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Local and International Actors Influencing Inter-Communal Relations in Rakhine State

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Stakeholders play a crucial role in addressing inequality and nurturing social capital, the process critical to promoting better inter-communal relations. They are local and international actors such as the government, government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and political, social, and economic leaders. They can affect inter-communal relations through public policy that shapes, alters, and informs relations between different groups in society (United Nations Development Program, 2020). The better their policy, the more they are supportive of social inclusion that strengthens inter-communal relations. Their weak policy usually results in a social exclusion that weakens inter-communal relations. Moreover, people's trust and confidence in stakeholders and their social, economic, and political institutions also affect inter-communal relations (UNDP, 2020). The more members of diverse communities believe in stakeholders' benevolence and efforts to bring about equality between different communities, the more they are confident about developing and sustaining better inter-communal relations between them. This study examines how local and international actors have historically influenced trends and dynamics of inter-communal relations in the multi-ethnic Rakhine State of Myanmar. The study also intends to explore how the community's high or low trust and confidence in local and international actors have affected Rakhine State's inter-communal relations.

Government and Political Parties

The Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) government's enforcement of the 1982 Burma Citizenship Law led to systematic racial exclusion, seriously affecting Rakhine State's social cohesion. As a result of the citizenship law, the vast majority of Muslims referred to as foreign illegals have become stateless in Rakhine State. Illegal migration or statelessness itself is a legal issue. However, it gradually becomes a racial issue when the government and politicians systematically politicize it. They have manipulated illegal migration and statelessness for political gains such as public trust, electoral success, and legitimate presence in Rakhine State.

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) government was at the forefront of politicizing citizenship or statelessness, taking several undemocratic policy measures. The government intentionally excluded Muslims from their access to citizenship and many other types of civil rights (Ullah and Chattoraj, 2018). The government put the process of citizenship verification for Muslims under durable suspension and stirred up the Muslim community's resentment at being treated unfairly or differently from other ethnic communities. The government also instigated the Rakhine's concern about the multitude of Muslims becoming citizens who could access the same political rights as they could. It finally resulted in the situation that both communities began to feel excluded by each other. However, such a mutual sense of exclusion did not lead to a confrontation between the two communities under the repressive military regime sensitive to any communal conflict that may lead to regional instability that may, in turn, threaten their administration. It only continued to exist as a ticking timebomb that would explode at the very right time of political transition in 2010.

Communal tensions came into striking prominence in Rakhine State only when Myanmar's political transition began in 2010. The Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP) won the majority seats for the Rakhine State Hluttaw in the 2010 general election (The Burma Fund UN Office, 2011). However, the RNDP found it impossible to compete

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with the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) to gain influence on the legislation, given that the USDP had already sought to achieve an alliance with 25% of military appointees in the State Hluttaw. Given this situation, the RNDP came up with its post-election mandate to gain the Rakhine people's absolute trust and win the vast majority of seats in the upcoming election, which would be of tremendous importance in achieving absolute political power in the Rakhine politics. Following that mandate, the party strategically prepared to seek to gain overwhelming support from people throughout Rakhine State in the future election.

The party realized that it had lost many seats because people in many Rakhine townships had voted for the USDP in the past election. The party leaders were much likely to believe that permanent supporters of the Arakan League of Democracy (ALD), the Muslim community, the pro-military Rakhine, and ethnic minorities were responsible for its loss in the past election. They assumed that the ALD supporters had not voted, Muslims and the pro-military Rakhine voted for the USDP, and ethnic minorities voted for their ethnic political parties in the past election. Given this assumption, the party came to prepare three major strategies; to unite all Rakhine parties into a single national Rakhine party, question non-citizens' enfranchisement, and mobilize all the Rakhine to vote for only local Rakhine parties.

The RNDP leaders could successfully convince the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD) leaders, the second-most powerful party in Rakhine State, to share the same dream about Rakhine State. It finally resulted in a successful merger of the two parties into a single Arakan National Party (ANP) in early 2014 (Nyein, 2014). It was much helpful to compete against the big national parties such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the USDP, mainly in the southern Rakhine State. Taking advantage of a comparatively more expansive democratic space right after the 2010 election, the ANP leaders were also able to freely mobilize the Rakhine people through highlighting the grand Rakhine's history, the Bamar's colonial subjugation and authoritarian rule of Rakhine State, and the Muslim community's threat to the Rakhine's cultural identity.

