

5th CONFERENCE ON
MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN
MYANMAR

Inclusive Independent Media in a New Democracy

7-8 November 2016

Chatrium Hotel, Yangon

CONTENTS

04	ACRONYMS
05	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
07	Highlights from 5th Myanmar Media Development Conference
08	OPENING SESSION
10	SESSION ONE: REVIEW OF MEDIA LAW AND SPACES
12	SESSION TWO: THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS
15	SESSION THREE: GENDER AND MEDIA
18	SESSION FOUR: SOCIAL MEDIA – A GAME CHANGER
20	SESSION FIVE: RIGHT TO INFORMATION
22	SESSION SIX: SUSTAINABILITY OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA
24	SESSION SEVEN: STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF COMMUNITY MEDIA
27	SESSION EIGHT: CONCLUDING SESSION AND CLOSING
29	ANNEX

ACRONYMS

(BJA)	Burma Journalist Association
(BNI)	Burma News International
(BRA)	Burma Reporters Association
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
(DVB)	Democratic Voice of Burma
(IMS)	International Media Support
(MDTWG)	Media Development Thematic Working Group
(MoI)	Ministry of Information
(MJI)	Myanmar Journalism Institute
(MJN)	Myanmar Journalist Network
(MPC)	Myanmar Press Council
(NMC)	National Management College
(NGO)	Non-Governmental Organizations
(SEAPA)	Southeast Asian Press Alliance
(UNFC)	United Nationalities Federal Council
(UNESCO)	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 5th Myanmar Media Development Conference 7 – 8 November was organised by:

Myanmar News Media Council (Myanmar Press Council)

Myanmar Journalist Association

Myanmar Journalist Network

Myanmar Journalist Union

Burma News International

Myanmar Journalism Institute

With support from:

Myanmar Ministry of Information (Mol)

UNESCO

International Media Support - FOJO Media Development Programme in Myanmar

Deutsche Welle Akademie

USAID

Centre for Law and Democracy

Internews

DVB

ARTICLE 19

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Special thanks should be given to:

Embassy of Sweden, Myanmar

Forever Group

Shwe Than Lwin Media Limited

The conference secretariat team consisting of:

Myo Min Htike

Ye Wint Hlaing

Sitt Aung

Letyar Tun

Pyi Kyaw Myint

Mikel Aguirre Idiaquez

Naing Naing Aye

Grace Robertson

The Ministry of Information Team led by U Myint Kyaw

The annual Myanmar Media Development conference continues to receive widespread coverage in media.
Photo: IMS-Fojo



1. Highlights from 5th Myanmar Media Development Conference

Under the heading “Inclusive, independent media in a new democracy”, the 5th annual Myanmar Media Development Conference took place 7 – 8 November 2016 in Yangon, the first to be held under the new democratically elected government. The conference featured government representatives, media owners, human rights activists, and media practitioners from different ethnic backgrounds. A less stringent, hardtalk-like format paved the way for a less formal and more frank discussion than that of previous years.

Gender inequality in media and the challenges of ethnic and community media were at the heart of discussions, where Minister of Information, U Pe Myint, expressed continued commitment to the media reform process.

“This year’s meeting theme recognises that for media to develop, the country’s diverse voices, in terms of gender and ethnicity, must also be considered.” The exceptionally high turnout of more than 300 representatives from the media, government, military, judiciary, civil society and international press freedom organisations at the meeting was, if anything, a clear illustration of the continued sense of importance invested in the media reform process in Myanmar.

Picking up on the themes of previous media development conferences, panelists from Myanmar’s media community, government and invited international media development experts took stock of media reforms in areas such as media law, the safety of journalists and community media. Crucially, the involvement of the judiciary in this year’s conference talks through the Attorney General’s office and the Supreme Court meant that there was a direct dialogue with those tasked with interpreting the key legal rules supporting freedom of expression and the safeguarding of journalists’ rights. The drafting of the Right to Information Law is thus under way, designed for the benefit of the whole populace.

While women now make up the majority of staff members in the country’s media environment, the majority of news sources continue to be men. Women face challenges in terms of culturally rooted stereotyping of women, lack of maternity leave opportunities in private media. In addition, panelists raised the fact that the Myanmar News Media Council only has one female member. It was

generally agreed that more awareness is needed to address these stereotypes and that media could do its part in this by diversifying sources and promoting role models of leading women in politics and economics. This to ensure that women as well as minority and ethnic groups are better able to engage in and contribute to the country’s ongoing democratic process.

Reforms in the Myanmar media sector have come a long way, but much remains to be done, as also indicated in the UNESCO/IMS Myanmar Media Development Indicators Report (2014-2016), a study of and recommendations for Myanmar’s media sector.

This document summarises the main points from engaging and vibrant discussions made by both panelists and audience members during the two day conference.



H.E Dr. Pe Myint, Union Minister, Ministry of Information opens the conference. Photo: IMS-Fojo

2. OPENING SESSION

The opening session of the fifth Myanmar Media Development Conference opened with a frank discussion on the status of and way forward for media development in Myanmar. It was also an opportunity for the media stakeholders gathered to engage directly with the country's newly elected government on press freedom and media development needs and issues.

Panellists:

- H.E Dr. Pe Myint, Union Minister, Ministry of Information
- Ms Min Jeong Kim, Head of Office of UNESCO in Myanmar
- Mr. Steffan Herrstrom, Ambassador, Embassy of Sweden to Myanmar
- U Khin Maung Lay, Chairman of the Myanmar News Media Council/ Myanmar Press Council

Keynote speaker: U Thiha Saw, Executive Director, Myanmar Journalism Institute

Dr. Pe Myint of the Ministry of Information (MOI) noted that the difficulties of obtaining information from government offices have eased in recent years. He noted that spokespersons for Myanmar's ministries and departments have received training on how to communicate with the media. The right to information does not only apply to media, but to the general public and members of the public should be able to check the "three pillars" (adminis-

tration, parliament and judiciary) and ask questions of government officials, he added.

The April 2017 by-elections will be a test of whether MOI can work closely and efficiently with media stakeholders, but when writing about sensitive subjects such as religion and race, members of the news media should proceed with caution, he said. "News should be accurate and avoid misinterpretations and unreliable sources that can give the public false messages," he said.

Ms. Min Jeong Kim, the head of UNESCO's office in Myanmar, noted that only five years ago, Myanmar's media was heavily controlled and censored. "Today, we have government representatives, media owners, human rights activists, and media practitioners, both women and men, from different ethnic backgrounds gathered here to openly discuss media development, freedom of expression and access to information. This is a testimony of how far Myanmar has come in such a short period."

She commended the presence of women and members of ethnic media on the conference's panels as well as the emphasis on the safety of journalists and combatting impunity. She quoted the recent remarks of Mr. Frank La Rue, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, that "all harassment against journalists must be rejected, including arbitrary arrests and verbal intimidation. Ending impunity on all these acts is the most important step towards guaranteeing the safety of journalists."

Mr. Steffen Herrstrom, Sweden's ambassador to Myanmar, emphasized the crucial role of a free press and access to information in ensuring domestic accountability from government officials. Investigations by Swedish journalists in the previous months had led to the resignation of the entire leadership of the Swedish National Audit Board. The journalists had been tipped off by a whistleblower from within the board; nonetheless, their work "was strongly facilitated by the constitutionally protected right to information. Documents including e-mails were made available, not because anyone leaked them but because they legally were public," he said.

Earlier Media Development Conferences showed that "Myanmar's media stakeholders understand the importance of strong media development in the process of state-building." This year's meeting theme recognizes that for media to develop, the country's diverse voices, in term of gender and ethnicity, must also be included.

