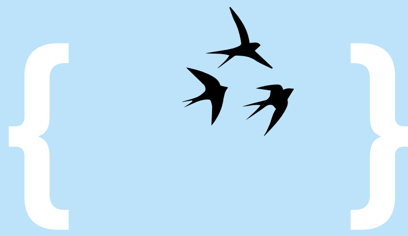


CREATING SAFER SPACE
STRENGTHENING CIVILIAN PROTECTION AMIDST VIOLENT CONFLICT

Creating Safer Space Working Paper Series • 03/2025 • Vol.3(2) • ISSN: 2754-947X

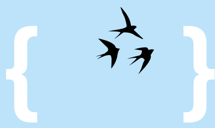
The Diffusion of Protection Norms and Practices in Kachin and Northern Shan, Myanmar

Authors:
Nang Seng Raw, Arfiansyah, Mang Pi

GCRF Global Challenges Research Fund

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

Nonviolent Peaceforce



Creating Safer Space

Creating Safer Space is an international research and impact collaboration, which aims to understand and support unarmed civilian protection (UCP) and self-protection in the midst of violent conflict. It supports research that explores how violence against civilians can be deterred or prevented by civilians without the use or threat of force.

The Network brings together conflict-affected communities, protection practitioners, academics, policymakers, and artists to jointly work on the vision of enhancing unarmed protection practices, which create safer space for communities and individuals amidst violent conflict, raise their levels of resilience and help prevent displacement.

Creating Safer Space is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

For further information on the work of the Network, please visit our website: https://creating-safer-space.com

All rights reserved. Copyright lies with authors of work published in this series.

The sole responsibility of content published lies with the author(s). Short sections of text, not exceeding two paragraphs, may be quoted with full attribution to the source.

Department of International Politics
Aberystwyth University
Penglais
Aberystwyth
SY23 3FE
creating-safer-space@aber.ac.uk

Summary

This working paper discusses the diffusion of protection norms in Kachin and Northern Shan, two among many conflict areas of Myanmar. For many decades, Myanmar's people have experienced protracted violent conflicts, which have forced them to adapt and build protection mechanisms for their own safety and that of others. When ceasefire talks between the state military Tatmadaw and some ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) were initiated in 2010, local civil society organisations (CSOs) invited Nonviolence Peaceforce (NP), an international nongovernmental organisation (INGO) specialising in unarmed civilian protection (UCP), to share experiences and develop mechanisms for the participation of civilians in monitoring potential ceasefire agreements. In the following years, NP assisted various CSOs in the establishment of independent civilian ceasefire monitoring mechanisms and in advocating for the centralisation of protection norms in the monitoring and implementation of any ceasefire agreements. In this process, NP accompanied local CSOs in developing and organising appropriate protection mechanisms, rooted in existing structures and local contexts. This working paper discusses how protection norms were localised, allowing for an adaptation of protection practices in response to the military coup of 2021. The underlying research asked: How were protection norms diffused? How did actors transform protection norms following Myanmar's changing political and security landscape? And what norms were maintained? These questions were investigated from July 2023 to June 2024 in Kachin, Northern Shan, and Yangon. The authors conducted face-to-face and online interviews as well as focus group discussions. In this working paper, they argue that protection norms are diffused in conflict areas, when external and internal actors accompany and collaborate with each other and with communities to face threats and violence, to allow norms to be localised and re-imagined. A process of ongoing proactive engagement allows both actor types to learn together, exchange ideas, and develop appropriate strategies to protect civilians.

Keywords: Norm diffusion, unarmed civilian protection (UCP), early warning early response (EWER), ceasefire monitoring

Acknowledgements

This working paper is an output of the project "Understanding Changing Strategy and Practice of Civilian Protection Under a Military Junta: The case of Kachin and Northern Shan, Myanmar". It was supported by the Network Plus "Creating Safer Space", financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). We specifically thank our local partners Kachin State Women Network (KSWN) and Se Loun Kham (SLK) Women Organisation.

Contents

Introduction	6
New threats and escalation of violence after the coup in Myanmar	10
Localising Protection Norms: Civilian Ceasefire Mechanisms (CCM)	13
Translating Protection Norms: Civilian Protection in the Post-Coup Situation	16
Conclusions	27
Recommendations	28
References	29

Introduction

The Myanmar civil society organisations (CSOs) Nyein Foundation, Kachin Women Empowerment, Gender Development Institute Myanmar (GDI), Zin Lum, Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network (KSMPN), New Generation Shan State (NGSS), Christian Aid (CA), Mercy Corps, Shalom (Nyein) Foundation, and Women Peace Action Network (WPAN) collaborated with the international NGO Nonviolence Peaceforce (NP) in developing mechanisms that involved civilians in ceasefire processes between the Myanmar military Tatmadaw and eight ethic armed organisations (EAOs), which culminated in a National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015. The primary aims of these civilian ceasefire monitoring (CCM) networks was to enhance civilian protection practice and increase civilian participation in the early stages of the peace process at the national and district levels. CCM was a bottom-up or community-based monitoring mechanism that differed from formal ceasefire mechanisms created by those involved in the NCA and focusing mainly on military matters and significant breaches of the agreement (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2016, 7).

CSOs and communities expected that the NCA would bring peace to Myanmar. Yet, the military coup on 1 February 2021 dashed the hope. It changed the political context and escalated threats and violence against civilians. The Tatmadaw arrested State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and other senior leaders of the National League for Democracy party and declared all opposition as terrorist groups in order to legitimise their offensive actions. This was primarily directed at the National Unity Government (NUG) consisting of representatives of minority groups, which formed immediately after the coup and declared itself an "emergency civil government". The Tatmadaw also took an offensive approach towards the ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), with which the previous democratic government had initiated the peace-building process (Amnesty International 2022).

Civilians immediately launched protests. Initially, these protests were peaceful; however, the response from the Tatmadaw was brutal. Arrests, tortures, killings, and other means of oppression became daily occurrences. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), by 24 June 2021 the newly constituted State Administrative Council (SAC) had arrested or charged more than 5,104 persons and killed at least 880 civilians for opposing the coup (AAPP Burma 2021). In December 2021, Amnesty International reported that of the people detained since 1 January, at least 8,338, including 196 children, remained in detention. By September 2021, the military had forcibly displaced 200,000 people, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar (cited in Amnesty International 2022). The number had doubled to 400,000 people by January 2022. Killing, torture, burning private facilities, and other oppressive actions were widespread across the country. From January 2021 to January 2022, at least 1,350 civilians were killed (Fishbein and Nachemson 2022).

In response to the increasing violence from the Tatmadaw, civilians established the People's Defence Forces (PDFs), a new armed actor in a country already crowded with anti-government groups (Picard 2022). Ethnic groups also solidified their armed capacities against the Myanmar military junta. Some of them have fought independently from other groups, while others have joined forces against the Tatmadaw, such as some People's Defence Forces and the Ethic Armed Organisation (EAOs). A few groups have accepted the Tatmadaw's call for peace talks. The large majority of civilians, however, remain caught between the fighting parties (Bociaga 2022).

