

# Monitoring Myanmar's 2020 Elections: Capacity Needs Assessment of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in Ethnic States

## Executive Summary

Ahead of Myanmar's 2020 General Election, The Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL) and Democracy Reporting International (DRI) conducted a mapping and electoral observation needs assessment of civil society organisations (CSOs) in northern Shan State, southern Shan State, Kayah State, Rakhine State and Kachin State. The assessment was conducted in March and June 2019. The mapping assessed the plans, needs, constraints and challenges of CSOs in carrying out effective election observation as well as assessing their funding and technical capacities.

In the lead up to the 2020 elections, where more than 1,100 seats in Union, state and regional legislative bodies will be decided, CSOs across regions have expressed interest in conducting election observation and advocacy with key democratic stakeholders.

CSOs in Myanmar's ethnic minority states face many challenges and need to build capacity on a variety of skills and knowledge required for sound electoral observation. To address the challenges and needs, the assessment paid particular attention to assessing CSOs' capabilities in election observation planning, implementation, and post-election observation. This included assessing their capabilities in creating fundraising strategies and using effective planning techniques.

Most of the CSOs are rights-based organisations whose members have experience in election observation during national and by-elections, either as Long-Term Observers (LTOs) or Short-Term Observers (STOs) with nationwide observing organisations. The selected CSOs plan to conduct election observation of the whole electoral cycle in townships and other remote areas, with a particular focus on women, youth, persons with disability (PWDs), internally displaced persons (IDPs), migrants, and ethnic minority voters.

CSOs engaged in election monitoring encounter numerous challenges, including financial constraints, technical deficiencies, registration issues, lack of cooperation from government departments, lack of permits to conduct activities, influence from religious leaders in some areas, weak coordination among CSOs, and security threats.

The assessment found that CSOs require training on skills for activities before, during and after the election observation, including proposal development, observation planning, observation methods, communication planning, observation forms, electoral and voting systems, election laws, codes of conduct, report writing, and advocacy skills. In order to support improving the general public's political literacy and knowledge of electoral matters, CSOs also need to widen the scope of their technical knowledge on topics such as democracy, federalism, human rights, civic education, voter education, political ideologies, research and advocacy skills, proposal-writing and reporting skills.

## Introduction

CSOs are essential in the domestic observation and monitoring of elections worldwide. This ranges from their work in national election observation to voter education and awareness, and advocacy for electoral reform (Baradei, 2012). In particular, the participation of civil society is vital in promoting the integrity of and building confidence in the election process and informing the work of election administrators, political parties, and the media.<sup>1</sup> CSO participation is also crucial for ensuring the voices and rights of all citizens are promoted and protected.

In accordance with international standards, outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), non-partisan CSOs conducting election observation should base their assessment of the electoral process on relevant national laws (such as the constitution and electoral legislation) and on the international obligations states have accepted in treaties covering the conduct of elections.

Civil society organisations have been important actors in Myanmar's democratic reform, as advocates for reform, and in strengthening civil engagement in the broader transition process. During Myanmar's 2015 General Election, civil society played a critical role in monitoring the election cycle with the support of domestic and international observers and mobilised to improve voter education.<sup>2</sup> This was also the case for the 2017 and 2018 by-elections.

In 2019, the EU launched the European Strategy for Strengthened Partnership with Civil Society in Myanmar, emphasising the key role civil society should play in the democratisation of Myanmar, the peace process and constitutional reform<sup>3</sup>. It also outlines key challenges facing CSOs in Myanmar, including: surveillance and pressure on rights-based CSOs, exclusion from policy-making processes, and reduced freedom of expression. Nowhere is this more relevant than for CSOs based in states experiencing armed conflict in Myanmar, and in states that experienced instances of election violence during the 2015 election.<sup>4</sup>

Ahead of the 2020 General Elections, where more than 1,100 seats in Union, state and regional legislative bodies will be decided, CSOs in ethnic minority states face specific challenges in their ability to plan effectively for election monitoring and outreach to citizens. This includes technical and financial shortages, a lack of knowledge of election observation practices and the Union Election Commission (UEC) code of conduct, poor voter education and weak cooperation of election management bodies, local authorities and other CSOs.

