

# From humanitarian resistance to resilience

Number 88 April 2024

## Network Paper

## Nation-building in active conflict

Adelina Kamal and Rin Fujimatsu



## **Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)**

**ODI**

**203 Blackfriars Road**

**London SE1 8NJ**

**United Kingdom**

Tel: +44 (0)20 7922 0330

Fax: +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email: [hpn@odi.org.uk](mailto:hpn@odi.org.uk)

Website: [www.odihpn.org](http://www.odihpn.org)

### **About HPN**

The Humanitarian Practice Network at ODI is an independent forum where field workers, managers and policy-makers in the humanitarian sector share information, analysis and experience. The views and opinions expressed in HPN's publications do not necessarily state or reflect those of the Humanitarian Policy Group or ODI.

This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Cover image: Almas Korotana/Canva

### **About the authors**

**Adelina Kamal** is an independent analyst with more than 25 years' experience with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). She led the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (the AHA Centre) as its Executive Director from 2017 to 2021, and prior to that, worked with the ASEAN Headquarters in Jakarta for over two decades. Adelina currently sits as a steering committee member of the Southeast Asian Women Peace Mediators, a voting board member of the Melbourne-based Centre for Humanitarian Leadership Executive Committee, and an Advisory Group member of ODI's Humanitarian Policy Group in London. Since leaving the AHA Centre, Adelina has been consulting for governments, international and regional organisations in the areas of disaster management, humanitarian assistance, crisis management and alternative public financing. Adelina is based in her home country Indonesia.

**Rin Fujimatsu** is a consultant working on issues related to human rights, peace-building, and the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons. She is also the co-founder and former Advocacy Director of Progressive Voice, a rights-based policy research and advocacy organisation rooted in civil society that maintains strong networks and relationships with grassroots organisations and community-based organisations throughout Myanmar. Rin obtained a Masters of Studies (MSt) in International Human Rights Law from Oxford University.

### **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to every one of the 115 individuals that we interviewed and/or consulted during the course of our study for giving their precious time and sharing their voices and thoughts with us. Special gratitude goes to our anonymous private donors for their confidence in us to design and implement the study the way we wanted it. We would also not have been able to conduct the study without the help of some individuals as they provided generous advice and access to the local groups and those who support them. Collectively, they have been the source of our courage to continue advocating for locally led humanitarian resistance. Last but not least, we thank the Humanitarian Practice Network for providing this wonderful platform and helping us amplify the voices of local humanitarians, which otherwise would be unheard and often muted.

# Network Paper

Number 88 April 2024

**HPN**  
Humanitarian  
Practice Network

## From humanitarian resistance to resilience: nation-building in active conflict

### Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b>	5
<b>Introduction</b>	6
<b>Myanmar's resistance humanitarians</b>	10
<b>The default approach is a mismatch</b>	16
<b>How traditional humanitarianism has failed in Rakhine State</b>	22
<b>How resistance contributes to resilience</b>	29
<b>Reimagining the ecosystem</b>	31
<b>Conclusion</b>	38
<b>References</b>	40

---

## Abbreviations

<b>AA</b>	Arakan Army
<b>AHA Centre</b>	ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (on disaster management)
<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>CDM</b>	Civil Disobedience Movement
<b>CSO</b>	civil society organisation
<b>DDM</b>	Department of Disaster Management
<b>HDCO</b>	Humanitarian Development Coordination Office
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>INGO</b>	international non-governmental organisation
<b>MoU</b>	memorandum of understanding
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>NLD</b>	National League for Democracy
<b>NUCC</b>	National Unity Consultative Council
<b>NUG</b>	National Unity Government
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>TA</b>	travel authorisation
<b>ULA</b>	United League of Arakan
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States of America

---

## Introduction

‘New thinking on Myanmar is needed – urgently – to bring this unspeakable tragedy to an end’  
(OHCHR, 2023a).

The United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) made this statement just weeks before the Myanmar military junta attacked the village of Mung Lai Hkyet in Kachin State that hosted hundreds of displaced civilians. The nighttime airstrike on 9 October 2023 was followed by a barrage of mortars and artillery, which rained down on sleeping families, killing 28 civilians including 11 children – mostly women and girls – and injuring 60 people (Amnesty International, 2023).

This attack took place right as we concluded our field visit to the Thailand–Myanmar border, where we had met with over 100 key informants as part of a follow-up study on locally led humanitarian response to the crisis in Myanmar. Following the military junta’s attempt to retake full power in February 2021, Myanmar is now one of the most violent places in the world (Raleigh and Kishi, 2023), ranking as one of the deadliest conflicts and most dangerous countries globally, right below Ukraine and Palestine. In 2023 (as of December), Myanmar suffered among the highest number of civilian casualties by airstrike in the world (ACLED, 2023), even though such indiscriminate attacks on civilians and displaced persons are prohibited under international law and amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In response to this conflict, courageous women, former refugees and activists are working tirelessly to reach millions of displaced people from Myanmar’s neighbouring countries. Hundreds of doctors and medical workers in central Myanmar, who have resisted the military’s administration and joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), have formed humanitarian and medical networks to address the dire needs deep within the country. Many human rights organisations are responding to the humanitarian crisis by expanding their already stretched work. They are filling the humanitarian gap by providing direct assistance to the communities that they work with as well as documenting human rights violations. When asked if they have concerns about convergence between human rights and the humanitarian sector, they were firm in their belief that such sectorisation is a privilege enjoyed only by external actors who can separate the context in which they operate from the people they hope to serve.

These individuals, and many more local frontline responders, are building bridges and breaking barriers, often going unnoticed. They are disrupting the rigid sectorisation of human rights, humanitarian, development and peacebuilding through their work on the ground. They are breaking down barriers between aid providers and recipients. With limited resources, they are efficient and effective, relying on their own resolve to strengthen their administrations and systems, and finding new pathways to provide for the communities in dire need by overcoming the hurdles of security and access.

As described by Professor Hugo Slim, they are humanitarians who take sides against repression, support the democratic movement and use non-state networks to save as many lives as possible (Slim, 2021; 2023). In previous articles by the main author of this paper (Kamal and Benowitz, 2022;

Kamal, 2023), these individuals are referred to as resistance humanitarians. In Myanmar, this ‘resistance humanitarianism’ manifests in rejecting the military junta, working towards dismantling the military’s decades-long oppressive systems, and building a resilient web of people-centred horizontal networks as building blocks for a future federal democracy in Myanmar (see Box 1). Through their humanitarian resistance approach, they are building local resilience and fostering social cohesion, while preparing for a new Myanmar.

### **Box 1 Resistance humanitarianism in Myanmar’s history**

While the term resistance humanitarianism has recently gained prominence in humanitarian discourse, it is not new to Myanmar. Over the decades, temporary shelters and refugee camps have been established along the borderlands to host those fleeing Myanmar’s civil war. Local humanitarians operating along the border of Myanmar for decades have covertly crossed the border to deliver aid to those inside the country, bypassing military checkpoints, security apparatus and administrative bodies, taking sides with the resistance against successive military regimes. For decades, they worked to strengthen ethnic administrative bodies to better respond to the humanitarian crisis brought on by the Myanmar military’s atrocity crimes and violence.

Humanitarian resistance is a non-linear approach of nation-building in active conflict. Principles, policies, systems and institutions are built concomitantly while conflict is still at its peak, rather than waiting for stabilisation and reconciliation to take place. For the regional and international community, this means supporting the Myanmar people in building an inclusive and resilient community now, amidst active and escalating conflict, rather than waiting until the conflict ends, by changing humanitarian approaches and supporting a locally led, horizontally constructed ecosystem. As such, humanitarian resistance is also a means to decolonise the traditional aid system as it offers a new type of aid architecture and equalises the power imbalance within the system.

This requires not only new thinking but thinking ahead, bringing in peacebuilding as the starting point rather than at the end. This approach focuses on addressing the root causes of conflict, and then integrating humanitarian, human rights and development initiatives that build long-term resilience (Redvers and Parker, 2020).

This paper begins with the methodology behind the research and a snapshot of the current crises in Myanmar that sets the background for the observations of resistance humanitarians in action in Myanmar. The paper highlights their work to build resilience and a future federal democracy in Myanmar amid active conflict while exploring the dilemmas faced by local humanitarians. It then looks at the constraints of the default externally-driven aid response to the humanitarian crisis and discusses how traditional humanitarianism has failed to respond to Cyclone Mocha in Rakhine State. The paper further elaborates on the locally led humanitarian ecosystem in which resistance humanitarians could effectively

operate and ways that they could be supported by external humanitarians and the international community. Finally, the paper identifies performance drivers to ensure sustainability of a locally led humanitarian ecosystem.

## Methodology

The research underpinning this paper started with an examination of different approaches to humanitarian aid and coordination efforts through consultations and in-depth interviews between August and October 2023. The study incorporates findings from 115 key informants, including individuals working for local and international humanitarian organisations; civil society organisations; governments, including the National Unity Government (NUG); ethnic resistance organisations; UN agencies; and journalists and academics.

During the study, we met with humanitarians from Syria who are responding to the crisis to learn from the UN Security Council's failure to pass a resolution on cross-border aid after the devastating earthquakes in February 2023 (Beals, 2023). The community-based mutual aid that emerged in Sudan within a remarkably short space of time after the military conflict broke out in April 2023 was also used as a reference (Nasir et al., 2023). The debate on the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has also been instructive for the final analysis. The study further considers challenges and lessons from these major crises of the world to inform their global implications on the Myanmar crisis.

The study was also informed by our visit to the United States (US) in October 2023 where we, together with local humanitarians and human rights defenders from Myanmar, met with donor governments, UN member states, and human rights and humanitarian groups to advocate for more support for locally led humanitarian approaches, including cross-border aid.

As the conflict in Myanmar is dynamic and constantly changing, the authors also considered new developments and insights during the analysis stage in November 2023–February 2024 to further enrich and sharpen the findings and recommendations.

## Background

Myanmar's civil war is one of the longest-running civil wars in the world. The conflict between the Myanmar military and ethnic resistance organisations that began after Myanmar's independence from Britain in 1948 has subjected ethnic minorities to a range of human rights violations, committed primarily by the Myanmar military. Decades of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and more recently genocidal action against the Rohingya since 2017, has led to mass displacement that has been largely overlooked by the world.

Through armed conflict and under the guise of 'non-disintegration of the union', the military ruled Myanmar with an iron fist until 2011 when power was partially handed over to a nominally civilian government made up of former military generals under the military-drafted 2008 Constitution, which was passed in a fraudulent referendum in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. The military solidified its

dominance over key sectors of governance, including the economy, and ensured impunity for atrocity crimes. A series of peace negotiations led to the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in 2015 with some of the ethnic armed groups. However, conflict continued to rage on in the peripheries of the country's borders, including with the resumption of civil war in Kachin State in 2011.

Cycles of conflict, displacement and the Myanmar military's atrocity crimes continued despite the landslide victory of the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, in the 2015 general election. In November 2020, the NLD party once again won overwhelmingly in the general election, but on 1 February 2021, the military began staging an illegal coup attempt that failed to abide by its own 2008 Constitution (Human Rights Council, 2023).

Immediately, the military faced an unprecedented, nationwide resistance from a bottom-up people's movement – the Spring Revolution – that refused to accept the military's attempt to rule with brutal violence. Civil servants, starting with doctors and nurses, refused to work under the military, mobilising a Civil Disobedience Movement and paralysing the junta's administrative mechanisms (Action Committee for Democracy Development et al., 2023). At the forefront of the multi-class, multi-generational and multi-ethnic revolution has been youth, women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) communities playing key roles to lead the intersectional defiance that rejects the illegal and illegitimate military junta. In April 2021, the NUG was formed as the legitimate government by virtue of the votes cast by the people of Myanmar in the November 2020 general election.

The Myanmar military responded by launching a nationwide systematic campaign of violence. Over 4,500 people have been killed by the junta and 26,000 detained over the past three years. As the junta committed atrocity crimes with total impunity, many have taken up arms in defence of their own communities forming People's Defence Forces. Central regions such as Sagaing, Magway and Mandalay (also called the 'Dry Zone'), which are heartlands of the Bamar ethnic and Buddhist majority and which had not previously experienced conflict, began to see some of the fiercest attacks, causing devastating levels of displacement. By the end of 2023, the total number of people displaced inside the country climbed to an unprecedented 2.6 million as the military stepped up its aerial attacks and nationwide terror campaign.

In the first weeks and months following the coup attempt, the people of Myanmar – many full of hope that the international community will act to aid their plight – held placards that read 'We need R2P'. They were invoking the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) principle, that if a state manifestly fails to meet its responsibility to its own people, the wider international community must 'take collective action in a timely and decisive manner' to protect populations from atrocities (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2021). While the Myanmar people were unequivocal in their calls, their hopes were ultimately betrayed (Pawnday and Scott, 2021). Almost two years had passed before the UN Security Council finally adopted its first ever resolution on Myanmar in December 2022, but it failed to include concrete enforceable measures and continued to emphasise the central role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in responding to the crises (UNSC, 2022). Meanwhile, ASEAN also failed to produce any results following its adoption of the Five-Point Consensus with the coup leader, Min Aung Hlaing. As political solutions stall, humanitarian aid is used as a band-aid to chronic conflicts like Myanmar.

---

## Myanmar's resistance humanitarians

### 'Neutrality trap'

Humanitarianism is underpinned by its humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, as championed by the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. For much of the externally driven humanitarian response, neutrality is founded on a state-centric response where actors must talk to all parties to the conflict and remain aloof from political considerations. Over time, this approach also requires humanitarian actors to be professionally detached from the people they intend to serve and the context of the operational environment, however politicised this environment may be.