Few observers have studied how civilians protect themselves and others after the coup in Myanmar escalated clashes between armed groups, threats, and violence. With regard to the pre-coup situation, Krause and Kamler (2022) studied the case of CCM in Kachin, arguing that although NGOs trained local communities to be ceasefire monitors when the ceasefire was no longer effective, the trainees played crucial roles in assisting their communities in protecting each other from armed violence. The trained civilians adapted their knowledge and capacity to the existing threat contexts, despite significant constraints due to the armed parties' lack of sensitivity and commitment to human rights protection. Learning from the impact of civilian ceasefire monitors before the coup in 2021, Krause and Kamler (2022) were optimistic that civilian ceasefire monitoring mechanisms could contribute to civilian protection in places where the need for such protection is high. However, their observation did not extend beyond 2020 to study how civilians have kept protecting each other and how they have adapted their efforts to new threats and vulnerabilities under the military junta after the 2021 coup.

This working paper fills this knowledge gap by expanding the study of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) in Myanmar into the post-coup situation. It discusses the development of civilian protection practices that NP and their Myanmar partners shared between 2012 and 2016 and beyond, and asks how the protection norms underpinning their work have been contextualised and shared with a larger audience in Kachin and Northern Shan states. The research underpinning this study was guided by the following questions: How were protection norms diffused in Myanmar? How did norm entrepreneurs transform protection norms following Myanmar's changing political and security landscape after the military coup of 2021? And what pre-coup norms have been kept alive?

Norm diffusion

Norm diffusion is often associated with state- and elite-led processes that influence the policies of so-called norm-taker states and guide the norm-taker state to the appropriate action in a given context. Park (2006) identifies direct and indirect socialization as two processes of norm diffusion. Gilardi points to a more variegated process, in which norms are diffused through coercion, competition, learning, and/or emulation (Gilardi 2013, 461–69). Whilst most of the literature centres a state- and elite-led diffusion process, there is less empirical evidence about norm diffusion in war settings.

Some literature on norms in war settings demonstrates that organisational culture within military institutions plays a role in

restraining soldiers from inflicting harm on civilians in enemy territory. Organisational culture, defined as beliefs and customs, shapes a military`s behaviour and policy. This has been observed, for example, in World War II among US and the UK troops in their fight against Germany, and in US military policy on tightening the use of airstrikes and night raids to prevent civilian casualties in Afghanistan (Filkins 2009; Legro 2013). Norms are thus not necessarily diffused through states and elites alone, but also through culture, religion, and mysticism. And they may be positive or negative, sometimes indeed inspiring violent actors to do more harm (Muana 1997; Reid 2023; Abbink 2020).

Park and Archarya[1] criticise the majority of studies on norm diffusion for focusing on the Western conception and practice of transmitting norms from one state to another. They argue that these studies do not sufficiently include the role of civilian actors in the non-Western world (Park 2006; Acharya 2015, 60). Acharya stresses the important role of local agents, who may localise and internalise externally transmitted norms. According to him, a localised norm is not simply the reflection of a pragmatic need for a new norm. Rather, its adoption depends on the prospects the new norm offers in terms of legitimacy and authority in the context of the norm-takers' culture, tradition, and the scope of the norm. There is a filtering and adaptation process by which local agents can remain true to existing culture and customs. Zimmermann (2016) stresses the importance of translation in the localisation of norms. She argues that one can assess the development of global norms in the local context by analysing the translation of norms. In doing so, she differentiates between three steps of translation that can be analysed: (1) translation into discourses, (2) translation into law, and (3) translation into implementation (Zimmermann 2016). However, these translations still appear to be state- or elite-led forms of norm diffusion. By contrast, in war settings such as present-day Myanmar, the role of law tends to be limited if not absent.

Kaplan (2013) formulates a more grounded approach to norm diffusion and demonstrates the importance of civilians in the norm diffusion process in conflict-setting areas, where international organisations (IOs) and international nongovernmental organisations (INGOs) are often ineffective. By referring to the concept of norm entrepreneurs introduced by Finnemore and Skikkink (1998), Kaplan stresses the crucial role of local civilians as another type of norm entrepreneur in the diffusion process. Local norm entrepreneurs develop protection norms while at the same time influencing the violent actors' perspective on violent approaches toward civilians. Norms may originate from culture, religion, and other sources, and even from the violence itself with civilians expecting conflict actors to reduce violence. Kaplan (2013) argues that compared to IOs and INGOs, civilians in conflict settings have more interest, access, and legitimacy in promoting protection. This makes them crucial in norm diffusion and more effective than external norm entrepreneurs. Based on cases from Syria and Colombia, Kaplan (2013) identifies two different ways that protection norms can operate to reduce violence in conflict settings, which are

1 Acharya later introduced the concept of norm circulation, combining his previous ideas of norm localisation and internalisation. Norm circulation means that the norm does not stop with the norm-taker's situation, but that the norm-taker feeds back into the norm and shares it in its new form with others (Acharya 2004, 2015).

based on the cooperation and collective action of well-organised local civilians. First, civilians can promote the norms of pacifism and harmonious relations within their community to limit residents' involvement with armed groups and prevent interpersonal disputes from being resolved by armed groups. Second, civilians can transmit the same violence-limiting norms so that they eventually become internalised by armed groups. They can do this through collective protest and by nudging more amenable fighters to unite to oppose abusive individuals within the local front collectively (Kaplan 2013).

Core findings

Like the aforementioned scholars, this working paper stresses the importance of local civilians as norm entrepreneurs in diffusing protection norms to other civilians and to conflict actors. As Kaplan suggests, civilians have greater access to armed groups, greater legitimacy, and can take advantage of social dynamics within armed groups. As the conflict in Kachin and Northern Shan states is highly localised, this research finds that protection norms have been effectively diffused through the collaborative work of INGOs as external norm entrepreneurs and local CSOs as local norm entrepreneurs. Through continuous learning about threats and violence, and the exchange of knowledge and skills with mutual respect, both groups of norm entrepreneurs have been able to localise and translate protection norms within conflict-affected communities. They have also synthesised local and external norms into one applicable protection norm.

This working paper also shows that norms translation in war settings is different from that of state- and elite-led norms translation as suggested by Zimmermann. In war settings, the analysis of norm translation is better divided into two steps: (1) translation into discourse and (2) translation into implementation, instead of the three phases offered by Zimmermann: discourse, law, and implementation. However, observing the gap between discourse and implementation and whether the discourse is translated into practice is crucial. This research finds that proactive accompaniment and engagement are key factors in filling the gap that helps the norm to be translated into practice by CSOs and civilians as local norm entrepreneurs.

Underpinning research

The fieldwork for this research was conducted from July 2023 to June 2024 in Kachin state, Northern Shan state, and the city of Yangon. Assisted by Nonviolence Peaceforce's network of local contacts, the research team conducted face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with representatives of CSOs, NGOs, internally displaced people (IDPs), and communities in the three areas under study. FGDs were conducted with a maximum of five persons per discussion group in Northern Shan and eight in Kachin due to security considerations. In addition to in-person meetings, the team also conducted online interviews and FGDs using a secure platform of the informants' choice to avoid the digital surveillance applied by the Tatmadaw throughout the country.

The security situations in the study regions imbalanced our findings between Kachin and Northern Shan, which thus also impacts our narrative in this working paper. CSOs in Kachin are more coordinated through a relatively structured and strong network, which helped the authors meet individuals offline and online. Meanwhile,

we encountered more difficulties in accessing individuals and CSOs in Northern Shan, where CSOs are less coordinated due to a more complicated conflict situation. Fieldwork and mobility were therefore limited. For security and ethical reasons, this working paper does not reveal personal identities or organisational affiliations. This also includes any social media platforms used for communication in the field. Considering these challenges and limitations, the findings of this working paper cannot represent other conflict settings in Myanmar.

