



**Università
di Genova**

DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE POLITICHE
E INTERNAZIONALI

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in:
Security and International Relations

Humanitarian Action in Myanmar: Conflict Dynamics,
Operational Challenges and Future Scenarios

Geography of Conflicts

Relatore

Prof. Pietro Piana

Candidata

Tamara Moloshtan

ANNO ACCADEMICO

2025-2026

Abstract

The thesis examines humanitarian action in Myanmar in the context of an armed conflict that has substantially intensified since the 2021 military coup. It analyses how conflict dynamics, territorial fragmentation, limited humanitarian access, and the changing role of local actors affect the provision and effectiveness of humanitarian assistance.

The study primarily adopts a qualitative comparative approach and combines qualitative document analysis, descriptive analysis of quantitative data, comparative analysis of selected cases involving international and local humanitarian organisations, thematic synthesis of published research, and scenario analysis. The sources include academic literature, humanitarian and institutional reports, political and strategic documents, statistical data, and other secondary sources. This methodological combination makes it possible to examine both measurable humanitarian trends and the broader political, territorial, and institutional conditions in which different humanitarian actors operate.

The findings show that humanitarian activities in Myanmar are carried out under highly heterogeneous conditions that vary substantially across regions. Local humanitarian organisations, civil society organisations, and ethnic service providers often play a key role in delivering assistance to affected populations, particularly in areas where international organisations face serious access constraints. At the same time, local actors encounter significant limitations, including restricted access to direct funding, limited institutional resources, security risks, and dependence on international intermediaries.

The final part of the thesis presents four possible scenarios for the future development of the situation in Myanmar and examines how different conflict trajectories could affect humanitarian access, localisation, funding structures, and the organisation of humanitarian response.

Riassunto

La tesi esamina l'azione umanitaria in Myanmar all'interno di un conflitto armato di lunga durata, segnato dalla frammentazione politica e da limitazioni all'accesso umanitario. Il colpo di Stato militare del 2021 ha determinato un marcato peggioramento della situazione umanitaria del Paese: la resistenza armata si è diffusa in nuove aree, gli sfollati interni sono aumentati e le organizzazioni umanitarie hanno visto ridursi notevolmente la propria capacità di operare mediante i meccanismi di accesso tradizionali.

È mutata, nello stesso tempo, anche la natura della risposta umanitaria. Le strutture statali non assicurano un accesso uniforme alle popolazioni colpite e il controllo del territorio risulta ripartito tra le forze armate del Myanmar, le strutture locali, le organizzazioni armate etniche e altre forze di resistenza; in simili condizioni, l'azione umanitaria dipende sempre più dalla capacità delle organizzazioni di adattarsi a un contesto politico e territoriale frammentato.

Obiettivo principale della ricerca è analizzare come le dinamiche del conflitto incidano sull'organizzazione e sull'efficacia dell'azione umanitaria in Myanmar, nonché esaminare il ruolo degli attori umanitari internazionali e locali entro un contesto connotato da accesso limitato, frammentazione istituzionale e forte incertezza politica. L'attenzione si concentra in particolare sulla localizzazione dell'aiuto umanitario, sulla distribuzione delle risorse e dei rischi tra organizzazioni internazionali e locali, sull'accesso alle popolazioni colpite, sui meccanismi di finanziamento e sulla dipendenza dell'azione umanitaria dal contesto territoriale e politico. Lo studio prende inoltre in considerazione le possibili traiettorie future del conflitto e le relative implicazioni per la risposta umanitaria.

Sul piano teorico, la ricerca si fonda sulla letteratura concernente l'azione umanitaria, l'efficacia della risposta umanitaria, la localizzazione e la geografia politica dei conflitti armati. L'efficacia umanitaria non viene intesa soltanto come conseguimento dei risultati previsti, ma anche, in accezione più ampia, come capacità degli attori umanitari di raggiungere tempestivamente le popolazioni colpite, di adattarsi a un contesto in continua evoluzione e di impiegare le risorse disponibili in modo che l'assistenza corrisponda ai bisogni effettivi. In tale quadro, l'efficacia si distingue dall'efficienza nell'uso delle risorse: la prima attiene soprattutto al grado di conseguimento degli obiettivi umanitari, la seconda al rapporto tra risultati ottenuti e risorse impiegate. Nel caso del Myanmar, simili criteri risultano strettamente connessi alle questioni dell'accesso, della sicurezza, del finanziamento e delle restrizioni politiche.

Un peso rilevante assume, nella ricerca, il concetto di localizzazione dell'azione umanitaria, con cui si designa l'ampliamento del ruolo degli attori locali e nazionali non solo nell'attuazione dei progetti, ma anche nei processi decisionali, nella distribuzione delle risorse finanziarie, nella definizione delle priorità e nell'elaborazione delle strategie umanitarie. Secondo la letteratura, le organizzazioni non governative locali, le organizzazioni della società civile e i fornitori etnici di servizi sociali godono spesso di vantaggi riconducibili alla conoscenza del contesto locale, alle reti sociali, alla lingua, alla fiducia delle comunità e alla possibilità di operare in aree che restano difficilmente accessibili alle organizzazioni internazionali. Una maggiore partecipazione degli attori locali, tuttavia, non comporta automaticamente un sistema umanitario più sostenibile o più efficace: molti di essi si trovano ad affrontare un accesso limitato ai finanziamenti diretti, la dipendenza da intermediari internazionali,

risorse amministrative insufficienti, un elevato carico di lavoro per il personale e una distribuzione sproporzionata dei rischi.

L'impianto metodologico della ricerca è prevalentemente qualitativo e comparativo e combina più metodi: l'analisi qualitativa dei documenti, l'analisi descrittiva dei dati quantitativi, l'analisi comparativa di casi selezionati relativi alle attività delle organizzazioni umanitarie internazionali e locali, la sintesi tematica di studi pubblicati e l'analisi di scenario. Quanto alle fonti, esse comprendono la letteratura accademica, i rapporti delle organizzazioni internazionali e umanitarie, i documenti delle Nazioni Unite, i materiali analitici dei centri di ricerca, i dati su bisogni umanitari, spostamenti della popolazione e finanziamenti, oltre alle pubblicazioni dedicate alle attività delle reti umanitarie locali e transfrontaliere. Grazie alla combinazione di fonti qualitative e quantitative è possibile analizzare non soltanto le caratteristiche istituzionali e politiche della risposta umanitaria, ma anche l'entità dei bisogni umanitari e le differenze tra le diverse regioni del Paese.

Una sezione specifica del lavoro è dedicata al contesto politico e umanitario del Myanmar, dove il conflitto viene letto come sistema multilivello e territorialmente eterogeneo, nel quale il confronto armato non si esaurisce nello scontro tra lo Stato centrale e un'opposizione unitaria. Nei vari territori sono attive organizzazioni armate etniche, forze locali di resistenza, strutture legate al Governo di Unità Nazionale e numerose reti politiche e civili. Le condizioni in cui si svolge l'azione umanitaria variano pertanto in misura considerevole da una regione all'altra: in alcune aree le organizzazioni internazionali riescono a conservare un accesso relativamente formalizzato, in altre la risposta umanitaria poggia in larga misura sulle organizzazioni locali, sulle reti informali e sulle rotte transfrontaliere.

L'accesso umanitario risente direttamente della frammentazione territoriale del conflitto. La possibilità di prestare assistenza dipende infatti da chi controlla il territorio, dal livello di sicurezza delle vie di trasporto, dall'esistenza di meccanismi amministrativi funzionanti e dai rapporti che gli attori umanitari intrattengono con le strutture politiche e sociali locali. I meccanismi formali di accesso tramite le istituzioni statali non assicurano le stesse possibilità in ogni parte del Paese; anzi, nelle aree dove il controllo statale è limitato o contestato le organizzazioni umanitarie possono essere indotte a ricorrere a canali alternativi, comprese le partnership locali e le reti transfrontaliere. La geografia del conflitto diviene così uno dei principali fattori che plasmano la struttura della risposta umanitaria.

Dall'analisi emerge che le organizzazioni umanitarie internazionali continuano a svolgere un ruolo di rilievo, potendo contare sull'accesso a importanti fonti di finanziamento, su capacità istituzionali, su competenze tecniche e su meccanismi internazionali di coordinamento. Esse sono in grado di sostenere programmi su larga scala, di assicurare la rendicontazione ai donatori e di collegare la situazione del Myanmar al più ampio sistema umanitario internazionale. Al tempo stesso, le loro attività possono risultare limitate dai requisiti di registrazione, dagli ostacoli amministrativi e legati ai visti, dai problemi di sicurezza, dalle restrizioni alla libertà di movimento, dalla necessità di interagire con le strutture ufficiali e dalle condizioni poste dai donatori. Non sempre, dunque, le organizzazioni internazionali riescono a operare direttamente nelle aree più difficili da raggiungere.

In tale scenario, le organizzazioni locali assolvono spesso funzioni che la presenza internazionale non è in grado di sostituire del tutto. Esse possono appoggiarsi a reti sociali, etniche e territoriali preesistenti e il loro personale è spesso in grado di continuare a operare anche quando la presenza internazionale si riduce. Risulta particolarmente significativo il ruolo delle organizzazioni attive nelle aree controllate da attori etnici e lungo i confini internazionali: i meccanismi transfrontalieri consentono infatti di raggiungere comunità per le quali l'accesso attraverso i canali statali centrali è

limitato o impossibile. Anche queste forme di assistenza, però, si scontrano con problemi specifici, quali l'instabilità dei finanziamenti, la sensibilità politica, le difficoltà connesse al riconoscimento internazionale e i maggiori rischi per il personale locale.

Dal confronto tra attori internazionali e locali emerge che le rispettive capacità non vanno considerate alternative tra loro. Alle organizzazioni internazionali fanno capo risorse finanziarie, amministrative e tecniche; le strutture locali dispongono spesso di una conoscenza più approfondita del contesto, di modalità operative più flessibili e di un accesso più stabile a determinati territori e comunità. La questione centrale, pertanto, non è stabilire quale categoria di attori risulti complessivamente più efficace, bensì individuare le condizioni alle quali i diversi tipi di organizzazione possono integrarsi e completarsi reciprocamente. Dalla natura delle partnership, dal grado di partecipazione degli attori locali ai processi decisionali, dai meccanismi di finanziamento e dalla distribuzione dei rischi dipende, in definitiva, l'efficacia della risposta umanitaria.

Quanto alla localizzazione, l'analisi mette in luce un divario consistente tra il ruolo operativo crescente delle organizzazioni locali e la loro posizione istituzionale nel sistema umanitario. Per quanto una parte considerevole dell'assistenza sia concretamente attuata dai partner locali, le risorse finanziarie e le decisioni strategiche restano spesso concentrate a livello internazionale, e il limitato accesso ai finanziamenti diretti dei donatori genera una dipendenza dai finanziamenti per progetto e dagli intermediari internazionali. Ne consegue un possibile freno alla capacità delle organizzazioni locali di investire nel proprio sviluppo istituzionale, nella pianificazione a lungo termine, nella sicurezza del personale e nei sistemi amministrativi. L'ampliamento della partecipazione locale, quindi, non si accompagna necessariamente a una redistribuzione corrispondente di risorse e influenza.

Viene inoltre affrontata la questione di chi debba essere considerato esattamente un attore "locale". Nel contesto del Myanmar tale categoria è eterogenea e ricomprende organizzazioni non governative locali, organizzazioni della società civile, reti comunitarie, fornitori etnici di servizi sociali e altre strutture che possono differire notevolmente per dimensioni, modello organizzativo, legami politici e area geografica di attività. La contrapposizione binaria tra organizzazioni internazionali e locali, perciò, non sempre rispecchia la reale struttura dello spazio umanitario: alcune organizzazioni locali collaborano strettamente con le agenzie internazionali, altre operano prevalentemente nell'ambito di sistemi di assistenza alternativi o transfrontalieri.

Muovendo dall'analisi condotta, la parte conclusiva del lavoro presenta quattro possibili scenari di evoluzione futura della situazione in Myanmar. Il primo prevede il protrarsi di un conflitto prolungato senza mutamenti decisivi nei rapporti di forza; in tal caso i bisogni umanitari resterebbero elevati e il sistema di risposta continuerebbe verosimilmente a operare con accesso frammentato, finanziamenti instabili e forte dipendenza dai partner locali. Per le organizzazioni umanitarie, le sfide principali resterebbero l'adattamento costante, il mantenimento dell'accesso e la combinazione di canali operativi formali e informali.

Il secondo scenario ipotizza una consolidazione parziale del controllo da parte delle autorità militari su determinati territori e su importanti centri di trasporto o amministrativi. Un'evoluzione simile potrebbe ripristinare meccanismi di accesso più formalizzati in alcune aree, ma anche rafforzare il controllo amministrativo sulle attività umanitarie. Se in alcune regioni le organizzazioni internazionali potrebbero beneficiare di condizioni operative più prevedibili, l'accesso ai territori controllati dalle forze di resistenza o dalle organizzazioni armate etniche rimarrebbe limitato, con il rischio di accentuare ulteriormente la divisione del sistema umanitario tra canali di assistenza ufficiali e alternativi.

Il terzo scenario riguarda un'ulteriore espansione dei territori controllati dalle organizzazioni armate etniche e dalle forze di resistenza. In tal caso è probabile che cresca l'importanza degli attori locali e dei fornitori etnici di servizi, come pure dei meccanismi umanitari transfrontalieri. Poiché operare esclusivamente attraverso meccanismi statali formali risponderebbe sempre meno alla struttura effettiva del controllo territoriale, le organizzazioni internazionali e i donatori potrebbero dover adattare gli attuali modelli di finanziamento e cooperazione. Uno scenario siffatto potrebbe ampliare le opportunità di localizzazione, ma solleverebbe al contempo questioni relative al riconoscimento internazionale, ai vincoli normativi, alla rendicontazione e alla sensibilità politica dell'interazione diretta con strutture non statali.

