



 World Learning Myanmar
EDUCATION | DEVELOPMENT | EXCHANGE

Civil Society in Myanmar's New Democracy

CONFERENCE REPORT | MAY 2019

WORLD LEARNING

World Learning, Myanmar
14, Taw Win Road, Yangon, Myanmar

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iPACE
INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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The Civil Society in Myanmar's Political and Social Development Conference was organized by World Learning in September 2018 through its Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE) program. 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 is Htet Htet Aung.
Speakers and panelists provided their services on a voluntary basis.

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I. Introduction

The civil society sector in Myanmar has developed dramatically since the time after Cyclone Nargis struck in 2008, with different roles ranging from implementing emergency reliefs and delivering services to doing advocacy works. Since then, the sector has interacted with different stakeholders—from citizens at the grassroots level to government officials, business tycoons, politicians, policy makers, etc.—by various means, but with the aims related to assisting the country's political and social development and later, its flourishing new democracy. Although key actors in civil society make remarkable attempts to enhance the areas that they put their values and interests on such as education, gender, health, civic engagement, etc., civil society in Myanmar has yet to speak as a unified voice and act as an influential sector. This leaves a gap to collectively gather strength and influence in order to systematically and effectively address the country's current challenges to achieve a just and equal society.



This was the second conference designed by World Learning's Institute of Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE) to provide an opportunity for civil society actors and other important stakeholders to pose and examine the most pivotal questions regarding civil society's role in Myanmar's current trends towards social and political development. Similar to the overwhelming response in 2017, we received more than 120 attendees from civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties, embassies, and international organizations for this two-day event at the American Center Yangon on September 18 and 19, 2018.

In designing this second conference, like the strategies we used for the first conference, we consulted with some of the country's most engaged and experienced democracy advocates from different aspects of the political spectrum: political prisoners, labor unions, political party members, interest groups, media, and international donors.

Common themes which resulted from the discussions included the following:

- Civil society plays a critical role in the political and social development of a country, especially in young democracies like Myanmar.
- Civil society in Myanmar has yet to present itself as a whole sector. CSOs respond to the needs and interests of their individual communities and only work together when they have common interests.
- Myanmar's transition to a democracy led by a civilian led government took place with the national elections of 2015. As a new democracy, its citizens' knowledge and skills in civic engagement and political participation are limited, especially in regard to effectively dealing with conflicts, protecting freedom of expression, and guaranteeing inclusion for all peoples across the country regardless of ethnic group, religion, etc.
- The status and independence of media freedom in Myanmar is an important question to ask in this political transition. Civil society is a key player for democratization and takes on an essential role to work with media for freedom of speech and expressions. Media and civil society need to work more closely for further political and social development.
- Strengthening strategic advocacy efforts employed by civil society in Myanmar remains an immediate need for sustainable development and effective policy change.

In summary, we would like to express our special thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the event—the distinguished speakers and panelists, staff and consultants, interpreter who artfully interpreted in English, attendees, and the U.S. Embassy of Burma whose generous support of World Learning makes this iPACE program possible.

II. Panelists and Speakers

(Listed in order of appearance)

Rebecca Spotts, Director of Cross-Sector Programming, World Learning

Scot Marciel, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Burma

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

U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint, Executive Director, People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE)

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin, Former Member of Parliament representing Bahan Township; Founder of School of Law, Gender and Politics

Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai, Managing Director & Research Consultant, Insight Research Corner

U Zeya Thu, Deputy Chief Editor of the Voice Journal; Independent Analyst of Politics and Economics

Daw Kathleen Thein, Chairperson, Hindu Women Association

U Aung Myo Min, Executive Director, Equality Myanmar

U Minn Latt (a) Tun Myint Kyaw, Founder/Reporter, Than Lwin Times; Former President, Thanbyuzayat Township Development Committee

Ma Thida (San Chaung), Writer; Director, PEN International

U Kyaw Soe Lynn, Communications Officer, World Bank

Daw Nilar Myaing, Research Program Director, Sandi Governance Institute

U Kyi Zaw Lwin, Secretary, Mon State Youth Committee; Technical Adviser, Mon State CSO Network

Daw Thinzar Shunlei Yi, Youth Advocate and Activist

III. Summaries of Remarks and Presentations

Welcoming Remarks from World Learning

REBECCA SPOTTS

Rebecca Spotts provided opening remarks for the conference by welcoming special guests, civil society leaders, and distinguished speakers, followed by a brief description of World Learning's mission and the activities of the Institute for Political and Civic Engagement (iPACE), which was established in 2012. iPACE has had a wide reach, with training and support provided to more than 2,800 iPACE alumni from 44 political parties and more than 1,000 CSOs, covering every state and region of Myanmar. She highlighted the conference as a unique opportunity "to think about the role of the civil society sector more broadly as a crucial component" of democratic development of Myanmar and to consider the fundamental questions of what civil society can and should be doing to contribute. Spotts addressed the audience, "Civil society is more than an individual organization—to be truly effective, the sector must be nurtured and strengthened by finding ways to work together, to be more inclusive and to form effective coalitions across sectors to achieve a shared vision and goals. The conference is the forum to reflect on progress made, tackle tough questions about what can and should be done better and identify strategy that we can all adopt to strengthen civil society sector as a whole."

