



Next Steps



Myanmar

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In partnership with





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Acronyms

AKYU	All Kachin Youth Union
EAO	Ethnic armed organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAD	General Administration Department
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
KII	Key informant interview
KSPP	Kachin State's People Party
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and all other sexes, genders and sexualities
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NYP	National Youth Policy
NSSYAC	Northern Shan State Youth Affairs Committee
NSSYN	Northern Shan State Youth Network
PwD	People with disabilities
RS-CO	Rainbow Star LGBT Community Organization
UGN	Universities Green Network
YAC	Youth Affairs Committee
YUOE	Yangon University of Education
YUEC	Yangon University Environmental Club
YULSA	Yangon University Law Students Association

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Forewords

We are delighted to introduce you to *Next Steps Myanmar*, the first in a series of reports building on the findings presented in the British Council's 2019 report *Next Generation Myanmar* and examining specific issues affecting young people in Myanmar.

Next Steps Myanmar was produced by the British Council and VSO, with the support of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Research was undertaken by Conflict Management Consulting, in close consultation with a task force of young people from across Myanmar.

The British Council's Next Generation series focuses on countries undergoing change, whether social, economic or political. It aims to understand youth attitudes and aspirations, amplify youth voices and in turn contribute to improved youth policy and programmes through analysis and, also, recommendations for policy and programme direction.

Among the concerns highlighted in our 2019 report were the limitations on young people's social and political engagement. We noted that while opportunities for social activism and political activity had increased, numerous obstacles meant that many young people were still unable to participate in Myanmar's young democracy. This report examines the experience of young civic activists as they navigate a changing social and political landscape.

Myanmar has a rich history of civil society activity. Many of the country's most recognised and influential

historical figures were active in social and political movements during colonial and post-colonial eras, a tradition that continues to this very day. While it is leaders who are best remembered and make the pages of the history books, success could only be achieved through the mass participation of ordinary people. Students and other young people have always constituted a large proportion of those who have shaped Myanmar's modern history from below.

Next Steps Myanmar provides a picture of the unique circumstances facing young Myanmar volunteers and civil society practitioners today by using data from case studies of four civic organisations. While spurred into action by their commitment to different causes – the natural environment, LGBTIQ+ rights and ethnic minority rights – and having access to varying amounts and types of resources, the research reveals important overlaps in experience and practice.

Young activists in Myanmar clearly feel the weight of history on them. Their stories in the report reveal a collective sense of duty to encourage positive change in their communities and to advance the causes they represent. Many have been motivated by witnessing injustice, while others get involved following conversations with friends or attendance at workshops. Young people also cite the skills and new connections they can benefit from when participating in civic activity as important elements in their personal and professional development.

Yet social action can incur costs.

Despite Myanmar's continuing democratic and economic development, social and political involvement is still widely discouraged by families. Parents worry about physical dangers their children might face and the opportunity costs of activism or volunteering; as well as any immediate financial cost, taking time away from valuable studies may end up depriving today's activists of tomorrow's jobs, a worry disproportionately affecting individuals and families from poorer and marginalised communities.

As a new administration prepares to take office, the British Council and VSO look forward to supporting both government and civil society in their endeavours toward a flourishing just, democratic society.

Joyce Laker
Director Myanmar, VSO

Sarah Deverall
Director Myanmar, British Council

This year's Next Steps report comes as Myanmar faces a growing list of challenges. With the arrival of an unanticipated global health pandemic, the decades of neglect to various sectors and institutions have exposed our vulnerability to Covid-19. A dilapidated healthcare system continues to struggle against a persistent rate of infections. Classrooms remain closed as schools have been unable to open properly since the second quarter of the year, and much of our business and industrial sectors has been practically shut down as well. An economic crisis most likely awaits, if not already under way, at the turn of this decade.

Myanmar's 2020 would not be complete without mentioning the second, historic general elections that saw an estimated 70 per cent voter turnout, about the same number as in 2015. Of the 37 million eligible voters, over five million were first-time voters between the ages of 18 and 22, and although there were not as many young candidates contesting, there were still a few more than last time around. The incoming government faces a tall order of challenges and expectations over the next five years. Befittingly, this report ends with a note of advice for government officials and agencies, with ten main takeaway points focusing on strengthening youth for the future ahead.

Youth activism paved the way for the Myanmar we see today. My own participation in the 2019 Yangon City Development Committee elections, both as an independent candidate and the

youngest, merely reopened the doors to youth participation in politics and government that were forced shut in our previous darker days. Youth thrive on innovation and creativity, constantly questioning the status quo and seeking areas of improvement and change. This defining characteristic is all the more present in Myanmar, and as the findings and recommendations in this report will also suggest, empowering our young leaders will be key to unlocking the potential for growth and development that Myanmar desperately needs.

I encourage all readers of this report to reflect also on our own personal experiences, and the times in which we ourselves have come across moments of conflict within our own culture. Our politics and governments have changed, but entrenched social norms and mindsets continue to persist. The pillars of free speech and intellectual debate must be upheld, and censorship, even in the name of culture, must be challenged. Equally, the importance of ethical guidance and morality is at an all-time high in the age of social media, where unchecked biases risk creating volatility.

It will take each and every one of us to foster a socio-political environment that better enables youth involvement, whether in business, social work or government. We count on publications like this to help further this endeavour.

Alex Aung Khant
Urbanize: Policy Institute for Urban and Regional Planning

Introduction and summary

Myanmar (Burma) boasts a storied history of youth activism. Many of its most iconic leaders began their careers as organisers and demonstrators, against great odds.

Min Ko Naing, once described as ‘the most influential opposition figure after Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’, began his activism in the 1988 Four Eights Uprising. Pyone Cho, another 1988 activist, spent decades as a political prisoner before his election into Myanmar’s parliament. In 1936, the late dissident writer Ludu Daw Amar led a university strike sparked by the expulsion of two classmates: none other than independence hero General Aung San and the future first prime minister of Myanmar, U Nu.

The tradition of youth activism in Myanmar has proven consistent enough to have developed certain recognisable features, at least in its most visible forms. Youth engagement is most often thought of as *student* activism, its means most often protest, and its base most often *Yangon*. Indeed, each of the activists referenced above started while students at the same institution, Rangoon University (now Yangon University). Stories of Myanmar’s opposition movements, from pro-independence to pro-democracy, share a particular image in common. The crowds and banners of student street protests are central to the narrative.

This is changing. In the last decade, Myanmar society has experienced change to a degree unseen in generations. A nascent electoral

democracy has taken hold, and restrictions on civil liberties have been relatively eased – though not completely, nor equitably. Information and communication technology has been rapidly and widely adopted, with smartphones ubiquitous and Facebook popular. Many Myanmar expatriates, including former opposition figures and civil society leaders, have returned to the country. Today, much of what constitutes activism no longer needs to be ‘underground’, as there are now more ways to organise, express grievance and advocate positions than there once were. Analysts are right to note that ‘[t]he image of the student protester, [...] is less relevant to the 2010 transformation than it was in earlier decades in Myanmar’.¹ Youth activism today may not resemble the activism of years past.

What, then, does youth activism look like today? Observers are working to understand how young people in Myanmar today engage in the social and political issues they care about. There are several works of history and sociology that account for the role that youth, particularly students, played in the opposition movements of the 20th century.² Several more studies examine youth activity within particular issue areas, such as social inclusion³ or Myanmar’s peace process.⁴ This report complements these studies with a dedicated account of youth activism *today*, as an object of study in and of itself. It explores the experiences of some of today’s young activists, many of whom may someday emerge into national leadership, with a view to help

1: Definitions – young people and youth

Youth in this study is defined as individuals aged between 18 and 32, an age group that represents about 17 per cent of Myanmar’s population.¹

Youth and young people are used interchangeably.

2: Definitions – activism and engagement

In this study, youth activism and youth engagement are used interchangeably. Both refer to any deliberate and organised action carried out by a youth or a group of youth with the intention of causing social and/or political change.

A youth activist is a person aged between 18 and 32 who leads or carries out such actions.

1 > See Menager (2017).

2 > See Taylor (2009).

3 > For works on social inclusion and youth, see Maber (2014), Hedström (2015) and Svensson (2015).

4 > For works on youth with regards to Myanmar’s ongoing peace process, see Grizelj (2017), Tickner et al. (2018), Paung Sie Facility (2017), Grizelj (2016), Smith (2017), Smith and Hald (2018).

international organisations and donor agencies who intend to support them.

While the study does not purport to cover *all* forms of youth activism, it poses a series of questions across five themes, and applies these questions to four in-depth cases. One case focuses on students in Yangon, the others feature activists in Kachin, Shan and Mon states. To place them in context, qualitative data from these cases is complemented by statistics from a nationwide survey of Myanmar youth.

The report reveals many of the ways in which youth perceive and practise activism today. Youth activists widely understand their work as a responsibility to their communities. Most are motivated by everyday features of their lives, from interpersonal relationships to first-hand experiences of injustice. Many explained their inspiration came from youth events and activities, where the curious can quickly become the committed.

The report also illuminates the many challenges youth activists face in maintaining their work and achieving their goals. Economic barriers to youth involvement remain high, and inexperienced youth-led organisations find fundraising difficult. Youth initiatives struggle to balance inclusive decision-making with strong leadership. Most significantly, youth working on politically sensitive issues face a considerable risk of prosecution and violence. Myanmar's recent reforms have changed much, but in many ways, Myanmar remains an illiberal environment for social and political engagement. This environment has only been complicated further by the outbreak of Covid-19, which has interrupted activists' plans and forced in-person activities to take place online.

The report's findings inform several recommendations for people and institutions with an interest in youth activism. Aimed at youth organisations, international donors, universities and the Myanmar government, these recommendations seek to foster an environment in which young activists in Myanmar can thrive. The recommendations were developed and refined in collaboration with youth activists, both from the case studies of the report and from a dedicated advisory board established to bring in perspectives from a wider range of youth organisations and institutions.⁵

Min Ko Naing once said that when he began his activism in his youth, he 'never expected it would last this long. Nor that it would be this rough'.⁶ Advocating for social and political change will always be difficult, but it need not be perilous. A detailed, up-to-date understanding of youth activism will allow institutions, both domestic and foreign, to better support it, thereby creating a more liberal environment for civic activity in Myanmar.

5 > The advisory board comprised youth representatives from diverse backgrounds and organisations and possessing relevant expertise and knowledge.

6 > British Council (2020).

Chapter 1:

How this study was done

To do justice to its research questions, the report uses a mixed-methods approach. In pursuit of detail and nuance, the study is first and foremost case based. Researchers visited activists across the country, observed and participated in their activities, and conducted interviews and focus group discussions with activists themselves and people around them. Four cases were selected with the aim of creating a diverse set of cases across the type of topic they work on, how they do it, how they fund their activities, where they are located,

and who they work with. We also wanted to focus on initiatives that have been less studied in the past.⁷ These cases cannot give a full account of youth activism – nor are they meant to. But within and across the cases, they let us explore and examine in depth some of the social and personal dynamics that unfold around youth activism. See more about how the cases were selected in Appendix 1.

To contextualise insights from the case studies and place them in a broader setting, a national survey was carried out informed by the case studies. The survey

was administered nationwide to a representative sample of more than 1,600 youth⁸ – with the exception of certain areas that were deemed unsafe due to conflict. The study aimed to compensate for the blind spot this incurred by selecting a case study located in a conflict-affected area. Throughout the report, findings from the survey are used to provide a broader perspective on the social and personal dynamics highlighted in the cases to explore their resonance with the context they exist in.

The four cases are presented below.

Case study

Yangon University Environmental Club

Like young people around the world, youth in Myanmar are increasingly becoming aware of environmental issues. This is particularly true on university campuses, where students form environmental clubs and hold events to increase awareness of environmental challenges and call for action to protect the environment.

The Yangon University Environmental Club (YUEC) was one of the first student-driven environmental clubs in Myanmar, and the first on Yangon University's campus. Like other student initiatives, it has not been officially recognised by university authorities, so the club does not have access to a

meeting room or other perks. But, as of early 2020, the club had 60 registered members, and it was recently granted permission to use the university's Diamond Jubilee Hall for a panel discussion on sustainability and environmental justice – a milestone since the club's launch in 2017 and a testament to its growing recognition.

Most of its members are enrolled in the university's relatively new environmental studies programmes. On a weekly basis, its core team of 15 leading members meet to discuss ways to realise the club's vision 'to build an environmental community with all the universities in Myanmar in order to achieve the sustainable development of the country'.

Based on campus, the club's activities fall into three broad categories:

1. raising public and student awareness
2. engaging with university authorities to promote a green campus
3. building networks between universities, such as the Universities Green Network, of which it is a part.

As a case of youth engagement, the YUEC is a present-day example of campus activism – a decisive element in 20th-century Myanmar politics. Yet, in the way it pursues change, YUEC is also at pains to depart from some of the strategies employed by the well-documented student activism of generations past. Characterised less by protests and more by influencing and networking, YUEC is also an example of a different form of contemporary university activism.

7 > For this reason, the report does not focus on student unions. Student unions have played an important role in shaping Myanmar today, but have also been the subject of many previous studies. See Silverstein and Wohl as far back as 1964, and Clymer (2003) or Chan Koon-Hong (2014) more recently.

8 > The 2014 census was used as a sampling frame. Formally, the population of the survey was youth in Myanmar aged 18 to 32. Sampling took place in multiple stages, first using stratified sampling to ensure urban/rural representation in each state and region, and subsequently cluster sampling to select first townships and then wards/tracts within these. Skip-step was used to select households, and Kish grids were used for individuals. A total of 1,624 were interviewed, meaning the survey achieves a margin of error of three per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. Only statistically significant differences between groups are included throughout the report. For more information about the survey methodology, please refer to Appendix 1.

Case study

Northern Shan State Youth Affairs Committee

A throng of motorbikes stand parked by the entrance of the Kachin Literature and Cultural Committee Hall in Kug Kai. The hall is the venue for a youth workshop, advertised by a large vinyl banner hung beside the building's Kachin cultural objects and symbols. Bold text reads 'Shan State Youth Affairs Committee Youth and Job Opportunities Development Training'. The banner displays the logos of the Northern Shan State Youth Network (NSSYN), the Ministry of Social Welfare, Rescue and Rehabilitation, and the Shan State Youth Affairs Committee next to the title.

The event has been organised by the Northern Shan State Youth Affairs Committee (NSSYAC). It gathers 39 participants from different ethnic groups in Northern Shan State, from Shan to Kachin to Pa Lang. The draw is unsurprising, as employment is a critical issue for youth in Northern Shan State. Jobs are sparse in Lashio and even more so in surrounding rural areas. Ongoing conflict between various ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and government forces further damages job prospects while threatening public safety.

The NSSYAC was established in 2018. It was created to serve the area's ethnically diverse youth through 'youth development activities in accordance with [the] youth policy'.⁹ It is part of the NYP, the government's multi-ministry

policy for youth, which calls for the creation of youth affairs committees (YACs) across the country. These committees are tasked with the implementation of the policy and receive government funding. There are YACs at all levels of government in Myanmar, from the national 'union' level to the township.

All seven NSSYAC members elected in 2018 are volunteers. All have separate jobs in addition to their role on the committee. They are mostly based in Lashio city, where meetings are held every two weeks to co-ordinate the YAC's activities, though these meetings are sometimes held online. NSSYAC activities include workshops, campaigns and other youth-focused events.

The NSSYAC also works in tandem with other youth groups in the area. This includes the NSSYN, which is largely made up of the same people. But where the NSSYAC is supported by the government, the NSSYN is independent – a distinction which is sometimes handy for the members.

The NSSYAC is a case of youth activism in an ethnically diverse context in a part of Myanmar which is deeply affected by armed conflict. Violence and forced recruitment are risks to activists in the area, risks that influence how they conduct their activism.

The NSSYAC is also an example of youth activism that is associated with the government. Established as part of the government's initiative to foster youth participation, the NSSYAC benefits from financial support from the government and commands access to certain decision makers. At the same time, the links to government come at the cost of being seen as less independent by youth who are more critical of the government. This means the committee members have to find ways to work with both those supportive and those sceptical of its mandate.

Case study

All Kachin Youth Union

A short 20-minute motorbike drive from downtown Myitkyina is the Kachin Youth Centre, a hall built entirely of bamboo, surrounded by farmland. In the back of the centre is the office of the All Kachin Youth Union (AKYU). The office is sparsely furnished, with only a table and plastic chairs, and usually only has one or two staff members working there at a time. But its decorations make the longevity of the AKYU clear. Pictures of past events, many faded by years of sunlight, span across the woven reed walls, hanging next to traditional Kachin symbols.

The office and its staff are one of the unique features of AKYU. Privileged with its own dedicated meeting space and paid staff, AKYU uses the Kachin Youth Centre for most of its events, from workshops on federalism to Chinese-language classes.

AKYU is the oldest initiative among the four case studies. Following the 1988 demonstrations, thousands of students and protestors fled the country to avoid the military crackdown. A great number of Kachin youth were exiled to neighbouring countries. Kachin youth in India formally organised themselves into an organisation called the All Kachin Students and Youth Union (AKSYU) in 1996, with the goal of building connections throughout the diaspora. The AKSYU later moved to Chiang Mai in Thailand, and then repatriated to the Kachin capital of Myitkyina once the Myanmar government began its political reforms. To be able to conduct in-country operations, members changed the organisation's name to the All Kachin Youth Union in 2014, dropping the implicit reference to the Four Eights Uprising.¹⁰ It now has just over 150 registered members.

AKYU's stated objective is 'to safeguard the national interest of Kachin through youth empowerment' in a context of high ethnic diversity and ongoing conflict. Its portfolio of activities is diverse: the group hosts workshops on peace and federalism, shares scholarship opportunities on its Facebook page, and arranges language classes for young people. AKYU is also known for its strong political positions and statements, which sometimes test the boundaries of 'appropriate', at least in the eyes of authorities. In 2018, prominent AKYU members helped to mobilise public opinion and led protests demanding the government rescue internally displaced individuals trapped in the jungle amid fighting.¹¹

AKYU has proven a catalyst for Kachin youth activism and political leadership. Several well-known Kachin activists and leaders were initially members of the All Kachin Students and Youth Union. Human rights activist Lum Zaung, for example, served as AKSYU's general secretary before running as the Kachin Democratic Party's youngest candidate in the 2015 elections. Seng Nu Pan, another member of AKYU, received the 2019 PEN Myanmar Freedom of Expression Award after being sentenced to prison for a street performance marking the eighth anniversary of resumed conflict in Kachin State.

With more than 24 years of activity, AKYU balances the younger initiatives selected in this study. It provides insights into the internal function of a well-established youth organisation, particularly one that engages in politically sensitive activity. It also expands the analysis to Myanmar's far north, ensuring a geographical spread between the cases.

¹⁰ > The Four Eights Uprising refers to nationwide protests against military rule that took place on 8 August 1988 (8/8/88). It was largely led by students, some of whom fled the military's crackdown on the demonstrations and organised armed groups. Some of these groups had names starting with 'All Burma Students' or similar. The name All Kachin Students and Youth Union was therefore an implicit reference to the names of these post-Four Eights Uprising groups. The name was changed to avoid this association and conduct activities in Myanmar more easily.

¹¹ > See Weng (2019).

Case study

Rainbow Star LGBT Community Organization

When Covid-19 hit Myanmar, the Rainbow Star LGBT Community Organization (Rainbow) in Mawlamyine quickly organised both the production and distribution of hand sanitiser to local communities in the area. It was part of a strategy to promote the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ communities through a broad range of activities with local communities.

In spite of recent progress, Myanmar's LGBTIQ+ community continues to face social, political and economic marginalisation, including among youth. The 2019 *Next Generation Myanmar* study documented a bias against LGBTIQ+ people: 58 per cent of youth respondents said they would not like to have LGBT people in a group of friends.¹² In 2019, the suicide of a young gay librarian who had been 'outed' and bullied by his colleagues shook the LGBTIQ+ community and its allies.¹³ Myanmar's colonial anti-sodomy laws remain in place.

Still, thanks to the efforts of young and dedicated LGBTIQ+ activists, perceptions are gradually changing. Several organisations, including &Proud, the group behind Yangon's recent Pride events,¹⁴ have conducted public and inclusive cultural and artistic events promoting discussion and understanding of LGBTIQ+ rights and the community. This activism is most visible in urban centres, in particular Yangon and Mandalay, where the LGBTIQ+ rights movement is largely based. But activists are also committed to the movement's expansion to Myanmar's states and regions.

The LGBTIQ+ community organisation Rainbow Star LGBT-CO in Mawlamyine, Mon State is an example. Rainbow was founded in 2016 by nine gay and transgender youth in Mawlamyine, in dialogue with Yangon-based LGBTIQ+ activists. Today it has about 50 members.

The group hosts a range of activities, including workshops on rights and empowerment for the LGBTIQ+ community, public awareness campaigns and even guitar classes. In 2019, Rainbow organised an International Day Against Homophobia event in Mon State. The group had planned a Mon State Pride event for 2020, but it was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The initiative is also active online, sharing health and beauty advice, information on their activities and LGBTIQ+-positive media and video content. The group's online presence allows it to foster community ties remotely with its more than 3,500 followers on Facebook, while also providing members a level of anonymity, particularly around content on sexual and reproductive health that may be seen as taboo.

As a case of youth engagement, Rainbow is an example of a group working to bring a form of activism often seen as 'urban' outside of the perimeters of Myanmar's major cities – while still maintaining close ties with the more experienced communities in Yangon and Mandalay. It is also an organisation organised almost entirely online, a format that presents both particular opportunities and challenges.

12 > See British Council (2019).

13 > See Deutsche Welle (2019).

14 > See AFP (2018).

Limitations

Research requires making choices, and all research has limitations, including this study. Choosing a case-based approach informed by participant observation and interviews allows us to dig deeper, provide more context, and ultimately better understand the personal and social dynamics the report focuses on. It comes at the cost that the cases are not 1:1 representative of all youth activist initiatives in the country. Through maximising variation along a set of pertinent variables, the set of cases chosen aims to straddle a broad range of experiences. But there are youth activists whose experience we do not cover. The hope, however, is that the cases chosen – together – allow us to capture some of the most important social and personal dynamics. Critically, by contextualising the findings of the case study through a nationwide survey, we become able to gauge whether they resonate with the broader population. But more research into specific sub-sets of youth activist organisations, for instance in conflict settings or extremely remote areas, would be beneficial.

The report draws its information mainly from youth who are active in different organisations. This allows us to understand which challenges they face, and how they overcome them. It draws less on information from those who are, for different reasons, unwilling or unable to seize opportunities which may or may not be afforded to them for pursuing change. This is a weakness of the report. These youth, who may lack motivation,

but more often opportunity, awareness or capability to be active, are represented in the nationwide survey. Further studies of youth who are not active would nonetheless be fruitful.