Il quarto scenario contempla una parziale de-escalation e la formazione di cessate il fuoco locali o di accordi specifici sull'accesso. Pur in assenza di una soluzione politica complessiva, una riduzione dell'intensità dei combattimenti in determinate aree potrebbe migliorare l'accesso umanitario, agevolare gli spostamenti della popolazione e creare condizioni più favorevoli al ripristino dei servizi essenziali. Tali accordi, tuttavia, sarebbero probabilmente limitati geograficamente e instabili, sicché il sistema umanitario dovrebbe conservare la capacità di adattarsi rapidamente a un'eventuale ripresa delle violenze.

Dall'analisi di scenario risulta che, in tutte le possibili traiettorie del conflitto, il ruolo degli attori locali, dei meccanismi di finanziamento flessibili e dei canali di accesso diversificati rimarrebbe significativo. Nessuno degli scenari considerati prefigura un rapido ritorno a un modello di azione umanitaria del tutto centralizzato e uniforme. L'evoluzione futura della risposta umanitaria dipenderà dunque, con ogni probabilità, dalla capacità delle organizzazioni internazionali e dei donatori di operare in condizioni di eterogeneità politica e territoriale, di rafforzare partnership sostenibili con le strutture locali e di adeguare i meccanismi finanziari e amministrativi al mutare della situazione.

Nel complesso, la ricerca conclude che l'efficacia umanitaria in Myanmar non può essere analizzata prescindendo dalla dinamica del conflitto armato e dalla distribuzione territoriale del potere, poiché accesso, sicurezza, localizzazione, finanziamento e struttura organizzativa della risposta umanitaria sono strettamente interconnessi. Le organizzazioni internazionali restano un'importante fonte di risorse, competenze e coordinamento globale, mentre gli attori locali svolgono un ruolo cruciale nel garantire l'accesso e nell'attuazione concreta dell'assistenza, soprattutto nei territori dove le possibilità di presenza internazionale sono ridotte. Al tempo stesso, il crescente ruolo operativo delle organizzazioni locali non sempre si accompagna a finanziamenti adeguati, a una sufficiente partecipazione ai processi decisionali e a un corrispondente rafforzamento istituzionale.

Ne deriva che rafforzare la sostenibilità della risposta umanitaria in Myanmar non significa semplicemente sostituire le organizzazioni internazionali con quelle locali, bensì costruire un sistema più flessibile di interazione tra le diverse categorie di attori. Un simile sistema dovrebbe tenere conto delle differenze territoriali, sostenere una pluralità di meccanismi di accesso, ampliare le possibilità di finanziamento diretto e a lungo termine per le organizzazioni locali e garantire una distribuzione più equilibrata di responsabilità e rischi. In un contesto di persistente incertezza, la capacità del sistema umanitario di adattarsi a configurazioni politiche e territoriali diverse rappresenta una delle condizioni principali della sua efficacia futura.

Contents

1. Introduction	8
2. Literature Review and Methodology.....	10
2.1. Academic Literature on the Myanmar Conflict.....	10
2.2. Geographical Perspectives on Conflict, Territoriality and Humanitarian Action in Myanmar	12
2.3. Academic Literature on Humanitarian Action and NGOs in Armed Conflict	14
2.4. Academic Literature on International and Local Organisations in Humanitarian Response.....	16
2.5. Academic Literature on Humanitarian Localisation.....	17
2.6. Academic Approaches to Assessing Humanitarian Effectiveness	18
2.7. Research Gap.....	19
2.8. Methodology.....	21
3. Historical Background of the Myanmar Conflict and the Role of Non-Governmental Organisations	24
3.1. Geographical and Ethno-Territorial Setting of Myanmar	24
3.2. Historical overview of the conflict	31
3.3. The 2021 Coup and the Escalation of the Conflict.....	33
3.4. Ethnic Armed Organizations and Civilian Impact.....	35
3.5. Quantitative Assessment of Humanitarian Trends in Myanmar (2021–2025)	37
3.6. Overview of major NGOs present in Myanmar	40
3.7. Case Studies of Selected NGOs.....	43
4. Analysis of the Role and Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Myanmar Conflict	50
4.1. Comparative Analysis of NGO Responses to the Myanmar Conflict	50
4.2. Thematic Synthesis: Sources and Analytical Framework	53
4.3. Humanitarian access and the adaptation of operational approaches.....	55
4.4. Local presence, community trust, and population reach	60
4.5. Funding, Bureaucratic Requirements, and Risk Distribution	62
4.6. Criteria for Assessing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Response	63
4.7. Key Findings from the Thematic Synthesis	65
5. Future Prospects for the Conflict and NGO Engagement in Myanmar	67
5.1. Methodological Approach to Assessing the Conflict’s Future Development	67
5.2. Possible Trajectories of the Conflict and Their Humanitarian Implications	74
5.3. Comparative Assessment of the Four Scenarios	89
5.4. Cross-Scenario Humanitarian Needs and the Future Role of NGOs.....	94
5.5. Policy Recommendations	95
6. Conclusion.....	98
7. References	100

1. Introduction

The armed conflict in Myanmar represents one of the most complex and protracted crises in Southeast Asia. Although its current phase intensified significantly following the military coup in February 2021, the causes of the conflict extend far beyond this event. They are rooted in a long history of military dominance, ethno-political tensions, limited integration of peripheral regions and armed resistance against various forms of centralized control. After 2021, the conflict became even more fragmented, with the People's Defence Forces and other resistance groups assuming a significant role alongside ethnic armed organizations. At the same time, hostilities spread to other territories, which had previously been less affected by the conflict.

Such a political and territorial fragmentation directly affects the humanitarian situation. Ongoing hostilities, internal displacement, infrastructure damage, and declining access to healthcare, education, and other basic services have led to a significant increase in humanitarian needs. However, conditions vary significantly across regions. In some areas, the main factors affecting humanitarian access remain ongoing hostilities and unstable lines of control, while in other areas dominance of a specific political or armed actor creates different administrative and operational constraints. Therefore, the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar should not be approached as a single, uniform situation across the country.

In such circumstances, activities implemented by non-governmental and other non-state actors become particularly important. International humanitarian organizations, local non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, and ethnic service providers are involved in providing medical and food assistance, supporting internally displaced persons, protecting affected populations, restoring basic services, and documenting human rights violations. Their role is especially significant in areas where state institutions are unable to guarantee essential services or where access to affected communities is limited.

However, formal presence of international organisations does not necessarily mean effective and continuous provision of humanitarian assistance. Organizations' ability to operate depends on physical access to affected populations, staff safety, administrative requirements, political status of a particular territory, access to funding and relations with actors controlling the territory. In the context of Myanmar, these constraints are particularly significant, as humanitarian organisations have to operate across diverse political, territorial, and institutional environments.

The position of international and local organizations differs significantly in this regard. International organisations have broader access to larger funding sources, technical expertise, international coordination mechanisms, but they might face restrictions on direct access, registration requirements, administrative procedures, legal and donor constraints. Local organisations, by contrast, have more reliable ties with communities, better understanding of social and political context and are able to use more flexible mechanisms for delivering assistance. At the same time, their practical contribution is not accompanied by a corresponding level of institutional sustainability. They largely remain dependent on short-term funding, face greater security risks and limited participation in strategic decision-making.

This constitutes the central research problem of this thesis. The assessment of humanitarian action in Myanmar cannot be based solely on the number of organizations operating in the country, the volume

of funding or the number of aid recipients. It is necessary to take into account which organisations actually have access to the affected populations, to which extent their programmes are aligned with local needs, whether they are capable of sustaining their activities over the long term and how resources, responsibilities, risks, and influence over decision-making are distributed between international and local actors.

The central research question of this thesis is formulated as follows:

What role do international and local non-governmental organizations play in the humanitarian response to the armed conflict in Myanmar, and what factors determine the effectiveness of their activities under conditions of fragmented territorial control, limited humanitarian access, and a changing political environment?

The main objective of this study is to analyse the role and the effectiveness of international and local non-governmental organizations in the humanitarian response to the conflict in Myanmar, as well as estimate how possible shifts in political and military situations may alter humanitarian needs and the conditions shaping their future activities.

To achieve this objective, the study examines the historical, political and territorial context of the current conflict and its impact on the humanitarian situation. It also analyses the evolution of humanitarian needs following the 2021 military coup and compares the roles, capacities and limitations of different types of non-governmental organisations. Particular attention is given to the main factors shaping the effectiveness of the humanitarian response, including access, localisation, funding, contextual relevance, institutional sustainability and the distribution of risks. The study also considers several possible trajectories for the future development of the conflict and their potential implications for international and local humanitarian actors.

Methodologically, the research combines qualitative document analysis, descriptive quantitative analysis, comparative analysis of selected organisational cases and scenario analysis. A detailed description of the research design, data sources, analytical approaches and limitations is provided in Section 2.8.

The thesis follows this analytical progression, moving from the relevant literature and methodological framework to the historical and humanitarian context of the conflict, the analysis of NGO activities and effectiveness, and finally the assessment of possible future developments and their humanitarian implications.

2. Literature Review and Methodology

This chapter reviews the main strands of literature relevant to the analysis of humanitarian action in the context of Myanmar's conflict and outlines the methodological approach adopted in this study. First, academic interpretations of the conflict are examined, including geographical perspectives on territoriality, borderlands, spatial fragmentation, and the relationship between conflict and humanitarian access. The chapter then moves to the broader literature on humanitarian action in armed conflict settings. Special attention is given to studies focusing on differences in the roles of international and local organisations, as well as to discussions on the localisation of humanitarian response. It subsequently considers approaches to assessing the effectiveness of humanitarian action and identifies the main gaps in the existing literature that this research seeks to address. Finally, the chapter presents the methodology of the study, including the research approach, sources, methods of analysis, and the main limitations of the research.

2.1. Academic Literature on the Myanmar Conflict

The existing literature on the conflict in Myanmar examines it through several interrelated dimensions. Prominent themes include the processes of state formation, the institutional role of the armed forces, centre-periphery relations, ethno-political tensions, demands for autonomy and federalism, and the uneven nature of territorial control. Most scholars do not approach the conflict solely as a consequence of the 2021 military coup. Instead, post-coup developments are normally viewed as a new stage of a longer-term crisis linked to unresolved issues of political representation, territorial integration and the distribution of power between central institutions and ethnic regions (Smith, 1999; Callahan, 2003; Taylor, 2009).

One of the central themes in the literature concerns the historical development of the state and the role of the armed forces. Callahan (2003) examines the emergence of military rule in close connection with the process of state-building and protracted post-independence domestic conflicts. In the context of weak institutional integration and armed resistance in a number of regions, the army gradually began to position itself not only as a military structure, but also as an institution responsible for the preservation of the country's territorial integrity and political unity. This perspective allows subsequent military coups to be analysed not as entirely isolated events, but as part of a broader and more persistent pattern of relations between the military, state institutions, and society.

Taylor (2009) also highlights the long-standing institutional presence of the military in Myanmar's political system. Even periods of relative political liberalisation did not completely eliminate the privileged position of the armed forces. The literature on the political transition of the 2010s, therefore, does not characterise this period as one of full democratisation, but rather as a period of limited or controlled liberalisation within which the military preserved significant constitutional and institutional powers. Egretteau (2016), in particular, draws attention to the army's capacity to preserve political autonomy and institutional mechanisms of influence even under a civilian government and competitive elections. This approach helps to explain the structural vulnerability of the political system that existed before the 2021 military coup.

Another major strand of research concerns the country's ethno-political structure and relations between the central state and peripheral regions. Smith (1999) argues that armed conflicts involving ethnic organisations have deep historical roots and are related to unresolved issues of autonomy, political representation, cultural rights, and the structure of the state. Therefore, armed resistance cannot be reduced solely to a security problem, but should instead be understood as part of a broader

struggle over the nature of Myanmar's political system and the distribution of power between the central government and the regions.

Special attention within this strand of literature is paid to the problem of federalism. Demands for greater autonomy and a federal system have occupied a prominent place in the political agendas of several ethnic organisations for decades. Consequently, the conflict is often interpreted not only as a consequence of ethnic differences themselves, but also as a consequence of the failure to establish a sustainable institutional mechanism capable of accounting for the country's territorial and political diversity. In this sense, ethnicity is not an independent cause of the conflict, but rather an element of a broader system of political tensions related to territorial autonomy, the distribution of power and resources.

South (2008) further argues that ethnic armed organisations should not be treated solely as armed actors. In some regions, they have developed their own administrative mechanisms and exercised forms of governance alongside or in competition with state institutions. This is important for understanding Myanmar's political structure, because territorial control in this context involves not only a military presence, but also the capacity to exercise authority and maintain certain public functions.

This gives rise to another strand of the literature: research on territorial fragmentation and the political economy of Myanmar's borderlands. Studies focusing on these areas emphasise that formal administrative boundaries do not fully capture the spatial organisation of political authority and economic activity. Bennett and Faxon (2021), for example, examine the relationship between state and militia-led violence, resource extraction, trade and uneven development in Myanmar's border regions. Their analysis shows how borderland economies and political relations may develop in ways that do not correspond neatly to formal state territorial structures.

Research on cross-border linkages also highlights the importance of geographical factors. Grundy-Warr and Wong (2002) show that in some cases international borders cross historically established social and ethnic communities. This contributes to the preservation of cross-border economic, social, and political networks and affects the ability of armed organisations to maintain a long-term presence in border areas. Thus, geographical peripherality is closely linked to patterns of political control and the resilience of non-state structures.

After the 2021 military coup, the structure of the conflict changed considerably, which was also reflected in the academic literature. Earlier works predominantly focused on the confrontation between the central government and ethnic armed organisations in peripheral zones. The post-2021 conflict has made this model significantly more complex. The emergence of the People's Defence Forces, the expansion of armed resistance in predominantly Bamar regions and the strengthening of cooperation between new resistance groups and some ethnic armed organisations have led to the involvement of a wider range of actors and to the geographical expansion of armed activity. As a result, recent research increasingly views the conflict as multi-layered and territorially heterogeneous (International Crisis Group, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2022; tokke & Nyi Nyi Kyaw, 2024).