Welcoming Remarks from U.S.

AMBASSADOR SCOT MARCIEL

U.S. Ambassador Scot Marciel, in his remarks, started off with a brief history of the American Center, highlighting it as a constant place to gather and talk about issues, study and to exchange ideas, even throughout difficult years in Myanmar. Ambassador Marciel stressed the importance of the civil society sector in relation to the goals and policies of the United States government, which is to support the people of the country in the struggle to "a freer, more democratic and peaceful Myanmar where all people can enjoy the rights and their justice." The building blocks of democracy require free and fair elections, an independent and strong parliament, a strong justice system, good governance, and independent media, but it is incomplete without a strong civil society. Civil society is "...not instead of (the government or the media) but to complement and supplement these other important institutions to amplify the voices from the grassroots," Ambassador Marciel told the audience. "We also see civil society as a source of ideas, and democracies and governments need those ideas" and that those ideas are fundamental to Myanmar's prospects for success—socially, politically, in terms of peace, governance, and in making people's lives better. In pursuing these, civil society has the responsibility to be an example for citizens and the government as well, which means to operate with transparency, highest ethical standards, and to be inclusive of all citizens.

Keynote Presentation

*How Civil Society Contributes to the Political and Social Development of Myanmar:
2018 Update—Reflections and Current State*

DR. SAI KHAING MYO TUN

Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun's keynote presentation was delivered in three parts—how civil society is involved in democratization in which he presented theories and international standards; the history of civil society in Myanmar; and the current state of the civil society sector. He restated, as Ambassador Marciel said earlier in the conference, that a fully functioning democracy cannot be achieved without strong civil society. Moreover, the size of the civil society sector in terms of number of members or organizations should not be the only indicator, but rather that the quality of a civil society sector is just as important. Civil society also has the responsibility to invite the elite (including educated people, artists, activists, etc.) to become engaged in the democratic transition. However, Myanmar's civil society is lacking in that aspect as many elite focus only on their own communities or politics, Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun pointed out.

Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun outlined the concept of good governance in international development studies called the ABC model, where A represents authority or state, B represents business or private sector, and C represents civil society. Within that framework, every sector is crucial for state-building and those three sectors should have internal checks and balance. Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun suggested the seven areas which the United Nations Development Program recommends for civil society to contribute to state-building and democratic transition, which include: political support; parliamentary development; electoral system and process; justice and human rights; e-governance and access to information; decentralization; public administration reform; and corruption control. By furthering those areas, civil society can: enable the participation of women and minority groups, create spaces for political dialogue, and provide voter education, among many other areas. Civil society in Myanmar is already taking part in most of the areas mentioned, but there are also areas that are still weak, said Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun.

Myanmar is no stranger to the concept of CSOs, however, in the past, most of them were community-based organizations focusing on social or ad hoc issues. Under the Socialist and junta regimes, most of the organizations were formed by the respective governments and were not able to operate independently. In the later period of the military rule, there were some underground CSOs, but they had to operate in challenging conditions under a repressive regime. Only after Cyclone Nargis in 2008 did the state accept the role of civil society as an important necessity after which the civil society sector was strengthened as a result of the constitution, union laws, and official CSO laws. Nevertheless, issues related to engaging the government persist. Civil society continues to have a weakened position under the current government, with one factor for this weakness being the unclear policies of the National League for Democracy (NLD) led-government towards the civil society sector. "At present, we always have to proactively approach the government, but in an ideal scenario, the government should also initiate the conversation. It's lacking active engagement," said Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun.

In his concluding remarks, Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun, stressed the importance of trust, interactions, and tolerance between the government and the civil society. "[Currently], trust is lost between civil society and government and it is happening like this because of very few interactions," continued Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun. "The government should view the CSOs as its partner. Moreover, the government should tolerate CSOs in some cases, while the civil society should also do the same."

Panel Discussion

Civil Society in Civic and Political Engagement

DISCUSSANT: U SAI YE KYAW SWAR MYINT

PANELISTS: DR. NYO NYO THIN AND DR. LWIN LWIN WAI



This panel focused on: the challenges that civil society in Myanmar encounters in fully engaging with the political transition; how the civil society sector should improve citizens' civic and political engagement (especially in dealing with conflicts, freedom of expression, and inclusive participation); and what hurdles the sector needs to overcome.

In his introductory remarks, U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint discussed two main challenges that CSOs are facing: how CSOs view the current transition to democracy and how CSOs will engage the current government. He questioned—will CSOs use the approach that was used during the military junta, namely a demand-based approach including big demonstrations and protests, or a more collaborative approach generally seen in more established democracies? U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint stated that CSOs should think carefully about how to analyze and engage with the current government and the transition process.