In March and June 2019, ANFREL and DRI conducted a mapping and electoral observation needs assessment of civil society CSOs, most of which are rights-based organisations, in the ethnic minority states northern Shan State, southern Shan State, Kayah State, Rakhine State and Kachin State. These states contain armed conflict areas with many Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), government-backed militias and ethnically diverse communities.

This needs assessment maps the planning, needs, constraints and challenges of CSOs in carrying out effective election observation as well as assessing their funding and technical capacities. The report outlines the key challenges CSOs face in election observation planning and outlines core recommendations of how CSOs can be supported ahead of the 2020 General Election.

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<sup>2</sup> DRI (2015) Domestic Election Observation: Key Concepts and International Standards [http://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/dri-mm-bp\\_52\\_domestic\\_election\\_observation\\_2015-01.pdf](http://democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/dri-mm-bp_52_domestic_election_observation_2015-01.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> EU (2019) Shifting Space for Civil Society in Myanmar [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/myanmar-burma\\_en/65937/Shifting%20Space%20for%20Civil%20Society%20In%20Myanmar](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/myanmar-burma_en/65937/Shifting%20Space%20for%20Civil%20Society%20In%20Myanmar)

<sup>4</sup> United State Institute of Peace. Myanmar's 2020 Elections and Conflict Dynamics [http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Report\\_Peaceworks\\_-\\_Myanmars\\_2020\\_Elections\\_and\\_Conflict\\_Dynamics.pdf](http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Report_Peaceworks_-_Myanmars_2020_Elections_and_Conflict_Dynamics.pdf)

## 2) Methodology

The needs assessment of CSOs interested in election observation based in northern Shan State, Southern Shan State, Kayah State, Rakhine State and Kachin State was undertaken to identify the needs and constraints CSOs may encounter in conducting observation missions for the 2020 General Election.

The assessment primarily focused on the CSOs' election observation planning, needs in implementing effective planning, technical constraints to carry out the observation mission and common challenges CSOs face. The following methodology was used:

### Data Collection

ANFREL and DRI met with selected CSOs in Lashio (northern Shan State), Loikaw (Kayah State) and Taunggyi (Shan State) to gather data through meetings. Phone interviews were conducted with CSOs in Rakhine State and Kachin State. The following data collection methods were employed:

- i) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)
- ii) Direct questionnaires
- iii) Interviews

FGDs, direct questionnaires and one-to-one interviews were carried out in northern Shan State and southern Shan State, while interviews were conducted with CSO groups in Kayah State, Rakhine State and Kachin State. Twenty-four organisations participated in the FGDs and 18 responded to the direct questionnaires. Sixteen interviews were conducted in person, and six through phone interviews. Some CSOs participated in several of the data collection methods. A total of 42 organisations participated in the study. For confidentiality and security reasons, as well as to allow for frank discussion, the names of CSOs and individual respondents are not included in this report.

CSOs were selected according to whether they met the following criteria: non-partisan, previously covered elections in at least one full state, plan to observe elections in 2020, and work in relation to elections is part of the strategic plan of the organisation.

Below is a breakdown of CSO participants per data-gathering method by state:

	Focus Group Discussions	Direct Questionnaire	Interviews	Total CSOs Assessed
Lashio (northern Shan State)	14	8	5	16
Taunggyi (southern Shan state)	10	10	4	13
Loikaw (Kayah State)	-	-	6	6
Sittwe (Rakhine State)	-	-	4	4
Myitkyina (Kachin State)	-	-	4	4
<b>Total</b>				<b>43</b>

### 3) Findings

#### a) Overall findings

CSOs gave positive feedback on election observation being a way to support justice and democratisation processes that would help strengthen the people's right to vote. The following were identified by CSOs as benefits of conducting election observation:

- Attain free, fair, and transparent elections;
- Improve the participation of ethnic minorities, women, and youth;
- Elect qualified leaders for more credible and better changes through the right choice;
- Support democratic reforms and;
- Empower voters to exercise their right to vote without fear.