The coupling of state-centric response and efforts to depoliticise aid consequently leads to a dismissal of alternative methods of aid delivery that do not pass the test of 'international consensus', which largely focuses on channels provided by the 'de facto government' – no matter how contested this notion of 'de facto government' may be domestically and internationally, as seen in the context of Myanmar. This subsequently leads to a misguided conclusion that anything other than this state-centric approach would be considered 'politicised aid' because it goes to areas controlled by 'terrorists', according to the junta's unilaterally imposed registration law (see Box 2). Cross-border aid that does not have the junta's active consent is treated in the same vein. In contrast, support through UN organisations, most international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and ASEAN, which provide aid through the authorisation of the military junta, is seen by default as neutral.

The illegal and illegitimate Myanmar military junta takes advantage of this state-centric operational approach and weaponises assistance for its own political and tactical advantage. While donors and governments may have good intentions in firewalling the humanitarian principle of neutrality, when assistance is distorted and abused on a large scale and becomes a convenient political weapon by the junta that is at war with its own people, this well-intended assistance can do more harm than good.

As stated by a Myanmar activist, 'there's nothing neutral about engaging with Myanmar's military' (Ohmar, 2021). To expect that the military junta – the root cause of the humanitarian crisis – will expand the humanitarian space and access inside the country to alleviate suffering is either a hallucination or self-serving strategy (Kamal et al., 2023). By insisting on working through the military junta following three unsuccessful years of expanding access, the concept of neutrality in Myanmar has become a farce.

The state-centric narrative that places the junta at the centre of the solution to Myanmar's crises also leads to oversimplified narratives that claim Myanmar as a 'failed state'. As the Myanmar military loses ground throughout the country, it is crucial that 'Myanmar is understood and re-conceptualised as an interim state comprising non-state entities' (Pongsudhirak, 2024). Any engagement and approach including humanitarian assistance that is state-centric ultimately fails to capture the complexities on the ground and undermines the work of diverse humanitarian and democracy actors.

## **Box 2 The military's tactic of divide and conquer**

The new Organisation Registration Law ('registration law') that was unilaterally imposed by the Myanmar military in October 2022 is the centrepiece of the junta's politicisation of aid that allows it to control and limit humanitarian assistance and dictate where and how aid will be delivered (International Commission of Jurists, 2022). Organisations that are registered under the military junta are bound by its access constraints and unable to access areas under the control of the resistance organisations, including ethnic resistance organisations, where the majority of the displaced people flee.

The amendments introduced to the 2014 Organisation Registration Law make registration compulsory for all non-profit organisations, imposing criminal penalties, including fines and imprisonment, for violations of the registration law's terms. Organisations are required to disclose personal information of staff, details of their funding sources and proposed projects as well as operational locations (OHCHR, 2023b). OHCHR has reported that as part of the registration process, the military has requested humanitarian actors to remove certain geographic areas and activities from the draft memorandum of understanding (MoU). The registration law further prohibits contact with organisations deemed 'unlawful' as well as those who might directly or indirectly oppose the state, and those declared as committing terror. An individual interviewed by the UN notes, 'If you register, you cannot do your work because you cannot do anything the military does not permit' (ibid.).

The question of whether to register with the junta or not has become a moral, ethical and operational question for both international and local organisations. However, for local organisations, not registering means possible loss of what little funds they have; an increasing number of international organisations and donors place the burden on local partners to register to receive funds, as partnering with unregistered organisations could lead to criminal penalties. Through the unilateral instrumentalisation of the legal system and by criminalising non-registered organisations, OHCHR asserts that 'the military has cohesively linked access to funds, goods, authorisations, visa, and numerous other critical aspects of humanitarian actions, to registration' (ibid.). The registration law blatantly shows the military junta's effort to control and regulate the country's humanitarian landscape.

This situation features the divide and conquer tactic long used by the military to pit different ethnic groups against each other, often creating conflict to thwart peace. Deploying this tactic against humanitarians, the junta is creating a divide between those who are registered and those who are not, making it impossible to operate as neutral humanitarian agents. At the same time, this has also had the chilling effect of widening a 'grey zone' where local organisations feel further forced to engage with a humanitarian system that requires engagement with and authorisation from the military.

Myanmar is not the first country where such a dilemma has come into sharp focus. Lessons can and must be drawn from elsewhere, including Gaza, Syria and Sudan, where venerated notions of neutrality have trapped humanitarians into playing roles that are possibly prolonging the war, propping up systems of injustice and overall suffering of the people. In Syria, for example, actors delivering assistance to its capital Damascus – from where jets and missiles were launched – were seen as neutral, while small NGOs were dismissed by humanitarian decision-makers in the west as ‘political’ actors as they were seen as cooperating with insurgents (Wieland, 2021). According to some Syrian humanitarians, what further contributed to challenges in supporting alternative aid delivery methods (including cross-border support) was that the UN views aid in terms of goods, not services.<sup>1</sup> Such views are mirrored in Myanmar.

Unlike humanity and impartiality, which are moral values, neutrality is an operational principle. It is an easier operational guideline for external humanitarians to follow as they may be able to detach themselves from injustices and grave violations. For local humanitarians, this is far more challenging, as they are often the targets of violence.

The international community should not use neutrality as a reason not to support local actors and cross-border assistance which disengage the military junta. The international community should also stop imposing neutrality on local responders, who are often themselves targets of the Myanmar military’s atrocities and do not have the privilege of leaving their country or being prioritised for evacuation when crisis worsens. In fact, it is not required of humanitarians to be neutral in order to be a good humanitarian (Slim, 2022). Instead, there should be holistic assessment and efforts to address the humanitarian crisis across the entire conflict in a way that is most direct, simple and appropriate. This study attempts to do that.

## **The work of resistance humanitarians in Myanmar**

One of the ways in which the issue of neutrality comes to the forefront in Myanmar is through the military junta’s tactic of ‘divide and conquer’ (see Box 2). Most international organisations – including UN agencies, INGOs and the Red Cross and Crescent Movement – have signed agreements, presented their credentials and/or have registered under the Myanmar military (Justice for Myanmar, 2023). Most regard the military junta as the ‘de facto authority’ in Myanmar and work under their scrutiny and restrictions.

Some local organisations, however, fully adopt the core values of humanity and impartiality and totally disengage the military junta. These resistance humanitarians are unequivocal in their support for the people’s resistance movement against the military junta. This includes making difficult choices in the financing of their operations, including refusing to work with donors that have signed MoUs or those who have chosen to retain their representation inside the country. Resistance humanitarians choose to receive funds that do not require the exchange of information or the use of structures controlled by the

---

1 Anonymous interview (30 August 2023).

junta. Many rely on the diaspora, their own community living outside the country, to provide the funds necessary for their operations and assistance. They do not register their entities with the junta in order to avoid attacks and scrutiny.

Resistance humanitarians are often networks of locally organised responders, both inside and outside the country, which foster strong ties with each other digitally. They are embedded within the local population as community leaders, and grassroots and non-profit networks. Some have been established and operational for decades, responding to the civil war and the military's atrocities in ethnic-minority areas. These organisations and networks have been established by grassroots activists, volunteers and members of the CDM who have forged alliances and networks with hundreds of volunteer responders including doctors, nurses, technicians, teachers and students.

They are experts in navigating the complex landscape on the ground, including in seeking support from or protection by ethnic resistance organisations and other armed revolutionary groups while maintaining their operational independence. Utilising their expertise, they are establishing local governance structures outside the military junta's control to deliver aid efficiently and effectively. In doing so, they are also resisting the asymmetrical power imbalance of a system that has long privileged centralised governance structures, dominated by the Bamar-centric status quo, and maintained by decades of military oppression and propaganda.

Their system is decentralised and therefore adaptable and flexible. This allows resistance humanitarians to swiftly respond to the urgent needs of those displaced in the hardest-to-reach areas. The presence of armed resistance forces prevents the military from gaining territorial control. This also means that administration and governance in each village and township can vary greatly, with immense implications for the safety and security of frontline humanitarians. This necessitates a decentralised operation that is quick to adapt to the changing dynamics, with full trust that those closest to the ground can best determine the safest, most effective and efficient way to aid those in need. Importantly, a decentralised system also challenges power dynamics formed through a centralised system of governance.

Resistance humanitarians are difficult to identify as they only reveal themselves and the full extent of their work to those they trust, for security reasons. Trust is the cornerstone of their work. The trust they have fostered with the affected population allows them to have deeper and wider coverage to access those most affected, and to enter areas inaccessible to most international aid actors. This, along with their knowledge, experience and ability to manoeuvre complexities on the ground, further expands their areas of operation.

Many of the resistance humanitarians are former internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, and are embedded within the community they wish to serve. They have long-established community networks that they are part of, and through these networks they can gain quality data that allows them to have a comprehensive understanding of people's needs. Coordinated data is powerful, not only in addressing needs but also for advocacy, donor engagement and to mobilise resources.

Resistance humanitarians are often part of ‘networks of networks’ and multiple coordination bodies. Through leveraging this interconnectivity, they can collect multiple levels of data in a swift and timely manner. For example, local humanitarians are part of networks that also include human rights organisations, who have decades of experience in systematically documenting human rights violations, conducting interviews, and triangulating data and information. Such organisations can work to collect data and assist in ground-truthing and the triangulation of information in a timely manner.<sup>2</sup>

While the local organisations have both the data and access for effective action, with potential to scale up the response, they are continuously challenged by the limited nature of resources and are forced to do more with less. They are innovative in their response, including in response mapping, needs assessment and aid delivery methods. Resources to support their innovative system of administering aid are not forthcoming, and they are often plagued by questions of accountability, independence and capacity, despite some groups having demonstrated decades of work and proven accounting and financial records.

While strongly supported by a small number of intermediaries that are also not bound by the need to seek consent or acquire access from the military and who support resistance humanitarians’ vision of a federal democratic Myanmar, the unfortunate reality is that aid and resources are often allocated based on politics and power, not operational coverage.

What few resources are available to them is further limited by the principles, policies, strategic decisions, and success indicators that are set by those at the top of the aid pyramid – often in the Global North – who continue to ignore the vehement and active calls to channel funds and humanitarian assistance directly through local actors.

Despite having these elements of ‘formal’ mechanisms, local groups are often considered ‘informal’ by the UN-coordinated international responses. In contrast, the UN-coordinated bodies that sign MoUs register with the illegal and illegitimate military junta, and operate in areas under the junta’s control are considered ‘formal’ mechanisms. This poses further challenges for local groups when attempting to obtain funds from international ‘formal’ state-centric mechanisms, including pooled funds.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these challenges, local organisations have worked to form specific mandates and structures recognised by administrative structures outside of the military junta. Some are even registered with Myanmar’s NUG or political organisations of ethnic resistance organisations, have sophisticated communication and coordination platforms, and have developed accountability mechanisms. Most importantly, they are recognised and trusted by the communities they serve.

---

2 Anonymous interview (24 August 2023).

3 Anonymous interview (8 September 2023).

## Local organisations' dilemma: engaging with the junta

In the three years since the coup attempt, despite their best efforts, local groups have faced shortages in funds and support from the international community while needs continue to grow. Meanwhile, as more and more international organisations and governments sign MoUs, register with the junta, and work with access from and/or in partnership with them, some local organisations have faced pressure to follow suit, especially in order to obtain funding or to participate in internationally led coordination platforms.

This has left many local organisations to grapple with an impossible choice: they must decide either to continue to completely disengage the junta, not register and not take funds from registered international organisations, or they take steps to register with the junta, take funds from international actors that have signed MoUs and registered with the junta, and work at the periphery of formal internationally led coordination platforms, while being continuously confronted with operational, ethical and moral dilemmas.

All local actors we spoke to disagree with the junta's brutality and oppression. However, local organisations, particularly those with previous registration status prior to the coup with offices in major cities and a large number of staff members across the country, have chosen to register with the junta, and let their presence be known. These larger local NGOs have also organised to form networks that seek to act as intermediaries in channelling funds to frontline humanitarians and participate in the UN's localisation agenda (Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network, 2022; Décobert and Wells, 2023).

Largely unspoken, these different approaches have created divisions as well as tensions among the local actors. The authors observe that there is a horizontal spectrum of response where resistance humanitarians are at one end of the spectrum, and at the other end are those who decide to register or take funds from registered international actors. There are also those in between who take a mixed approach where they register with the junta but continue to discretely subvert the junta's scrutiny.

Some resistance humanitarians have expressed concern about the lack of transparency from international partners and donors, who despite their repeated inquiries about the status of their MoUs and registration process, faced difficulty in receiving a clear reply.<sup>4</sup> This speaks to the larger issue of equal partnerships where international organisations are making decisions that deeply impact the security, funding and sustainability of their local partners without adequate consultations or any consultations at all. Such vertical, top-down decisions by international organisations have further created tensions and mistrust with local organisations, who are unsure about who they can trust for support and assistance that aligns with their principles.

---

4 Anonymous interview (3 September 2023).

---

## The default approach is a mismatch

As discussed earlier, externally driven aid upholds the status quo of internationally accepted and venerated norms such as the neutrality principle, while privileging state-centric response. Any other responses that do not fall within the confines of the internationally accepted consensus are often delegitimised, leaving little room for diversity of local approaches. Local resistance humanitarians who work in areas controlled by the resistance groups are viewed with suspicion and scepticism, and questioned on whether their operations are neutral. This is ironic, given that the externally driven aid continues to prioritise its engagement with the military junta for access.