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin opened her remarks on the relationship between the current government and CSOs. In her own experience, she has observed several different engagement styles. Of the two CSOs networks that Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin is involved with, one has been proposing good policies but on account of the fact that it doesn't have a good relationship with the government, the government is hesitant to accept their policy recommendations. However, another network which offers less effective policy recommendations has had much greater success in government responsiveness since they have a good relationship with the government. In listing multiple types of relationships between the government and CSOs, she pointed out that the best relationship for the public is one in which CSOs and government engage as partners to serve the needs of citizens.

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin also pointed out a current weakness of CSOs in Myanmar, “To be frank, CSOs are weak in the collective bargaining approach.” They are active in doing so only when the problem is dire. She highlighted, “Currently, we see collaboration of women CSOs in Parliament (Hluttaw) on the sex and prostitution law. But this type of CSO collaboration is exceptional and the collective engagement, negotiation and collaboration of CSOs with government institutions is still weak.”

Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai discussed the evolving relationship of previous and current governments with CSOs. She shared that CSOs used to work surreptitiously on a wide range of issues, even regarding environmental issues. But under the U Thein Sein government, CSOs often got more space for their activities, including stakeholder meetings with government and business owners to be more transparent in natural resource issues. She offered her opinion that “space for CSOs has become narrow under NLD government as compared to more open space under the U Thein Sein government.” On the one hand, CSOs have been able to engage in more activities due to the support of international funding, but as a result, have had to lessen the political focus of their work in order to be in compliance with international donor agendas.

Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai also noted that CSOs are successfully leading a bottom-up, problem solving approach taking the issues from the people to the government. However, the current government often sees this engagement as complaining from CSOs. The government often sees themselves as having greater expertise than CSOs and CSOs as being incapable of collaboration, which has led to limited space for CSOs.

In the discussion, U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint agreed that CSOs’ mandate and space has been decreasing since 2015. However, this is based on reported experiences of individuals and CSOs since there is no detailed research about the current challenges faced collectively by CSOs.

Q & A Session

Attendees at the panel primarily asked about the access to information, capacity, and the standing of CSOs in Myanmar’s current context. Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai answered the question about the capacity of CSOs. She pointed out that there is still limited policy research carried out by CSOs to advocate and lobby the government. CSOs need space, human resources, technical skills, and capacity to carry out these activities.

U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myin offered another point of view of on this question stating that that capacity is not needed on some issues: “We shouldn’t say that CSOs cannot work if they need capacity in all issues.”

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin also supported his opinion, “I cannot totally accept the perception that CSOs have no capacity. Capacities can be identified according to the nature of their activities. For example, youths without any experience could participate very well in checking and reporting on the waste of water in municipal water pipe line in Yangon city. Moreover, the issue of low capacity is true in Myanmar at all levels, not only in CSOs, but also in parliament (Hluttaw) and government, which is due to the problem of the education system.”

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin was asked about the reduced space for CSOs and reduced collaboration with current government and CSOs as compared to previous years. She highlighted that government, especially parliament (Hluttaw), mainly recognize registered CSOs rather than unregistered ones, limiting space and collaboration between CSOs.

U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint shared 2017 and 2018 survey findings that show only 5 percent respondents participated in demonstrations and 11 percent participated in civic education. He highlighted that the participation of CSOs in charity and social activities like blood donation, funeral services, and religious associations is consistently around 33 percent. However, participation remains low in political activities such as meeting with local authorities, meeting with MPs of their constituency, signature campaign and demonstrations. He also encouraged CSOs to find creative ways and strategies to promote knowledge, values, and practices of democracy and civic education to their community members other than through formal training designs.

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin discussed basic concepts of partnership between government and CSOs. She highlighted two facts that the small size of government and good governance are essential to build partnerships. She noted, "Building democracy will not be successful if there is no or low active citizenship and public participation." She also highlighted that CSOs as well as political parties need to reach the grassroots level.

Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai highlighted that there were more demonstrations and social movements in previous U Thein Sein government than today. This may be due to the ability of people who can directly meet with their MPs to solve their problems.

Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai also pointed out CSOs also need to understand democratic culture and practices based on her experiences. U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint shared the 57% of survey respondents answered "I don't know" to questions about the main principals of democracy.

Panel Discussion

Easing Communal Conflicts

DISCUSSANT: U ZEYA THU

PANELISTS: DAW KATHLEEN THEIN AND U AUNG MYO MIN

This panel focused on: how to ease communal conflicts; how civil society in Myanmar responds when communal conflicts such as religious tensions, ethnic conflicts, etc. emerge among diverse communities; how should civil society sector be involved in working together to support conflict resolution and prevent conflict, focusing on approaches with the biggest impact and what they need to do differently.

U Zeya Thu kicked off the panel with a discussion about the current situation of CSOs in handling community conflicts. U Aung Myo Min discussed that communal conflict not only affects local communities but also CSOs as they are organizations made up of community members. Conflicts can often limit CSOs' activities because despite most CSOs being neutral, they can often be swept up in communal tension and be seen as the enemy. CSOs often become the target of attacks and face significant hurdles in implementing their activities. To alleviate these issues, CSOs have to try to overcome these challenges with solutions such as networking and collaboration with partner organizations. CSOs in these situations mainly focus on education activities to promote acceptance and tolerance of diversity, data collection including facts finding and documentation, and advocacy to both government and international bodies regarding the situation on the ground during communal conflicts.



