

Understanding the Role of Civil Society Organization in Raising Public Voices to the Government in Bogalay of Ayeyarwady Delta Region, Myanmar.

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Abstract

In Myanmar, the discussion and engagement between the government and public is almost impossible during the previous government. Nowadays, there have been engagement between the government and public through the civil society organizations. It is very interesting to understand how these engagement are happening, how the relationship between government and public are happening, how the public is advocating to the government and addressing the important issues that the public is facing. Because these public and government engagement are critical important for Myanmar transition to Democracy.

The objective of this study is to understand the role of civil society organizations in raising public voices to the government in Bogalay of Ayeyarwady Delta Region, Myanmar. This study is mainly qualitative research method base on Anthropology research conducted in Bogalay of Ayeyarwaddy Region from December 2014 to September 2015. One successful and another unsuccessful advocacy and engagement on issue are selected. Data are collected using methods of social anthropology; in-depth interviews with member of grassroots association, community members, and government official, and field observations of public-government relationship in Ayeyarwaddy.

The outcomes and the relationship of public and government engagement can be different according to the having common interest among them, the participation of people, relationship among the stakeholders, different advocacy strategies and efforts. In conclusion, this study provides real life experiences of rural people and the civil society organizations engagement with the government authority addressing the issues which are critical important. By presenting the one

successful and another unsuccessful engagements, this study find out the factor influencing on the engagement process.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to praise and thank God for guiding me so I could complete this research. I am indebted to many people who helped me in various ways. My heartfelt thanks goes to Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD) for giving me a chance to conduct research under the “Understanding Myanmar’s Development” research fellowship program. Particularly, my gratitude goes to the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada for their financial support, without which this research could not have been completed.

Secondly, my warmest gratitude goes to Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and U Tin Maung Than, my mentor and editor. I must express my thanks for their impressive instruction, patience, concrete suggestions and every kind of help.

Glossary

Union Government	Central government of Myanmar
Chief Minister	Chief Executive of state or region government
Hluttaw	Council or assembly. Historically a council of ministers, now denotes legislative bodies at national and state/region level
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw	Union Legislative Assembly: a joint session of upper and lower houses of parliament
Pyithu Hluttaw	People's Assembly: lower house of parliament
Amyotha Hluttaw	Nationalities Assembly: upper house of national
Community Based Organization	voluntary associations which form by the community to fulfill the community needs.

Acronyms

NLD	National League for Democracy
NDF	National Democratic Force
MIMU	Myanmar Information Management Unit
USDP	Union State and Development Party
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CBO	Community Base Organization
NGO	Non-government Organization
LNGO	Local Non-government Organization

Introduction

The mass, grassroots movements' especially regional wide engagement on policies formulation process with the national and regional level authorities is very significant in Myanmar. In the transitional context of Myanmar, engaging with the authorities and initiating changes has often been seen as a matter of high level government engagement especially, mainly of international organizations and elite sectors of Myanmar Society. However, Myanmar's transitional context has seen the renegotiation of power relations at multiple level. While there are policies dialogues in Naypyitaw, the grassroots communities such as farmers, fishers, landless, laborers, small scale traders in the rural area are also seizing the new opportunities by mobilizing and reaching out to the local authorities to address the pressing issues but also to establish the long term relationship with the government. The case of grassroots movements in Ayeyarwaddy demonstrate the non-elite actors challenge longstanding norms around what is possible for communities to achieve in Myanmar, it is important to have in-depth understanding . To understand the development process of grassroots associations evolution from 2008 to 2014.To explore how this three stakeholders (public-government and grassroots associations) relationship among in their region/ community.

Research Problem

In Ayeyarwaddy Division, state-civil society and public meetings are not like the meetings in other regions. There have never been such a meeting to discuss about the political, social and economic issues happening at the grassroots level in Myanmar. It did not happen in the past and it does not happen in nowadays in other states and divisions. We need to understand why and how these meetings are happening at the Ayeyarwaddy. The happenings are the cause of political reform and the changes are critical situation. There was no previous study carried out to understand this kind of phenomena in Myanmar. So, the kind of study research is needed to be done. By doing this research, it can be understood how government reforms have impact on the grassroots level, how public and government are having interaction by civil society organization. By understanding this process it is expected that these good practice can be adapt in other states and regions resulting in more democratic society.

Research Objectives and Questions

My research to understand the role of civil society organizations in raising public voices to the government in Bogalay of Ayeyarwady Delta Region, Myanmar. There have two main research objectives:

1. To understand the development process of civil society organizations evolution from 2008 to 2014.
2. To explore how this three stakeholders (public-government and civil society organizations) relationship among in their region/ community.

Research Methodology

The research in this study was mainly qualitative base on grounded theory using the ethnographic approaches. A literature review was conducted of academic literature, articles in the press, translated legislation, NGO reports, complain letters, newsletters, and policy recommendations, audio and video records of the state-civil society meetings reports.

Research conducted 25 Key Informant interviews, individual in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions with the people who has been affect and facing with the issues, community leaders, village authorities, the representative of the community, mentors, member of the community base organizations, officers from the Non-government organization, officers from the government department. I also used the participant observation method in the village level meetings, township level meeting in Bogalay and Pathein townships in Ayeyarwaddy. In order to understand the current conditions, relationship and possibilities for community base organisations to dealing with the government. Another reason is that how do these actors (public-government and civil society organizations) are participated in different kind of level meetings- village, township and region.