The Muslim community, unfortunately, became a point of the Rakhine's confrontation. The ANP leaders felt distressed in a particular situation that the vast majority of Muslims voted for the USDP and not the RNDP in the 2010 general election, precisely the same way they did for the NLD and not the ALD in the 1990 general election. The party leaders' post-election distress, reinforced by their former racially sensitive views against the Muslim community, became much likely to affect the communal violence in 2012. The ANP leaders have reportedly played a significant role in instigating inter-communal tension (Burke, 2016), stirring up the Rakhine's ethnonationalism when seeking to gain the Rakhine's much broader support.

After the 2012 communal conflict, the RNDP grew in popularity among the Rakhine community, despite its lousy image among the international community. The USDP government's image was said to have improved among the international community following its timely response to the conflict, such as establishing investigation commissions, investigating root causes of conflict, and taking somewhat effective conflict prevention measures. Coincidentally, no more inter-communal violence happened after 2013 despite lingering tensions between diverse ethnic groups. The government's success was also highly attributable to the Tatmadaw's coordination with the government in taking conflict prevention measures. Being the de facto armed wing of the USDP, the Tatmadaw was ready to support the government in maintaining law and order across all State regions.

At the same time, the government allowed international organizations to freely carry out humanitarian relief operations following the communal violence in Rakhine State. Moreover, it also passed a law enabling non-citizen Muslims to vote in a particular referendum, assumably to avoid the international community's pressure. However, the newly formed ANP could successfully orchestrate mass protests that led to the USDP government's withdrawal of temporary voting rights for over a million Muslims living as non-citizens in Rakhine State (McLaughlin, 2015). From the international community's perspective, the government proved to have a moderate view towards the international community and be willing to promote better inter-communal relations and take proactive conflict prevention measures in coordination with the international community. On the other side, the international community seriously assumed the ANP leaders to have held hardline views towards reconciliation and the international community. Regardless, the ANP, led by influential leaders of the former RNDP, advanced its ethnocentric approach to Rakhine politics even further against the government's image's rise at its expense and the international community's direct or indirect

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criticism against it.

Communal violence ceased to exist and communal tensions also significantly decreased in Rakhine State during the NLD government's term since 2016. However, the vast majority of the State population, regardless of ethnicity, did not acknowledge the Union or State Government's role in de-escalating communal tensions and promoting social cohesion. People commonly believed that armed conflict had replaced communal conflict while ethnonational tension had replaced communal tension. The Tatmadaw's armed conflict with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) once in October 2016 and another in August 2017 seriously threatened the northern Rakhine State's regional stability. Despite the ARSA's attacks on non-Muslim civilians during the armed escalation, it did not take the form of conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims. Similarly, the continuing armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army (AA) also threatened regional stability and peace, driving thousands of residents, regardless of ethnicity, out of their homes to IDP camps in many State regions. Still, the conflict also did not affect intercommunal relations in the State. However, ethnonationalism's continued rise among the Rakhine community has triggered the armed conflict in Rakhine State. Disagreements between the Rakhine political leaders, factions within the ANP, and splits from a single Rakhine party have made the Rakhine reluctant to trust their political leaders and believe in party politics, finally resulting in the public's overwhelming support for the AA.

Armed Groups

Despite its preeminence in conflict prevention and resolution between 2012 and 2015, the Tatmadaw's role in managing inter-communal conflicts has progressively declined following reduced inter-communal conflicts in Rakhine State in recent years. In the few years leading up to 2015, the Tatmadaw was viewed positively by many Rakhine community leaders and their fellow Rakhine locals for its ability to facilitate and build conflict prevention mechanisms between different community leaders. The Tatmadaw intervened in conflict-prone areas, prevented communal conflicts, and orchestrated a successful conflict prevention mechanism in earnest coordination with local authorities and village community leaders (Center for Diversity and National Harmony, 2017). Since early 2018, the Tatmadaw's security focus has shifted from communal conflicts to ethnic conflicts, with ongoing armed clashes replacing communal violence incidents. A severe decline in the Rakhine community's reliance on the Tatmadaw followed the Tatmadaw's initiation of militarization of Rakhine State. At the same time, members of different communities, including the Rakhine community, widely came to feel and perceive that the state army intentionally instigated the outburst of ongoing communal conflicts to help gain a stronghold in Rakhine State. Then, the Rakhine community held a sense of resentment against the Tatmadaw for waging a series of offensive warfare against the commonly-supported Arakan Army (AA), and with these armed conflicts came the deaths of innocent Rakhine locals.