The remainder of this working paper is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the new and escalating threats and violence in the post-coup situation. The second section discusses the localisation and translation of protection norms and how the community adapts and practices some of the norms, such as early warning early response (EWER) and proactive engagement. The final section contains conclusions and recommendations for stakeholders and those who are concerned about the Myanmar situation.

New threats and escalation of violence after the coup in Myanmar

After the coup of 2021, people in Kachin and Northern Shan experienced drastic changes in freedom, economic activities, social trust, and mobility. While they had experienced civil war since Myanmar's independence from British rule, facing similar violence (Rieffel 2019; Picard 2022), violent incidents have escalated and become more frequent since the military coup. Only the digital threat is new, as the Tatmadaw has imposed restrictions and tight digital surveillance since the coup. As a result, the police now conduct random checks on the VPN use on personal smartphones, even in public spaces and transportation in Yangon.

Before the coup, there were four main armed groups in the Kachin armed conflict that clashed in specific areas: the Tatmadaw, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), local militias, and the New Democratic Army Kachin (NDA-K) Border Guard Force (BGF) (a militia that signed a peace agreement with the Myanmar military). After the coup, more armed groups have emerged in both Kachin and Northern Shan states. Armed clashes have expanded significantly and become more frequent. They even occurred in urban areas such as Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. The fights expanded simultaneously to Waingmaw, Hpakant, Sadung, Kamine, Laiza, and Bhamo, causing damage and threats to civilian properties and lives. During the data collection process, they were still relatively less intense, however, than in other conflict hotspots like Sagaing and Magway.

The KIA is the strongest opposition to the military forces in Kachin State. It has been openly supporting the NUG and has acted as a haven for those who had to flee the

oppression of the Tatmadaw in other areas. The KIA was also among the earliest ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) providing military training to young activists from across the country, which eventually established new armed groups in Kachin state. The two new armed groups Kachin People's Defence Forces (KPDF) and the People's Defence Forces of the NUG (NUG-PDF) are still associated with the KIA but have different lines of command. The NUG-PDF is under the NUG's direct line of command, while KPDF coordinates with the KIA. Other forces include the Arakan Army (AA), the All Burma Students' Defence Front (ABSDF), the Chin National Front (CNF), and other ethnic forces, particularly in the Laiza region.

In northern Shan State, there are at least ten armed groups: Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA), Arakan Army (AA), Taang National Liberation Army (TNLA), United Wa State Army (UWSA), State Administration Council (SAC), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and People's Defence Force (PDF). This research could not map their relationship due to security issues limiting our access and informants' trust.

Since the coup, arrests, abductions, and killings have significantly increased. In Waingmaw township, Kachin state, for example, the Tatmadaw troops have been involved in the indiscriminate abduction of individuals they encounter along their way. Even those staying in their homes are at risk of abduction, especially if their residences are situated along the path of Tatmadaw deployment. The abductees were forced to carry the troops' belongings and were used as human shields on the front lines.

The Tatmadaw specifically hunted, raided, and interrogated young people of Kachin and Northern Shan ethnicities, while ignoring ethnic minority groups such as Indian and Chinese. They suspected all young men in these areas to be part of People's Defence Forces (PDFs) or ethnic armed organisations (EAOs). In Northern Shan, the Tatmadaw organised local gangs to join them and to use knives and wooden sticks to search those associated with PDFs and EAOs.

According to a December 2023 UN-OCHA report, the current situation in Kachin State has left 92,378 people displaced, who have sought refuge in camps and camp-like settings. An additional 38,000 or more displaced individuals were in areas with limited access, making it difficult for humanitarian actors to deliver aid. The displacement of such a large number of people further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Civilians experience almost the same threats and violence from both the Tatmadaw and the EAOs. However, they have different perceptions towards these armed actors. In Kachin, civilians tend to feel a slight sense of relief when they hear that the KIA has captured a community member. When this happens, they are usually still able to trace the detainee's whereabouts for verification. They cannot expect the same chance from the Tatmadaw due to extremely limited access and the risk of being the next victim. In the town of Bhamo in Kachin there have been increasing reports of forced child soldier recruitment, either to join the Tatmadaw or the KIA. A significant number of individuals has opted for the latter. In Northern Shan, the EAOs sent a message with a deadline to the village leaders to send the number of people they wanted to

be new soldiers. If there were two sons in a family, one of them had to join the EAOs based on the ethnicity of their parents. If the parents are in a mixed marriage, then two sons had to join the EAOs, one a group of the father's ethnicity and the other a group of the mother's ethnicity. The EAOs knew every family's number of children based on documents taken from the registration office. Some families now protect themselves by dividing their family registration documents into two or more to save as many children as possible.

EAOs also took care of the education of some children. Depending on request and agreement, EAOs supported fees for the education of their future soldiers, with the agreement that the children would join the force once they had completed their education. Some families paid EAOs not to recruit their children and sent them abroad to Thailand or Malaysia for work or education. Yet, many young people in Kachin and Northern Shan have joined EAOs as soldiers. Some families even volunteer to send their drug-addicted children to EAOs, a practice which has significantly increased after the coup. These parents prefer to see their children fight in armed groups rather than seeing them causing more social disturbance.

Urban areas have become the most contested battle arenas among armed conflict parties. This has stopped urban people's access to education and job opportunities, disrupted everyday life, and increased fear. A large number of people have fled and are enduring hardships. The economic collapse has had multiplier effects on social and familial life. As sustaining livelihoods becomes harder, more civilians of all ages and genders get involved in drug use and dealing. Drug selling and use have become shortcut solutions for dealing with stress and economic depression. One person we spoke to in Northern Shan told us that a mother of two had become a drug dealer to support her children.

Before the coup, many organisations including the EAOs had been involved in drug eradication activities. The coup has shifted the focus and limited mobility, including of those working on humanitarian issues. The EAOs have focused more on increasing their combative capacities and fighting against the Tatmadaw and other EAOs.

Localising Protection Norms: Civilian Ceasefire Mechanisms (CCM)

Because of the longevity of armed conflict in Myanmar, people have established their own protection strategies, such as how and what to prepare in order to flee, where to go, how to safely access their farm, and how to prepare the home if they choose to stay. Such protection strategies have become internalised in their culture and traditions.

According to a member of Nyein Foundation, the idea of involving civilians in the peace process started in 2010 when there was a potential peace talk between EAOs in Mon state and the Tatmadaw. Nyein Foundation invited other CSOs to coordinate and collaborate to advance the initiative. Before this initiative, according to the informant, CSOs had worked independently in their respective ethnic territory. Although they agreed to collaborate and coordinate, the main question was how they should be involved in the peace process. Through its international network, Nyein Foundation found Nonviolence Peaceforce in the Philippines, who had been working on civilian protection and the monitoring of the agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government of the Philippines since 2007 (Furnari 2016, 4). Nyein and partners invited NP to Myanmar to share their experience and work as their consultant.

Nyein, local CSOs, and NP initiated the creation of a civilian ceasefire mechanism (CCM) with support from international donors. The members of the CCM, called monitors, were trained between 2012 and 2016 to support and facilitate the involvement of grassroots representatives in the monitoring of the implementation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) as well as bilateral ceasefire agreements. The training took place in many different states. Chin and Mon states were piloting areas where EAOs were willing to discuss the ceasefire initiative and which had relatively fewer armed clashes than other areas (Bächtold 2015). Moreover, in Chin state civil society had been part of negotiating a bilateral ceasefire agreement and were formally invited by both sides to monitor the agreement. Starting with these two states, CCM was then introduced and spread to other states, including Kachin and Northern Shan. Protection norms in the CCM were contextually translated to the different support and responses from the various states and the nature of conflict and political sensitivities in each locality. In Mon and Chin states, for instance, CCM networks focused on monitoring ceasefire agreements. Meanwhile, in areas where ceasefires were absent or not deemed relevant or functional, such as Kachin and Northern Shan states, CCM groups focused more on direct physical protection (Bächtold 2015).