Daw Kathleen Thein pointed out that role of CSOs is very important in preventing conflict. CSOs need to participate in early warning and early response systems. CSOs should participate in conflict prevention such as trust building activities and reducing rumor distribution. CSOs should be neutral, regardless of their emotions.

U Aung Myo Min pointed out that the invisible root causes such as history, system, and governments need to be explored more thoroughly. The voices of different communities and perceptions need to be collected to understand the real situation between communities and to ensure that CSOs are not working off of propaganda. Based on his experience as an All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) member, different ethnic groups are afraid of each other due to negative opinions, especially inherited through family generations and through the propaganda spread on national TV and radio.

Offering another point of view, Daw Kathleen Thein argued that prevention efforts for future conflict is more important than identifying the root causes. She noted, "I prefer prevention and collaboration than wasting a lot of time to find the complex root causes as I feel finding the causes means looking backward and we need to move forward leading peacefully by collaboration."

U Zeya Thu remarked that we should consider that all CSOs are not neutral and posed the question: "Can some civil society worsen the conflict?" U Aung Myo Min pointed out the concept of QUANGOS, CSOs who propagate the policies of government, which can be found across the region. While CSOs should follow 'Do No Harm' principles, some CSOs do not contribute to peace and harmony, but instead promote hate speech and exacerbate conflict.

Daw Kathleen Thein highlighted that there are often internal power struggles among CSOs, and it is often difficult for them to find common ground and work together. "We can use fire in positive ways, and we can find the beauty of diversities in positive ways too, especially to build social harmony. The most effective weapon is education and CSOs need to promote exchange between different." U Zeya Thu also suggested that different communities need exposure to each other.

Q & A Session

The questions of panel attendees focused on issues including how to control misinformation, rumor and hate speech on social media, how to handle negative beliefs among different ethnic groups, how to handle the impact of international pressure and neighboring countries, the impact on local communities, and how to handle conflicts among different groups.

Daw Kathleen Thein noted that using positive messaging in social media is one of the options for promoting conflict prevention by building social harmony. U Aung Myo Min answered that effective prevention of conflicts lies in sharing the right information and public education focused on diversity as an asset to the country rather than a problem. Curriculum reform in formal education is needed to provide this greater focus on peace education, which should be led by the government. For conflict resolution, government is the most responsible stakeholder, but it needs the collaboration and support of CSOs. Daw Kathleen Thein also noted that critical thinking must be promoted in formal education by the government.

Social media such as Facebook tracks user preferences so that people can avoid thoughts and opinions other than their own, which led to deepening divisions and the inability of people to understand others' opinions and perceptions. Accordingly, social media was misused in Myanmar and CSOs have requested Facebook to control the distribution of hate speech.

Panel Discussion

Democracy, Media Freedom and the Civil Society

DISCUSSANT: U MINN LATT @ TUN MYINT KYAW

PANELISTS: MA THIDA (SAN CHAUNG) AND U KYAW SOE LYNN

This panel focused on: democracy, media freedom and civil society; why media freedom is significant in the democratic transition of Myanmar and the obstacles that hinder media freedom in the country; and the role of civil society to elevate the importance of media freedom.

U Minn Latt introduced the panel with a discussion about the role of media freedom in democratic transition. Ma Thida (San Chaung) noted that people are the most powerful actors in democratic countries. However, citizens can only make well-informed decisions if they have freedom of choice, for which unbiased information from a free media is very important. U Kyaw Soe Lynn suggested that the functions of media are rights-based in that they empower people to assure the accountability and transparency of all institutions including government and civil society. Nowadays, the public's trust in media is reduced, but government and domestic and international civil society should promote engagement with media to empower them.

U Minn Latt pointed out that the public must be well-informed with the right information from multiple sources to independently examine rumors and propaganda and to make the right decision in democracy. As a watchdog, media informs both the government and public. If the media is not independent, the 'marketplace of ideas' cannot

survive to support democracy. He highlighted that news media as well as entertainment media such as music, movies, and opera need creative freedom to be sustained.

Ma Thida (San Chaung) added that freedom of expression is also included with freedom of opinion and freedom of assembly. Myanmar's 50 year-long censorship and propaganda mechanisms have affected creativity and critical thinking in the country. This has resulted in a large portion of citizens not being able to understand the differences between real information and propaganda. The continuous reduction of access reliable information created non-balanced reporting and the propagation of misguided opinions. She noticed that representatives and members from all sectors use propaganda and misinformation to disseminate their message as they are unable to identify reputable sources and verify information. Also, print license performs the task of censorship (i.e. if there is information that is not allowable by the authority, one cannot get the print license). Therefore, there are still propaganda and censorship mechanisms that make intra media conflict. Despite these challenges, there are few CSOs in Myanmar that only focus on the promotion of freedom of expression.