This shift has particular significance for understanding the political fragmentation of the country. Whereas earlier analyses often focused on the relationship between the central authorities and the ethnic periphery, after 2021 armed resistance spread to central areas. At the same time, numerous resistance actors remain politically diverse: their interests may align in their opposition to the military

authorities, but their approaches to the future of the country's political system, territorial autonomy and the distribution of power may differ significantly.

Therefore, the weakening of central government control should not be automatically interpreted as a transition towards a single alternative system of governance. The expansion of territorial control by ethnic armed organisations and other resistance forces may be accompanied by the strengthening of local administrative structures; however, these structures are likely to differ in their levels of institutional development, available resources, and political goals. Thus, in recent literature, the political fragmentation of Myanmar is understood not only as the presence of multiple armed actors, but also as the coexistence of different forms of governance and territorial control.

Overall, the existing literature identifies both long-standing structural problems and significant post-2021 transformations as essential to understanding the contemporary conflict in Myanmar. Military dominance, unresolved issues of autonomy and federalism, varying levels of state presence and diverse forms of territorial governance remain key elements of the conflict. The post-2021 expansion of armed resistance has further altered the relationship between these elements and broadened the geographical and political scope of the conflict.

These characteristics have direct implications for humanitarian action, as they shape access to local populations, the conditions under which organisations engage with actors controlling particular territories, and the ability to maintain a sustained presence across different regions. However, the academic literature on the conflict is largely centred on its political, military and institutional aspects. Therefore, the next section turns to the broader literature on humanitarian action and the role of non-governmental organisations in contexts of armed conflict.

2.2. Geographical Perspectives on Conflict, Territoriality and Humanitarian Action in Myanmar

Geographical literature on Myanmar complements political and institutional research on the conflict by focusing particularly on the spatial organization of power, territoriality, borders and borderlands, uneven state presence, population mobility, and the spatial diffusion of armed resistance. Within this approach, space is not treated simply as a physical environment in which armed conflict takes place, but as a factor shaping its development. Territorial control, access to transport routes, proximity to international borders, the presence of local administrative structures and the ability to move people and resources affect both armed actors' capacities and the situation of the civilian population.

One of the central areas of political-geographical research on Myanmar is the analysis of the relationship between formally established state territory and the actual spatial practices of populations living in border regions. Dean (2005), in his study of the China-Myanmar border and Kachin territoriality, argues that international borders do not eliminate social, political, religious and economic ties between communities living on different sides of the border. As a result, formally defined state territory does not fully correspond to the "lived" space of the local population. This is particularly relevant to Myanmar, where many ethnic communities are historically connected through cross-border networks, while the presence of the central government in peripheral areas remains uneven.

Research on other border regions also indicates that borderlands should not be viewed solely as the periphery of the nation-state. In such areas, state institutions, armed organisations, local communities and cross-border economic networks interact with each other and shape distinct patterns of mobility and territorial control. Hu and Konrad (2018), examining the Kokang region along the China–Myanmar border, emphasise that the political significance of the border changes depending on the conflict situation, the intensity of cross-border movement and the policies of neighbouring states. Therefore, the border becomes an active element of the conflict rather than merely an external boundary marking the limits of sovereignty.

The importance of border regions is particularly evident in the analysis of forced population displacement. Zhou, Wu and Su (2022) analyse internally displaced persons (IDPs) living along the Myanmar–China border. Their findings indicate that the border simultaneously creates both constraints and opportunities. Displaced persons are not permitted to enter China as refugees or asylum seekers, but they can cross the border as residents of border regions for trade and employment purposes. The authors introduce the concept of “cross-border livelihood”, which describes how cross-border networks become part of the survival strategies of displaced populations. Consequently, the situation of displaced persons depends not only on forced displacement itself, but also on their access to cross-border networks, employment opportunities and other resources available in border regions.

Another important strand of the geographical literature focuses on territorialization, understood as the processes through which state and non-state actors seek to define, consolidate, and represent control over space. Faxon et al. (2022) compare One Map projects in Myanmar and Indonesia and conclude that mapping and the production of geospatial data are not just technical tools of governance, but elements of broader processes of state-building and territorial control. The creation of a unified spatial data system can strengthen the state’s capacity to define and authorise spatial information relating to land boundaries, land use and resource governance. However, these data can also be used by local communities and other non-state actors to challenge official boundaries and state representations of territorial ownership. Therefore, territoriality in Myanmar is related not only to the physical presence of state or non-state actors in a particular area, but also to competing ways of defining, classifying, and cartographically representing space.

A more contemporary understanding of non-state territoriality is offered by Loong (2025) through the example of the Salween Peace Park in Karen State. The author introduces the concept of *more-than-rebel territory*, drawing attention to the fact that territory controlled by non-state actors is not necessarily established exclusively through armed seizure and subsequent governance by a single armed organisation. In the case of Salween Peace Park, the Karen National Union’s military control created conditions that enabled civil society organisations and representatives of local communities to participate in the governance of the area. Thus, the development of non-state territoriality can result from interactions between armed and civilian actors, rather than solely from the activities of an armed organisation.

Following the 2021 military coup, geographical analysis has gained additional significance in light of the expansion of armed resistance and changes in its spatial structure. Stokke and Nyi Nyi Kyaw (2024) argue that resistance to the military regime in Myanmar includes not only armed struggle, but also economic, political, and symbolic forms of mobilization. The authors draw special attention to the spatial dimensions of resistance: various forms of resistance emerge under particular local conditions, but remain connected through broader political and organisational networks and operate across multiple territorial scales.

Vrieze (2024), in turn, analyses the transition from mass protests against the coup to armed resistance. His findings indicate that state repression contributed to the escalation of the protest movement, while armed methods gradually spread across different parts of the movement. Local initiatives, existing social networks, and cooperation among resistance groups played an important role in this process. Vrieze's study, therefore, helps explain how armed mobilisation spread beyond isolated local centres of resistance and became part of a broader movement against the military regime.

Loong (2026) offers a more complex conceptualization of the spatial character of contemporary warfare. The author uses the concept of *warscapes* to describe localized spaces of armed conflict and proposes understanding them as *relational conjunctures*. Within this approach, a specific space of war emerges from the intersection of social and political processes operating at different levels. Accordingly, local conflicts cannot be explained solely by the actions of armed groups directly present in a specific territory. They must also be understood in relation to broader historical and political processes and to connections between different spaces. Such an approach makes it possible to identify variation among local warscapes in Myanmar while also analysing the relationships between them.

Taken together, these studies indicate that the conflict in Myanmar is characterised by a high degree of spatial heterogeneity. International borders do not always overlap with the social and economic spaces of border communities; actors may differ in how they define boundaries, use land and claim authority over particular areas; various forms of resistance develop in specific regions while remaining interconnected through political and organizational cooperation; and local warscapes are shaped by distinct historical and political processes. Thus, Myanmar's territorial fragmentation refers not only to the presence of multiple armed actors, but also to the coexistence of different forms of political and social organisation across space.

These geographical insights are also relevant to the analysis of humanitarian action. The spatial heterogeneity of the conflict means that the conditions under which humanitarian organizations operate vary across regions. Access to affected populations depends on which actors control a particular territory, which administrative institutions operate there, the accessibility of transport routes and the availability of local or cross-border networks. Formal permission to operate at the national level does not automatically provide equal access throughout the country. This is particularly relevant when comparing international and local organisations, as their ability to operate in specific areas depends largely on the political and territorial context, as well as on access to formal and informal channels of engagement with local structures and communities.

2.3. Academic Literature on Humanitarian Action and NGOs in Armed Conflict

Literature on humanitarian action in armed conflicts covers a wide range of issues, including humanitarian principles and their practical application to staff security, humanitarian access, and changes in organisations' operating models. One of the central themes is the tension between the normative principles of humanitarian action and the practical conditions of operating in a politically and militarily fragmented environment.

Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics by Barnett and Weiss (2008) presents contemporary humanitarianism as a field in which the traditional principles of neutrality, impartiality,

and independence increasingly come into tension with broader political and institutional objectives. The authors draw attention to the fact that contemporary humanitarian activities extend beyond the direct provision of assistance and increasingly intersect with the protection of human rights, long-term development, support for peace processes, and post-conflict recovery. As a result, the boundaries of humanitarian action and its relationship with political objectives have become a central subject of academic debate.

Slim (2015) examines the ethical dimension of humanitarian action in greater detail. The principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, as well as the difficulties associated with applying them in specific situations of armed conflict, form a central part of his analysis. This research perspective is important because adherence to humanitarian principles is not solely a normative issue, but also a factor directly affecting an organisation's relations with parties to the conflict, the way its activities are perceived, and its ability to maintain access to the affected population. Slim (2015) also emphasises that humanitarian principles have to be interpreted and applied within specific operational contexts. In practice, the way an organisation interacts with state institutions, armed groups, donors and local partners can influence how its neutrality and independence are perceived by different parties to the conflict.

Duffield (2001) places humanitarian action within the broader political and security environment of contemporary armed conflict. He draws attention to the growing interconnection between humanitarian assistance, development, security and international governance. From this perspective, humanitarian action cannot be understood as operating independently of the political structures and power relations that shape conflict-affected societies.

A distinct strand of research focuses on humanitarian access and on how security conditions affect organisations' ability to reach affected populations. Stoddard et al. (2017), drawing on the experiences of Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, and Syria, conclude that high levels of insecurity can significantly reduce the geographical coverage of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian needs are often particularly acute in the most dangerous areas; however, humanitarian organisations are less likely to maintain a sustained operational presence there. This creates a persistent gap between the locations of greatest need and the areas that humanitarian actors are able to reach on a regular basis.

In response to such constraints, international organisations increasingly use alternative operational models. Stoddard, Harmer and Renouf (2010) regard remote management as one means of continuing programmes in areas where a direct international presence would involve excessively high risks. Under such arrangements, some functions are delegated to national staff and local partners, while management is carried out from safer locations. The authors, however, emphasise that such an approach does not eliminate existing problems, but alters their nature, creating additional challenges for monitoring, coordination, quality control and the distribution of risk.

Schreter and Harmer (2013) state that sustained humanitarian access to high-risk areas depends on a combination of several factors, including negotiations with parties to the conflict, security measures and operational flexibility. Their review emphasises that there is no single approach to securing humanitarian access in highly insecure environments: appropriate strategies depend on the characteristics of the operating context, security conditions and organisations' capacity to negotiate and manage risks.

Taken together, these studies show that humanitarian action in armed conflict is shaped by a combination of normative, political, security and operational constraints. At the same time, different

categories of humanitarian actors experience these constraints differently and have unequal capacities to address them. This makes it necessary to examine more closely the respective roles, comparative advantages and limitations of international and local organisations in humanitarian response.

2.4. Academic Literature on International and Local Organisations in Humanitarian Response

A distinct strand of humanitarian research compares the roles of international and local organisations in crisis response. Academic literature does not treat these actors as interchangeable; instead, it emphasises that they have different operational capacities, occupy different positions within the humanitarian system, and often perform complementary functions. International organisations usually possess broader access to donor funding, technical expertise and international coordination mechanisms, while local organisations benefit from deeper knowledge of the local context, established ties with affected communities and the ability to maintain a presence in areas where international access is limited (Wall & Hedlund, 2016; Barbelet, 2018).

Wall and Hedlund (2016) examine localisation and locally led crisis response. Their findings indicate that local actors often play a central role from the early stages of a crisis and may continue operating after international presence has been reduced. At the same time, the authors highlight that their practical contribution is not necessarily reflected in their position within the formal humanitarian system, where international organisations traditionally retain considerable control over resources, coordination, and decision-making. The authors thus distinguish between direct involvement in aid delivery and institutional influence within the humanitarian system.

According to Barbelet (2018), approaches to assessing the capacity of local organisations are often shaped by criteria established by international actors. As a result, capacity development may be primarily oriented toward meeting international requirements related to financial management, reporting and administrative procedures. Such an approach may underestimate existing capacities of local organisations and their ability to independently define and implement humanitarian responses in a specific context.

Based on this critique, Barbelet (2018) argues for a stronger focus on complementarity between local and international actors. The approach is not centred on determining which type of actor possesses greater overall capacity, but rather on how different forms of capacity can be combined within a specific humanitarian context.

Empirical research also demonstrates that local organisations can perform humanitarian functions independently rather than merely implementing programmes developed by international institutions. Refugee-led organisations in Kenya and Uganda examined by Betts, Easton-Calabria and Pincock (2021) provide empirical support for this argument, demonstrating an ability to independently identify needs, provide services, disseminate information, and fill gaps in the formal humanitarian response system. Even though the research concerns refugees and the COVID-19 pandemic rather than armed conflict directly, it demonstrates the broader potential of some locally rooted organisations to adapt their activities independently to the needs of affected communities.

At the same time, proximity to communities does not, in itself, provide local organisations with sufficient access to funding, technical expertise and institutional support. Similarly, the greater resources available to international organisations do not guarantee a better understanding of local needs or sustained access to affected populations. Therefore, the existing literature points to differences between types of capacity rather than to a clear advantage of one category of actors over another.

Roepstorff (2020) highlights that complementarity and localisation do not necessarily imply an equal position for international and local actors within the humanitarian system. The author draws attention to persistent power imbalances, particularly in relation to access to resources and influence over humanitarian priorities and decision-making. Thus, an expansion of the operational responsibilities of local organisations does not automatically translate into a comparable redistribution of institutional power.

Taken together, the literature examined in this section shows that international and local actors possess different but potentially complementary forms of capacity. However, the expansion of the operational role of local organisations does not necessarily lead to a comparable redistribution of resources and institutional influence. This disparity has become one of the central issues in the debate on the localisation of humanitarian response.