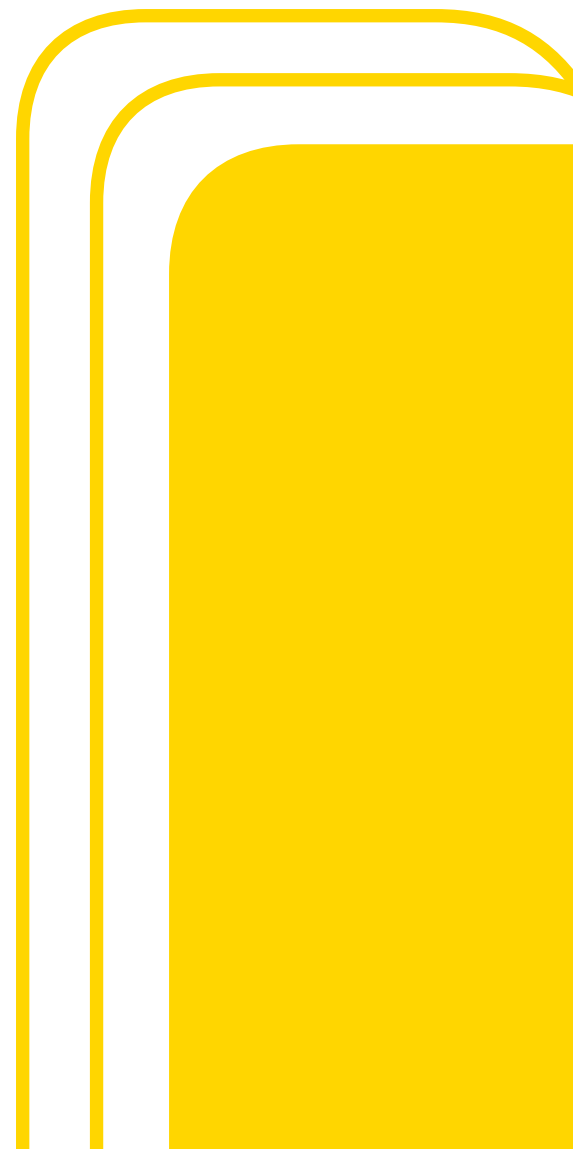
The study's household survey is nationally representative with the exception of some areas which were deemed too unsafe to conduct research in – for the sake of enumerators and respondents (see Appendix 1 for a specific breakdown). This, too, is a weakness of the report. By including case studies in locations affected by conflict, we nonetheless aim to shed light on some of the blind spots that follow.

Conceptually, the report refrains from using too narrow definitions, but rather takes a reasonably broad view of youth activism. The cases chosen do, however, lean towards initiatives that seek change to the status quo. Youth play an important role in many communities, for instance volunteering to provide education, build roads or collect money for various purposes. These activities are important and make the world go round, but receive less attention in this report. The exception is in the survey, in which activities falling under this form of youth engagement are partly captured.

Despite these limitations, we hope the insights gained from the study can help institutions, foreign and domestic alike, to support youth engagement and promote a more liberal civic space in Myanmar.

A note on risks and sensitivities

Even as things have evolved in recent years, many still see political and social engagement as carrying risks, whether reputational or security-wise – in some cases for a good reason. A research piece should never compromise its subjects. To avoid this, great care has been taken to ensure that the findings presented in this report are conveyed in a way that does not put at risk the people the report describes. All interviewees provided express and informed consent to participate. As a special measure of precaution, representatives from each case study have reviewed the final report with researchers to ensure the report does no harm.





Chapter 2:

From responsibility to action: Why youth get involved

Myanmar is not like other countries. We need many young leaders to change the country. We have civil war. The development of regions and states is not equal at all. That is why the youth in Myanmar should become engaged.

This is how 23-year-old Seng Hkawn¹⁵ justified her activism. Over coffee in a busy café near Myitkyina University, the activist explained in a mix of English, Burmese and Jingpao how her view of social and political engagement developed as a student. A 2015 youth leadership programme inspired her to start an English study group in her dormitory, which later grew to become the campus-wide Myitkyina University English Club. As a master's student, she founded the Kachin State Universities Exchange Program, an initiative that fosters connections between student leaders across the state. All of this work, Seng Hkawn insisted, is her response to a duty she feels to address longstanding problems.

Seng Hkawn's attitude is widely shared among youth activists in Myanmar. Most youth activists feel their work is the fulfilment of a responsibility to act. In other countries, social and political activism might be seen as optional, an extracurricular activity that one can pursue in their free time; this was not the view of youth activists in this study. Across each case, youth activists felt called to address social problems, especially when governments, universities or other institutions have left them unsolved.

Responsibility to act

'We, the Kachin people, have been left far behind any other ethnic groups in Myanmar. I want to help my people to become developed,' explained one student in Myitkyina, who volunteers his time teaching free Chinese language classes at the AKYU office for his peers. He explained that, as a fluent Chinese speaker, 'it automatically appeared in my mind that I needed to use my expertise to help my community'. This experience is typical for many youth activists. After identifying a need that isn't being otherwise met (in this case, the education of his fellow Kachin peers), activists feel called to provide what they can (language lessons).

This sense of duty develops in different ways for different activists. For some, it starts with their ethnic identity, as in the case above.¹⁶ For others, it begins with their gender or sexuality, as in the case of activists in Rainbow. Common to all is a sense of responsibility to do something, particularly where others are doing little.

Members of the NSSYAC, for example, want to serve youth in the rural, conflict-affected areas of Northern Shan State in ways that others are not. 'There are no activities [conferences, training, workshops] in Northern Shan State. Only in Taunggyi,' explained a Lashio activist. So he and his peers took on the task themselves, organising events through the volunteer organisation he founded. 'We want to create these kinds of opportunities in Northern Shan State.'

During interviews, some accounted for young people's responsibility to participate in Myanmar's development by mentioning historical figures – in particular Bogyoke Aung San, 1988 student demonstrators and various ethnic minority leaders – who 'were also young' when they began their activism. These activists appeared to provide a historical reference point for youth, strengthening their idea that activism is a way to fulfil one's responsibility to their communities.

The idea that young people have a duty-bound and collective responsibility to their communities was echoed in the quantitative survey carried out as part of this study. Respondents – when asked why people become activists – most often connected social and political engagement with the needs of others, rather than personal advancement. Sixty-one per cent of respondents said people become active 'to help their community'; 63 per cent said 'to contribute to Myanmar's development' (see Figure 1). Personal motivations such as career advancement or skill development came second – but by a long way. Perhaps reflecting stronger local ties in rural areas than in urban centres, even more rural respondents said people become active 'to help the community' (64 per cent) than did urban respondents (55 per cent).

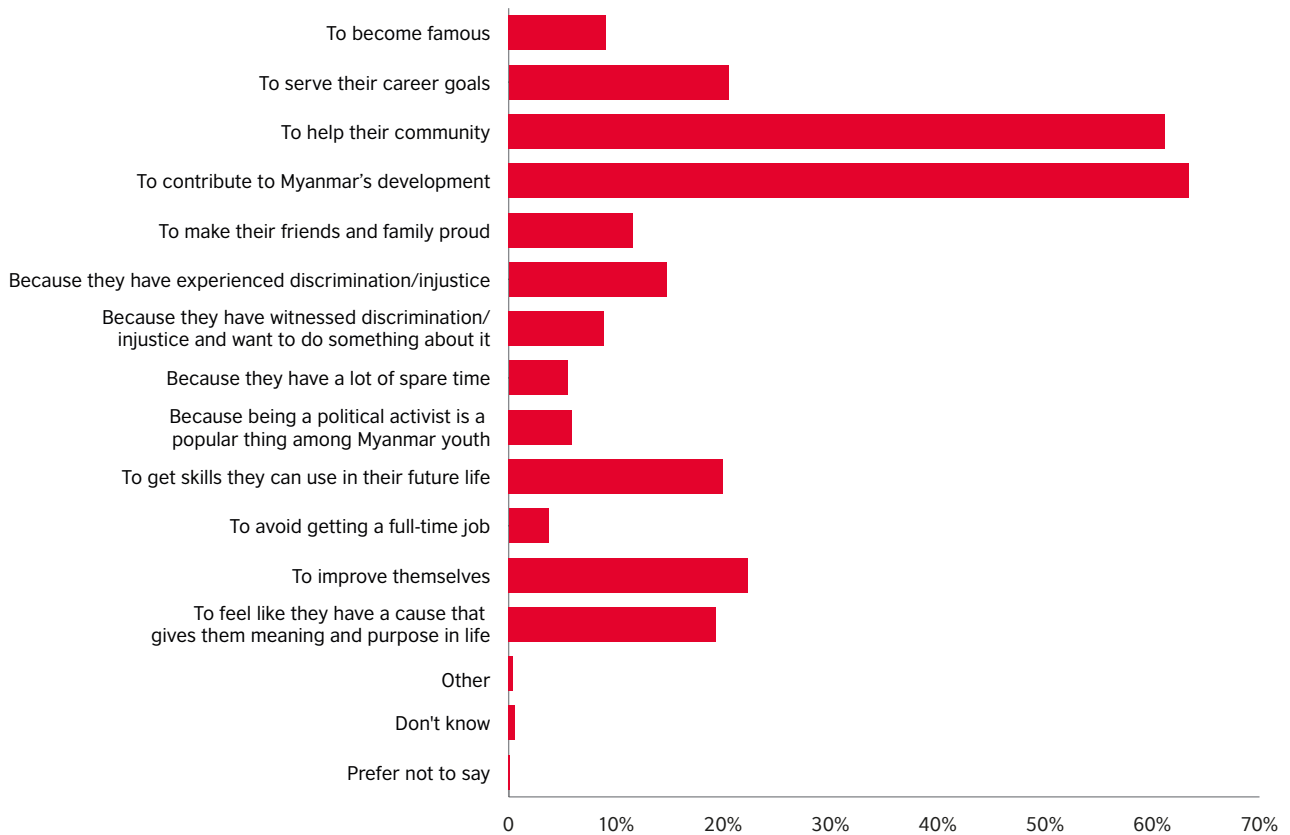
¹⁵ > With the exception of public figures, names of activists have been changed throughout this report.

¹⁶ > For more on Kachin youth activism and Kachin identity, see Oosterom et al. (2019).

That volunteering and activism is seen as a responsibility, rather than simply an optional good, reflects the moral weight that youth place on social engagement. This is also shown in the survey results. Eighty-one per cent of surveyed youth went as far as to say they would prefer volunteering over spending time with friends or playing games (see Figure 2).

While this is unlikely the case in reality (respondents may be more likely to say what is socially desirable than the truth), it shows the high degree of social value placed on volunteering among Myanmar youth. Volunteering, survey data suggests, is seen as something virtuous: 98 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering is more virtuous than paid work.

Figure 1: Youth activists are seen to contribute to Myanmar’s development



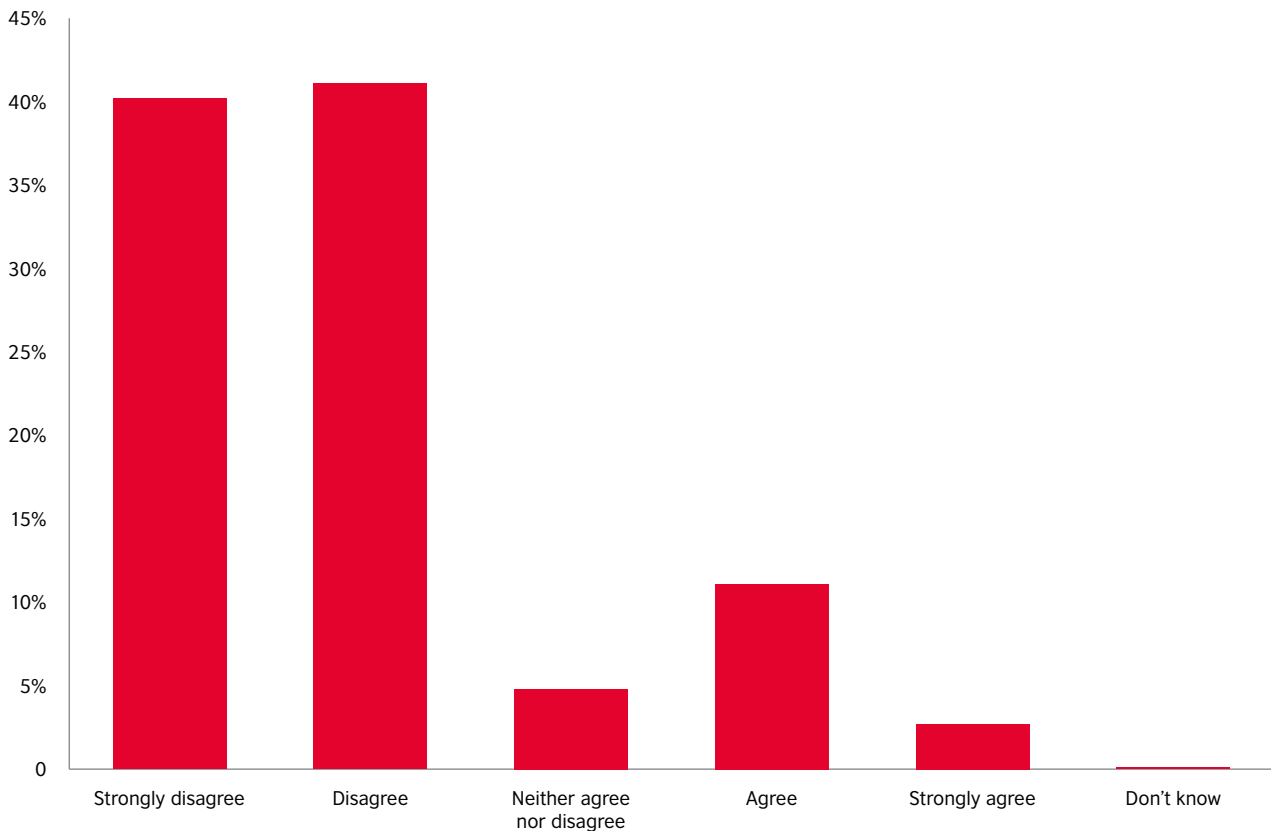
Question: Why do you think people become socially or politically active?

The moral weight that youth place on volunteering contrasts with ideas that youth are disinterested in activism. In an earlier report, some youth suggested that their peers do not value volunteering or activism, complaining that youth are more interested in social media or online games.¹⁷ But the data collected in this study suggests that these accounts describe anecdotal youth behaviour that fits a negative stereotype of youth, rather than how youth perceive activism themselves.

The survey results presented above suggest that Myanmar youth greatly value volunteering. Many feel called to it. For many others, however, this calling does not translate into action. Despite how much young people appear to value volunteering, there is a lapse in how many actually do it. Despite most youth claiming to have donated (67 per cent) or volunteered (46 per cent) in the past 12 months (see Figure 8), when asked if they were engaged in any kind of volunteer work at the time of the

survey, only 28 per cent of youth said they were. Roughly seven in ten youth said they were not currently volunteering in any way (see Figure 3). Youth activists complain that very few youths actually turn up to events, and even fewer help organise them. What explains the difference between those that pursue activism and those that do not? What motivates the remaining three youth in every ten to get involved?

Figure 2: The majority of youth disagree that they prefer spending time with friends or playing games to volunteering



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I prefer spending time with my friends or playing games, rather than volunteering.'

17 > See British Council (2019), pp. 30–31.

This study provides some clues. More often than not, activists are motivated by local and proximate features of their daily lives – often features that are particular to their lives and personal. They are often enabling factors like close mentoring relationships or everyday experiences of injustice or discrimination. In this study we find that such features of daily life push some youth beyond passively valuing activism and into activism itself, especially when combined with access to channels for activism and in-person youth events that inspire youth to action.

Someone who inspires

In Ko Lwin’s tailor shop in Lashio, a shelf is lined with certificates of his active life. Each document describes a workshop, a training session or a Northern Shan State club in which he has participated. In an interview in the shop, under the shelf displaying his achievements, the young activist explained how his parents inspired him to get involved in his community.

My mom is very supportive of anything I do, including volunteering activities. She is herself a volunteer in the Islamic Women Organisation. They organise

fundraising to support the community, for instance to prepare funerals. She was also part of the Mother and Child Association. My dad was also very active in volunteering. He was formerly part of the fire brigade and was a judge for Lethwei matches. Volunteering is part of the family spirit. My mom encourages me a lot to be socially and politically active. Even if she doesn’t always exactly understand what I do, she trusts my judgement and knows that ‘I am doing good things’. We often discuss volunteering activities together.

Ko Lwin’s mother is extremely proud of him. A veteran volunteer herself, she knows how to support her son’s pursuits. She joins the activities he organises whenever she can. One such event was the NSSYAC’s 2019 Human Rights Day rally. ‘I was so happy, beyond happiness,’ she recalled. ‘So many young people joined the event and my son was the one who organised it!’

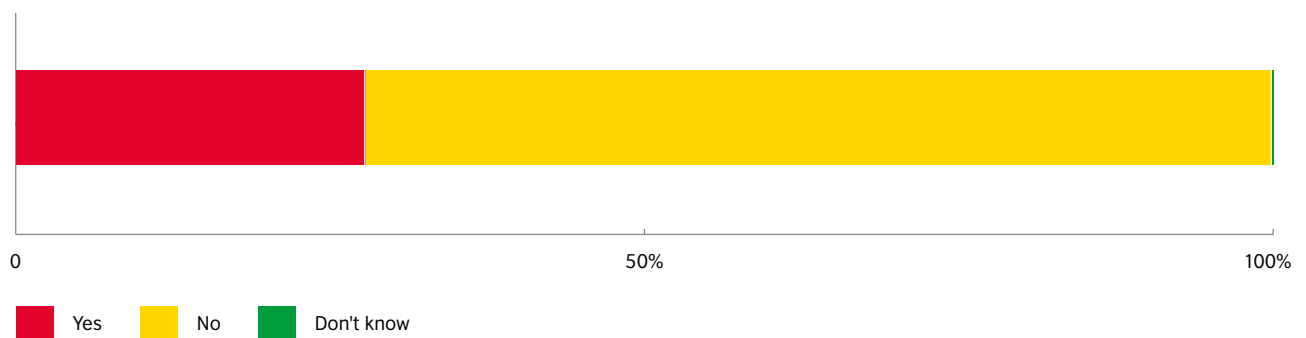
Close personal relationships, like the one between Ko Lwin and his mother, were frequently cited as an example of the local, proximate factors that motivate

youth into activism. Mentorship from family members and close friends can inspire a young person to get involved. Many youth activists consulted in this study spoke of an elder who inspired them to pursue the work of social change.

Others are not as lucky as Ko Lwin. Many parents, even those once active themselves, are often hesitant to allow their children to volunteer, for fear it distracts from their educations or careers.¹⁸ For those unable to convince their parents, mentorship can come from a number of community figures, from teachers to older youth leaders. The AKYU, for example, relies on its prominent youth activists to attract other young people:

In 2018 there was a demonstration led by AKYU’s patrons, requesting the government to help the IDPs trapped in the jungle amidst fighting. It was publicly known that the demonstration was youth led. It was remarkable for us; it showed that young people are capable of changing things. I went to the demonstration with a friend. There, I met Lum Zaung.¹⁹ He inspired me to join AKYU.

Figure 3: Most youth are not currently volunteering



Question: Are you currently doing any work as a volunteer?

18 > See British Council (2019), p. 18.

19 > Lum Zaung is a lawyer and prominent Kachin youth activist.

Forming networks

In many ways, interpersonal relations are an important aspect of youth engagement. They not only play a role in triggering engagement, but also in sustaining it. This was particularly evident in the cases of the NSSYAC and the YUEC, where members specifically described themselves as friends. Members of both initiatives reported enjoying spending time together outside of the initiative's work. Most YUEC members are from the environmental studies department, thus spending substantive time together in and outside of the classroom. On the way to a basketball match, for instance, YUEC members talked about the bonds they had formed through the club.

'After classes we go and eat snacks together, we travel together [...] YUEC really created a friendship spirit among members.'

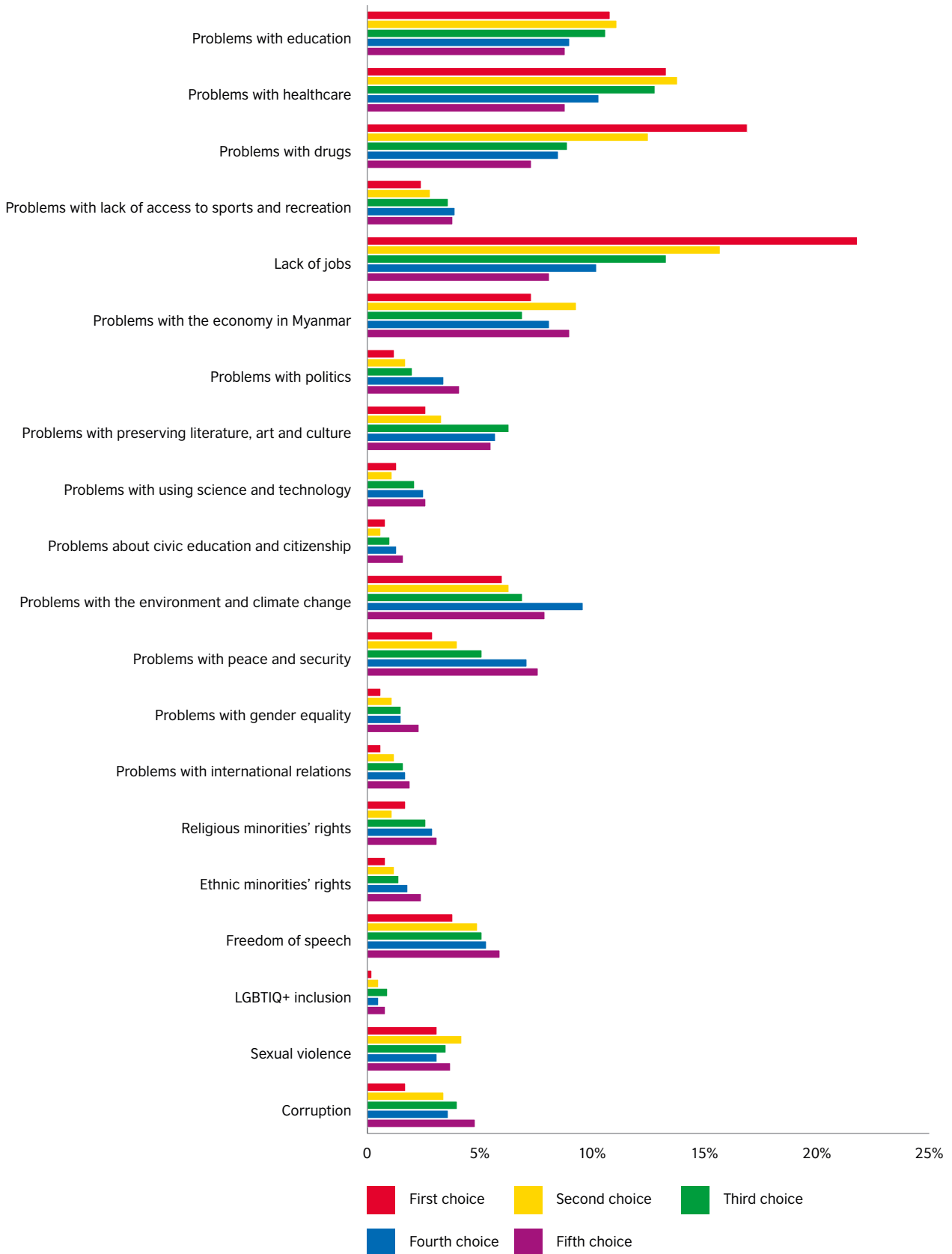
This 'friendship spirit' appears to be understood by many youth organisations. The YUEC and AKYU employ recruitment and retainment strategies that centre around interpersonal relationships within their initiatives. 'YAC events provide the rare opportunity to learn news and make friends among youth in rural area,' explained one youth in Northern Shan State. This corroborates the findings of previous studies into youth volunteering, one of which found that 63 per cent of youth volunteers were first introduced to it by a friend.²⁰

But beyond making friends, activists and organisations understand the instrumental value of the networks people acquire. A Yangon University student explained that 'students who don't live in a dorm and don't join a club only have a handful of friends. When you apply for a job, the division is quite evident. Friendlier university students have broader networks, thus more opportunities and chances.' Volunteering is a way to make friends, but it also leads to career opportunities.

