to ensure an emerging democracy that lasts.

Conference Closing Keynote: What's Next for Civil Society in Myanmar? **Kavi Chongkittavorn**

Kavi Chongkittavorn wrapped up the conference with a recap of what he saw as some of the great assets of Myanmar civil society as compared to that of his homeland of Thailand. Referring to the previous presentation, he mentioned how lucky CSOs are in Myanmar for donors to sit on a stage and ask for their proposals and offer assistance. He talked about how successful the past four years were in Myanmar and the incredible energy that people have for change.

He gave three suggestions for civil society leaders in the room. The first was to listen more, which he pointed out was a trend echoed throughout the day. It is easy to be confident that what you think is right, but you won't get anywhere working with government unless you listen to where government is coming from.

You won't get anywhere working with government unless you listen to where government is coming from ... work with regional partners ... use media creatively and think of media as a partner.

The second was to work with regional partners, instead of thinking like an isolated nation. Everyone is willing to share their past experiences and to help Myanmar succeed. It is important to learn from those experiences so as not to repeat them. Without working together, you won't succeed.

The third suggestion was to use media creatively and think of media as a partner. Exiled media and foreign media helped to share the story of Myanmar in the past. While the media environment in Myanmar is not like the West, it is certainly much freer than before and is now ranked number four in ASEAN in terms of press freedoms. Without having the media on board during the transition, the Myanmar government could never have received the legitimacy that it now has or convinced others that what it was doing was real.

"To sum up, you need a communication strategy," he said. "You need to plan. A communication strategy for CSOs is the most important way to protect the space for civil society." In Myanmar, that is relatively easy to do because there are freedoms to speak to the press and speak to the public, which is not the case in places like Singapore and Thailand. Organizations can criticize the government very freely in Myanmar, so a narrative needs to be crafted to create trust in a genuine new democracy.

IV. Conference Agenda

Civil Society in Myanmar's New Democracy Institute for Political and Civic Engagement Conference 2017 September 20, 2017 Novotel Hotel, Yangon, Myanmar

8:30-9:00am **Registration**

9:00-9:30am **Welcoming remarks**

Gretchen Kunze

Country Representative and iPACE Director, World Learning Myanmar

Sakil Malik

Vice President, Global Development, World Learning

9:30-10:00am **Keynote Presentation: State of the Civil Society Sector in Myanmar: Where We Came From and Where We Are Now**

U Kyaw Win

Former Editor-in-Chief of *The Waves*

Former Member of Amyotha Hluttaw Political, Economic, and Legal Affairs Commission

10:00-10:45am Tea break

10:45am–Noon **Panel Discussion: Civil Society's Role in Myanmar**

How is civil society engaging on Myanmar's three priority challenges: peace, democratic consolidation, and media/freedom of expression? Is civil society engagement making a positive impact? Should it be doing something differently, or should it be involved at all? This panel will examine the work of civil society on these three critical issues facing the country, and consider bigger questions of civil society's role and impact.

Moderator:

Nyein Zarni Naing

Independent Analyst

Panelists:

Daw Khin Ma Ma Myo

Executive Director of Myanmar Institute of Peace and Security Studies

U Min Ko Naing

Leader from 88 Generation Peace and Open Society

U Myint Kyaw

Executive Member of the Myanmar Journalist Network and Member of the Myanmar Press Council

Noon-1:30pm Lunch

1:30-2:45pm **Panel Discussion: How Do We Work Together? How Government Sees Civil Society's Role in Myanmar's Future**

As both the new government and civil society continue to define themselves since the 2015 elections, they are also forming new ways of interacting with each other. How does the government envision the role of civil society in a democratic Myanmar? What common ground do the nation's government and civil society share? What are the barriers to working more closely together, and can they be overcome?

