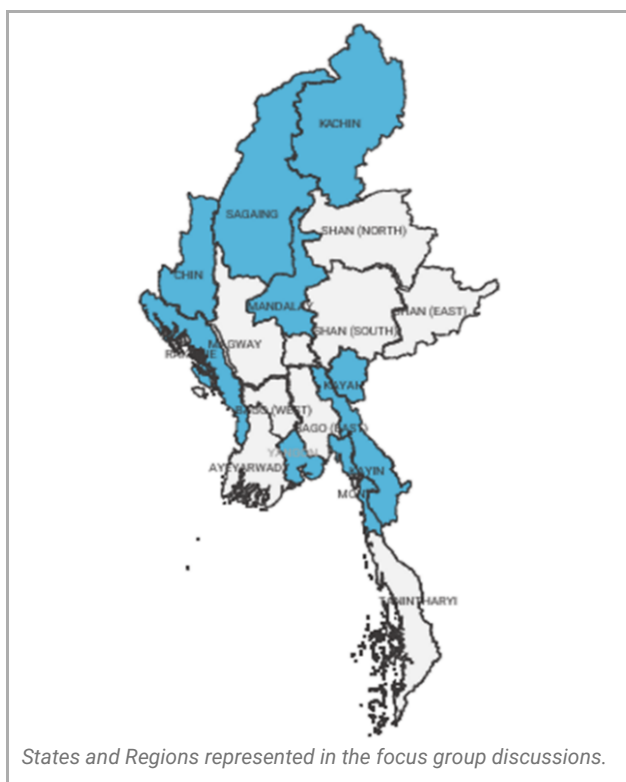


Women-Led Organisations Sustaining Humanitarian Access in Myanmar

March 2026

About this analysis

This brief, developed by a GiHA partner, draws on focus group discussions with 18 women-led organisations (WLOs) and women's rights organisations (WROs) delivering humanitarian assistance across Myanmar in 2025. It presents field-based evidence to inform access strategies, humanitarian programming, inclusive coordination, and funding. The brief also highlights the need for greater recognition of WLOs and WROs as equal leaders, trusted partners, and decision-makers in locally driven humanitarian response.



Humanitarian context

Protracted conflict, climate disasters and economic collapse have devastated lives in Myanmar, and

women and girls are among the most affected. They face overlapping risks, including gender-based violence, trafficking, loss of livelihoods, and the erosion of essential services. Despite the challenges – including unprecedented global funding cuts – WLOs and WROs remain on the frontlines of the humanitarian response. They play a critical role in sustaining access to lifesaving assistance, often under highly constrained and high-risk conditions.

Humanitarian access constraints for WLOs and WROs

WLOs/WROs face significant challenges in conflict-affected areas, including pervasive security threats, deliberate obstruction, and severe movement restrictions. The 2025 earthquake has only worsened these challenges.



100%

face security threats and deliberate obstruction



89%

encounter increased checkpoint scrutiny, technology-enhanced security checks, and forced route changes

89%

face direct safety and security risks from airstrikes and bombings during travel and service delivery

89%

receive limited, partial, or minimal access support from funding partners when navigating access challenges

Gendered risks for female staff

53% face safety threats while travelling to communities

22% are subjected to sexual harassment at checkpoints and during community programming

Gendered advantages for female staff



Often gain easier access to communities because of strong, trust-based relationships



Greater acceptance by affected populations



In some contexts, fewer barriers at checkpoints

Adaptive access strategies of WLO/WROs

WLOs and WROs demonstrate sophisticated and adaptive approaches to sustaining humanitarian access in fragmented and volatile contexts.

72% use community-based access strategies, with women community leaders playing critical roles in mediating access

61% use strategic relationship management, including stakeholder analysis, power mapping, and the use of existing networks

17% use field-level negotiation, with field staff leading engagement and building trust at the local level

"There is no best approach [to humanitarian access]. The challenges that we experience are different each year and getting more complicated. Challenges from 2023 were not the same as in 2024 ... Now, in 2025, it is more complicated and difficult."

Representative from a WLO in Myanmar

Gaps between localisation commitments and practice

WLOs and WROs report persistent gaps between rhetoric on localisation and practice in funding, coordination, and duty of care. These gaps contribute to unequal power dynamics and erode trust between local organisations and the wider humanitarian system.



61% report limited access to funding, with the perception that most resources flow through intermediaries



50% report never receiving duty-of-care-related funding despite operating in high-risk environments



44% report financial pressures that put organisational sustainability at risk, particularly due to underfunded core and operational costs



67% face significant barriers to meaningful participation in humanitarian coordination



33% report inadequate recognition and limited consultation in response planning

Recommendations

For humanitarian actors

- Recognise and leverage WLO and WRO expertise, including their ability to reach marginalized groups, across all stages of the humanitarian response, including through their meaningful and safe participation in coordination and decision-making spaces.
- Ensure the Localization Working Group and Humanitarian Access Working Group integrate gendered and intersectional considerations into their workplans, analysis, and recommendations, with regular reporting back to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT).
- Promote a culture of shared risk and responsibility, where international agencies, donors, and the HCT collectively bear security, financial, and reputational risks alongside local organisations.
- Support safe, context-sensitive documentation of WLO and WRO contributions and community impact to demonstrate effectiveness and build donor confidence, without compromising staff or community safety.

For donors

- Ensure duty of care is fully resourced and implemented, including provisions for staff safety, emergency support, mental health services, and context-specific risk mitigation.
- Champion WLO and WRO leadership by funding and enabling their safe, meaningful participation in coordination, policy dialogue, and access negotiations at all levels (e.g., covering costs for connectivity, interpretation, safe transport, and caregiving responsibilities).
- Expand and simplify direct funding channels and pooled funding mechanisms accessible to WLOs and WROs, and prioritise quality funding that is predictable, flexible, and covers full operational, compliance, and duty-of-care costs.
- Adequately resource the Myanmar Humanitarian Fund, which is critical to ensuring local organisations, including WLOs and WROs, can access quality funding direct.

This analysis was supported by the Complex Risk Analytics Fund (CRAF'd), a multi-partner initiative supporting improved use of data and analytics to anticipate, prevent and respond to complex risks.

About the Myanmar Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group

The Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group aims to ensure gender is integrated across all areas of humanitarian response and coordination in Myanmar.

It brings together women-led and women's rights organisations, community groups, NGOs, UN agencies, donor gender focal points (as observers), and cluster leads.

The group is co-led by UN Women and UNFPA.

For more information

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