To explore the first objective of my study for the development process of these community base organizations from the period of 2008 to 2014. As there are many of them, I only selected Alin

Tan social development organization from southern Bogalay as my case study. As Alin Tan organization is one of the most active and most mobilized communities, it will be able to reflect the whole civil society movements in Ayeyarwaddy. I particularly tried to understand how they have gradually developed over time, how they networked with other organizations, how they mobilized the community and how they dealing with the authorities in different levels.

Another to explore my second objective of my study, I selected the two kind of common issues from the community who have been mostly issue discuss. Land confiscation by the army and small scale fisher rights issues were selected. The research base on this two issues, the persons who have been involved case studies are strongly finding in my research. My research analysis on the selected only six cases which is different people in the community. Some case from the people who are beneficial in the State-civil society meetings and some case from the people who are highly representative from the community they have been involved in this evolution process.

The whole research process time take 13 months from October 2014 to October 2015. I was carry out the preliminary research for one month in December 2014. My academic paper design by base on my preliminary finding. Stakeholder analysis, modified and developed the questions for different actors, common coding and themes collect and selected based on the preliminary finding. There was nearly two months in the field trip to data collection in January and February 2015. After my field finding I was reviewing and analyzing the data using the method of SWOT analysis.

Description of the field site

My field research area is called Ayeyarwaddy Region is located in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta and is the lowest expanse of land in Myanmar. It is called Ayeyarwaddy Delta Region because the long flowing of Ayeyarwaddy River from top of country in Kachin state ends at this area forming many rivers, channels and several creeks. In the delta, the Ayeyarwaddy River's main tributaries are the Pathein River, Bogalay River and Toe River. Ayeyarwaddy Division is composed of 6 districts such as Pathein district, Maupin district, Myaungmya district, Hinthada district, Lapputta district, Pyapone district. Of these district, Pathein district is composed of 6 townships, Maupin district is composed with 4 townships, Myaungmya district is composed with 2 townships, Hninthada district is composed with 8 townships, Latputta district is composed with 2 townships and Pyapone district is composed with 4 townships respectively. There are altogether 26 townships. Under districts there are altogether

72 village tracts and several villages in Ayeyarwaddy. Patheingyi is the capital township of Ayeyarwaddy Region. Ayeyarwaddy is one of the most populous regions of Myanmar.



Figure 1: Ayeyarwaddy Region of Myanmar

Being such an ethnic diverse country, there is a number of ethnic communities living together in the delta region. There are three primary ethnic groups: the Bamar make up the majority of the population with smaller numbers of ethnic Karen and Rakhaing while the latter live on the largely west coast whereas the Bamar and Karen are distributed throughout the Delta. Depending on the

settlement history, the villages are composed with different ethnicity (Maung Mya, 1991). There are also small numbers of Mon who are Buddhist and Indian Muslims. Ayarwaddy is widely known among the Myanmar people as “Rice basket of Myanmar” as it produces high amount and good quality of rice which is main source of local consumption. The livelihoods of the people of Ayeyarwaddy delta are primarily farmers, fishers, home gardeners and laborers with a small proportion engaged in service industries and working as traders. While there are some district cities mentioned above are accessible by the roads, the majority of the population live in small villages along the banks of delta area and are accessible only by the river, making boats as important means for transports.

Despite its fertile and plain lands, the majority of the people living in Ayeyarwaddy are poor and the region can be regarded as one of the poorest region of the country. It share the highest values of poverty 32 % of the people are under the poverty contributing 19% of the national poverty incidence 2009-2010 (IHLC, 2010) In addition to their poverty situation, cyclone Nargis ,which hit the Lower Myanmar on 2nd and 3rd may and left the more than 4million people dead, pushed further into poverty and debt. I was repeatedly told by many respondents during the field trip that the small farmers and fishers in the area are increasingly losing access to the land and fishing ground.

Chapter 2: The Context of the Study

Background of Myanmar Reform

After half of a century, Myanmar is experiencing what appeared to be the democratic transition of the country. The long drafted constitution was released by the military government on 9th April 2008 and the parliamentary democracy is reintroduced after 50 years of time. In 2011 the military rule was officially replaced by a new government led by President Thein Sein, which has taken steps towards democratization, *political reforms and reopening of the country toward the outside world*. The reforms process has generated some possibilities to achieve a more inclusive society in which the benefits from economic development and greater integration into the regional and global economies are equality shared among all the citizens. In this process, the rich natural resources of the country, including land, forest and water will be essential components to

achieve more inclusive development. Especially, the decisions over the property rights on the natural resources will be significant important for the majority of the Myanmar population who engaged in the agriculture sector and reside in rural area.

Background of the Communities

Farmers in Ayeyarwaddy are very restricted in their ownership of land the rights to use. There is no freedom for the farmers to grow crops of their choice. They have no access to government-backed bank loans and resort to the local money-lender. They are often charged 10–20 per cent a month for loans from informal moneylenders and at the harvesting time, as they payments are due, the small scale farmers have to sell to the money lenders and middle men at the price below the market price. In addition the recent cyclone nargis in 2008 have destroyed almost all paddy crops in the area. Farmers felt added pressures to maximize yields in the wet and dry season – and to do this, they turned to increased use of fertilizer. And yet, while fertilizer use and its associated costs-increased season by season, yield remained.