In Myanmar's context, this default approach is instrumentalised to the fullest by the junta, which is the perpetrator of the crisis and its primary source of violence. Promoting this default approach could further embolden the military junta and prolong the conflict and the suffering of the people.

The default approach also pushes the Myanmar people away from their strong desire to end the military dictatorship. Humanitarian resistance, which works based on the basic tenet of total disengagement with the military junta, thus resonates with the people's struggle for self-determination, justice and rights (Barter, 2023).

The following section further outlines some of the ways in which this default approach is a mismatch for the Myanmar crisis, and could deepen conflict and prolong the crisis.

### Denial of access

Questions of sovereignty and territorial integrity are often at the heart of discussions about aid, particularly in contexts where access to aid is denied. The issue is politicised as it becomes about recognition, as well as about who has the power to authorise access to those in need.

The systematic denial and restriction of aid delivery, including food, water, healthcare and shelter for the most vulnerable populations – acts that could constitute war crimes – is a tactic long deployed by the Myanmar military (Meixler, 2018). This weaponisation of humanitarian aid is part of its 'four cuts' strategy whereby the military attempts to cut off the resistance groups' access to funds, food, information and recruits, with devastating consequences for civilians. By only allowing distribution of aid to areas it deems worthy of support (i.e. where the people offer political, strategic and tactical advantage to the junta), the junta is attempting to starve and weaken the resistance. At the same time, it is driving the international community to engage with its illegitimate body for access in order to bolster its legitimacy (see Box 3, on the example of humanitarian corridors).

### **Box 3 Humanitarian corridors are not a viable option**

Anticipating an influx of refugees due to constant fighting between Myanmar's military and revolutionary groups, Thailand is launching a new initiative to establish corridors to scale up assistance along the Thailand–Myanmar border. The initiative will initially involve the Red Cross Societies of two countries with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) brought in to monitor the distribution of humanitarian assistance (ASEAN, 2024).

The Thai corridor initiative has been met with scepticism and outrage from Myanmar pro-democracy activists. The pitfall of this approach is apparent: displaced communities seek refuge in resistance-controlled areas along the border out of reach of the Myanmar military. The initiative is also fundamentally flawed as it will involve the Myanmar Red Cross, which lacks trust of the public as it operates as an auxiliary of the Myanmar military. The most troubling aspect here is of course that of human security, which the initiative was initially meant to address. Displaced communities, and those supporting them, could be placed in harm's way as information collected could be shared with and exploited by the Myanmar military.

Internationally led humanitarian corridors, including the current Thai initiative and its variations that rely on the Myanmar junta for access, do not work in the context of the crisis. Resistance humanitarianism, on the other hand, is a more direct, simpler and more cost-effective way to distribute aid that does not require heavy infrastructures and laborious political negotiations. While Thailand does have a valid concern to protect its border from the consequence of an escalating conflict, the following painful lessons should be considered to avoid unintended consequences.

First, humanitarian corridors rely on all warring parties' willingness to respect the corridors as protected spaces (Price, 2020). If the intention is to distribute aid to those most affected by the conflict along the border, then it necessitates working with ethnic resistance organisations who are in control of the border. However, a lack of trust among parties makes enforcement of such a corridor incredibly difficult, as the Ukraine example has shown (Gelsdorf and Kurtzer, 2022). It is unlikely that the Myanmar military would agree to or honour a particular arrangement.

Second, humanitarian corridors require the international community's political will to be proactive in ensuring the safety of the corridors. This will be very difficult to achieve in the absence of a UN Security Council resolution. A follow-up to Resolution 2669 (December 2022) on Myanmar that includes elements of humanitarian corridors could potentially be blocked by Russia and China. This was shown in the case of humanitarian corridors in Syria, where the delivery of aid was initially allowed, with notification rather than consent of the Syrian regime, through the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution, but its renewal process was instrumentalised by nefarious actors with veto powers (Beals, 2023).

Third, international organisations contend that under international law, humanitarian pauses, corridors and safe zones should not be required for civilians to receive life-saving support (Stanforth and Corfixen, 2023) and that only a ceasefire can stop the bloodshed (O’Callaghan et al., 2023). It is illegal in the first place to target civilians and deny humanitarian relief supplies. By proposing humanitarian corridors and pauses rather than focusing on the cessation of violence, the conflict could become further protracted as the root cause of the violence remains unaddressed.

Box source: Kamal (2024)

This tactic by the military to leverage humanitarian aid for its own political gain has been effective, as UN agencies defaulted to state-centric engagement by travelling to Myanmar’s capital Naypyidaw to meet various members of the Myanmar military junta, including coup leader Min Aung Hlaing, in the hopes of gaining access rather than openly and formally engaging with the NUG (Justice for Myanmar, 2023; Special Advisory Council For Myanmar, 2023). Hundreds of civil society organisations have expressed concerns that this approach taken by the UN is further emboldening the junta in conducting military atrocities (Progressive Voice, 2023a).

Worryingly, there is a serious disconnect between the position of the UN intergovernmental forums that have hardened against the junta over time, and the approach taken by the UN Country Team and its partners in Myanmar as they move closer to the junta through further engagement and cooperation. No UN intergovernmental forum – the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly or the UN Human Rights Council – has recognised the military as Myanmar’s government or the ‘de facto’ authority (Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, 2023). Meanwhile, the UN Country Team’s ‘principles of engagement’, while urging agencies to avoid meeting in public events with the junta, recognises the military junta as the ‘de facto’ authority, despite this being factually and legally inaccurate according to former UN mandate holders (ibid.). UN member states should make a decision at the highest level on how the UN agencies should treat the military junta consistently across the different agencies and levels.

This is vital as trust is the cornerstone of humanitarian assistance. Many ethnic-minority people distrusted the military prior to the failed coup due to the collective memory of the decades of atrocities committed against them. Now, even those who come from the heartland of Myanmar military’s recruiting grounds in the central Dry Zone also largely distrust the junta and attempt to take refuge in resistance-controlled areas. They are fleeing to areas where the military has neither control nor authority. More than the aid itself, how aid is provided and who is providing it matters (Kamal et al., 2023; see also the next section).

The externally driven approach of accessing populations in need through the junta is also ineffective as the junta does not have full territorial control of Myanmar. The Special Advisory Council for Myanmar has claimed that the resistance forces, including ethnic resistance organisations, hold approximately 60% of the country’s territory, with the junta only able to hold onto stable control in 22% of the townships

studied (Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, 2022; Human Rights Council, 2023). This claim has been affirmed by the NUG (Bloomberg News, 2023). Furthermore, access severity monitoring in August 2023 by the UN showed that only a quarter of the townships assessed are considered relatively accessible (OCHA, 2023a). The coordinated operation against the Myanmar military that started on 27 October 2023 in northern Shan State, carried out by three ethnic resistance organisations known as the Three Brotherhood Alliance, and subsequent coordinated offensives by other resistance forces in various part of Myanmar, will pose further challenges for externally driven aid (Ford and Thin Zar Htet, 2023).

As the territory controlled by the resistance widens, access and travel authorisations issued by the military to reach the most vulnerable people become even more irrelevant (Fishbein and Zau Myet Awng, 2023). For example, during the fighting in Loikaw, capital city of Karenni State, it was the Karenni revolutionary groups and the NUG that coordinated a pause in their offensives to evacuate over 200 employees and family members of the UN and INGOs (MoCIT, 2023). There is an increasing need to formally and openly engage with the resistance forces, including the NUG.

There are other considerations beyond operational effectiveness, such as the question of morality, in the application of humanitarian principles. When access is constrained by one belligerent to the extent that it is in Myanmar, the provision of service through that belligerent cannot be considered ‘impartial de facto [...] When it is primarily food aid, and very few other needs are being met, it cannot be considered effective’ (Harvey et al., 2023: 8). Humanitarian Outcomes conducted a survey on the coverage, operational reach and effectiveness of humanitarian aid in Myanmar and concluded that ‘the operational presence and reach of the formal aid sector is even more limited’ than the suggested data and that it is ‘not poised to improve’ (ibid.). Compared to other crises around the world, including those in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Central African Republic, the percentage of people in need targeted by the UN-coordinated response is much smaller and the coordinated response is much sparser and more tightly controlled. Moreover, while aid delivery can be skewed geographically and by sector in access-constrained conflicts, the extent observed in Myanmar calls for a ‘rethink of humanitarian strategy’ (ibid.: 8).

## Skewed data

This lack of access to vast areas controlled by resistance bodies, coupled with the likelihood of there being limited operational partners, results in less accurate and lower-quality data. In July 2023, OCHA reported that there were 322,600 IDPs across the entire Kawthoolei area.<sup>5</sup> However, local Karen networks report a much higher figure, nearly double that number, indicating a significant underestimation by OCHA and suggesting a need for a critical reassessment of the data provided by the ‘formal’ humanitarian sector (Karen Peace Support Network, 2023). Nearly a year after its reporting was brought to the public’s attention, nothing has changed, with the UN continuing to report numbers that only reflect half the displacement numbers compared to those provided by resistance humanitarians (Karen Peace Support Network, 2024).

---

5 ‘Kawthoolei’ generally refers to the Karen homeland where Karen populations live, including parts of the Tanintharyi, Bago and Ayeyarwady regions and Mon State. These are also areas that are largely administered by the ethnic revolutionary organisation, the Karen National Union.

Additionally, data and work presented by ‘informal’ local humanitarian groups are often either overlooked, met with scepticism or remain unrecognised by the international humanitarian framework. A glaring example of this was OCHA’s 2022 humanitarian update, which claimed there was an absence of gender-based violence case management agencies in Myawaddy, along with a lack of legal services for survivors, particularly in areas outside the junta’s control. Contrary to this report, the local Karen Women’s Organisation has been providing comprehensive community gender-based violence services for over a decade in all seven Karen districts, including Myawaddy Township (Karen Women’s Organisation, 2022). The formal aid sector has consistently failed to recognise the critical and invaluable contributions of local networks, especially when they operate outside the formal coordination system. This disregard not only hinders the advancement of women’s rights but also the effectiveness of humanitarian aid that is being carried out by displaced and refugee women-led and -initiated humanitarian resistance networks.

## **Aid colonisation, not localisation**

Recognising that access constraints are not about to improve, the UN has been increasing the number of local partners who are operational on the ground. The Humanitarian Country Team Localization Strategy, which was adopted in October 2023, aims to ensure the availability of ‘inclusive and risk-sensitive coordination arrangements’ for local actors and to advocate for increased funding and flexible requirements that enables their work (OCHA, 2023a: 42). This includes a new coordination structure which began operating in September 2023.

This localisation strategy, however, does not fundamentally change the representativeness in a system led by international agencies, nor does it shift the power and resource imbalance that plagues the local and international agencies’ relationships. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) continues to lead while local organisations are invited to partake in its coordination structures. Some local responders who have decided to take part in the UN coordination structure expressed hope in influencing the UN localisation agenda, despite knowing the challenges with this approach. Their major concern is that without their involvement, a junta-aligned organisation will take their place.

Those who are familiar with the current coordination platform raise trust as a major issue in creating a conducive environment for information flow.<sup>6</sup> Resistance humanitarians are reluctant to participate in coordination structures that include the components of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as observers due to their relationship with the Myanmar Red Cross, which acts as an auxiliary force of the Myanmar military (Myoe, 2009; Buchanan, 2016). Over 400 civil society organisations expressed serious loss of confidence in the Myanmar Red Cross in an open letter that condemned its attendance at the Armed Forces Day in April 2021, a day the military celebrated by killing nearly 170 people, including children (Progressive Voice, 2021).

---

6 Anonymous interview with local humanitarians (25 August 2023); Anonymous interview with INGO (8 September 2023); Anonymous interview with local humanitarians (6 October 2023).

Furthermore, groups such as CSO Nexus Consortium – Tanintharyi have outright rejected this new coordination structure, stating, ‘UNOCHA’s engagement with the terrorist army, which is perpetrating widespread war crimes, is seen as an acknowledgement and legitimization of their actions’ (CSO Nexus Consortium – Tanintharyi, 2023). The group is comprised of civil society organisations (CSOs) carrying out humanitarian assistance in Tanintharyi, and it has urged the agency to realise that only cooperation with local organisations trusted by the communities and alternative methods of support will comprehensively address the humanitarian crisis. In not acting upon the expressed will of the people of Myanmar to disengage with the military, these attempts at ‘localisation’ could be viewed as colonisation of locally led efforts that, instead of assisting those in need, further entrench a system that violates their rights and oppresses them through brutal violence.

## Disproportionate funding

The UN-coordinated humanitarian response has identified a requirement of \$994 million to fund its work in Myanmar in 2024, which targets 5.3 million people in need (OCHA, 2023a). In 2023, it had called for \$887 million targeting 5 million people, including in the Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeal, but only 32% of requested funding was met (OCHA, 2024). This makes the response in Myanmar comparatively small in contrast to other disasters; in 2023, Ukraine was funded at 64% (FTS, 2024a), and Sudan was funded at 43% (FTS, 2024b). While grossly underfunded, Myanmar’s funding levels must be understood in the context of what the humanitarian agencies can do to address the needs within the access constraints imposed by the junta.

In providing aid to Myanmar, donors must consider the issue of proportionality.<sup>7</sup> Local organisations and administrative bodies are doing much more with less. For example, Karen Peace Support Network’s urgent appeal for cross-border emergency rice provision asks for \$43 million for 637,414 IDPs in Kawthoolei areas, while a Karenni flash appeal requests \$18.5 million for food and non-food aid for the whole year.<sup>8</sup> These amounts are very small compared to the collective figure of \$887 million requested by the UN and its partners in the Humanitarian Response Plan and Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeal.