The Arakan Army (AA) that came into prominence as the newly-formed Rakhine armed group in 2009 has begun to challenge the Tatmadaw's military might and successfully asserted its influence over the Rakhine people since 2015. Compared to other stakeholders currently maneuvering in Rakhine State's politics, the AA undoubtedly has the greatest influence over the Rakhine living in Rakhine State and further afield in other states, regions, and even abroad. The AA has gained popularity among diverse ethnic communities regarding its political vision, strategy, and capacity to bring about autonomy, democracy, reconciliation, peace, and development in Rakhine State. However, the AA has been popular in slightly different ways among diverse ethnic groups in Rakhine State. When it comes to the AA's political vision, many people do not support 'the AA's objective to replace the federal system with a confederacy' (Choudhury, 2019). This controversy has arisen even among the Rakhine; those with 'ethnonationalist' sense agreeing on 'confederacy' and those with 'integrationist' sense supporting a more flexible 'federal system.' All non-Rakhine ethnic minorities are much likely to object to 'confederacy,' assuming that the majority Rakhine with their own army will monopolize political power at the expense of all other ethnic minorities within the State. They also raise their concern that a political system conferring absolute power to the majority with a chauvinistic attitude will go against the will of, or persecute, ethnic minorities within the State.

The Muslim community's attitude towards the AA's rise has proved to be rather unidirectional. They do not have high expectations when it comes to the AA's rise. They feel they are not entitled to discussing high political issues such as 'state-building and 'nation-building,' as they do not belong to any 'ethnic-national (*Taing-Yin-Thar*)' status or citizenship. They expect most from the AA's rise: their freedom from ethnic discrimination, tensions, and conflicts

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targeted to them and safety to live, earn livelihoods, and travel within the State. The AA has also put forward its vision for an Arakan State to necessarily include the Muslim community (Broome, 2021). These days, the AA has also guaranteed their safety and access to rudimentary rights, which they could never expect from the government or state security forces since the 2012 communal conflict. The AA has established a well-functioned conflict-resolution mechanism to prevent tensions or conflicts between diverse ethnic groups, mainly between the Rakhine and Muslims, across most rural areas in northern and central regions of the State since early 2020.

However, there is a strategic calculus behind the AA's attempt to maintain peaceful relations and contain intercommunal conflict between the Rakhine and Muslims during its peak insurgency or revolution period. First, the AA does not want the Tatmadaw to exploit the situation where communal conflicts are seen as existential threats to people's security and regional stability, thus allowing it a permanent presence in critical areas of Rakhine State. Second, it does not want communal conflicts to divert the Rakhine public's attention from its collective nationalist interest. Third, they do not wish the Rakhine public to suffer simultaneously from armed and communal conflicts. Fourth, they aspire to become a national establishment respected by local Muslims in Rakhine State and by the international community for their impartiality regarding non-Rakhine communities. Finally, they would like to forge better bilateral relationships with the Bangladesh government, whose negligence of their military mobilization across the border has been pivotal in allowing the AA to mount strategic attacks against the Tatmadaw. Therefore, it is still uncertain or even doubtful among local Muslims, as Mathieson (2020) suggested that 'the AA may eventually exhibit even more overt anti-Muslim sentiments than the Rakhine and potentially target Muslims.'

Compared to the AA, the ARSA has failed to gain widespread support from its Muslim community in Rakhine State. Despite its strategic warfare against state security forces, it was prone to severe public denunciation for its wrongful acts of threatening ethnic minorities to death in its operation areas, mainly for its massacre of around 100 Hindus in the northern Rakhine region in August 2017 (Amnesty International, 2018). It also paved the way for security forces to scale up their clearance operations in the name of protecting ethnic minorities against the ARSA's attack. Moreover, its political vision 'to defend, salvage, and protect the Rohingya against the state repression (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2017) has proved to be short-sighted, excluding all other ethnic groups and even Muslims who are reluctant to claim themselves to be 'Rohingya,' claim themselves to be genealogically different from the 'Rohingya,' and deny the existence of 'Rohingya' ethnicity. As a result, their military campaign has failed to mobilize Muslims living outside the northern Rakhine region and proved ineffective.