Likewise, many fishers in Ayeyarwaddy are losing their livelihoods due to unclear and biased inland fishery laws. The fishers are forced to ‘buy’ fishing rights from local businessmen, who themselves get access to the rights through a Department of Fisheries (DoF) tender process. Many fishers in the delta do not have access to formal credit and are often charged 10–20 per cent a month for loans from informal moneylenders. They have limited access to government extension services and have little information on fish markets (NAG, 2010). The fishers are then forced to sell their catch to middlemen and businessman, leaving them with virtually no profit. In this way, fishers and farmers become vulnerable and a vicious cycle of poverty and debt and suffered exploitation from weakness of law, lack of regulation, exploitative prices; cheating on weights and measurement, high interest.

The combination of these acute and longstanding issues has meant that many farming families with large accumulated debt have been forced to sell their land. The problems of the farming and fishing communities also affected the casual laborers and other people engaged in these industries.

Background of the Community Based Organization in Bogalay

In Myanmar, there are many CBOs which help the social welfare of the village as women association or youth association and these associations stand for health and social affairs. There are

the young leaders of the village, young men's leader and young women's leader and the leader of the whole village called Tha Gyi in Myanmar language. These groups are strong in the community. But, according to the law of Myanmar, it is not allowed to form group. So, the civil organizations and CSOs were only as social welfare organizations and their roles were diminished. Under military rule in Burma/Myanmar¹, independent groups have had little space in which to emerge and develop. Some religious, cultural, and social welfare organizations have been allowed to function outside direct government control, particularly at the local level, but many seemingly innocent organizations have either been eliminated or co-opted.

CBOs (Community Based Organization) were started to have strong foundation in 2008 and it can be recognized that there are civil society organizations in Ayeyarwaddy Division in Myanmar. A dynamic, varied, active, mobilized and intelligent civil society exists in Myanmar.² In Nargis, CSOs have to work over bound when the government cannot control the situation. So they have more space to empower. The organizations were cooperated with the international organizations, NGOs to rehabilitate their village. Women, youths, monks, farmers, marine workers participated in the CBOs. They are the volunteers of the village.

The leaders of the CBOs are the people who used to lead the village such as ex- administrator, ex-teacher and monks. In other way, they had power and influenced the people in the village. They are the kind of people who are working as volunteers to do a development of the village. They are chosen and voted by the people. They worked in the past that's why they know the history of village and the country, so they can be regarded as spokesperson. They were the leader or administrator the village, they have connection with government staffs in township level and township administrator. They can connect to the level of township. They also have to take responsibility for the security to hold the meetings. After 2010, groups of CSOs are founded to connect with CBOs from other villages. The intension is to register as a registered organization and to help and solve the social and economic problems of people effectively. There are four CSOs Zone committees which represent for three townships such as Bogalay Township, KyaikLat Township and Mawlamyaing Kyun Township in Ayeyarwaddy division. The CSO named Ah Lin Tan (meaning radiant) represents southern Bogalay Township, RDO (Regional Development Organization) represents northern Bogalay Township, Pan Daing Shin represents KyaikLat Township and Yaung Ni Oo represents Mawlamyaing Kyun. They call

¹ As ICG Asia Report No. 11, *Burma/Myanmar: How Strong is the Military Regime?*, 21 December 2000,

²Post-Nargis report

the Civil Society Organization because CBOs of the village are organized and the organization is not formed by the government. Some people understand the concept of CSO but some people just call the organization's name. The villagers use the name of the organization and they know that the organizations stand for the people to present the government.

Background of Civil Society Organization in Ayeyarwaddy Region

Civil society is mentioned as international organization by the word of 'Public ends'. It means social welfare organizations. It means that the organization represents the people and works for the people.

“The notion of “civil society” used here is derived primarily from de Tocqueville (1994), and denotes voluntary, autonomous associations and networks that are intermediate between the state and the family, and concerned with public end”.³

Civil society can be defined as people's organization. It does not mean that people's organization cannot be formed by the government or someone for purposes. It means that people cooperate the work by their desire. CBOs of the villages are the members of CSO. People does not mean country, elite. It only means the people in a relatively lower position. It means the movement of the people in a relatively lower position and there is a definition from London Economics University in following. Civil society refers to the area of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purpose and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between civil society, state, family and market are blurred and negotiated. Civil societies are often populated by organizations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organizations professional associations, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.⁴

That's why CSO is a kind of organization which is formed for filling up the blank between the states and the families. Some people call CSO as Non-government organization. Although the meaning is right, it may be misunderstood as NGO. The different between NGO and CSO are researched and

³de Tocqueville (1994)

⁴Landon Economic University

mentioned as follow. In Myanmar, the role of NGO and CSO must be cleared. Some people may think CSO and NGO are the same. And also they think CSO and NGO are the same, but they are not. CSOs are not formed for setting up project. There is no administrative INGOs employed by ranks, projects, position and salary. The organizations (CSOs) are not commanded by anyone and they work as they have mindset that it is the responsibility to do for them. So they are the volunteer and there is no one to give command them. But they have better power. As they are the local people, they have bargaining power. Followings are the differences of CSO and NGO.

“NGO negotiates for the physical affair, but we try to solve the problems.”

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“If we have to give example, there is an affair of Myitsone (Ayeyarwaddy River). No one tell to know what we need to protect the Ayeyarwaddy River, but we know it in our instinct and we protect it by our patriotism. At that time, CSOs cooperate for it. Later technicians and people point out that the government is doing negative. It is the role of CSO.”⁶

It is because of the spirit to get successes of CSOs. People's organizations and CSOs are included in the important sector of democratic community.