Between 2012 and 2016, NP and partners of five local organisations trained 401 monitors (about one third female and two thirds male). They spread the CCM to 139 villages located in 62 townships in eight regions. The monitors had diverse social, cultural, religious, and professional backgrounds. Some were activists of local organisations or INGOs working in Myanmar. On some occasions, community leaders identified candidates from within their community; in other cases, CCM was built on existing human rights networks or women's groups. NP and Nyein usually encouraged ethnic and gender diversity and at times assisted in the selection process, but ultimately local groups decided on the desired composition of their CCM networks. All of them were recruited through personal networks due to security concerns. Those who joined the monitoring mission had personal pride, expressing their obligation to protect their people and work for the common good (Krause and Kamler 2022, 7). They all participated in the diffusion of protection norms (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2016, 11).

NP, Nyein Foundation, and other local partners trained monitors on key aspects of unarmed civilian Protection (UCP), such as building a network, nonpartisanship, and proactively engaging with influential actors to protect civilians, as well as more traditional monitoring skills, such as documenting the impact of ceasefire violations on civilian populations, observing, and reporting with impartiality (Furnari 2016). Proactive engagement includes: (1) encouraging potential perpetrators to minimise harm to civilians rather than blaming them for their actions, and (2) direct physical protection of civilians by civilians. Trainees were directly involved with civilians of different ethnicities to identify and influence actors to build relations, exchange views, and even resolve actual cases of civilian protection. NP's proactive engagement with monitors was a key aspect of localising and translating protection norms to different contexts. This proactive engagement has been crucial to improving the monitor's capacity, enabling them to debrief responses to incidents, discuss challenges, find solutions with other monitors, and learn additional skills on issues of their choice (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2016, 14–15). This complex training method has allowed norm entrepreneurs to evaluate the acceptability and effectiveness of norm translation to a certain conflict setting. This method of norm diffusion also allowed the norm-takers to translate the protection norm into their locality and creatively navigate and improvise the norm to address situations in various cultural settings and threats in different conflict areas (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2016, 6–7; Krause and Kamler 2022, 3).

Between 2013 and 2015, with the support of international donors, the CCM reached out to more individuals from diverse backgrounds. Nyein Foundation recorded that the monitors reached more than 3,000 civilians for awareness campaigns, capacity building, and exploring strategies such as what they should do when they meet the Tatmadaw and how to approach armed actors for protection purposes (Lathaw 2015).

In Kachin State and Northern Shan states CCMs focused primarily on providing direct physical protection, as the armed groups in these areas did not sign the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Monitoring bilateral ceasefires was tried for a while but was not deemed meaningful or effective. As a bottom-up approach, monitors instead focused on violations of human

rights and the direct physical security of conflict-affected communities before, during, and after violence occurred. This work included protecting civilians under threat, preventing or reducing violence, facilitating humanitarian assistance, providing humanitarian corridors to evacuate civilians caught in crossfires, or accompanying injured civilians to hospitals. These were usually prioritised over the documentation and reporting of ceasefire violations (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2016, 7). Some groups stopped calling themselves CCMs to articulate their change of focus. In southern Shan, Karen, Mon, Chin, and Tanintharyi, CCMs continued by and large to focus on monitoring the NCA, although they too increasingly embraced unarmed civilian protection work. With all the limitations that monitors encountered in areas of armed conflict, their efforts were expected to support and strengthen those formally assigned to monitor, collect, and report information about civilians' needs and concerns to the ceasefire signatory parties (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2016, 6–8).

During the work, the monitors sometimes hid their identity as CCMs to avoid confrontation with the Tatmadaw and the EAOs. They then utilised social identities, e.g. as community elders, religious leaders, or members of village development committees, to negotiate with the Tatmadaw or the ethnic armed groups. With monitors' direct intervention in the field of civilian protection, civilians started appreciating and using the CCM. For example, community members were not just running to the jungle anymore when armed clashes occurred, but they could use a better and more systematic protection mechanism embodied in the CCM (Krause and Kamler 2022, 8–10).

While the CCM was a bottom-up approach to the peace process and was considered informal monitoring, the signatory parties established a formal monitoring mechanism: the Joint Monitoring Committees (JMCs) at the Union, state, and local levels. This formal mechanism was designed to monitor the provision of the NCA in each signatory's geographical area. The CCM monitors successfully advocated for the representation of civilians in the JMC structure, not only in Chin and Mon but in all places where the NCA would be expected to be impactful (Lathaw 2015).

Having CCMs working with a bottom-up approach and JMCs with a top-down approach was expected to create an ideal peace process. CCMs would prepare the community at the grassroots level for peace situations and involve them in the peace process. On the other hand, the JMCs would move from the top, preparing the main conflict actors for peace-making and establishing a peace infrastructure to support and expand the NCA to the bottom. This was supposed to create what Mac Ginty (2008, 2011) calls a hybrid peace process instead of the liberal peace process that often fails to bring peace to the grassroots level. However, due to fundamental disagreement between the NCA signatories, the JMCs lost legitimacy and political support. This forced the CCMs to transform into "peace observers" and to form a civilian monitoring group within the JMC structure. However, little progress was observed from this transformation (Krause and Kamler 2022, 5).

The disagreement between NCA signatories also affected the CCM's work in the ceasefire monitoring process. This transformed CCM into Community Peace Support (CPS) and shifted monitors' focus from monitoring to civilian protection, the

need for which has significantly increased after the failure of the NCA and the change in the political landscape after the coup. In 2019, Justice Community, a local CSO, diffused an additional protection norm to the CPS members by introducing digital security, which later became crucial to providing basic protection to civilians in the midst of increasing digital threats and surveillance after the 2021 coup. In 2022, NP in Myanmar strengthened local networks and collaborations by reintroducing early warning and early response (EWER) and proactive engagement, while continuing the proactive engagement with their partners and civilians to localise and translate protection norms. The combination of digital security and EWER mechanisms functioned in the field for civilian protection. EWER and proactive engagement require a strong network and collaborative actions. Digital technology has become the virtual world for civilians to coordinate work and the main tool for practicing EWER. The following discussion shows how protection norms were diffused after 2021.

Translating Protection Norms: Civilian Protection in the Post-Coup Situation

According to a member of Nyein Foundation, before the establishment of the CCM, all CSOs in Kachin, Mon, Chin, Kayin, and Northern Shan states were inclined to work separately and only focused on their locality. The creation of the CCM and the diffusion of other aspects of protection norms led them to collaborate and coordinate their work. This helped them to adapt their protection strategy to the escalating threats and violence after the coup. The most noticeable protection strategy in post-coup situations has been the incorporation of digital security into the early warning and early response system and proactive engagement, two core strategies that were reintroduced after the coup.

Early Warning and Early Response (EWER)

Most people in Kachin and Northern Shan have learned to adapt their lives to the ongoing violent conflicts. This adaptation and self-established EWER helps individuals to protect themselves, for instance, by going to their farm only accompanied by companions or by collecting information and verifying rumours from other village members about the current situation. Those who live in areas where armed clashes occur frequently have taken even more proactive measures to enhance their safety and preparedness, among others, by digging trenches and bomb shelters at their homes, providing protection

when armed clashes or bombings occur. Additionally, civilians have been actively stockpiling basic food supplies such as oil, rice, and salt. Storing these essentials ensures their resilience and ability to self-support during times of uncertainty or when access to resources is limited.