Moderator:**Nyein Zarni Naing**

Independent Analyst

Panelists:**Daw Zin Mar Aung**

Member of Parliament representing Yankin Township, Yangon, in the Pyithu Hluttaw

U Nay Phone Latt

Member of Parliament representing Thingangyun Township, Yangon, in the Yangon Regional Hluttaw

Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun

President of Myanmar Teachers' Federation; Lecturer of International Relations at University of Yangon

2:45- 2:55pm **Remarks from United States Embassy in Burma**

George Sibley

Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Burma

2:55-3:30pm Tea break

3:30-4:30pm **Panel Discussion: An International View of Myanmar's Civil Society: Why is Civil Society a Priority for Donors?**

There are clearly multiple goals and objectives international donors can choose to support in Myanmar, yet many prioritize the development of a strong civil society. What is the rationale for this decision, and what do donors hope to see in Myanmar through their support of this sector? What are their future plans to support civil society in Myanmar? What is the definition of success? These are just some of the questions we will explore during this interactive session with donor representatives who are based in Yangon.

Moderator:**Jennifer Whatley**

Senior Technical Advisor for Civic Engagement and Governance, World Learning

Panelists:

Teresa McGhie

Mission Director of US Agency for International Development (USAID)

Gail Marzetti

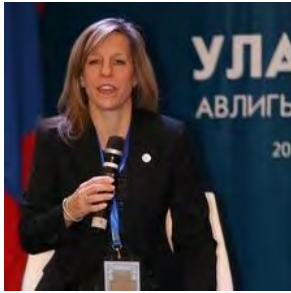
Head of Department for International Development (DFID)

4:30-4:50pm **Conference Closing Keynote: What's Next for Civil Society in Myanmar?**

Kavi Chongkittavorn

Editor-in-Chief and Executive Director of *Myanmar Times*

V. Bios of Presenters



Gretchen Kunze has more than 19 years of experience in international development, particularly in the areas of democracy building, good governance, civic engagement, access to justice, and civil society, and has spent over 14 years living and working in Asia. She is currently based in Yangon as World Learning's Country Representative for Myanmar, where she leads the Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE) and American Center English Language Program, among other World Learning programs. She has written numerous articles on civil society in Asia and authored the chapter on Laos for the recently published Routledge *Handbook on Civil Society in Asia*.



Sakil Malik is World Learning's Vice President of Global Development. Prior to joining World Learning, Malik served as director for the USAID-funded Reading within Reach (REACH) Project and Global Reading Network (GRN), which worked to improve the literacy of primary school children around the world. He has master's degrees in educational leadership and policy, and in economics.



Kyaw Win is an active contributor to the Myanmar literary scene whose interests span a variety of cultural, economic, and political issues. His published translations include Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* and Joseph E. Stiglitz's *Making Globalization Work*. In the 1980s and 1990s, Kyaw Win founded and ran a private school in Monywa. After three periods of imprisonment, he moved to Yangon and became a freelance writer and editor. He has edited five magazines, most recently *The Waves* magazine, where he was Chief Editor. He has won numerous awards for his writing and has published 102 books to date. In 2008, he attended the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa.



Nyein Zarni Naing started his career as a humanitarian worker in Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and later continued as a volunteer civic educator for monastic schools in Sagaing Hill. He co-founded the Myanmar Debate Education Society in 2011, implementing youth-led debate training in ethnic regions and organizing debate tournaments, forums, and workshops. Since 2012, he has been an independent researcher and policy advisor for World Bank, UNDP, Oxfam in Myanmar, and other donor agencies on rural economy, poverty, and local governance. He is currently an independent analyst and writer on aid, civil society, and emerging development issues.



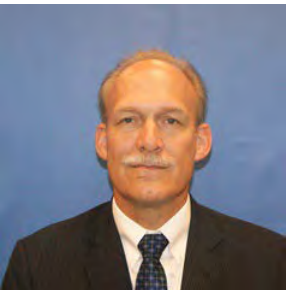
Khin Ma Ma Myo is the Executive Director of the Myanmar Institute of Peace and Security Studies (MIPSS), which she founded in 2013 to facilitate the peace and reconciliation process in Myanmar. She is also the founder of two other institutes, the Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) and the Myanmar Institute of Politics and Policy (MIPP). In addition to her many years working for democratic movements, she is currently involved in the Myanmar peace process, serving many roles. Khin Ma Ma Myo is a well-published writer in various political and education journals. She is also an experienced trainer and facilitator for over 160 organizations in the areas of women, peace and security, human rights, gender equality, civil education, democracy, and electoral processes. Khin Ma Ma Myo has numerous academic credentials from UK universities. She is a Peace Leadership Fellow of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS), based in Cambodia.