Meaning of Workshop

There are workshops held by the government and by the purposes of business with varieties of topics. But these workshops are not for negotiating about the problems of living, land issues, health, social and livelihood of the people. In these workshops, the range of participants are from the ordinary people to ministers of divisions, technicians, civil organizations and government departments. The main point of holding workshop is to solve the problem by cooperating with the government. So the civil organizations try to invite the township level government departments to participate, but it is not successful.

“People has varieties of problems and they know they need to cooperate with the authorities to solve the problems. We tried to connect with authorities to participate. But they did not. They tried to do it. It was not successful because they have to be afraid of the officers from the upper ranks according to the formation of

⁵U Ohn Kywe - Bogalay Ah Lin Tan social organization

⁶ Interviews, Daw Daewi Thant Sin - The founder of River Green Network

the department. Only orders or commands are the preference of them looking by the way of administration or department. We would like to try to work with the authorities of division, so we need to connect with the prime minister of the division. We had to spend over a year to connect with him. The advocacy was successful because there is a direction of the prime minister that they have to attend and discuss at the workshops".⁷

People need to understand the rules and regulations, and the government should understand and help the problems of the people nowadays. *A program director discusses why it is needed to hold the workshops.*

"Sometimes, there is a gap between national level point of view and community level point of view. For example, our country is the chairperson of the ASEAN in 2014, there is one community. To be one economic community, new roads must be constructed. In constructing road, there may be land grabbing that is what we (community) concern. And in the economic sector, the powerful group will win. So, the local people do not accept the program and they say no. But they need to say no systematically. We must understand that we have to face ASEAN. To be a national level one community, some people work for it in advance. We must understand we have to face it. So they may see the problems of our grassroots and their situation. And we must have constructive dialogue what we should do." ⁸

Chapter Three: The Evolution of Civil Society Organisations in Ayeyarwaddy

Cyclone Nargis

Cyclone Nargis in May 2008 was one of the worst natural disasters of recent decades, killing over 130,000 people leaving over a million homeless. The Cyclone's impact was concentrated in the flat, heavily populated Ayeyarwady river delta area with the townships of Bogale, Kyaiklat and Mawlamyainggyun among those worst affected.

The role of Mentor of Paung Ku

⁷ Interviews, Chairman of Ah Lin Tan CSO, Bogalay township, Ayeyarwaddy region

⁸ Interviews, Phe Phe- Program Director of Paung Ku, Yangon Office

Paung Ku is a NGO founded in 2007 to mainly strengthen the civil society organization in Myanmar. After the devastated cyclone Nargis, Paung Ku worked for the development of the villages and after the political reform in 2010 Paung Ku supports to form groups of zone by organizing the community based organizations. It has since developed wider objectives related to civil society capacity to address and influence the major issues facing individual communities, and Myanmar as a whole. Paung Ku supports transportation charges, materials for communication, information to fishermen and farmers and information of law by holding trainings, workshops, and literacy talk. And also supports for exposure visit to other countries. Paung Ku mainly focus on experience learning to strengthen the civil society. It is not like other NGOs which only give trainings. Paung Ku teaches them to be able to apply or practice like writing the proposal for small grant, micro grant, reporting among themselves. Later, the role of CSOs are wider, so Paung Ku gives opinions to CSOs that how to speak with the government and how to grab the trusts of the people.

The Role of Local Mentor

The sector of mentors of CSOs is important to mention why CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) can connect and work well in Ayeyarwaddy Division. The responsibilities of mentors are to improve skills and give knowledge, to support sustainable development to CBOs (Community based organization) and to be able to connect with each CBOs and to establish a successful community among CBOs and the people. CBOs are improved in the short period of time because of the spirits and performance of the mentors who are the local consultants. Another point is that the strategy of Paung Ku Local NGO is also good for them. Paung Ku use the tool called mentoring for strengthening after 2010. And the organization give trainings to the middle-aged persons who are selected among the active CSOs and local organizations. To select the trainees, it was a priority that people who works for the voluntary works actively and the persons who is depended on by the local people. After the training, they became the mentor who consults for the social organizations. They are eager to develop their community and they can go and communicate with any villages. They have a strong conception to develop their community and they actively work for it. Mentors are not the persons who are not working as cooperators, they are working as consultants or volunteers in the local community. They also need to work for their living and when they have free time they work as mentors.

For example, there is mentor named Ko Thein Than, he is from Bogalay Township, his parents are farmers. As he is descendant from the pheasant, his parents do not support his education very much. His parents want him to work as a farmer. But Ko Thein Than was interested in education

and he tried very hard. He is the eldest son in his family. He proved that education is very important, if someone is educated the person may have a better life, so he studied till he is graduated and while he was a student he earned money by teaching the children. He has a younger brother and younger sister and he made them to be the educated persons. There were only handful amount of educated persons in Bogalay Township. Ko Thein Than teaches the children whether they are rich or poor. He is very interested in voluntary work and he spends his time for the affairs. Ko Thein Than always try to find out the solution for the difficulties of the local people and he is very eager to study why there are difficulties. Everyone know him in that region for his voluntary works. Local people respect Ko Thein Than. Ko Thein Than said he is interested the training so he applied for it.

There are four mentors who works for CSOs in Ayeyarwaddy Division. They work for the respective sectors as they have better performance and prefer, they work for the region where they are assigned. To improve the mentors' ability, the trainings which they may need, the information's such as information of law and policies, updated news of CSOs, travelling charges, phones, computers and stationary are supported to the mentors. Mentors have to give advice and help the people, administration of the village, CBOs from the villages. While they are working as consultants, a mentor has to support the discussion to know the solution or the source of the problems from detail discussion. So mentors are trained for long time to be able to do it. To be a mentor is difficult, they have to sacrifice their time and they are trained a lot and they have strong spirit.