Ultimately, though, it is not about balancing the percentage of funds that is provided to local organisations, but about a paradigm shift in the humanitarian aid system that continues to pay lip service to localisation and refuses to let go of the lion’s share of the resources.<sup>9</sup>

---

7 Anonymous interview (22 September 2023); Anonymous interview (20 September 2023); Anonymous interview (1 September 2023); Anonymous interview (15 September 2023); Anonymous interview (24 August 2023).

8 Largest network of Karen civil society consisting of 30 organisations in Myanmar and Thailand (see Karen Peace Support Network, n.d.).

9 Anonymous interview (28 August 2023).

---

## How traditional humanitarianism has failed in Rakhine State

Rakhine State, one of Myanmar's poorest states, is also one of the most difficult places for resistance humanitarians to work. This is partly due to the mushrooming of international aid organisations, presenting the fragmented scenery of local humanitarian and development actors with a dilemma (see Box 2).

On 14 May 2023, Category 5 Cyclone Mocha hit Rakhine State with brute force. One of the strongest cyclones ever to hit the region, it left a trail of destruction in its path. An estimated 150 villages and wards across Chin, Sagaing and Magway were impacted. In Rakhine, where the Rohingya continue to endure apartheid-like conditions in open-air prison camps, an estimated 85% of shelters in IDP camps and sites were destroyed (Human Rights Watch, 2023). According to OCHA, 3.4 million people endured destructive winds during the cyclone (OCHA, 2023b).

The responses from the various actors and failure of the international approach to address a natural disaster highlight major flaws in the current approach to aid in Myanmar. There were advance warnings before Cyclone Mocha hit, giving enough time for preparations. Still, the deaths of many, particularly Rohingya – which could be as high as over 400, with other estimates of around 270 – were not prevented.

The Myanmar military's relief response to the cyclone was not only wholly inadequate, but it also deliberately withheld life-saving aid to the most vulnerable population, turning a natural hazard-induced disaster into a manmade catastrophe. While the military declared that the cyclone was coming, its evacuation efforts were limited, and information sharing was insufficient.<sup>10</sup> Apart from a limited number of Rohingya evacuated by military trucks to Sittwe University (Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK, 2023; Cho, 2023), there were no significant efforts made to evacuate them or provide adequate information as to the severity of the storm or guidance on where shelters are located. No information was provided in Rohingya language and international organisations' requests to provide cyclone education to Rohingya were denied by the junta (ibid.). Living in conditions of apartheid where they are denied their right to freedom of movement as well as nationality, the Rohingya either thought it impossible to obtain official travel permission or were simply denied (ibid.).<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath of the cyclone, the military junta blamed the victims for failing to comply with its evacuation procedures (RFA Burmese, 2023).

It is true that Rakhine, Rohingya and other ethnic minorities did not trust the information coming from the military, as it waged a brutal campaign of terror even as the storm approached.<sup>12</sup> As at least 15 townships flooded, the military launched assaults further displacing civilians in Sagaing and Magway and causing children and women to suffer both from the storm and the military's attacks (Frontier Myanmar,

---

10 Anonymous interview with Rohingya and Rakhine civil society (31 August 2023); (21 September 2023); (8 September 2023).

11 Anonymous interview (21 September 2023).

12 Anonymous interview (21 September 2023).

2023). It continued to launch heavy artillery offensives in Tanintharyi region, Mon and Karen States and throughout Myanmar (HURFOM, 2023). The junta arrested journalists in the aftermath of the storm, silencing independent reporting that covered the impact of Cyclone Mocha (IFJ, 2023).

Most egregiously, the junta detained local aid workers, and restricted UN and INGO access to disaster areas, blocking aid from entering communities in need. It also issued a directive requiring international agencies to deliver humanitarian assistance solely through their ‘rehabilitation committee’, which consists of serving military officers (Border News Agency, 2023). After impeding and restricting access for nearly a month after the cyclone, on 8 June, the military issued a blanket suspension of travel authorisation for aid agencies, and formalised its obstruction of aid (Human Rights Watch, 2023; OCHA, 2023c).

From the onset of the preparation, ASEAN and the UN-coordinated response looked to the military junta for access and action, but neither was forthcoming. Contrary to observations on the ground,<sup>13</sup> the UN press release noted that evacuations were ‘well underway through local authorities’ while stressing the importance of ‘access to affected people and increased funding’ (United Nations Myanmar, 2023a). AHA Centre situation reports laid out in detail the actions taken and resources mobilised by the ‘Myanmar government’. However, even three weeks after the cyclone, residents in Sittwe reported seeing very limited assistance. It is likely that the junta delivered the aid through the Myanmar Red Cross, the police and the General Administrative Departments under their control, with concerns raised that the military’s media coverage of its relief efforts was performative (Border News Agency, 2023; Development Media Group, 2023) and that some of the materials were provided to military families and government staff (ibid.).<sup>14</sup>

To negotiate access with these intransigent ‘local authorities’, the UN focused on a series of high-level engagements at Naypyidaw level (Myanmar News Agency, 2023). In August, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths, arrived in Myanmar for the first time since the coup attempt, visited Rakhine State, and called for ‘expanded humanitarian access’ and funding to assist the woeful state of humanitarian relief efforts in Myanmar (United Nations Myanmar, 2023b). These visits were instrumentalised by the junta to legitimise itself as the authority in Myanmar and did not lead to significantly increased access on the ground (Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, 2023).

Months after the cyclone, OCHA continued to report a lack of approval for Travel Authorisations (TAs) to distribute goods. While World Food Programme and a few other organisations reportedly provided limited support, the centralisation of the cyclone response at the Naypyidaw level, and lack of approval for TAs, delayed efforts to provide timely and effective disaster response as the junta continued to pause cyclone-related relief efforts (ibid.).

---

13 Anonymous interview with Rohingya and Rakhine civil society (31 August 2023); (21 September 2023); (8 September 2023); (23 September 2023).

14 Anonymous interview (28 September 2023).

The junta had begun to enforce its 2022 registration law requirements by tying the approval of TAs to having valid registrations and MoUs. Requests for TAs were approved on a case-by-case basis depending on the agency's engagement with the military, including its MoU and registration process. Worse, approval at the Naypyidaw level did not necessarily translate into regional-level approval where humanitarian actors faced further restrictions and obstructions by the military.<sup>15</sup> These restrictions not only impacted the UN and INGO response, but also Rakhine civil society where they were, in many cases, the actual implementing partners on the ground (Mathieson, 2023). Some agencies, who were able to restart their regular programming in July, assisted cyclone victims where possible, but the scaling up of cyclone relief and reconstruction efforts was severely delayed, and many endured the monsoon season without further assistance.

The AHA Centre, which worked directly with the junta's Department of Disaster Management (DDM), was also restricted in its response. While the AHA Centre coordinated with the military for its aircraft to pick up stockpiles of essential supplies from warehouses in Thailand and Malaysia prior to the cyclone and deliver them to Yangon, it awaited the military junta's approval for nearly a week following the disaster.<sup>16</sup> The relief goods arrived in Yangon on 22 May and were handed over to the junta's DDM for distribution in Rakhine State (AHA Centre, 2023). It also deployed its ASEAN Emergency Response and Assessment Team in Rakhine State to conduct a needs assessment in late May.

Meanwhile, regional governments – including Thailand, India and Bangladesh – offered direct bilateral support to the junta (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand, 2023). Other donor governments, including the US, the United Kingdom and Japan, pledged further support to local and international partners.

At the time of the cyclone, the United League of Arakan (ULA), the political wing of the Arakan Army (AA), claimed that it had administrative control of some two-thirds of Rakhine State (Al Jazeera, 2023). The Humanitarian Development Coordination Office (HDCO), which was founded in 2021 to assist ULA in its public services, worked to coordinate the delivery of aid with community-based organisations, CSOs, INGOs and the UN through its regional offices. The HDCO-led effort warned people of the impending cyclone through posters and telegram channels (Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office, 2023a; Lin, 2023), evacuating 120,000 people (including Rohingya) by 12 May (Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office, 2023b). On 17 May, the ULA also established a response-specific committee (United League of Arakan, 2023), and leveraged its links with armed and political groups, civil society and diaspora to fundraise for cyclone victims. It received donations from the NUG as well as various armed actors totalling around \$40 million from its military and political allies (Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, 2023a). In contrast to the international response, the ULA-led effort was more efficient in mobilising support for assistance on the ground.

---

15 Anonymous interview (28 September 2023).

16 The approval was given on 20 May (AHA Centre, 2023).

## Resistance humanitarians' cyclone response

Among the first responders in the cyclone response were civil society, travelling to affected areas and assisting survivors immediately in the aftermath of the cyclone.<sup>17</sup> Rakhine youth and humanitarian networks launched fundraising campaigns, and some worked with Rohingya youth to coordinate assistance.<sup>18</sup> Compared to other parts of Myanmar, in particular the Thailand–Myanmar border where local organisations have responded to emergency relief and conflict-related humanitarian assistance provision for decades, CSOs in Rakhine State have strengthened their momentum and multiplied since the intercommunal violence in 2012 and subsequent events (i.e. the 2017 Rohingya genocide, and the intensification of clashes between the AA and the Myanmar military from 2018). They function at local administrative levels building strong networks that are loosely organised, but also with some participation in more formal national humanitarian coordination networks. Like most CSOs working at grassroots level, they are under-resourced and take high risks to navigate the complex political context and representation on a daily basis. Some Rakhine CSOs are registered with the junta, while others choose to register at a regional level (where only basic information is required), or both.

Similar to many other parts of Myanmar, primarily due to security risks, there is no comprehensive data on how far and deep the reach of local civil society response in Rakhine is. However, as the UN and INGOs were hampered by access constraints, much of the support on the ground from international agencies ultimately went through local CSOs.<sup>19</sup> Local observers categorise Rakhine civil society response broadly in three categories:

- those who redistribute aid from INGOs and UN agencies;
- local charity groups that work with individuals and organisations inside and outside the country to distribute materials and donations;
- those who adopt a mixed approach (Border News Agency, 2023).

It is suggested that the second approach, while facing some challenges to deliver aid to rural areas, has been able to better organise and deliver support.

Whether registered with the junta or not, some Rakhine CSOs, including women-led organisations, chose not to seek permission from the junta to access those affected by the cyclone and instead sought alternative methods of delivery. In considering the safety and security of their staff and information, they continued their work in a low-profile manner, coordinating with residents from affected areas and working with flexible village administrators.<sup>20</sup> The delivery of aid was conducted in a sophisticated manner so as to avoid checkpoints by the junta and investigations.<sup>21</sup>

---

17 Ibid.

18 Anonymous interview (31 August 2023).

19 Anonymous interview (4 September 2023); (31 August 2023).

20 Anonymous interview (8 September 2023).

21 Anonymous interview (28 September 2023); Anonymous interview (31 August 2023); Anonymous interview (4 September 2023).

## Lessons from the Cyclone Mocha response

The Myanmar military is the main culprit in restricting swift and effective response to Cyclone Mocha, but the approach taken by the international community (including ASEAN) highlights glaring flaws in the system.

**Contextualise the crisis.** Cyclone Mocha is categorically a natural hazard-induced disaster that occurred within the contexts of active conflict, fragility and violence, where international humanitarian law should have been used as the prevailing body of law (Gavshon, 2009). There is an urgent need for a serious reckoning within the international community on how to respond to such complex emergencies, and if the ‘authority’ that is committing genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity should be considered an impartial entry point for aid access.

**Rethink access.** The restrictions in Rakhine State and the military’s obstruction of humanitarian aid and access are not new. Following the 2008 Cyclone Nargis and its devastation in the Ayeyarwady Delta, the previous military junta blocked international aid contributing to the death of nearly 140,000 people. If nearly a decade and a half of experience has shown that the military is unwilling and unable to offer access to some of the most vulnerable people in need, humanitarian agencies must shift their strategy and stop relying on the same dead-end unilateral decisions of a military that is weaponising humanitarian aid.

**Respond to needs pragmatically.** This requires innovative forms of cooperation whereby local civil society actors that are operationally independent and impartial have some levels of protection and security from regional authorities (like the AA), to enable them to secure access to assist people in need, including the Rohingya and other minorities. Such an approach may address some concerns around protection of minorities (see Box 4), and discrimination and violations against the Rohingya by the AA, which are increasing as the conflict intensifies in Rakhine State following Cyclone Mocha.

**Localise response and build meaningful partnerships.** Despite having offices in Sittwe and implementing projects in IDP camps for years, some for over a decade, months went by before UN-coordinated efforts could gain nominal approval for transportation and distribution plans for cyclone relief. Ultimately, roughly 110,000 Rohingya remained unprotected in Sittwe. While the UN-coordinated response waited for its approval from Naypyidaw, it was forced to respond through local organisations.

International humanitarian actors have not done enough to move away from direct provision of aid toward localisation by forming meaningful and equal partnerships with local organisations. Meanwhile, funders’ stringent compliance and documentation requirements continue to be barriers for smaller groups to obtain funds to conduct and scale up their life-saving work. Humanitarian agencies and donors need to have a cohesive response policy that draws on successes from other areas in Myanmar. For example, donors have allowed community financial transactions such as ‘Hundi’ (informal cash transaction networks) to be used in other parts of Myanmar. This should be applied to all CSOs in Rakhine State

instead of forcing local organisations to use the junta's banking system.<sup>22</sup> More lives could have been saved if smaller organisations were able to mobilise to build trust and to evacuate the Rohingya.<sup>23</sup> They are the ones who have the access to affected communities, who know how to navigate the complex political landscape in Rakhine State with safety and security in mind, have connections that can be leveraged, and care most deeply about the long-term sustainability of their communities.