20 > 'The vast majority of respondents indicated that they were introduced to volunteerism by a friend (63%), with the next most common method of referral being a mentor (18%) or a religious group (11%). It seems that the methods for volunteer recruitment are primarily informal and occur through personal connections rather than through formal volunteer programs' CUSO International (2015).



Figure 4: Youth feel drugs, healthcare and lack of jobs are the biggest challenges



Question: If you think about the situation right here where you live, in what areas do you think the biggest problems are that most need attention?

Personal experiences

Interpersonal relationships, from family and teachers to role models and friends, are one example of how local proximate factors can inspire youth activism. Others relate to concrete and lived experiences of injustice. When discussing what made them become socially active, youth activists in our case studies often referred to individual experiences of discrimination.

Given the importance youth place on ethnic identity in Myanmar,²¹ experiences of ethnic discrimination were particularly formative for youth of ethnic minorities. A member of NSSYAC explained:

Belonging to the Palaung [Ta'ang] ethnic group is really important to me [...] Palaung [Ta'ang] people traditionally live in the mountains. I became aware when I was young of the discrimination experienced by Palaung people. There are so many stereotypes about us, for instance 'Palaung people don't shower'. Within the Ta'ang community as well, there are divisions based on class; between the Shwe Ta'ang, descending from Shan Sultans, and the others. When I was younger, I didn't want to tell others that I was Palaung. Now, I am really proud of it.

After gradually building his confidence in youth groups, this NSSYAC member went on to launch the Ta'ang Youth Group, and currently serves as a liaison between the NSSYN and Ta'ang youth.

Young people born among Myanmar's civil conflicts are often the first victims of ethnicity-based violence and security threats. This experience can prove a powerful motivation for social activism. One AKYU member, who later founded with other youth a Kachin IDP Youth Committee, highlighted her experience

of living in a camp for internally displaced people:

The reason why I joined the performance in Manau Park two years ago was because I wanted to show the fate of Kachin people who had been internally displaced. I wanted to share what the fate of IDP youths is [...] I am a very direct actor of change here. I should not wait for other people to create change for me.

Other forms of discrimination can be motivating, too. Rainbow was founded to advocate for the LGBTIQ+ community in Mon State, a community that suffers harsh discrimination in employment and higher rates of drug use. Prejudices against LGBTIQ+ people exist among youth; when asked if LGBTIQ+ people should be more involved in social and political issues, over half of surveyed youth (59 per cent) said no.

People with disabilities also face discrimination that motivates them into activism. 'It is impossible for youth with disabilities to join existing businesses [...] so many people with disabilities haven't completed their education, but job offers are only for graduates,' explained a disabled activist in Lashio, who had begun her activism as a response to her own experiences of discrimination. Youth appear biased against people with disabilities as well. When asked if people with mental or physical disabilities should be more involved, 85 per cent and 62 per cent said no, respectively.

Experiences of such discrimination can be powerful motivations for activism. The examples offered above are similar to those described by Agatha Ma, Poe Ei Phyu and Catriona Knapman (2018) in their study of women's activism in Myanmar. 'Each of our participants,' their study reads, 'was able to identify

a particular personal experience which had such a powerful impact on her that she was motivated to become an activist despite the clear difficulties'.²² Like close personal relationships, they are another example of proximate day-to-day occurrences that can lead to greater engagement. These examples show a pattern in the cases: activists' motivations are often very local and very personal.

Youth events: Catalysts for engagement

Similarly, the research conducted for this report shows how exposure to others' social engagement serves as an important catalyst for activating people. Whether arranged by a local organisation or an international NGO, activists interviewed in this study often pointed to in-person events such as workshops, conferences or training as the origin of their activism. These events introduce young people to possibilities for engagement and give youth a chance to turn a personal passion – or in some cases an experience of injustice – into common missions.

According to a number of youth activists, attending training led directly to their greater involvement. For youth who otherwise would not have access to opportunities to express themselves, one event can make all the difference. They may, for instance, provide marginalised youth with a chance to share experiences, visualise a better future, network with likeminded activists, and build the 'vocabulary and knowledge to address ... injustices in a time of change'.²³ Relatively few youths have the opportunity to attend such events, especially outside urban centres²⁴ – but when they do, such events can inspire people to commit for the long term.

21 > See British Council (2019), p. 26. See also Oosterom et al. (2019).

22 > The authors offer several examples: 'Wint War Yu's route into land activism began when her family land was confiscated and her father and elder sister were sent to prison as a result of activism to protect their land [...] Ei Ei Min's motivation comes both from her experience as an ethnic Karen woman and her experiences of being ignored and dismissed as a leader working in the resource rights sector' (Ma et al., 2018).

23 > Quoted from Nielsen and Standhart (2015), whose study of young Myanmar activists similarly identifies training sessions as events in which youth motivations are transformed into engagement.

24 > While some studies find considerable engagement among young people in youth initiatives and related events, their focus is exclusive to urban areas. Cases selected in this study suggest that rural youth have far fewer opportunities for engagement (see Chapter 4). See also Grizelj (2018), pp. 3–4 and CUSO International (2015), p. 24.

'I faced traumatic experiences as a woman with a disability. I felt that I had fewer opportunities, that I was always left out,' explained one disabled activist, meeting with researchers in a teashop owned by the chair of a disability advocacy organisation.

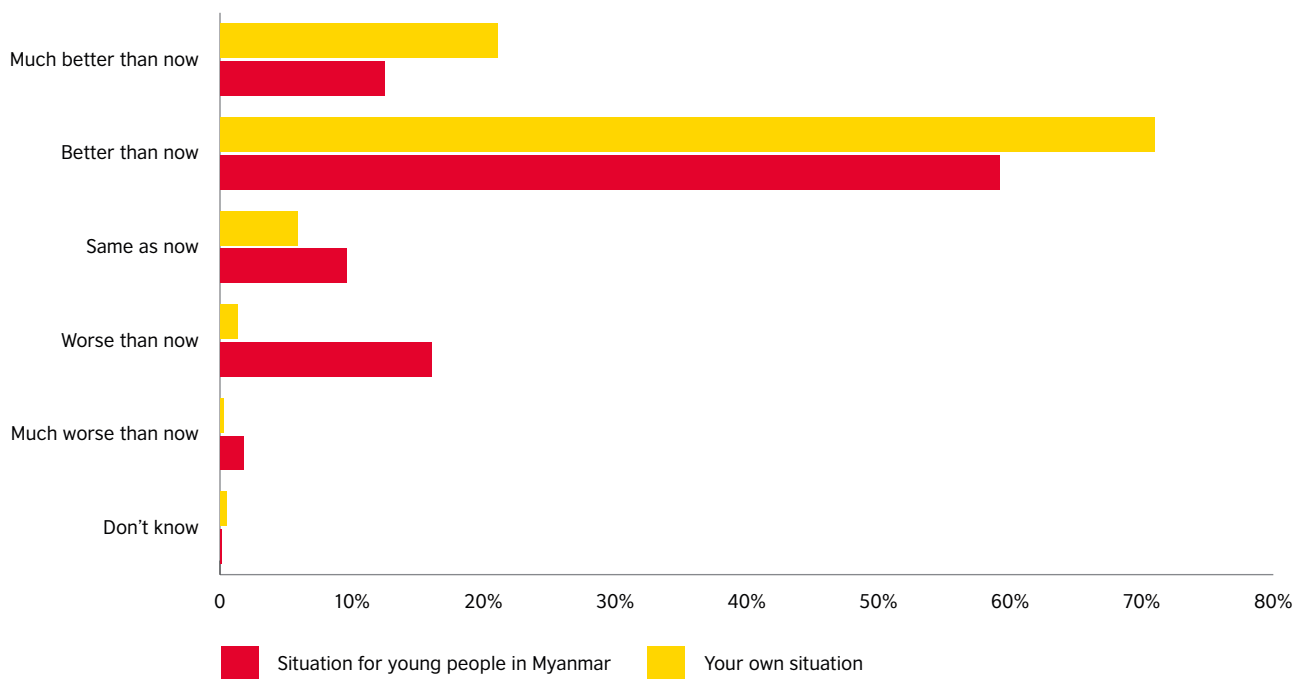
I was lucky to attend a three-month programme in Yangon in 2016. Before the training, I wanted to become engaged, but I didn't know how to. I want to show to other people [with disabilities] that they can do it too.

At the 2018 Youth Forum, everyone supported my candidature. I wanted to compete to show that there are youth with disabilities and that they are capable too.

In some cases, youth events inspire activists to form new organisations in new places. 'I attended trainings and [a] mentoring programme at [prominent Yangon LGBTIQ+ organisation] Color Rainbow. Then, I got the idea of establishing an LGBT rights-based group in Mawlamyine,' explained one of the founders of Rainbow.

In 2015, I joined the National Level Debate Competition with the topic of LGBT rights. After that debate competition, I became more committed to establishing a rights-based LGBT group in order to increase LGBTs' participation and inclusion in several sectors. I joined and established Rainbow Star in 2016.

Figure 5: Youth think the future will be better than the present



Question: What if you think about the future? If you think about the situation for young people in Myanmar and your own situation five years from now, do you think it will be:

Survey results suggest that many youths in Myanmar believe personal advancement is a strong motivation for youth engagement. When asked why they think people become socially or politically active, respondents ranked 'to improve themselves', 'to serve their career goals' and 'to get skills they can use in their future life' higher than reasons of discrimination or injustice (see Figure 1). These motivations are indeed why many youth attend events in the first place. 'In the past, young people who freshly graduated went directly to a paid job and lacked some

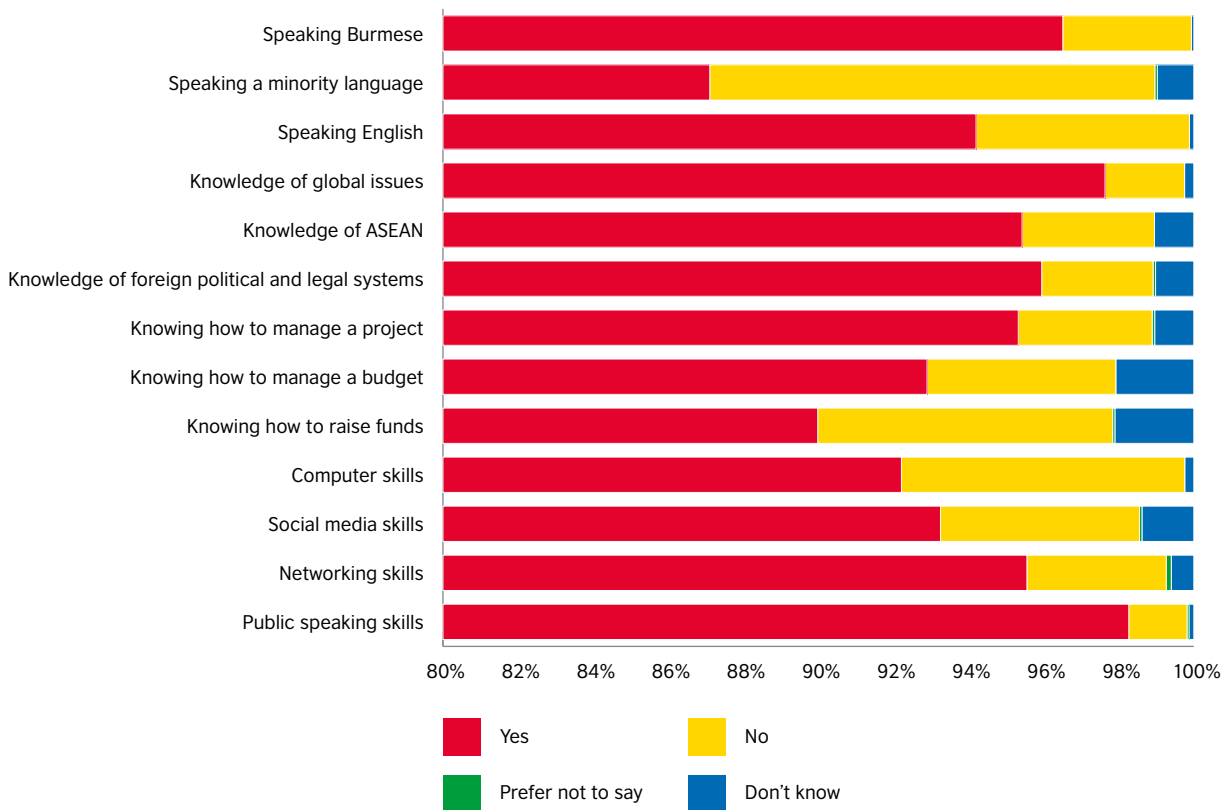
crucial social skills,' explained a student activist in Yangon. 'By getting involved in a youth-led initiative, you can get these skills.'

Many youth appear to attend events for personal advancement, but stay involved because the event gave them a newfound interest. Youth events appear to catalyse nascent interests into commitments to engagement:

In 2018, I attended the Asian Youth Camp in Thailand which focused on environmental issues. There, I learned a lot about environmental issues. There

were 11 countries represented and youth representatives exchanged ideas about solutions for environmental preservation. I felt like Myanmar needed to come up with its own solutions. So, when I came back to Myanmar I decided to get engaged on this topic. I joined YUEC in 2019. Before attending the Youth Camp, I didn't feel that much interested in environmental issues. After the Youth Camp I started thinking about how I could contribute to finding solutions.

Figure 6: Youth see public speaking, knowledge of global issues and Burmese language speaking as the three most important skills for activists



Question: What do you think are the most important skills for young people to have to be able to pursue social and political change in Myanmar? You may choose as many options as you like.

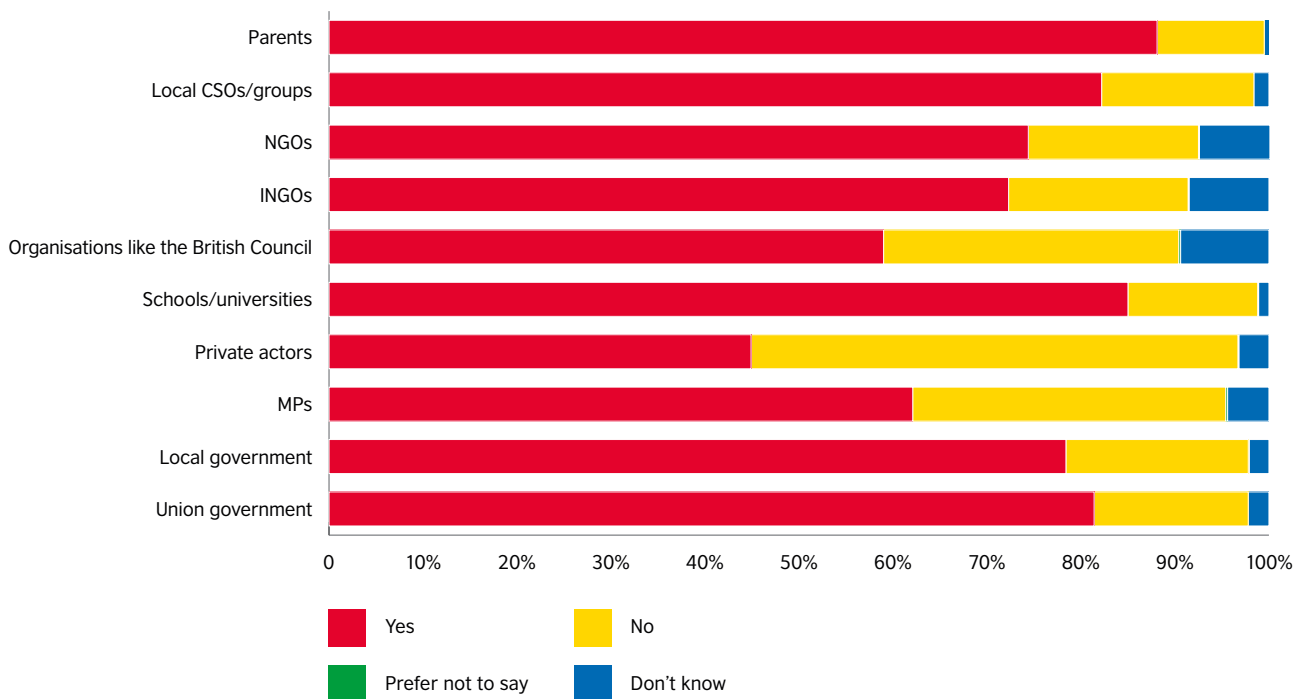
After my matriculation exam, I wanted to improve my English skills. That's why I joined the iNature initiative at the American Center [...] it made me become really passionate about environmental issues.

The motivation to act is not incompatible with the motivation for personal success; for many youth the two are closely linked. In the words of one activist: 'Why [do] I volunteer? I want to help people. I

want to contribute. The second reason is that I want to get a scholarship to go study abroad.' Some youth initiatives appear to understand this dual motivation. Training focused on employable skills may be the first point of contact between a young person and an initiative, and it may keep them coming back. NSSYAC skill-building training, for example, intentionally includes a section on the National Youth Policy to introduce youth to the initiative.

Similarly, in Kachin State, the AKYU Youth Centre offers several scholarship application and skill-building training sessions, including English and Chinese language classes. Participants of the Chinese language class explained that they did not know about AKYU before joining the class, but, thanks to it, they are now aware of AKYU's activities.

Figure 7: Youth believe parents, universities and local CSOs can help build the skills they need to become activists



Question: Who do you think can help young people build these skills?

Encouraging youth activism

Youth acquire the motivation to act through local and proximate features of their day-to-day lives (such as interpersonal relationships or personal experiences of injustice), and youth events can then transform this motivation into sustained engagement. Regardless of where youth first acquire a spirit for activism, youth events appear critical for the continued engagement of youth. Without access to workshops, training or conferences, initial motivations may not be nurtured into sustained engagement. This suggests that the difference between youth who become involved in causes and those who do not, is in part a difference in opportunity. If training, workshops and conferences were more accessible and widespread, especially for unemployed youth and youth in rural areas,²⁵ more youth would have the choice of joining them.

This is a promising pattern for organisations interested in encouraging youth engagement in Myanmar. Events can be expanded beyond urban centres and into underserved rural areas. They can include exercises that help youth connect their individual, day-to-day, local experiences to social or political problems that they can help solve. They can include job skills content to attract youth to the event who may not have otherwise attended. In these ways, foreign and local institutions in Myanmar can help more youth gain a 'volunteering spirit', leading to sustained engagement for years to come (see Chapter 5).

25 > A 2018 study by Conciliation Resources found that youth in rural areas may not be interested in 'social and political events' due to employment and livelihood concerns. Youth events will need to address these concerns to attract more youth (see Chapter 4) (Htet Lynn Oo & Myo Myo Kyaw, 2019: p. 8).





Chapter 3: The means of youth engagement: Balancing confrontation and co-operation

In late October 2019, the Yangon University campus was slated for renovation. A ring road was to be built around campus. Landscapers began marking trees for felling in order to clear the way. University administrators informed the teacher association and student unions of the tree cutting on 31 October.²⁶ The announcement quickly spread through Facebook.

Many students were angry. The Yangon University Student Union organised protests at the project site in early November, calling for a halt to the project.²⁷ Students taped signs reading 'don't cut' on trees marked for removal. Newspapers published photos of youth gathered with megaphones and picket signs.²⁸

Another organisation, the Yangon University Environmental Club (YUEC), shared the student union's complaints, but showed their dissatisfaction in a different way. The club's president contacted authorities directly. When the protests began, he called the Forestry Department of the Yangon region government to check whether permission had been granted to proceed with the project. He then called the minister of education to inform him of the situation. The minister reportedly called him back the next day, requesting his help to invite students to attend a meeting. The YUEC president agreed.

The meeting took place that week, gathering the student union, the teachers' association, the YUEC,

the Ministry of Education and several Yangon University administrators. The YUEC came to the meeting with questions sourced from a poll of its Facebook followers, each of which were intended for government and university officials. Student union leaders voiced their concerns about the cost of the project. After a very tense meeting, all parties reached an agreement: the trees would only be cut down with the approval of the teachers and students. The tree cutting was suspended. In a second meeting, university authorities invited students back.

The case has still not been settled. For now, it is unclear whether the trees will survive. But a process involving the students has started, and the halting of the project was a clear success. Youth made their opinions known, and authorities responded.

How did this change come about? Who deserves the credit? Which approach was more effective?

More opportunities for engagement

Youth have more options for expressing themselves today than they once did. As civic space in Myanmar has gradually opened, so have new ways for youth to get involved in the causes they care about.²⁹ Today's youth are no longer limited to the public demonstrations once relied upon by previous generations of youth activists. Protests are now but one means of social and political engagement, among many others.

In our survey, 88 per cent of youth said they had done something of a voluntary character, broadly defined, over the past 12 months. Sixty-seven per cent said they had donated for a cause. Forty-six per cent said they had volunteered. Some said they had voted (14 per cent) or participated in an online campaign (11 per cent). Fewer had contacted local authorities (four per cent), participated in protests (two per cent) or gone on strike (less than one per cent).

The survey results show that certain forms of engagement are more convenient for youth – it is easier to donate to a cause than to engage with local authorities. But they also reflect what means of engagement youth consider to be most effective. Generally speaking, the survey results show that most youth consider collaborative approaches more effective than direct, confrontational approaches. Forming organisations, holding meetings, engaging with local authorities and contacting MPs were in most cases seen as more effective than protesting, going on strike or even engaging in armed action.

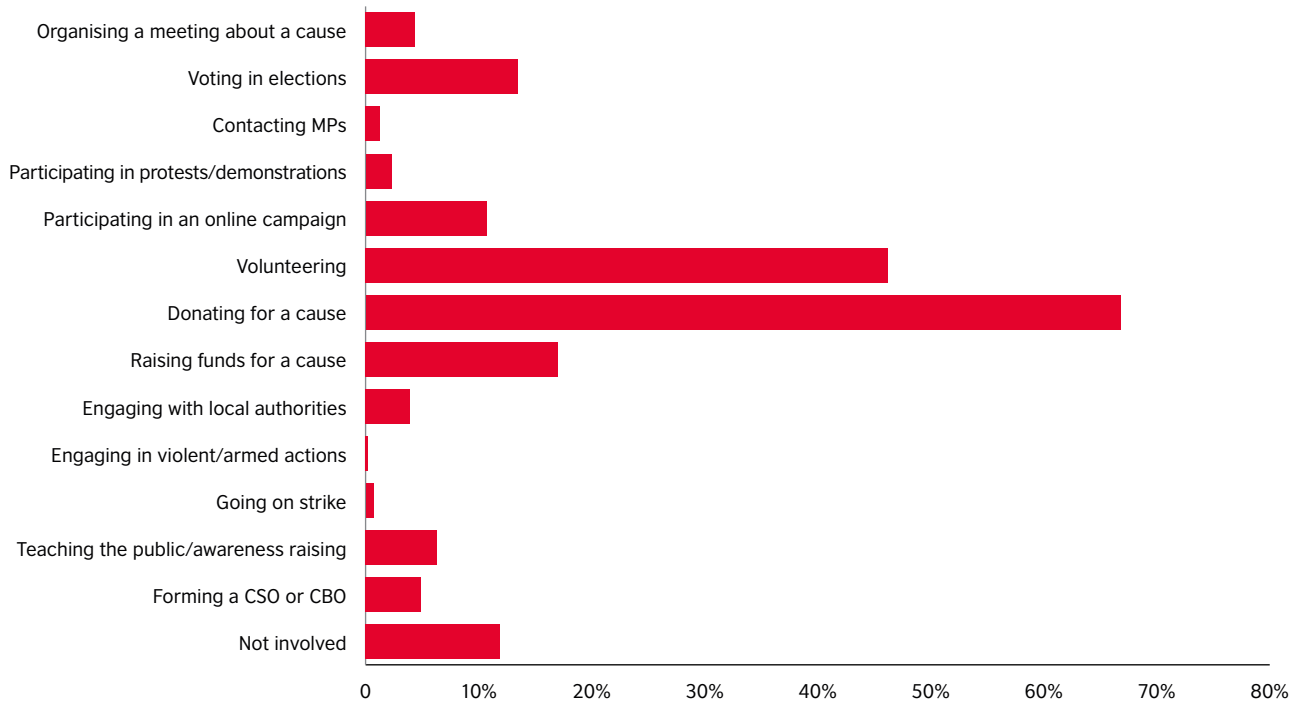
26 > See Zaw Zaw Htwe (2019).