U Kyaw Soe Lynn remarked, "Today is the most challenging time for traditional media due to the increasing prominence of social media, reducing numbers of printed media, non-credible media spreading hate speech." U Minn Latt pointed out that creativity in all sectors is also decreasing due to self-censorship in Myanmar. FM radio license is still difficult in ethnic areas. There are still difficulties and limitations to access information due to restrictive laws.

Q & A Session

Panel attendees focused their questions on: issues including media ethics with freedom of expression; how to engage media with CSOs; community journalists; and the two imprisoned Reuters journalists.



Ma Thida (San Chaung) noted that, “The public needs to access information from primary sources, information released by media is information processed based on its viewpoint.” She also highlighted the role of community journalism, particularly in enabling ethnic radio programs to encourage media pluralism. Oftentimes, capacity is a challenge in community and citizen journalists.

U Minn Latt closed the discussion with his last remark that Facebook is technically very useful but misused in Myanmar. The role of CSOs is very important in promoting media and digital literacy to public, promoting media relationship with local and Union governments, and acting as watchdogs to monitor and counter platforms that spread hate speech.

Panel Discussion

Civil Society for Advocacy—Innovative Ideas to Old Issues

DISCUSSANT: DAW NILAR MYAING

PANELISTS: U KYI ZAW LWIN AND DAW THINZAR SHUNLEI YI

This panel discussion focused on how civil society in Myanmar raise new voices and new ideas and how civil society can promote innovation and creative approaches to solve long-lasting problems in society.

Daw Nilar Myaing started the discussion by asking the participants about how they understand advocacy. After collecting opinions on advocacy, she shared concepts and types of advocacy, including based on her experiences. She highlighted that CSO advocacy must be evidence-based to enable public policy reform.

U Kyi Zaw Lwin shared his advocacy experiences about youth policy. At the union level, government encourages youth policy to be written by youths themselves. The youth policy committee must be composed of 60 percent youth and 40 percent by government and non-governmental organizations. But regional and state level governments were unaware of youth policy processes. Youth advocates had to use many lobbying and campaigning approaches to both local youth and state government with content presentations, international youth policies, documentation, law and orders, and workshops. Youth learned and followed the language and pro-government systematically to change the government’s perception that youths have less capacity and they are just complaining.

Civil society is needed as a check and balance to government in democracy. In Mon state, there are approximately 1,000 CSOs but 95 percent of them are working in service providing emergency response and so very few of them are actively advocating to the government. The Mon state civil society network was organized in the civil society forums in ten townships for exchange knowledge about role of civil society in democratic transition, networking, coordinating and promoting advocacy power of CSOs to Mon state government.

Daw Nilar Myaing suggested many approaches to engaging in advocacy based on her experiences. The first step is empowering and the second step is mobilization including choosing the target and how to approach. Government also needs the support and collaboration of civil society to implement their policies successfully. CSOs should consider innovative ideas for effective evidence-based advocacy. She shared her advocacy experience organizing a

press conference linked with media in Mandalay about the association registration law and advocating simultaneously to Hluttaw committees by releasing press statements and networking. Determining a clear goal of advocacy and message is the major key to success and the right target powerful decision maker should be chosen for successful advocacy. CSOs should analyze legitimacy, benefactors' situation, and impact before planning policy advocacy agenda.

U Kyi Zaw Lwin shared his advocacy experiences in Southern Myanmar Journalist Network to build up the capacity of journalists. He found that there was no engagement with CSOs in state government, although CSOs were favored in previous U Thein Sein government. So CSOs restarted their advocacy in the Hluttaw and the government gradually via ethnic political parties and successfully built relationship and trust between them.

Daw Thinzar Shunlei Ye highlighted the question of government to CSOs, "Do CSOs really represent the public?" She answered that CSOs should work to meet the public's needs and interests so that they are accurately representing their voices. CSOs should answer this first question before advocacy, "Are you really passionate on this issue? Why? Can you take sustainable action?" An advocacy process must be participatory inclusive process.

Daw Nilar Myaing noted that greater advocacy efforts are needed by CSOs for the current government to accept CSO activities. She warned that some CSOs waste time by attending meetings and forums away from their communities which creates a risk that they will become disconnected from the situation on the ground and unable to represent their community and their concern. She encouraged CSOs to seek innovative ideas for creative and effective advocacy strategies.

Q & A Session

Attendees asked questions about: how to find the right person for advocacy; how to choose strategies for policy change; how to strengthen CSOs and their roles in multiple sectors; contents of the youth policy process and future planning to engage it; and how to reduce the gap between urban and rural CSOs.

Daw Thinzar Shunlei Ye shared her opinion that community based organizations carrying out free funeral services, social services, etc. are still needed in Myanmar as they serve as an entry point for effective, community-driven, and sustainable organizations.

She continued that the youth policy is not the end but rather the beginning for progress related to youth. She also advocated for a separate ministry to be dedicated to youth affairs in order to implement youth policies. More youth institutions are needed for future activities. The participation of youth of political parties is still weak due to limited networking and access.