#### **Box 4 Protecting ethnic minorities in humanitarian resistance: the Rohingya example**

Most local actors that we spoke to during the course of the study are working with UN agencies or INGOs who have signed an MoU, or they are registered with the junta and/or the AA. Very few exceptional cases of resistance humanitarians from the Rohingya community can be found. Rohingya humanitarians in particular would need some levels of protection and support from other resistance humanitarians as well as revolutionary forces, in view of the high degree of risks involved and the complex political landscape.

Rohingya are less organised and the most vulnerable due to decades of discrimination, systematic persecution and denial of fundamental rights, including access to livelihoods, education and other basic rights. However, 'it is not the Rohingya's fault', as some Rohingya youth told the authors during the study.<sup>24</sup>

Rohingya are not just passive victims and survivors of genocide, who require the international community's support for their survival. They are active agents of a future federal democratic Myanmar who bring with them the experience and the insights to ensure that justice and accountability are addressed at the core of the nation-building process. Despite decades of oppression and against all odds stacked against them, they are among the most resilient and therefore play an important role in nation-building through humanitarian resistance and in the wider resistance movement.

Ultimately, what is needed is political will to ensure that those who committed heinous international crimes are held accountable and that the Rohingya are included at the political level to address the decades of persecution and atrocities committed against them. There can be no sustainable peace in the future federal democratic Myanmar without equality, justice and accountability for the Rohingya.

---

22 Anonymous interview (8 September 2023).

23 Ibid.

24 Anonymous interview (21 September 2023).

**Support local efforts to build social cohesion.** Several youth and humanitarians noted that while it would be very difficult for Rohingya civil society to operate in Rakhine State, Rohingya and Rakhine youth networks worked together for cyclone response.<sup>25</sup> Some Rohingya provided shelter during the cyclone or assisted those who are vulnerable including children, the elderly, and pregnant people to find shelter in schools.<sup>26</sup> The youth networked and coordinated in several village tracts, working in both Rakhine and Rohingya villages together with Rakhine youth networks.<sup>27</sup>

There are Rakhine that believe that they should work towards social cohesion despite the immense challenges. This work to plant the seeds of social cohesion was described by a Rakhine activist as ‘demolish[ing] a mountain with the seed of a palm fruit’, as the Burmese saying goes (Kyaw Hsan Hlaing, 2023b). There are Rohingya youth who are driven to work with Rakhine youth to address humanitarian needs. These are the seeds of a palm fruit that should be watered, not undermined. What is required is strengthening the local response to support the most vulnerable and encouraging the fragile process of building social cohesion and resilience.<sup>28</sup>

By not capitalising on this reckoning and supporting local efforts, and instead looking to the perpetrators of genocide to solve the humanitarian crisis, is it possible that the humanitarian response is further disenfranchising and side-lining the agency of Rohingya and Rakhine actors who can work together to support their communities where possible? As one Rohingya woman lamented, the international humanitarian agencies ‘depoliticise our issues and neutralise our pain’.<sup>29</sup> By not putting human rights at the forefront of their work, is the international community making itself blind and getting in the way of local efforts to build resilience and social cohesion?

---

25 Anonymous interview (31 August 2023); Anonymous interview (29 September 2023); Anonymous interview (23 September 2023); Anonymous interview (21 September 2023); Anonymous interview (28 September 2023).

26 Anonymous interview (21 September 2023).

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Anonymous interview (23 September 2023).

---

## How resistance contributes to resilience

The failure of the international community to respond to Myanmar's crisis for nearly three years and through Cyclone Mocha has forced Myanmar's resistance humanitarians to build their resilience and rely on their own community to respond to needs on the ground. Their resilience is locally fostered and supported through a complex web of local networks that is both intersectoral and intersectional. While their work is rooted in local responses, their financing is global, leveraging established and newly formed diaspora connections that have strengthened as more activists, members of the CDM, professionals and others who are able to mobilise communities to raise funds have fled Myanmar.

### Building stronger 'muscle' for effective action

The work of local resilience through humanitarian resistance is like building muscle, whereas internationally led humanitarian aid is akin to cosmetic surgery (Kamal, 2023). Expensive cosmetic surgeries are carried out to meet external standards of beauty, in an effort to meet unrealistic expectations. The maintenance is often dependent on money, and without it, the perceived 'flaws' begin to resurface.

Alternatively, one can focus on building muscle. The work takes longer, requires more patience and discipline, but it has longer-lasting benefits beyond the superficial. Such work is not dependent on money. It is extremely flexible to one's environment, making it more accessible as well as inclusive when such precious work is shared with others. While the process can be slow, difficult and painful at first, it is then easier to maintain the routine to prioritise long-term health.

Externally driven aid that comes with international aid dependence, when provided in tightly controlled high doses and concentrations, can prohibit the muscle growth of locally led resistance humanitarianism. International aid and its funds bring with it their requirements, compliance and deliverables. While this is not necessarily bad in itself, such systems often clash with the horizontal, consultative and fluid nature of grassroots and community-led aid. By making itself dependent on international aid, resistance humanitarianism risks the 'NGO-isation' that often professionalises, depoliticises and ultimately weighs down or sometimes even demobilises the strong momentum of community-led action.

Instead, encouraging the growth of local efforts that fit the environment and purpose will lead to a more sustainable ecosystem. Rather than the local humanitarian ecosystem remaining dependent on external funds and thus its demands, it is vital that resistance humanitarians begin to find new pathways to more sustainable and resilient funds.

To build peace and dynamic regional stability, the international community, donors, ASEAN and the UN must work to support this long and difficult work of building muscle that is locally led, horizontal

in nature and builds on the resistance movement that is the most practical and effective approach to Myanmar's humanitarian crisis. This work should not be based on external systems of humanitarian aid that are often focused on short-term cosmetic gains.

## **The seeds of federal democracy**

Many of Myanmar's resistance humanitarians are fiercely resisting utilising the junta's administrative bodies and instead are building new local community structures, strengthening existing administrations under the control of the resistance groups that encourage social cohesion and resilience. In doing so, they are planting seeds for the growth of a future federal democracy.

Women-led organisations, medical networks, religious leaders and community groups are working with local independent administrative bodies within Chin State, where 70% of its state civil servants joined the CDM (Loong, 2022; Fishbein, 2023a), to deliver humanitarian aid – and successfully opening hospitals to provide medical assistance for free. Ethnic educational bodies in Karen State – which has seen a growth of 900 schools and educational bodies, up from 300 such bodies since the failed coup – are working with resistance humanitarians to respond to the growing number of students and meet their needs in their reclaimed indigenous land.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, student enrolment in Karenni areas and in refugee camps has increased, with CDM teachers filling the gaps. Doctors from central Dry Zone areas are drawing inspiration from recently strengthened Karenni administrative bodies and their humanitarian coordination structures to help strengthen their own networks to better assist those on the ground (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2023).<sup>31</sup> The NUG is also taking control of public administrative bodies in areas that are now controlled by the resistance, distributing food supplies to IDPs (National Unity Government, 2023).

The resistance humanitarians are making significant contributions to future federal democracy. They are not only working to assist those in need, but reimagining and creating administrative bodies that reject the military's attempt to hold on to power. While much of this is not new, particularly in ethnic areas where such administrative bodies have long been a central function of ethnic-minority people's lives, such nationwide effort is unprecedented – and should be supported.

This resilience is built locally with the trust and support of their communities. Organisations are working slowly and painfully, sewing back together the pieces of their lives and their communities' lives that have been destroyed by the Myanmar military over the decades. This work cannot be achieved by international organisations, via spreadsheets, capacity-building and workshops that are adorned with donor logos and tiny country flags that take credit for the work accomplished by local actors.

---

<sup>30</sup> Anonymous interview (25 August 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Anonymous interview (7 September 2023).

---

## Reimagining the ecosystem

While the ‘formal’ aid sector, driven by international agencies, is even more limited than before in its operational presence and reach and unlikely to improve, localised and ‘informal’ aid is reaching significant numbers of people and has the room to scale up (Harvey et al., 2023). With the recent clashes as coordinated operations by resistance forces take hold of junta-held territories and as the coup enters its fourth year, time is of the essence to better illuminate the factors that make horizontal locally led humanitarian resistance effective and to better mobilise to support its ecosystem to scale up the response.

### A diversity of coordination approaches at the local level

While there is a diversity of approaches to aid provision in different areas, local coordination networks have formed at different community, state and regional levels.

Local groups in eastern and western parts of Myanmar such as Karenni, Karen, Chin and Shan states, along with their intermediaries and networks along the borders, have years and decades of experience that have proven effective in delivering aid. Their governance is more established. They are also more accessible to external partners as they have offices or representatives along the borders.

In Sagaing and Magway, emerging humanitarian actors and networks were formed swiftly after the coup. Some have started to connect with those in other areas such as Chin and Karenni states, and to learn from them. As seen in Rakhine, some CSOs are working to foster social cohesion with Rohingya youth and other minorities. The Arakan Army, through its humanitarian wing, is exerting leadership in rural and cyclone-hit areas and provides authoritative data on the cyclone evacuation and post-recovery efforts.

While coordination networks may not form clusters or work centrally – mirroring OCHA’s coordination structures – groups are coming together to present information about their response, operations and challenges, and attempting to share principles of engagement among local actors.<sup>32</sup> These efforts, while challenging in an environment where a diversity of approaches exists, are seeds for a locally led coordination structure that has the potential to reimagine coordination that is fit for purpose.

A locally led coordination structure should not attempt to copy the formal, heavily bureaucratised international humanitarian system, nor give in to the externally driven localisation agenda. These would significantly reduce the ingenuity and adaptability of local actors. While a certain level of coordination is necessary, it should not be imposed from above or driven by external actors that have different aspirations.

---

32 Observed in local workshop, and anonymous interviews with local networks (23 August 2023).

The growth of this locally led coordination structure should be organic to allow trust to build and flourish among local groups. Challenges faced by local and national actors in the ‘grey zone’ should also be addressed, to ensure unity of purpose among the local groups.

## **Changing the seating arrangement**

The current UN-coordinated international response has, along with most INGOs, not shown its willingness to take a backseat. These actors continue to seat themselves in the spotlight – despite not being able to contribute much – and because of this seating arrangement on the global stage, they have a difficult time understanding the atmosphere of the theatre holistically, or even seeing all the actors occupying it.

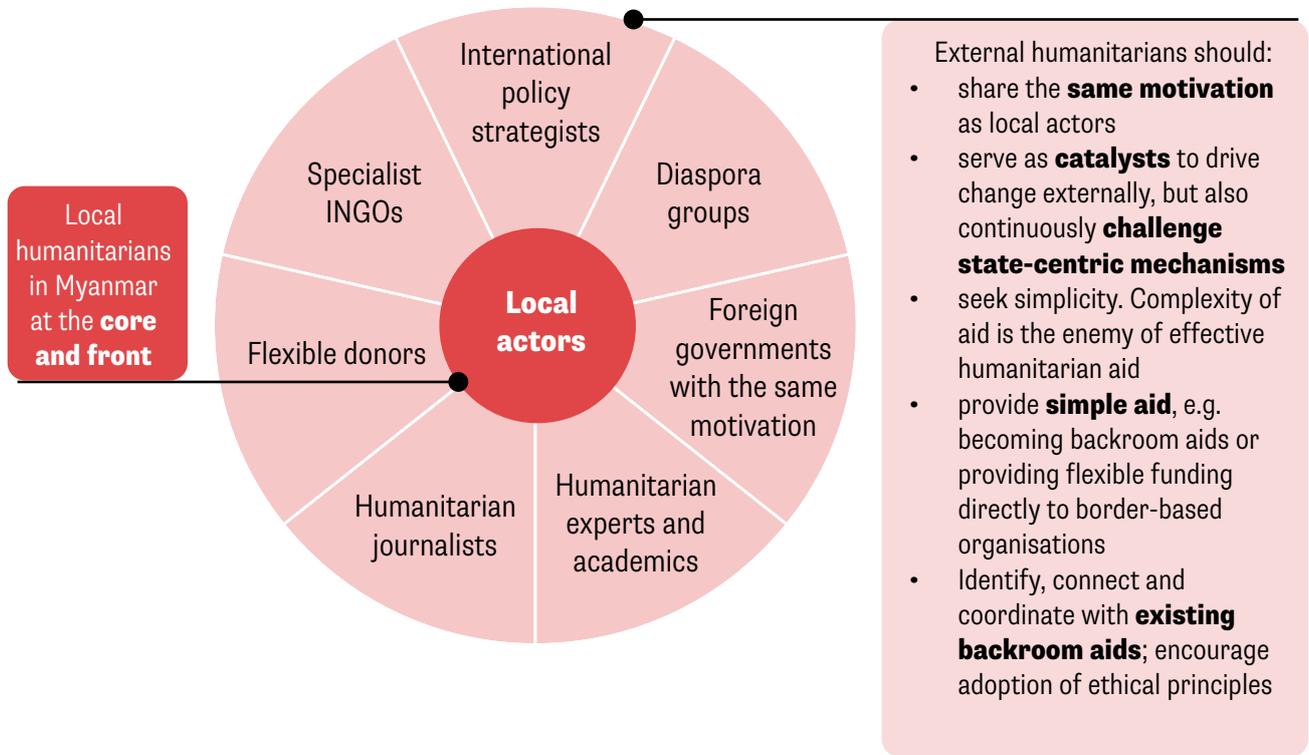
Expecting local participants to independently drive change in a complicated and unstable conflict environment is unreasonable. However, they must take leading roles at the front of the stage, determining which acts and scenes play out next, with behind-the-scenes support and advice of external humanitarians who share the same vision and motivation (Seiff, 2022).