2.5. Academic Literature on Humanitarian Localisation

Localisation has become one of the central areas of reform in the contemporary humanitarian system. In a broader sense, it refers to the expansion of the role of local and national actors not only in the implementation of humanitarian programmes, but also in decision-making, resource distribution and priority setting. This agenda gained particular institutional significance following the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and the adoption of the Grand Bargain, under which donors and humanitarian organisations committed to increasing the share of humanitarian funding reaching local and national responders as directly as possible and to strengthening their role within the humanitarian system (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2016).

One of the central areas of this discussion is funding. Willitts-King et al. (2018), analysing the position of local humanitarian actors in Somalia and South Sudan, demonstrate that there is a significant gap between political commitments to localisation and the actual mechanisms of resource allocation. The authors emphasise that both the amount of funding and the conditions under which it is provided are important. Short-term and highly restricted funding can limit local organisations' ability to plan beyond individual project cycles and strengthen their organisational capacity over time. Although the study focuses on Somalia and South Sudan, its findings contribute to the broader discussion on the financial dimension of localisation.

A separate question concerns how progress in localisation should be assessed. Barbelet et al. (2021) note that a significant portion of the existing literature is focused on institutional indicators such as the volume of funding received by local organisations or the degree of their participation in programme implementation. At the same time, whether localisation leads to improvements in humanitarian response is assessed much less frequently. This distinction is important because greater

participation by local actors does not, in itself, indicate the extent to which the quality, accessibility, or sustainability of the humanitarian response has changed.

Barbelet et al. (2021) also emphasise that the increased responsibility of local actors should be accompanied by a more balanced distribution of risks between international and local partners. In the context of armed conflict, local actors often maintain a physical presence in conflict zones and, consequently, are more exposed to security risks, legal restrictions and political pressure. If the expanded operational role of local organisations is not matched by corresponding access to resources and institutional support, the transfer of responsibilities may also result in a disproportionate transfer of risks to local partners.

Another strand of the literature concerns how “localisation” is defined. Maung, Wells and Scott (2026) examine humanitarian response in Myanmar and show that international organisations, national NGOs and affected communities may understand localisation differently. Mainstream international approaches often frame localisation in terms of shifting leadership, resources and responsibilities towards local and national humanitarian organisations. However, communities themselves may understand it more broadly as their direct participation in setting priorities and making decisions. Therefore, transferring additional resources to national organisations does not necessarily mean that decision-making becomes more closely aligned with the needs and priorities of local communities.

Overall, the literature approaches localisation as a multidimensional process involving not only the delegation of operational functions, but also broader changes in resource access, decision-making authority and risk-sharing arrangements. The literature suggests that greater involvement of local actors may improve access, strengthen the contextual relevance of humanitarian action and support more locally grounded forms of response. However, these potential advantages depend on the institutional conditions under which localisation takes place. Thus, localisation should be treated as one of the factors influencing the effectiveness of humanitarian response, rather than as an independent measure of its success.

2.6. Academic Approaches to Assessing Humanitarian Effectiveness

The assessment of humanitarian effectiveness constitutes a distinct strand of the literature, focusing on the criteria used to determine the extent to which a humanitarian response achieves its intended objectives and meets the needs of affected populations. One of the most widely used frameworks for the assessment of international assistance is the set of criteria developed by the OECD-DAC (Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Initially, the criteria were used primarily to evaluate international development programmes and included relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability (OECD, 1991). Coherence was later introduced as a separate criterion in the revised framework (OECD, 2019). These criteria were subsequently adapted for use in the evaluation of humanitarian action. However, their application in the context of emergencies and armed conflicts required additional adaptation. ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action), an international network focused on the quality, accountability, and effectiveness of humanitarian action, played a significant role in this process. Work by ALNAP and Beck (2006) places particular emphasis on categories such as appropriateness, coverage, and connectedness, which

help assess whether assistance responds to specific needs, reaches affected populations, and takes account of the relationship between short-term response and longer-term needs (Beck, 2006).

Coverage refers to the extent to which assistance actually reaches populations in need (Beck, 2006). In armed conflict settings, this indicator is particularly important since the highest levels of humanitarian need may be found precisely in those areas where international organisations have the most limited access. Therefore, the coverage criterion takes into account not only the overall number of aid recipients, but also which population groups and territories remain insufficiently covered.

Another crucial criterion is appropriateness, which refers to the extent to which the objectives, form and delivery of humanitarian assistance are suited to actual needs and to the specific context of a crisis. Abdelmagid et al. (2019), analysing existing approaches to the assessment of appropriateness, conclude that there is no single way to define or measure it. Depending on the study, various factors may be taken into account: the extent to which assistance corresponds to identified needs, whether the chosen form of support is appropriate for a particular population group, and how well it takes the local context into account.

The criterion of connectedness also holds a distinct place in humanitarian evaluation. It reflects whether short-term humanitarian assistance is linked to longer-term recovery and development needs. Beck (2006) emphasises that in protracted humanitarian crises, individual interventions should not be examined in isolation from longer-term processes of recovery and support for affected populations.

More recent research also emphasises the importance of timeliness and the ability of humanitarian organisations to adapt to changing conditions. The State of the Humanitarian System 2022 (ALNAP, 2022) underscores the significance of pre-crisis preparedness, an established presence and existing partnerships in sustaining humanitarian operations during a crisis. The report therefore suggests that humanitarian performance depends not only on programme outcomes, but also on preparedness, existing operational presence, partnerships and the capacity to respond to changing conditions.

Overall, the literature reviewed suggests that the effectiveness of humanitarian response cannot be reduced to a single indicator. Its assessment should consider the achievement of intended objectives, the coverage of affected populations, the alignment of assistance with specific needs, and organisations' ability to take the longer-term context of the crisis into account. In addition, the literature highlights the importance of timeliness, adaptability, and pre-crisis organisational preparedness, especially in protracted and unstable crisis settings. Therefore, humanitarian effectiveness is a multidimensional concept that depends on both programme results and the conditions under which humanitarian organisations operate.

2.7. Research Gap

Despite the substantial body of research on the conflict in Myanmar and humanitarian action in the context of armed conflict, these strands of the literature often develop separately from one another. Research on Myanmar analyses in detail the historical causes of the conflict, the role of the military, ethno-political tensions, territorial fragmentation and different forms of governance. However, humanitarian consequences are generally not the primary focus of this strand of the literature (Smith, 1999; Callahan, 2003; Taylor, 2009; Bennett & Faxon, 2021; Stokke & Nyi Nyi Kyaw, 2024).

At the same time, the literature on humanitarian action in armed-conflict settings offers a detailed examination of access, security, humanitarian principles and the adaptation of operational models. These studies demonstrate that the capacities of humanitarian organisations depend on the political and territorial conditions in which they operate (Duffield, 2001; Schreter & Harmer, 2013; Stoddard et al., 2017). Yet, much of this literature draws on conflicts outside Myanmar and therefore does not directly address the particular configuration of territorial control and humanitarian access that characterises contemporary Myanmar.

The existing literature also documents significant differences between international and local humanitarian organisations. International organisations, as a rule, possess greater access to funding, technical expertise, and international coordination mechanisms, while local organisations have a better understanding of the specific context, maintain closer ties with communities, and may be able to sustain a presence in areas with limited international access. Nevertheless, existing studies largely explain how these organisations differ from one another rather than how these differences affect the effectiveness of their activities in specific armed-conflict settings (Wall & Hedlund, 2016; Barbelet, 2018; Roepstorff, 2020).

The literature on localisation complements this discussion, examining the funding of local actors, their participation in decision-making, the distribution of risks and differing understandings of who should be considered “local”. However, the question of whether an expanded role for local organisations leads to a more effective humanitarian response, and under what conditions this occurs, has been examined less systematically (Willitts-King et al., 2018; Barbelet et al., 2021; Maung et al., 2026).

Research on humanitarian effectiveness, in turn, suggests various dimensions of assessment, including effectiveness, coverage, appropriateness, connectedness, timeliness and adaptability. Although these criteria are more commonly used to evaluate individual programmes or the humanitarian response as a whole, they are much less frequently applied to comparisons of international and local organisations operating within the same conflict but facing different conditions of access, funding, security and institutional support (Beck, 2006; Abdelmagid et al., 2019; ALNAP, 2022).

Another underdeveloped area in the literature is the use of scenario analysis to assess possible trajectories of the conflict and their humanitarian implications. The scenario-based approach has already been applied to Myanmar: for instance, the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership developed several possible scenarios for the development of the situation following the coup and examined their implications for humanitarian actors (Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, 2021), while a separate scenario analysis for Kachin State was aimed at supporting forward-looking planning by humanitarian response actors (COAR Global, 2021). However, these scenarios relate primarily to the early post-coup period and, in the case of Kachin State, to a single region. More recent humanitarian documents assess future needs and operational constraints (UN OCHA, 2025), while significantly less attention is given to the systematic comparison of several plausible political and military trajectories of the current phase of the conflict and to how each scenario could affect humanitarian needs and the operating conditions of international and local organisations.

Therefore, the major gap in the existing literature lies in the lack of an integrated comparative analysis that simultaneously accounts for the specific characteristics of the conflict in Myanmar, the differences between international and local organisations, several interrelated dimensions of

humanitarian effectiveness, and possible changes in the operating conditions of humanitarian organisations under different conflict scenarios.

This study seeks to address this gap through a comparative analysis of the roles and effectiveness of international and local non-governmental organisations in the humanitarian response to the conflict in Myanmar. Particular attention is given to humanitarian access, the alignment of assistance with local needs, the capacity of organisations to maintain their activities over time, and the influence of funding, localisation and risk distribution on humanitarian response. Finally, the research considers several possible trajectories for the future development of the conflict and assesses their potential implications for humanitarian needs and the operating conditions of international and local organisations.

2.8. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to analyse the roles and effectiveness of international and local non-governmental organisations in the humanitarian response to the conflict in Myanmar. The methodological design takes into account the fragmented and territorially heterogeneous nature of the conflict, which means that humanitarian organisations operate under diverse political, institutional and security conditions.

The research combines qualitative document analysis, descriptive analysis of quantitative data, and comparative examination of the activities of international and local organisations. Such a combination allows the study to account for both measurable changes in the humanitarian situation and factors that cannot be adequately captured by quantitative indicators alone.

The primary method employed is qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009). The work draws on documents and publications produced by international organisations, humanitarian agencies, non-governmental organisations, research institutions, human rights organisations, and representatives of Myanmar's civil society. The main types of sources include humanitarian needs assessments, response plans, operational updates, situation reports, organisational publications, analytical reports, and documents on the evolution of the conflict. Particular attention is given to sources from UN OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), humanitarian NGOs, research organisations, and institutions monitoring political and conflict developments. News agency publications are consulted primarily to verify the latest political and military developments when more comprehensive institutional reports are not yet available.

Sources were selected according to their relevance to the main research question and the key areas of analysis. Priority was given to publications and reports containing data on humanitarian needs, population movements, territorial control, humanitarian access, funding, localisation, organisational constraints, and interaction between international and local actors. The relevance of the sources in terms of time and geographical scope was taken into consideration as well. Since the humanitarian and political situation has significantly changed since the 2021 coup, priority is given to more recent data when assessing current conditions, while earlier publications provide historical and conceptual context.

Descriptive analysis of quantitative data serves as a supplementary method. Quantitative indicators allow the study to determine the scale and evolution of such processes as internal displacement, rising humanitarian needs, changes in funding requirements, and the geographical spread of the conflict. The purpose of this analysis is not to construct a statistical model or establish causal relationships, but to identify major trends and provide an empirical context for the qualitative analysis. For this reason, quantitative data are examined alongside documentary evidence concerning political, territorial, and operational conditions.

The comparative component focuses on differences between international and local non-governmental organisations and the circumstances under which their respective strengths and weaknesses become relevant in practice. The research does not assume that either category is more effective by default. Instead, the comparison seeks to identify how differences in access to funding, institutional resources, local networks, information, coordination mechanisms, and access to affected populations shape organisations' capacity to deliver assistance under specific conditions.

To structure the comparison, the study uses three qualitative analytical dimensions developed on the basis of the humanitarian evaluation literature reviewed in Chapter 2: operational effectiveness, contextual relevance, and institutional sustainability. These categories function as analytical tools rather than as a system for quantitatively ranking organisations. Their meaning and application are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The research also examines funding, localisation, and risk distribution as cross-cutting factors shaping the capacities of international and local organisations and the nature of interactions between them. These elements can simultaneously influence the scale of operations, the degree of autonomy, programme sustainability, and the distribution of operational responsibilities among different humanitarian actors.

Additionally, scenario analysis forms part of the research design to explore possible future changes in the political and military situation and their potential impact on humanitarian needs and organisations' operating conditions. Scenario analysis is used here as an exploratory method for examining several plausible trajectories rather than predicting a single expected outcome (Schoemaker, 1995; Börjeson et al., 2006). In order to avoid duplication of methodological material, a detailed description of the principles underlying scenario construction and the criteria for comparing them is provided in Chapter 5.

The study has several limitations. Firstly, it is primarily based on secondary documentary sources, which limits the ability to independently verify all reported data and directly include the perspectives of members of affected communities and humanitarian staff. Secondly, the availability of information varies considerably across regions and is especially limited in areas affected by active hostilities and restricted communications. Thirdly, various organisations may employ different definitions, reporting periods, and data collection methods, which hinder direct comparison of some indicators. Finally, the conflict remains dynamic, so the findings reflect the situation within the period covered by the evidence examined.

Despite these limitations, the combination of qualitative document analysis, descriptive analysis of quantitative data, and a comparative approach provide a sufficient basis for answering the central research question. The methodological design enables the study to link the characteristics of the humanitarian situation to the operating conditions of different humanitarian actors and to

systematically compare international and local organisations without reducing their effectiveness to a single quantitative indicator.