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs)

International organizations began to arrive in Rakhine State in the 1990s. However, the government allowed only a couple of organizations led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to carry out a minimal number of humanitarian projects like HIV/AIDS prevention in the northern Rakhine region (International Crisis Group, 2006). Given that the organizations implemented their activities in the north of the Rakhine region, where the Muslim community forms over 90% of the total population, their actions led to the Rakhine's grievances that they had focused only on the Muslim community's welfare. It was not until the communal conflict in June 2012 that many organizations have shifted their focus from the northern to the central region of the State. Many international humanitarian actors scaled their relief efforts to meet a surmounting number of cases after the conflict. Given that approximately 90% of the displaced during the violence were Muslims, this support was directed mainly at Muslim communities, fostering a sense of injustice amongst all non-Muslim communities of international aid bias.

The Rakhine's belligerent attitude towards international organizations is reasonably justifiable in their traumatic experience of outsiders' subjugation in history. The historically sovereign Arakanese Kingdom fell into different outsiders' hands several times; first to the Burmese conquerors in 1985, second to the British colonizers in 1826, and third to the successive Burmese regimes since 1948 (CDNH, 2015). They also faced the situation that Indian Muslims the British had brought into Rakhine State as farm laborers had strived for the secession from the State in the 1950s and 1970s (Leider, 2018). Backed by their feeling of subjugation by different outsiders, they also feared further post-colonial domination of their State's affairs, mainly regarding inter-communal relations, by international actors. This fear finally led to their stiff opposition to international organizations.

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However, the Rakhine's and ethnic minorities' perception of international organizations has significantly changed since 2017. There are critical reasons behind their changing attitudes towards international organizations. First, the international organizations themselves have changed their policy and strategy of assisting local communities in Rakhine State. After taking nearly a decade to implement their projects, they have realized that the provision of humanitarian assistance alone has been unsuccessful and led to an even worse social segregation between diverse communities in Rakhine State. Given this understanding, most international organizations have become more development-focused and shifted to their strategy to provide humanitarian assistance in combination with development assistance since 2017. Second, the vast majority of Muslims in the northern Rakhine region have fled their areas to Bangladeshi refugee camps, following national security forces' clearance operations against the ARSA's attack on security outposts and civilians. From the Rakhine's and ethnic minorities' perspective, international organizations would divert their attention to them as they no longer need to focus on a mass Muslim population in Rakhine State.

Third, the humanitarian crisis stemming from the armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and the AA, followed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, has also contributed to the Rakhine's and other ethnic minorities' considerable change in attitude towards international organizations. They have acknowledged international organizations' role in providing food and non-food items for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and pandemic prevention materials for local communities. Fourth and finally, the emergence of CSOs in times of democratic transition has also contributed to local communities' attitudes towards international organizations. Members of local communities, mainly in rural areas, had been unable or reluctant to reach out to and engage with international organizations for many decades. Today, local CSOs across all the Rakhine State townships have played a vital role in enabling community members to make their voices heard about how they want international organizations to help them out with fulfilling their livelihood and development needs.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Before 2012, no civil society organizations (CSOs) existed across all ethnic communities in Rakhine State. Despite community-based organizations (CBOs), they came up with the exclusive mandate to carry out only basic community welfare across rural and urban areas of the State, with no extensive focus on socio-economic development. A few CSOs came to exist on the Rakhine community's side, along with the Union Parliament's endorsement of the Association Registration Law in 2014. However, most of them proved to be ethnocentric and defensive about their ethnicity and religion, with no intention to promote comprehensive social welfare and development across diverse communities. Despite a couple of them with their initial focus on promoting better inter-communal relations between various communities, they became reluctant to carry on their mandate due to the Rakhine's backlash against their communications with members of the Muslim community. On the other hand, CSOs or CBOs had historically never developed on the Muslim community's side. The government's restrictions on the Muslim community's civil rights had seriously undermined their capacity to form CSOs in their areas. With their extensive hands in humanitarian and development sectors, but with their little role in capacitating local communities to manage these sectors, the crowded population of INGOs had also undermined the development of new CSOs on the Muslim community's side (Oo, 2020). Correspondingly, the network of CSOs and CBOs that had worked towards a pluralistic and peaceful society remained underdeveloped in Rakhine State until 2017.

