

"We cannot expect to do development [in Myanmar] in 2018, or even tomorrow, as we are doing it today. Not when 60 million people start to direct their own digital destiny, smartphone in hand."

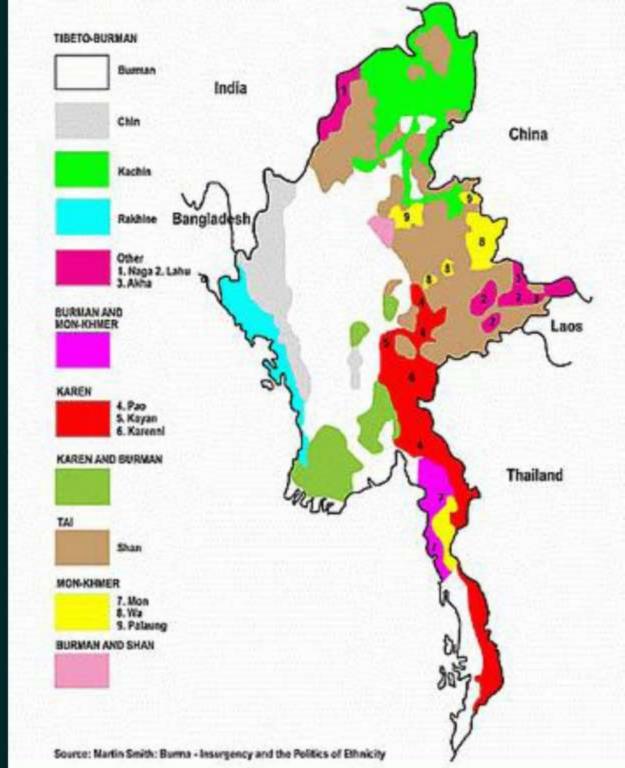
- Wayan Vota, global ICT analyst

Myanmar is at a historic crossroads. The beginnings of an unprecedented democratic liberalization come just as the spread of mobile phones and the internet is opening up massive new opportunities for communication and civic education.

Recognising the incredible opportunity to access new markets and affect positive change, international companies, NGOs, and funders are pouring time and resources into Myanmar like never before, and domestic companies and civil society are emerging and expanding just as fast.



But it is no simple task to transition a diverse country of more than 50 million from five decades of autocratic military rule to a fully functioning democracy that represents and responds to the will of its citizens... especially as armed groups continue to operate throughout much of the ethnic regions.



Since November 2010, a series of institutional reforms have nominally moved Myanmar into the realm of democratic nations: multi-party elections have been held, political prisoners freed, restrictions on the media and public gatherings lifted, and ceasefires signed with most rebel groups. The international community has responded by lifting sanctions and re-establishing ties with the country's leaders.

But while all those conditions are necessary for a true democracy to function, they are not sufficient for it to flourish. For that, citizens must be empowered with the knowledge of what it means to live in a democracy and given tools to hold their leaders accountable for carrying out the functions of government effectively and fairly - respecting the interests of all the country's people. Elected officials must be educated about how to govern well and what it means to represent citizens interests, and they must be given the tools to communicate regularly and effectively with their constituents. And peace must prevail.

Since 2010...

- ✓ multi-party elections
- ✓ political opening
- ✓ direct censorship ended
- √ ceasefires
- ✓ int'l sanctions lifted
- diplomatic ties re-established

Now citizens need...

- ✓ civic education!
- mechanisms to hold leaders accountable

Elected officials need...