At the mean time of mentors use their role to improve the discussions, they take the trust from villagers. Later, they make to get more interests of the discussions or meetings of the village. People participate the discussions or meetings because mentors could manage to reduce the fears and worries which the villagers have suffered and they can point out the way of participation. After that, to get the better performance of CBOs by accessing the advantages and disadvantages of the CBOs group by each other and they have to connect and cooperate each group. The role of mentors are improved by applying the advantages in how and where. CSOs have better views or opinions by the supports of mentors and they can apply the plan to reach the goal step by step. So, people have the right to speak more and more. Moreover, they understand their participating role and the tasks. They have skills to participate. The discussions are titled from the livelihoods to the law of the country. Ko Thein Than said that people understands what the wrong policies for us is and they can claim to the government in following.

“In the past, it is impossible to discuss about the policy and the law among the people. They cannot know by themselves. We give or support some information in the village discussions and some events. For example, they know the basic point is that the policy and the law is weak by discussing a case, we do not tell or point which law is weak, we only support and help to think for them. it is only the supporting to them.”⁹

From 2010 to 2012, mentors can upgrade CBOs to form Zone Committee according to the situations. Zone representative groups are formed by gathering the CBOs from the village.

There are CSOs (Civil Society Organization) like Ah Lin Tan @ Radiant a group which represents the whole southern Bogalay Township. It has already been written in the paragraph how they organize the CSO. Mentors help to form township representative groups and after the formation, they give necessary advices to meet with government organizations and other organizations. For example, they help the CSOs to understand how to present and how to apply for throwing a township event. Those are the main facts of making township level meetings and regional level meetings after 2012. The evolution process of meetings is mentioned in Township Level Meetings and Regional Level Meetings. The role of mentors is included in the evolution process of CSOs.

When there is a meeting, they need to participate in preparing questions to ask government, after the meeting they have to prepare for accessing the results of the meetings and the matters they have to do in the future. Later, the performance of mentors is better, so it is found out that they can participate well. The result is assumed that there is no aim to do but we use the opportunities we encountered. Now, mentors can work very well in developing the regions, communicating with the government offices. According to the study, the role of mentors is wider. Later, Paung Ku does not need to give commands to mentors where they go and what they do, they can choose the things they need to do themselves.

Village Level Meetings

There is a custom that village level meetings are held in village library, monastery, house of village leaders, and other places made for holding meetings weekly. In these meetings, they discuss openly like the family members and they also discuss about the problems in different levels like family affairs to village affairs step by step. Moreover, if there are special occasions like religious events or

⁹ Interviews, Ko Thein Than: Local Mentor of CSOs

other festivals, they call for making meetings. In these meetings, they share the duties groups by groups. The whole village take the responsibility for the affairs as volunteers actively. There is no discrimination for helping whenever they work for those affairs. The administrators of local villages also cooperate with the people in their village. Village meetings and other affairs are the customs of the villages since long time and after the devastating storm Nargis in 2008, it can also be found that they work for the development of their villages. For doing this kind of development, the financial sector and the role of participants are wider and wider. So, it is more important to manage, take responsibility and work effectively than the past. In performing the developing of village, it is not only one village's performance but also the cooperation with other villages, organizations and government departments. To be effectively, the village leaders are elected and make it as groups to lead the regarded sectors. Leaders are elected by the village people as they like. Those Leaders are the leaders of farmers, the leader of fisher and the leader of youths. Those leaders are the persons who can urge the villagers to follow his leading, the persons who has strong spirit for doing social affairs for the village, the person who are good at management, the educated persons, the persons who has little (or) more authority and the leader of the religion.

It is found out that management skills, performances are better and the leader of the village has wider knowledge while doing developing by the organization which is made up of the leaders of the village people. In some villages, if there is unnecessary projects which can be replaced to the villages which need the projects. At that time, it is a kind of result that CBOs can manage make the projects which is worked together with NGOs and also CBOs can access to the concerned government departments when the projects are being implemented. The performance of the CBOs of the villages are better for developing the villages but it is only for building more physical structures. The village people more depend on CBOs than NGOs which is only concerned with limitation. But it cannot reach to discuss about what the difficulties of their lives facing daily because there is no chance. It is also found out that people has fear and there is no organizations which is not bias and negotiate between powerful persons, rich persons, authorities and ordinary people. The leader of the Ah Lin Tan U Ohn Kywe explained the concerns are as follow.

"In the past, people do not will to depend on CSOs locally. No cooperation at the time of started implementing the system. Because there are many NGOs. People depend on NGOs which can supply money and materials they need directly. Later, CSOs tried to find out and solve the problems and difficulties

which the local people encounter in their daily lives as much as they can. Now people recognize the importance of CSOs.”¹⁰(Ah Lin Tan - Chairperson)

After the political reform in 2010, it is the main discussion of the meeting which is held in the local village. The democracy cannot be entirely changed within short time. After the election in 2010, the government released the strict rules for the media to present freely, so the results are that there are more information, speak freely and there is a slowly change that the public participation to the local mentor. In the past, the infrastructure of the village was mainly discussed but the topic changed to discuss for the difficulties of their lives.