The CSOs identified the following themes and areas they would like to focus on ahead of election observation efforts for the 2020 election:

- Participation of ethnic minorities, women, and youth in the election;
- Gender-related issues;
- Review of the performance of Election Management Bodies;
- Campaign period and campaign finance;
- Right to vote of people from different religious backgrounds;
- Election day observation;
- The process of post-election installing of elected candidates in their seats and formation of government.

Most of the CSOs assessed across the different ethnic minority states face common challenges, which are presented below. Additional state-specific circumstances and challenges are presented in later sections on each state.

#### b) Technical and financial gaps

Most of the CSOs assessed face technical issues and financial insecurity. They generally do not have enough funding and lack effective techniques to effectively and efficiently conduct their regular activities. These difficulties extend to election observation, where funding, knowledge and skills were identified as major concerns.

#### c) Election-monitoring experience

With the exception of some organisations from Kachin and Rakhine states, most CSOs do not have experience conducting an election observation mission as an organisation. Instead, representatives from the CSOs have previously been invited by other organisations conducting a nationwide observation to join as STOs to observe on by-election and general election days. Some observers who had previously observed elections had received very little training in election observation before doing so. The lack of experience in election observation made it difficult for some CSO to identify the support that would be needed to organise an election observation mission.

This lack of experience has hindered CSOs in developing election observation plans along with project design, proposal development and budget planning. Although the CSOs were eager to observe the upcoming 2020 general elections, almost none had a concrete election observation plan.

#### d) CSO coordination

Several CSOs identified the lack of coordination in election planning among CSOs as a challenge, although some CSOs were planning to coordinate to avoid overlap in polling stations and in areas covered. In southern Shan State, the CSOs plan to coordinate, and CSOs in Kachin State and Rakhine State were planning to form a coordination body to consolidate election observation efforts. Some CSOs expressed willingness to work with nationwide organisations as LTOs and STOs.

CSOs also foresee a difficulty in getting volunteers to serve as LTOs and STOs, particularly in insecure areas, in addition to funding, technical issues, language barrier and difficulties in transportation.

#### **e) Security threats**

The CSOs expect several external challenges in conducting election observation missions, particularly threats to security from armed and local authorities. For example, in previous elections in one area controlled/dominated by an armed group, the group threatened people so that they would vote for the party of their ethnicity.

CSOs who try to observe in IDP camps, armed conflict areas, and military compounds could also face security threats. Currently, in some areas controlled by armed groups, activities such as awareness programmes, training in drug prevention, environmental protection, child rights and women rights is not allowed. Some CSOs also reported that election observers came under surveillance from the authorities.

#### **f) Weak stakeholder engagement**

The lack of cooperation from government departments and local authorities is also a core challenge. Threats from armed groups, local authorities, and religious leaders hinder CSOs from conducting activities freely. Little to no cooperation from government departments is provided, as well as weak support from local governments. Access to key contacts in the UEC and government is difficult, and problems exist with obtaining accreditation for observers.

There are also incidences of religious leaders influencing voters (some religious leaders were paid by some political parties to influence voters), voters being restricted due to the existence of curfews (section 144) in Rakhine State and in Kachin State (section 19 of the respective peaceful assembly and peaceful procession law).

CSOs reported that most of the public in the areas assessed had little or no interest in politics and elections, with weak civic education in electoral and democratic practices. CSOs also encounter barriers to conducting activities in certain communities. The ethnically diverse make-up of communities also creates language barriers.

The performance of regional Election Management Bodies (EMB) was questioned by some CSOs as several problems with advance voting had been observed, such as inaccurate voter lists, and difficult access to polling stations for elderly voters and PWDs.