Local CSOs have been crucial in establishing more systemic or elaborate forms of EWER in Kachin and Northern Shan, although their coverage area is still limited. CSOs share responsibilities among themselves to apply EWER to different issues of concern. Some CSOs focus on monitoring the impact of the political situation on civilians. Others provide mental support, raise awareness, and offer humanitarian aid. Yet others support temporary safety measures and food supply, accompany gender-based violence (GBV) survivors, and conduct awareness-raising training on landmines. There is also a CSO network that focuses on IDP issues. All these collaborative and networking efforts translate the diffused protection norms to their needs.

Digital technology is fundamental for EWER systems and practice in Myanmar. Already before the coup, the Tatmadaw was very focused on the use of digital technologies. In 2019, they arrested anyone using any digital technology, including walkie-talkies producing voice with codes. After the coup, restrictions increased and the Tatmadaw rolled out digital surveillance throughout the country. One of the people we spoke to, a former NP partner working on legal issues in Kachin, related that they always reminded their clients to avoid using digital communication and social media to reduce risk:

> ***"I always advise them to be careful regarding their activities online – especially what they post, react to, and share on social media. Because through their posts on social media, military intelligence can trace their activities and who they are linked with, which can create problems for more related people as a consequence."***

Digital technology has made it easier for CSOs to collect information and deliver assistance to the community after the coup. They have coordinated through the most secure digital channels to establish collective EWER efforts. They share knowledge, techniques, and best practices related to EWER in addition to sharing information about the conflict among themselves. This has further enhanced CSOs' collective capacity to monitor and respond effectively to emerging violence.

Kachin and Northern Shan provide examples of digital-based EWER. Digital EWER in Kachin is based on organisational networking and deliberately set up and managed by the participating organisations. In the Northern Shan, digital EWER is more communal, organically set up and managed by the community. These two EWER practices are different in their capacities, coverage areas, and capacity to influence the violent actors' perspective of violence. Based on these differences, the authors find that organisational networking in EWER is more impactful than communal networking. With the strong presence of collaborative work of local CSOs, civilians have been able to influence the perspective of armed actors about violence.

CSOs established internal digital-based EWER as part of their broader services to the community. For example, one CSO organised and built their EWER system in four steps: The first consisted in knowing the situation and possible harms in the region very well. The second step was monitoring the region, whereby EWER committees in villages monitored and reported any changes in the area. The third step consisted in using the most secure social media platform to share information among them. If the internet was cut, they used phone message applications with code language to update on the situation. The fourth step was emergency response, whereby responders had to disguise themselves as a community development committee members to avoid attention from the Tatmadaw.

In addition to CSOs' internal digital EWER systems, a larger collaborative and networked EWER system was also established. Those in Kachin practicing organisational EWER strategically assigned EWER focal points in villages to collect and share real-time information about incidents and developments in their respective areas. This has enabled them to have timely and accurate information about situations on the ground, facilitating swift and appropriate responses.

One example of these practices was a coordinated effort between CSOs in Waingmaw township. The Social Welfare and Development Network (SWDN) in Waingmaw established a Resource Hub to foster social cohesion within the community, as its members consisted of diverse social groups, ethnicities, and religions. The organisations joining the Hub include the Waingmaw CSOs Network, Majoi Social Development, Mingalar Foundation, Edin (a Christian religious organisation), Shan Youth Waingmaw, the Waingmaw Women's Network (WWN), Waingmaw Women Social Development (a subgroup of WWN), the Township Leading Group (TLG), the Shan Women Development Network, and individual women leaders representing specific villages and IDP camps.

They all connected only through the most secure digital platform of their choice to share information, clarify rumours, and coordinate responses to emergencies. They also organised regular in-person meetings in irregular and random places, where they shared real-time information about conflict situations, community activities, and responses to any accident in their respective areas. The Resource Hub functions beyond collecting, analysing, and sharing information. It also develops response plans for various scenarios, including armed clashes and natural disasters. For example, in the case of armed clashes, the Hub maps conflict zones and divides areas within Waingmaw Township for escape, evacuation, and establishing connections with organisations for emergency relief responses.

Proactive engagement with all parties for the purpose of civilian protection, a core method of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) and central to the CCM has seamlessly translated to EWER. One person from Kachin we spoke to said that to collect first-hand information that informs EWER, they have to engage with different armed actors at all levels, including EAOs and Tatmadaw, as well as militia groups that the Tatmadaw supports. Such proactive engagement can only be performed through strong networking among the CSOs and civilians, where they collaborate and coordinate. A community interested in such a protection system will form structured committees

to circulate information and develop their EWER system. The EWER will contribute to a more organised and structured work environment that will allow them to collaborate and coordinate with each other to provide protection. The person we spoke to said that:

> ***"People in Kachin state understand conflict very well because the military situation is already there, but one problem is that everyone is doing their thing individually, and most of them are not systematic. Well-trained monitors have filled the gap by engaging and sharing knowledge with community members on how to collect information and how to communicate effectively with each other. We have seen some success stories by applying such methods."***

One of the success stories of EWER in Kachin occurred when a local committee engaged with both the Salang Kaba (the authorities at the grassroots level assigned by the Kachin Independence Organisation – KIO) and the Tatmadaw's troops. Both occupied different sides of the same area, where civilians would be caught up in their potential armed clash. The community's members went to the Salang Kaba to plead not to fight near the villages. The leader told them to negotiate with the leader of Tatmadaw about not using roads except for the main Chiphwi road. If the Tatmadaw cooperated, the Salang Kaba would fulfil the request. While the negotiation was taking place, villagers prepared to form emergency cell groups, agreed a destination to flee to, and prepared the mechanism to protect their most vulnerable members, particularly the elderly and children, and to transport and store food if fighting broke out. Eventually, the community representative convinced both conflicting armed parties to avoid armed clashes near the village. Our contact person measured the success in this case as follows:

> ***"We can say that we had achieved success when nothing happened. There was no burning of houses or villages. Actually, when we went to Mandong, we raised awareness among the community members. After learning about the [EWER] concept, the villagers did all the work themselves because they knew best how to protect themselves."***

A EWER mechanism was also established at an IDP camp where a particular individual was assigned to the front line. In Kachin, for example, our contact person was responsible for guarding the camp gate, where they ensured no stranger would enter the camp. If they saw someone, they would closely follow the stranger and ask them to leave the camp. At the same time, they immediately shared the situation with others to make them aware of the potential threat:

> ***"In Dukahtawng, we have a system where we immediately share important information. We may advise people not to come during a particular week, indicating a temporary halt in activities. For instance, if we notice anything suspicious near the Japanese bridge (in Sitapu Ward) or if there's a need for caution, we send out warnings via phones."***

The assigned individual consistently implements these measures to maintain the safety and security of the people in the camp. Camp residents are notified to exercise caution and verify the identity and purpose of any strangers attempting to enter the camp. This measure aims to prevent potential threats. It has been observed that before the outbreak of war in the area, strangers, often referred to as "hair collectors" and "odd street vendors", appeared from other places who it was suspected may have served as scouts. This raised concern among the IDPs and CSOs that such strangers should not be allowed into the camp.