U Kyi Zaw Lwin suggested that policy reform advocacy by CSOs should be targeted to relevant stakeholders such as the Hluttaw, union or state or local government, ethnic armed groups, and ethnic political parties based on the issues. CSOs will gradually consider changing from traditional charity-based organizations to issue and rights-based platforms focused on policy reform. Most CSOs do not have any knowledge about the principles of freedom of expression and democratic processes. This knowledge gap among CSOs must be addressed in order for the organizations and their members to become more effective.

Conference Closing Reflection

Key Questions from the Conference

RAPPORTEUR: U THIHA MAUNG MAUNG

U Thiha Maung Maung presented the closing remarks reflection by summarizing some of the aforementioned key questions from this two day conference that were raised and discussed, including: how to use media or social media to reduce the gap between elite and the grassroots; how to promote the bargaining power of CSOs in advocacy through coalitions and networking; identifying the role of CSOs in conflicts; how to approach to overcome dichotomy in conflict; how CSOs should collaborate with media promoting media literacy and digital literacy to the public and CSOs as a watch dog on the media; and how CSOs should advocate to government. The topic of the conference was clearly broad, but it raised many interesting questions to explore for CSOs in the coming years. Through conferences such as this, in addition to regular courses and alumni activities, the iPACE program looks forward to continue working hard to support CSOs in their efforts to build a strong and inclusive democracy across Myanmar.

IV. Conference Agenda

Civil Society in Myanmar's Political and Social Development

INSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE 2018

September 18–19, 2018 | Freedom Hall, American Center Yangon, Myanmar

Day One

| SEPTEMBER 18, 2018 |

12:30–1:00 pm

Registration

1:00–1:30 pm

Welcoming Remarks

Rebecca Spotts

Director of Cross-sector Programming, World Learning

Scot Marciel

Ambassador, the United States of America Embassy in Burma

1:30–2:00 pm

Keynote Presentation

How Civil Society Contributes to the Political and Social Development of Myanmar: 2018 Update—Reflections and Current State

Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun

President of Myanmar Teachers' Federation, Lecturer of International Relations Department, University of Yangon

2:00–3:30 pm

Panel Discussion

Civil Society in Civic and Political Engagement

What are the challenges that civil society in Myanmar encounter in fully engaging with the political transition? What should the civil society sector in Myanmar do to improve citizens' civic and political engagement, especially in dealing with conflicts, freedom of expression and inclusive participation? What hurdles does the sector need to overcome to do this?

Discussant:

U Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint

Executive Director of People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE)

Panelists:

Dr. Nyo Nyo Thin

Former Member of Parliament representing Bahan Township and
Founder of School of Law, Gender and Politics

Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai

Managing Director cum Research Consultant, Insight Research Corner

3:30–4:00 pm

Tea break

4:00–5:30 pm

Panel Discussion

Easing Communal Conflicts

How does civil society in Myanmar respond when communal conflicts such as religious tensions, ethnic conflicts, etc. emerge among diverse communities? How should CSOs and the sector as a whole be involved in working together to support conflict resolution and prevent conflict? What approaches have an impact? What needs to be done differently?

Discussant:

U Zeya Thu

Deputy Chief Editor of the Voice Journal
Independent Analyst of Politics and Economics

Panelists:

Daw Kathleen Thein

Chairperson, Hindu Women Association

U Aung Myo Min

Executive Director of Equality Myanmar

Day Two

| SEPTEMBER 19, 2018 |

1:00–1:15 pm

Recapping from Day One

U Thiha Maung Maung
Rapporteur for iPACE Conference 2018

1:15–2:45 pm

Panel Discussion

Democracy, Media Freedom and the Civil Society

Why is media freedom significant in the democratic transition of Myanmar and what are the obstacles that hinder media freedom in the country? What is the role of civil society to elevate the importance of media freedom?

Discussant:

U Minn Latt @ Tun Myint Kyaw
Founder/Reporter from Than Lwin Times, Former President of
Thanbyuzayat Township Development Committee

Panelists:

Ma Thida (San Chaung)
Writer and Director of PEN International

U Kyaw Soe Lynn
Communications Officer, the World Bank

2:45–3:15 pm

Tea break

3:15–4:45 pm

Panel Discussion

Civil Society for Advocacy—Innovative Ideas to Old Issues

How does civil society in Myanmar raise new voices and new ideas?
How is civil society promoting innovation and creative approaches to solve long-lasting problems in the society?

Discussant:

Daw Nilar Myaing
Research Program Director, Sandi Governance Institute

Panelists:

U Kyi Zaw Lwin
Secretary of Mon State Youth Committee, and Technical Adviser of
Mon State CSO Network

Daw Thinzar Shunlei Yi
Youth Advocate and Activist

4:45–5:00 pm

Conference Closing Reflection

Key Questions from the Conference

U Thiha Maung Maung
Rapporteur for iPACE Conference 2018

V. Bios of Presenters



Ambassador Scot Marciel was confirmed as the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of the Union of Burma in February 2016. Ambassador Marciel previously served as the Department of State's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs from August 2013-February 2016. Prior to his return to Washington, he served as Ambassador to the Republic of Indonesia. He was also Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, where he was responsible for relations with Southeast Asia, and as Ambassador for ASEAN Affairs. Ambassador Marciel also has served in Vietnam, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Brazil and Turkey, as well as in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs' Office of Monetary Affairs. He is a graduate of the University of California at Davis and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.