While women make up half the world's population, they represent 70 percent of the world's poor. In Myanmar, women are 29% less likely to own a mobile phone than men and the gap grows as household income declines. "The voices on politics or business in Myanmar media according to statistics I have seen are to 80% or more belonging to men. We know that more than half of the media professionals in Myanmar are women and yet gender imbalances still prevail." Mr. Herrstrom said. A component of sustainable and equitable development is access to information. Where there is badly skewed income distribution—a problem in Sweden, Myanmar and all over the world—there is "also unequal access to information. Gender and ethnicity are determining factors," Mr. Herrstrom said.

Noting that the conference's theme was "inclusive independent media development," Khin Maung Lay, chairman of the Myanmar News Media Council (also known as the Myanmar Press Council), said many changes were still needed to reach that goal, such as changes in the law relating to the News Media Council. The offenders, whoever they are, shall be penalised with substantial evidence. The media industry needs fair competition. As concerns the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, "the state newspapers shall not be used

as the reigning government's propaganda tool," he said.

In the keynote speech, U Thiha Saw, a senior journalist and executive director of the Myanmar Journalism Institute, said that a conference with the theme of "inclusive and independent media" should have more Myanmar media stakeholders present: "Although the organizing team endeavoured to promote gender balance and inclusiveness of ethnic minorities, there may still be some weaknesses." He asserted that there was gender balance in Myanmar, however, and he had met many female editors and journalists.

He was also concerned about laws that still threaten freedom of expression. "Many laws need to be amended, reviewed or potentially abolished. Legal frameworks have been the prominent challenge for media for many years," he said. Another important issue is media ownership, which is critical to media freedom. Capacity training needs to be expanded so that journalists aren't concentrated in Yangon, Mandalay, and other big cities, he said. "To achieve that training needs to be extended to ethnic areas and journalists working in ethnic media," he said.

He said that media freedom in Myanmar is still fragile and that the media industry needs fair competition. "Privately-owned media enterprises should have a fair share of advertisements," he said.

3. SESSION ONE: REVIEW OF MEDIA LAW AND SPACES

The session, Review of Media Laws and Spaces, discussed the News Media Law and the pending Broadcasting Law. Using examples, speakers and audience members said that the new News Media Law is still weak, unable to protect journalists from harsh penalties or act as a regulatory body. The broadcast sector is still awaiting the opening doors for private players through the proposed Broadcast Law. The Ministry of Information (MOI) has pledged to include ethnic media in the process of reviewing both the News Media and Broadcasting laws. The way ahead is challenging as many crucial issues such as ownership issues, viability and sustainability of the sector, codes of conduct and licensing procedures needed to be addressed in a pragmatic manner.

Panellists:

- Daw Thida Tin, Deputy Director General, Information and Public Relations Department, Ministry of Information
- U Myint Kyaw, Member of the Myanmar News Media Council/Myanmar Press Council
- U Khin Maung Win, Deputy Director of the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB)
- Oliver Spencer, Head of Asia, Article 19
- Moderator: U Ko Ko, Patron of the Myanmar Journalist Association

Formed in late 2015, the Myanmar Press Council, officially the Myanmar News Media Council, has 24 members. Some members were selected by media associations while others were appointed by the speakers of the Hluttaw (Parliament) and the president of Myanmar.

One member, U Myint Kyaw, said that the 2014 News Media Law requires government respond to requests for information within 24 hours. However, “ministries and the government bodies, including Tatmadaw, often do not respond to such requests.” As an example of another weakness in the News Media Law and of how the penal code is still used against journalists, he brought up the October 2016 conviction for defamation of two journalists working for a Pa-O-language newspaper, The People’s Voice. The lawsuit was brought by a

Pa-O political leader after the newspaper reported that he had extorted money from villagers for a personal birthday celebration. The two journalists, who were in attendance at the conference, were sentenced after a lengthy trial to 30 days in prison or payment of 30,000 kyat.

U Ko Ko, Patron of the Myanmar Journalist Association, agreed that laws governing media are still weak. “I am not satisfied with these laws ... With MPs, we make an effort to be involved. Independence and sustainability are important. There still isn’t fair competition in print or broadcasting.”

Oliver Spencer, Head of Asia for the international NGO, Article 19¹, agreed that the new Press Council, which replaced the Interim Press Council in 2015, so far had operated “quite independently” but the council members are still not legally protected since the president of Myanmar can dismiss any of them at any time. “The law should be changed so that both the Press Council and the Broadcasting Council are independent,” he said.

“We encourage the government to amend the penal code. Myanmar is like a museum of British law. These were all these laws created by the British government created in colonial times to suppress Burmese people like the laws concerned with sedition, religion, and obscenity,” he noted.

U Ko Ko, patron of the Myanmar Journalist Association, said he was unsatisfied with all the existing laws governing the media and journalists should work with legislators to amend them. He asked whether the government planned to amend such laws.

To that, Daw Thida Tin, Deputy General of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), replied: “We are trying our best. In the constitution, there is a provision regarding freedom of expression. As for implementation, all have to follow the law and conform with Article 19 and Article 29 [of the Universal Declaration]. “We don’t have much experience liaising with the media and there may be some obstacles in operations. There should still be state-owned newspapers. We can’t just point to other countries’ experience. We have to follow our own. There are many new sources and newspapers that do not accurately portray the news.”

¹ Article 19’s name derives from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which declares that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and to impart information and ideas through any media.

"The government should not be in charge of a newspapers and broadcasting. We are independent because we were exile media," U Khin Maung Wan, Deputy Director of the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). "It is not enough for laws to exist. The laws should have certain standards. We have to have a veto to comply with international standards. Although private newspapers were given permission to print, they cannot survive. To build an inclusive independent media in a new democracy requires survival of those in media. The government should just be a regulator, not a player in the market."

Mr. Spencer reiterated that "a future government could easily crack down by sacking members. There is a need to start implementing the law. We must be concerned about private companies entering the sector. In two years, broadcasting could still be in hands of government. There is a need to start to change the state media into public service, private media and community media... A new government can easily crack down on the Press Council. Broadcast media, as it currently stands, makes no attempt to recognize the diversity of Myanmar. "We need the government to elaborate what is meant by 'community media' Which now seems just geographical, while we should integrate diverse religious, ethnic groups and so on and to increase the population of women in broadcast media," Mr. Spencer said.

To review and amend the media laws, U Myint Kyaw said that a committee including members of news agencies should be formed. Members of the media should hold public forums to discuss changes. "State-owned newspapers should be abolished. Not in a day or two, but there should be a plan in the coming two years."

During the question-and-answer period, a member of the audience asked Daw Thida Tin if the News Media Law would be reviewed, which parties would conduct the review, and whether ethnic media could be included. She said that professionals from ethnic media would be included. A member of the audience, Khun Yar Zar, one of the Pa-O journalists recently convicted of defamation, said that "the Press Council cannot do much when the media are sued. How can the News Media Law help in such cases?"

3.1 Summary of Session

For the News Media Council and Broadcasting Council to be truly independent, the laws that created them need to be amended so that members cannot be dismissed by the Myanmar president.

Besides weaknesses in the 2014 News Media Law, some existing provisions, such as the right-to-access government information, are not being carried out.

There is a need to begin transforming the state media into public service, private media and community media. Daw Thida Tin of MOI said state-published newspapers should continue for now and gave no schedule for abolishing them.

For freedom of expression, it is not sufficient that the private sector now has permission to print. Private media need income to survive and should not have to compete with state-supported media.

Ethnic media are poorly represented in the Myanmar landscape but representatives will participate when the News Media Law is reviewed soon for possible amendments.