27 > During research, we contacted the student union to schedule interviews, but its members did not wish to participate.

28 > See Myat Moe Aung (2019).

29 > Other studies have documented this change as well, noting that there are more opportunities for engagement with authorities than there once were (Htet Lynn Oo & Myo Myo Kyaw, 2019: p. 5).

Figure 8: Most youth claim to have donated to a cause or volunteered in the last 12 months



Question: Thinking back on the past 12 months, have you yourself done any of the following?

Within youth organisations, this question of how best to pursue change plays a big role in the day-to-day discussions among activists. In many ways it defines how different organisations see themselves. In the organisations featured in this study, activists constantly weigh the pros and cons of different forms of activities. On a spectrum from confrontation to co-operation (see Box 3), the means organisations decide upon

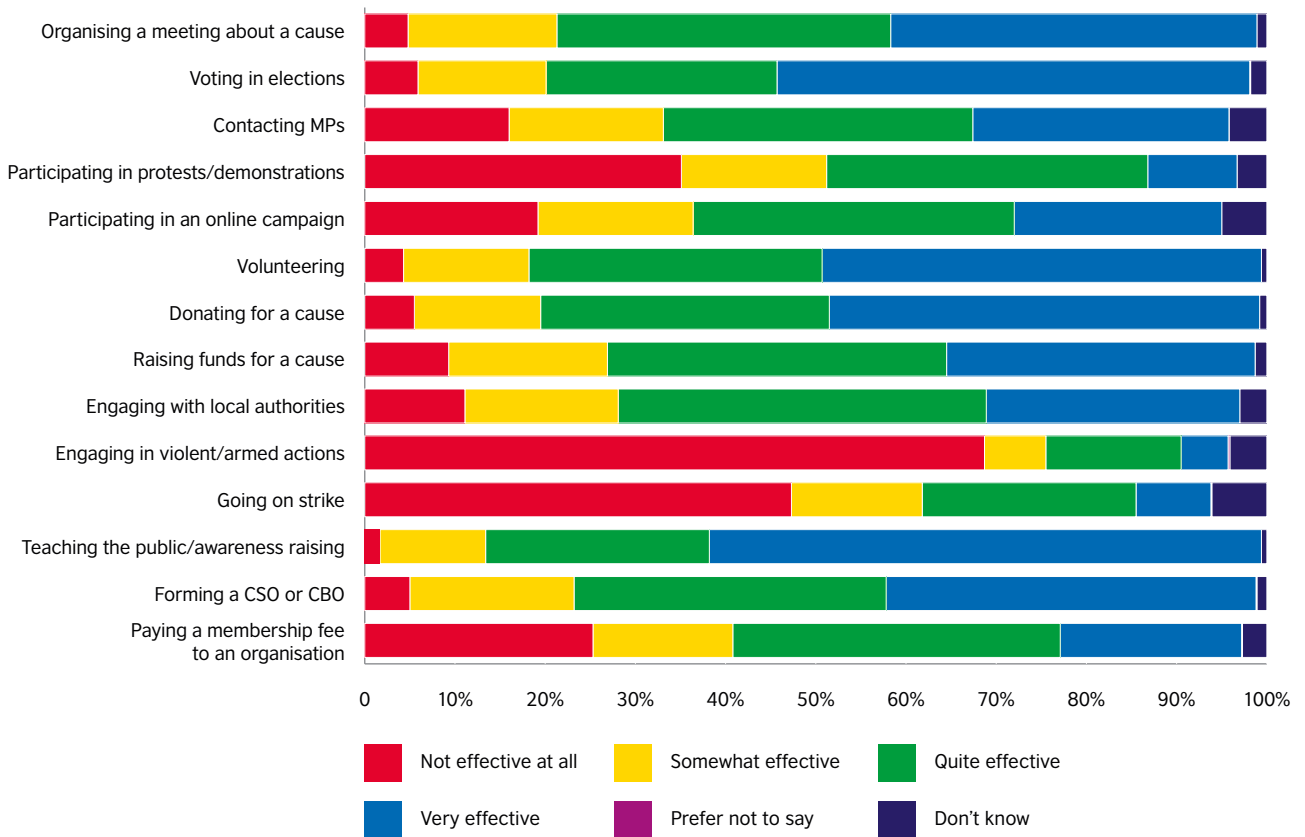
depend on a range of factors, including members' goals, values and resources, but also their risk-tolerance.

The case of the landscaping project at Yangon University provides an illustrative example. Where the YUEC chose means of co-operation by contacting authorities and arranging dialogues, the student union preferred to organise protests and demonstrations.

The pros and cons of co-operation

'YUEC only wants peaceful solutions. No demonstrations,' explained one of the environmental club's members. 'YUEC thinks that demonstrations are a wrong way to negotiate.' In the view of the YUEC leadership, demonstrations are counterproductive.

Figure 9: Youth see voting and awareness raising as the most effective actions for social change



Question: Generally speaking, how effective do you think the following actions are? By effective, I mean that they work well to create change.

Most YUEC members, and its president in particular, believe the trees on Yangon University's campus were saved because the club co-operated with authorities. They argue that by negotiating with authorities in civil, if tense, meetings, the club was able to articulate concerns without threatening the standing of people in power. 'Young people should not engage in demonstrations,' claimed one YUEC member. 'It is not a solution; it only creates more tensions.'

The YUEC plans to continue its engagement with authorities on the landscaping project. It intends to create an advisory group to provide comments to the university leadership on environmental issues. For the YUEC, this approach is a clear choice over means of confrontation:

In Yangon University, there are lots of 'hard-line' activists who are mostly blaming others. YUEC wants to bring a different approach for the purpose of environmental conservation. What I want this organisation to do, is to provide evidence-based advocacy, to look for solutions and not only to point out to the problems. When you're demonstrating, you are asking someone else to solve the problem. You are not solving it yourself.

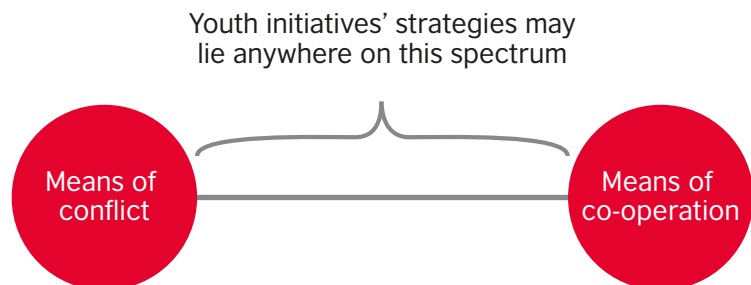
3: Pros and cons of confrontation and co-operation

Activists often debate whether means of *confrontation* or means of *co-operation* are more effective. On one end of the spectrum, means of confrontation include any act that seeks to effect change by confronting, pressuring, embarrassing or influencing authorities by drawing public attention to an issue. Conversely, means of co-operation are those in which activists meet and collaborate with decision-makers to reach their goals.

Organisations often use a mix of both, depending on the situation and resources at hand. Means of confrontation may be necessary when decision-makers do not have an interest in engaging activists in discussion. It can raise awareness of a particular issue, but it may also frustrate possible supporters if done carelessly. There are also risks relating to lack of protection of freedom of speech and assembly.

Means of co-operation, on the other hand, facilitate discussions between activists and decision-makers that may lead to an agreement, but this is not always possible. The option to negotiate and follow through on agreements depends on the willingness of the more influential party.

Figure 10: The spectrum of youth initiatives' strategies



Outside the campus tree case, the youth committee in Northern Shan State follows a similar approach. The members of the NSSYAC feel co-operation with officials is more productive, at least in certain cases, as it provides a venue in which youth can influence the government. 'With the YAC, at least you get a chance to talk with the government. The government knows you,' explained the committee's secretary. Another member claimed that 'the government carefully listens since we are YAC members. YAC members can push their concerns.' As a government-sponsored committee, the NSSYAC is purpose-built for this co-operation, and its members acknowledge that some instances require a different approach (NSSYN takes over for more sensitive matters) – though the acknowledgement among NSSYAC members of the co-operation's benefits shows the value the approach can have.

In some ways, co-operation with the government can facilitate social and political engagement for youth. Whereas some initiatives may struggle to receive permissions for an event or activity from local authorities, for example, YACs can easily obtain them. YACs also receive financial support from the government that other organisations may not be able to access.

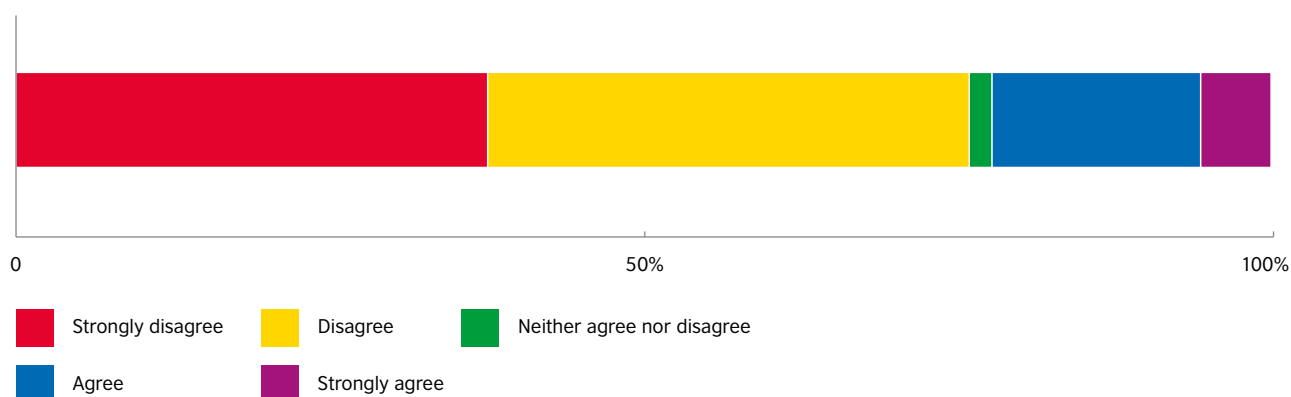
Co-operation is not always possible

The benefits of co-operation, however, are not equally accessible to all organisations. If a different youth initiative were interested in developing the same relationship with government authorities, it is not certain they would be successful. Not all groups have the same access to decision makers as others, and gaining this access may be a source of tension. 'In 2019, the GAD selected youth from the community as

township YAC members,' explained an activist in Lashio. 'That created a lot of tensions among the youth. After that, we don't feel OK with the YAC anymore. Now we feel like the YAC is on the same side as the GAD/government. We hope they will stand for the youth, but how can we trust them?'³⁰

As such, even for those who have access to collaborating with authorities, it may come at the cost of credibility. It may limit a youth initiative's independence, and thereby affect the amount of trust it commands from others. The youth committee's work on the National Youth Policy demonstrates these disadvantages.

Figure 11: Two-thirds of youth disagree that it is easier to create change if you are alone



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'It's easier to create change if you are alone.'

³⁰ > Other studies have found similar examples of the tensions that sponsored participation can create among youth. Oosterom et al. (2019) note the divisions among Kachin youth regarding engagement with government, complicated further by international donor support: 'Youth participation in policy processes is hampered by divisions between different groups over how to engage with the government, with youth belonging to non-Kachin minorities favouring a more pragmatic approach. While international donors often choose to support youth participation in such formal institutions, there are real issues with how representative youth delegates are, and how substantive their participation' (ibid.: p. 21).

For some, a question of credibility

Committee activities, members explained, must operate within the boundaries of government tolerance. Programmes must be approved by external officials and elder committee members, members that make up 40 per cent of YAC membership. 'It is not independent. The government doesn't allow all activities,' a member explained. 'For example, they didn't agree to a "youth and politics" labelled activity.'

When asked about YACs, many activists across the country notice this dependence on government. One Kachin State activist frankly stated that YACs 'cannot implement freely what they want, because of the 40 per cent [elder membership requirement]'. Not all youth initiatives that co-operate with the government will be required to have such a membership requirement; the

40 per cent is unique to YACs, and it varies widely in practice. Nonetheless, it is an illustrative example of how means of co-operation can dilute the freedom of youth initiatives. The notion that YACs are not completely independent seems to resonate with youth more broadly. Among surveyed youth, only about half of respondents who knew about YACs felt they could be trusted, given their relationship with government. In particular, less-educated respondents were more critical of YACs' independence than more-educated youth.

For some, the problem of independence concerns funding. An outsider remarked that:

Because they receive money from the government, young people need to please the government. It feels that with the YAC, instead of giving young people the space/opportunity to figure out freely what they want, the

government simply gives them seats and tries to blend them in the existing political structure.

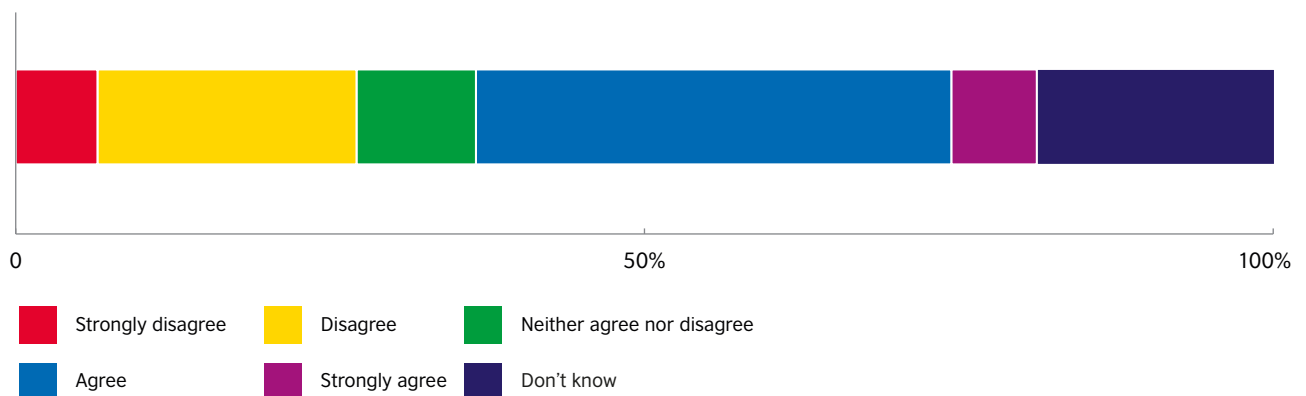
YAC activists themselves were also aware that 'funding comes with its own agenda'.

Not just staying independent of government

The concern with outside influence is not limited to co-operation with government. Some activists were hesitant to collaborate with any institution, fearing such a relationship might come with certain restrictions or obligations.

Some activists held this concern about international donors. 'I don't want to collaborate with international donors because I am afraid of being influenced,' explained one activist interviewed in this study. Most acknowledged that international NGOs can help networking

Figure 12: About half of youth suspect foreign donors have a hidden agenda



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Initiatives funded from outside Myanmar have a hidden agenda.'

and outreach and that they provide a source of funding for activities and campaigns that would otherwise be unattainable. Some thought international NGOs might interfere less in their activities than other partners, yet the concern of being pressured remained. The founder of a youth club said he did not 'want to deal with the NGOs', admitting: 'I'm afraid of being influenced and I think that our club cannot do everything that the donor asks.'

In some areas of Myanmar where governance is contested, staying independent might also mean findings ways to function with different parties at odds with each other. In areas where EAOs and the government both claim territory, activists may need to avoid being partial to one power or the other, depending on this situation. Members of one organisation in a conflict-affected area, for example, explained how they use one name when dealing with government, and sometimes a different name when dealing with EAOs. Sometimes, members would adjust their approach from village to village. '[Here], every village has its own government and rules. Every place has different rules. Using the [one label] or [the other label] depends on the situation.'³¹ Co-operation may have its benefits in some instances, but in others, it may affect the way youth initiatives are perceived and force them to adopt agile measures.

Moreover, means of co-operation are much less visible than means of confrontation. Because they rely on meetings and direct contact with officials instead of more 'noisy' tactics, many youth may not be aware of organisations working towards a cause through means of co-operation. The YACs, for example, despite their status as the most widely supported co-operative body between youth and government, remain relatively unknown.

Sixty-seven per cent of surveyed youth reported that they had never heard of youth affairs committees before, despite their national presence, likely because YACs lack the means for publicly visible activities. A third of youth being aware of the committees may be seen as progress in public awareness, but there is still work to be done. For this, more resources are necessary (see Chapter 5).

Youth activists may choose means of co-operation in a bid to influence officials directly. As demonstrated above, such a strategy may not always be straightforward. In many cases it demands an ability to come up with creative solutions to navigate situations as they unfold. In some cases it requires perseverance and an acceptance that people outside the initiative might not understand or condone one's activities. Despite their disadvantages, the expediency and access of co-operation may prove worthwhile to activists who believe confrontational approaches would be counterproductive.

Means of confrontation

Activists may also opt for means of confrontation. Protests, demonstrations, campaigns, online publications and other publicly visible forms of engagement can pressure decision-makers and bring public attention to a cause. The Yangon University student union, for example, arranged campus-wide demonstrations that were widely covered in the media. They brought publicity to the landscaping project, pressuring decision-makers. The YUEC's meeting with administrators and government officials would perhaps have never happened without the student union's demonstrations bringing the problem to light.

For the All Kachin Youth Union, protests are also a preferred tactic. The group often organises anti-war demonstrations to call attention to the ongoing conflict in Kachin State. In May 2018, the AKYU helped to organise protests against the conflict and the displacement of civilians in Myitkyina's famous Manau Park. Local reports claimed the protests drew thousands of people. 'It was publicly known that the demonstration was youth led. It was remarkable for us,' explained one demonstrator who joined the AKYU after meeting members at the 2018 protests. 'It showed that young people are capable of changing things.'

One AKYU member, who later co-founded the Kachin IDP Youth Committee, explained how demonstrations enable participants to express personal truths and experiences of injustice. 'I wanted to share what the fate of IDP youths is.' Protests may serve to inspire youth, offering them highly visible means to get involved. They also create attention. Press coverage is an important outcome of protests, serving the goal of raising awareness of the injustice of violent displacement.

But means of confrontation may also be risky. Demonstrations may bring attention to a cause, but also to the activists themselves. This may increase their risk of arrest or harassment, as the freedoms of speech and assembly remain limited in Myanmar. Criminal charges against satirical performers in Yangon, internet access demonstrators in Chin and Rakhine states, and environmental activists in Kayin State are but a few recent examples that demonstrate the risks activists face when expressing grievances publicly.³² The All Kachin Youth Union is aware of these risks. While the group is able to gather crowds and attention, its members feel 'watched'. They generally have to be mindful of security concerns because political activities 'are really sensitive'.

31 > This flexible posture resonates with the concept of the 'trickster,' defined by Babcock-Abrahams and employed by Nielsen and Standhart (2015): 'Our interlocutors felt as if they were constantly torn between rural and urban areas, traditions and new knowledge, and between being responsible community leaders (i.e. YAC members) and young activists (i.e. NSSYN members).' Emphasis and parentheses added. See Nielsen and Standhart (2015), p. 48–49.

32 > See Amnesty International (2020).

One Yangon environmental activist suggested that demonstrations common to other parts of the world were too risky for Myanmar activists.

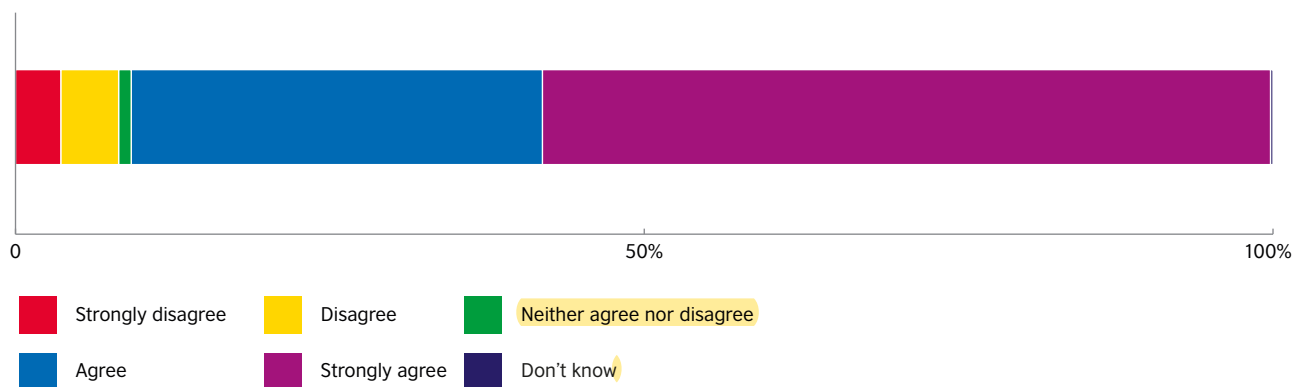
Greta Thunberg's work is really impressive and has enabled large-scale awareness raising. Yet, it somehow seems to be effective for Western countries only. It is difficult to imagine strikes every Friday in Myanmar; if people protest here, they would be arrested by the police.

For some activists, the risk of persecution is enough to deter them from means of confrontation. This appears especially true in conflict-affected areas, where youth activists must worry not only about the government but also armed groups. A youth in Northern Shan State claimed that 'in Lashio, demonstrations and protests are not possible, because of all the security risks'. She gave an example of a student who had 'protested about what should be done in the university' and got arrested by local authorities. 'We think it is better to avoid this.'

To some extent, the risk of arrest and harassment, combined with the difficulty of obtaining authorisation for protests, explains why NSSYAC/NSSYN activists often opt for co-operative means over demonstrations. Just as means of co-operation are not available to all activists, neither are means of confrontation. The choice between the two depends greatly on an activist's local context, and, for some, confrontation is simply too dangerous.

For other youth consulted in this study, a main concern around confrontational methods revolved around not only the immediate risks of arrest and harassment, but also reputational risks in the long term. 'I do not have the courage to get involved in a demonstration,' admitted a Lashio University student, who said teachers and administrators already discriminated against him for his previous affiliation with a student union. 'I am scared that it would hinder future opportunities, for instance when looking for a job.'

Figure 13: Nearly all youth reject violence



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Violence is never acceptable.'

4: Youth and social media

'In Lashio, young people spend at least three hours a day online. If the YAC wants to reach out to more people, they should get better at using Facebook,' explained a Lashio community leader.

Many youth activists agree. Social media, particularly Facebook and its messaging service, Messenger, is an integral part of youth life in Myanmar. It helps youth activists relay information and announce plans for action.

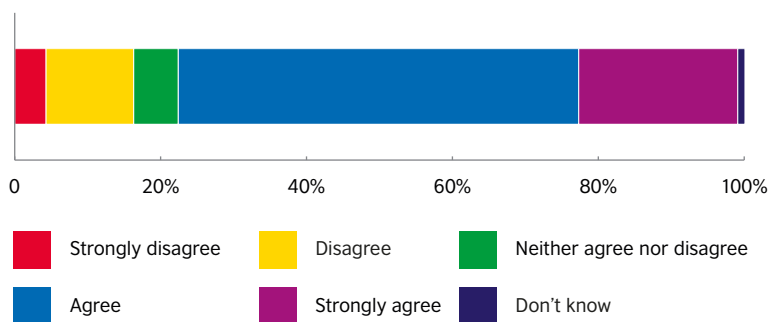
Rainbow, for example, regularly produces informative content on LGBTIQ+ terminology, public perceptions and other related information. AKYU members recalled efficiently mobilising people via social media to participate in demonstrations.