Farming and fishery which are the basic livelihoods of the local people are mainly discussed. So the basic points of problems from farming and fishery are discussed and found out. Later the solutions are followed. The connections between villages are better by the discussions, so they discuss about collecting information, analyzing. Collecting information and checking the information which is right or wrong are performed to present the difficulties in the local village, after that there is an action that implementation. When there is a development of the village discussion, CBOs are collected and organized to form as Township CSOs. Only registered organizations can connect and cooperate with authorities. To be able to present to the authorities about the case of the villagers, information are collected from the village meetings. So the village meetings are the main source of basic information. Local people come to these meetings and they participate to the meetings and another point is that other civil organizations come and study to the places by joining the social leaders from the villages. In following, formation of CBOs, township meetings and the steps of foundation are mentioned under respective topics.

Issue Focus (Recommendation on New Land Law)

¹⁰ Interviews, U Own Kywe- Chairperson of Ah Lin Tan CSO, Bogalay, Ayeyarwady

After the political reform in 2010, the CBOs carried out the cross visit to be able to network among the villages and formed the zonal committee which represent the villages. It is intended to network easily, share information, and make interactive discussions and to learn each other. After that two representatives per a village are voted and selected in 15 villages. Then 10 zone committee members are elected among the 30 representatives. The zone representative group is formed from different four zones in Ayeyarwaddy division from 2010 to 2011. After forming the representative group, Ah Lin Tan which represents southern Bogalay is started by 9 villages and now it has over 40 villages. In 2012, new land law is emerged after forming the zone committee. It is the issue which the farmers are very interested in. The farmers from the (Ah Lin Tan CSO zonal committee organized a meeting in Tal Pin Thit village to gather CSOs and to give recommendation on the new land law on the Independent Day, 4th January 2012. It is the meeting to think and discuss about the new land law together. After reading the new land law, disadvantages and advantages were discussed. Then, the suggestions over the new land law is signed to present to Hluttaw, Hluttaw in Division, representatives of Hluttaw who live in townships. After finalizing the statements. People has to gather for getting signs in each zone and then present it. Accordingly to the one local person

“Since after the new land law is issued on 2012, it gave us some opportunity to solve many of our existing problems. We came to understand about the new land law from the leader of the SCO. According to the new land law, we will be able to register, own and reclaim the ownership for the original owner.”¹¹

In January 2012, these networks formulated a set of recommendations about new land laws about to be adopted in parliament. Together with over fifteen hundred farmer’s signatures, the recommendations were sent to Myanmar President Thein Sein, the Speakers of Parliament (or *Hluttaw*) and local members of Parliament. The farmer’s petition was an exciting moment: It represented one of the first examples of mass, grassroots to national policy engagement with Myanmar’s new government. And it represented extraordinary growth: four years prior, these farmers had been working individually to rebuild after the devastation of Cyclone Nargis.¹²

While there is a discussion about developing the farmers' lives, peoples' wishes are collected and presented. While presenting the draft land law in Hluttaw, small scale farmers in Ayeyarwaddy

¹¹Interviews, Ko Naing Soe- Secretary of Regional Development Organization CSO

¹²Paung Ku- Growing Networks- March 2013 report

division discussed with 800 farmers about the solution to solve the problems they had. The result is signed by 1673 farmers and they did signature campaign.

Their recommendations are as follow-

1. Although there are purchasings of rice paddy, the exact information which is the rate of quality, price, weight, moisture fixed by the government must be sent to the farmers in time by relevant company.
2. The names of the banks which has the right to work as money lending centre for formers according to the land law must be confirmed and published in time of cultivation, because there are losing farmlands and losing the opportunity to cultivate because of dropping market price of subsidiary paddy drops, high initial costs, high price, high interest rate on money loan.
3. The formation of the farmer union which can work or cooperate with the government to develop the profit of the farmers must be allowed.
4. The government must perform for the farmers to get qualified fertilizers and Pesticides.
5. The government must perform for the farmers who need to get marketable seed grains.
6. The government must perform that the products must be purchased by the companies with right weighing machines or materials.
7. The government must keep the price of rice especially not to rise when there is no rice paddy in farmers' hands.
8. The government must perform for the soil test and to contribute the techniques for getting the qualified rice.
9. The government must allow the farmers to repair the irrigation system as proper way of irrigation to the farmland to cultivate the irrigation methods.
10. The government must draw and confirm the law to solve the arguments between farmers and fishermen in seasons of cultivation in their respective fields.
11. The decent compensation fees must be given to the farmers to work for a living for long time when the farmers' farm land is taken by the government to undertake the national projects (or) the farmers must have the right to get the same amount of benefit as a share holder when the farmers' farm land is given to the company.

These claims are sent to union government (Nay Pyi Taw), Chief Minister: Chief Executive of state or region government, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw-Union Legislative Assembly: a Joint session of Upper

and lower houses of parliament, Amyotha Hluttaw- Upper House ,Pyithu Hluttaw-Lower House, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock-Union Level, Member of Parliament respectively.7 claims among 13 claims of farmers' right are allowed.

Township Level Meetings

After the zonal committee were formed there have been stronger network among the CSOs. The people are also increasing involved in CSOs' activities because CSOs had generated the recommendation on the new land law when it was drafted in Parliament. The CSO got more attention from the public and government. Based on this experience the CSO have made many effort to include the government official in their meetings. There have been four township level meetings already organized once in three months. The township level meetings were organized in Bogalay, Kyatlit, and Mawlamyngjyung Township respectively. There were many difficulties in organizing the first meeting.

Before the meeting were held, the CSOs had to collect the issues which are to discuss at the meeting. They also have to make sure that people, themselves or a representative be able to present the issues at the meeting. They also had to make sure the presence of the different government departments at the meeting. CSOs has to send the collected issues to discuss to the government department in one day advance. Also, after the meeting, the CSOs are to record the discussions and produce the minutes reports. In this way, the CSOs are making sure the meetings are happening successfully.