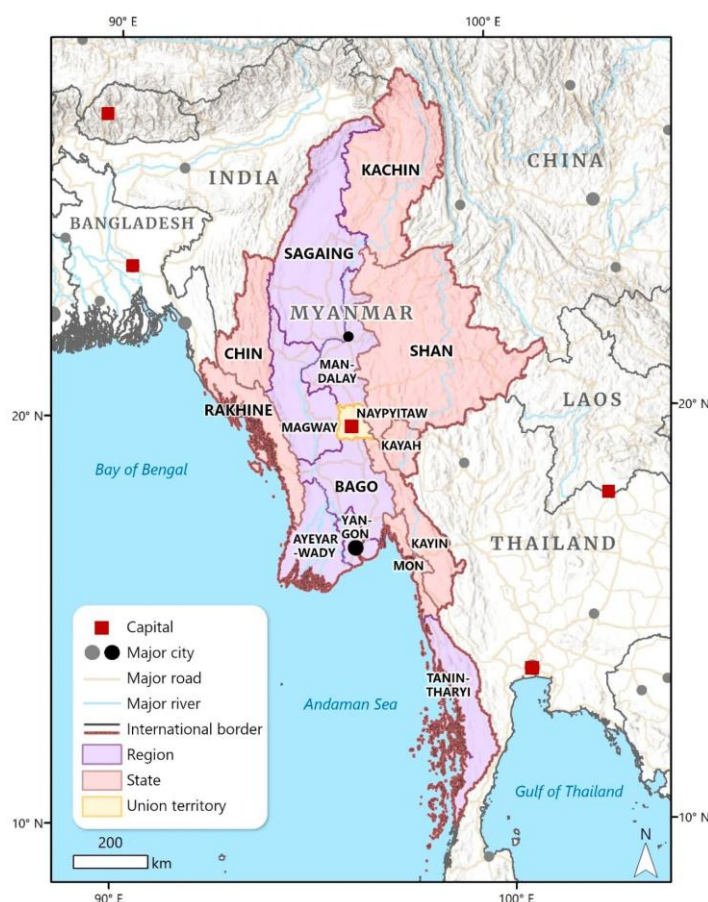
3. Historical Background of the Myanmar Conflict and the Role of Non-Governmental Organisations

Understanding the role and influence of non-governmental organizations in Myanmar requires careful examination of political, historical and social conditions which have been shaping the ongoing conflict in the country. The modern crisis in Myanmar hasn't been caused by the isolated event of the military coup in 2021, but rather a continuation and worsening of structural tensions formed over decades and rooted in colonial models of governance, unresolved ethnic frictions, authoritarian rule and a fragile democratization process. In this regard, the current chapter provides the necessary contextual basis for the analysis of NGO activity within the conflict.

3.1. Geographical and Ethno-Territorial Setting of Myanmar

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia. It shares borders with Bangladesh and India to the west and north-west, China to the north and north-east, and Laos and Thailand to the east and south-east. The country's southern and south-western coastline faces the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. The considerable length of its land borders and its proximity to major regional powers have historically facilitated cross-border trade, migration, and cultural exchange, while also giving Myanmar's borderlands particular political and strategic significance (Taylor, 2009; Bennett & Faxon, 2021).

Figure 1. Myanmar's First-Level Administrative Divisions and Major Geographical Features



Source: Bennett and Faxon (2021, Figure 1).

Myanmar's physical geography is characterised by a marked contrast between the central lowlands and the mountainous regions that surround them. The central part of the country is dominated by the basin of the Ayeyarwady River and its tributaries, particularly the Chindwin, as well as by the Sittaung River valley. The central lowlands and the Ayeyarwady Delta contain a substantial share of the country's most fertile agricultural land. This area is also home to major urban centres, including Mandalay and Yangon, and is traversed by the country's principal transport routes. Historically, the central plain constituted the demographic, economic, political, and administrative core of the Burmese state (Taylor, 2009).

The central lowlands are surrounded by mountainous and elevated areas located predominantly along the country's international borders. To the west lie the Patkai, Naga, and Chin Hills, as well as the Rakhine Yoma range, which separates central Myanmar from the Bay of Bengal coast. The north of the country is characterised by high mountain terrain, while the east is dominated by the extensive and deeply dissected Shan Plateau. These mountain systems extend towards the south-eastern border with Thailand. Overall, the country's physical structure may be described as a central lowland corridor enclosed by remote mountainous and forested borderlands (Taylor, 2009; Myanmar National Portal, n.d.)

These physical and geographical differences had a significant influence on the country's political development. The central lowlands were comparatively more accessible to state institutions and allowed for the development of more concentrated systems of administration, agricultural production, and transport. By contrast, many peripheral areas were characterised by difficult terrain, underdeveloped infrastructure, and considerable distance from the principal centres of political authority. These conditions hindered the establishment of sustained and uniform control by the central authorities over the border regions (Callahan, 2003; Taylor, 2009).

Myanmar's administrative and territorial structure reflects, to some extent, the country's ethnic and territorial diversity. The country is divided into seven regions, seven states, and the Naypyidaw Union Territory. The seven regions are Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, and Yangon. They are located predominantly in the central and southern parts of the country and are generally associated with the Bamar ethnic majority. The seven states (Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Chin, Mon, Rakhine, and Shan) are named after some of the country's largest ethnic groups and are situated mainly along its international borders (South, 2008; Taylor, 2009).

However, these administrative boundaries do not correspond precisely to ethnically homogeneous territories. The population of most states is characterised by significant ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. Members of the same ethnic group may live in several states and regions, as well as on both sides of international borders. For example, a substantial proportion of the Karen population lives outside Kayin State, while the cities of the ethnic states are home to large Bamar communities. Therefore, the administrative boundaries of states only partly correspond to the actual geographical distribution of ethnic communities (Smith, 1999; South, 2008).

The Bamar, Myanmar's largest ethnic group, are predominantly concentrated in the central lowlands, including the regions of Mandalay, Magway, Sagaing, Bago, Yangon, and Ayeyarwady. Burmese, the language primarily associated with the Bamar majority, is the country's official language and has historically occupied a dominant position in public administration, the education system, and national political institutions. Political and administrative centralisation developed largely around territories and institutions associated with the Bamar majority (Smith, 1999; Taylor, 2009).

The largest ethnic minority groups of Myanmar live predominantly, but not exclusively, in peripheral states. The Kachin are concentrated primarily in the mountainous areas of northern Myanmar, particularly in Kachin State and parts of northern Shan State. The Shan live predominantly in Shan State, a vast and ethnically diverse territory bordering China, Laos, and Thailand. Chin communities inhabit the mountainous western regions near the borders with India and Bangladesh. The Rakhine, a predominantly Buddhist ethnic group, are concentrated mainly in Rakhine State along Myanmar's western coast, whereas the predominantly Muslim Rohingya population historically lived mainly in the northern part of the state. (Smith, 1999; South, 2008).

The Karen, also known as the Kayin, live in Kayin State, as well as in parts of Bago Region, Mon State, and other areas of south-eastern Myanmar. The Karenni are concentrated primarily in Kayah State, while the Mon live mainly in Mon State and neighbouring southern areas. Myanmar's ethnic diversity also includes communities such as the Wa, Pa-O, Palaung, Kokang, Naga, Lahu, and Akha. Shan State is characterised by a particularly complex ethnic composition, as it is home to numerous groups with distinct linguistic, cultural, and political identities (Smith, 1999; South, 2008).

Religious affiliation constitutes an additional dimension of Myanmar's ethno-territorial diversity. Theravada Buddhism is practised by the majority of the Bamar population and has historically occupied an important position in national identity and political life. Christianity is particularly widespread among several ethnic minority communities, including many Chin, Kachin, Karen and Karenni, while Islam is practised by a number of minority groups, most prominently the Rohingya. Although ethnicity and religion do not always overlap in Myanmar, some minority groups differ from the Bamar majority in both ethnic and religious terms. This reinforces their perception as distinct communities and widens the divide between them and the Buddhist Bamar majority. In particular, Buddhist nationalist movements and anti-Muslim narratives have contributed to discrimination and episodes of communal violence, especially in relation to the Rohingya. Nevertheless, religion should not be treated as an independent or sufficient explanation of Myanmar's conflicts, which are also shaped by disputes over citizenship, political representation, territorial autonomy, state power and control over resources (Smith, 1999; Walton, 2017).

The principal ethnic groups discussed above and their main areas of geographical concentration are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Major Ethnic Groups and Their Principal Areas of Concentration in Myanmar

Ethnic group	Principal area of concentration	Main administrative units	Relevance to the conflict
Bamar	Central lowlands and major urban centres	Mandalay, Magway, Sagaing, Bago, Yangon and Ayeyarwady Regions	Constitute the ethnic majority and have historically been closely associated with central state institutions and national political authority.
Shan	Eastern and north-eastern highlands	Shan State	Shan State contains several armed

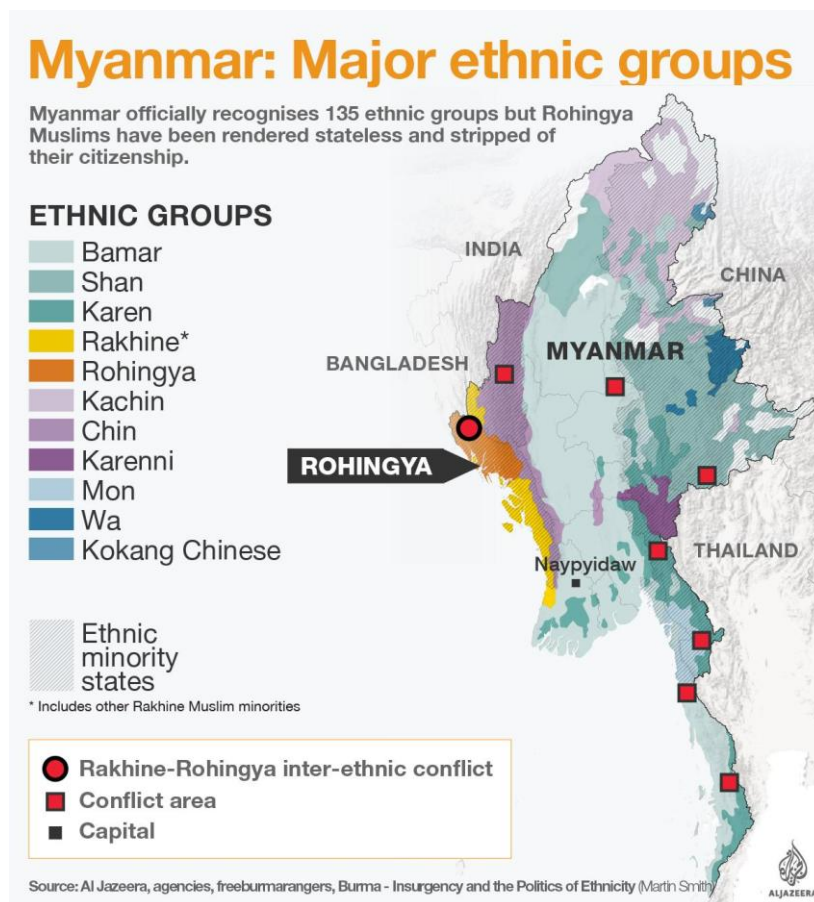
			organisations and areas of fragmented or overlapping territorial control.
Karen/Kayin	South-eastern borderlands	Kayin State, eastern Bago Region, parts of Mon State and Tanintharyi Region	The region has experienced one of Myanmar's longest-running ethnic conflicts and has important cross-border links with Thailand
Kachin	Mountainous northern borderlands	Kachin State and northern Shan State	The Kachin Independence Army maintains a significant territorial and political presence, particularly in areas bordering China.
Chin	Mountainous western borderlands	Chin State and parts of Sagaing Region	Difficult terrain, limited infrastructure and proximity to India have influenced resistance activity, displacement and humanitarian access.
Rakhine	Western coastal region	Rakhine State	The state has experienced conflict involving the Arakan Army, the Myanmar military and severe restrictions on humanitarian access.
Rohingya	Northern Rakhine State	Primarily Maungdaw and Buthidaung townships	The Rohingya population has faced long-term discrimination, statelessness, mass displacement and restrictions on movement and access to services.
Karenni	Eastern mountainous areas	Kayah State and neighbouring areas of southern Shan State	The region has experienced intense post-2021 fighting, fragmented territorial control and large-scale

			displacement.
Mon	Southern coastal and border areas	Mon State and neighbouring parts of Tanintharyi and Kayin	Mon political and armed organisations have historically sought greater autonomy and protection of cultural rights.
Wa	Eastern borderlands adjoining China	Eastern and northern Shan State	Wa-controlled areas possess a high degree of territorial autonomy and are governed through institutions separate from those of the central state.
Pa-O	Southern Shan highlands	Southern Shan State	Pa-O communities are represented by political and armed organisations operating within a complex multi-ethnic territorial environment.
Ta'ang/Palaung	Northern Shan highlands	Northern Shan State	The Ta'ang National Liberation Army is an important actor in the armed conflict in northern Shan State.

Note: The table identifies broad areas of concentration and does not imply that the listed territories are ethnically homogeneous. Many ethnic groups are distributed across several states and regions, while most administrative units contain ethnically mixed populations.

Source: Compiled by the author based on Smith (1999), South (2008), Taylor (2009), Callahan (2003), International Crisis Group (2022), ACLED (2026a, 2026d), and Karen Human Rights Group (2024).

Figure 2. Major Areas of Ethnic Group Concentration in Myanmar



Source: Al Jazeera (2017), “Myanmar: Major Ethnic Groups and Where They Live.”

The map of ethnic distribution should be treated as an approximate representation of the areas in which particular groups are predominantly concentrated, rather than a depiction of clearly demarcated and ethnically homogeneous territories. The population of many areas is mixed, while the identities of some communities may incorporate multiple linguistic, religious, and territorial dimensions. Moreover, armed conflicts, forced displacement, and migration have repeatedly altered the demographic composition of particular areas. Accordingly, ethnic boundaries can not be represented as fixed and clearly defined lines (Smith, 1999; South, 2008).