The importance of social media is such that youth initiatives often assign specific staff to manage it. Rainbow maintains a 'technology team' and the YUEC assigns a public relations officer responsible for its social media accounts.

Despite its popularity, social media is still best understood as a tool that youth activists use, rather than a means of activism itself. Only 23 per cent of surveyed youths think participating in an online campaign works well to create change. Only 11 per cent say they have participated in an online campaign in the last 12 months.

The Covid-19 pandemic may change this. Activists may come to rely on social media even more, and for some it may become a primary means of advocating for change (see Box 11). But for now, social media appears to support, not replace, youth activism.

Figure 14: Most youth believe that social media makes it easier to mobilise people



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Social media makes it easier to mobilise people.'

Choosing the best options available

When choosing how to pursue change, youth initiatives must weigh the benefits of different strategies against their disadvantages. The choice is critical to the identity of activists' initiatives and the success of their mission.

Some favour co-operative approaches and see protests, demonstrations and other forms of confrontation as counterproductive, even disingenuous. On the other hand, activists who choose means of confrontation may value the publicity and independence that such means offer.

Our survey showed that youth generally prefer means of co-operation (see Figures 9 and 11). This may be because youth believe them to be more effective, though the results may also reflect aversion to risk. Means of confrontation continue to carry significant risks for youth activists, from harassment and reputational damage to arrest and prosecution.

There is, however, no right or wrong in this discussion. Most of the time, activists' choices will depend on the situation at hand. The choice of strategy may include a mix of co-operation and confrontation. In some cases, the two types of means may work in tandem. Youth activists must find a balance suitable to their context, resources and risk tolerance.

One Yangon University student activist thought this was the case on campus during the tree-cutting protests. 'I think that demonstrating longer could have been more effective,' he suggested. 'In the end, it's good that the two actions came together.'



Chapter 4:

Challenges and opportunities for youth initiatives

Youth activists today may have more ways to pursue change, but that does not make activism easy. Advocating for social and political causes in any context is difficult. In Myanmar, there are particular challenges that make youth activism even more trying.

This section describes challenges to political and social engagement in Myanmar, from deterrents to youth participation and the difficulties of managing an organisation to the effects of ongoing conflict. It also offers suggestions to overcome or mitigate them. Some are manageable in scope; others deal with greater, more systemic challenges. Until Myanmar's economy becomes more egalitarian, or its politics more democratic, they are likely to remain in some form. Nonetheless, institutions both public and private, foreign and domestic, can do a lot to support the work of Myanmar youth activists, thereby contributing to a more vibrant and inclusive civic space.

Not enough time and money

Young people across the country see voluntary work as virtuous. But fewer actually participate (see Chapter 2). The two main reasons, according to our survey, are time and money.

'People have to work for their survival,' one Northern Shan State YAC member explained. 'It makes it difficult for them to give time to the team.'

Many young adults (including unmarried youth) have a number of family responsibilities; some have to earn income as a 'breadwinner' to the household. The opportunity cost of volunteering is therefore not only borne by the volunteer themselves, but also by

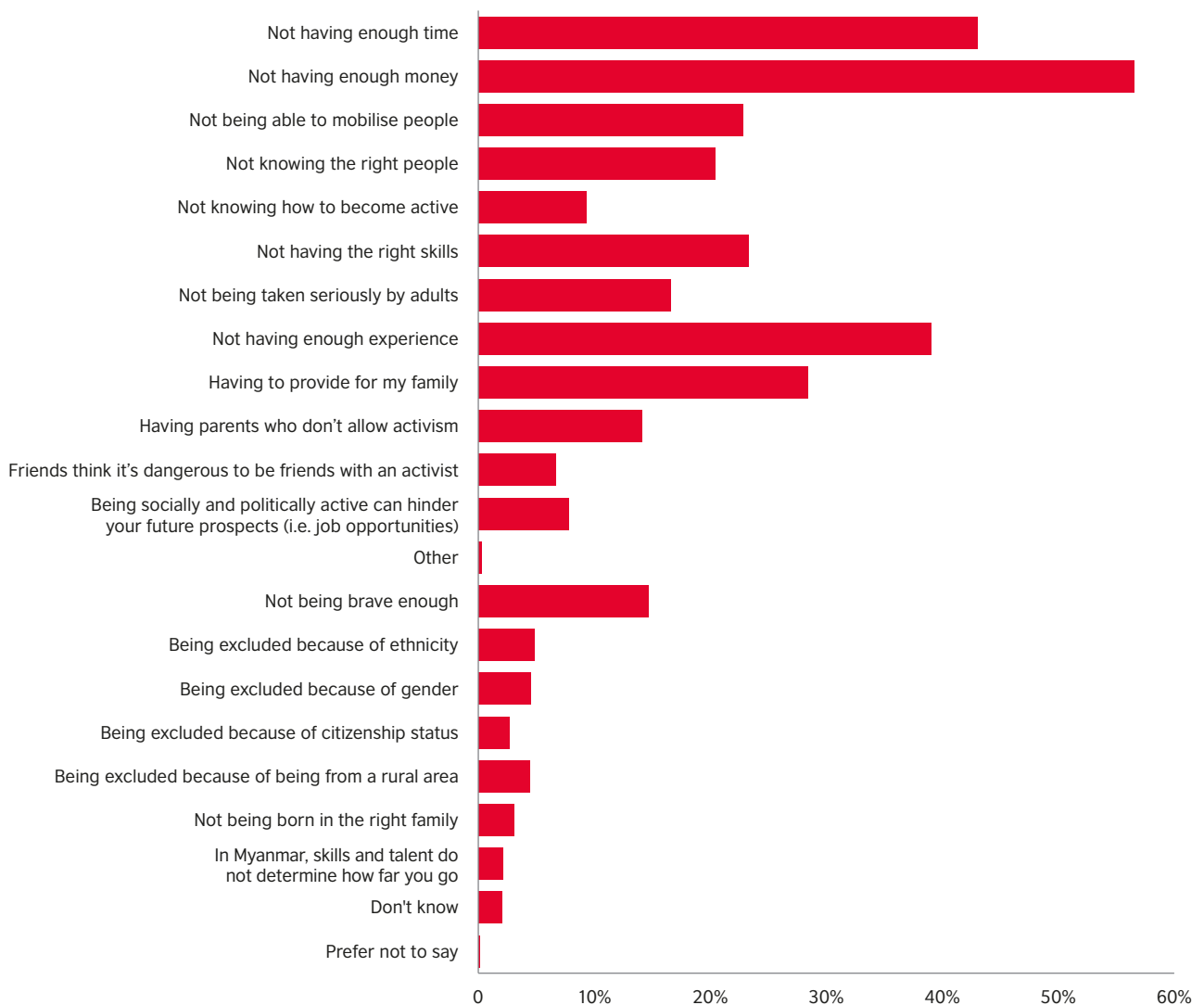
their parents, siblings, spouses or children. Volunteering for an initiative, as youth activists explained, can imply that one has passed up on paid work. As 'youth have to strive for the survival of their families,' in the words of a Myitkyina activist, this can be seen as irresponsible, or even irrational.

For this reason, many activists' friends and family members are sceptical of unpaid activities. 'My friends ask: "why are you working without being paid?";' recalled one YAC member in an interview. 'I try to explain [to] them that I am interested in politics.' A young female AKYU member, living in an IDP camp, described the pressure she feels from her parents.

'What you're doing is wasting your time. You're not earning any money.' I try my best to explain [to] them that what I am doing right now benefits me and the community. [...] Finally, they allow me to do this as long as I enjoy it.

These accounts match those of the Next Generation study, which found that youth must often negotiate with their parents about their interests.³³

Activists also shared that many youth organisations require financial contributions from their members. Not only are youth volunteers offering their time without compensation, they are often required to pay members' dues or cover other 'hidden' fees, such as accommodation or transport to training and events. Youth generally appear to be aware of this. When surveyed, 89 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that you often need to contribute financially when you are a volunteer (see Figure 16).

Figure 15: Money and time are the most common challenges to social and political engagement

Question: Which challenges do you and others face in becoming more socially and politically engaged?

In addition to money, time proves another scarce resource. Recalling that two original members had to quit the Northern Shan State Youth Affairs Committee, its secretary explained: ‘One quit to pursue higher education, the other couldn’t afford to do volunteer work anymore.’

Even committed organisational leaders struggle with the demands of volunteering. ‘Working in Rainbow Stars makes me hesitant to pursue my education journey,’ explained one Mon State volunteer. ‘I am now stuck in the third year at university because of my time investment in Rainbow Stars.’

The Mon State volunteer is not the only student to feel pressed for time. Students who want to become involved in a club face a dilemma between being active members and skipping classes. To be able to sit final exams, students must meet attendance requirements. Several student activists felt these requirements deterred students from their initiatives.

‘The 75 per cent of required attendance is the biggest challenge to university

students’ engagement,’ a Yangon University student estimated. ‘If there are 100 members in the club, only 30 really dare to become really active/ invested because of this threat.’

Often, time constraints are particularly restrictive for young women. In many cases, young women’s whereabouts are more constrained than their male peers, including due to formal or informal curfews imposed by their parents or dormitories. Yangon University’s dorms, for instance, require female students to return by 6 p.m.

One YUEC activist complained:

The travelling distance between home and university is a barrier to young people joining clubs. In particular for female students, if they have a curfew, then it is even more difficult for them to attend activities after class.

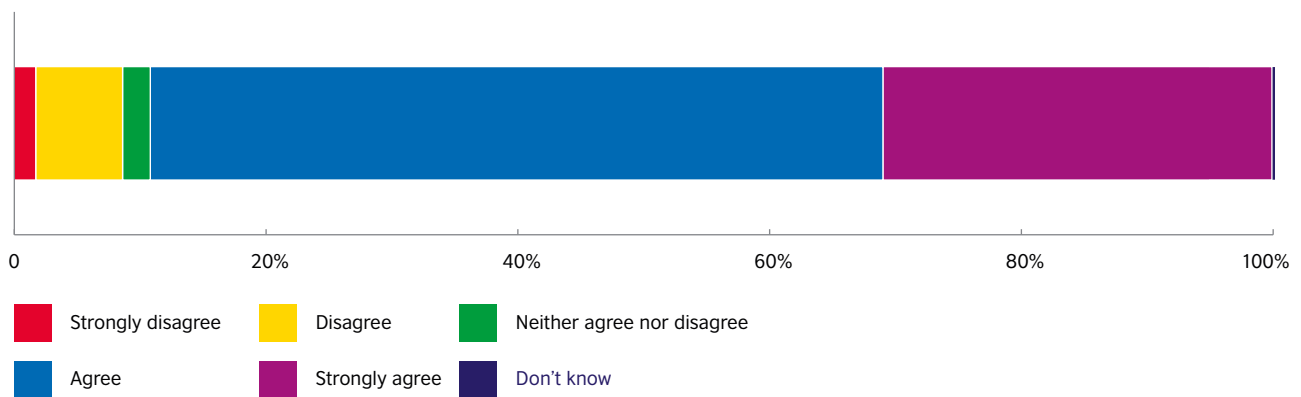
Family members should encourage more younger female students to join activities, explain [to] them what benefits they could gain, from career and personal perspectives. Sometimes,

the YUEC talks to female members’ parents who are against their daughter’s involvement in the club.

The YUEC’s tactic of engaging directly with community leaders is an approach that other youth initiatives can adopt. By demonstrating the benefits of volunteering directly to parents, officials or other seniority figures, they might be more likely to approve of youth spending their time in youth initiatives.

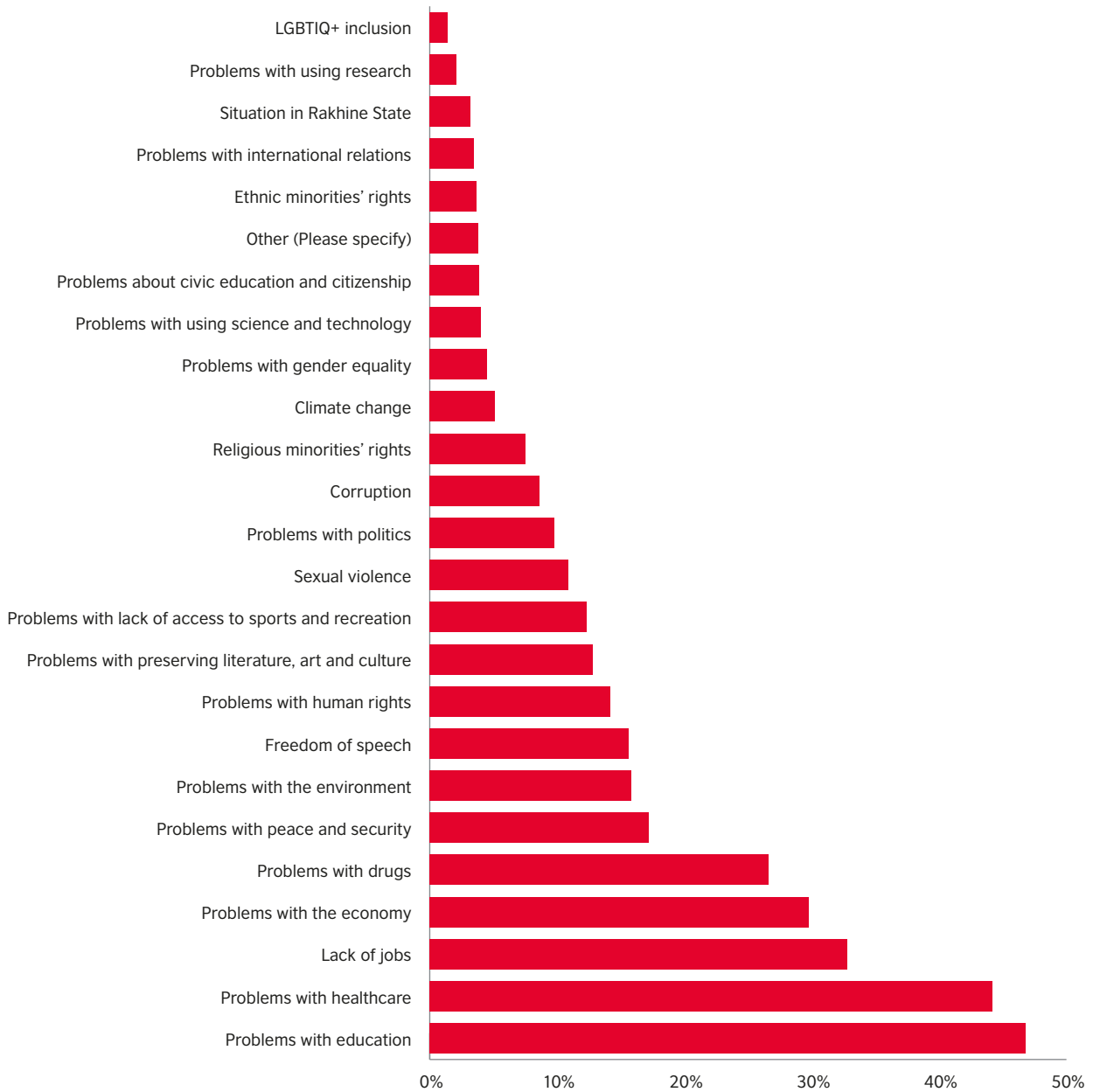
There are also ways government and foreign institutions can help. They can lead public awareness campaigns explaining how the benefits of youth engagement can outweigh the costs. They can allocate specific funds for youth-led initiatives, intentionally designed to help less-privileged youth participate. These funds can cover any costs associated with volunteering, including travel, accommodation and other hidden expenses. Universities can review their academic and extracurricular requirements, including dorm policies, to make volunteering more feasible for students.

Figure 16: Youth believe volunteering requires financial contributions



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘When you are a volunteer you often need to contribute financially’

Figure 17: Youth would like to be more involved in education, healthcare and access to jobs



Question: Which topic would you like to engage in?

Not enough experience

In addition to time and money, many youth feel they lack the experience or skillsets to volunteer. Thirty-nine per cent of surveyed youth said 'not having enough experience' was a reason they were not more socially and politically engaged, the third most cited reason (see Figure 15).

Many feel they do not have the public speaking skills, advocacy skills, computer skills or language ability (particularly in English) to be helpful. One AKYU member expressed the concern that 'if you have no skills,

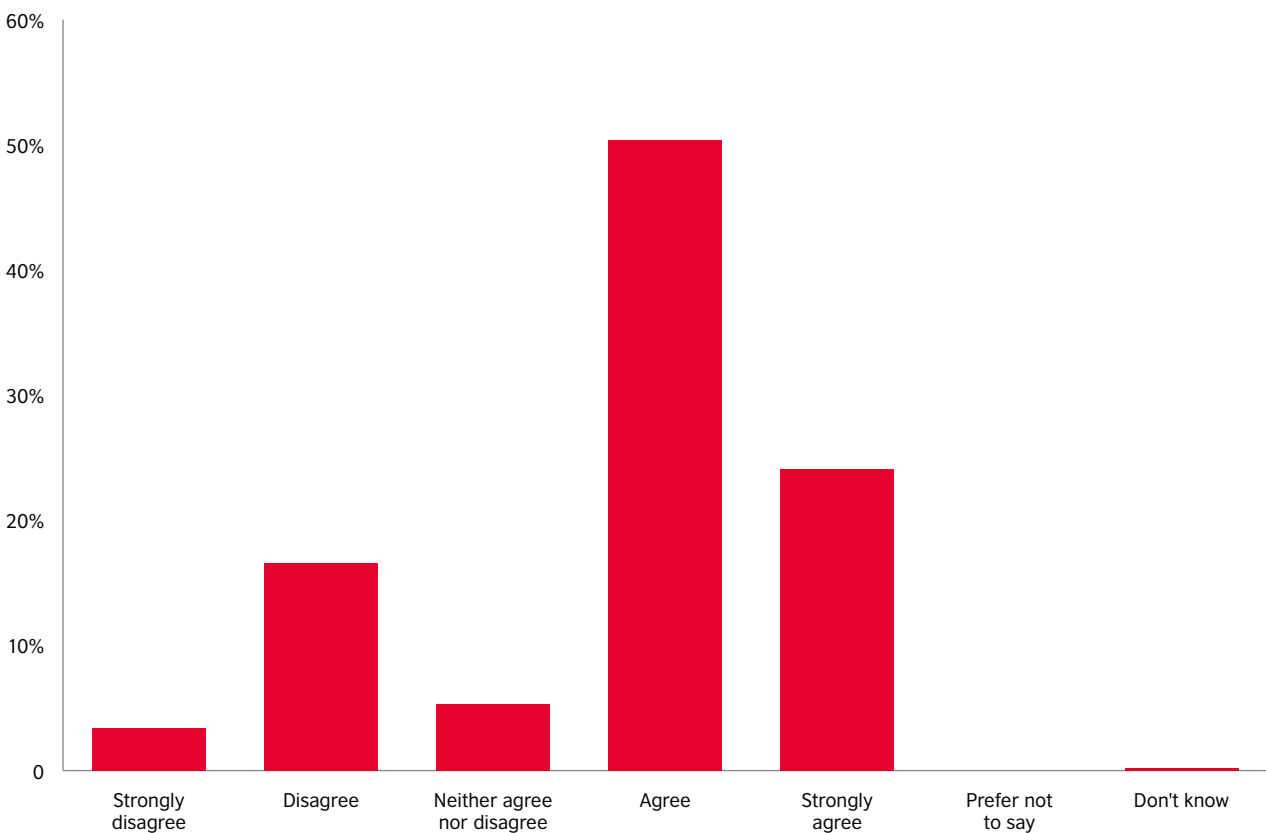
capacities, you cannot bring effective and efficient change. That's what we need to become effectively engaged.'

This is ironic of course. Other activists highlight that volunteering and engagement are precisely how many youth build skills and gain experience. 'Before joining the AKYU, I was just a normal girl,' explained a young woman in Myitkyina. 'After joining AKYU, I have responsibilities, I have become mature [...] I can personally benefit from my engagement in AKYU as I get information about education, available scholarships.'

Volunteering is also confidence-building for youth. For many, this makes the personal investment of time worth it. 'Volunteering cannot provide money, but volunteering can provide self-esteem and satisfaction,' explained one activist.

Volunteering requires time, energy and commitment. But volunteering can provide self-inner peace and self-satisfaction. Volunteering provides priceless experiences, knowledge and awareness. It can also build friendships among the different groups.

Figure 18: Youth believe easier decision-making sets them apart



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Decision-making is easier with young people than with older people.'

Often, then, youth are deterred from volunteering because they lack the very thing that volunteering builds. Experience, skillsets and confidence can be gained from volunteering. If this were more widely understood, youth may be less likely to view volunteering as costing time and money, and instead see it as an investment in their futures.

Youth initiatives can make this benefit clear in their recruitment, while also encouraging youth to join regardless of their current skills. Local and international institutions can further communicate the skill-building nature of engagement through public awareness campaigns, as well as helping youth build skills directly by expanding training opportunities in rural and underserved areas. These actions may draw more youth to activism, particularly those who think they do not have skills to offer.

Getting to an inclusive leadership model

At the organisational level, setting up and running an organisation is a challenge for any initiative, including youth initiatives. Organisations must decide how to structure their initiatives and how to make decisions. Whether designed intentionally or organically grown, the way in which an organisation is run is a trait that defines an organisation. The youth initiatives included in this study were organised in very different ways, reflecting widely contrasting approaches to organisational leadership. Where some valued flat hierarchies and collective decision-making, others leaned more towards individual charismatic leadership. Both approaches, and any combination of them, carry their own benefits and disadvantages.

The AKYU, for example, maintains several procedures for collective decision-making. Among AKYU's more than 100 members, 17 serve as part of the Members' Committee. These 17 members (ten women and seven men) are tasked with representing the voices of the members. The 'organiser', a paid

staff member, acts as a bridge between members and the Executive Committee and reports on the goals and activities discussed among the former. Executive Committee members meet on a monthly basis, and every two years general decisions are made at the Members' Conference. All of this is described clearly to members on a large organisation chart posted on the wall next to the entrance of the AKYU's Youth Centre, alongside a metal suggestion box for members to submit their ideas.

These procedures were developed over decades to ensure broad inclusion. Yet the organisation also recognises the value of more centralised leadership, at least on occasion. As one AKYU member explained:

For political statements – this is decided mainly by the Executive Committee and the Central Committee [...] It's not within the Members' Committee's capacity. The choice of words and publication is done by senior members.

Groups like Rainbow, on the other hand, lean more decisively towards individual charismatic leadership. A younger organisation, Rainbow relies more on the guidance and vision of its founder, and members often seek his approval for events. Important decisions are led by the organisation's chair. 'For big events, all team members will gather and share advice,' explained one Rainbow member. '[Then the chair] makes the acceptable decision, considering every idea and thought of the team members.'

The YUEC is similarly arranged. Major goal setting and mission decisions are made by the club president, alongside some consensus-based decision-making, a feature recently introduced to increase members' influence. Many members valued this structure, arguing that the president's leadership aids recruitment through inspiration. 'I think that young people are interested in environmental issues. But they need someone who starts the initiative and then they will join. They always need a

leader,' one activist argued. Another said: 'Because of this centralised system, we can work smoothly.'

The benefits of charismatic leadership, however, also come with risks. By relying on a single leader, or even a few leaders, youth initiatives may exclude certain youth from decision-making and deter their development into future leaders. Young women, in particular, raised this issue during fieldwork for this study (see Box 7). Centralised leadership structures also present a sustainability challenge. If promising youth are not coached into leadership by their peers, initiatives may not survive if (and when) their founder moves on.