External humanitarians should seek simplicity, and not further complicate the conflict context. Local humanitarians are already providing simple, direct aid using locally sourced and available resources through the trust of the communities that they serve. In a complex conflict situation, simple aid, such as cash transfers, can be most effective. Simple aid is also flexible, able to flow directly to border-based organisations that have been effectively responding to multiple conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes for decades.

External humanitarians can serve as catalysts to drive change externally, and can also continuously challenge the state-centric humanitarian aid system from outside, exploring ways to advance the interests of local resistance humanitarians. Such external humanitarians can include international policy strategists; specialists; humanitarian experts and academics; flexible donors; journalists with a focus on humanitarian aid; and diaspora groups (see Figure 1).

These ‘backroom aid’ actors and external humanitarians with the self-reflection and willingness to move their seat to the back of the room already exist. What is needed is better coordination and connection, strengthening horizontal relationships to build awareness, capacity and shared values among these like-minded external actors.

**Figure 1 External humanitarian and ‘backroom aids’ supporting local actors**



## Diaspora funding

The Myanmar diaspora is considered the ‘single most important source of funding for Myanmar’s resistance movement’, according to some international analysis (ICG, 2022). In Karenni State, 75% of locally led humanitarian response is supported by individuals, including the diaspora, while only 20% comes from other sources including INGOs and NGOs.<sup>33</sup>

Numbering more than 3 million people (Fishbein, 2023b), the diaspora live in the region and throughout the world and come from extremely diverse backgrounds including unregistered migrants, refugees, students and professionals. They have played a key role in sustaining resistance humanitarians’ work since 2021 by carrying out auctions, donation drives and charity concerts; holding collection boxes on the streets; and building unique games and applications, all to raise millions to support the resistance inside Myanmar. While the UN-coordinated response was paralysed by the junta’s refusal to grant it access, the diaspora stepped up, with some Rohingya insisting that ‘if the diaspora hadn’t sent some assistance after the cyclone, many more Rohingya would have died’ (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Many of the diaspora groups are not ‘neutral’ in that they do not seek junta approval for access to their communities, and instead use systems such as Hundi networks to transfer funds in small sums directly

33 Anonymous focus group discussion (6 September 2023).

to the local community, who then purchase goods through local markets. They pay close attention to the ever-evolving ground situation, sharing timely personal messages, photos and information via social networks, often with continuing ties to their communities. This allows the diaspora to respond swiftly to the ground needs and assistance more broadly and comprehensively (DEMAC, 2022).

While diaspora organisations have very informal accountability systems, for example providing brief written or verbal confirmation of funds received or information shared during networking events, they nevertheless remain one of the strongest sources of funds supporting the humanitarian response in Myanmar. Such a source, with its grassroots community-based response, better complements the horizontal nature of grassroots movements and of humanitarian resistance.

### **Network of networks – the humanitarian resistance ‘spider web’**

Having analysed the horizontal movement of movements that characterises Myanmar’s Spring Revolution, the concept of a ‘network of networks’ is the most suitable coordination form, as it builds on the horizontal relations among local humanitarian actors and groups (Kamal, 2023). Akin to a spider web, a network of networks may look intricate and fragile, but it is rapidly built and can be remarkably strong.

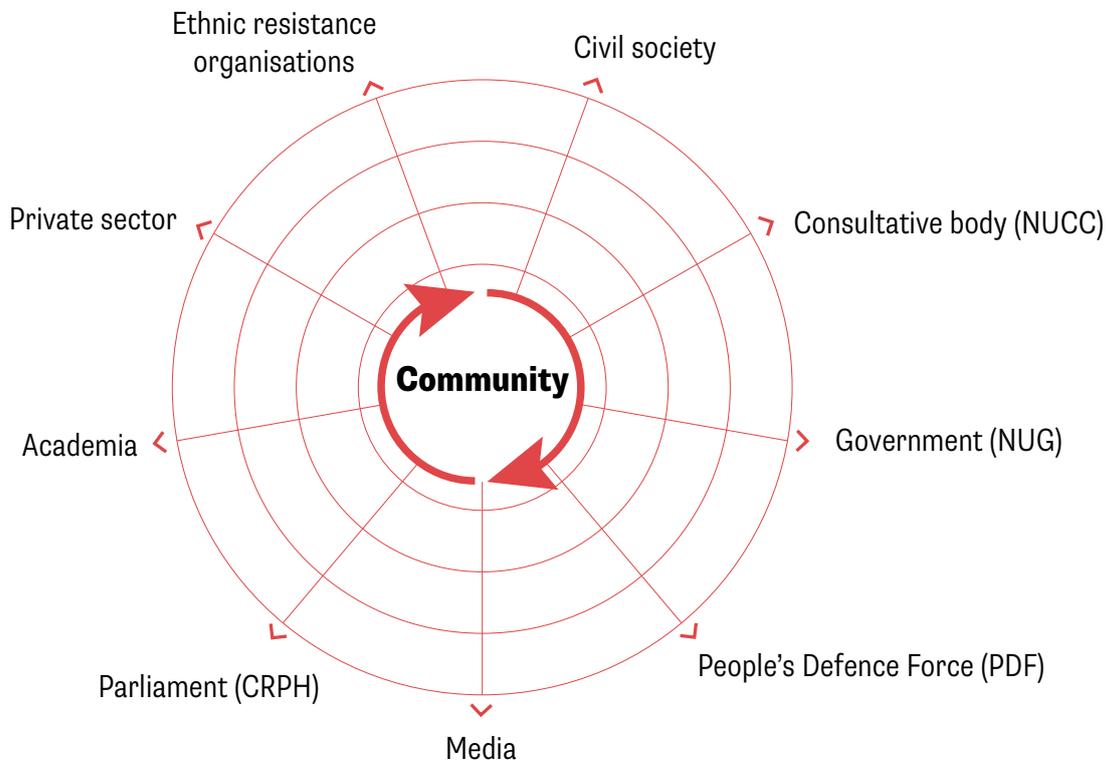
The humanitarian resistance ‘spider web’ should be connected to other elements of the people’s resistance, including the NUG, National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) and ethnic resistance organisations, to form a larger ecosystem where the elements are interconnected, mutually dependent, collaborative and evolving together (see Figure 2). Such an ecosystem shall reflect the vision of a federal democracy as envisioned by the Spring Revolution: equality, justice and self-determination.

The elements of the ecosystem should reinforce one another. In this regard, the NUG could provide local resistance humanitarians with means of registration, to address concerns about their unregistered status by the junta and increase donors’ confidence in aid accountability.<sup>34</sup> However, resistance humanitarians should be given operational independence so that they can ensure impartiality of their operations and remain agile. This would also be more acceptable to donors, as they may fear a diversion of funds for weapons financing.

---

34 Based on a dialogue with the NUG, while it is not mandatory, those who wish to register with the NUG are able to do so. Some donors have supported this process (30 October 2023).

**Figure 2 Reimagining an ecosystem that is suitable for the Myanmar crisis**



### **Building a versatile 'spider web'**

Resistance humanitarians must continue to challenge misconceptions, particularly around the issues of **neutrality** that often come up in view of donors' unwillingness to fund non-neutral humanitarians; **accountability**, as donors lean towards their taxpayers rather than the affected people on the ground; **capacity** of local actors, who are considered unable to absorb and manage sizable funds; and **legitimacy**, as many local resistance humanitarians are unregistered within Myanmar and are outside or at the periphery of the international humanitarian system. All these basically show the rigidity of the international humanitarian system and its inability to adapt to the context where it operates.

The above misconceptions should be challenged collectively, and this is where a durable and versatile humanitarian resistance 'spider web' comes in. Resistance humanitarians should be working collectively within their networks and with others in the ecosystem, supported by external humanitarians and other like-minded actors, to address these misconceptions and flip the narratives.

The durability and versatility of the web are influenced by at least four performance indicators (see Figure 3). Some of the elements already exist to some extent within the current localised coordination networks, but the elements need to be strengthened and better supported.

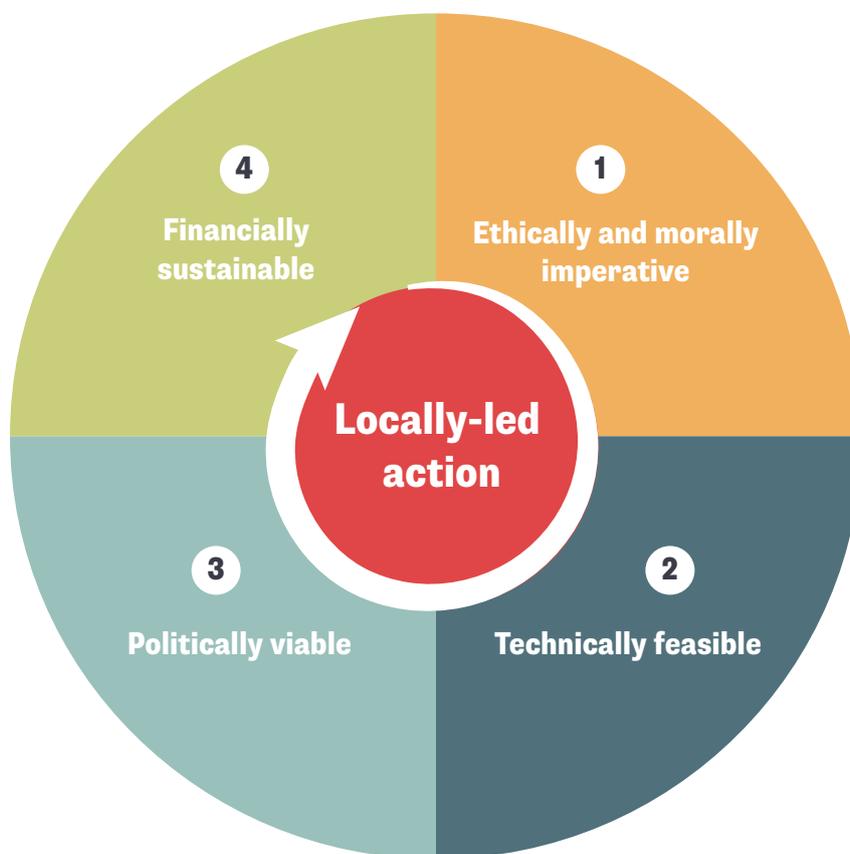
**Ethically and morally imperative.** Locally led humanitarian resistance should be ethically and morally imperative. It is another form of humanitarianism; it is legitimate, and it should be supported. To further reinforce this, resistance humanitarians need to work with like-minded international law experts and policy strategists to showcase that humanitarian resistance meets internationally accepted values and principles, and to demonstrate why the international community needs to better support them. This work could include examples of values and principles in action, such as solidarity, equity, justice and sustainable peace; a production of narratives on how humanitarian resistance could build the foundation for federal democracy in Myanmar; sharing sessions among Myanmar's resistance humanitarians from different geographical and thematic operations; and cross-learning with humanitarians working in other crisis contexts, such as in Syria, Sudan and Ukraine, to build powerful arguments for a systematic change in the international humanitarian system and to form a global network of resistance humanitarianism.

**Technically feasible.** In view of donor scepticism around funding a multitude of diverse and 'small-scale' unregistered local organisations who are not known to them, resistance humanitarians need to demonstrate their advantages, i.e. the depth and breadth of their operational coverage, and direct access to areas inaccessible by others. As they are absorbed in their ground operations, they could turn to their networks to help compile and aggregate field data based on ground realities, as already done by some civil society networks operating along the Thailand–Myanmar border. Tapping into the experience of long-established members, the networks could help emerging aid actors in developing their operational arrangements, risk and security measures, and transparency and accountability guidelines. More established local organisations could step up in place of UN agencies and INGOs to act as a conduit for funds to smaller local aid actors.

**Politically viable.** This performance indicator, along with the next one, is the most challenging – they are both associated with power and politics. This is where resistance humanitarians need to turn to their networks and other elements of the resistance movement. The networks can work with policy strategists to help demystify complex international and regional systems, and work with seasoned journalists to write compelling stories. The NUG can support the networks by forming a coalition with like-minded governments and international advocacy groups to influence policymakers and narratives at global and regional forums.

**Financially sustainable.** As the main challenge for resistance humanitarians is lack of financial support, the networks can help identify potential donors that can provide sizable, direct and flexible funding. They can work with others at the ecosystem level, such as diaspora groups, philanthropists and the private sector, to creatively explore alternative funding sources. Finance experts could be engaged to develop financing mechanisms, such as tax exemptions and deductions for Myanmar diaspora living abroad, so they can contribute more. At the ecosystem level, the networks can work with the NUG to talk to foreign governments to allow public fundraising organised by diaspora groups and provide security to protect contributors (ICG, 2022). They can work with tech-savvy experts to create secure crowd-funding platforms, as well as to strengthen existing applications such as NUG Pay.

**Figure 3 Four performance indicators that can strengthen the humanitarian resistance 'spider web'**



Interconnectedness and collaboration within the web, as well as with other elements in the resistance movement at the ecosystem level, are necessary to exercise political influence and scale up funding for humanitarian aid and build the versatility of the web. This could also contribute to reimagining a collaborative ecosystem for the new federal democracy of Myanmar where state and non-state actors work together as allies in building a resilient nation, without first waiting for the fall of the Myanmar military regime.

---

## Conclusion

Myanmar's deep-rooted and protracted conflict, along with the Rohingya refugee crisis, is unquestionably one of the most neglected and challenging crises, but it is not insoluble.