A striking number of CSOs have flourished across all Rakhine State regions, following comparatively far less restrictive regulations on the formation and registration of associations during the NLD government's term after 2016. The rising numbers of CSOs are also highly attributable to a considerably decreased social tension between diverse communities. CSOs have also focused on various sectors ranging from humanitarian relief to development to social cohesion. Despite many CSOs formed as a collective NGO Watch Team to scrutinize international humanitarian actors' activities in 2014 (ICG, 2014), today's CSOs have proved to be open-minded and flexible enough to coordinate with international organizations, most tellingly since 2019. The role of CSOs in mediating between Buddhists and Muslims and facilitating negotiation between warring parties and communities in conflict zones, including Rakhine State (Paung Sie Facility, 2018).

However, there are still many limitations to the practical implementation of organizations' humanitarian, development,

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reconciliation, and peace activities. The limits exist in the form of several laws such as the Anti-Defamation Law, Official Secret Act (1923), the Electronic Transactions Act (2004), and the Telecommunications Law (2013), Penal Code's Sections 124(A), Penal Code's sections 505(A) and (B), and Protecting the Privacy and Security of Citizen Law (2017) (Maung, 2019). The government authorities have been using the laws to control individuals' or organizations' freedom of expression and speech. When it comes to freedom of assembly for raising some public concerns, CSOs have found it challenging to receive the authorities' permission.

Until early March 2021, the Rakhine CSOs found it challenging to communicate and coordinate with the AA in addressing IDP issues in conflict areas. CSO leaders were also unable to serve as mediators between the Tatmadaw and the AA, as they may face the Tatmadaw charging them with communicating with the AA, which the government had declared as an unlawful association or even a terrorist group. On the other side, it is generally true in Myanmar political context that CSOs' failure to participate in the peace process is also highly attributable to a general unwillingness of political parties and armed groups to share an equal political space for local CSOs. While some political parties also raise their concern that CSOs' participation in the peace process will make too many parties reach an agreement possible (Asia Development Bank, 2015), ethnic armed groups believe that CSOs should not have equal decision-making power. Local CSOs in Rakhine State have also lacked sufficient political representation that the AA and the ANP, the State's two most influential stakeholders, should share at reconciliation and peace talks at the Union or State levels.

International Governments

The Rakhine community's perception of individual countries engaged in the Rakhine issue also affects Rakhine State's inter-communal relations. Four main groups are said to have been funding nearly all local and international organizations working on humanitarian and development projects in Rakhine State; the United Nations (UN), the United States of America (US), the European Union (EU), and Japan. The UN agencies have rarely seen serious difficulties in coordinating several humanitarian and development projects with the government in Rakhine State. The Rakhine community has also proved to be less critical about all UN agencies except the UNHCR, whose mandate is to exclusively focus on 'the refugee crisis,' which means 'the Muslim affairs' in the Rakhine context. Organizations directly or indirectly funded by the US and EU have faced comparatively closer watch or tighter restrictions on their activities in Rakhine State by the government than the UN agencies. Still, they have successfully managed their project activities, directly seeking help from local authorities on reaching out and providing assistance to local communities with humanitarian needs. However, the Rakhine community has embedded relatively lower trust in these US or EU organizations than in the UN agencies, given their perception that the West is biased towards the Muslim community. From many Rakhine community leaders' perspective, the US and the EU have raised the 'Rohingya' issue on the global agenda to seek to build much better relations than China can do with members of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) or the Arab World. Compared to other Western countries, the US and the United Kingdom (UK) have made the Rakhine more suspicious of their motives in terms of their pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial imperialist history.