The relationship between physical geography and ethnic distribution plays a key role in understanding the development of armed conflicts in Myanmar. A substantial portion of ethnic minorities resides in mountainous, forested, or otherwise remote border areas. Before the establishment of modern state borders, these territories had been connected to neighbouring countries through trade routes, migration flows, kinship networks, and cultural exchange. In some cases, international borders divided communities and historical territories whose settlement patterns had developed before the emergence of the modern state (Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2002).

Topographical complexity and underdeveloped transport infrastructure limited the capacity of the central government and the military authorities to establish uniform territorial control. At the same time, proximity to international borders gave some ethnic armed organisations access to cross-border

trade, supply routes, migration channels, and areas of temporary refuge. Cross-border networks also facilitated the movement of refugees and other population groups forced to leave conflict-affected areas. More broadly, the development of Myanmar's borderlands has been shaped by the interaction of state presence, armed-group activity, natural-resource extraction, cross-border trade, and population movements (Grundy-Warr & Wong, 2002; Bennett & Faxon, 2021).

However, geographical conditions alone do not explain the emergence of ethnic armed resistance. Its formation was shaped by political demands linked to autonomy, federalism, security, protection of cultural and linguistic rights, political representation, and control over local resources. Physical geography did not create these contradictions, but it influenced the capacity of ethnic armed organisations to maintain a long-term territorial presence and resist centralised state control (Smith, 1999; Callahan, 2003; South, 2008).

For much of its history, the conflict has followed a clear geographical division between the centre and the periphery. The central lowlands have traditionally been the main centre of state power, while many of the country's longest-running armed conflicts took place in ethnic minority border areas. Regional disparities in economic development, the limited presence of state infrastructure, competition for natural resources, and political marginalisation of peripheral communities further reinforced this divide. These disparities persisted even during the period of political and economic liberalisation (Bennett & Faxon, 2021).

Some ethnic armed organisations developed their own administrative and governance structures and, in certain areas, became involved in the provision of public and social services. In this context, territorial control in Myanmar should not be viewed solely in terms of military presence or physical control over territory. It also encompasses the capacity to exercise governance, regulate the movement of people and goods, interact with local communities, and ensure that certain public institutions continue to function (Callahan, 2003; South, 2008).

The armed conflict that followed the military coup in February 2021 partly altered the traditional geography of the conflict. Hostilities continued in established areas of ethnic conflict, but they also spread to predominantly Bamar-populated regions that had not previously been major areas of prolonged armed struggle. In particular, Sagaing and Magway Regions became important centres of activity for the People's Defence Forces and other resistance groups. This demonstrates that the current conflict can no longer be understood solely as a confrontation between the central state and ethnic armed organisations operating in peripheral areas (International Crisis Group, 2022).

Nevertheless, physical geography and ethnic distribution continue to influence the intensity of violence, patterns of forced displacement, and possibilities for humanitarian access. Mountainous and forested terrain, damage to transport infrastructure, shifts in front lines, and fragmentation of territorial control constrain the movement of civilians and humanitarian organisations. At the same time, well-established community networks and cross-border ties enable local organisations and ethnic social service providers to reach population groups that remain beyond the direct reach of formally registered international organisations (Harvey et al., 2023; Karen Human Rights Group, 2022; UN OCHA, 2025).

Overall, Myanmar's geography is not merely the physical environment in which the armed conflict takes place. It has also influenced the formation of political identities, the persistence of the centre-periphery divide, the prolonged existence of ethnic armed organisations, and the uneven territorial presence of state institutions. Geographical conditions also shape the distribution of humanitarian

needs and influence which organisations can access conflict-affected populations and through which mechanisms. Understanding these spatial characteristics is necessary both for analysing the historical development of armed conflicts in Myanmar and for assessing the role of NGOs in the contemporary humanitarian response.

The relationship between territorial diversity and political authority became further institutionalised during the colonial period, when the British administration applied different systems of governance in the country's central and peripheral regions. The historical origins and subsequent development of this division are examined in the following subsection.

3.2. Historical overview of the conflict

Myanmar became a part of the British Empire in the 19th century following three Anglo-Burmese wars (1824–1826, 1852, 1885), through which British control expanded progressively and which ultimately resulted in the abolition of the Burmese monarchy and the annexation of Upper Burma in 1886. Until 1937, Burma was governed as a province of British India, but later became a separately administered British colony (Taylor, 2009).

Central and frontier areas were administered differently by the colonial administration. Central Burma, primarily inhabited by the ethnic majority called Bamar, was governed directly, while several frontier territories, including the Shan States, Kachin Hills and Chin Hills, had a special administrative status and were administered indirectly through hereditary rulers and local authorities (Callahan, 2003).

Representatives of some ethnic minorities, particularly the Karen, Kachin and Chin, were disproportionately recruited into the colonial armed forces, which provided them with military experience and institutional roles (Callahan, 2003). At the same time, the Bamar majority was much less represented in the colonial army. These policies contributed to interethnic mistrust and reinforced unequal access to political and military power (Smith, 1999).

The economic model of the colonial period further shaped structural imbalances. The economy of Burma was increasingly oriented toward the export of agricultural products, particularly rice cultivated in the rapidly expanding agricultural areas of Lower Burma and the Irrawaddy Delta. By the early twentieth century, the country had become one of the world's leading rice exporters (Thant Myint-U, 2001). However, the benefits of this export-led growth were distributed unevenly. European trading, milling and shipping companies, Indian merchants and financiers, the colonial administration and larger landowners captured a substantial share of the profits, while many Burmese cultivators remained dependent on credit. The rapid expansion of rice cultivation required substantial borrowing, increasing the vulnerability of small landholders. When rice prices collapsed during the Great Depression, widespread loan defaults resulted in the transfer of considerable areas of cultivable land to creditors and contributed to the expansion of absentee landownership, tenancy and landlessness (Taylor, 2009). Economic growth was therefore accompanied by increasing social inequality and dependence on foreign capital and international markets (Thant Myint-U, 2001).

From a post-colonial state perspective, these administrative and economic legacies complicated the formation of inclusive institutions after independence. Colonial rule had incorporated the central lowlands and the ethnic minority borderlands into different systems of administration, leaving them

with distinct political and institutional experiences (Taylor, 2009; Callahan, 2003). At the same time, the export-oriented colonial economy had intensified rural indebtedness, landlessness and socioeconomic inequality, particularly in the rice-producing regions of Lower Burma (Thant Myint-U, 2001; Taylor, 2009). The post-colonial state therefore inherited administrative boundaries, coercive institutions and governance structures that had been developed primarily to maintain colonial control rather than to integrate the country's diverse ethnic and territorial communities into a common political system (Callahan, 2003). These structures provided a weak basis for resolving disputes over political autonomy, territorial authority and the distribution of power after independence. As armed resistance expanded, warfare and state-building became increasingly interconnected, reinforcing the reliance of state institutions on military and coercive responses (Callahan, 2003). The resulting problems of institutional legitimacy, territorial integration and limited state authority correspond to several characteristics associated with state fragility in the broader political-science literature (Rotberg, 2004).

Independence and the Emergence of Protracted Internal Conflict

Myanmar gained independence on 4 January 1948. However, the newly formed state faced significant state-building challenges. The Panglong Agreement of 1947 accepted in principle full autonomy in the internal administration of the Frontier Areas represented by Shan, Kachin and Chin leaders. However, a stable power-sharing arrangement between the central government and peripheral regions was never fully institutionalised (Taylor, 2009).

Violent clashes between the central government, ethnic armed organisations and communist insurgent movements began soon after the declaration of independence (Smith, 1999). The conflict quickly became chronic and spread primarily to the country's border regions. The persistence of these conflicts contributed to the militarization of the state and strengthened the armed forces' claim that they were the primary institution responsible for preserving national unity and territorial integrity (Callahan, 2003).

The 1962 military coup and the institutionalization of military dominance

On 2 March 1962, General Ne Win led a military coup, justifying it with the need to prevent the country's disintegration (Taylor, 2009). As a consequence, the armed forces became the dominant governing institution, and the country was placed under direct military rule.

The military regime established a centralised system of governance, limited political competition and strengthened control over society. The economic policies of nationalisation and isolation led to economic stagnation and declining living standards (Taylor, 2009).

Military operations against ethnic groups were accompanied by widespread human rights violations, including forced displacement and destruction of civilian infrastructure (Smith, 1999).

From the perspective of Civil–Military Relations Theory, the 1962 coup represented a breakdown of civilian control, as the armed forces subordinated civilian structures and assumed direct authority over political decision-making (Huntington, 1957; Taylor, 2009).

The 1988 protests, renewed military rule and subsequent political liberalization

Mass protests of 1988 became one of the most significant attempts to transform the political system. Despite large-scale mobilisation of the population, the protests were suppressed, and the military

preserved control of power. In September 1988, the armed forces reasserted direct control through the State Law and Order Restoration Council, beginning another prolonged period of direct military rule (Taylor, 2009).

Only in the early 2010s did a process of limited political liberalization begin. Following the 2010 general election and the formation of President Thein Sein's government in 2011, restrictions on the media and civil society were eased, political prisoners were released and negotiations with some ethnic armed organisations were resumed. Nevertheless, the 2008 Constitution preserved the privileged position of the armed forces, including control over the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs, as well as 25 per cent of the seats in both chambers of parliament reserved for military representatives nominated by the Commander-in-Chief (Egreteau, 2016).

The political system that operated between 2011 and 2020 can be characterized as a hybrid or military-constrained regime, combining formal democratic procedures with the preservation of constitutionally protected military authority. Despite the outward signs of liberalization, the structural advantage of the army remained (Egreteau, 2016).

Structural Vulnerability Prior to the 2021 Crisis

By the late 2010s, the country continued to face several unresolved structural problems: ongoing armed conflicts in ethnic regions, the absence of a stable federal model, significant autonomy of the armed forces and socio-economic inequality (International Crisis Group, 2021).

From a fragile-state perspective, the combination of weakly inclusive institutions, unresolved territorial conflicts and the dominance of coercive actors made the political system vulnerable to sudden changes in power (Rotberg, 2004). Considering the context, the military coup of 2021 can be interpreted not as an isolated event but a manifestation of structural contradictions that had remained unresolved throughout the preceding political transition (International Crisis Group, 2021).

3.3. The 2021 Coup and the Escalation of the Conflict

On 1 February 2021, the Myanmar armed forces, commonly known as the Tatmadaw, carried out a coup d'état and detained key civilian leaders, including State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint. The military justified the seizure of power by alleging widespread fraud in the November 2020 general election, which had resulted in a decisive victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD). However, domestic and international observers did not identify irregularities on a scale capable of altering the overall result. The Carter Center reported that election day proceeded without major irregularities, although it also identified significant weaknesses in the legal framework and the exclusion of substantial parts of the population from the electoral process (The Carter Center, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2021).

The results of the 2020 general elections illustrate the scale of electoral support for the National League for Democracy. As shown in Table 2, the party secured a dominant majority of seats in the House of Representatives (Pyithu Hluttaw), while the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) received significantly fewer seats.

Table 2. Results of the 2020 Myanmar General Election: Elected Seats Filled in the Pyithu Hluttaw

Party	Seats Won
National League for Democracy (NLD)	258
Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	26
Other parties combined	31
Total elected seats filled	315

Note: voting was cancelled in 15 of the 330 elected-seat constituencies. The table also excludes the 110 seats reserved for military-appointed representatives.

Source: *Compiled by the author based on the International Foundation for Electoral Systems Election Guide and Union Election Commission Announcement No. 268/2020.*

The results demonstrated the NLD's strong electoral support and provided it with a decisive majority among elected representatives. Nevertheless, the broader political system remained only partially civilian. Under the 2008 Constitution, one quarter of the seats in each chamber of the Union Parliament was reserved for military representatives appointed by the Commander-in-Chief. The armed forces also retained control over the Ministries of Defence, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs (Egreteau, 2016). Although civilian political parties could secure substantial electoral majorities, the constitutional framework preserved the military's institutional power. The NLD's renewed victory therefore exposed the continuing imbalance between the electoral legitimacy of the civilian leadership and the constitutionally protected authority of the armed forces.

The coup caused mass protests all over the country. Demonstrations, strikes and acts of civil disobedience spread across broad sections of the population, including civil servants, students, healthcare system workers and representatives of other professions. Refusal of a significant portion of public sector workers to collaborate with the military authorities significantly disrupted the functioning of state institutions and became one of the largest manifestations of civil resistance in the modern history of the country.

The military authorities responded to the protests with increased repression. Security forces carried out mass arrests, used live ammunition against demonstrators and imposed restrictions on the media and internet access (Human Rights Watch, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2021). As of 16 July 2026, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners had documented 31,519 arrests and 8,183 deaths of pro-democracy activists and civilians attributed to the junta and pro-military groups since the coup. AAPP notes that the actual figures are likely to be higher (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, 2026). These figures illustrate the scale and persistence of repression and violence against civilians and pro-democracy activists since the coup.

The harsh suppression of predominantly peaceful protests contributed to the radicalisation of parts of the opposition movement and to a gradual shift toward armed resistance. In April 2021, representatives of the ousted civilian authorities, elected parliamentarians, and several ethnic and political groups formed the National Unity Government (NUG), which claimed to represent the legitimate democratic government of Myanmar. In May 2021, the NUG announced the establishment

of the People's Defence Force (PDF) as an armed resistance structure opposed to military rule. Although many local resistance groups subsequently identified themselves as PDFs, their degree of coordination with and control by the NUG varied considerably (International Crisis Group, 2021).

The appearance of these armed groups significantly changed the character of the conflict. There was a rapid escalation of armed violence throughout the country. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), political violence in Myanmar has resulted in more than 93,000 reported fatalities since the February 2021 coup. This figure includes fatalities recorded across different forms of political violence and should not be interpreted exclusively as a count of civilian deaths. The scale and geographical spread of the violence demonstrate the transformation of the political crisis into a broader nationwide armed conflict (ACLED, 2026).

Concurrently, interactions between new resistance forces and existing ethnic armed organizations intensified. Some Ethnic Armed Organizations provided resistance groups with training, logistical support, weapons, or shelter in territories under their control (ACLED, 2024; Stokke & Nyi Nyi Kyaw, 2024). Such interaction contributed to the expansion of the geography of the conflict and further complicated the structure of the confrontation.