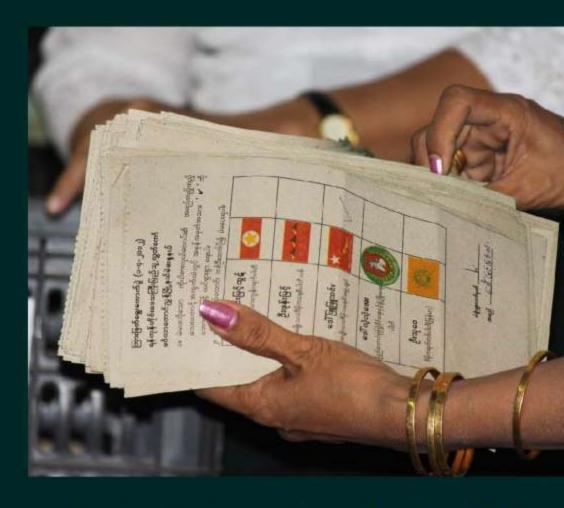
- ✓ civic education!
- mechanisms to communicate with citizens

And everyone needs...

✓ lasting peace

These are long and difficult processes, but the dividends of peace and democracy can be enormous: economic development and increased opportunity for all the country's citizens to live healthy, prosperous, and fulfilling lives.

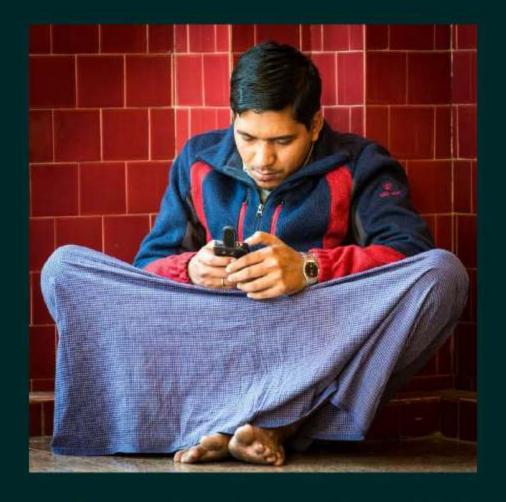
And now a key test of Myanmar's fledgling democracy is on the horizon: national elections are expected in 2015, providing a tremendous opportunity during the next 12 to 15 months to both educate citizens about democracy and entrench the foundations of a truly democratic nation. The international community is rallying to support the country's democratization.



- ✓ national elections planned for late 2015
- a key moment to educate citizens about democracy and entrench democratic ideals and institutions
- ✓ international community is rallying behind the forces of democracy

And fortunately, Myanmar's democratic transition comes at the same time that communication tools are revolutionising how democracy and development are done worldwide. Recent changes in law and policy are now enabling that revolution to sweep across Myanmar too.

Two international telecom companies are launching mobile services in August and September, with millions of people expected to gain access to voice, SMS, and internet services in the coming months as a result. And the number of people accessing these powerful information and communication technologies (ICTs) will only continue to grow even more rapidly in the coming years.



- ✓ Telenor & Ooredoo launching in 2014
- millions of citizens are expected to get affordable voice, SMS and internet access for the first time
- access will continue to expand nationwide in 2015 and beyond

So Myanmar's people and their government will need support in carrying forward the country's democratic transition at this critical time, and the ICT revolution offers some very powerful mechanisms to do that, both to educate and build connections between citizens and their elected officials. But an empowered civil society is needed to support the citizens and the government throughout the process.

While Myanmar's civil society is still in its early form, the government liberalization of recent years has enabled organisations around the country to begin to grow in size, skills, and boldness. While the capacity of many organisations is still limited, civil society is by-and-large open-minded and enthusiastic, and across the sector leaders recognise the potential ICT offers to increase the impact of their work. They are eager to incorporate new tech tools into their approaches.



And as in all countries, youth have been the first adopters of new technologies, and they are driving tech growth across the country. Youth are already embracing the ICT revolution in Myanmar's larger cities and towns, and they will continue to be at the forefront as new technologies spread nationwide in the coming years.