Min Ko Naing is a leading democracy activist and former political prisoner. He was the chairman of the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) and a leader of the pro-democracy protests in 1988. He spent most of the years from 1988 until 2012 imprisoned by the state for his activities, and was released on January 13, 2012, in a mass presidential amnesty. Upon his release, he immediately returned to campaigning for democracy and peace in the country. He and his colleagues established the 88 Generation (Peace and Open Society), which has become one of the leading civil society organizations in Burma. Min Ko Naing has won numerous international awards for his efforts, such as National Order of Merit, Gwangjy Prize for Human Rights (2009), the Civil Courage Prize (2005), the Homo Homini Award by People in Need Foundation, the Student Peace Prize (2001) and the John Humphrey Freedom Award (1999).



Myint Kyaw started his career as a journalist at Myanmar Dana Magazine in 2003. From 2008 to 2010, he wrote news and articles on economics in a number of journals, including Thitsar News Journal, and from 2010 to 2012 he worked as an editor for Yangon Press International Online News Agency. From 2012 to 2015, he worked as the Secretary of the Myanmar Journalist Network and as a temporary Executive Member of the Myanmar Press Council. He is now a Journalism Advisor at Internews, an Executive Member of the Myanmar Journalist Network, and a Member of the Myanmar Press Council.



George Sibley assumed his duties as Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Burma on July 31, 2017. Previously, he served at the U.S. Embassy New Delhi from 2013-2017 as the Minister Counselor for Economic, Environment, Science and Technology Affairs, and as the U.S. Co-Chair of the U.S.-India Science and Technology Endowment Fund (USISTEF). Mr. Sibley joined the Foreign Service in 1988 and is a career member of the Senior Foreign Service. Before arriving in New Delhi, Mr. Sibley was Director of the Office of Environmental Quality and Transboundary Issues at the U.S. Department of State. Prior to that assignment Mr. Sibley served a year in Iraq as the Senior Advisor for Northern Iraq and as the Team Leader of Provincial Reconstruction Team Ninewa, following two years as the Director of the Office of Iraq Political Affairs at the Department of State. He previously served as Consul General in Kolkata, India, from 2002-2005.



Zin Mar Aung is an activist and politician, currently serving as a Pyithu Hluttaw MP for Yankin Township. Due to her involvement in Burma's democracy movement, she served 11 years as a political prisoner; nine of those years were in solitary confinement. She was released in 2009. She is a founding member of the Yangon School of Political Science and the Rainfall Gender Studies Group to promote women's participation in democracy building. She serves on the Public Affairs Committee for the Pyithu Hluttaw, the Joint Public Account Committee for the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, and on the UPDJC Working Committee on Social Affairs. She is the first woman from Burma who received the International Women of Courage award in 2012.



Nay Phone Latt is a Burmese blogger and activist, currently serving as a Yangon Region Hluttaw MP for Thingangyun Township. Nay Phone Latt was a recipient of the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award and was selected for the 2010 Time 100 list under the Hero Category. Nay Phone Latt wrote regularly for a Burmese internet magazine Thanlwin Ainmat (Dream of Salween River) and his personal blog, The City that I Have Dropped before he was arrested in January 2008. He was sentenced to a total of 20 years and 6 months in prison due to his alleged involvement in spreading news during the 2007 Saffron Revolution using his blogs. After he was released under the presidential amnesty in 2012, he participated in the International Writing Program's Fall Residency at the University of Iowa in Iowa City. He is also a co-founder of Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO), a local NGO focusing on ICT for Development, Internet Freedom, and Civic Technology.



Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun is a lecturer from the Department of International Relations, University of Yangon. He has also been the president of the Myanmar Teachers' Federation since July 2017. In 2016, he was a visiting professor at the Department of Development Studies at the University of Vienna. His focus areas are labor issues and foreign and domestic policies of Myanmar. He was also involved in the national minimum wage setting committee from 2014-2015. He has published research articles on the state-building of Myanmar and writes articles on the politics of Myanmar for local media.