#### **g) Capacity-building needs**

In terms of technical assistance, CSOs need help in a range of areas, including in basic organisational issues in addition to election-related areas. For example, capacity-building was sought in proposal writing, project design, budget planning and financial management, organisational development, IT skills, report writing, advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation.

In terms of capacity-building needs directly related to election observation, the following gaps were identified:

#### **Knowledge about election-related concepts:**

- Civic education
- Concepts of democracy
- Election laws and the Constitution
- Federalism
- International standards
- Electoral and voting systems
- Citizen observation
- Codes of conduct for election observers
- Election procedures
- UEC procedures and working guidelines
- Lobbying for electoral reform

#### Conducting an election observation mission:

- Election observation methods
- Training observers, including on the UEC's manual for polling station staff and Code of Conduct
- Drawing up election observation plans
- Developing election reporting forms for STOs and LTOs
- Data-gathering techniques
- Call centres for the core team of observers
- Analysis and reporting
- Communication plans
- Managing relations with the UEC

## 4) Overview of challenges and opportunities in assessed States

### Shan State

Shan State is one of Myanmar's armed conflict areas with many Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), government-backed militias and ethnically diverse communities. It has a population of more than 5.8 million (2014 Census) with many different ethnic groups.

It is one of two states where the ethnic parties won many seats in the Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union). The only self-administered division, Wa, and four out-of-administered zones - Danu, Pa-O, Pa Laung and Kokang - are in Shan State. The sporadic fighting between the Myanmar military and the Northern Alliance, composed of four armed groups: Arakan Army (AA), Kachin Independence Army/Organisation (KIA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), have displaced civilians several times in the northern part of the state.

There are also some CSOs which are backed by armed groups/militias. Such organisations have been founded by people who have strong and close connections to the armed groups/militias and receive 'black' money to conduct activities.

### Northern Shan State

ANFREL and DRI conducted a Focus Group Discussion in Lashio with 19 participants from 14 different CSOs. The organisations were based in Lashio, Mantone, Bawtwin, Hsipaw, Mine Pan, Mine Rel, Muse, Kutkai and Thenni in northern Shan State. Interviews were also conducted.

Most of the FGD participants and interviewees in northern Shan State had experience in election observation missions as STOs, but the organisations they represented have not conducted election observation independently.

Competition between CSOs was cited as an obstacle to coordination and collaboration. Partisanship, racism, and lack of unity proved to be challenging for CSOs too, as these make it difficult to organise and gather people for events such as awareness workshops and community mobilisation. The divisive nature of the campaign between political parties and divisions between religion and ethnicity also contribute to people's lack of interest.

CSOs also have poor access to information and face challenges to the secure conduct of their work. A lack of communication and infrastructure hinders access of CSOs to reliable and accurate information in a timely manner. Threats from several armed groups and local authorities also prevent CSOs from freely conducting activities such as public awareness on democracy and human rights. Other issues identified were difficulties in transportation, language barriers, and donor-driven activities.

Aside from the challenges CSOs encounter, the lack of interest and low political awareness among the population as well as challenges to the exercise of the right to vote were also identified during the FGD and interviews. Citizens have little interest in politics and have very limited knowledge about elections. To some extent, people do not believe in change and do not trust that their right to vote is protected.

For those who exercise their right to vote, several conditions were identified which led to disengagement and poor trust of the voters in recent by and general elections. For example, some citizens who wanted to register to vote were not accepted by the Ward and Village Tract sub-election commission (the lowest level of the election management body).

In previous elections, voters have been discouraged from voting because of long queues and crowded polling stations. Some polling stations were located in very remote areas, making it difficult for elders and PWDs to vote. Also, voters' lack of awareness on how to vote resulted in invalid votes. In addition, threats by armed groups compromise the freedom of choice of voters.

### **Southern Shan State**

Thirteen representatives from 10 different organisations participated in the half-day FGD in Taunggyi. The CSOs were from Taunggyi, Nyaung Shwe, Shwe Nyaung, Ho Pone, Pin Long, Loi Lem, and Inle. ANFREL and DRI also conducted interviews in Southern Shan State.