As violence spread, the humanitarian consequences of the conflict intensified significantly. OCHA (the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) reported rapidly increasing displacement, severe constraints on access to healthcare, food and other basic services, as well as extensive humanitarian access restrictions. The destruction of civilian infrastructure, disruption of livelihoods and economic activity, and movement restrictions further contributed to the deterioration of humanitarian conditions (UN OCHA, 2023).

The escalation of violence after the 2021 coup transformed Myanmar's political crisis into a large-scale internal armed conflict involving multiple armed actors and producing severe humanitarian consequences. In this context, non-governmental organisations began to play a more important role providing humanitarian aid, documenting human rights violations and supporting affected communities.

Since much of the armed conflict occurs in regions where ethnic armed organizations operate, understanding their role and interactions with local communities is key to analysing the dynamics of the conflict. The role of ethnic armed organizations and their impact on civilians is discussed in the next section.

3.4. Ethnic Armed Organizations and Civilian Impact

Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have been one of the key elements of the armed conflict in Myanmar for decades. Some of the country's longest-standing EAOs emerged soon after independence in 1948, while others were established during later phases of the conflict. Several ethnic communities started armed resistance demanding more autonomy, a federal structure for the state, or the protection of their political and cultural rights. Over time, some of these organizations formed armed units and administrative structures that allowed them to control certain territories, especially in border regions inhabited by ethnic minorities (Smith, 1999).

Among the most influential ethnic armed organizations are the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karenni Army (KA), and the Arakan Army (AA).

These groups operate primarily in such regions as Kachin State, Kayin State, Kayah State, and Rakhine State, where armed clashes between the Tatmadaw and ethnic forces have occurred repeatedly. In some cases, EAOs and their associated political organisations developed administrative and governance structures in territories under their influence, including mechanisms of taxation and the provision of certain public services (Callahan, 2003; Smith, 1999). The existence of such administrative structures has made these organisations not only armed groups but also important political actors in the regions where they operate.

The 2021 military coup significantly changed the role of EAOs in the conflict. Following the violent crackdown on protests, some EAOs began supporting new resistance groups, including People's Defence Forces (PDFs) and other local resistance organisations. This collaboration included military training, shelter and other forms of material and operational support, although the extent and form of cooperation differed considerably among organisations and regions (International Crisis Group, 2022b).

These developments significantly changed the structure of the confrontation. Previously, armed clashes had often been concentrated in border and ethnic-minority regions and had primarily involved the Tatmadaw and individual EAOs. However, since 2021, the conflict has involved a wider range of actors and shifting or overlapping alliances, including EAOs, PDFs, other local resistance forces, and the Myanmar military. This has made the system of territorial control more complicated and increased instability in regions where civilians live. Conflict has also spread into many Bamar-majority areas that had previously experienced comparatively limited armed violence.

The growing involvement of Ethnic Armed Organizations and the increasing fragmentation of territorial control have had significant consequences for civilian populations. Armed clashes, air strikes, and military operations have damaged infrastructure and contributed to repeated displacement, particularly in rural and border areas. Civilians have also faced human rights violations and abuses committed by different parties to the conflict, although UN reporting identifies the Myanmar military as the principal perpetrator of widespread attacks against civilians. Moreover, many conflict-affected communities are located in territories controlled or contested by EAOs, which restricts or complicates the access of international humanitarian organisations and the delivery of assistance. Humanitarian access has additionally been impeded by fighting, military restrictions, insecurity, and administrative barriers.

Under these conditions, local civil society organisations, community-based initiatives, and national NGOs often assume a particularly important role because they possess stronger local networks and greater familiarity with the political and security environment. Local organisations are frequently able to deliver assistance in areas that international organisations cannot reach directly, although they also face serious security, legal, and financial risks. The influence of EAOs and fragmented territorial control on civilians therefore extends beyond the direct consequences of armed confrontation: patterns of territorial control also affect displacement, access to essential services, and the channels through which humanitarian assistance can reach affected communities.

While this section has examined how EAOs and fragmented territorial control influence civilian conditions and humanitarian access, the broader scale and evolution of the humanitarian crisis are assessed quantitatively in the following section.

3.5. Quantitative Assessment of Humanitarian Trends in Myanmar (2021–2025)

Building on the qualitative discussion of conflict dynamics and their consequences for civilians, this section provides a descriptive statistical assessment of the evolution of humanitarian needs in Myanmar between 2021 and 2025, drawing primarily on data published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA). The purpose of this analysis is not to establish causal relationships between individual variables but rather to illustrate the scale and evolution of the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar following the military coup of February 2021. The quantitative overview provides an empirical foundation for understanding the growing role of non-governmental organisations in responding to humanitarian needs.

Before analysing the quantitative indicators, it's necessary to acknowledge several methodological considerations. Humanitarian indicators, published by the United Nations, are regularly revised in response to the changes in the security situation, expanding access to information and improvements in methodology for assessing humanitarian needs. Changes in annual indicators may therefore reflect not only an actual deterioration in humanitarian conditions but also improvements in data collection and assessment methodologies.

Furthermore, the indicators employed in this section are drawn from complementary United Nations humanitarian monitoring sources. Data on people in need of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian funding requirements are derived from successive *Myanmar humanitarian response plans* published by UN OCHA, while figures on internally displaced persons (IDPs) are based on UN OCHA and UNHCR displacement monitoring and represent approximate point-in-time estimates towards the end of each year. Although these indicators are produced through different monitoring processes, they capture interconnected dimensions of the humanitarian crisis and, taken together, provide a broader picture of its evolution.

The statistical analysis covers the period from 2021 to 2025. Although the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026 contains more recent annual planning estimates, its indicators are not incorporated into the longitudinal analysis. The plan was prepared in a different humanitarian and analytical context, shaped by the continuing consequences of the March 2025 earthquake, updated assessments of humanitarian needs, and revised prioritisation decisions. Unlike the original 2025 HNRP, which was prepared before the earthquake, the 2026 plan incorporates both the effects of the ongoing armed conflict and the longer-term humanitarian consequences of the disaster. Therefore, several indicators presented for 2026 are not directly comparable with those used for the preceding period.

Similarly, following the earthquake, the original Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025 was supplemented by the Earthquake Flash Addendum, which introduced additional estimates of the population in need and additional funding requirements. Since the purpose of this study is to analyse the role of non-governmental organizations in armed conflict settings, with a primary focus on conflict-related humanitarian dynamics, this section uses indicators from the original version of the HNRP 2025, published before the earthquake. This approach improves the comparability of statistical data and allows for the tracking of humanitarian dynamics more closely associated with armed conflict.

An additional comparability limitation concerns the 2021 estimate of people in need. The original 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, prepared before the military coup, identified approximately one million people requiring humanitarian assistance in selected conflict-affected areas. Following the coup, the Interim Emergency Response Plan estimated a target population of two million people

beyond the scope of the original HRP. However, this figure represented people targeted rather than a revised estimate of people in need. Since the present analysis uses figures for people in need from the original annual response plans, Table 3 retains the original 2021 estimate of one million people. The sharp increase recorded in 2022 therefore reflects not only the deterioration of humanitarian conditions but also the substantial expansion of the geographical and analytical scope of humanitarian needs assessments.

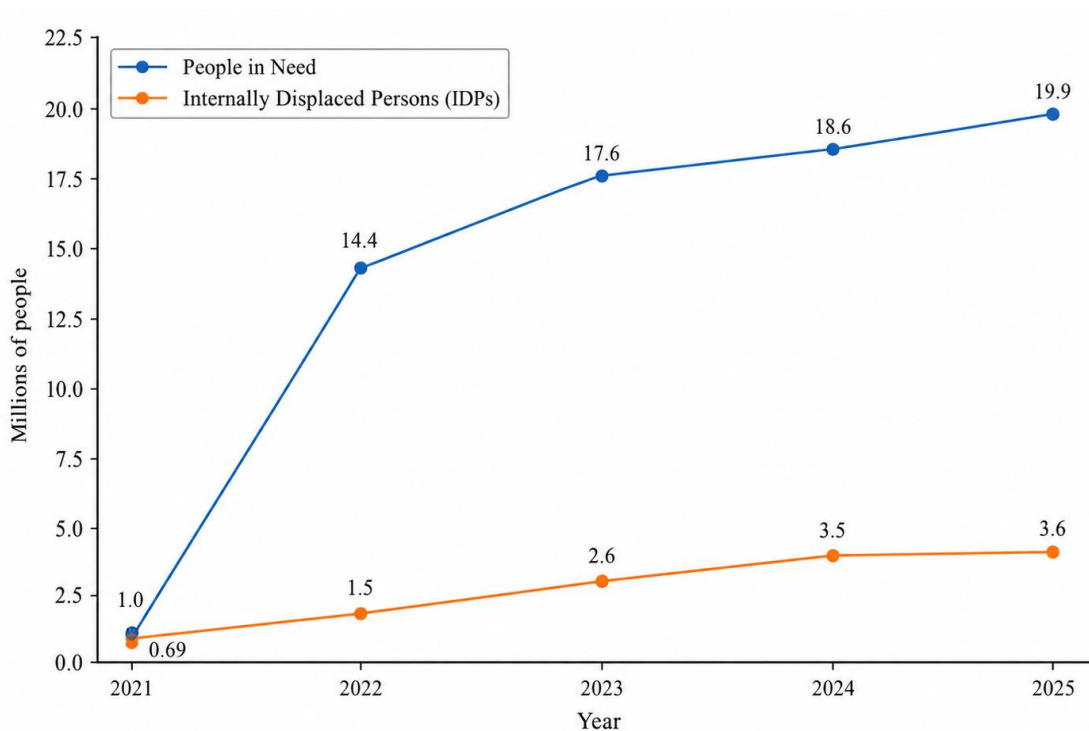
Despite these methodological nuances, the overall conclusion drawn from the UN humanitarian assessments is that the humanitarian situation deteriorated substantially over the period under review. The statistical data presented in Table 3 demonstrate a substantial overall increase in humanitarian needs of the population, an increase in the scale of internal displacement and a significant increase in the volume of financial resources required to implement humanitarian programs.

Table 3. Evolution of Key Humanitarian Indicators in Myanmar (2021–2025)

Indicator	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
People in need of humanitarian assistance (millions)	1.0	14.4	17.6	18.6	19.9
Internally displaced persons (millions)	0.69	1.50	2.60	3.50	3.60
Humanitarian funding required (US\$ million)	276.5	826.0	764.0	994.0	1,100.0

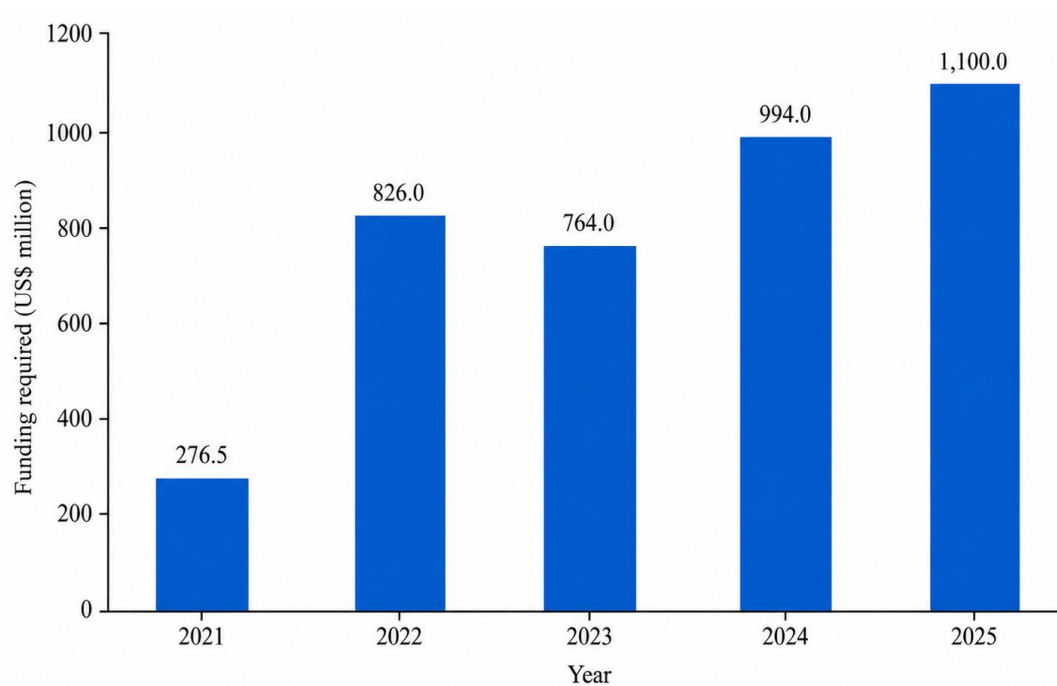
Source: Compiled by the author based on *Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans* (UN OCHA, 2021–2025), UN OCHA humanitarian updates, UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS), and UNHCR/UN OCHA displacement monitoring reports.

Figure 3. Trends in Humanitarian Needs and Internal Displacement in Myanmar (2021-2025)



Source: Compiled by the author based on UN OCHA humanitarian plans and updates, and UNHCR displacement monitoring, 2021-2025.

Figure 4. Humanitarian Funding Requirements in Myanmar (2021-2025)



Source: Compiled by the author based on UN OCHA Response Plans and Financial Tracking Service data, 2021-2025.

As can be seen from Table 3, Figure 3 and Figure 4, the humanitarian situation in Myanmar has significantly deteriorated after the 2021 military coup. During the period under review, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased from approximately one million people in the original 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan to 19.9 million people in 2025, indicating a significant expansion of the humanitarian crisis. However, the magnitude of this increase should be interpreted with caution. The original 2021 plan was prepared before the military coup and covered a narrower group of conflict-affected areas, whereas subsequent humanitarian plans were based on a broader nationwide assessment of needs. The increase therefore reflects not only the deterioration of humanitarian conditions but also the expansion of the geographical and analytical scope of humanitarian assessments. At the same time, the number of internally displaced persons grew more than fivefold, from approximately 690,000 at the end of 2021 to nearly 3.6 million by late 2025, a trend consistent with the geographical expansion of hostilities, repeated displacement, and continuing obstacles to safe and sustainable return.