Collaborative protection efforts between different faith-based institutions are particularly noteworthy. As the needs of IDPs have continued to increase, churches in the communities and some Buddhist monasteries have stepped in to provide support by offering temporary shelter and food. The Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) coordinates closely with these churches, including monasteries, to ensure adequate assistance to the displaced individuals. This coordination includes sharing food items as necessary to ensure that the basic needs of the IDPs are met.

Nyein Foundation, one of the leading entrepreneurs of protection norms and the first main partner of NP in Kachin, has played a significant role in channelling funding and distributing aid items from KBC to Buddhist IDP sites. The coordination process operates as follows: In the event of an emergency and urgent intervention need, the churches at the community level notify the KBC, and monasteries notify Nyein, if they lack the necessary items to respond effectively. Subsequently, KBC mobilises its resources and distributes emergency assistance to the churches at the community level and through the Nyein Foundation's established system to the Buddhist IDP sites. This collaborative approach ensures that timely and appropriate aid reaches different IDP sites, facilitating an effective response to their urgent needs.

The Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee (KHCC) has been the largest coordination actor amongst the organisations addressing IDPs issues. It was formed in 2017 to initiate a return and resettlement programme for individuals whose places of origin have become relatively safe and free from ongoing conflict. KHCC comprises various organisations in Kachin, including CSOs, faith-based organisations, and national-level institutions, including the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC), KBC, KMSS, and other concerned institutions in Kachin State. With strong coordination, they aim at designating areas as "no war zones" to increase safety and security of IDPs. KHCC has provided some capital for collective business activities for households and other necessary support like tools for home gardening or building new housing for those ready to return to their villages of origin. A representative from KBC said that:

> ***"In the WFP-funded program, we provide stipends (30,000 MMK) for food to individuals for six months. To date, KBC has constructed approximately 2,000 housing units for returning IDPs and plans to build an additional 600 units this year. This support is not limited to the Kachin community alone but includes all IDPs from different backgrounds."***

Since the military coup, KHCC has discontinued negotiations with the military junta. This decision was made based on the belief that engaging with the current military regime would not positively impact peace and justice.

In northern Shan, NP and local partners have established EWER committees in village communities. Due to security concerns, these committees had to disguise themselves as community development committees to avoid suspicion from the Tatmadaw. According to a representative from a local women's organisation, this mechanism still functions in the post-coup situation, although the financial support for this activity ended far before the coup:

> ***"Through this collaborative effort, we promote information sharing among CSOs, enabling a greater understanding of EWER methodologies and best practices. Additionally, we strategically assign EWER focal points in our targeted villages. These focal points act as local representatives, responsible for gathering and disseminating real-time information about incidents and developments in their respective areas. This approach enables us to obtain timely and accurate awareness of the situation on the ground, thereby enabling swift and appropriate responses."***

Community for Peace Support (CPS) in Northern Shan has also focused on providing EWER. They have shared early warning information with community members using their chosen most secure digital platform. When community members request humanitarian assistance, CPS refers them to relevant CSOs/NGOs to provide assistance.

The locally modified and strengthened EWER enables the community to maintain their social capital and use it to protect each other. Their exposure to real-time situations increases their social awareness and solidarity. They support and help each other by giving food to older people and sharing vegetables with neighbours. Local and international NGOs working in Northern Shan, like ICRC, Relief International, and DCA/NCA, were part of this mechanism. However, due to extreme insecurity in the post-coup situation, they have had to work with as low a profile in the field as possible to support IDPs.

The digital communal EWER in the Resource Hub has increased social cohesion among the community. This goes beyond sharing conflict, violence, and other harm-related information among themselves to include daily life and needs. The members of this communal EWER have diverse backgrounds ranging from ordinary civilians to community leaders (religious, customary, and village leaders). This has made EWER not only about sharing information related to threats and violence, in a similar way that CCM was not just about collecting and reporting data on ceasefire violations. EWER has expanded according to the interest of each mechanism's members, to include the exchange of daily information about needs and markets and about regular crimes such as livestock or agricultural theft and gang robbery.

While the communal EWER has been quite open and inclusive, one CSO in Northern Shan has organised their own EWER mechanism through an exclusive digital platform in addition to their internal EWER.

They pseudonymise themselves during their digital interaction on the most secure digital platform of their choice. Aside from this use of technologies for EWER, the CSO still organises in-person meetings in irregular places. They also emphasised the importance of maintaining a low profile online and on social media platforms, with an IT policy to guide their activities and ensure that information was carefully handled. For further anticipation of threat, they were cautious about commenting on the conflict parties, recognising the potential risks associated with expressing opinions that might attract unnecessary attention or scrutiny.

Although EWER has provided a significant contribution to the protection of civilians in Kachin and Shan, many civilians, particularly women, have yet to be made aware of the method and its importance. Furthermore, not everyone has followed advice for self-protection that was provided by the CSOs. It is not clear to what extent the information is intentionally ignored or not properly understood. According to CSOs we have engaged with, the only way to make people understand EWER has been by keeping this topic in every discussion and continuously talking with the community. In doing so, some CSOs routinely disseminate information about EWER and digital safety in all their activities involving the community. According to one CSO representative, the community will eventually remember and more likely apply these methods, if they are continuously reminded:

> ***"Therefore, it's crucial to continue this process as much as possible. We intend to do so. It should be integrated into all our activities when we visit villages in the field. It doesn't matter if it's for 20 minutes or 15 minutes; it should always be included and shared. It's no longer a private task but something we must share consistently during our interactions."***

Gender-focussed EWER

In 2015, NP and CSO partners made efforts to increase the role of women in ceasefire monitoring and, most importantly, to prepare women as agents of protection in their community. They diffused international norms on women's rights, gender equality, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), as well as unarmed civilian protection (UCP) principles and methods, which aided in protecting women in local conflicts and violence. The initiative was conducted in Chin, Kayin, and Kachin states. These efforts increased women's participation in CCM to sixty percent of the total monitors in these three states (Nonviolent Peaceforce 2015; Furnari 2016).

NP and women's organisations believe that involving women in monitoring and direct protection strengthens community engagement with armed actors. Armed actors, mostly men, tend to be less suspicious of women. According to some people we spoke to, women are better negotiators to influence violent actors to change their perspective about violence. And as local actors, women have great access, interest, and legitimacy. However, women still encounter major barriers when

they introduce women's rights, CEDAW, and gender equality, even though some EAOs like the KIA have established gender divisions within their structures. Moreover, the EAOs argue that they are not signatory parties to any international norms, so they are not tied to any international treaties.

The specific support that NP and partners have provided to women in enhancing their leadership roles, confidence, and agency has contributed to increased coordination among women-led CSOs. They have built an organised and strong collaborative and coordinative network in responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other violences toward women. According to an advisor of the Kachin State Women Network (KSWN), the support helped to set up coordination and collaboration among women's organisations in Kachin state. Now, the network consists of 20 women's organisations across Kachin State, in which KSWN has been central. Through the network, they share information, collectively advocate issues, and provide a more comprehensive and solid response to the needs of survivors and vulnerable individuals. The most noticeable change has been an increase in their confidence to talk and proactively engage with violent actors and other stakeholders, where previously they had been held back by a patriarchal perspective that sees women as second-class citizens.