Even more importantly, youth tend to drive change across all aspects of societies, and the next few years will be a huge test of whether Myanmar is ready for democratic change. The conditions for democratic transition may have been put in place by decrees from the top, but the entrenchment of democratic foundations must now happen at the bottom, in the form of individual citizens around the country standing up for their rights and holding their leaders accountable for promises of transparency and good governance. While this will ultimately require the participation of Myanmar citizens young and old, the youth have the flexible mind-sets and open-minded temperaments needed to propel the transition forward during these critical early stages.



OneWorld has been working with civil society in Africa and Southeast Asia to integrate ICT into civic education, political participation and accountability, reproductive health and livelihoods programmes for many years, helping local organisations reap the enormous benefits new technologies afford.

OneWorld has gained particular recognition in recent years for election and democracy programmes focusing on civic education, election monitoring, and media training and monitoring, with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling OneWorld's Senegal project "perhaps the most sophisticated monitoring programme ever deployed in Africa or anywhere else."



So as Myanmar prepares for critical national elections, Oxfam Novib engaged OneWorld to conduct a scoping study to assess key opportunities afforded by ICT to promote positive political participation and accountability. The scoping study consisted of desk-based background research, three weeks of in-country meetings with leaders of international NGOs, civil society organisations, tech groups, telecom companies, and funders; focus group discussions with Myanmar youth; and a workshop with key stakeholders working on democracy, elections and peace process activities.



This slidedeck offers a summary of our key findings regarding the current context and key needs as Myanmar prepares for the upcoming national elections. We hope this will be a useful tool for the many organisations looking to engage in the country at this critical time.

✓ If you're pressed for time, try skimming the yellow bullet points from here on – you should get the key points.

organisations consulted include:









HALOM FOUNDATION























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"Our people have the goodwill to live in a democracy, but our capacity is very limited."

- Civil society leader, Yangon

Myanmar's Citizens

new to democracy, but enthusiastic to participate

- knowledge about democracy is relatively low
- many are aware of electoral processes but there is less understanding of the implications of those processes
- strong desire to learn and practice democracy, especially among youth
- ✓ women are interested but often marginalised
- ✓ therefore... a big opportunity to promote democracy through civic education especially for youth and women in the lead-up to and beyond the 2015 election.

The vast majority of Myanmar's people have known nothing but autocratic military rule, and a poor education system and closed media meant they were exposed to very few alternative governmental structures. As a result, they know very little about democracy.

The past few years have provided the beginnings of an education by doing, with elections held in 2010 and 2012. People are beginning to become *aware* of electoral processes, but their understanding of the *implications* of those processes remains limited. In other words, many know they need to vote to choose leaders, but there is less understanding about leaders' responsibility to be responsive to citizens' needs and desires.

There is, however, enthusiasm for democracy among the general public, and especially among the youth, who are exposed to more progressive concepts through international and online media. Women have shown significant interest as well, but tend to be marginalised by traditional and cultural norms throughout the country.

The low knowledge levels but high enthusiasm present a great opportunity for civil society and others to promote democracy through civic education programmes, especially aimed at youth and women, during the 2015 election period and beyond.



The Government

new to their job, but ready to learn

- many in the government truly want to develop strong democratic institutions
- ✓ but the transition to democracy is just beginning, so with little experience within government, the capacity to implement democratic functions is still quite low
- ✓ therefore... there is a big opportunity to promote democracy by supporting the government with trainings and tools to help them carry out the functions of representative democracy

The governmental transition Myanmar has been experiencing since 2012 is truly unprecedented. The military has freely given up power and offered to re-create the state within a democratic framework. While many onlookers were sceptical at first, initial signs have been quite positive. Political prisoners have been freed, the government has dismantled the repressive censorship office that restricted and penalised dissent in the media and online, and in the 2012 by-elections the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, won seats to gain a voice in parliament.

Many democracy proponents OneWorld spoke with indicated they believe most key government leaders intend to follow through with the full transition to democracy, but that even a few holdouts could destabilise and undermine the transition. Carrying out credible national elections in 2015, with the informed engagement of the electorate, will therefore be a critical step in the process.