Difficulties with the registration of organisations hinder CSOs from cooperating with government bodies and conducting activities. The lack of support or cooperation from local authorities is also challenging for CSOs, with some even receiving threats from local authorities, armed groups, and religious leaders in some areas.

Gathering and mobilising community members also proves to be difficult, as many people are not interested in politics, while others are still afraid to participate in political affairs. This has led to people having limited knowledge on politics, economics, education, health, and other matters of public interest. Some areas in Shan State reject concepts like human rights due to traditions and conservative views. Communication challenges were also observed between people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Other challenges identified were weak coordination and collaboration among CSOs, individual and institutional capacities of CSOs, fundraising, and financial management skills. The willingness of CSOs to participate as election observers is unclear, however. Only the Democracy for Ethnic Minorities Organization (DEMO) has formulated plans for election observation efforts and sought funds.

In general, the CSOs observed that the rule of law is weak as there is low compliance with election laws, guidelines, and other procedures set by the authorities. There were reports of political parties buying votes in previous elections and voters being easily influenced by local authorities and religious leaders.

Reports of voters being threatened and government employees/civil servants pressured to vote for a particular party also surfaced. The CSOs observed that there is a weak sense of community among the public.

Based on previous experience as election observers, there was not enough support at the polling stations on election day, with some observers being treated as subordinates and pressured by polling station officers. There have also been incidents where polling stations did not have sufficient space for election observers.

The participants also shared that some observers were seen as being partisan in previous elections or by-elections, while some were evidently not trained. Proper election observation training remains a major challenge.

Other challenges include security threats in some areas and a lack of voter education as some election observers were asked by voters on how to vote. There were also instances where election observers were subjected to investigation by sub-commissions. In addition, problems had arisen of LTOs dropping out and problematic reports from election observers. Other challenges cited include issues with transportation, the weather, health problems, and misunderstanding with communities.

## Kayah State

Kayah (Karenni) State has a population of less than three hundred thousand (286,627 according to the 2014 census) and is comprised of different ethnic groups such as the Karenni, Padaung, Paku and others. Decades of civil war between ethnic armed groups and the Burmese Army has displaced tens of thousands of civilians. Long-term neglect by the central government, including the lack of economic development and infrastructure, makes Kayah State one of the poorest and least-developed regions in Myanmar.

In May 2019, a disagreement between activists and the state government occurred when the chief minister tried to raise a statue of General Aung San. Now, the tension has been increasing between CSOs and the state government, which impacts CSO activities for democratic reform and awareness.

Interviews were conducted with six CSOs in Loikaw. Four of the organisations have election observation experience as short-term observers, one had experience as a long-term observer, and one had no experience.

The rising tension between the Kayah State government and CSOs is a serious concern among the CSOs assessed. Registration and other regulatory issues have also affected the conduct of CSO activities. The state government has ordered CSOs to get permits at the General Administration Department (GAD) 15 days prior to organising any events.

CSOs without proper registration would also be rejected from conducting outreach and activities. Most CSOs in Kayah State did not register in protest at the strict rules and regulations of the state. CSOs also do not want to conduct activities that support the government. Without permission from the GAD, CSOs cannot book venues like hotels to hold activities. Religious buildings like churches and monasteries have been instructed not to allow CSOs to conduct any activities. There are instances when CSOs implement activities in villages, and the Ward and Village Tract Administrator refuse to collaborate.

The lack of registration has an impact on CSO funding as donors do not want to fund unregistered organisations.

In addition to these and other challenges, it was reported that election observers could themselves pose challenges to observation missions. Data collection may vary depending on the experience, skills, and knowledge of the observers. The potential of observers breaking election laws and the code of conduct is a concern as well as their potential bias and political partisanship. Potential overlap among observer groups is also a concern.

All organisations except one expressed the desire to conduct election observation for the 2020 general elections. Elections were seen as promoting the people's right to vote, ethnic rights, and good governance processes.