Although women's organisations have been able to offer safe houses, emergency aid, and referrals to organisations with safe housing services for victims and survivors, their ability to support the victims of gender-based violence through legal protection programmes has been severely hindered, and their mobility has been restricted. Like other CSOs, women's organisations also have to keep a low profile, particularly when encountering the Tatmadaw. Mobility restrictions have complicated their EWER practices, particularly in collecting first-hand information and reports from villages or wards regarding GBV cases. The participation of the Literature and Culture Association and CSOs specialising in GBV management in Kachin has also decreased after the coup, following the escalation of armed clashes, threats, and violence. Some organisations have been hesitant to respond to a case as openly as they previously did. The fear and uncertainty of the coup have caused these women's groups to adopt a more discreet approach to managing incidents. Consequently, many GBV cases have been resolved quietly through monetary compensations mediated by community leaders.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, strong coordination and networking among women's organisations has enabled them to influence community leaders to respond to SGBV cases against their subordinates in the field. One of the essential aspects of proactive engagement is the ability of protection actors to negotiate with conflict actors to carefully change their perspective on violence. This can be done, as Kaplan suggests, by strong coordination among organisations in areas of conflict. In the cases of Kachin and Northern Shan, women's organisations have been able to immediately coordinate with the EAO leaders to respond to emerging incidents. Their increased confidence to speak up and engage has been crucial in advocating and influencing violent actors' perspectives on violence.

Support and Proactive Engagement

Tatmadaw attacks in Kachin and Northern Shan in 2015, which broke a the 19-year peace agreement with the KIA, increased the support among civilians for EAOs in both areas. Following the attacks and later the coup, the KIA established and supported new armed groups in Kachin, and new armed groups also emerged in Northern Shan. While the KIA has been the dominant power in Kachin and relationships among EAOs here are quite organised and structured, the ties among EAOs in Northern Shan are complicated. Not all groups adhere to civilian protection norms, nor do they share common objectives in their armed struggle. Many EOAs are ethnically based and operate in their own ethnic territories. This ethnic focus makes it hard or insecure for people from different ethnicities to pass through these areas. One person we spoke to, who is a village executive committee member in Northern Shan, shared their observations as follows:

> ***"It is tricky to say that every ethnic group got their community's support. Yet all EAOs can last longer because of their people's support with any means. That's why the SAC [Tatmadaw] didn't trust all the EAOs who were against them, and ethnic groups were their enemies. This is reality. Yet no EAOs can win this war, as they have different values and goals. For example, SSPP and RCSS are known as SSA (Shan State Army). Both groups were representing Shan. However, RCSS was an NCA 9National Ceasefire Agreement] signatory and had a good relationship with the SAC. SSPP was not an NCA signatory. After the NCA signing, people saw that RCSS expanded its territory or military operation area to northern Shan. There was much fighting between RCSS and SSPP. Two groups in Shan will support SSPP, and another will support RCSS. In reality, communities are scared of both Shan EAOs and other EAOs in northern Shan."***

Although supporting one of the armed groups could cause people harm and violence, it is also a protection mechanism. Barter (2014, 18–20) observes in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand that support is often given by those who choose to stay. This can take the form of giving supplies, information, or any other unarmed activities in return for protection given by the armed actor to the supporters. Support shows that civilians are not necessarily innocent, even though they do not pose a direct mortal threat to others. However, support does not always mean ideologically choosing a side; it may also be given for pragmatic protection purposes (Barter 2014, 18–20). In Kachin and Northern Shan, many civilians support EAOs for either ideological reasons or just as a pragmatic choice for their protection from occurring threats. On the other hand, EAOs rely on their community to prolong their struggle. EAOs need civilians for updated information, new knowledge, new soldiers, and logistical supplies.

This interdependence between civilians and the EAOs in each territory also enables civilians and CSOs to influence the EAOs' perspective on violence and civilian protection. Since before the coup,

EAOs have acted as the representative authorities of their ethnic groups. Not only did they provide security and protection, but they were also involved in eradicating drugs and addressing social disorder, sexual violence, and other crimes, and sometimes coordinated and collaborated with CSOs and faith-based organisations. Such concerns and direct interventions on social issues have decreased since the coup. EAOs have focused more on preparing and increasing their combative capacities but have kept their concern for social order after receiving reports from community members. One person we spoke to from Northern Shan shared cases involving EAOs:

> ***"There was a child rape in one village, and the victim's family was demanding help. I gave a referral to the EAO. The EAO took action on this issue. They care about domestic violence, too. People feel safer when they're with the EAO's forces. EAO forces look after the civilians, so people can even travel alone without worrying about their security."***

The interdependence between EAOs and civilians has often led to meetings on issues of mutual interest. The KIA, for example, invited activists and other civilians to draft the Kachin constitution and governance system. On the other hand, the EAOs delegated representatives to respond to a meeting invitation of a CSO to update and learn new things. Such mutual interest raises collective confidence among CSOs to address any requests directly to the EAOs. In Kachin, if the CSOs could not collectively respond to an incident, they would travel to the KIA headquarters in Laiza to meet the key officials in person or at least send an open letter to KIA leaders addressing the incident.

Such great high degree of access and legitimacy allows CSOs to influence EAOs' perspectives about violence. It also enables them to introduce international norms such as gender equality and CEDAW carefully. A member of a women's organisation in Kachin shared that they have coordinated with the gender team under the KIA administration to discuss women's issues. Through the meetings, the CSO improved KIA's perspective and capacity in gender issues and introduced other norms such as CEDAW, gender equality, and domestic laws on GBV. This introduction has been extremely challenging due to the strong and rooted influence of patriarchal tradition.

In addition to gender-related perspectives, the CSOs and women's organisations have also influenced the Finance Department under the parallel government and the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) during their meetings about corruption and inequality in customs and taxation. The KIO's subordinates in the field often collect higher amounts of taxes than required by the KIA. This has added an economic burden to the already poor community. Unfortunately, these interdependencies have gradually decreased following increased armed clashes in the area. One representative from a local women's organisation said that their relationship with the KIA has been frozen lately. The EAOs are now more suspicious of everyone.

Meanwhile, EAOs in Northern Shan do not possess the same military strength and authority as the KIA. The synergy that exists between KIA and communities across Kachin, even as it is decreasing, never

existed as strongly or cohesively in Shan state. The ten EAOs share almost equal authority among them. Consequently, their influence rarely exceeds their controlled territory, which is ethnically based. This makes it harder for civilians, particularly CSOs delivering aid, to navigate complex situations. They have encountered more threats and violence as well as increased restrictions to their mobility. Each time they travel, they encounter checkpoints and investigations either by EAOs in their ethnic territory or by the Tatmadaw.

Language barriers between ethnic groups have also been a challenge in engaging and negotiating with EAOs and the Tatmadaw at checkpoints. Some CSOs ask other members from their networks, who share a common language with EAOs or the Tatmadaw or speak their language, to accompany them. Meanwhile, the main threat at the Tatmadaw checkpoint is organisational registration documents. Many CSOs have been reluctant to register their organisation with the government. They argue that registration means recognition of the Junta government. Meanwhile, some CSOs have registered their organisation to deliver humanitarian assistance efficiently, while putting aside their political differences. Yet this does not necessarily make them safer: the mobility of humanitarian actors makes them the group most prone to violence, as both EAOs and Tatmadaw often suspect them of being affiliated with the other side.

Conclusions

The diffusion of protection norms in conflict-affected areas requires specific and unconventional methods that localise and translate these norms into practice. NP, Nyein Foundation, and other local CSOs have shown that proactive engagement and accompaniment are key to enabling translation and localisation of protection norms. Proactive accompaniment and proactive engagement have allowed INGOs and local CSOs to continuously learn, share, and exchange ideas and expertise in respectful ways, while strengthening the local capacities of communities to protect themselves and others.