But many - perhaps most - of the individuals currently tasked with carrying out the functions of government and elections are new to their roles and have little experience with democracy. As a result, their capacity to implement democratic functions is low, although many are enthusiastic about participating actively as democratic representatives of their constituents. This presents another important opportunity to promote democracy by building the capacity of Myanmar's government officials to carry out their duties.



The 2015 Elections

a chance to entrench democracy, but a lot to do in a short time

- ✓ the 2015 elections will be a critical test of the nation's commitment to and capacity to carry out fundamental democratic processes
- ✓ The UEC has a difficult task, and little experience organising elections of this scope
- civil society and many individuals are eager to participate as civic educators and/or election monitors, but many don't fully know what those processes entail
- ✓ UEC still has not clarified many electoral processes and regulations

After disputed national elections in 2010 and contentious by-elections in 2012, national and international onlookers are now pointing toward the 2015 national elections as the next critical opportunity to re-establish the country's democratic credentials. The Union Electoral Commission (UEC), which is charged with organising the elections, has a very difficult task ahead with little experience behind it. The international community is providing critical training and logistical support, noting every step of the way that the world will be watching in 2015, and a demonstrably credible election will go a long way toward proving the nation's leaders' commitment to democracy and rule of law.

With the experience of the 2010 and 2012 elections behind them and major democratic reforms underway, civil society and many individual citizens are very eager to participate fully in the electoral process, both by taking part in and conducting civic education activities, and also as election monitors. With about 15 months to go before the elections, however, the UEC has not yet clarified the rules on election monitoring and civic education activities, and while many civil society organisations are eager to conduct activities in both domains, many are not sure exactly what is entailed, especially in the field of election monitoring.

"Young people are interested in politics now but they were afraid during the last election and didn't talk as much."

- Focus group participant, 16



Civil Society & the Media

fledgling sectors with tremendous room to grow

- ✓ transition has allowed fast growth, but capacity is still quite low
- ✓ lots of interest, enthusiasm, and effort
- ✓ lots of trainings, not as much follow up
- ✓ therefore... big opportunity to improve efforts with training, tools, and sustained support from domestic & international partners, promoting longterm approach to capacity building

Until the liberalisation of the last few years, Myanmar's civil society was limited to health and humanitarian interventions. In recent years, however, the sector has grown very quickly as international interest (and funding) has enabled many new organisations to emerge while older ones have been able to broaden their scope and increase their reach. The media has experienced a similar trajectory.

Unfortunately, neither sector has been able to keep up with the increased demand, as the existing supply of skilled human resources is small. Staff are enthusiastic and hard-working, but there aren't enough qualified people to carry out all the projects that are needed and currently being implemented. Recognising this, donors and international partners conduct trainings regularly, but more sustained capacity building support is needed to build up these two critical sectors, if government is to be held accountable and made responsive to its citizens' needs.



"There's a real interest from civil society in what ICT could do for their work but because the knowledge is quite weak it will take some time to harness that potential."

- International technology expert, Yangon

Peace & Stability

critical precursors of democracy and development

- peace process at a critical juncture, ceasefire monitoring starting
- average citizens have little awareness/ understanding of the peace process
- peace necessary for democracy to take root; new violence could derail the entire transition
- hate speech occurring online; media is not countering with enough peace-positive reporting
- therefore... there is a major need for tools & trainings on ceasefire monitoring and countering hate speech, and reporting & awareness raising about the peace process

The government is currently engaged in varying levels of conflict with nearly 20 different armed groups representing ethnic minorities scattered around the periphery of the country. But the peace process is reaching a potentially critical juncture, with unprecedented negotiations about a nationwide ceasefire now underway. Many believe that if the peace process fails to hold, the entire democratic transition may stall – and possibly even be reversed.