4. SESSION TWO: THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Session 2, Safety of Journalists and Issues of Impunity, discussed vulnerabilities faced by the journalists and media workers. Though the country is experiencing a fragile peace process, journalists are still expected to travel and report stories from the conflict-ridden areas where their safety can be heavily compromised. Also journalists in urban areas face threats. Those that write about national security, anti-corruption, religion, conflict and land rights among other subjects are at particularly at risk of threats, violence and charges under somewhat outdated laws. When physically threatened, journalists have in some cases failed to get assistance from police. Several cases in which the journalists were sued under Article 500, the defamation law, and sentenced to fines and imprisonment were discussed. Examples of national safety and protection mechanisms for journalists set up in the South-East and South Asian regions were also described as a means to inspire cooperation between media stakeholders in both media, national and local government, law enforcement authorities and CSOs in Myanmar. The way forward to enhance safety of the media workers and to combat impunities is to promote cooperation between media, law enforcement, armed forces and local authorities, especially in conflict areas.

Panellists:

- U Than Zaw Aung, Secretary of the Myanmar Media Lawyers' Network
- U Khin Maung Tun, Deputy Director General of the Union Supreme Court Occie
- Ma Nan Ohnmar, Senior Reporter with Shan Herald News
- Lars Heiberg Bestle, IMS-Fojo Myanmar Media Development Programme and Head of the Asia Department for International Media Support (IMS)
- Moderator: U Zayar Hlaing, General Secretary of the Myanmar Journalists Network

The vulnerability of media and its practitioners has become especially visible with the expansion of press freedom in the country. Though Myanmar is experiencing a fragile peace process, journalists

are still expected to travel and report stories from the conflict-ridden areas where their safety could be heavily compromised.

Similarly, over the past year, there has been a tendency to penalise individual journalists for addressing issues viewed as sensitive in a Myanmar context such as national security, anti-corruption, religion, conflict and land rights. The risk increases outside of urban areas and where media workers are also marginalised for other reasons such as their gender or ethnicity.

Ma Nan Ohnmar Aung, Senior Reporter with the Shan Herald News, said she was assaulted and then sued the offender, who was a relative of a former civil servant. She said, "There were no organizations to help me out when I went to the court ... I do not know why he assaulted me."

U Than Zaw Aung, Deputy Director-General of the Myanmar Media Lawyers Network, explained that his organization can only give legal training or assist when journalists are sued. "It is the responsibility of the police force to protect the journalists but the police are not doing so," he said. He noted that while covering timber and drug cases, Myanmar journalists are sometimes threatened. Referring to a much-publicized case in 2016 involving the trial of the proprietors of a Yangon tailor shop who had tortured their young female maids, he said a journalist reporting on the situation was threatened. "The main problem is insufficient protection and no effective penalties," he said.

Mr. Lars Heiberg Bestle, representing the IMS/Fojo Media Institute Myanmar Programme and speaking also in his capacity as Head of the Department for Asia in IMS, emphasised that without government protection, the safety of journalists won't be sustainable. The discussions amongst the meeting participants suggested that one of the biggest safety issues for the media in Myanmar is that the police are not yet involved in ensuring journalists' safety, as reflected through accounts by several journalists in the audience who recounted experiences of being physically threatened for their work without receiving any assistance from the police.

U Khin Maung Tun, Deputy Director-General of the Supreme Court, noted that the 2008 constitution guarantees freedom of expression. He added that often cases concerning journalists did not fall un-



The safety of journalists is crucial to an enabling working environment for media. Photo by IMS-Fojo

der police jurisdiction and that journalists needed to understand procedures, process and how to file with the courts. U Khin Maung Tun acknowledged however, that the situation of journalists in remote areas was particularly difficult, as journalists have no way of registering themselves.

Ma Nan Ohnmar Aung said that in Shan State, journalists “are quite scared of the border guard force” and thus are fearful when they cover news. Recalling her own experience, she described how she was forced into hiding in Taunggyi and in doing so was aided by a Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) journalist.

However, it is possible for Myanmar to draw on experience from a number of Asian countries, where locally driven, broad-reaching safety mechanisms for journalists set up by a broad range of national and international partners have helped to improve safety. While each country and conflict is different, there are best practices that can be shared and learned from.

Lars Bestle, IMS/Fojo Media Institute, described well-tested approaches to improve the safety of journalists in South and Southeast Asia: getting stakeholders from both national and local government, media, NGO and law enforcement personnel involved in emergency responses. For example, in Pakistan, five press clubs across the country have agreed to cooperate on setting up safety hubs for journalists at their facilities where journalists and editors are given safety training, legal advice and where telephone hot lines are available for journalists in trouble.

Lars Bestle also pointed to the Afghan Journalists’ Safety Committee in Afghanistan, a locally led country-wide safety mechanism run by a network of journalists, unions and civil society representatives and supported by IMS. Regional safety coordinators in eight hubs around the country and a num-

ber of volunteers manage an alert system, liaising with journalists under threat and providing updates on violations and changing circumstances for media, as well as relocation of journalists in special instances. Basic services include various types of trainings for both male and female journalists, legal advice, a 24/7 hotline, safe houses and a safety fund coupled with efforts to influence media law and other legal reforms through advocacy efforts.

“Together with the International Federation of Journalists, IMS is developing a study of best practices focusing on the safety of journalists in seven Asian countries including Colombia, Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Nepal. The study documents and explains best practices of locally driven safety mechanisms in various forms and shapes, building on a discussion paper developed by UNESCO in 2015,” Lars Bestle explained.

4.1 Summary of session

Journalists in attendance mentioned numerous cases where they had felt threatened or were assaulted as a consequence of their journalistic trade. There were also examples of journalists who had lost court cases although they felt they were legally in the right, but with little legal aid support to draw on in instances where they were being sued. It was clear that Myanmar journalists are not clear on the responsibilities and duties of the police, army and courts regarding the protection of journalists and that perhaps there is a need to enhance mutual understanding for one another’s roles.

With many examples cited from other Asian countries, there is a real opportunity for media stakeholders in Myanmar to be inspired by existing best practices in other countries where national safety mechanisms have been established with a broad range of stakeholders from local authorities, media, national and international CSOs and law enforcement.

Social media, community media and gender were amongst the new items on the agenda at the 5th Myanmar Media Development Conference. Photo: IMS-Fojo



5. SESSION THREE: GENDER AND MEDIA

Gender roles and women's representation in the Myanmar media industry and news content has only been explored recently in Myanmar history, as has the broader framework of freedom of expression in relation to gender. The results of a Fojo research study on the status of women in Myanmar media was launched at the meeting. Women comprise 60 per cent of registered journalists in Myanmar today, but few occupy decision-making roles, the study found. Discussion centered on sexual harassment, obstacles to career advancement and the depiction of women in Myanmar mass media. Together with the liberalisation of the media environment has come more objectification and sexualisation of the image of women in the media, which has led to criticism from both women's organisations and religious groups. Special attention was paid to conditions in rural areas, gender awareness training and the digital gender gap.

Panellists:

- Ma Thin Thin Thar, Executive member of Myanmar Journalist Union
- Ma Esther Htusan, reporter for the Associated Press
- Ma Eaint Khaing Oo, a co-founder of the Myanmar Women Journalists Society
- Nan Paw Gay, chief editor of the Kayin Information Centre
- Moderator: Agneta Soderberg-Jacobson, Senior Gender Advisor with the IMS-Fojo Myanmar Media Development Programme

Ms. Agneta Soderberg-Johnson presented the results of research on women working in Myanmar media conducted by Sweden's Fojo Media Institute. The research was carried out in 2014 and 2015 through survey and focus groups with 298 respondents working in Myanmar print, online, and broadcast media. The respondents, more than half of them women, worked in Yangon, Kayin and Shan states, and in the Sagaing Region. The results are included in a report that had just been issued by Fojo-IMS, "Gender in the Myanmar Media Landscape."