Rebecca Spotts is World Learning's Director of Cross-sector Programming and oversees the organizations' global development programming in civic engagement and governance, youth development and workforce readiness, and institutional strengthening. In addition, she has expertise in gender equality and social inclusion programming and building the capacity of CSOs. Throughout her career, she has built the capacity of communities, schools, and policy makers to improve life outcomes for all with a special emphasis on highlighting opportunities for girls, young women, and other traditionally marginalized youth to drive positive social change. She is a graduate of Columbia University and University of Pittsburgh.



Dr. Sai Khaing Myo Tun is a lecturer from the Department of International Relations, University of Yangon. He has 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 areas of expertise include labor issues and foreign and domestic policies of Myanmar. His accomplishments include serving on the national minimum wage setting committee from 2014-2015, published research articles on state-building of Myanmar, and writing articles on Myanmar politics for local media outlets.



Sai Ye Kyaw Swar Myint is the Executive Director of People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE) and board member of Tagaung Institute of Political Studies (TIPS). From 2011 to 2013, he worked as Political Engagement Director at Yangon School of Political Science. From 2010 to 2011 he worked at Nyein (Shalom) Foundation as a Political Parties and Campaign Analyst in the Election Observation Project and a curriculum development consultant and trainer in a civic education project. He received his bachelor's degree in Geology from Taunggyi University in 2001.



Dr. Nyo Nyo Thinn was elected as the one of the six women MPs to Yangon Region Parliament in 2010 Election. She has been selected as a rising star among political leaders by the Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, International Republican Institute, and Wesley College. In 2013, she was awarded the winner of Women Rights & Politics award by the Women Organization Network in Myanmar. She was also selected as one out of 100 influential women in the world according to the BBC survey in 2014. From 2012 to 2015, several local media groups such as 7 Days, Myanmar Herald, Voice, Mizzima, Hot News, and The Sun Rays selected her as Person of the Year, HERO, Lonely Running Lion and Iron Hinthar.

In 2016, she established Yangon Watch, which is a watchdog organization. In 2017, she also founded the first private law school in Myanmar. She has held fellowships and lecturer positions at the United Nations University, Keio University, Hosei University, and Chuo University, and Yangon University, Yangon Distance University, and Taungoo University. She holds a Doctor of Laws from Yokohama National University, Japan.



Dr. Lwin Lwin Wai is a Managing Director and Research Consultant for the Insight Research Corner a part of Insight Corner Company Limited. She is also currently doing Media Monitoring on Political Diversity program with Myanmar Institute for Democracy. Over the course of her career, she has worked with the ministries of Myanmar, international and local NGOs, local civil society, and research firms on diverse issues such as environmental and social research, public consultation and stakeholder engagement, governance, and rule of law. She also supports training for young researchers and environmental education efforts. She has conducted public opinions studies and stakeholder consultations on Environmental Conservation Law (2012), Myanmar Hydro-power Sector, River Economy, Environmental and Social Management Framework for Yangon City Development Committee and the Ayeyarwady River Basin

Management Plan. She has been a Research Consultant with the civil society network MATA (Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability).



Zeya Thu is the publisher, managing director and deputy chief editor of the Voice Journal, a leading news publication based in Myanmar. The author of five books, he is a commentator on Myanmar politics and economy in the local and international media. He is the joint secretary of the board of directors at Myanmar Journalism Institute, an independent institute founded by local media groups that provides quality journalism education. He is an advisor to Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies, a major foreign policy think tank affiliated with Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Graduated as a civil engineer from Yangon Technological University in 2002, he holds a master in international development studies (2006) from Chulalongkorn University of Thailand.

Aiming to support economic development of Myanmar, Zeya Thu co-founded “Myanmar Development Partners”, a microfinance organization that is providing financial service to low-income families, micro and small businesses. At the request of successive governments, Zeya Thu has been playing an advisory role in the discussion of fiscal federalism in the peace process.



Kathleen Thein is a professional educator and Co-chair of Mm TESOL (English Teachers’ Organization in Myanmar). She has made numerous presentations of ELT workshops organized by the American Center and the British Council in Myanmar. Moreover, she had made ELT presentations in Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia, and attended TESOL Convention in U.S.A and Canada. As the current Chair of Hindu Women Association, she promotes the importance of women in civil society. She has been involving in interfaith peace program in several organizations on the important of religious coexistence. She attends international forums on women’s leadership, inter-faith dialogue and religious freedom, and promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. She was selected as a speaker of “Environmental Peace and Harmony” on behalf of Hindu representatives at the Sitagu International Buddhist Academy in 2016 and 2017.