Among the reasons identified were:

- Have ethnic parties win the elections
- Promote free and fair elections
- Monitor election fraud in ethnic areas
- Uphold the right to participate

The participation of women and PWDs in the elections and the issue of Myanmar migrant workers in Thailand were identified as specific areas of focus for election observation.

The CSOs plan to observe the election in the townships in Kayah State in coordination and collaboration with other organisations to avoid overlapping. The CSOs have yet to draw up a plan for the election observation mission and to gather funds for the project. One organisation, Kayah, plans to lobby the UEC, political parties and armed groups to facilitate Myanmar migrants to vote in Thailand and if necessary, observe the voting process on election day in Thailand.

## Rakhine State

Rakhine State is situated on the western coast of the country and has a population of more than three million (2014 census: 3,188,807). It has an intercommunal conflict among different religious groups, particularly between the Buddhist and the Muslim community.

The struggle of the Arakan Army for secession has led to worsening situations in the northern part of the state. Fights between the Myanmar military and AA occurred in several townships.. Thousands of civilians are internally displaced, vulnerable to rising sea levels and risk detention and torture by the military.

The CSOs in Rakhine State have prior experience in election observation. Two organisations have experience in election day observation, while the two other organisations have joined election observation missions as both short-term and long-term observers.

The CSOs identified issues related to access to information and security threats as common challenges expected in conducting election observation. Concerns were expressed that polling officers could bar observers from entering polling stations especially those near IDP camps.

The ongoing armed conflict in northern Rakhine could also potentially compromise the elections with some CSOs expressing fears of their cancellation. Issues with registration and working relations with the government are also common among CSOs in Rakhine State. The government welcomes and supports the work of some CSOs, while others do not have a good relationship with the government. These CSOs are closely watched and scrutinised whether they have connections with the AA.

Youth are also being targeted and in some incidents being discouraged from actively participating in political matters in Rakhine State. There is still a curfew (section 144) in 7 townships: Buthe Taung, Maung Taw, Yathetaung, Pononar Kyun, Kyauk Taw, Myauk U and Min Pyar.

Other challenges CSOs face in Rakhine State are funding constraints, freedom to conduct activities, political tension, and military tension.

While most of the CSOs expressed intent to observe the 2020 general elections, funding and preparations are yet to be drawn up. The escalation of conflict in Rakhine leads to an additional challenge, as the cancellation of the elections becomes more likely if the fighting continues. CSOs would also prioritise observation of voting by IDPs in case violence in Rakhine State further escalates and continues.

CSOs that intend to conduct long-term and short-term election observation detailed that they would like to focus on the following areas:

- Participation of women and PWDs in the election;
- Issues of the elderly, the youth, and IDPs;
- Performance of the EMB;
- Election campaign.

CSOs have identified the townships of Buthetaung, Maung Daw, Yathetaung, Ponenarkyun, Kyauktaw, Myauk-U, and Minbyar as their planned coverage areas for the election observation mission with a special focus on the polling stations near IDP camps.

One organisation planned to cover all 17 townships in Thantwe, Kyauk Phyu, Myauk U, Sittwe, and Maung Taw districts. Unlike in other states covered in this study, CSOs in Rakhine State are in the process of establishing a common CSO Committee of 30 organisations to observe the elections.

## Kachin State

Kachin State is the northernmost state of Myanmar and has a population of more than 1.6 million (2014 census). One of the main armed groups is KIA/KIO and groups such as All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) and AA are also based in Kachin State. The conflict has been ongoing between the Myanmar military and the KIA, with more than 100,000 people being displaced as a result of the conflict.

Land confiscation, drug use and abuse, forced labour, forced recruitment into armed groups, torture and ill-treatment, sexual violence against women, IDPs, and human rights violations are the main issues in the area. Kachin is a resource-rich area with jade, gold, amber, timber, iron, and other, which has the potential to generate millions of dollars.