"Women may constitute more than 60 per cent of Myanmar's 2,000 accredited journalists, but they lack the opportunity to advance to decision-making levels due to discrimination," Ms. Agneta Soderberg-Johnson said. "Parents often do not approve of daughters becoming journalists and society is less supportive of women journalists, as reflected by the expectation that they not return to their jobs after becoming mothers. In remote areas with insurgencies, women often are not allowed to report on conflicts by protective superiors."

"Our research shows that women media professionals are lagging far behind when it comes to promotion, choice of beats, status in society, salary level etc. It also shows that outside of Yangon, half of the female respondents have experienced sexual harassment in their work. The respondents said they did not know who to inform, but were also reluctant to report incidents, due to the related shame as well as the possibility of being blamed for provoking the harassment."

Ms. Söderberg-Johnson added that the general understanding of sexual harassment and gender based violence is low in Myanmar, and that the media has an important role to play in raising awareness - not only by reporting on the issues but also by working internally to create a safe environment for all employees.

Female journalists are paid less than men when performing the same jobs, the study found. Women also tend to cover "soft issues" like health, education and the family more often than men. The panelists and women journalists in the audience agreed that their biggest problems were lack of maternity leave and safety concerns, especially in conflict zones.

Nan Paw Gay, Chief Editor of the Kayin Information Center, said that women in the many ethnic media organisations face discrimination stemming from both traditions and religious norms. "I think it is also related to less development in these areas and narrow-mindedness of the people. Media has only just recently "opened up". There have been many discouraging incidents. Harassment can be physical and verbal. Sometimes interviewees want to talk in private. In my experience, female journalists are very scared. We were born in a conflict

area. We are weak in self-confidence. Sometimes the community criticises women for being outside the home too much.” She added that amendments to the News Media Law “should include gender policies and protection for women and men.”

Ma Thin Thin Thar, an executive member of Myanmar Journalist Union with more than 20 years of experience as a journalist, said she and other women had the experience of their work being credited to senior male editors. “If we say, ‘please use our name,’ they will hate us and sometimes we have to quit.”

Ma Esther Htusan, a reporter for the Associated Press said: “Sometimes people criticise what we are wearing. During the election campaign, a female reporter asked a candidate why the number of women in his party was so small, he replied with offensive language, saying something like, ‘Women are useless.’ So even if there isn’t violence, there is harassment.” However, she also said that perceptions and attitudes of men have started to change, Gracy Sinang Hlei Dim of Chinland Post TV in the audience said that she often felt unsafe when staying in villages overnight because “I don’t have any female colleagues to accompany me.”

When asked why an exclusive women’s organisation was necessary, Ma Esther Htusan said: “We still have fewer chances to work as a journalist in our society. Men think women can’t do everything that they can do. Editors often say, ‘You can’t do this. You will just waste money.’ We are physically women, but can do everything men can do.”

Ma Eaint Khine Oo, a co-founder of the new Myanmar Women Journalists Society and a freelancer for Voice of America, said: “We founded the Women Journalists Society according to the needs of society. As long as gender-based discrimination is there, we need to exist ...

When we do a workshop on women’s issues, three main issues are raised. One is sexual discrimination; two, maternity leave (“We don’t have it”); and three, security. Female journalists most often request training in investigative reporting, safety, and gender.”

Asked how her supervisors take responsibility for her safety, Ma Esther Htusan said she is given a protective vest, a contact person, and a satellite phone.

A male audience member, Dr. Tin Htut, said: “I always give assignments to women which suit them. I do not understand the word ‘discrimination.’” Another male audience member said, “I’m a magazine editor. Journalists must travel up and down everywhere. When I advertised, only one application was from a woman, so I had to hire her.”

Another man in the audience said: “You talk about gender equality. I think if they have the capacity, women get a promotion. So, is it the chicken or the egg? However, some female journalists want to go to conflict areas, but media houses do not encourage them.” Another male audience member commented: “According to the nature of the job, women are less involved in media. Even though we would like to hire women, only a few women apply for a job.”

“Who will decide what is suitable for women? We can go and do anything but who will take responsibility for safety? Who is responsible for our safety? Is it the police? Military?” responded a woman in the audience.

A woman in the audience said that after women have a baby, “No one will hire us, so women can never get to higher levels at their job. When we do the training about gender, we should have 50 per cent men and 50 per cent women because men need help to understand equality.”

When asked how women journalists’ problems could be better handled, women on the panel and in the audience made requests rather than demands. Ma Thin Thin Tar said, “Please lend your ears to our policies.” “Give us a chance,” one audience member said. Another said, “Please give ethnic media a chance to attend capacity building.”

“We should give mothers a chance to continue their work and give them maternity leave. It is great that now we are talking about gender on the stage. In the past, we did not know what gender is about,” another said.

Ms. Soderberg-Johnson ended the session remarking she had hoped someone would ask why there were no men on the panel. “None we invited wanted to join us,” she explained.



“None of the men we asked wanted to join our gender-focused panel today,” said Ms. Soderberg-Johnson of the IMS-Fojo Myanmar Media Development Programme with a smile. Photo: IMS-Fojo

5.1 Summary of session

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to advancement for female journalists in Myanmar is the expectation by society and their employers that they are unable to tackle and cover the same journalistic issues as men and secondly, that they quit after having a baby. Media houses should have maternity leave policies and ensure equal pay for men and women.

Sexual harassment of female journalists is much more common in areas beyond Yangon, but there is also weak understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment.

Women in the ethnic media want training in gender and safety. Women journalists might be safer if they could go out together to report. Men should be encouraged to attend gender training.



A woman is interviewed about the plight of female journalists in Myanmar. Photo: IMS-Fojo

6. SESSION FOUR: SOCIAL MEDIA – A GAME CHANGER

With the rapid expansion of the telecommunications and IT sector, social media, especially Facebook, is becoming a major player within Myanmar's social fabric. The number of smartphones is expected to reach 25 million by the end of 2016 and to reach 110 per cent within the next two years. Many users tend to be of the younger generation, who define social interaction through the extensive use of social media. Evidence of this was the impact social media had during several episodes of unrest when the government had to collaborate with social media outlets to mitigate the situation. During the run-up to the November 2015 elections, hate speech proliferated on Facebook.

The media benefits from social media as a source of information and as a means to spread news to remote areas. At the same time, many readers believe gossip and false reports in Facebook posts and Facebook has made many readers less interested in buying print publications with genuine news. Furthermore, media literacy also plays a significant role in educating the public.

Panellists:

- Ma Phyu Phyu Thi, Research and Development Manager, Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO)
- Ko Nay Ye, Marketing and Communications Manager, Phandeeyar;
- Ko Thiha Thwe, Senior Journalist, NHK
- Ko Swe Win, Chief Reporter, Myanmar Now
- Moderator: U Myo Tha Htet, Media Advisor, Internews.

Ko Swe Win, a reporter for Myanmar Now news agency, referred to the well-known Innwa tailor shop case that had attracted much public interest and news coverage in 2016. Two teenage maids employed at the tailor shop in Yangon were imprisoned and tortured for five years. A Facebook comment on an article published by the Myanmar Now news agency about domestic abuse prompted him to visit the Innwa shop. He reported to the police that one girl at the shop appeared physically abused. He subsequently made a report to the Myanmar Human Rights Commission.

Although the shop owners could have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms, the commission brokered a monetary settlement between the girls, their families and the shop owners. When Myanmar Now reported this, outraged members of the public responded on Facebook, demanding prosecution and the resignations of commission members and setting up a petition campaign. In September 2016, the trial began of six members of the family operating the shop. They have been charged with human trafficking.

"Social media was very important in that case," Ko Swe Win said, but that doesn't mean that it would be useful in every case. "The news has to be accurate first, then we can use the power of social media."

"How much can we rely on Facebook?" Ma Phyu Phyu Thi, Myanmar ICT for Development Organization (MIDO) asked. "According to my research, people in rural areas trust Facebook like journalism. They rely on Facebook without thinking about whether the news is accurate or not. People need media literacy to be able to determine what is right or wrong."