Aung Myo Min is the Executive Director of Equality Myanmar working on human rights education and advocacy for protection and promotion of human rights in Myanmar. He was one of the student leaders in 1988 Uprising and left Myanmar after the military coup. He was the members of All Burma Students' Democratic Front until 1992. He graduated with a master's degree and concentration in Human Rights from Columbia University, New York in 1993. He served as the Director of Human Rights Documentation United of the exiled government and had intensive lobby experience at the UN and many other countries on the human rights situation in Myanmar. He has received eight human rights awards for his outstanding human rights work including Shuman Human Rights Award in 2017.



Thiha Maung Maung is the rapporteur for iPACE Conference 2018. He has an extensive experience in the media industry first as a journalist and later as the program manager of Yangon Journalism School. He has worked with a range of CSOs in conducting thematic reporting trainings across the country. He is a recent graduate from Central European University and holds a degree in Master of Public Administration.



Minn Latt, also known as Tun Myint Kyaw, is a Central Committee Member in merged Mon Party, one of the founders of Thanlwin Times, a local based bi-lingual weekly journal, and the former Chairperson of Township Development Committee (Municipal Mayor). In 1988, the '88 uprising changed his view on society and he became involved in Mon socio-cultural organizations in 1993. From that time onwards, he studied social and political concepts at different institutes in Yangon, including the British Council and the American Center. In 2009, he joined a Young Politician Program from the Konrad Adenauer School for Young Politicians (KASYP) and since then, he has become its fellow and later a fellow of Asia Young Politician Caucus. He was elected as Chairperson of Township Development Committee (Municipal Mayor) in 2013.



Ma Thida (San Chaung) is a medical doctor, writer, human rights activist and former prisoner of conscience. She is currently an editor at the Burmese magazine, Shwe Amyu Tay and a two-weekly journal, Info Digest and volunteers at a free clinic run by a local NGO. In October 1993, she was sentenced to 20 years in prison for "endangering public peace, having contact with illegal organizations, and distributing unlawful literature." But in 1999, she was released due to

declining health, increasing political pressure and the efforts of organizations like Amnesty International and PEN International. She was awarded several international human rights awards, including the Reebok Human Rights Award (1996), the PEN/Barbara Goldsmith Freedom to Write Award (1996), Freedom of Speech Award (2011) and Vaclav Havel's Disturbing the Peace; Courageous Writer at Risk Award (2016).

From 2008 to 2010, she lived in the U.S. as an International Writers Project Fellow at Brown University and a Fellow of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University. She was the very first elected president of PEN Myanmar (2013-16) and also elected as a board member of PEN International since October 2016.



Kyaw Soe Lynn is the Head of Communications at World Bank Myanmar, where he has worked since 2013. Prior to this, he worked as public information and communications professional with various UN agencies including United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Myanmar. He also worked as a journalist for the Myanmar Times in 2006-08. He holds B.A. in English from the University of Foreign Languages, Mandalay and Master of Journalism from the University of Hong Kong. As a public relations and communications professional, he provides strategic communications support, manages media relations with both domestic and international media organizations, and strengthens relationship and engagements with CSOs, media, and academic institutions; and other relevant stakeholders.



Nilar Myaing is a Research Program Director at the Sandhi Governance Institute. The Institute was founded in 2008 to empower young potential development leaders and expanded after 2010 to the areas of political empowerment and evidence-based advocacy. In addition, she is a freelance consultant providing support for baseline, mid-term and final program evaluations as well as providing training and support to write policy papers, strategic plans and advocacy papers for CSOs in Myanmar. Since 1997, she has worked Swissaid, UNAIDS, Save the Children and World Vision in Myanmar and with International Rescue Committee in Thailand to support health and education services to internally displaced persons, refugees and migrants from Myanmar. Since she returned back to Myanmar in 2011, she had worked as Executive Director of LRC and Myanmar Program Director of The Border Consortium. Nilar obtained a bachelor's degree from Yangon University and a master's degree in Public Policy from Lee Kwan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore.



Kyi Zaw Lwin is Secretary of Mon State Youth Committee, and Technical Adviser of Mon State CSO Network. He has extensive experience in training, facilitation, and other skills development related with youth topics in different sectors. He is also an active youth advocate in civil society, with experience working as a CSO and Media Consultant and Associate at UNDP Myanmar, Political Editor at Than Lwin Times, and Business and Human Rights Part-time Coordinator for the Governance Program at the British Council.



Thinzar Shunlei Yi is the awardee for the International Emerging Youth Leaders Award. With interests in youth, peace, and local governance she has been a volunteer since she was a teenage and realized the importance of education and role of young people for a better nation. Transitioning from the teaching profession she became an advocate and activist in her twenties. She has organized dialogues and forums for young people, where she takes a firm stand against extremism and atrocities by military across country and injustice around the world. She is passionate about policy-making and influencing policy makers. She works with local democracy development organization called Action Committee for Democracy Development (ACDD) and join hands with grassroots activists and young people. She also hosts weekly TV program named Under 30 Dialogue on various youth issues inviting prominent speakers across country.

VI. About World Learning in Myanmar

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 2,800 participants representing over 1,000 CSOs, 44 political parties, and 10 labor unions. Our alumni come from all states and regions in Myanmar, 49 ethnicities, and every major religion in the country.

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