

“Our Shared Responsibility”: How Civil Society is Strengthening Local Resilience for a Federal Democratic Burma/Myanmar

Executive Summary & Key Recommendations



This report was authored by 18 Myanmar civil society organizations, including the 14 organizations whose logos are above, LGBT Alliance Myanmar, Twae Latt Myar, and two organizations who wish to remain anonymous.

Executive Summary

Following the Myanmar military junta's illegal coup attempt on 1 February 2021, an unprecedented people's revolution emerged—aiming to end military tyranny and establish federal democracy—as the junta plunged the country into a severe human rights and humanitarian crisis. Since 2021, as collective punishment of the people for their resistance, the junta has escalated its terror campaign against them, including airstrikes, artillery shelling, ground attacks, arbitrary arrests and detention, mass displacement, and the deliberate obstruction of aid. In the face of these atrocities, the Myanmar people are pursuing a homegrown political transformation by establishing bottom-up governance in the country's liberated areas and caring for each other in response to disasters—both natural and military-made—through collective and coordinated action.

Operating independently of the junta, Myanmar's civil society groups have met this moment with diverse and multifaceted initiatives to strengthen local resilience, bridging the urgent humanitarian needs of today with Myanmar's federal democratic future. These groups are delivering lifesaving humanitarian aid, pursuing sustainable community initiatives, protecting human rights, and supporting the ongoing establishment of inclusive, bottom-up federalism. These groups include civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), CSO/CBO networks, and groups of human rights defenders and local humanitarian responders.

Drawing on qualitative research with 28 diverse civil society groups operating in Myanmar, this report provides examples of how Myanmar civil society is strengthening local resilience through support for:

- **Responsive humanitarian aid:** Providing tailored and lifesaving emergency assistance—such as food, cash, health care, and shelter—that directly responds to the needs of Myanmar's most vulnerable communities and is based on deep community trust, often in areas under attack by the junta and inaccessible to international agencies.
- **Sustainable community initiatives:** Promoting community-led agriculture and home gardening, vocational training, development of small-scale infrastructure, and community health care—to enhance food security, self-reliance, social cohesion, psychosocial well-being, and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Bottom-up federalism and human rights:** Protecting human rights defenders; providing education about human rights and federal democracy; empowering women and youth to participate actively in their communities, especially in political decision-making and bottom-up governance; and supporting institution building to establish an inclusive federal democracy.

In doing this work, Myanmar civil society groups face immense challenges, including physical and digital security threats, attacks, and surveillance; transportation and communication barriers; funding delays; and major funding cuts by governmental donors. In particular, the dearth of adequate and flexible funding—compounded by onerous reporting requirements—poses a major challenge to the groups' "do no harm" approach, as well as their personal and organizational safety and security. Despite these challenges, equipped with decades of expertise, in-depth understanding, and quick adaptability, Myanmar civil society groups continue to respond to the needs on the ground—driven by people-to-people solidarity and a strong sense of shared responsibility to Myanmar's communities.

These independent Myanmar civil society groups are holding up the sky—saving lives today while laying the democratic foundations for an inclusive, just, and peaceful future free from military tyranny. The international community must urgently take principled action to support their ongoing efforts and deprive the junta of the means to carry out further atrocities against the people of Myanmar.

Key Recommendations

To the international community and donors:

- Cut all ties—including political, business, and military engagement—with the illegal Myanmar military junta immediately, and stop lending false legitimacy to the junta, including through international and regional forums;
- Take all necessary actions to prevent the Myanmar military junta's commission of further atrocities, including through a global arms and aviation fuel embargo;
- Join and expedite the ongoing international and Myanmar people's efforts to hold Myanmar military generals and all other perpetrators of atrocity crimes in Myanmar to account under international law through all available avenues;
- Engage formally and officially with the National Unity Government, ethnic resistance organizations, and bottom-up governance bodies, including ethnic and regional consultative councils and administrations;
- Robustly support the Myanmar people's efforts to end military tyranny and establish inclusive bottom-up federal democracy, including by supporting people-led governance bodies, democratic institutions, and the rule of law at Myanmar's local and state/regional levels to ensure adherence to international humanitarian law and international human rights law; and
- Increase financial support for, recognize the contribution of, and form equal partnerships with trusted local frontline humanitarian responders, including ethnic civil society organizations, community-based organizations, and other Myanmar civil society groups, in delivering aid through border-based channels.

To the National Unity Government, ethnic resistance organizations, ethnic councils, and people's administrations:

- Collectively call on the international community to support locally led border-based channels for delivery of humanitarian aid and other forms of assistance to reach the most vulnerable populations, particularly internally displaced persons;
- Prioritize the security of the Myanmar people by ensuring adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law and related codes of conduct on the part of resistance forces, and by taking all necessary measures, including informing local communities when resistance forces' operations will occur; and
- Promote and comply with the principles of "do no harm" and non-discrimination in the delivery of humanitarian aid.