One student activist at Yangon University thought youth initiatives tended towards charismatic leadership for deep-seated cultural reasons:

I don't think democracy is in our blood. We don't know what to think and how to think. A lot of young people in Myanmar love to follow. Youth think that Myanmar people are not good at being creative. Since democracy is not in our blood, most organisations' structures are not transparent and democratic.

Supporting civil society is popular. But civil society is not inherently democratic. Donor agencies and NGOs can support youth initiatives in their organisational development with special management training programmes that focus on leadership structures and accountable decision-making. In this way, institutions can not only nurture the sustainability of youth initiatives, but also help them become more inclusive.

Funding is difficult

Another significant organisational challenge for youth initiatives is funding. Often, the ability of a youth-led organisation to acquire funds and grants depends on its organisational capacity and its legal status. If either is insufficient, youth initiatives must try to fundraise elsewhere, often through crowdsourcing, or cut costs.

Grants from government, NGOs or foreign donor agencies are popular. But they are few in number and difficult to get. Activists explained that to receive a grant, an initiative must be sufficiently organised, legally registered and well-networked. Few, they argue, can easily satisfy these requirements.

Reporting and compliance requirements of grants are often weighty, and deter youth initiatives from applying for funding. Some activists feel that getting a grant is daunting and fear they can get into trouble if they misstep.

Funding opportunities are also determined by initiatives' registration status. Among the four case studies, only the YAC held an official status. In the university context, YUEC members explained that, while the university rector had recognised the club verbally, they did not have 'the official paper' to legitimise their organisation in writing. They explained that this makes it more difficult to apply for funding. Conversely, some organisations may choose *not* to register with the government due to their politically sensitive activities, though this means that they also have difficulty acquiring grants. The requirement that organisations be registered (whether a real or perceived requirement) appears to make grant applications impossible for many youth initiatives.

The requirements that youth organisations have to meet led one activist to conclude that donors 'are interested in the topic of youth, not in youth-led initiatives'.

Helping each other out

The four initiatives examined in this study have different strategies to cope with fundraising in the absence of public grants. The AKYU, for instance, relies on local donors in Myitkyina. The YUEC and Rainbow heavily rely on members' fees, which cost a few thousand kyats per month. The YUEC also regularly sells homemade products, including pastries or flower bouquets. These alternatives provide some revenue, but usually in amounts far less than grants.

To help revenues stretch further, organisations sometimes pool resources. These resources can be material or technical. For example, a separate youth organisation in Northern Shan State provided a bus to the NSSYAC event held in Kug Kai in February 2020, to allow the YAC team to travel to the training location. Another organisation provided YAC members with financial training to help them better manage the organisation's funds. Others have followed this trend. In Yangon, younger environmental university clubs have requested meetings with the YUEC to discuss best practices on running their club and programmes.

To youth activists, these informal collaborations/partnerships are useful ways to overcome material constraints. Youth initiatives regularly share meeting space with one another to cut costs. Among the four initiatives, only the AKYU had an office; the others relied on their networks. NSSYAC members used the offices of other local initiatives who lent space to them. Sharing resources, however, requires an initiative to be on good terms with others, which is not always the case.

To address funding and resource issues, youth initiatives can consider launching revenue-generating activities, such as making and selling products. Some youth initiatives, like the YUEC, report to have raised some revenue in such activities. Institutions, however, can have an even greater impact by reviewing their registration requirements for grants. If funding were made available for a wider range of youth initiatives, including those that choose not to maintain a legal status, more youth initiatives could thrive.

Factional politics and discrimination

Youth initiatives are not immune to the factional politics of Myanmar. Several activists regretted that rivalries along ethnic, religious and geographic lines, lines that characterise the country's conflicts, also characterise youth groups. As one activist noted:

Young people are not harmonious, not united. There are rivalries between states, regions and ethnicities. People tend to accuse each other instead of sympathising: 'You Shan, you Kachin ...' In a youth meeting, someone even threw a chair out of anger. Myanmar youth are not united.

Divisions might play out along religious lines. Short of confrontation, in many cases people of different affiliations just do not tend to interact much. 'Sometimes, youths befriend others based on their religions. Islam, Hindu and Buddhist youth groups don't mingle,' a member of the Mon Youth Affairs Committee explained. 'Some people think they are safer alone or in a group of people with the same religion.' Often family and elders play a role. 'Sometimes our parents advise us not to be friends with people from different religion/ethnicity,' explained an activist in Lashio.

Tensions also arise within ethnic and religious minorities. One activist, for instance, shared how in Kachin State, different Christian churches were not getting along, hindering collaboration between different youth groups: 'One fundamentalist group does not join any activities. Others tend to invite people from [two other churches], but they do not invite participants from other groups.'

Exclusion might also play out along other dimensions. For example, two members of the Youth Affairs Committee in Northern Shan who live with disabilities described their engagement as an exception rather than the norm. They explained that most opportunities, not least opportunities to engage with social and political change, were often not physically accessible to people with disabilities, especially outside of Yangon. This speaks to broader issues of stigma that people with disabilities face, particularly people with mental disabilities. Only a third of survey respondents thought people with physical disabilities should get involved in social and political affairs. For people with mental disabilities, only 14 per cent thought so.

But despite prejudice among youth, youth initiatives can also prove to be important proponents of inclusion. For many, inclusivity is a specific goal. Many youth initiatives work to create a more inclusive society and bridge divides through their day-to-day work, whether by addressing stigma against the LGBTIQ+ community or people with disabilities, or by bringing together youth across different faiths.

5: Religious minorities

Religious minorities want to be more involved in politics. Eighty-six per cent of non-Buddhist respondents said religious minorities should be more involved.

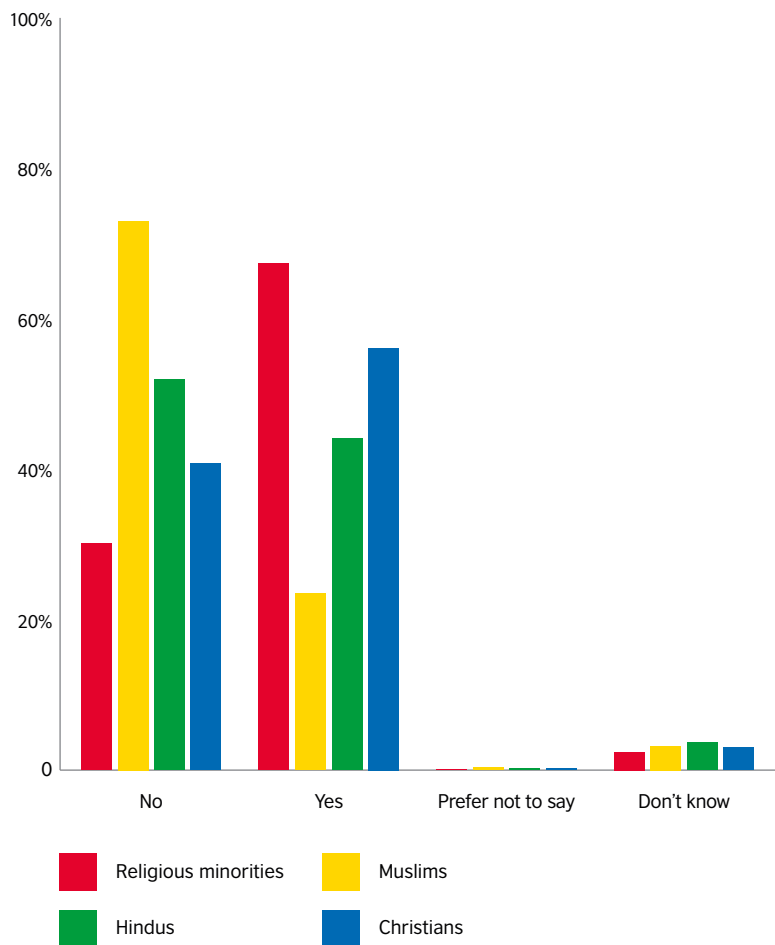
Most Buddhist youth also think religious minorities should be involved more – but not as overwhelmingly. Only fifty-six per cent of Buddhist respondents wanted religious minorities to be more involved.

And there are differences in how much respondents want different minorities to be involved.

Fifty-six per cent think Christians should be involved more, and 44 per cent think the same for Hindus. Yet only 23 per cent think Muslims should have more of a say.

Religious minorities see it differently. Twice as many respondents from religious minorities thought Muslims should be more involved in politics.

Figure 19: Youth disagree about which religious minorities should be more involved in social and political issues



Question: Should people from religious minorities be more involved in social and political issues?

Youth initiatives may also simply serve as a space where people can meet each other who would not otherwise have met. At Yangon University, for example, a young female student felt student clubs were an opportunity to form bonds to help counter discrimination on campus:

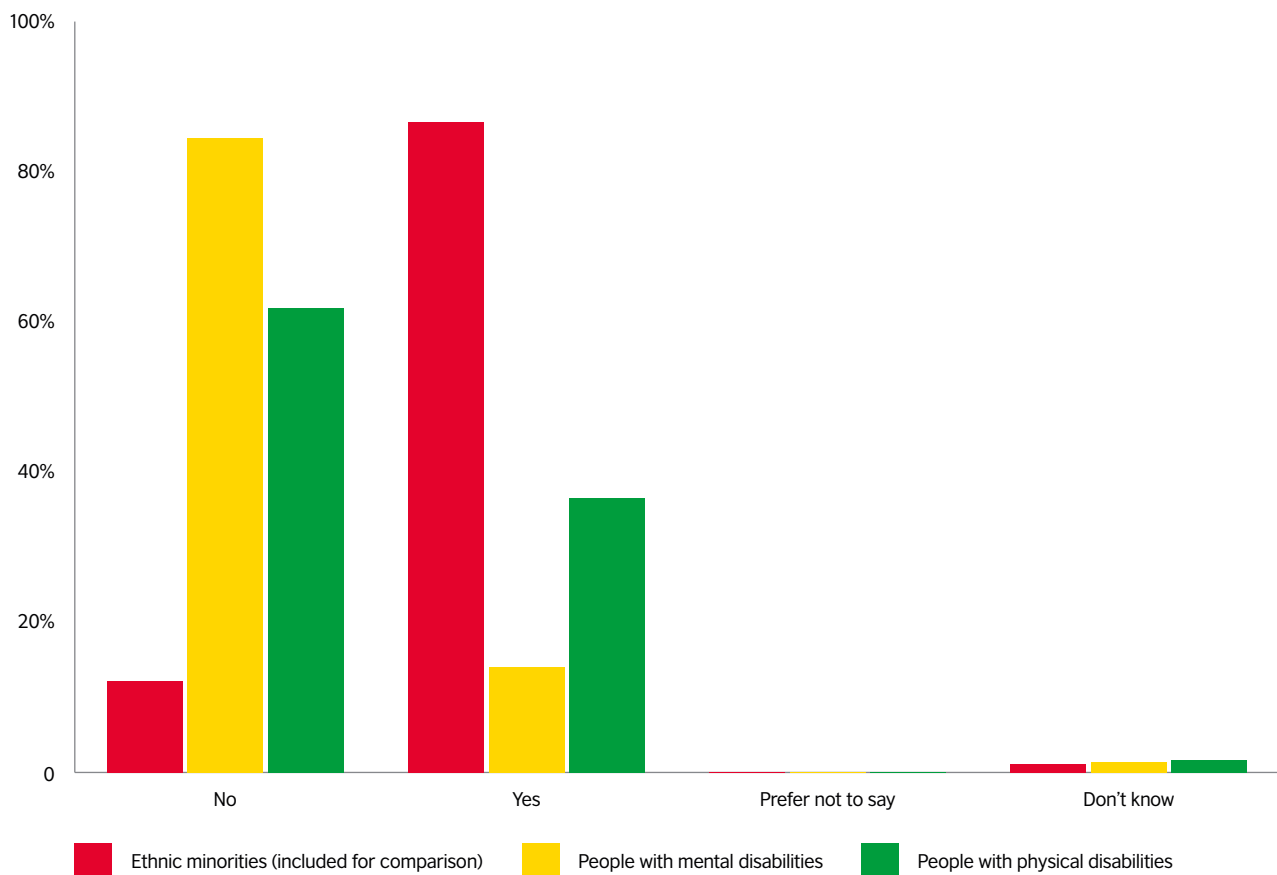
Now, I am not facing any discrimination because I am Muslim. But when I joined in 2015, I felt like other students judged me because I was Muslim. This improvement is not really linked to the political situation. It is more due to the fact that, by spending more and more time together, they can see beyond the fact that I am Muslim.

The YAC in Shan State is unique in that it brings people together from the ‘three Shans’ who usually would not interact. The committee ‘offered a place where we could build trust,’ said one member. ‘Volunteering is beneficial because we can learn from each other in terms of communication, networking, intercultural networking, humanity,’ a female member elaborated. ‘Volunteering can increase mutual understanding among the youth and different ethnicities.’

Youth organisations can themselves make diversity and inclusion an explicit goal of their work, so they are more likely to achieve it in their organisations.

There is also much external institutions can do to support youth organisations to achieve this goal. Government and donor agencies can ensure that training, workshops and other youth events are accessible to a wide variety of youth to ensure no groups are excluded. Then, they can design exchange programmes in which youth activists can share experiences, work together on a project and network. This will not only help activists gain experience and build networks, but it will also provide a venue for the kind of youth teamwork that can overcome differences between groups.

Figure 20: Many youth are biased against people with disabilities and their political and social engagement



Question: Should people with disabilities be more involved in social and political issues?

The danger of ‘political’ issues

Across Myanmar, issues deemed ‘political’ in nature are often seen as too risky for youth activists. Activists consulted in this study did not feel any issue should be off limits for youth, but they were aware that society around them has different views.

‘In Kug Kai,’ one activist said, ‘the community thinks politics is a thing that should not be touched, because they think politics are a way to prison.’

Families, one person explained, continue to associate political activism with subversive activity, recalling painful experiences under previous governments. ‘During the dictatorship and Thein Sein era, parents used to say, “politics are not for you”,’ explained one Northern Shan State volunteer. ‘Parents lived in a dark time, the only info they got was propaganda. They don’t know what is truly happening.’

Youth tend to have slightly fewer reservations about politics. In our survey, over three-quarters of respondents disagree that youth should not get involved in political issues.

But concerns remain. Journalists and activists in Myanmar, such as the Peacock Generation performers,³⁴ may be harassed or arrested and sentenced. Youth activists understand these risks and see how they affect their space to pursue change.

‘Youth are very positive about volunteering, but as soon as it gets political, they get scared, because parents have taught them that politics are a [forbidden] fruit; you should not eat it,’ explained one youth activist in Lashio. Particularly in conflict-affected areas of the country, the risks of political engagement require youth to be judicious. Any work perceived as a challenge to authorities is seen as risky. Protests, demonstrations and other ‘political’ means are feared, because they are seen as activities that carry the risk of arrest.

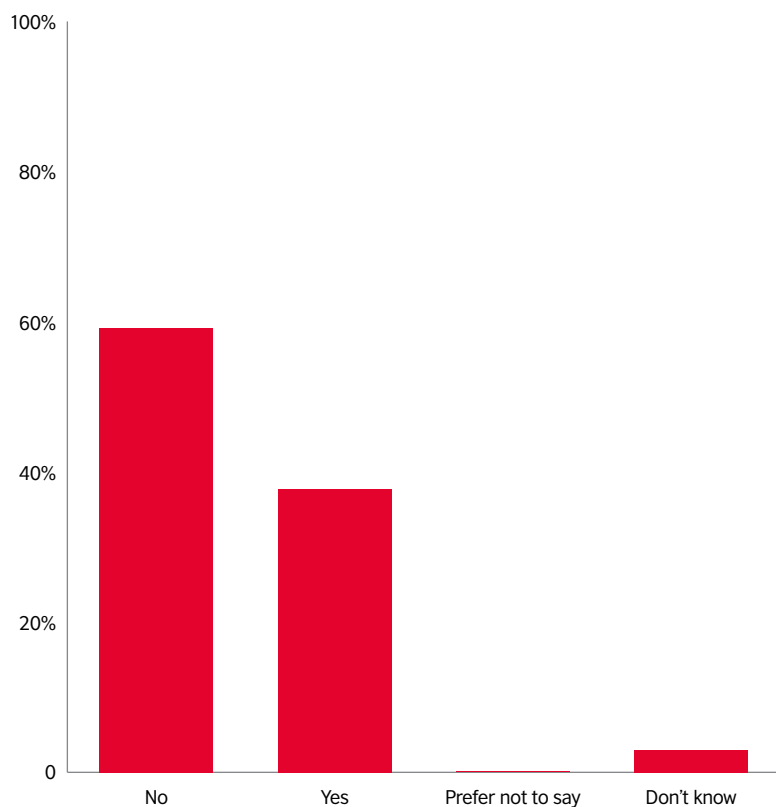
6: LGBTIQ+ youth in Myanmar

Though LGBTIQ+ youth in Myanmar have benefited from recent changes to social attitudes, progress is incremental. More than half (59 per cent) of youth surveyed in this study felt that LGBTIQ+ should not be more involved in social and political affairs.

For many LGBTIQ+ youth, discrimination is a daily experience. ‘Job opportunities are already scarce, but in addition to this, LGBT are being discriminated when looking for work,’ explained a youth activist in Lashio.

Youth initiatives can help counter discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people by raising awareness among their members and by adopting inclusive practices.

Figure 21: More than half of young people would not like LGBTIQ+ youth to be more involved in social and political affairs



Question: Should LGBTIQ+ youth be more involved in social and political affairs?

When youth involve themselves in sensitive issues, harassment can come from any powerful party. 'There are always potential risks to get arrested [...] by both the military and ethnic armed organisations,' one activist said.

Youth initiatives have to take precautions and make sure their members are aware of the risks of certain means of activism. Foreign donor agencies can leverage their

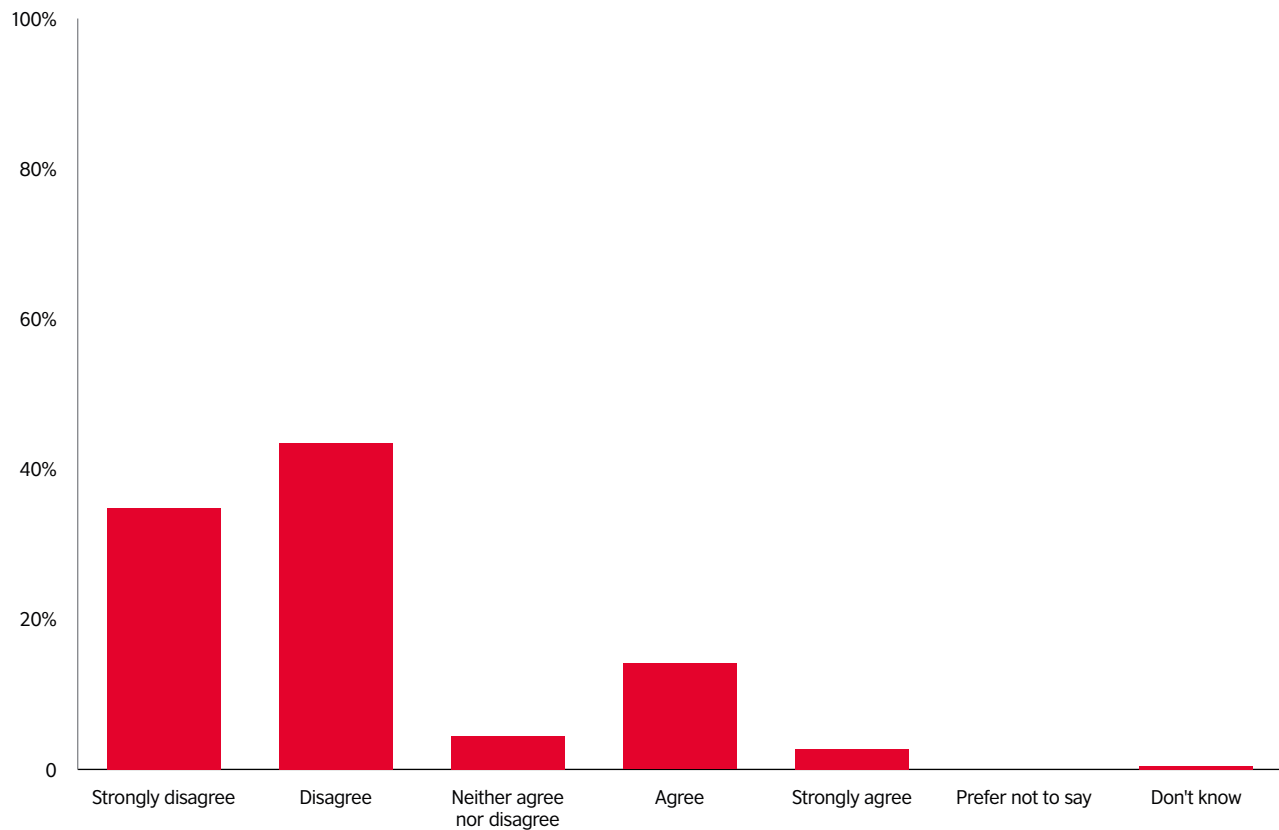
relationship with government to advocate for the rights of assembly and free speech, not least for young people. Universities can protect and defend their students when they exercise these rights. Most importantly, government and the political figures that lead it can use their positions to protect and promote freedom of expression.

Activism in difficult places

'When NGOs and international organisations come to Kachin State, they only come to Myitkyina. They don't go to Bamo or elsewhere.'

Social and economic opportunity varies across Myanmar, particularly between urban and rural areas. In harder-to-reach areas, this creates a special set of challenges for youth interested in social or political engagement.

Figure 22: Youth believe young people should be involved in social and political affairs



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Young people should not get involved in political issues.'

7: Political activism: A male domain?

‘Most young women are afraid to be involved in politics,’ a young female politician in Myitkyina explained. ‘Because of culture, traditions, women are afraid to participate in politics.’

In youth politics, young men are still more visible than women. Often, it’s a matter of what is seen as ‘appropriate’ in a relatively conservative country. Parents and the local community play an important role.

‘I come from a rural area. Most people are narrow-minded and don’t see positively the fact that a woman like me is active,’ explained an environmental activist.

For many young women, fear of activism deters them from greater involvement. Due to Myanmar’s historic and continuing experience of conflict, political activism is seen as dangerous and therefore something women should be protected from. Sixty-five per cent of surveyed youth thought being an activist is too dangerous for women.

At the same time, 75 per cent of surveyed women felt confident that women have the strength to engage in political activism, and where women take up the challenge, the power of example is changing minds.

‘I wanted to prove people that I am right with the results of my actions. Now things are better. I have proved [to] my parents that I was right,’ explained one young woman.

Youth initiatives can make sure to have inclusive organisational structures and promote women leaders, so they can become role models for other young women.

Few opportunities

To begin with, in many cases opportunities for youth engagement are concentrated in Myanmar’s urban centres. Yangon and Mandalay, for example, are hubs for youth social and political activism, in part because of the jobs and education opportunities they offer and the concentration of people and institutions.³⁵ Rural areas, according to youth activists, offer less to youth.

‘The challenges we face before we get a job are more acute,’ explained one AKYU member.

Despite graduating from the university, you have to take special courses to gain special skills – but there is a limited choice in Myitkyina. The university is not a place where necessary and essential skills are given to students. I don’t want to blame university students. All of this is happening because of structural

problems and violence. But given the current context, the lower Burma and the upper Burma are very different in terms of opportunities. Upper Burma has less opportunities. In Yangon, you have so many choices. If you’re interested in politics you can do a diploma in political sciences, you can learn a foreign language. That is not the case here.

