



No COVID-19 response is possible without civil society involvement |

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CSOs are essential for any country's successful COVID-19 response. In Myanmar, civil society organisations are working quickly and efficiently on the frontlines, supporting the communities and Government in their immediate COVID-19 response. The CSOs receive both direct and indirect funding from various international organisations.

The Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT), managed by UNOPS, has been supporting Myanmar's development since 2009. LIFT's current donor countries are the United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia, Switzerland, the United States of America, Canada and Ireland. Of the 153 organisations engaged in LIFT's COVID-19 response, 128 (or 84%) are local or national organisations - present, committed, quick and responsive to the emerging needs.

LIFT also estimates that more than 80% of the response activity is undertaken by local partners - it is they who go to villages, factories, quarantine centers, camps and border gates (while international staff and sometimes national staff from international organisations are not allowed) and it is they who provide the awareness training through loudspeakers and pamphlets, visit families in their homes, and support quarantine centers with essential materials.

By example, LIFT's five strategic civil society partners (Karuna Mission Social Solidarity, Land Core Group, Metta, Network Activities Group, and Gender Equality Network) alone reached almost a million beneficiaries, of which half are women, within the first month of their emergency response. Their COVID work has also extended to influencing policy and practice, for example GEN's work with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement to announce nation-wide GBV data in collaboration with all CSOs and international organisations.

LIFT's Decent Work and Labour Mobility programme delivered emergency support to 355,673 direct beneficiaries (of which 58% are women), across multiple states and regions of Myanmar, covering Yangon, Kayin, Mon, Shan, Tanintharyi, Bago, Chin, Mandalay, Magway, and Ayeyarwaddy. A key factor behind the effectiveness of this response in these difficult times is the engagement of local civil society and labour organisations in the management and implementation before and during the crisis. With



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local organisations' ability to mobilise quickly, their high level of personal commitment and their extensive local knowledge, these organisations have formed the backbone of LIFT's support to migrants in border areas, communities of origin and communities of destination.

Our local CSO partners have also supported internal migrants through the provision of shelter and food and financial support to women in crisis, particularly the garment workers who have lost their jobs due to widespread factory closures in Yangon. LIFT-funded CSOs have also provided legal assistance to migrant workers to claim compensation for terminated employment and resolve labour disputes, both of which have increased dramatically during the pandemic, they supported community-level quarantine facilities and raising of awareness in Yangon's Hlaing Thar Yar Township.

For returning international migrants, LIFT's local CSO partners have provided front-line emergency assistance at the main Thailand-Myanmar border crossing points in Kaw Thauung, Myawaddy, Tachileik, Htee Kee and Payathonzu. Some have also provided support to specific populations of vulnerable migrants, including pregnant women and child returnees, to ensure their basic needs are met.

At the same time and as part of LIFT's nutrition programme, local civil society organisations have supported COVID-19 response activities in both Government and non-government controlled areas across the country. The Community Health and Development Network and the Kachin Baptist Church alone have provided support to 19 internally displaced people's (IDP) camps and 15 host communities that few organisations are allowed to access. They have been able to reach around 10,000 people with information, education and communication (IEC) materials and awareness initiatives, and the beneficiaries have also received personal protective equipment (PPE) and hygiene kits. Nyein Foundation is also covering the needs of 30 internally displaced people's camps with handwashing points and by upgrading the water systems, in addition to the general awareness activities. In the coming weeks, this assistance will be further extended to answer the needs of around 10,000 IDPs living in 30 camps in four different townships in Kachin.

Upland Township Fund (UTF) managed by LIFT's partners Swiss Aid, Metta and GRET is another notable example - it works exclusively to provide small grants assistance to local CSOs implementing COVID-19 response activities in Chin, Kachin, Shan and Kayah States. So far, the fund has distributed 12 small grants to local CSOs for COVID-19 awareness activities in Moegaung, Waingmaw, Sadun, Chipwi and Mohnyin Townships in Kachin State; Hakha and Falam Townships in Chin State; and Pindaya, Ywar Ngan, Hopone, Pekhon and Lashio in Shan State. This type of support is an "opportunity grant", which is a short-term grant designed for conducting awareness-raising (such as through vinyl posters or distributing IEC materials) and providing prevention items (soaps, masks, etc.). So far, the support has reached 359 villages in the targeted townships.

As we know, some areas in Myanmar are under "mixed administration", meaning that some parts are under Government control while others are managed by ethnic organisations. LIFT's ability to reach vulnerable populations living in these mixed administration areas relies heavily on local CSOs. Core Group, for example, set up a community quarantine centre in Cee Bu village tract, which is in a mixed administration area between Kayan New Land Party (KNLP) and the Government in the southernmost Shan State, on the Demawso-Taungoo car road.

The reach and depth of civil society's partnerships and networks across Myanmar is clear evidence that working with civil society partners is essential to any COVID-19 response. Quite frankly, LIFT could not have responded without them.

From a funding perspective, LIFT has invested USD22 million in its COVID-19 response. LIFT estimates that 24% of this USD22m (USD5.27m) is managed by local partners, while 76% is managed by international organisations. With the 5.27 million, LIFT civil society partners alone have reached over 2.5 million people needing support. This accounts for 58% of the total number of COVID-19 response beneficiaries reached by LIFT in Myanmar.

Very few of the 128 local partners (out of the 153 partners in LIFT's COVID response) are contracted directly, only 10 of them, while 118 are sub-contracted through other organisations (local or international). The 25 international partners are all contracted directly.

On the one hand, procurement tends to go through the international organisations and this can carry most of the cost in this response. Yet local organisations should of course increasingly manage COVID response funds, and humanitarian and development funding more generally, including through direct contracts. One step LIFT made towards this was to earmark 20% of direct funding for local organisations in our calls for proposals.

Civil society organisations have always been key partners for international development organisations, but they have truly shown their importance during the coronavirus pandemic. LIFT and its donors value highly the work of civil society. LIFT will continue to support Myanmar's CSOs and we must work to see them manage more of the funding and we will rely on them for their continued excellent work on the ground, where their support really matters.