

SCS Myanmar: Advancing Transition to Peaceful Democracy through Participation of Civil Society and Media

Overview

The Advancing Transition to Peaceful Democracy through Participation of Civil Society and Media II (CSM II) project (2018 – 2023, \$25 million) is a USAID/Burma-funded initiative that works with civil society and media to 1) increase the prevalence of high-quality reporting about democratic reforms, intercommunal harmony and religious freedom, and peace processes; and 2) bolster efforts in legal and policy advocacy while increasing understanding of and engagement in a peaceful, inclusive, democratic transition.

Myanmar Context

Even after Myanmar's recent transition to democracy, power remains in the hands of a few. After decades of authoritarian military rule, a quasi-civilian government took over in 2011, followed by the victory of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) in the 2015 elections. Despite the establishment of an elected government, the military continues to play a dominant role, and civil society and media groups are unable to play their vital roles in the democratic transition.

Major Program Components

Enhance availability of and access to quality information to the public, including vulnerable populations across Myanmar to promote inclusive democratic reform and intercommunal harmony and religious freedom, and to advance peace processes, through:

- Awarding grants and supporting journalists to produce high-quality information products on issues related to peace and national reconciliation, intercommunal harmony and religious freedom, and legal and policy reforms
- Training journalists, developing capacity and mentoring media outlets on improved business management and innovative digital approaches

Increase influence by civil society and independent media actors on the decision-making of state and nonstate actors related to peace and national reconciliation, intercommunal harmony and religious freedom, and legal and policy reforms through constructive engagement with them at all levels by:

- Awarding grants to CSOs and media which support sustainable advocacy initiatives
- Supporting CSOs to use a variety of innovative platforms to promote citizen and public understand and engagement on CSM II thematic areas
- Strengthening CSO capacity in both advocacy and community engagement/mobilization through capacity-building support, grants, networking and

coalition strengthening, and advocacy fellowships

Achievements

- Awarded grants to 37 local organizations to support their work to advance peace, intercommunal harmony and legal reform. Activities include:
 - a) Advocating for women's perspectives to be included in security reform
 - b) Using community theater to teach principles of tolerance in Southern Myanmar
 - c) Producing short films on successful stories of inter-ethnic cooperation in Eastern Myanmar
 - d) Fighting to repeal colonial-era anti-LGBT laws
 - e) Exposing fake news on Facebook and reporting instances of hate speech
 - f) Promoting social cohesion and harmony by supporting proactive agents of change in conflict-affected Western Myanmar
 - g) Advocating for a more inclusive peace process to ensure participation of marginalized people, the civil society and unarmed ethnic groups
 - h) Producing stories of real-life impacts of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
 - i) Conducting policy research on social justice to share with union level policymakers, practitioners and the public
- Supported civil society's engagement with lawmakers resulting in amendment of two laws related to land rights
- Provided training and support to 119 journalists to produce 1,413 media stories
- Co-sponsored the Media and Communications for Development Forum, bringing together more than 500 participants for exchange of skills and knowledge among media professionals, CSOs, social entrepreneurs and youth organizations
- Supported two independent media outlets to travel to the Hague to report on hearing against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice
- Through Advocacy Fellowship, brought skill-enrichment opportunity to 43 disadvantaged individuals including former political prisoners
- Sponsored two national level forums on peace bringing civil society's recommendations to peace process stakeholders
- Reached 13,241 people through 275 events, training and activities for public engagement

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