Jennifer Whatley is World Learning's Senior Technical Advisor for Civic Engagement and Governance. She has 20 years of international development experience, focused primarily on civil society strengthening, democracy, and human rights issues. She has designed and overseen programs in Asia, Europe and Eurasia, the Caribbean, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Ms. Whatley joined World Learning in 2004 and has held a variety of technical and management roles within the organization. She came to World Learning from Freedom House where she oversaw international exchange programs for human rights activists, civil society leaders, and media members. She earned a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and a bachelor's degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service.



Teresa McGhie has been the Mission Director for Burma since June 17, 2016. Before joining the Burma Mission in July 2014, Ms. McGhie most recently served as Mission Director for South Sudan. Ms. McGhie also served as USAID's Mission Director in Angola, Deputy Mission Director in Mozambique, and Regional Legal Adviser in Sudan. Her extensive career in USAID's Foreign Service also brought her to Bangkok as part of the Regional Development Mission for Asia, as well as to Nairobi where she served in the East Africa Regional Mission. She joined USAID in 2000 as a legal officer. A lawyer by training, Ms. McGhie worked as an associate attorney with Sidley and Austin in Washington, D.C., and with Orrick, Herrington and Sutcliffe in New York City before joining USAID. She also served as the assistant director of the International Legal Studies Program and as director of the Summer Law Program in Chile for American University's Washington College of Law.



Dr. Gail Marzetti has been the head of DFID Burma since July 2017. Prior to this, Dr. Marzetti was the Head of DFID in Nepal for four years, which included leading the UK's humanitarian response to the 2015 Nepal earthquake. She is an agricultural economist with a background in development, having worked for many years in agricultural development in Mozambique and forestry in Brazil. Past roles with DFID include the Deputy Director of Research and Evidence Division, Deputy Head of the United Nations and Commonwealth department, Head of the Corporate Strategy Group and Natural Resources Adviser and Head of DFID Brazil. Dr. Marzetti has a PhD from Manchester University, where she examined the impact of cash cropping on poverty and food security in post-conflict Mozambique.



Kavi Chongkittavorn is editor-in-chief and executive director of Myanmar Times. He has been a journalist for more than three decades covering Thai and regional politics. He began his career in 1983 as a reporter and became the paper's foreign news editor in 1986. Then, he was asked to explore Indochina—first as Bureau Chief in Phnom Penh, Cambodia (1988-1990) and later in Hanoi, Vietnam (1990-1992). After a year in Oxford University as a Reuters Fellow in 1994, he went to Jakarta and served as Special Assistant to the Secretary General of ASEAN in Jakarta in 1995 before returning to journalism. He was named the Human Rights Journalist of 1998 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by Amnesty International. From 1999-2000, he was President of the Thai Journalists Association. From 2000-2001, he went to Harvard University as a Nieman Fellow. He is also a senior fellow at Chulalongkorn University's Institute of Security and International Studies.

VI. About World Learning and iPACE

For 85 years, **World Learning** has worked to create a more peaceful, sustainable, and just world. Our education, development, and exchange programs help people find their voices, connect with their communities, and strengthen the institutions that form the backbone of a democratic society. With our support, these emerging leaders tackle critical global issues like poverty, conflict, and inequality.

Since 2003, World Learning has supported community development efforts in Myanmar by implementing training, networking, and organizational strengthening programs and providing technical expertise for the U.S. Embassy's American Center in Yangon and Jefferson Center in Mandalay. Alumni of our Myanmar programs have gone on to start their own community-based organizations, won small grants from the U.S. Embassy in Burma, earned Fulbright Scholarships, run for public office, and started new schools.

The **Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE)**, a program of World Learning, is an educational resource for Myanmar's emerging democratic leaders to develop and increase their knowledge and practical application of fundamental democratic principles while promoting civic engagement to foster more representative and accountable governance. iPACE designs and implements intensive civic education through thematic courses, mobile clinics, and networking and advocacy events at the American Center in Yangon and the Jefferson Center in Mandalay. Since 2012, iPACE has trained more than 2,000 participants representing 754 civil society organizations, 39 political parties, and 10 labor unions. Our alumni come from all states and regions in Myanmar, 28 ethnicities, and every major religion in the country.

iPACE is made possible by a generous grant from the U.S. Embassy in Burma.