Ko Thiha Thwe, a senior journalist with NHK, noted

that crime is a popular subject of Facebook posts. "Now people feel the crime rate has increased because they read about it on Facebook ... The current government cannot control social media. Police have to respond to Facebook information, so people will feel safe. Parliament members are very weak about responding on Facebook as well."

Ko Nay Ye, Marketing and Communications Manager for the Yangon internet community organisation Phandeeyar said that Facebook is replacing radio as the chief source of information. Many people sell and buy things on Facebook. "It is like a monkey getting a coconut, but we see a lot of negative content and hate speech too."

"Hate speech will lead to more hating," Ma Phyu Thi said. "Social media can spread it out to the whole nation. Hate speech always tends to be aimed not at an individual but at a group of people. It can even influence people's ideology and can change the whole society's situation. Before the elections, there was so much hate speech in order to get votes." However, she felt that care must be taken when attempting to control hate speech, so as not to restrict freedom of expression: "We all really don't want to lose freedom of expression."

Ko Thiha Thwe added: "People cannot decipher what is right or wrong, so the government needs to manage these issues. If not, there is going to be an explosion very soon."

Ko Swe Win said, "We need to educate people." He referred to his experiences reporting on the controversial Latpadaung copper mining project to which many locals from the area are strongly opposed. Local people heckled Daw Aung San Su Kyi when she visited as head of an investigating commission in 2013. "Facebook users blamed the local people. When the local people heard about this, they blamed us [the media] and asked 'Why did you write the report?' They feel like everything they see on Facebook is the responsibility of a media person. Good and bad things happen at the same time. According to our religion, we should not do hate speech, so we need to raise awareness among people ... Every media stakeholder should think when uploading something on social media."

An audience member pointed out to Ko Thiha Thwe that the President's office, the military, departments and First State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi all have Facebook pages.

He answered: "When all the institutions have their

own page, it limits the news that appears elsewhere. People read Facebook news and now they aren't interested in other media. Our role is getting smaller, little by little. That is our new challenge. The private newspaper market is struggling, so the government newspapers shouldn't publish anymore."

Ma Phyu Phyu Thi said that women are being targeted on Facebook with hate speech. For example, there is hate speech saying women should not marry men of another religion or ethnic group. "People see that story again and again. They become more convinced. We should respect women and women's right to choose."

6.1 Summary of session

Social media can have a positive effect, as when it brings the public's attention to unjust decisions made by the Human Rights Commission, but most consumers cannot distinguish between rumours, fake news items and well-attributed news articles. Crime news, whether true or not, is shared and read widely on Facebook for which reason many people believe crime is getting worse.

Especially in rural areas, people do not have access to new private print publications and tend to believe all social media posts, not paying attention to the sources of the information.

In order to address the difficulties of distinguishing fake news and social media rumours from researched news pieces, media literacy should become a greater priority both for government and media development organisations.

Social media posts, particularly on Facebook, must take on a more responsible handling of the information posted. Established news agencies and media houses should cooperate in some shape or form with Facebook to ensure the survival and distribution of good journalism. Government agencies and news organisations have Facebook pages too, further eroding the reach of private media.

Hate speech is very common on Facebook and when this goes unregulated, it contributes to animosity between people of different religions, ethnicity and interfaith marriages. Hate speech tends to be aimed not at an individual, but at a group of people.

Moving forward, the issue is whether the government should have a role to play in controlling hate speech and fake accounts on social media, also in light of not losing elements of the country's new-found freedom of speech.

7. SESSION FIVE: RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Myanmar's 2008 constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but the country does not yet have specific access to information or right-to-information (RTI) laws. As the process of democratisation deepens in Myanmar, the country is preparing legislation on the right to information, and the government has held public workshops to discuss drafts it has prepared. The session examined the current status of RTI laws, insights about building an inclusive and effective law-making process, and the benefits of rights to information. Once the legislation is adopted, the process of implementation will require considerable government attention, as well as the support of civil society and other actors. This session highlighted the steps that have been taken within Myanmar on this issue and shared international best practices both in terms of drafting legislation and undertaking key implementation measures. The goal is to support the process of developing and implementing RTI legislation in Myanmar.

Panellists:

- U Tin Maung Oo, Member, Commission for Assessment of Legal Affairs and Special Issues
- Daw Nwe Zin Win, Executive Director, Pyi Gyi Khin
- U Aung Hla Tun, Vice Chairman, Myanmar News Media Council/ Myanmar Press Council
- Toby Mendel, Executive Director, Centre for Law and Democracy
- Moderator: U Aung Myo Min, Executive Director, Equality Myanmar

U Aung Myo Min noted that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right to information and that many countries, including Thailand and Indonesia, have adopted right-to-information (RTI) laws. "Myanmar is far behind in the policy implementation, but that could be an advantage because it can learn about existing models and avoid repeating the same mistakes," he said.

There are many Myanmar laws related to information, at least fifty of which need to be amended, said U Tin Maung Oo, Member of the Commission for Assessment of Legal Affairs and Special Is-

sues. Some of these laws were written in English in colonial times, so cannot be understood by many Myanmar people. Six laws related to the Ministry of Information (MOI), including media and communication laws, need to be amended.

"Without media freedom, the country will not progress. Media workers should be given space to improve access to information. The status of current processes for implementing the right to information is that lawmakers have endorsed the importance of the right to information law. As the need of the law prevails, the law would be materialised as soon as possible," he said.

Daw New Zin Win, Executive Director of Pyi Gyi Khin, an NGO working with children and women, noted that a right-to-information law was already drafted by the previous government. "It's very important to develop the News Media Law too. Public access to information should be stated very clearly in the legislation. Agencies will need public information officers and public awareness of their rights must be raised," she said.

To meet international standards, the right-to-information law must satisfy seven criteria, she pointed out.

Those are:

- 1) Ensuring freedom to access and responding to requests for information aside from secrets related to national security and the like;
- 2) Identifying the forms of information that can be requested;
- 3) Identifying the parties, government organizations, and private enterprises that the right-to-information law covers;
- 4) Adopting simple operational procedures for accessing information;
- 5) Identifying exceptions, the kind of information which cannot be disclosed;
- 6) Appeal procedures;
- 7) Penalties and protective measures.

Toby Mendel, Executive Director of the Centre for Law and Democracy, noted that 112 countries now have right-to-information laws. Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, India and, most recently, Sri Lanka have enacted right-to-information laws. "Sri Lanka's is the ninth-strongest in the world," he said. Mexico is number one.



Myanmar's 2008 constitution guarantees freedom of expression, but the country does not yet have specific access to information or right-to-information (RTI) laws. Photo: IMS-Fojo

Besides the seven key characteristics of a strong law, he said there are four great benefits. First, the right to information law is a strong counter-measure to corruption and, second, it stimulates citizen participation. Third is government accountability. "To develop the law, you need to engage the public. Sustainable development happens while involving people." Fourth, such a law sets a basis for sound economic development. Fifth, it's good for business. "In my country [Canada], twenty-five percent of requests for information come from businesses," he said. Sixth, it's good for ordinary people.

Myanmar still needs a fully-developed right-to-information law. One shortcoming of the existing draft law is the lack of an oversight provision, he said. U Aung Hla Tun, Vice Chairman of the Myanmar Press Council (News Media Council), said the law should be clear about who has to the right to access information and it should be stated in the Myanmar and English languages, as well as the minority languages of the country. He said that some countries only give access to information to their own citizens, but the right should extend to non-citizens as well. "To handle information disclosure, the relevant ministry should adopt both proactive information disclosure and reactive information disclosure under the right-to-information law." It also should be clear that the right-to-information applies to the telecom sectors and internet, he said.