The following provide hope for a solution:

**People's power.** Myanmar's Spring Revolution is unprecedented in the country's history (Jordt et al., 2021). It is more resilient and effective than previous anti-junta movements and uprisings in Myanmar, such as the 1988 uprising, and even when compared to resistance movements in other parts of the world, such as in Iran, Syria, Sudan, etc. (Ford and Thin Zar Htet, 2023). Ignited by Gen-Z, the Spring Revolution – a movement of movements that emphasises horizontal relations and accentuates social justice inclusive of all members of society – has spurred a collective effort whereby the people envisage an inclusive, future federal democracy that is void of the Myanmar military. Narratives such as 'we are in this together' are powerful for building a common purpose in the midst of diversity and adversity.

**People's will.** The past three years have shown nothing but strong determination and persistence of the people of Myanmar to remove the root cause of the crisis once and for all – the Myanmar military's decades of oppression – and to disengage the military junta completely, including in humanitarian action. This is where the international community, including foreign governments, international humanitarians, donors and ASEAN, is lagging behind, as many of them still see the junta as part of the solution. Any externally driven approach, including peace dialogues and humanitarian aid, that contradicts the will of the people to end military dictatorship once and for all and build a new federal democracy, will be short-lived and counterproductive (Progressive Voice, 2023b).

**People's creativity.** As shown by Myanmar's resistance humanitarians in the past three years, it is possible to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by the crisis effectively and quickly, without seeking consent from the military junta. The networked system of resistance humanitarians has shown creativity in the midst of crisis. While the traditional humanitarian system has failed to fill huge gaps on the ground, resistance humanitarians are able to spring into action, delivering aid to meet the needs of the most affected, while at the same time advocating for justice, solidarity and equality. Myanmar's local resistance humanitarians have shown that it is possible to meet needs without undermining rights.

The international community needs to play its part. International humanitarian organisations, donors, foreign governments and ASEAN can no longer be complacent and hide behind neutrality. It is allowing oneself to be complicit and trapped in the medieval game played out by the military dictatorship, which is using the weaknesses of the international system to its fullest advantage. In a world where access constraints are becoming the norm and not the exception, these approaches are further deepening and prolonging the conflict.

The best that the international community can do is to support a locally led, horizontally constructed, military-avoiding ecosystem of Myanmar's resistance humanitarians and to work with other like-minded international humanitarians. The least that the international community should do is to not step on and drag the Myanmar people's feet, as they are already at full speed moving towards building an inclusive and resilient nation amidst active conflict.

---

## References

- ACLEED** (2023) 'ACLEED dashboard'. Dataset (<https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard>).
- Action Committee for Democracy Development, Athan – Freedom of Expression Activist Organization, Burmese Women’s Union, et al.** (2023) *Civil disobedience movement: a foundation of Myanmar’s Spring Revolution and force behind military’s failed coup*. Progressive Voice (<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2023/05/25/civil-disobedience-movement-a-foundation-of-myanmars-spring-revolution-and-force-behind-militarys-failed-coup/>).
- Al Jazeera** (2023) 'Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand'. 13 May ([www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/13/thousands-evacuated-as-cyclone-mocha-nears-myanmar-bangladesh](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/13/thousands-evacuated-as-cyclone-mocha-nears-myanmar-bangladesh)).
- Amnesty International** (2023) '28 civilians killed in military air strike'. 13 October ([www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/myanmar-28-civilians-killed-in-military-air-strike-new-investigation-and-witness-testimony/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/myanmar-28-civilians-killed-in-military-air-strike-new-investigation-and-witness-testimony/)).
- AHA Centre** (2023) 'Situation update: tropical cyclone one (Mocha) Myanmar'. No. 6. Jakarta: AHA Centre (<https://ahacentre.org/situation-update/situation-update-no-6-tropical-cyclone-mocha-myanmar-22-may-2023/>).
- ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations** (2024) 'Press statement by the chair of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Retreat'. Statement, 29 January (<https://asean.org/press-statement-by-the-chair-of-the-asean-foreign-ministers-retreat/>).
- Barter, D.** (2023) 'Myanmar, Gaza, and why it’s time for humanitarian resistance'. The New Humanitarian, 13 November ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/11/13/Myanmar-Gaza-humanitarian-resistance](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/11/13/Myanmar-Gaza-humanitarian-resistance)).
- Beals, E.** (2023) *Convoys, Cross-Border, Covert Ops Responding to State-Led Arbitrary Aid Denial in Civil wars. Lessons from Syria, Myanmar, and Ethiopia*. Beirut: Heinrich Böll Foundation (<https://lb.boell.org/en/2023/07/06/convoys-cross-border-covert-ops>).
- Bloomberg News** (2023) 'Myanmar resistance leader claims majority control over territory'. Bloomberg News, 29 September ([www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-09-29/myanmar-resistance-leader-claims-majority-control-over-territory](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-09-29/myanmar-resistance-leader-claims-majority-control-over-territory)).
- Border News Agency** (2023) 'One month after Cyclone Mocha'. Transnational Institute, 29 June ([www.tni.org/en/article/assessing-what-is-happening-in-arakan](http://www.tni.org/en/article/assessing-what-is-happening-in-arakan)).
- Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK** (2023) *Preventable deaths in Cyclone Mocha and the Rohingya genocide*. London: Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK ([www.brouk.org.uk/new-report-preventable-deaths-in-cyclone-mocha-and-the-rohingya-genocide/](http://www.brouk.org.uk/new-report-preventable-deaths-in-cyclone-mocha-and-the-rohingya-genocide/)).
- Buchanan, J.** (2016) *Militias in Myanmar*. The Asia Foundation (<https://asiafoundation.org/publication/militias-in-myanmar/>).
- Cho, K.** (2023) 'Hundreds feared dead after Cyclone Mocha hits western Myanmar’s Rohingya IDP camps'. Myanmar Now, 16 May (<https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/hundreds-feared-dead-after-cyclone-mocha-hits-western-myanmars-rohingya-idp-camps/>).

- CSO Nexus Consortium – Tanintharyi** (2023) ‘Position statement of CSOs Nexus Consortium – Thanintharyi regarding UNOCHA’s AHCT (Area of Humanitarian Country Team) Process’. 15 October, Facebook ([www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122100405704075516&set=pcb.122100405770075516](https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=122100405704075516&set=pcb.122100405770075516)).
- Décobert, A. and Wells, T.** (2023) ‘To help tackle aid inequality, support Myanmar’s local intermediaries’. *The New Humanitarian*, 3 August ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/08/03/help-tackle-aid-inequality-support-myanmars-local-intermediaries](https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/08/03/help-tackle-aid-inequality-support-myanmars-local-intermediaries)).
- DEMAC – Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination** (2022) *Diaspora organizations and their humanitarian response in Myanmar*. Copenhagen: DEMAC (<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/diaspora-organizations-and-their-humanitarian-response-myanmar>).
- Development Media Group** (2023) ‘Vox Pop: cyclone victims in Sittwe share views on junta aid provisioning’. 8 June ([www.dmediag.com/interview/vox-junta-aidp.html](https://www.dmediag.com/interview/vox-junta-aidp.html)).
- FTS – Financial Tracking Service** (2024a) ‘Ukraine 2023’. Website (<https://fts.unocha.org/countries/234/summary/2023>).
- FTS** (2024b) ‘Sudan humanitarian response plan 2023’. Website ([https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1123/flows?order=directional\\_property&sort=asc](https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1123/flows?order=directional_property&sort=asc)).
- Fishbein, E.** (2023a) ‘Myanmar’s striking civil servants: displaced, forgotten, but holding on’. Al Jazeera, 29 August ([www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/29/myanmars-striking-civil-servants-displaced-forgotten-but-holding-on](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/29/myanmars-striking-civil-servants-displaced-forgotten-but-holding-on)).
- Fishbein, E.** (2023b) “‘Still my people’”: Myanmar diaspora supports democracy struggle back home’. Al Jazeera, 25 September ([www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/25/still-my-people-myanmar-diaspora-supports-democracy-struggle-back-home](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/25/still-my-people-myanmar-diaspora-supports-democracy-struggle-back-home)).
- Fishbein, E. and Zau Myet Awng** (2023) “‘Fighting is all around’”: Myanmar faces deepening humanitarian crisis’. Al Jazeera, 14 December ([www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/14/fighting-is-all-around-myanmar-faces-deepening-humanitarian-crisis](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/14/fighting-is-all-around-myanmar-faces-deepening-humanitarian-crisis)).
- Ford, B. and Thin Zar Htet** (2023) ‘We shouldn’t fear a resistance victory in Myanmar’. United States Institute of Peace, 16 November ([www.usip.org/publications/2023/11/we-shouldnt-fear-resistance-victory-myanmar](https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/11/we-shouldnt-fear-resistance-victory-myanmar)).
- Frontier Myanmar** (2023) “‘They have no mercy’”: war in the eye of the storm’. 31 May ([www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/they-have-no-mercy-war-in-the-eye-of-the-storm/](https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/they-have-no-mercy-war-in-the-eye-of-the-storm/)).
- Gavshon, D.** (2009) ‘The applicability of IHL in mixed situations of disaster and conflict’ *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 14(2): 243–263 (<https://doi.org/10.1093/jcsl/krp021>).
- Gelsdorf, K. and Kurtzer, J.** (2022) ‘Why “humanitarian corridors” in Ukraine could do more harm than good’. *The Independent*, 11 March ([www.independent.co.uk/voices/ukraine-humanitarian-corridors-zelensky-putin-b2034135.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/ukraine-humanitarian-corridors-zelensky-putin-b2034135.html)).
- Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect** (2021) ‘Applying R2P to Myanmar. Presentation by Professor the Hon Gareth Evans AC QC\* to Myanmar Institute of Australia Webinar, 26 April 2021’. ([www.globalr2p.org/publications/applying-r2p-to-myanmar/](https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/applying-r2p-to-myanmar/)).
- Harvey, P., Stoddard, A., Czwarno, M., et al.** (2023) *Humanitarian Access SCORE report: Myanmar: survey on the coverage, operational reach, and effectiveness of humanitarian aid*. Humanitarian Outcomes ([www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/SCORE\\_Myanmar\\_April\\_2023](https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/SCORE_Myanmar_April_2023)).

- Human Rights Council** (2023) ‘Illegal and Illegitimate: Examining the Myanmar military’s claim as the Government of Myanmar and the international response. Conference room paper of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar’ ([www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/mm/2023-01-27/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-01-31.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/mm/2023-01-27/crp-sr-myanmar-2023-01-31.pdf)).
- Human Rights Watch** (2023) ‘Myanmar: junta blocks lifesaving cyclone aid’. 20 June ([www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/20/myanmar-junta-blocks-lifesaving-cyclone-aid](http://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/20/myanmar-junta-blocks-lifesaving-cyclone-aid)).
- Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office** (2023a) Telegram post, 8 May (<https://t.me/hdcoULA/24>).
- Humanitarian and Development Coordination Office** (2023b) ‘Cyclone Mocha Report and Update Sharing Presentation’ (PowerPoint presentation). Unpublished.
- HURFOM – Human Rights Foundation of Monland** (2023) ‘Monthly overview: while Cyclone Mocha threatened to destabilise civilian livelihoods and safety, the military junta continued to deploy attacks: Mon human rights’. Rehmonnya, 30 May (<https://rehmonnya.org/archives/8361>).
- IFJ – International Federation of Journalists** (2023) ‘Myanmar: photojournalist sentenced to twenty years imprisonment’. 7 September ([www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/myanmar-photojournalist-sentenced-to-twenty-years-imprisonment](http://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/myanmar-photojournalist-sentenced-to-twenty-years-imprisonment)).
- International Commission of Jurists** (2022) *Myanmar State Administration Council Organisation Registration Law 2022: legal briefing*. Geneva: International Commission of Jurists (<https://icj2.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Myanmar-ORL-final.pdf>).
- ICG – International Crisis Group** (2022) *Crowdfunding a war: the money behind Myanmar’s resistance*. London: ICG ([www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/328-crowdfunding-war-money-behind-myanmars-resistance](http://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/328-crowdfunding-war-money-behind-myanmars-resistance)).
- Jordt, I., Tharaphi Than and Sue Ye Lin** (2021) *How Generation Z galvanized a revolutionary movement against Myanmar’s 2021 military coup*. Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute ([www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/trends-in-southeast-asia/how-generation-z-galvanized-a-revolutionary-movement-against-myanmars-2021-military-coup-by-ingrid-jordt-tharaphi-than-and-sue-ye-lin/](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/trends-in-southeast-asia/how-generation-z-galvanized-a-revolutionary-movement-against-myanmars-2021-military-coup-by-ingrid-jordt-tharaphi-than-and-sue-ye-lin/)).
- Justice for Myanmar** (2023) *Developing a dictatorship*. Justice for Myanmar ([www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/developing-a-dictatorship?fbclid=IwAR16ZzvoY7GsWJZr2aSGy4eibulhqfwYLpwHy-amTMRct-McUn43ors53J8](http://www.justiceformyanmar.org/stories/developing-a-dictatorship?fbclid=IwAR16ZzvoY7GsWJZr2aSGy4eibulhqfwYLpwHy-amTMRct-McUn43ors53J8)).
- Kamal, A.** (2023) ‘Beyond the “egositystem”: a case for locally led humanitarian resistance’. *The Humanitarian Leader*, 15 November (<https://doi.org/10.21153/thl2023art1907>).
- Kamal, A.** (2024) ‘Thailand’s “humanitarian corridor” initiative needs a reality check’. Myanmar Now, 13 February (<https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/thailands-humanitarian-corridor-initiative-needs-a-reality-check/>).
- Kamal, A. and Benowitz, D.** (2022) ‘Supporting the people of Myanmar: it’s about political will’. Humanitarian Practice Network, 29 October (<https://odihpn.org/publication/supporting-the-people-of-myanmar-its-about-political-will/>).
- Kamal, A., Naw Hser Hser and Ohmar, K.** (2023) ‘Myanmar’s neglected crisis demands a different response’. *The New Humanitarian*, 1 February ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/02/01/Myanmar-coup-Ukraine-cross-border-aid](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2023/02/01/Myanmar-coup-Ukraine-cross-border-aid)).
- Karen Peace Support Network** (n.d.) ‘About us’ ([www.karenpeace.org/about-us/](http://www.karenpeace.org/about-us/)).