FGDs were conducted with four organisations in Kachin State. Three of the four CSOs have experience participating in election observation missions.

In addition to general technical challenges, CSOs have identified several issues related to the relations with government bodies like the UEC and individual and institutional capacity.

Other concerns include influence from the military, advance voting, inaccurate voter lists, registration and various permissions from the government, and coordination with Yangon-based CSOs. The CSOs also particularly identified the challenges posted by Section 19 (peaceful assembly and peaceful procession law).

The CSOs believe that the election is a necessary component of democratic transition and have expressed interest in observing the 2020 General Elections.

The CSOs are in the middle of planning election observation in all four districts of Myitkyina, Bhamo, Mohnyin, and Putao. In cooperation with HI (Humanity Institute), NDI (Naushawng Development

Institute), and Panyadagar Academy, the CSOs are trying to establish a Kachin CSO consortium together with 30 CSOs based in Kachin State.

The consortium aims to promote free and fair electoral process and localise data collected from the election observation in the future federalisation and democratisation process. While the consortium has not received any funding for the project, the CSOs plan to raise funds together after formally forming the group.

## 6) Conclusions and Recommendations

Most of the CSOs assessed intend to conduct election observation missions for the 2020 General Election but many have not drawn up plans and are still seeking funding. There is a need to strengthen the technical and financial capacity of the CSOs as most seek training not only on topics related to election observation but also on the daily operations of the organisation. Registration and security threats were also commonly identified as challenges. The findings of the study suggest that CSOs could be supported in the following areas:

- 1) Continuous technical support, mentoring and coaching;
- 2) Support and assistance in the development of proposals, project design, observation plans, observation methods, communications plans, observer forms and report writing;
- 3) Financial assistance in accordance with budgeting best practice;
- 4) Fundraising if their financial needs are out of the budget line. CSOs could also be supported through proposal writing assistance and connecting with potential donors;
- 5) One-to-one consultations on proposal development, project design and observation plan;
- 6) Fundraising through project design and proposal development with the strategically drawn up election observation plan (one-to-one consultation);
- 7) Trainings on election observation with a special emphasis on report writing (for Election Observation Report), election observation, observation planning, observation methods, electoral and voting systems, election laws, observers' code of conduct, electoral knowledge, and research and advocacy;
- 8) Continuous technical support on producing credible election reports;
- 9) Promotion of coordination and collaboration among CSOs to prevent the problems of overlapping and therefore reduced coverage, for example, helping CSOs with drawing a coordination plan by providing technical and financial support;
- 10) Assistance in the registration of the organisation to be able to properly participate in election monitoring.

## List of Abbreviations

AA	Arakan Army
ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
ANFREL	Asian Network for Free Elections
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DEMO	Democracy for Ethnic Minorities Organization
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
EAOs	Ethnic Armed Organisations
EMB	Election Management Body
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
GAD	General Administration Department

HI	Humanity Institute
IDPs	Internally-displaced persons
KIA/KIO	Kachin Independence Army/Organization
LTOs	Long-term Observers
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NDI	Naushawng Development Institute
PWDs	Persons with Disability
STOs	Short-term Observers
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
ToT	Training of Trainers
UEC	Union Election Commission

## About STEP Democracy

The European Union (EU) funded project ‘Support to Electoral Processes and Democracy – STEP Democracy’ – supports inclusive, peaceful and credible electoral processes and enhances the capacity of national stakeholders to strengthen Myanmar’s democratic transition. STEP Democracy builds on the achievements of the projects’ first phase (2015-2018) where the programme worked intensively with the Union Election Commission (UEC), political parties and civil society organizations (CSOs), through innovative approaches to supporting Myanmar’s democratic transition with tailor-made programming in line with the unique needs of each electoral stakeholder. Over this period, STEP Democracy fostered a deeper awareness of, and advocacy for, reform to the legal framework and played a key role in supporting the administration of credible elections, which were widely perceived to be the first step in Myanmar’s wider democratic transition.

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