"We do understand there are so many challenges, U Tin Maung Oo said. "The constitution states that media should be the fourth pillar [along with the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of government]. Now when we try to get information, we encounter so many challenges. What kind of information will be considered top secret?"

Daw Nwe Zin Win said that in countries where the right-to-information laws have been adopted, women still have significantly low access to information. "What I would like to advise is that the role of women shall be explicit in the process of making the law. For ethnic communities, the issue of poor infrastructure prevails in access to information. For the law-making process, the difficulties of the women and ethnic communities should be considered in the agenda.

7.1 Summary of session

The right to information is already stated in the 2008 constitution and MPs have endorsed the importance of a right-to-information law, but Myanmar still needs a law that meets seven internationally accepted standards.

A right-to-information law was drafted by the previous government but should be strengthened before being enacted. For example, the law should specify an oversight panel.

The law needs to state explicitly that the public has the right to access government information, which will necessitate public information officers in government agencies. A right-to-information law has benefits such as increasing government accountability, and setting a foundation for business activities.

Finally, additional efforts must be made to ensure that women and ethnic minorities have access to government information.



Session 6 discussed the sustainability of media as many new entrants have launched and now struggle to survive.
Photo: IMS-Fojo

8. SESSION SIX: SUSTAINABILITY OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA

Session 6, Sustainability of Independent Media, discussed the challenges the Myanmar media face as many new entrants have launched and now struggle to survive. While some challenges like distribution are pertinent to almost all private media in Myanmar, local news media at the city level and ethnic media face specific challenges: high costs of production and lack of reliable financial sources for their sustainability. The perspectives on social media vary: most media members view it as a threat, while realizing it also offers an opportunity to extend reachability and popularity and offer new products. Session 6 ended with two questions from the moderator: Does media freedom exist in Myanmar? Can independent media survive in Myanmar? The key words are survival, sustainability and economic viability while maintaining independence in the new era of media.

Panellists:

- U Thaung Su Nyein, CEO of Information Matrix
- U Myo Aung, Editor-in-Chief, Dawei Watch Media
- Daw May Thingyan Hein, CEO, Myitmakha News Agency
- Daw Aye Hnin Swe, Managing Director of Mango Media
- Moderator: U Soe Myint, CEO/Chief Editor of Mizzima Media

Moderator U Soe Myint asked the panellists how they balance economic and political pressure. U Thaung Su Nyein, CEO of Information Matrix, which publishes the 7Day newspaper, responded: "There are no pressures from businesses and tycoons influencing the way the news is portrayed. We do not listen to those people anyway. I have experienced political pressures from the government and authorities."

He referred to coverage of a visit by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's to the controversial China-run Letpadaung copper mine when she was an opposition lawmaker. The paper received a complaint from NLD that there was an error in 7Day's report. "In some cases, we have been sued. I do not blame the newsroom. As publisher, I am accountable. Since the beginning of 7Day media, we ensure that the news we produced is impartial and unbiased," U Thaung Su Nyein said.

Daw Aye Hnin Swe, also known as Daw Rose Swe, the managing director of Mango Media, pointed out that she was responsible for public relations and advertising for her company, but "I have informed the clients that they cannot influence the media in which the advertisements are posted just by buying the services. The income from advertisements in media is substantial and much needed for the media. Media and advertisements are mutually dependant on each other. Advertising practices in media are not regulated in Myanmar, thus it is difficult to know what's right and wrong in the field."

Daw Aye Hnin Swe said, "For media, income from ads is very important. Back in the 1970s, about 20 per cent of newspaper income was from advertising. Today we don't know exactly how much it is, but advertising is necessary for the sustainability of the media."

"One important thing in doing business is to understand the market well," said U Myo Aung, Editor-in-Chief of Dawei Media Watch. "Because we have a market in a rural area, I need to specifically produce the news that is suited to context and to use words understandable to the locals. We cannot just copy practices of those big media enterprises like 7Day. We have our own mission and vision. The mainstream media and Facebook pose challenges to our small media. People are consuming social media a lot."

U Soe Myint agreed that because Facebook presents "free" news, it is a big challenge. U Thaung Su Nyein said that social media didn't necessarily have to be a threat. "If people have a smartphone all the time, they won't be reading a newspaper. That shouldn't be a threat; we should see it as an opportunity. In some areas, there is no distribution, yet people there tell me 'I read 7Day.' They are reading it online. Due to Facebook, we have 11 million readers online now."

Daw May Thingyan Hein of Myitmakha News Agency wanted to convey a message to Union Minister H.E Dr. Pe Myint directly. She suggested that the government subsidize production materials. "Papers should be sold at a lower price for newspapers and journals publishers. The main challenge for ethnic media is distribution. As the government has a wide network for distribution of its own state-owned newspapers, it should help the private print press publishers to distribute to those areas where their journals and newspapers could not be reached."

During the discussion period, one audience member said there is a need to "commercialize" Facebook: "If you continue to read, you must pay." Another remarked that ad income received for the year is already spent, explaining why "newspapers are disappearing."

In reply to a somewhat hostile question, U Thaung Su Nyein replied, "If we want to survive, we must do business and journalism. Eventually, most of our income will be generated mostly from digital products. How do we survive for now? By selling subscriptions and from advertising."

Daw Aye Hnin Swe remarked that 80 per cent of ad income now goes to TV and most of that goes to entertainment rather than news programmes.

An audience member from a local weekly said, "We have to reflect voices of the local community. National media cannot do that. We are in a difficult position not only regarding income, but for survival. State-owned papers get more support."

A foreigner in the audience commented that continued support from international organisations was needed for local media. She said the Myanmar government could at least follow the model of some foreign governments and reduce taxes, such as VAT, on media.

8.1 Summary of session

Compared to pressures from business advertisers on content and angles in independent media, political pressures are more evident. Both mainstream media and Facebook are threats to the survival of local media houses. Facebook can be a positive force for independent media because now readers far from distribution points can read articles, but news consumers are also becoming accustomed to "free" news on Facebook. The share of advertising in local and online Myanmar media is tiny.

Advertisers in news media sometimes expect special coverage. Because advertising is not yet regulated, it is difficult for publishers to know what is right or wrong. The government should indirectly support ethnic and local media by subsidizing printing paper or aiding in distribution.

9. SESSION SEVEN:

STRENGTHENING THE VOICES OF COMMUNITY MEDIA

Session 7, Strengthening Voices of Community Media, discussed the need for community media in ethnic as well as remote areas and the challenges the existing community media are facing in terms of financing, production, distribution, managing human resources, and other technical issues. The community media workers suggested the government assist in the production of community media. The ongoing media reform process intends to introduce community radio to Myanmar, despite limited experience in this sector. There could be seen an emergence of several regional newspapers but the question remains whether these publications fit the classification of community media.

Panellists:

- U Ko Ko Zaw, Chief Editor, Than Lwin Times
- Daw Wint Wade, Senior Producer, BBC Media Action
- Salai Hon Tun Gai, Executive Director, Chin Media Network
- Mr. Per Oesterlund, Senior Media Consultant, DW Akademie
- Moderator was Ma Tu Tu Thar, Founder/Chief Editor, Thanlyin Post Journal

U Ko Ko Zaw, Chief Editor of the Than Lwin Times in Mon State, said that many mainstream publications are available in Mawlamyine, the state capital, "yet only one hundred copies are distributed to the townships." He founded Than Lwin Times newspaper because he believes local people have the right to information and that there is not much local information available in mainstream media. The newspaper is published in both Mon and the Myanmar (Burman) language, since many people in remote areas still do not speak, read or write the national language. One problem now is that after training with his newspaper, some people quit and get recruited by bigger media enterprises.