Most citizens still have relatively low levels of awareness and understanding of the peace process, and there have been worrying outbursts of ethnic and religion-based violence, with high-profile incidents of hate speech spreading online in recent months. Social media tools are increasingly being used to spread information — both accurate and inaccurate — and so it is imperative that those on the side of peace and understanding do more to put those tools to use, because those who wish to undermine the peace process are already using them to promote their own dangerous aims.



The Coming ICT Boom

an unparalleled force for change

- today, infrastructure very poor, but where infrastructure exists, usage is high & high-end
- ✓ ICT access will soon expand massively
- civil society is very interested in using ICT to increase effectiveness of its programmes, but has little knowledge of how
- ✓ a few very motivated indigenous ICT orgs are already starting to do good work

therefore...

- targeted ICT projects are already feasible and could offer high value for money
- ICT-based approaches will get even more effective year by year
- ✓ It's important to connect local ICT organisations more with civil society
- ✓ a sustained effort to support local civil society to better use ICT & to develop ICT-based interventions could have a big impact

In the next few months, Myanmar is set to emerge from decades of technological isolation as Telenor and Ooredoo launch service and gradually extend their infrastructure nationwide, and the Japanese firm KDDI works to expand and improve the existing national telecom services. The government expects mobile phone access to increase from 15% of the population today to 80% by 2016.

Myanmar is expected by many to be the first country in the world to leap from almost no telecommunications directly to affordable, 3G-internet-enabled smartphones. In fact, a large majority of the phones in the country today are Android-enabled smartphones, thanks to the influx of relatively cheap handsets from Chinese manufacturers. Most who use the internet do so on smartphones, and Facebook and Viber dominate the market because they provide relatively cheap and fast mechanisms for instant messaging, which is a primary aim of most phone users.

In every country, when new technology emerges, youth are the first to adopt. Myanmar is no different. Youth are expected to be the early users and primary beneficiaries of Myanmar's mobile phone and internet boom over the coming months.



"By 2018, almost every household [in Myanmar] will have a smartphone, which means that almost every person will have access to a mobile device, and most people will own a mobile phone and have some level of both digital and information literacy to use the Internet effectively."

 a vision for Myanmar in 2018, emerging from FHI360's "Future of ICT in Myanmar" workshop (August 2014)

Key Conclusions

The planned 2015 national elections present an immense opportunity for Myanmar to solidify its democratic foundations and implant the roots of a strong, representative democracy. But while there is a great deal of enthusiasm for election participation and monitoring activities among civil society and the general public, understanding of basic democracy principles is low, the UEC has a long way to go to ensure the election process is credible, and civil society's knowledge about how to conduct a nationwide, systematic and impactful election monitoring effort is limited.

The peace process is at a critical juncture – with any failures having the potential to derail the democratic transition – and hate speech online is a growing concern. Thus there is a big need for tools and trainings to support civil society in ceasefire monitoring, countering hate speech, and awareness raising about the peace process.



Key Conclusions

Meanwhile, Myanmar's citizens are already starting to use ICT tools, including mobile phones and the internet, and are on track for an unprecedented leap forward in terms of access to and use of those tools.

Therefore, well-targeted ICT-based interventions to support the country's nascent democratic foundations are already feasible and could bring high value for money in the current context; and ICT-based approaches will only become more effective as access spreads to more people and more parts of the country in the coming years.





Landscape Mapping (2014-2015)

CIVIC EDUCATION		
KEY ISSUES	 Citizens have very limited experience participating in electoral processes and witnessing democracy in action. Citizens have had limited opportunities for learning about government, electoral processes, and political issues. Most citizens get news and information about political issues and governmental processes from political parties and/or other non-independent sources. 	
CURRENT & PLANNED ACTIVITIES	What? - Basic education about democratic institutions - Specific education about the 2014-15 electoral process - starting from voter registration all the way through Election Day - Traditional approaches - gatherings with key community leaders - Some groups doing specific activities targeting ethnic regions	Who? - UEC - Civil society: • Pandita Development Institute • ActionAid • Shalom Foundation • Women's Organisations Network (WON) • Yangon School of Political Science • New Myanmar Foundation • IRI partners (iSchool) • iPACE
KEY GAPS	 Limited reach of current non-partisan education activities. Most education is not ongoing (many one-off educational sessions without follow-up). Most education activities only occur around elections - need long-term civic education. Lessons more likely to focus on "what" and "how", but not "why" (e.g. how to vote but not why it is important to vote or what it means for a government official to represent constituents). 	