Some of the government officials start appreciated on the efforts of CSOs made. One government official stated that "At first, I thought these meetings will be no use for us. People will ask some unnecessary questions, the CSOs will put blames on us. After the first meeting, I no longer have these concerns, because the CSOs' engagements to us are very constructive, they talk about how we can cooperate together to make improvements. For example: the CSOs offer some of their contributing including the cash and labors for the road constructions.

The CSOs also have made efforts to include the chief of the minister to the meeting so as to be able to convince many government departments to cooperate in the meeting as well as the post conference works. Finally, they could convince the chief of the ministers to join the meeting as well as the other departments.

“I think it is much effective to directly talk to the chief minister because he not only directly answer the questions but also he instructed the respective to government to solve the problems”

One time, during the meeting, a representative asked about the over 300 acres of land confiscated by the government for piloting some rice species if these lands are actually benefiting the nation or they become the benefit of some individuals. Now these lands are not benefiting the country and actual farmers who used to work on these lands are losing their rights and suffering. If these lands are not returned to the original owners, farmers, the government will not be implementing the clean government and good governance accordingly its promise. In addition, though the union level decisions is to return the lands which were previously confiscated by the military and no longer in use, the regional level institutions are implementing and insisting to return the lands. After this request, the minister U Sann Maung replied that these issues to be addressed soon, however, the lands are still not returned to the original owners yet.

One CSOs members remark that “ Though these meetings do not produce the immediate changes or results, there become more space for general public to express and engage in this issues which are critical important to us. In past, we were very fear to talk about military, politics, human rights. We now have more chance to give recommends, suggests and involved in the laws changing process. The government authorities have more soft and flexible with the general public.”¹³

Regional Level Meetings

As the township level meetings do not have enough coverage to address the problems, the regional meetings were organized. The regional meetings were held at Patheingyi, the capital city of Aeyyarwaddy region. Until today, three regional level meeting were already organized. Each of this meeting were recorded by the video. While around 80 issues were discussed at the township level meeting, around 150 to 200 issues were discussed at the regional meeting. Some of the issues which cannot be resolved during the township level meetings were carried to the regional level meeting.

¹³ Interview, U Myint Khine – Farmer of Tal Pin Thit village

Chapter Four: Relationships between the Three Actors

How CSOs bring the public voices to the government

Some cases can have directly affect the government departments – and as you know, accordingly to the constitutions- these departments are under the management of the ministry of home affairs. The CSOs reach out the community members to generate the issues and cases which are suffering their lives. These issues are generated from the village level discussions led by the members of CSOs or the members of the CSOs reached out the communities which have been suffering from the cases. Before the big workshop, we invited the people who have issues and would like to discuss during the workshop. There are two parts – during the SA meeting- we mainly focus on the accountability – we try to collect the cases happening in the different townships such as farm, fishery and other issues. After collecting the cases, we also have to select the representatives from 26 townships to represent at the meeting. Then we modify the questions so that it becomes more comprehensive. The CSOs general sort out the issues received into two categories. The first group is that complaint letter which can be resolved through the meeting, the second group is those complaint letters which are quite sensitive for the government and couldn't resolve at a public event. Some of the issues which cannot be resolved during the meetings such as which can directly have shame on the government officials such as corruptions, lack of rule of laws, and the miss-use of the laws. One of the example is the township administrative officials have personalized the common fishing grounds and charging the fishers on fishing on it. If this kinds of cases were presented at the meeting, that can lead him to be a shamed and directly resulted in the punishments and resulting in the high tensions between the CSOs and government officials.

There is another cases where the complained have done successful. For example: there are many cases on the complaint on the lands which have been previously confiscated by the military. The union level land working committee- composed with many ministries and army have already decided to return the lands and the local levels authorities are insisting to the returns the lands. Therefore, CSOs thoroughly collect the data- compile the cases and submit to the chief minister of the region. The regional government can privately give warning and take action against the respective authorities and the issues can resolve calmly. By general observations on the cases above, many of the people suffering are directly resulted from the miss-use and corruptions of the authorities. And there is no or little willingness of the local level officials and authorities cooperate in resolving these kinds of cases.

Their cooperation mainly limited by two major reason. In some cases, they, they are insisting for the changes as they are getting benefit from the problems and limitation from highly centralized bureaucracy system. There is no initiation to resolve the problems from the authorities.

However, they now dare not commit the self-interest activities and treat the public more softly. In previous time, the people have to be fear of the officials even the normal clerk. Both process have some responses- while the complaint letter discussed during the meeting have faster responses and actions than those of not publically discussed.