Salai Hon Tun Gai, Executive Director of Chin Media Network, said that remote Shan State had so many dialects, even many in a single township, so the state's media comes in many languages. Alto-

gether, there are 16 independent publications and 40 others published by organisations. Mainstream media does not provide much benefit to Chin people, he said, "but I don't mean all news presented by ethnic media is very useful Because the ethnic media are new and have little experience compared to mainstream media, the capacity is significantly low. The interest of local ethnic people in ethnic media is also very minimal."

Daw Wint Wade of BBC Media Action said her programmes were for and about young audiences in rural areas. "Many spies, special police, follow us and local people are scared to talk to us. After we interview them, they are often interrogated." She said conditions have improved "somewhat" in recent years.

Mr. Per Oesterlund, Senior Consultant with DW Akademie, recounted a recent experience when he was in a local community in Zimbabwe and local people asked him about the candidates in the US election, yet they did not know about important issues in their own area because no local media were covering them.

Moderator Ma Tu Tu Thar, Founder and Chief Editor of Thanlyin Post Journal said, "We don't have the funds to do investigative stories. There are so many financial problems. How are we to manage these things?"

Salai Hon Tun Gai said, "If there is no new funding, community media will not be sustainable." U Ko Ko Zaw said there are three main challenges for community media: 1) financial 2) human resources and 3) technical challenges. He then added a fourth: printing costs for some media. Furthermore, "parents don't want to see their children as journalists. Daw Wint Wade said that regional radio is important for local communities. Many young people can be motivated by community programmes. "They want to listen to their songs or the local news or learn about development programmes in their area."

"You shouldn't cry when one of your people gets a good job somewhere else because your publication has a reputation for training good people," said Mr. Oesterlund. As for advertising, he suggested that community media could join together to offer advertisers a single package. If I am Ooredoo

or MPT, I want to go to one place to advertise." He suggested, "Your reporters could sell cards and take 5 per cent. Everyone can do something. Even if you make some money, that doesn't mean you are commercial."

During the discussion, a member of the audience noted that this was the fifth Media Development conference and that he had now attended four. "Now I would like to ask some question. I am from the Rakhine Voice. We have published since 2012. It is not commercial publication; it's for local people's requirements. We publish 5,000 to 6,000 copies. Now there are other publications and Facebook, so published copies decreased. We could not pay enough people salaries. Our quality decreased too. We struggle. Now we haven't been able to publish for two months. We can't find donors. Maybe we can find donors at this conference. We don't speak English, so we can't communicate to find donors."

The next audience member was from a community journal in the Sagaing Region. He mentioned a recent ferry accident in which more than 100 people died. "We covered all the details ... mainstream media is very weak on our local issues." He said the journal needed support for a printing press. We are a weekly journal. We could be daily. Now rich people can establish local radio, so there is more competition."

"I have attended this conference for three years," said another audience member. "My concern is community media. It cannot be sustainable. Every year there are the same issues, the same topic. There is no more to discuss. Advertising is not possible in small towns; everyone knows the shops already. We have no offset machines. How can the ministry can help?"

A member of the audience said that he had gone to northern Shan State to provide media training. A journal published there, in the Shan and Kachin languages, is supported by a 5,000 kyat contribution from each family.

U Ko Ko Zaw said that last year he had discussed printing with MOI. He was told that it was possible to use printing presses in MOI branches, "but your circulation must be at least 10,000. For community media, that is not possible. So, we send to our issue to Yangon and print there. We still have these same challenges."

Daw Wint Wade said that BBC Media Action provides media training to communities, including

training for mobile devices. For almost three years it has provided training to ethnic media in states and regions. "Over 200 journalists have been trained. We provide online training too."

Salai Hon Tun Gai said, "There are two sides: the government side and community side. In Mussoorie state, which is the Indian state bordering Chin state, he said there is government offset printing support for local journals. "The other issue is advertisements. We need government financial support. Why do our officials do press conferences in Yangon? Local people cannot read mainstream media. Local government should spread information through community media. The Ministry of Border Affairs should not exist."

In response to the repeated questions of where to find donors and where to find advertisers, Mr. Oesterlund said, "There are just three answers: Organise, organise, organise." He suggested that a percentage of revenue from phone top-up scratch cards could be channelled to fund to support local media. "You can only do these things if you are organised." He invited everyone interested in forming an organisation that could appeal to national advertisers as a group to meet with him after the close of the session, but no one took him up on the offer.

9.1 Summary of session

Local and ethnic media know that they are reporting on issues that mainstream doesn't, but they struggle with distribution, training of journalists, interesting local readers and listeners, and finding sources of revenue.

The media members are convinced that if they don't find new sources of funding – perhaps from donor organisations – their publications and services will not survive.

Mr. Per Oesterlund, Senior Media Consultant of DW Akademie, suggested alternative ways of raising revenue. For example, he suggested that local media join together to offer a single channel for big national advertisers to work through. It was also suggested by several panellists and audience members that the state should help subsidise community radio and help to ensure that press conferences held in Yangon were translated into the various languages of the country and put local government in charge of distributing the news. Potentially through community media.

Community media, if given the necessary government support, can help give a voice to Myanmar's marginalised communities. Photo: IMS-Fojo



10. SESSION EIGHT: CONCLUDING SESSION AND CLOSING

Panellists:

- Daw Thida Tin, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Information
- Ms. Teresa McGhie, Mission Director, USAID Myanmar
- U Khine Myat Kyaw, Director of Burma News International
- Dr. Zin Mar Kyaw, Associate Professor, National Management Degree College.
- Moderator: Ms Min Jeong Kim, Head of UNESCO in Myanmar

Summing up the conference as a whole, U Khine Myat Kyaw, Director of Burma News International, said he was glad to see so many people from ethnic media at the conference. "Mainstream media extended a hand to us, and I'm very thankful. Although the News Media Council [also known as the Press Council] is an independent organisation, it must be strengthened to protect the rights of media workers. In court cases, the council should have the capability to hire lawyers to protect those who are being sued."

He also noted the conference's emphasis on the gender balance among Myanmar media workers and the lack of women's voices in media. Women should be given awareness training to embrace the idea they can enter media professions as a career. "Especially in rural areas, states and regions female journalists don't participate. Parents think that media work is like political activity," he said.

"As for the right to information, we should provide capacity building training to both news givers and takers. That will make for better ways to access the news. As for the matter of inclusion, it is also highly important that ethnic media are not left behind. Elevating ethnic media is like elevating members of ethnic groups. This discussion is very important to all of us. We saw see all stakeholders of all parts of the country in this media conference. We were able to share knowledge and information in this place."

Daw Zin Mar Kyaw, Associate Professor at the National Management Degree College, recounted the need for greater police and military protection of journalists and other media workers and a mutual

understanding of one another's roles in society to ensure a free and professional media. For basic knowledge of gender equality, men also need to attend awareness trainings. "Civil servants enjoy maternity leave, but few female workers in the private media get it," she pointed out. As for the Myanmar Press Council and the process of revising the governing law, women media workers should be borne in mind. Women should be given a chance to participate in the drafting of a right-to-information law, she said.

It was also suggested that both the Myanmar government and media stakeholders look to other countries in South and South East Asia to learn from best practices on the safety and protecting practices of journalists.

s Min Jeong Kim, Head of UNESCO in Myanmar, suggested that the Press Council be gender balanced, if just by adding one female member. "Overcoming traditional and cultural barriers for women in media work is very important and perhaps the most difficult to overcome," she said.

Teresa McGhie, Head of USAID in Myanmar, noted the US history as a supporter of exile Myanmar media. She said that the discussions of censorship and self-censorship were "very concerning." Freedom of expression and freedom of the media are very important for democracy, so Myanmar journalists should continue to fight for a free and independent media. She was pleased to see at the conference that not only that media from across the country was represented but government representatives attended. Tension between the president and the press is common in the United States and similar tensions should be expected in Myanmar. "It shows that the media are thinking independently," she said.