As there are fewer youth organisations, campaigns and events in rural areas, there are fewer opportunities to get involved. This in turn means youth who would be more engaged if given the chance are left behind.

Government, youth organisations, NGOs and foreign donor agencies can double down to ensure their programmes have a broad scope and reach youth in rural areas.

8: Drug use and Myanmar youth

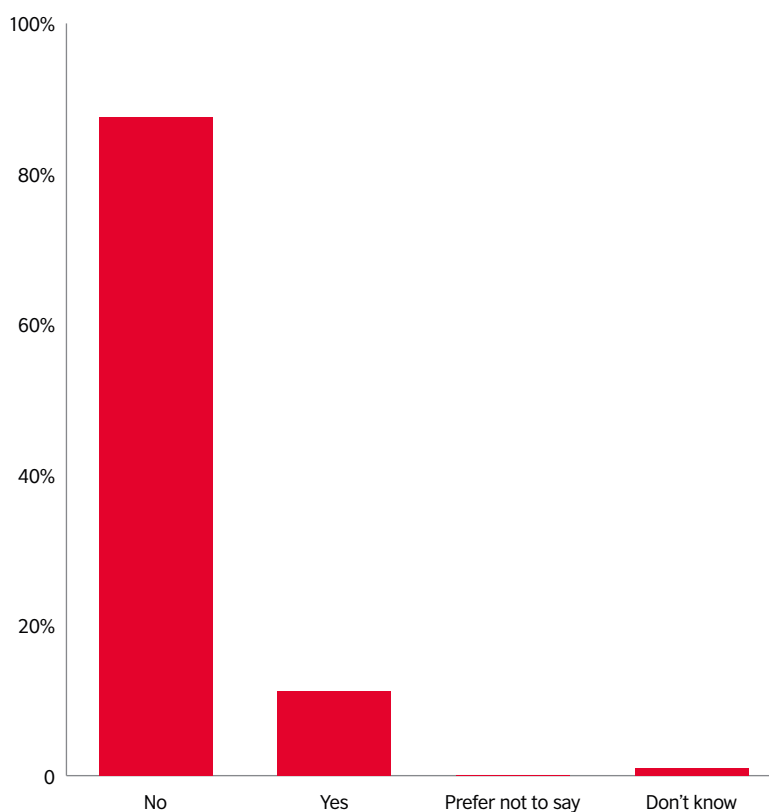
Rural areas in Myanmar do not only struggle with fewer opportunities for young people. According to activists consulted in this study, they also struggle with the greater prevalence and commonplace use of illegal drugs.

One Lashio activist referred to his town as a 'drug city', where drugs are easily accessible from an early age. 'Drugs are part of the culture,' he elaborated.

Young people who use or deal drugs face not only serious health consequences but also sharp social stigma. Some youth organisations bar them from activism. An activist in Myitkyina, for example, flatly explained that 'drug users have been excluded from participating in activities'.

Stigma against drug users is widespread. When asked which groups of people should be more involved in social and political issues, only one in ten youth said drug users. This contrasts even with other disadvantaged groups. Roughly eight out of ten youth, for example, said school dropouts should be more involved.

Figure 23: Only one in ten youth believe people who use drugs should be more socially and politically involved



Question: Should people who use drugs be more involved in social and political issues?

Navigating conflict areas

For youth who live in conflict-affected areas, the space for youth activism is particularly challenged. Youth living in or near these areas, for instance in Northern Rakhine, Kachin or Northern Shan, have to navigate a range of consequences stemming from armed conflict.

This includes direct security threats such as ongoing fighting. In some cases it includes the risk of being recruited to fight, either voluntarily or by force. It also includes broader effects on the social environment. When different parties compete to dominate a territory, it can lead to movement restrictions, heightened security and multilayered bureaucracy, each of which damages a community's trust in new initiatives. This makes it 'difficult to expect young people to create change,' as one Lashio activist said. Those who pursue change have to be creative.

In practical terms, one tangible consequence of living in a conflict-affected area is that doing things becomes a lot more involved. Youth organisations in conflict-affected areas face more scrutiny, allegedly for safety reasons.

To conduct activities, activists have to obtain permission. Whether the scrutiny is done by the government or EAOs, a Lashio activist explained that before holding any event, they have to submit authorisations. The activist explained that authorities are more lenient now, but only a few years ago, local authorities would come and attend activities to monitor them. Whenever conflict flares up, either through skirmishes, explosions or other events, getting permissions becomes even harder.

The cumbersome and often intrusive permissions process means organisations are sometimes tempted to proceed without permissions, at significant risk. In one instance, a group of youth organisations wanted to join forces to organise Human Rights Day and International Youth Day in 2019.

9: Internally displaced youth

Decades of conflict in Myanmar have led to the displacement of thousands. These IDPs often live in designated camps, supported by government, local civil society and international organisations. Internally displaced youth regularly experience discrimination.

'I feel like I am treated differently for being an IDP,' explained an IDP youth activist in Myitkyina, a city home to several IDP camps. 'Being an IDP is highly stigmatised. It is one of the factors making youth not engaging [in social and political affairs].'

Though IDPs are often served by international organisations, their programming sometimes leaves the needs of IDP unaddressed. For many, this leads to frustration:

[IDP youth] have to focus on their daily concerns rather than engage in political and social issues. [...] It doesn't mean that IDPs don't receive any trainings. NGOs come and give so many awareness-raising activities but then there are no job opportunities. IDPs get upset – they've got too much knowledge, but they have no job opportunities. Then, they lose interest in joining such activities. I do not assume that the way the trainings are delivered is not effective, but it doesn't result in concrete change in the lives of people.

The events went smoothly, gathering an enthusiastic youth crowd, a major achievement in light of the fragile security situation in their area. But the GAD had not wanted to authorise the event, meaning it could have been shut down at any point.

In general, activists in conflict-affected areas describe the need to tread more carefully than their peers in less affected areas. In one area, activists said they knew that they were under watch, both by government authorities and EAOs. This in turn affects how visible and outspoken activists dare to be. 'EAOs always know what we are doing,' claimed one activist. EAOs, the activist explained, keep a close watch of who is involved in social and political affairs. 'There are some lines we cannot cross – this considerably limits choices in terms of activities and locations.'

A peaceful settlement to Myanmar's conflicts will take time. But there are several actions institutions can take to address the inequality of opportunity between urban and rural areas, especially conflict-affected areas. Foreign donor agencies, NGOs and local initiatives alike can make concerted efforts to expand their programming into rural or difficult-to-reach areas. They can work with government to ensure high-speed internet access outside of urban centres, to further bridge the gap between cities and rural areas. To strengthen Myanmar's journey towards enduring peace, government and co-operating partners can do more to involve youth. They can, for instance, establish a youth parliament, which will allow youth from various areas of Myanmar to address issues important to youth as equal participants.

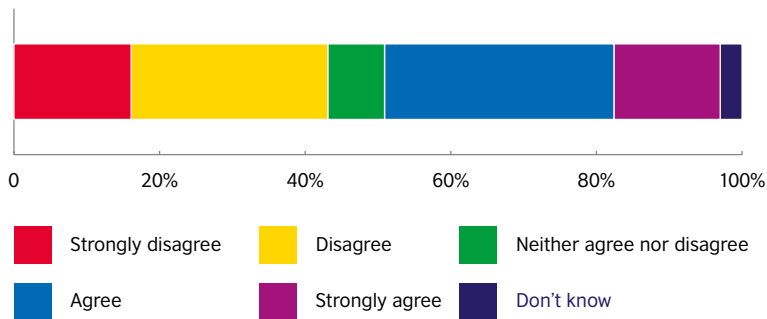
10: Youth and the 2020 general elections

‘It will be the first time for me to vote. I am very confused now, I don’t know which party to vote for,’ one youth volunteer admitted. ‘I want to use my vote for the right party. To be honest, I am a bit confused about which party I should vote for. I get information from social media, through friends, but I am still trying to make a comparison between all the parties [...] I am in a dilemma.’

For many youth, the 2020 elections will be their first time voting in a general election. Though activists were not always convinced that the election will lead to change, many argued it will be a catalyst for youth engagement. Many insisted that voter education for young people is crucial, in particular in rural areas.

Youth appear divided on the effectiveness of acts of political participation like voting. When surveyed, 43 per cent of youth disagreed or strongly disagreed that grassroots organising is more effective than working through the political system. Conversely, 46 per cent agreed or strongly agreed.

Figure 24: Youth are divided on the most effective way to create change through grassroots work



Question: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: ‘If you want to change something, it works better to do it through grassroots work (e.g. protesting, striking, creating a CSO or similar grassroots work).’



11: Youth engagement during the pandemic

The first cases of Covid-19 in Myanmar were confirmed by the Ministry of Health and Sports on 23 March 2020. Many organisations, as well as youth initiatives, suspended their activities and started working from home. As the April – May period is usually busy for youth initiatives, the pandemic was particularly disruptive. All four cases included in this study were forced to cancel or postpone activities. The AKYU, for instance, was forced to suspend its summer English programmes aimed at university students and fresh high school graduates.

Despite the uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, youth initiatives have not remained passive. The situation seems to have led to increased co-operation between local organisations, not least youth-led initiatives. One AKYU member described how, in Kachin State, youth-led initiatives have joined forces: ‘AKYU joined the Kachin State Covid-19 Prevention Network, and gave assistance in Kachin IDP camps with preventive measures such as temperature check and disinfectant spraying.’ Rainbow members explained how they volunteer in quarantine centres in collaboration with the Mon State Youth Affairs Committee.

Some youth were unsure how to volunteer during a pandemic. ‘Youth are hesitant to participate in Covid-19 prevention because of family discouragement and fear of becoming a silent carrier,’ one activist explained. But many felt the urge to act. Youth activists underlined their ‘community spirit’ and the efficiency of youth responses in emergency situations. One organiser shared that people have become more active in social activities, ‘especially in donations or sharing wealth’.

Youth are also responding to the pandemic online. AKYU and NSSYAC have created health literacy videos in different ethnic languages in collaboration with local organisations. The AKYU created and uploaded awareness-raising videos in Kachin dialects and interviews with medical doctors.

The ‘stay at home’ situation, however, also widens the divide between youth who have access to the internet and those who do not. Digital literacy and internet connection stand as a challenge to youth social engagement and to the possibility of transposing activities online. As one YAC member in Northern Shan explained: ‘Youth from rural area, including initiatives’ members, do not have access to digital technology due to the poor internet connection and lack of digital literacy.’

Chapter 5:

Advice for supporting youth engagement

Youth feel a responsibility to act when community problems go unanswered. They are motivated by a range of factors, from strong ideas about contributing to their community and the mentorship of close friends and family, to personal experiences of injustice or the inspiration of peers. Youth translate aspiration to influence where they can, balancing a range of approaches and navigating challenges as they come.

The full potential of youth engagement, however, is still limited by several constraints. Youth who may wish to get involved may not be able to afford it. Events that might reach and inspire these youth, who are often in rural areas, are instead concentrated in cities. Many initiatives are young organisations facing dilemmas in how to lead and organise. Youth organisations, particularly those without formal legal status, have difficulty raising funds. Discrimination exists within youth organisations, despite aspirations of inclusivity. Perhaps most significantly, youth activists continue to risk arrest and harassment for their activism, particularly in areas affected by conflict.

Despite these challenges, youth still want to get involved. They want to be more engaged in social and political affairs. When asked if they would like to be more active if they could, eight out of ten said yes. Youth activists across the cases in this study, from Yangon to Myitkyina, Lashio to Mawlamyine, felt it was their job to bring these youth into their initiatives.

But they also felt that others could help. Government bodies, universities, local organisations, foreign donors and NGOs can provide valuable support to youth initiatives in a number of ways. The following list provides several recommendations, examined and validated by case study subjects themselves using an online polling

system. These recommendations provide institutions with ideas for supporting youth engagement, informed by the findings of this study.

Youth activism is just one feature of Myanmar society. It shapes the country's culture and politics as much as it is shaped by them. Youth activism is not a panacea for ethnic conflict, inequitable development or any other problem, but it is important. If youth activists and their initiatives are supported to reach their full potential, they can help create a more vibrant, dynamic and effective civic space in Myanmar.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are organised by their respective audiences: youth initiatives themselves, local and international organisations and their donors, universities and governments. The recommendations were identified in a collaborative process, first with youth activists from the report's case studies, and subsequently in dialogue with a youth advisory board established to bring in perspectives from a broader range of youth initiatives.

For youth and youth-led initiatives

- Engage with parents and family members to shift common perceptions that social and political engagement is unproductive or even 'dangerous'. Advocate for the benefits of activism to both young people and the community, for instance by organising campaigns, sending newsletters or involving parents where relevant. Over time, this may lead families to encourage their children to get involved.
- Engage with community leaders, including clergy and local civil society organisations, to share information about activities and

volunteering opportunities to increase and diversify participation in initiatives, e.g. through offline or online notice boards or platforms.

- Use social media to stimulate interest among young people by sharing information about initiatives, volunteering opportunities and opportunities to gain technical skills.
- Create and sustain alumni networks of former members of youth initiatives to create bonds between members and promote peer-to-peer learning. This will help the longevity of youth initiatives by ensuring knowledge is handed down to younger activists.
- Create and sustain programmes, platforms and umbrella organisations (offline and/or online) that foster networks between youth initiatives at the local, state/region and union levels. Ensure that all initiatives involved have an equal chance to share their views and that collective actions are decided upon collectively and transparently.
- Design initiatives that enable participants to build both topical knowledge (e.g. on the environment or women's rights) and practical skills (e.g. English, public speaking) alongside their activism, to improve their 'job readiness'. This will help youth and their families recognise the value of volunteering and mitigate concerns.
- Consider self-generating revenue activities to maximise initiatives' sustainability, in a transparent and carefully monitored manner. A tactic already employed by several youth initiatives (the YUEC sells flower bouquets, for example), this can help mitigate difficulties in sourcing donor funds.



For local and international organisations and their donors

- Lead public awareness campaigns showcasing the benefits of youth social and political engagement, both for individuals and the community. After seeing positive examples of youth-led activism, families and community leaders may be more likely to support it. Engage specifically with parents and family members to shift common perceptions that social and political engagement is unproductive or even 'dangerous'.
- Allocate specific funds to youth-led initiatives, including – when possible – non-registered or non-officially recognised organisations. Make grants available for quick disbursement in small portions.
- Make sure funds provided to youth-led initiatives enable less-privileged youth to participate by covering their transportation and accommodation costs, and any other hidden costs associated with a given initiative. These costs should be covered whenever youth are required to travel for programmes and scholarships, including for the application process. This will help to ensure that youth from rural, distant areas are not deterred from joining.
- Develop inclusive training opportunities specifically designed for youth-led initiatives, with an emphasis on building capacity around their most significant organisational challenges: fundraising and management. This can help youth initiatives not only identify and source funding but also encourage more sustainable decision-making structures within youth organisations.
- Set up a 'support desk' for youth organisations to access free coaching, troubleshooting and support for grant applications, fundraising opportunities and venue hire. This will help alleviate fundraising concerns among youth initiatives.
- Develop mentorship programmes for grant and scholarship applicants, involving alumni and international mentors where relevant. This will help youth activists learn from the experience of older peers. Programmes should support remote participation to ensure youth from across the country have equal access to mentors. Where online interaction is unavailable, facilitate communication by phone or alternative means, e.g. recording and sending content via USB, CD, etc.
- Design exchange programmes across Myanmar's states and regions in which young social and political activists can share experiences and develop peer learning and problem solving. This will help activists build experience and leave inspired to continue their activism.
- Design training and programmes for young individuals that enable them to build both topical knowledge (e.g. on the environment or women's rights) and practical skills (e.g. English, public speaking). These can be online learning resources, in-person programmes, or both.
- Provide leadership training and programmes specifically for young women to support current and future cadres of female leaders. Develop standalone programmes or incorporate essential elements in existing initiatives. In leadership training for both women and men, strengthen gender analytical skills.
- Develop internship programmes within NGOs, donor agencies and businesses, available to young individuals of different education levels in Myanmar, to allow youth activists to build skills and improve their 'job readiness'. This will produce more confident youth activists and prepare them for careers in relevant fields.
- Ensure that activities and training opportunities are inclusive and accessible to all, including people with disabilities and rural youth.







For university administrations

- Allocate physical spaces that university clubs and youth initiatives can use freely on a regular basis. Ensure that university clubs can use campus facilities, free of charge, to hold events.
- Make financial support available to university clubs and initiatives. Competitive grants, for example, could give youth the opportunity to present their work, publicise their message and bid for additional funds.
- Lower bureaucratic obstacles for student organisations by clarifying registration procedures for university clubs, initiatives and student unions. This will help initiatives secure official recognition, granting credibility to their organisations and their messages.
- Support students to develop the skills necessary for engaging in social and political work through extracurricular courses. These courses can include public speaking, speechwriting and organising.
- Develop and implement media and social media literacy curricula. This will not only help to counter misinformation; it will also prepare youth to use social media effectively in their initiatives' outreach.
- Develop interuniversity exchange programmes to support unity building among students and foster interuniversity collaboration. This will serve to diffuse rivalries between groups and allow likeminded youth to network.
- For all opportunities and benefits provided to students, ensure that criteria for application and awards are clear and transparent to all, both students and staff.
- Ensure that campus facilities and initiatives are accessible to all, including people with physical disabilities. Such provisions would include wheelchair access lanes, ramps, accessibility devices and other accommodations.
- Allow students to earn university credits for internships and involvement in university clubs/ initiatives as well as outside the university. This will allow students to spend time building skills and experience without sacrificing their academic performance. Eligible clubs and initiatives could be decided by a committee made up of students, instructors and administration members.
- Allocate a weekly time period for students' involvement in extracurricular activities, including clubs, initiatives and sport activities. This would serve as official recognition of extracurricular activities as valuable opportunities to build skills and experience, allowing more youth to get involved.
- Abolish gender-specific curfews in university dormitories.



For government officials and agencies

- Double up on efforts to increase public awareness of the National Youth Policy. This can be finalised and released alongside the National Strategic Plan for the implementation of the National Youth Policy.
- Engage with parents and family members to shift common perceptions that social and political engagement is unproductive or 'dangerous'. Advocate for the benefits of activism to both young people and the community. Over time, this may lead families to encourage their children to get involved.
- Allocate more funds for youth social and political engagement, including for YACs. When allocating funds to YACs, consider regional differences in needs. The funds required for three sub-YACs in Shan State, for example, are greater than for other states and regions with only one central YAC.
- Strengthen co-operation of union, state and regional governments to implement the National Youth Policy and support youth social and political engagement. Such co-operation could include better budget allocation and shared technical assistance, from permission procedures to venue hire.
- Accelerate the establishment of youth centres, as envisioned in the National Youth Policy, as places where youth can meet, conduct activities and learn together. Ensure that they are accessible to all, including people with disabilities.
- Increase access to high-speed internet in rural areas and ensure that youth centres are equipped with reliable internet access. This will help ensure rural youth are not disenfranchised from the opportunities available to their urban peers. Avoid restrictions on internet access in conflict-affected areas.
- Expand government support for initiatives for and by people with disabilities. Develop campaigns for promoting their inclusion.
- Develop and implement sensitivity training for government officials at all levels, with a specific emphasis on people with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ inclusion. Ensure that complaint procedures and mechanisms are available to (youth-led) initiatives when interacting with government officials. Specifically, focus on active listening and non-threatening communication.
- Allow universities to develop programmes in which students can earn university credits for internships and involvement in university clubs/initiatives.
- Establish a national youth parliament with elected youth representatives from across the country. The youth parliament would provide a platform for young Myanmar people to participate in legislative debate on issues relevant to young people. It would also strengthen the next generation of politicians through experience in a democratic institution. The national youth parliament could be complemented by state and region youth parliaments. These bodies would demonstrate the government's commitment to youth empowerment, while giving youth the opportunity to work nationally across regional, ethnic and religious divides. Several other countries, including India, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste, maintain similar youth parliaments.





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Appendix 1:

Methodology

Overview

Data collection for this study took place between February and April 2020. The study employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Four case studies were used as the main entry point for exploring the study's research questions through participant observations and interviews. Findings from these case studies were contextualised through a nationwide survey.

The case studies

Case selection

Cases were selected to achieve a high degree of variation. More than 30 youth organisations were classified using a set of criteria and, based on this classification, four were chosen. The following criteria were used:

- the type of change being pursued (topic)
- the level at which change is being pursued (every day versus institutional level)
- the type of activism or tools being employed for change (tools and strategies)
- the type of funding which enables the work (funding)
- activists' type of involvement (volunteers versus paid staff)
- location (urban/rural).

In addition, attention was paid to include a diverse selection of youth across gender, age, ethnicity and religion, sexual orientation, disability, social status, education, marital status, and place of origin.

Qualitative data collection

Data collection took place as participant observations combined with interviews on site and during subsequent meetings and phone calls. Data collection was done by two team members: one female researcher (a 'foreigner') and one male researcher (a Myanmar national).

Participant observations took place from February to April and included a range of situations, including meetings, preparations for and implementation of activities, as well as leisure time. Researchers participated in activities and subsequently recorded impressions.

Interviews took place interspersed with participant observations. Whereas some interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide, others had a more impromptu character, allowing flexibility for researchers to pursue valuable topics with interviewees. Some interviews were conducted with an interpreter; others were conducted in Burmese and with Jingpao translation.

Interviews were conducted with a range of individuals. Most were youth activists affiliated in different ways with the organisations selected. Some were 'high-ranking' and others peripheral. In addition, interviews were held with individuals in the 'periphery' of the cases selected. This included other youth organisations and different officials such as university officials but also in some cases parents and friends. Occasionally, interviews were held with more than one interviewee at a time. More than 60 were interviewed in total.

All interviewees gave explicit and informed consent. Care was taken to ensure that researchers did not take too much of interviewees' time.

Data analysis

All data was coded using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. Open and closed coding was conducted. Researchers maintained contact with case study 'subjects' during the analysis and drafting process to verify information whenever needed.

Limitations

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, fieldwork was somewhat truncated in one case. To overcome this, alternative forms of data collection were used, including phone calls, web-based interviews, social media analysis and web polls. In conclusion of the study, case study participants were meant to gather in Yangon to discuss the research and identify solutions. This was not possible. Instead, researchers convened a 'virtual forum' through a private Facebook page, gathering 16 case study subjects to generate discussion. While valuable insights were obtained, less interaction was achieved than in an in-person forum. Researchers then used polls to evaluate support to the study's recommendations and followed up with phone calls.

The survey

Alongside the qualitative research, a nationwide household survey was conducted. Fieldwork for the survey took place from 14 March 2020 to 30 March 2020.

Population

The survey population (the people the survey aimed to say something about) was youth in Myanmar aged 18 to 32.

Sampling

A multi-stage sampling strategy was employed, using first stratified sampling and subsequently clusters. A total of 1,624 people were interviewed.