Accordingly one paper “However, the extent and success of communication has varied depending on the personal interests and prerogatives of individuals Hluttaw representatives. In one region, it was noted that “civil society has no communication with the Hluttaw representatives although the representatives are interested, they had never met them in person.”¹⁴

Engagement on a direct, individual level appears to be the most common medium, in none of the case study states and regions were there any formularized and routine interactions between the Hluttaw or state/region governments with the general public, say for instance by allowing the public to witness Hluttaw session or conducting “ town hall” type forums. The large scale public meetings in which government actors interact with civil society and the general public, seems to occur when instigated and framed around the program me interests of an international assistance actors.¹⁵

Relationship between the CSOs and Government

It can be observed that the relationship between the civil society organization and government has significantly improved over the period. There has no other civil society organization in other state/region of the country. This dynamic of the civil society organization is directly relating to the regional government. In Ayeyarwaddy, the regional governments just have to recognize the role of CSOs in Ayeyarwaddy. Accordingly to one member of the CSOs

“The cooperation of the government departments is reflectively very low. They are working based on the orders from above, there is no such as thing they start intimating to serve the public. The main difference is – the

¹⁴ State and Region Government in Myanmar, Sep 2013

¹⁵ State and Region Government in Myanmar, Sep 2013

relationship between the public and government officials have been improved. Previously the people have to be feared of the government officials even the office Clark and now they treat the public with respects”¹⁶

From the continuous networking and discussions among the villages, the networks and zonal committee were formed. After some period of trying to address the many of social-economic problems faced by the public, we realized that we have to cooperate with the authorities to effectively address these problems. As the first attempt, the CSOs attempt to work with the government officials from the township level; however, their cooperation was limited by their top down bureaucratic system.

“When we look at both the administrative or ministries in Myanmar, we found that these departments are mostly operated with the orders from above. Therefore, CSOs decided to connect to the regional government and only after one year time, the prime minister showed the interest and got the cooperation”

¹⁷

We received their cooperation only after 2012. Now, the CSOs and government have been discussing many of the pressing problems and trying to address them. The government has now more sense of responsibilities. It can be observed that the CSOs and local government relationships were mainly happening through the meetings. It was found that the meeting between CSOs and government also has served as an effective mechanism to address many of the critical problems. One of the farmers whose lands been confiscated by the military and seeking for the helps said that different from other channels such as through the political parties, media, sending to complain letter to the central land investigation committee, these meeting serve a platform to make direct engagement with the each respective persons.

“We have been going through different channels such as talking to the political parties, media, compiling the case to the central land investigation committee and none of them can directly address the problem. However, through these meetings, we could directly meet with the prime minister, respective government for the land confiscations”¹⁸

Another interesting point is these grassroots associations were formed just to address many of the issues faced by communities. However, they received more knowledge and they become more

¹⁶ Interviews, Ko Thein Than- CSO mentor, Bogalay Township

¹⁷ Interviews, U Oh Kywe, the chairperson of Alin than Association

¹⁸ Interviews, U Soe , representative of CSO

aware about the importance of their role in the political process. Therefore, they become more engaged and give recommendations to the policies which are directly relating to them. A farmer from Ah Lin Tan Association said that

“Before, we just intend to inform our livelihoods difficulties from these meetings. Just expect the government department to solve the issues we raise. We did not understand how important our roles are. At that time, our situation was to managing to think how to present, how to express and negotiation. Now, we come to understand we can only escape from the poverty only when our grassroots farmers’ practical voices are excluded in these laws”¹⁹

I also found out that the grassroots socially are tactically and cleverly engaging with the government. For example: They discuss about the issues before they present in the meetings. Moreover, they just rise the discussion only on issues which can be resolved by the government officials. They do not discuss the issues which can disgrace, blaming shaming on the government officials. They try to build the trust between the grassroots association and government officials. They mainly discuss the issues which are acceptable among the government officials. That led the grassroots associations to have better relationships between the public and government officials. The most common issues and policies discussed during the meetings are much relevant to the land laws and fishery laws.

The Government Interests

There can also be observed that there are some interests of the government to work with the civil society organization in Ayeyarwaddy. The first interest is to mitigate the potential conflicts by the civil society organization in the region. For example²⁰: One policeman was dead and dozens of police and protesters were injured on 27th February 2013 following clashes that broke out on Tuesday over efforts to end a demonstration by farmers demanding the returns of confiscated farmlands in Maupin of Ayeyarwaddy region. Accordingly the farmers, the protests began, when several hundred farmers gathered near an artificial fishpond on 550 acres of land in the village of Palaung in Maubin Township. The farmers say the land was confiscated from them by Myanmar’s former military junta in 1996 and

¹⁹ Interviews, U Own Kywe, chairman of Ah Lin Tan CSO

²⁰<http://www.irrawaddy.org/multimedia-burma/land-protest-leaves-one-dead-dozens-injured.html>

sold to a company owned by businessmen named Myint Sein in 2004. The regional government is really concerns that these kinds of conflicts will not able to managed by them timely and have negative impacts on the operation as well as on the reputation of the regional government. In this context, the CSOs and public forum have been serving the solving these kinds of problems in less violence ways as well as to make government awarded about the potential conflicts arise.

The second interest is to get the public support through the CSOs for the development projects. In Ayeyarwaddy, there were many development projects planned to start in Ayeyarwaddy and many of them do not get the supports from the locals. For example, a 300-megawatt coal fired power plant in the coast region of Nga Yoke Kaung township in Ayeyarwadday was planned to start in early 2014 in cooperation with the Japanese company. Nga Yoke Kaung is a coastal region comprised of two urban wards and 68 villages with a population of more than 35,000. The local people have strongly opposed to the power plant constructions and the Ayeyarwaddy division government has to back off the pal and said it will not proceed with the project if it is against the public's will²¹. The government of Ayeyarwaddy has officially requested the CSOs to find out the best ways to facilitated to make these projects happened.

The third interest of the government working with the CSOs is to get their popularity again in coming up election. As the main reason of strengthening the CSOs and government relationship is the country's ongoing democratic process especially on the decentralization process, the government wants to get the votes from the people and be re-elected at the coming up 2015 election.

²¹<http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/irrawaddy-division-minister-says-coal-power-without-publics-ok.html>