Practiced in this way, the diffusion of projection norms cannot consist in a one-off training or workshop by external parties to share international protection norms and standards but must be based on an engaged partnership with communities in the lead, re-imagining and adapting protection methods, tools, and norms to their own unique situation. Whether these partnerships on civilian protection are designed around ceasefire monitoring or early warning does not matter very much, because both unarmed civilian protection apocopates are rooted in similar methods, processes, and principles. Ultimately, they are about enhancing the capacity of communities to protect themselves without the use of weapons.

Through continuous collaborative and coordinated work, NP and local CSO partners have transformed previously more individual protection practices in Kachin and Northern Shan into group practices. This has enhanced the sustainability of already existing self-protection practices, which has allowed for more civilians to be connected, involved, and impacted. However, this relatively positive outcome of norm diffusion and translation does not guarantee the continuity of the organised practice of civilian protection in Kachin and Northern Shan. The uncertainty of armed conflicts and political dynamics in Myanmar could scatter the cohesion that has been built and leave civilians to fend for themselves.

Recommendations

1. In times of uncertainty, like in Kachin and Northern Shan, donor agencies and international and national NGOs should focus on enabling and supporting local CSOs in their efforts to influence armed actors, so that they reduce violence and harm.

2. External organisations should consider civilian protection as a key element in humanitarian assistance and acknowledge that protection mechanisms are not only about enabling civilians to protect themselves and others from harm and violence; they are also about allowing civilians to create space to navigate, be creative, and progress.

3. Donor agencies and international and national NGOs should engage in continuous, long-term proactive engagement and accompaniment to diffuse external norms in a particular locality, and provide long-term accompaniment and mentorship to grassroots civil society actors.

4. Instead of introducing new norms and telling others what to do, donor agencies and international and national NGOs should learn about, support, and maximise the existing informal and formal mechanisms at the grassroots level that provide direct physical protection for civilians in conflict situations.

5. Norm diffusion involves that outsider and insider actors learn together and exchange knowledge, skills, and experiences; negating the other's proactive engagement would directly and unfruitfully affect the outcome and impact of norm diffusion.

References

- AAPP Burma. 2021. "Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup." *Assistance Association for Political Prisoners*. 24 June. https://aappb.org/?p=16055.
- Abbink, Jon. 2020. "Religion and Violence in the Horn of Africa: Trajectories of Mimetic Rivalry and Escalation between 'Political Islam' and the State." *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 21 (2): 194–215.
- Acharya, Amitav. 2004. "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism." *International Organization* 58 (2): 239–75.
- Acharya, Amitav. 2015. "The Responsibility to Protect and a Theory of Norm Circulation." In *Theorising the Responsibility to Protect*, edited by Ramesh Thakur and William Maley, 59–78. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Amnesty International. 2022. "Myanmar 2021." POL 10/4870/2022. https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/report-myanmar/.
- Bächtold, Stefan. 2015. "Final Evaluation Report Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring Project." Basel: Swiss Peace Foundation. https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/16.01.15._External_Evaluation_Report_NP__Shalom_1.pdf.
- Banim, Guy Patrick, and Tin Maung Maung Ohn. 2019. "Final Independent Evaluation of the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) Support Platform Project (SPP)." New York: UN Peacebuilding Fund. https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/myanmar-irf-148-jmc-support-platform-final-evaluation.
- Barter, Shane. 2014. *Civilian Strategy in Civil War: Insights from Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bociaga, Robert. 2022. "Ethnic Armed Groups Eye Post-Coup Myanmar." *The Diplomat*. 31 May. https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/ethnic-armed-groups-eye-post-coup-myanmar/.
- Filkins, Dexter. 2009. "U.S. Tightens Airstrike Policy in Afghanistan." *The New York Times*. 22 June. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/world/asia/22airstrikes.html.
- Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. 1998. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52 (4): 887–917.

- Fishbein, Emily, and Andrew Nachemson. 2022. "Myanmar's Coup: A Year under Military Rule in Numbers." *The Guardian*. 2 January. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/feb/01/myanmar-coup-a-year-under-military-rule-in-numbers.
- Furnari, Ellen. 2016. "Analysis of Nonviolent Peaceforce Civilian Protection and Ceasefire Monitoring Projects in Kayin, Chin and Kachin States during 2015." Internal Report. New Zealand: National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Otago.
- Gilardi, Fabrizio. 2013. "Transnational Diffusion: Norms, Ideas, and Policies." In *Handbook of International Relations*, edited by Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse-Kappen and Beth A. Simmons [2nd thoroughly rev. ed.]. London: SAGE.
- Kaplan, Oliver. 2013. "Nudging Armed Groups: How Civilians Transmit Norms of Protection." *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* 2 (3): 1–18.
- Krause, Jana. 2023. "Civilian Protection Monitoring in War and Ceasefire Contexts: Evidence from Myanmar's Kachin and Karen States." In *Civilian Protective Agency in Violent Settings: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Jana Krause, Juan Masullo, Emily Paddon Rhoads, and Jennifer M. Welsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krause, Jana, and Erin Kamler. 2022. "Ceasefires and Civilian Protection Monitoring in Myanmar." *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (1).
- Lathaw, Ja Nan. 2015. "Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring in Chin and Mon States (31 December 2013-31 December 2015)." Internal Report. Myanmar: Nyein (Shalom) Foundation.
- Legro, Jeffrey W. 2013. *Cooperation under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Mac Ginty, Roger. 2008. "Indigenous Peace-Making Versus the Liberal Peace." *Cooperation and Conflict* 43 (2): 139–63.
- Mac Ginty, Roger. 2011. *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace*. 1st ed. Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Muana, Patrick K. 1997. "The Kamajoi Militia: Civil War, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency." *Africa Development* 22 (3/4): 77–100.
- Nonviolent Peaceforce. 2015. "Improving Women's Participation in and Ability to Monitor Ceasefires and Enhance Protection in Support of Peace Process." Internal Report. Myanmar: Nonviolent Peaceforce.
- Nonviolent Peaceforce. 2016. "Civilians Protecting Civilians through Ceasefire Monitoring Civilian Ceasefire Monitoring in Myanmar." Internal Report. Myanmar: Nonviolent Peaceforce.

- Park, Susan. 2006. "Theorizing Norm Diffusion Within International Organizations." *International Politics* 43 (3): 342–61.
- Picard, Jasper. 2022. "The Emergence of Civilian Resistance to Military Rule in Myanmar." *The Diplomat*. 3 August. https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/the-emergence-of-civilian-resistance-to-military-rule-in-myanmar/.
- Reid, Richard. 2023. "Sacred Violence and Spirited Resistance: On War and Religion in African History." *History and Anthropology* 34 (1): 20–38.
- Rieffel, Lex. 2019. "Peace and War in Myanmar." *Brookings*. 6 December. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/peace-and-war-in-myanmar/.
- Tun, Saw Chit Thet, Bobby Anderson, and Chosein Yamahata. 2022. "Myanmar's Peace Process and Ceasefire Monitoring Mechanism: A Post-Mortem." In *Demystifying Myanmar's Transition and Political Crisis*, edited by Chosein Yamahata and Bobby Anderson. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Zimmermann, Lisbeth. 2016. "Same Same or Different? Norm Diffusion Between Resistance, Compliance, and Localization in Post-Conflict States." *International Studies Perspectives* 17 (1): 98–115.

Previous publications in this series are available for free download on the Creating Safer Space website:

https://creating-safer-space.com/publications/working-paper-series/