- Karen Peace Support Network** (2023) ‘A shifting power balance’ junta control shrinks in Southeast Burma. Chiang Mai: Karen Peace Support Network ([www.karenpeace.org/report/a-shifting-power-balance-junta-control-shrinks-in-southeast-burma-english-version/](http://www.karenpeace.org/report/a-shifting-power-balance-junta-control-shrinks-in-southeast-burma-english-version/)).
- Karen Peace Support Network** (2024) ‘Massive displacement and soaring rice prices deepen humanitarian crisis in Kawthoolei’. Chiang Mai: Karen Peace Support Network ([www.karenpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Final-Infor-Factsheet-2024-2\\_compressed.pdf](http://www.karenpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Final-Infor-Factsheet-2024-2_compressed.pdf)).
- Karen Women’s Organisation** (2022) ‘Open letter to UNOCHA regarding its failure to recognize community-run GBV programming in Kawthoolei’. X/Twitter, 4 November (<https://twitter.com/karenwomenorg/status/1588396465206202368/photo/1>).
- Kyaw Hsan Hlaing** (2023a) ‘Responses to humanitarian needs in western Myanmar after Cyclone Mocha’. ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute ([www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2023-72-responses-to-humanitarian-needs-in-western-myanmar-after-cyclone-mocha-by-kyaw-hsan-hlaing/](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2023-72-responses-to-humanitarian-needs-in-western-myanmar-after-cyclone-mocha-by-kyaw-hsan-hlaing/)).
- Kyaw Hsan Hlaing** (2023b) ‘Coups, cyclone and a new bond between Myanmar’s Rohingya and Rakhine’. Al Jazeera, 31 July ([www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/7/31/coups-cyclone-and-a-new-bond-between-myanmars-rohingya-and-rakhine](http://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/7/31/coups-cyclone-and-a-new-bond-between-myanmars-rohingya-and-rakhine)).
- Lin, N.** (2023) ‘The strike of Cyclone Mocha and the fate of Arakan people’. Transnational Institute, 23 May ([www.tni.org/en/article/the-strike-of-cyclone-mocha-and-the-fate-of-arakan-people](http://www.tni.org/en/article/the-strike-of-cyclone-mocha-and-the-fate-of-arakan-people)).
- Loong, S.** (2022) ‘Northwest Myanmar: a quiet corner transformed by resistance’. International Institute for Strategic Studies, 15 November (<https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/northwest>).
- Mathieson, D.S.** (2023) ‘Disaster relief dysfunction in Myanmar’. Fulcrum, 30 June (<https://fulcrum.sg/disaster-relief-dysfunction-in-myanmar/>).
- Meixler, E.** (2018) ‘Myanmar army accused of “weaponizing” humanitarian aid’. TIME, 30 August (<https://time.com/5381336/myanmar-kachin-fortify-rights/>).
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand** (2023) ‘Donation Ceremony of Humanitarian Assistance provided by Their Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand to the people of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar affected by Cyclone Mocha’. Press release, 23 May ([www.mfa.go.th/en/content/royaldonation220523-2?page=5d5bd3da15e39c306002aaf9&menu=5d5bd3dd15e39c306002ab1d](http://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/royaldonation220523-2?page=5d5bd3da15e39c306002aaf9&menu=5d5bd3dd15e39c306002ab1d)).
- MoCIT – National Unity Government of Myanmar** (2023) UN and INGO staff and family members in Loikaw, Karenni State Date: 18 November, 2023. YouTube, 20 November ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW-NGzcJW58](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oW-NGzcJW58)).
- Myanmar Local Humanitarian Network** (2022) *Positioning paper on localisation and intermediary role by Myanmar civil society* (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fc4fd249698b02c7f3acf9/t/62344b7805620407528b354a/1647594360696/Myanmar+Positioning+Paper+on+Localization+and+Intermediary+role+by+CSO+31+January+2022+-+Eng.pdf>).
- Myanmar News Agency** (2023) ‘MoIC Union Minister receives UN Humanitarian Coordinator (a.i.) and OCHA Head of Office (a.i.)’. Global New Light of Myanmar, 1 June ([www.gnlm.com.mm/moic-union-minister-receives-un-humanitarian-coordinator-a-i-and-ocha-head-of-office-a-i/](http://www.gnlm.com.mm/moic-union-minister-receives-un-humanitarian-coordinator-a-i-and-ocha-head-of-office-a-i/)).
- Myanmar Peace Monitor** (2023) ‘IEC: a unique feature of the Spring Revolution – Issue 108’. 16 June (<https://mmpeacemonitor.org/320264/iec-a-unique-feature-of-the-spring-revolution-issue-108/>).

- Myoe, A.** (2009) *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces since 1948*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Nasir, R., Rhodes, T. and Kleinfeld, P.** (2023) ‘How mutual aid networks are powering Sudan’s humanitarian response’. *The New Humanitarian*, 2 August ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/08/02/how-mutual-aid-networks-are-powering-sudans-humanitarian-response](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/08/02/how-mutual-aid-networks-are-powering-sudans-humanitarian-response)).
- National Unity Government** (2023) ‘Declaration of the Functioning Public Administration in Kawlin Township, Kawlin District, Sagaing Region’. Facebook, 3 December ([www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=667668085536418&set=pb.100068796986578.-2207520000](https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=667668085536418&set=pb.100068796986578.-2207520000)).
- O’Callaghan, S., Khan, A., Nwajiaku-Dahou, K., et al.** (2023) ‘Humanitarian hypocrisy, double standard and the law in Gaza’. *ODI Insight*, 8 November (<https://odi.org/en/insights/humanitarian-hypocrisy-double-standards-and-the-law-in-gaza/>).
- OCHA – Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs** (2023a) *Humanitarian needs and response plan Myanmar*. New York: OCHA (<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023-enmy>).
- OCHA** (2023b) ‘Cyclone Mocha Flash Appeal’. New York: OCHA (<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-mocha-flash-appeal-may-2023>).
- OCHA** (2023c) ‘Myanmar: Cyclone Mocha Situation Report No.5’. New York: OCHA (<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-mocha-situation-report-no5-1600-15-june-2023-enmy>).
- OCHA** (2024) ‘Myanmar humanitarian update no. 35’. New York: OCHA (<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-35-2023-year>).
- OHCHR – United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** (2023a) ‘Myanmar: Türk calls for new thinking to end “unspeakable tragedy”’. Speech by Volker Türk, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 26 September ([www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/myanmar-turk-calls-new-thinking-end-unspeakable-tragedy](http://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/09/myanmar-turk-calls-new-thinking-end-unspeakable-tragedy)).
- OHCHR** (2023b) *Situation of human rights in Myanmar since 1 February 2021*. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. A/HRC/53/52. Geneva: OHCHR ([https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/A\\_HRC\\_53\\_52\\_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf](https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/A_HRC_53_52_AdvanceUneditedVersion.pdf)).
- Ohmar, K.** (2021) ‘There’s nothing neutral about engaging with Myanmar’s military’. *The New Humanitarian*, 28 July ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/7/28/theres-nothing-neutral-about-engaging-with-myanmars-military](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2021/7/28/theres-nothing-neutral-about-engaging-with-myanmars-military)).
- Pawnday, S. and Scott, L.** (2022) ‘The yearlong failure to protect Myanmar’s people and what to do now’. *The Diplomat*, 1 February (<https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/the-yearlong-failure-to-protect-myanmars-people-and-what-to-do-now/>).
- Pongsudhirak, T.** (2024) ‘Myanmar as interim “non-state” state’. *Bangkok Post*, 1 March ([www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2751048/myanmar-as-interim-non-state-state](http://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2751048/myanmar-as-interim-non-state-state)).
- Progressive Voice** (2021) ‘Open Letter from Myanmar CSOs Regarding the Myanmar Red Cross Society’s Attendance at the Murderous Junta’s Armed Forces Day Celebration Violating Principles of ICRC and IFRC’. 9 August (<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2021/04/09/open-letter-from-myanmar-csos-regarding-the-myanmar-red-cross-societys-attendance-at-the-murderous-juntas-armed-forces-day-celebration-violates-principles-of-icrc-and-ifrc-mrcs-part/>).

- Progressive Voice** (2023a) ‘Civil society statement on the visit of head of OCHA to Myanmar’. 22 August (<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2023/08/22/civil-society-statement-on-the-visit-of-head-of-ocha-to-myanmar/>).
- Progressive Voice** (2023b) ‘ASEAN: halt plans for “inclusive dialogue” and act to hold the military junta to account’. Statement, 1 December (<https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2023/12/01/asean-halt-plans-for-inclusive-dialogue-and-act-to-hold-the-military-junta-to-account/>).
- Price, R.A.** (2020) *Humanitarian pauses and corridors in contexts of conflict*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (<https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/15662>).
- Raleigh, C. and Kishi, K.** (2023) ‘Q&A: What does the new ACLED conflict index reveal about global political violence?’ ACLED (<https://acleddata.com/2023/09/26/qa-what-does-the-new-aced-conflict-index-reveal-about-global-political-violence/>).
- Redvers, L. and Parker, B.** (2020) ‘Searching for the nexus: give peace a chance’. *The New Humanitarian*, 13 May ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2020/05/13/triple-nexus-peace-development-security-humanitarian-policy](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2020/05/13/triple-nexus-peace-development-security-humanitarian-policy)).
- RFA Burmese** (2023) ‘Myanmar’s junta threatens media that don’t report official cyclone death numbers’. *Radio Free Asia*, 19 May ([www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/junta-death-toll-05192023162540.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/junta-death-toll-05192023162540.html)).
- Seiff, A.** (2022) ‘Backroom aid: the groups helping behind the scenes’. *The New Humanitarian*, 11 October ([www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2022/10/11/H2H-NGOs-innovation-assistance](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2022/10/11/H2H-NGOs-innovation-assistance)).
- Slim, H.** (2021) ‘Humanitarian resistance and military dictatorship’. *Humanitarian Practice Network*, 14 April (<https://odihpn.org/publication/humanitarian-resistance-and-military-dictatorship/>).
- Slim, H.** (2022) *Solferino 21: warfare, civilians and humanitarians in the twenty-first century*. London: Hurst.
- Slim, H.** (2023) *Humanitarian resistance: its ethical and operational importance*. Network Paper 87, *Humanitarian Practice Network*. London: ODI (<https://odihpn.org/publication/humanitarian-resistance-its-ethical-and-operational-importance/>).
- Special Advisory Council for Myanmar** (2022) ‘Briefing paper: effective control in Myanmar’. *Special Advisory Council for Myanmar* (<https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/2022/09/statement-briefing-effective-control-myanmar/>).
- Special Advisory Council for Myanmar** (2023) *How the UN is failing Myanmar*. *Special Advisory Council for Myanmar* (<https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/2023/10/report-un-failing-myanmar/>).
- Stanforth, R. and Corfixen, M.** (2023) ‘Why a “humanitarian pause” or “humanitarian corridors” are simply not the answer in Gaza’. *Blog. Oxfam* ([www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/oxfam-blog/why-a-humanitarian-pause-or-humanitarian-corridors-are-simply-not-the-answer-in-gaza/](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/oxfam-blog/why-a-humanitarian-pause-or-humanitarian-corridors-are-simply-not-the-answer-in-gaza/)).
- United League of Arakan** (2023) ‘Cyclone Mocha ERRCA (Cyclone Mocha Emergency Rescue and Rehabilitation Committee For Arakan)’. *Arakan Army*, 18 May ([www.arakanarmy.net/post/cyclone-mocha-errca-cyclone-mocha-emergency-rescue-and-rehabilitation-committee-for-arakan](http://www.arakanarmy.net/post/cyclone-mocha-errca-cyclone-mocha-emergency-rescue-and-rehabilitation-committee-for-arakan)).
- United Nations Myanmar** (2023a) ‘Humanitarian agencies on standby for scaled-up cyclone response in Western Myanmar’. *Press release*, 14 May (<https://myanmar.un.org/en/231445-humanitarian-agencies-standby-scaled-cyclone-response-western-myanmar>).

**United Nations Myanmar** (2023b) 'Lack of access and funding hampering aid to 18 million people in Myanmar, UN Humanitarian Chief Martin Griffiths says following visit to the country'. Press release, 17 August (<https://myanmar.un.org/en/242467-lack-access-and-funding-hampering-aid-18-million-people-myanmar-un-humanitarian-chief-martin>).

**UNSC – United Nations Security Council** (2022) Resolution 2669 (2022): adopted by the Security Council at its 9231st meeting, on 21 December 2022. S/RES/2669 (2022) ([www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s-res-2669.php](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/s-res-2669.php)).

**Wieland, C.** (2021) *Syria and the neutrality trap: dilemmas of delivering humanitarian aid through violent regimes*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.