Daw Thida Tin, Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Information, said that this fifth conference was unique "in that the discussion arrangements were like roundtable talks on various issues in media industry." She said the suggestions and comments were very appreciated, but to turn them into actions, the ministry will require the participation of media practitioners of varied backgrounds. She said, "I have listened carefully to the voices of community media. I will make sure I will report their messages back to the Union Minister and to higher levels of administration."



Women should be given awareness training to embrace the idea they can enter media professions as a career," said U Khine Myat Kyaw, Director of BNI. Photo: IMS-Fojo

Ms. Kim noted that UNESCO has a long-term commitment for the development of media in Myanmar. At the first Media Development conference five years ago, there were only three partners: MOI, International Media Support, and UNESCO. At this conference, there were 20 partners, "a very great achievement," as well as the participation of media actors from Myanmar's ethnic communities. Next year, there will be even more.

10.1 ARTICLE 19 survey of participating journalists at the conference

Oliver Spencer, Head of Asia for Article 19, presented the results of an annual survey of Myanmar journalists on the state of freedom of expression, information and media in the country. As in previous years, the survey of 40 journalists attending the conference was conducted with the Myanmar Working Group for Freedom of Expression. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 the freest environment, the respondents placed Myanmar at 4.5. Last year the grade was 5.7, so "the annual survey of Myanmar journalists' opinions reveals that they think freedom of expression has actually decreased since last year," Mr. Spencer said.

The constitution's provisions related to freedom of expression and information were deemed the laws most urgently in need of amendment by the new democratically-elected government. The next pri-

orities for reform were the News Media Law and Broadcasting Law. A new reform priority raised this year was the Telecommunications Law, which in 2016 had been used to prosecute and imprison journalists and human rights defenders, under Article 66(d), for criminal defamation online.

Participants also demanded reform of the Penal Code, which has been largely untouched since being enacted under the British colonial government in 1861. The top priority is reform of criminal defamation law, which has been used to sue journalists by subjects that did not like the reporting. Penalties in the Penal Code for insulting religion also need to be amended. Compared to the 2015 survey, survey respondents placed less of a priority on reform of sedition laws.

Asked to rate the Myanmar Press Council for its work to defend freedom of expression, half the journalists thought it had been successful and half did not. In the 2015 survey, the majority of participants said the Council needed to work harder to be independent. In 2016, participants were more interested in the Council leading the amendment of media laws. Regarding state-owned newspapers and broadcasters, the respondents said they should be abolished or turned into public service media. Finally, the overwhelming majority of journalists said they were not free to report on the military conflicts.

11. ANNEX

11.1 Annex 1

Agenda for 5th Media Development Conference / YANGON – Nov 7 & Nov 8, 2016 @ Chatrium Hotel, Yangon

Inclusive Independent Media in a New Democracy

07 NOVEMBER 2016 (MONDAY)

8:30 AM	REGISTRATION
9:00 AM	OPENING SESSION Panellists: » H.E. Dr. Pe Myint, Union Minister, Ministry of Information » Ms Min Jeong Kim, Head of Office of UNESCO in Myanmar » Mr. Steffan Herrstrom, Ambassador, Embassy of Sweden to Myanmar » U Khin Maung Lay, Chairman of the Myanmar News Media Council (Myanmar Press Council) Key note speaker: U Thiha Saw, Executive Director, Myanmar Journalism Institute
10:00 AM	GROUP PICTURE / TEA BREAK
10:30 AM	SESSION 1: REVIEW OF MEDIA LAWS AND SPACES Panellists: Daw Thida Tin, Deputy Director General, IPRD, MOI U Myint Kyaw, Member, Myanmar News Media Council U Khin Maung Win, Deputy Director, DVB Mr. Oliver Spencer, Head of Asia, Article 19 Moderator: U Ko Ko, Patron, Myanmar Journalist Association 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
11:45 AM	SESSION 2: SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS / IMPUNITY Panellists: » U Than Zaw Aung, Secretary , Myanmar Media Lawyers Network » U Khin Maung Tun, Deputy Director General, Union Supreme Court Office » Ma Nan Ohmar Aung, Senior reporter, Shan Herald News » Lars Heiberg Bestle, IMS-Fojo Myanmar Media Development Programme and IMS Head of Asia Department

	Moderator: U Zayar Hlaing, General Secretary, Myanmar Journalist Network 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
1:00 PM	LUNCH
2:00 PM	SESSION 3: GENDER AND MEDIA _Panellists: » Ma Thin Thin Thar, Executive Member, Myanmar Journalist Union » Esther Htu San, Reporter, AP » Eaint Khine Oo, CEC Member, Myanmar Women Journalist Society » Daw Nan Paw Gay, Chief Editor, Kayin Information Centre Moderator: Agneta Soderberg-Jacobson, Senior Gender Advisor, IMS-Fojo Myanmar Media Development Programme 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
3:15 PM	TEA BREAK
3:45 PM	SESSION 4: SOCIAL MEDIA THE GAME CHANGER Panellists: » Ma Phyu Phyu Thi, R&D Manager, Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO) » Ko Nay Ye, Marketing and Communications Manager, Phandeeyar » U Thiha Thwe, Senior Journalist, NHK) » U Swe Win, Chief Reporter, Myanmar Now Moderator: U Myo Tha Htet, Media Adviser, Internews 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
5:00 PM	END OF DAY 1
7:00 PM	DINNER (HOSTED BY FOREVER GROUP)

08 NOVEMBER (TUESDAY)

9:30 AM	SESSION 5: RIGHT TO INFORMATION Panellists: » U Tin Maung Oo, Member, Commission for Assessment of Legal Affairs and Special Issues » Daw Nwe Zin Win, Executive Director, Pyi Gyi Khin » U Aung Hla Tun, Vice Chairman, Myanmar News Media Council » Toby Mendel, Executive Director, Centre for Law and Democracy Moderator: U Aung Myo Min, Executive Director, Equality Myanmar 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
10:45 AM	TEA BREAK
11:15 AM	SESSION 6: SUSTAINABILITY OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA Panellists: » U Thaug Su Nyein, CEO of Information Matrix and Chief Editor, 7 Days » U Myo Aung, Editor-in-Charge, Dawei Watch » Daw May Thingyan Hein, CEO of Myitmakha News Agency » Daw Aye Hnin Swe, Managing Director, Mango Media Moderator: U Soe Myint, CEO/Chief Editor, Mizzima Media 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
12:30 PM	LUNCH
1:30 PM	SESSION 7: STRENGTHENING VOICES OF COMMUNITY MEDIA Panellists: » U Ko Ko Zaw, Chief Editor, Than Lwin Times » Daw Wint Wade, Senior Producer, BBC Media Action » Salai Hon Tun Gai, Executive Director, Chin Media Network » Mr. Per Oesterlund, Senior Media Consultant, DW Akademie Moderator: Daw Tu Tu Thar, Founder/ Chief Editor, Thanlyin Post Journal 40 minutes for presentations / 35 minutes for discussion
2:45 PM	TEA BREAK

3.15 PM	SESSION 8: CONCLUDING SESSION AND CLOSING The session will summarise the main points and key recommendations shared by panellists and participants. Panellists » Daw Thida Tin, Deputy Director General, Information and Public Relations Department, Ministry of Information » Ms. Teresa McGhie, Mission Director, USAID Myanmar » U Khine Myat Kyaw, Director, Burma News International » Daw Zin Mar Kyaw, Associate Professor, Journalism Dep., National Management Degree College Moderator: Ms. Min Jeong Kim, Head of Office, UNESCO Myanmar Duration : 45 minutes
4.00 PM	END
5.00 PM	COCKTAIL (HOST TBC)