Landscape Mapping (2014-2015)

ELECTION MONITORING

KEY ISSUES

- Limited experience monitoring electoral processes.
- UEC has not yet announced rules and procedures for monitoring.
- Many organisations are interested in monitoring the election but do not have the resources for largescale, systematic monitoring.

CURRENT & PLANNED ACTIVITIES

What?

- Monitoring the voter registration pilot project
- Monitoring the 2014 by-elections as a trial for 2015 general election
- Monitoring the 2015 national elections:
 - · long-term observation
 - short-term observation
 - · crowd-sourcing

Who?

- PACE (supported by NDI)
- MYNFREL
- EEOP (8-10 groups, many ethnic focused)
- MIDO
- Many individual groups are interested
- Many individual citizens are interested

KEY GAPS

- Limited coordination among the many coalitions wanting to or planning on doing election monitoring.
- Limited awareness of what election monitoring entails, especially the pros and cons of various approaches.
- Long-term observation not part of the plans for many organisations.

Landscape Mapping (2014-2015)

MEDIA TRAINING & MONITORING

KEY SSUES

- Rapid expansion of media sector has created huge demand for journalists.
- Lack of experience and limited knowledge among new journalists.
- Trainings are typically one-time workshops without long-term mentoring/follow up.
- There are not enough trainings on specific issues (politics, government, peace process, etc.).

CURRENT & PLANNED ACTIVITIES

What?

- Basic journalism training
- Training journalists to cover elections appropriately and fairly, focusing on equal treatment of candidates, coverage of issues
- Monitoring the media's coverage of elections for tone, themes covered, and access granted to candidates to identify failings and promote better coverage over the long term

Who?

- Internews
- BBC Media Action
- Yangon School of Journalism

KEY GAPS

- Ongoing training and mentoring opportunities are still limited.
- More training needed on specific issues related to the electoral process and peace process.
- Low levels of basic journalism skills mean there is even lower capacity for monitoring the media due to intricacy of the analysis.
- Insufficient support and resources for ethnic media organisations and journalists.

Landscape Mapping (2014-2015+)

SUSTAINING DEMOCRACY

KEY SSUES

- Citizens and officials have limited understanding of the concepts of responsiveness & accountability.
- Civic education and citizen engagement opportunities increase during electoral period but subside after elections are over.
- The general public has very limited knowledge and understanding of the peace process.
- Government is still in the process of digitising information and records, so most official information is not yet accessible to the public.

CURRENT & PLANNED ACTIVITIES

What?

- Training & networking to improve peace process reporting
- App with basic information on Myanmar MPs
- Some budget digitization / budget monitoring
- UEC & political party capacity building

Who?

- Yangon School of Political Science
- Internews
- BBC Media Action partners (DVB & other independent media)
- IFES
- IRI
- The Richardson Center
- ActionAid
- Open Myanmar Initiative
- Myanmar Alliance for Transparency & Accountability

KEY GAPS

- Government officials are becoming more tuned in to idea of responsiveness and accountability but citizens still have limited awareness of their responsibilities, and both parties lack reliable, regular channels for communication and interaction.
- Reporting and information on the peace process is not enough, and still fairly low quality.
- As information is becoming available, CSOs and citizens are not aware of how they can access it or why it matters to them to have access to official records and information.
- Few organisations have plans for harnessing the enthusiasm and participation from the electoral period for post-election and long-term democracy promotion activities.

Hope that's been helpful!

for more info, contact:

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