Table 1: Sample design

Areas	Locations State/ Region	Population						Sample size				
		Total		Urban		Rural		Calculated	Adjusted	Urban	Rural	PSUs
		N	%	N	%	N	%					
Central	Yangon	7,360,703	15%	5,160,512	70%	2,200,191	30%	219.592	220	154	66	4
	Bago	4,867,373	10%	1,072,336	22%	3,795,037	78%	145.208	146	32	114	3
	Nay Pyi Taw	1,160,242	2%	375,189	32%	785,053	68%	34.613	35	11	24	1
Dry Zone	Mandalay	6,165,723	12%	2,143,436	35%	4,022,287	65%	183.942	184	64	120	4
	Magway	3,917,055	8%	588,031	15%	3,329,024	85%	116.857	117	18	99	2
	Sagaing	5,325,347	11%	911,335	17%	4,414,012	83%	158.871	159	27	132	3
Delta	Ayeyarwady	6,184,829	12%	872,600	14%	5,312,229	86%	184.512	185	26	159	4
Hilly	Shan	5,824,432	12%	1,395,847	24%	4,428,585	76%	173.76	174	42	132	3
	Rakhine	2,098,807	4%	354,288	17%	1,744,519	83%	62.614	63	11	52	1
	Kachin	1,642,841	3%	592,368	36%	1,050,473	64%	49.011	50	18	32	1
	Chin	478,801	1%	99,809	21%	378,992	79%	14.284	30	6	24	1
	Kayah	286,627	1%	72,418	25%	214,209	75%	8.551	30	8	23	1
	Coastal	Tanintharyi	1,408,401	3%	338,419	24%	1,069,982	76%	42.017	43	10	33
	Kayin	1,504,326	3%	329,166	22%	1,175,160	78%	44.879	45	10	35	1
	Mon	2,054,393	4%	572,189	28%	1,482,204	72%	61.289	62	17	45	1
		50,279,900		14,877,943		35,401,957		1500	1,543	454	1,089	31

The survey used a randomised selection of respondents to produce representative data. The sample design was based on the 2014 census enumerated numbers and structured as shown in Table 1.

The sample sizes for each state and region were determined by the percentage distribution of population between the regions and states. The sample size was adjusted to have at least 30 respondents in all regions/states.

Subsequently, within the respective regions and states, the proportions between rural–urban populations were calculated according to the preliminary census data and the sample size split accordingly. The following percentages were used.

Table 2: Rural and urban populations in each region and state

State/Region	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
Yangon	30%	70%
Bago	78%	22%
Nay Pyi Taw	68%	32%
Mandalay	65%	35%
Magway	85%	15%
Sagaing	83%	17%
Ayeyarwady	86%	14%
Shan	76%	24%
Rakhine	83%	17%
Kachin	64%	36%
Chin	79%	21%
Kayah	75%	25%
Tanintharyi	76%	24%
Kayin	78%	22%
Mon	72%	28%

Then primary sampling units (PSUs) – i.e. wards (in urban areas) or village tracts (in rural areas), as well as sampling starting points (where fieldworkers start to interview within each PSUs) – were selected randomly. For each PSU, the exact same number of individuals was selected. A systematic random procedure was used to select households at village tract and ward levels. Survey respondents were then recruited using a Kish grid: all eligible respondents in the household were placed in a selection grid. The survey respondent whose number was at the intersection of the last digit of household ID and the number of eligible respondents was then selected. When selected households/survey respondents were not available,

interviewers attempted to visit again three times before finding a substitute.

The appropriate sample size was calculated at 1,543 respondents. Oversampling was done as a quality control measure, in case interviews needed to be disqualified, resulting in a final sample of 1,624. This means the survey achieves a margin of error of three per cent at the 95 per cent confidence level. The oversampling was accounted for using weighting. In addition, the subcontractor deployed a weighting scheme using the 2014 census enumerated numbers. The data was weighted to region and state level only. There was no weighting for age, gender or religion, as disaggregation between these groups was done analytically during data analysis.

Table 3: The weighting scheme employed by the subcontractor (Note: This scheme is based on the calculated appropriate sample size, not on the final sample)

Locations		Population					
Areas	Region/state	Total		Actual sample		Weight factor	
		N	%	N	%		
Plain	Yangon	7,360,703	14.64%	220	14%	1.026758	
	Bago	4,867,373	9.68%	146	9%	1.023089	
	Nay Pyi Taw	1,160,242	2.31%	35	2%	1.017307	
Dry Zone	Mandalay	6,165,723	12.26%	184	12%	1.028342	
	Magway	3,917,055	7.79%	117	8%	1.027414	
	Sagaing	5,325,347	10.59%	159	10%	1.027832	
Delta	Ayeyarwady	6,184,829	12.30%	185	12%	1.025953	
Hilly	Shan	5,824,432	11.58%	174	11%	1.027249	
	Rakhine	2,098,807	4.17%	63	4%	1.022359	
	Kachin	1,642,841	3.27%	50	3%	1.008317	
	Chin	478,801	0.95%	30	2%	0.489785	
	Kayah	286,627	0.57%	30	2%	0.293202	
	Coastal	Tanintharyi	1,408,401	2.80%	43	3%	1.005147
		Kayin	1,504,326	2.99%	45	3%	1.02589
Mon		2,054,393	4.09%	62	4%	1.016865	
		50,279,900		1,543			

To ensure quality control, the subcontractor built a series of logic checks into every questionnaire, controlled via the CAPI software logic. These checks meant that interviewers could not proceed to the next question if contradictory or nonsensical answers were given.

One quality control monitor was assigned per two teams. The quality control monitor worked independently to the team to conduct back-checks of interviews on a minimum of five per cent of completed questionnaires (combination of phone and live in-person checks). This added a further check and balance into the process. The sampling procedure, respondent qualification, length of interview, key

questions, attitudes and professionalism of the interviewers and receipt of the incentive were checked.

Limitations

For safety reasons, some wards and village tracts could not be accessed. This included:

- twenty townships in Kachin State
- three townships in Kayin State
- eight townships in Rakhine State
- one township in Chin State
- seventy-nine towns (not townships, as some townships are partly accessible) in Shan State.

Many of these areas continue to struggle with violent conflict between government forces and EAOs.

Due to Covid-19, enumeration was interrupted in Chin State. Enumerators had to leave a township before its administrators enforced a lockdown. This prevented ten interviews from being completed in the township. Follow-up phone calls in the region were made to make up for the missing interviews.

Data analysis

Data was analysed using SPSS. Where two categories of youth respondents are compared in the text of the report, the difference is statistically significant, as determined by a chi-square test. Differences that were not found to be statistically significant were not reported.

Appendix 2: Survey: British Council Next Steps

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1. Introduction

Instruction: Prior to starting the interview, interviewer(s) will thank respondents for their time and introduce themselves and the project and will seek the respondent's informed consent. They will ensure that the respondent is aware that they can choose not to answer questions, that they can withdraw from the study at any point, and that no statements will be attributed to them, unless specific consent is given.

2. Life right now – main concerns and priorities

Once again, thank you for taking the time. To begin with, I'd like to ask some questions about how you see your life right now and in the future, and which challenges you see as most important.

1. As a very first question I'd like to ask you: If you think about your life right now, to what extent would you say you're happy with it?
 - a. Very happy
 - b. Happy
 - c. Neither happy nor unhappy
 - d. Unhappy
 - e. Very unhappy
 - f. DNK
 - g. PNTS

2. What if you think about the future? If you think about your situation in five years from now, do think it will be:
 - a. Much better than now
 - b. Better than now
 - c. Same as now
 - d. Worse than now
 - e. Much worse than now
 - f. DNK
 - g. PNTS

- 2.1 What if you think about the future for young people in Myanmar in general? If you think about the situation for young people in Myanmar in five years from now, do think it will be:
 - a. Much better than now
 - b. Better than now
 - c. Same as now
 - d. Worse than now
 - e. Much worse than now
 - f. DNK
 - g. PNTS

I'd like to understand a bit about what you see as the main challenges in your community right now.

3. If you think about the situation right here where you live, in what areas do you think the biggest problems are that most need attention? I'd like you to choose up to five areas and to rank them from 1 to 5 after importance.

(Random order)

- a. Problems with education
 - b. Problems with healthcare
 - c. Problems with drugs
 - d. Problems with lack of access to sports and recreation
 - e. Lack of jobs
 - f. Problems with the economy in Myanmar
 - g. Problems with politics
 - h. Problems with preserving literature, art and culture
 - i. Problems with using science and technology
 - j. Problems about civic education and citizenship
 - k. Problems with the environment and climate change
 - l. Problems with peace and security
 - m. Problems with gender equality
 - n. Problems with international relations
 - o. Religious minorities' rights
 - p. Ethnic minorities' rights
 - q. Freedom of speech
 - r. LGBTIQ+ inclusion
 - s. Sexual violence
 - t. Corruption
4. Are there other problems you think are more important?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
 - i. Please specify

3. Solutions – who should deal with these problems?

Before we discussed what you think are the most important problems to address. Now I'd like to ask you about young people's role in dealing with these problems.

3.1 Young people's role in creating change

In this section, I'd like to ask what role you think young people can and should play in dealing with the problems we talked about before.

5. For each of the following statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree:

(Random order)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DNK	PNTS
1. Social and political affairs are serious matters that young people like you should address							
2. Young people are sufficiently involved in social and political issues in the area in which I live							
3. Young people are sufficiently involved in social and political issues throughout Myanmar							
4. Young people's perspective is important because it is different from elders'							
5. Young people can learn from elders' experience							
6. Young people and older people have difficulties understanding each other							
7. Young people are more open minded than elder people							
8. Decision-making is easier with young people than with older people							
9. Older people have different priorities							
10. Young people are less aware of the consequences of their actions than older people							
11. Young people are happier to take risks than older people							
12. Young people should not get involved in political issues							
13. Young people could contribute a lot more to Myanmar if they get the chance							

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DNK	PNTS
14. Older people need to step down to give more space for young people							
15. Older people are less concerned about the future of the planet							
16. Young women should be in more leadership positions							
17. Being an activist is too dangerous for women							
18. Young women are strong enough to engage with political activism							
19. As a political or social activist, it doesn't matter if you're a woman or a man							

6. How much influence do you think young people can actually get if they try? For each of the following levels, do you think young people can get:

	A lot of influence	Some influence	No influence	DNK	PNTS
At community/local level					
At township level					
At state level					
At union level					
At regional level (South East Asia)					
At international level					

3.2 The National Youth Policy

In 2018, the government released a National Youth Policy. With this policy, the government wants to involve young people more in Myanmar's development.

7. Have you heard about this youth policy before?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes
 - c. DNK
 - d. PNTS

8. (Skip if respondent has NOT heard of the National Youth Policy.) Have you ever participated in forums, discussions or meetings organised in relation to the National Youth Policy?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes
 - i. Please specify
 - c. DNK
 - d. PNTS

As part of the National Youth Policy, Youth Affairs Committees throughout the country have been formed to involve young people in the country's development.

9. Have you heard about these Youth Affairs Committees before?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes
 - c. DNK
 - d. PNTS

10. (Skip if respondent has NOT heard of a Youth Affairs Committee.) Did the committee you heard about work at union level, state/region level, district level or township level? If you have heard about more than one of them, please give more than one answer. **(Multiple answer)**
 - a. Union level
 - b. State/region level
 - c. District level
 - d. Township level
 - e. DNK
 - f. PNTS

11. (Skip if respondent has NOT heard of a Youth Affairs Committee.) Have you ever participated in events held by a Youth Affairs Committee?
 - a. No
 - b. Yes
 - i. Please specify

12. (Skip if respondent has NOT heard of a Youth Affairs Committee.) I would like to ask about your impression of the Youth Affairs Committee. For each of the following statements, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree. If you have heard of more than one, please think about the one you know the best.

(Randomise)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DNK	PNTS
1. Youth Affairs Committees do a good job							
2. If I wanted to become a member of a Youth Affairs Committee, it would be possible							
3. Youth Affairs Committees do not represent the views of ethnic, religious and social minorities							
4. Youth Affairs Committees understand the needs of local communities							
5. I do not trust Youth Affairs Committees, because they operate under the government							
6. Youth Affairs Committees in my district/township level are good at working together with local initiatives and groups							

3.3 Your role in creating change

In this part of the interview, I'd like to ask you some questions about how you see your own role, and what experiences you might have with social and political activities. By social and political activities, I mean any activity or initiative that seeks to change or improve things in your community. It might be through political parties, but it can also be through CBOs/CSOs or initiatives like campaigning to reduce traffic incidents or participating in events to clear away rubbish.

13. To what degree would you say that you are involved in your community's social and/or political affairs?
- Very involved
 - Quite involved
 - Somewhat involved
 - Not involved at all
 - DNK
 - PNTS

14. Are you a member of any organisation, network or group that tries to achieve social or political change?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
 - i. Please specify
15. If you think back on the last 12 months: Have you been involved in addressing any political or social issues, for instance by protesting, organising meetings or discussions, educating people, writing letters or contacting authorities?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
 - i. Which area best describes the topic you were involved in addressing?

(Unprompted)

- a. Problems with education
- b. Problems with healthcare
- c. Problems with drugs
- d. Problems with lack of access to sports and recreation
- e. Lack of jobs
- f. Problems with the economy
- g. Problems with politics
- h. Problems with preserving literature, art and culture
- i. Problems with using research
- j. Problems with using science and technology
- k. Problems about civic education and citizenship
- l. Problems with the environment
- m. Problems with peace and security
- n. Problems with gender equality
- o. Problems with human rights
- p. Problems with international relations
- q. Religious minorities' rights
- r. Ethnic minorities' rights
- s. Climate change
- t. Situation in Rakhine State
- u. Freedom of speech
- v. LGBTQI+ inclusion
- w. Sexual violence
- x. Corruption
- y. Other
 - i. Please specify

16. If you could, would you like to be more socially and/or politically active?
- a. No
 - b. Yes
 - c. DNK
 - d. PNTS
17. (Skip if respondent does NOT want to be more socially and/or politically active.)
Which topic would you like to engage in?

(Unprompted)

- a. Problems with education
 - b. Problems with healthcare
 - c. Problems with drugs
 - d. Problems with lack of access to sports and recreation
 - e. Lack of jobs
 - f. Problems with the economy
 - g. Problems with politics
 - h. Problems with preserving literature, art and culture
 - i. Problems with using research
 - j. Problems with using science and technology
 - k. Problems about civic education and citizenship
 - l. Problems with the environment
 - m. Problems with peace and security
 - n. Problems with gender equality
 - o. Problems with human rights
 - p. Problems with international relations
 - q. Religious minorities' rights
 - r. Ethnic minorities' rights
 - s. Climate change
 - t. Situation in Rakhine State
 - u. Freedom of speech
 - v. LGBTQI+ inclusion
 - w. Sexual violence
 - x. Corruption
 - y. Other
 - i. Please specify
18. Are you currently doing any work as a volunteer?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. DNK
 - d. PNTS

19. I'd like to ask a few more questions about volunteering. For each of the following statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree:

(Randomise)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DNK	PNTS
1. Volunteering is more virtuous than paid work							
2. Only rich people can afford volunteering							
3. When you are a volunteer, you often need to contribute financially							
4. Being a volunteer gives prestige							
5. Volunteering matters less than paid work							
6. I prefer spending time with my friends or playing games, rather than being a volunteer							
7. If you take risks doing social or political volunteering, you should get paid							

4. The best ways of creating change

Earlier, we discussed what problems you think are important, and we talked about who should deal with those problems. Now I'd like to ask some questions about what you think are the most effective ways to achieve change – that is, which methods work best.

20. Generally speaking, how effective do you think the following actions are? By effective, I mean that they work well to create change.

	Very effective	Quite effective	Somewhat effective	Not effective at all	DNK	PNTS
1. Organising a meeting about a cause						
2. Voting in elections						
3. Contacting MPs						
4. Participating in protests/demonstrations						
5. Participating in an online campaign						
6. Volunteering						
7. Donating for a cause						
8. Raising funds for a cause						
9. Engaging with local authorities						
10. Engaging in violent/armed actions						
11. Going on strike						
12. Teaching the public/awareness raising						
13. Forming a CSO or CBO						
14. Paying membership fees to an organisation						
15. Other – please specify						

21. Thinking back on the past 12 months, have you yourself been involved in any of the following?
- a. Organising a meeting about a cause
 - b. Voting in elections
 - c. Contacting MPs
 - d. Participating in protests/demonstrations
 - e. Participating in an online campaign
 - f. Volunteering
 - g. Donating for a cause
 - h. Raising funds for a cause
 - i. Engaging with local authorities
 - j. Engaging in violent/armed actions
 - k. Going on strike
 - l. Teaching the public/awareness raising
 - m. Forming a CSO or CBO
 - n. Other – please specify

22. I'd like to ask a few more questions about what works to change something. For each of the following statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	DNK	PNTS
1. Local initiatives are better at creating change than nationwide initiatives							
2. It's easier to create change if you are alone							
3. Social media makes it easier to mobilise people							
4. Initiatives funded from outside Myanmar are better at creating change							
5. Initiatives funded from outside Myanmar have a hidden agenda							
6. Sometimes it's necessary to use violence to be heard							
7. If you want to change something, it works better to do it through grassroots work (e.g. protesting, striking, creating a CSO or similar grassroots work) than through the political system (through parties, elections and government)							
8. Violence is never acceptable							

5. Motivations for pursuing change

Now I'd like to ask some questions about why some people are socially and politically active, and others are not.

23. Why do you think people become socially and/or politically active? You may choose as many options as you like. **(Prompted)**

	Yes	No	DNK	PNTS
1. To become famous				
2. To serve their career goals				
3. To help their community				
4. To contribute to Myanmar's development				
5. To make their friends and family proud				
6. Because they have experienced discrimination/injustice				
7. Because they have witnessed discrimination/injustice and want to do something about it				
8. Because they have a lot of spare time				
9. Because being a political activist is a popular thing among Myanmar youth				
10. To get skills they can use in their future life				
11. To avoid getting a full-time job				
12. To improve themselves				
13. To feel like they have a cause that gives them meaning and purpose in life				
14. Other – please specify				

6. Challenges and resources in creating change

It can be challenging to pursue change – but there are also things that can make it easier. In this section I'd like to ask about challenges and resources for young people trying to change things.

24. Which of the following challenges do you or others face in becoming more politically or socially active? You may choose as many options as you want.

(Prompted)

	Yes	No	DNK	PNTS
1. Not having enough time				
2. Not having enough money				
3. Not being able to mobilise people				
4. Not knowing the right people				
5. Not knowing how to become active				
6. Not having the right skills				
7. Not being taken seriously by adults				
8. Not having enough experience				
9. Having to provide for my family				
10. Having parents who don't allow activism				
11. Friends think it's dangerous to be friends with an activist				
12. Being socially and politically active can hinder your future prospects (i.e. job opportunities)				
13. Other – please specify				
14. Not being brave enough				
15. Being excluded because of ethnicity				
16. Being excluded because of gender				
17. Being excluded because of citizenship status				
18. Being excluded because of being from a rural area				
19. Not having the right family or connections				

25. What do you think are the most important skills for young people to have to be able to pursue social and political change in Myanmar? You may choose as many options as you like. **(Prompted)**

	Yes	No	DNK	PNTS
1. Speaking Burmese				
2. Speaking a minority language				
3. Speaking English				
4. Knowledge of global issues				
5. Knowledge of ASEAN				
6. Knowledge of foreign political and legal systems				
7. Knowing how to manage a project				
8. Knowing how to manage a budget				
9. Knowing how to raise funds				
10. Computer skills				
11. Social media skills				
12. Networking skills				
13. Public speaking skills				
14. Other – please specify				

26. Who do you think can help young people build these skills? **(Prompted)**

	Yes	No	DNK	PNTS
1. Parents				
2. Local CSOs/groups				
3. NGOs				
4. INGOs				
5. Organisations like the British Council				
6. Schools/universities				
7. Private actors				
8. MPs				
9. Local government				
10. Union government				
11. Others – please specify				

27. Some people might not have as much political and social influence as they should. Which of the following groups of people do you think should be more involved in social and political issues?

(Randomise)

	Yes	No	DNK	PNTS
1. Religious minorities				
2. Muslims				
3. Hindus				
4. Christians				
5. Ethnic minorities				
6. Underage soldiers				
7. 'Mixed-race' youth				
8. People who don't have a citizenship document				
9. Underage workers				
10. People with mental disability				
11. People with physical disability				
12. People with HIV				
13. People taking drugs				
14. Drop-out students				
15. LGBTIQ+				
16. Young women				
17. Young men				
18. University students				
19. None of the above				
20. Others – please specify				

7. Background information

Finally, I'd like to know a bit about your background. The details I am going to ask you about will be useful for me to better understand your experiences and compare them to those of other young people in Myanmar. Please could I ask you:

- Gender
 - > Female
 - > Male
 - > Other (please specify)
 - > Prefer not to say

- Age
 - > Numerical

- State/region of origin
 - > State/region of origin
 - > Township name

- State/region of residence
 - > State/region name
 - > Township name

- Languages you speak
 - > Native language
 - > Other languages

- Highest commenced level of education
 - > No education
 - > Primary school
 - > Middle school
 - > High school
 - > Vocational training
 - > University degree
 - > Postgraduate
 - > Other

- Religion you identify with
 - > Buddhist
 - > Muslim
 - > Hindu
 - > Christian
 - > Animist
 - > I'm not religious
 - > Other
 - » Please specify
 - > Prefer not to say

- Ethnicity you identify as
 - > List of ethnicities **(Multiple answer)**
 - > Prompt – do you have a mixed ethnic identity? Yes/no
(Revisit list if did not initially mention more than one)

- Your current occupation
 - > Employed for wages
 - > Self-employed
 - > Out of work and looking for work
 - > Out of work but not currently looking for work
 - > Retired
 - > Unable to work
 - » Please specify

- What type of identity document you have
 - > Citizenship scrutiny card (pink card)
 - > Associate citizenship scrutiny card (blue card)
 - > Naturalised citizenship scrutiny card (green card)
 - > NRC (threefold card)
 - > Foreigner registration certificate
 - > No document
 - > Other
 - > DNK
 - > PNTS

- Whether you have access to the internet through a mobile phone
 - > Yes
 - > No
 - » Do you have access to the internet through other means?
 - > Yes
 - > No

- You don't have to answer, but I would also like to ask whether you see yourself as having any disabilities. A disability might include a physical disability (such as vision, hearing or mobility impairment), or cognitive/neuro disability.
 - > No, I don't have any disabilities
 - > Yes
 - » Please specify, if you're comfortable with it
 - > DNK
 - > PNTS

- Marital status
 - > Married
 - > Unmarried
 - > Widow/widower
 - > Divorced
 - > Other – Please specify

- I would also like to ask if you have lived outside Myanmar for three or more months consecutively?
 - > No
 - > Yes
 - » Please specify country

- Finally, in order to know you a bit better, we would also like to understand a bit about who your friends are. Do you have friends who:

	Yes	No	DNK	PNTS
Are from a different religion than yours				
Are from a different ethnic group than yours				
Have a physical disability				
Have a mental disability				
Are HIV positive				
Take drugs				
Identify as LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer – or individuals questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity)				
Prefer to dress like the opposite sex				
Are political activists				



VSO is an international development agency which believes in the power of volunteering to bring about long-lasting, transformational change. VSO has been working in Myanmar since 2014 and has two programmes: education, and equality and inclusion. Integrated into all of our programmes are the VSO core approaches of social inclusion and gender, social accountability and resilience.



The UK is a major development partner in Myanmar. Last year UK aid invested around \$200 million here. Our aim is to help end poverty and to promote peaceful and sustainable development for the future. UK aid helps to address the health, education, livelihood and humanitarian needs of some of the people most in need. It also supports improvements in economic development and governance.



The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

We help young people to gain the skills, confidence and connections they are looking for to realise their potential and to participate in strong and inclusive communities. We support them to learn English, to get a high-quality education and to gain internationally recognised qualifications. Our work in arts and culture stimulates creative expression and exchange and nurtures creative enterprise.

The Next Generation series is part of the British Council's commitment to exploring youth voice and choice. It aims to understand youth attitudes and aspirations, amplify youth voice and support better youth policymaking. The reports focus on young people in countries experiencing a period of significant change, to ensure that young people's voices are heard and their interests represented in decisions that will have lasting implications for their lives.

www.britishcouncil.org/research/next-generation

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