While the Rakhine's suspicion of the US has grown only recently following the Rohingya issue, their wariness of the UK reflected their pre-colonial and post-colonial experience of how the British had treated them. The Arakanese viewed the Burmese and the British as ferocious colonizers; the Burmese annexed the Arakan kingdom in 1785, and the British grabbed the Kingdom from the Burmese in 1826 (Sarkar, 2018). Moreover, there has been an unforgettable event among today's Rakhine elders that severe inter-communal violence erupted between pro-Japanese Arakanese people and pro-British Muslims during the British retreat from the Arakan in 1942 (Sarkar, 2019). The Rakhine have historically been resentful of the British bringing Muslims as migrant laborers into Arakan and supplying them with weapons to fight against local Arakanese people. On the other side, the Japanese have faced no severe backlash from the Rakhine even though they had also occupied Arakan during the Second World War. The Rakhine's optimism with the Japanese government is highly attributable to the fact that the Japanese once sided with them in the expulsion of many Muslims from their land. The Rakhine's trust in the Japanese is discernable in their much more comprehensive support for the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) than for any other organization working to promote humanitarian and development sectors in Rakhine State today. While they claim that Japan historically had a political tie to the Rakhine State, they also believe that JICA backed by the Japanese

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government will never go against the Rakhine's will when it approaches the intercommunal issue in the State. The Rakhine have also expressed their collective willingness to let the Japanese government play a crucial role in promoting the peace process in Rakhine State. For example, Japan's special envoy Yohei Sasakawa's visit to mediate between the Tatmadaw and the AA on ceasefire and by-election issues in late 2020 has satisfied the Rakhine political leaders.

Compared to Japan and even the West, China has proved to be the least trusted country among all ethnic communities in Rakhine State. The Chinese government has rarely funded humanitarian, and development projects, as its interest and influence are primarily economic in Rakhine State. The Chinese government's large-scale investments in Shwe Gas Pipeline and Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ) projects have provoked an outpouring of the Rakhine community's grievances for an increase in social problems arising from the projects (Joy, 2018). Many non-Rakhine communities have even accused the Chinese government of sponsoring the Rakhine's anti-Muslim sentiment and communal violence to distract the Rakhine's attention from its bilateral agreement with the government to implement the oil and gas pipelines and SEZ projects. However, both Rakhine and non-Rakhine communities have had no alternative but to rely on Chinese companies, as no western companies have shown any interest in investing in any of the State's business projects. As such, community leaders of many ethnic groups in the State have viewed the West as merely a talking shop with no practical solution to the menace of Chinese unethical investment practices and the poverty-driven inimical relationship between different ethnic communities in Rakhine State.

Final Considerations

To conclude, there are several dynamics of changing inter-communal relations in Rakhine State. The government has endorsed and implemented several discriminatory policies and laws that divide diverse ethnic groups. Rival political parties have sought to gain legitimacy and public support, stirring up the Rakhine's ethnonationalism. The continued rise of ethnonationalism among the Rakhine community has triggered the armed conflict. Tensions between the Rakhine and Muslim communities have significantly decreased following the AA's prominent rise in Rakhine politics. However, there have arisen significant tensions between the Rakhine and ethnic minorities after the AA's conspicuous rise. Ethnic minorities have widely raised their concern that the Rakhine's ethnonationalism will loom large under the AA's support and humiliate the ethnic minorities' existence in the State. It was not until mid-2017 that the Rakhine community had a fairly positive view towards international organizations. Such an abrupt and marked change in the Rakhine's attitude is explicable by several factors such as the organizations' activities being less politicized by the government, political parties, and individual community leader, the organizations changing their policy and strategy of assisting local communities after facing a severe backlash from various non-Muslim communities, and the outbreak of armed conflict and COVID-19 pandemic driving local communities into dire need of help from the organizations for humanitarian assistance.

The number of CSOs working across diverse ethnic communities has significantly increased only after 2017. The rising numbers of CSOs are highly attributable to considerably decreased inter-communal tensions between various ethnic groups. Still, there are many limitations, such as the government's rigid laws and a disinclination of political parties and ethnic armed groups to share equal political space with them at the State- or Union-level peace and reconciliation talks. The Rakhine community has historically been skeptical about the West's (mainly US and UK's) role in responding to inter-communal issues in the State, as they have perceived that the West is biased towards the Muslim community. China has never gained and will never achieve public trust, as people of various ethnic communities have viewed the Chinese government as exploiting the State's natural resources and social divisions for its economic profits. However, the Rakhine have held an optimistic view towards Japan's role in the Rakhine's politics and sanguine hope that the Japanese government will best contribute to development, reconciliation, peace in Rakhine State.

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