Another important indicator is the overall increase in humanitarian funding requirements during the period under review (Figure 4). While approximately US\$276.5 million was required under the original 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan, the funding requirement reached US\$1.1 billion in 2025. Although the annual requirement declined temporarily from US\$826 million in 2022 to US\$764 million in 2023, the broader trajectory indicates a substantial expansion of the resources considered necessary for the coordinated humanitarian response. This increase occurred in the context of both growing humanitarian needs and the increasing complexity of humanitarian operations, including continuing hostilities, damage to infrastructure, restrictions on humanitarian access, and large-scale internal displacement. Despite methodological changes and annual fluctuations in funding requirements, the indicators taken together point to a substantial expansion of the humanitarian crisis over the period under review. The simultaneous increase in humanitarian needs, the scale of internal displacement, and the amount of financial resources required for the realisation of humanitarian programs, underscore the evolution of the humanitarian situation from a short-term emergency into a protracted crisis requiring long-term international commitment.

The presented quantitative data also provide a clearer understanding of the growing importance of non-governmental organisations in the humanitarian response. As humanitarian needs were increasing, the demands placed on the humanitarian response were becoming increasingly significant. In these circumstances, international humanitarian organizations, international human rights organizations and local civil society organizations assumed an increasingly important role in the provision of humanitarian assistance, documentation of human rights violations and support of affected communities. This quantitative assessment of humanitarian trends provides an empirical basis for the subsequent analysis of NGO activities.

3.6. Overview of major NGOs present in Myanmar

As demonstrated by the quantitative indicators presented in the previous section, the humanitarian situation in Myanmar has deteriorated significantly since the military coup of 2021. Non-governmental organisations have assumed an increasingly important role in responding to the growing humanitarian needs of the civilian population. This section provides an overview of the principal functional categories of NGOs and civil society organisations currently operating in Myanmar and examines their main areas of activity.

A wide range of international and local NGOs operate in Myanmar. However, their activities are often constrained by a number of factors, including security threats, restricted access to conflict zones, movement restrictions, and administrative barriers imposed by the military authorities (UN OCHA, 2025; International Crisis Group, 2021).

Non-governmental organisations operating in Myanmar can be divided into four broad and partly overlapping functional categories: humanitarian organizations, human rights organizations, development organizations, and local civil society organizations. Although their mandates are different, their activities often intersect in the context of a complex humanitarian situation.

Table 4. Types of NGOs Operating in Myanmar and Their Main Areas of Activity

Type of NGO	Examples	Main Activities
Humanitarian organizations	Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children, CARE International, World Vision, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Emergency medical care, food assistance, protection programmes, humanitarian relief, support for internally displaced persons, shelter, education, water and sanitation, and livelihood assistance
Human rights organizations	Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Fortify Rights	Documentation of human rights violations, monitoring, advocacy, reporting, international awareness
Development organizations	Mercy Corps, Helvetas Myanmar, Swisscontact	Education, livelihood support, community resilience, recovery programmes
Local civil society organizations (CSOs/CBOs)	Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN), Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)	Humanitarian aid distribution, community outreach, documentation of local needs and human rights violations, implementation of humanitarian projects, facilitating access to conflict-affected areas

Note: The categories are analytical rather than mutually exclusive. Some organisations conduct both emergency humanitarian and longer-term development activities, while some local civil society organisations also specialise in human rights documentation and advocacy.

Source: *Compiled by the author based on UN OCHA (2025), International Crisis Group (2021), Médecins Sans Frontières (2024a), Human Rights Watch (2025), and Fortify Rights (2024).*

As shown in Table 4, functions performed by NGOs in Myanmar extend far beyond the provision of humanitarian assistance. Besides delivering medical care and food assistance, they participate in

monitoring human rights violations, provide support to local communities, and contribute to maintaining the functioning of basic social services in areas most affected by the conflict.

One important category consists of international humanitarian organizations whose main task is to provide emergency assistance to populations affected by armed conflict. This group includes such organisations as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children, CARE International, World Vision, Danish Refugee Council, and Norwegian Refugee Council. Their activities include medical care, food assistance, protection programmes, shelter, education, water and sanitation, livelihood assistance, and support for displaced populations. DRC officially describes its activities in Myanmar as combining immediate humanitarian assistance with longer-term resilience support, while NRC identifies itself as a humanitarian organisation providing emergency assistance and protection to displaced populations. International humanitarian organisations often operate in collaboration with United Nations agencies and local partners in order to extend access to the most vulnerable groups of the population (UN OCHA, 2025; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024).

The second category includes human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Fortify Rights. They collect and analyse data on human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions, violence against civilians, restrictions on freedom of expression, and violations of international humanitarian law. The reports published by them are used by international organizations, research institutions, and accountability mechanisms to assess the situation in the country (Amnesty International, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2025; Fortify Rights, 2024).

The third category comprises development organizations whose work is aimed at strengthening community resilience and supporting long-term recovery. Despite the fact that after the 2021 military coup the implementation of development programs became much more challenging, some organisations still continue implementing projects related to education, livelihoods, psychosocial support, and community development where security conditions permit (International Crisis Group, 2021; UN OCHA, 2025). The distinction between humanitarian and development organisations is not always clear-cut, since several international NGOs combine emergency relief with resilience, recovery, and livelihood programmes. DRC, for example, describes its Myanmar response as including both humanitarian and development assistance.

A particularly important component of Myanmar's humanitarian landscape is the fourth category: local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs). Examples include the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), and Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN). Owing to their deep knowledge of the local context, close ties with local communities, and significant organizational flexibility, local organisations are often able to reach areas that remain inaccessible to many international NGOs. However, their access is not unrestricted, and they also face serious security, financial, legal, and administrative risks. OCHA has highlighted the frontline role of local responders, including CSOs, faith-based organisations, and volunteer networks, particularly in reaching communities inaccessible to international actors. The Myanmar Red Cross Society should not be classified as an NGO or ordinary civil society organisation because, as a National Red Cross Society, it has a distinct legal status as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. (Harvey et al., 2023; UN OCHA, 2025).

These characteristics have made local organizations increasingly important actors in the humanitarian response. As a result, international humanitarian organizations often rely on local partners to

implement projects, distribute aid, and maintain communication with affected communities. This approach reflects the humanitarian localization agenda, which promotes greater participation and leadership of national and local actors in humanitarian response (UN OCHA, 2025). According to KHRG, local organisations and ethnic service providers are among the principal providers of emergency assistance in many rural and displaced communities in south-eastern Myanmar (Karen Human Rights Group, 2022).

Despite the growing role of non-governmental organizations in the humanitarian response, their work faces numerous operational challenges. They face restricted access to conflict-affected areas, threats to the safety of their personnel, the destruction of transport and communications infrastructure, restrictions on banking operations, and administrative obstacles imposed by military authorities. Fragmented control over territory by the Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), and People's Defence Forces (PDFs) creates additional complications, making it necessary to negotiate access with different authorities and armed actors and significantly complicating the delivery of humanitarian aid (Harvey et al., 2023; UN OCHA, 2025).

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), humanitarian access to many areas of the country remains severely restricted due to ongoing fighting, insecurity, movement restrictions, and administrative requirements (UN OCHA, 2025).

The effectiveness of non-governmental organisations therefore depends not only on the resources available to them but also on their capacity to adapt to changing conditions, cooperate with local partners, and maintain access to affected populations. In this context, NGOs should be viewed not only as providers of humanitarian aid but also as important participants in the humanitarian governance system, sometimes supporting or temporarily substituting for essential services that weakened state institutions are unable to provide consistently.

3.7. Case Studies of Selected NGOs

While the previous section provided a general overview of the main categories of NGOs present in Myanmar, this kind of classification does not fully capture the specifics of their operations in the context of a protracted armed conflict. The organisations significantly differ in their mandates, areas of activity, applied strategies, and modes of interaction with local communities. A more detailed understanding of NGO roles therefore requires an analysis of individual organisational cases.

This section applies a multiple-case study approach to examine organisations operating in the same conflict environment but performing different tasks. The use of a common analytical framework makes it possible to identify common patterns and differences across the selected cases.

Although the previous section identified four categories of NGOs operating in Myanmar, this comparative analysis focuses on three organizations representing humanitarian, human rights, and local civil society actors. These categories were selected because they play direct but different roles in responding to the consequences of the armed conflict. Following the 2021 military coup, a number of development programmes and donor-funded initiatives were suspended, reduced, or redirected away from state institutions, while greater emphasis was placed on humanitarian assistance and support delivered through non-governmental and local actors (Coppel & Chang, 2024).

The selected organizations include Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), representing international humanitarian organizations; Fortify Rights, representing international human rights organizations; and the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), representing local civil society organizations. Together, these organizations illustrate different yet complementary models of NGO engagement in Myanmar's humanitarian response.

The empirical basis of the analysis is qualitative document analysis, including official reports of the abovementioned organisations, publications of the United Nations, materials provided by other international organisations, as well as academic research papers devoted to the conflict in Myanmar. To ensure comparability of results, each organization is analysed using a uniform framework that includes its mandate, core activities, specifics of its work in Myanmar, existing operational constraints, and its contribution to addressing the humanitarian needs of the population. Accordingly, this section moves beyond organisational description to compare different models of NGO engagement and assess how mandates, organisational structures, and operational mechanisms shape their effectiveness.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF): Humanitarian Healthcare in Conditions of Armed Conflict

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is one of the most illustrative examples of the work of international humanitarian organizations in Myanmar. The organisation was founded in 1971 and today is one of the largest international humanitarian organisations providing assistance to populations affected by armed conflicts, epidemics, and other emergency situations. MSF's work is based on the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, which allow the organisation to deliver help regardless of political affiliation, ethnic identity, or the position of recipients in relation to the parties to the conflict (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024a).

MSF has been operating in Myanmar since 1992. Even before the military coup, the organization was implementing programs to combat HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, as well as providing medical assistance to populations affected by long-lasting ethnic conflicts. After the 2021 events, the humanitarian needs of the population increased significantly as a consequence of the growing number of internally displaced persons, the destruction and disruption of medical infrastructure, and the deterioration of the healthcare system.

In these circumstances, MSF has continued to provide primary healthcare, sexual and reproductive healthcare, HIV and tuberculosis treatment, care for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and emergency referrals in different parts of the country (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024a). In 2024, MSF reported activities in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, Tanintharyi, and Yangon, although some projects had to be suspended because of escalating conflict and restrictions on movement.

Mobile medical teams and clinics play an important role in some areas, as they provide medical assistance where access to public health services has been severely disrupted or limited due to ongoing hostilities. For example, MSF operated 14 mobile clinics in northern Rakhine State before suspending its medical humanitarian activities in the townships of Rathedaung, Buthidaung, and Maungdaw in June 2024 because of escalating conflict and severe restrictions on humanitarian access (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024b).

This example illustrates one of the distinctive features of humanitarian organisations' functioning in the context of a modern internal armed conflict. Against the backdrop of weakening state institutions, international humanitarian organisations may partially perform functions normally provided through

public healthcare systems. In Myanmar's case, this has manifested primarily in providing the population with access to basic healthcare, treatment for communicable and chronic diseases, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and emergency medical referrals. MSF's role therefore extends beyond the delivery of emergency aid, as the organisation also contributes to maintaining a minimum level of healthcare provision where public services have deteriorated.

Despite its institutional capacity and commitment to humanitarian principles, MSF's activities remain heavily constrained by the conflict environment. Considering that different parts of the country are controlled or contested by different actors, including the Tatmadaw, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), and People's Defence Forces (PDFs), Médecins Sans Frontières must seek access and security guarantees from the relevant authorities and armed actors in the areas where it operates. Its ability to provide assistance is therefore partly dependent on decisions made by actors controlling access to the relevant territories.

This demonstrates the limitations of the principle of humanitarian neutrality in the context of a protracted internal armed conflict, as neutrality alone does not guarantee humanitarian access. Even highly experienced international humanitarian organizations lack complete freedom of action and are forced to adapt to constantly changing conditions on the ground, looking for a balance between preserving humanitarian principles and interacting with relevant parties to the conflict. Under international humanitarian law, humanitarian activities normally require the consent of the parties controlling the territory, although such consent should not be withheld arbitrarily where civilians are in need (ICRC, 2024).

In addition to political constraints, MSF also faces numerous practical challenges. Ongoing hostilities, damage to transport infrastructure, threats to the safety of medical personnel, interruptions in the supply of medicines, and administrative restrictions significantly complicate the implementation of humanitarian programs. MSF has reported attacks on its facilities, restrictions on staff movement, and the suspension of activities in several locations because of escalating violence. These constraints demonstrate that, even where financial resources and professional expertise are available, humanitarian effectiveness remains partly dependent on factors beyond an organisation's direct control.

This case study allows several broader conclusions to be drawn regarding the role of international humanitarian organizations in armed conflict. First, MSF's example demonstrates that the effectiveness of a humanitarian response is determined not only by the organization's resources but also by its ability to maintain humanitarian access to affected populations. Second, the organization's work demonstrates that international NGOs can partially compensate for the decline in state institutional capacity but cannot replace the functioning of public healthcare systems. Finally, MSF's experience demonstrates that even with strict adherence to the principles of humanitarian neutrality, the organization's capabilities remain dependent on the security situation and the decisions of actors controlling access.

Fortify Rights: Documenting Human Rights Violations and International Advocacy

In contrast to international humanitarian organisations whose main goal is direct assistance to affected populations, human rights organizations exercise their influence by documenting human rights violations, supporting accountability, and conducting national and international advocacy. One of the prominent organisations working in this direction in relation to Myanmar is Fortify Rights. Founded in 2013, the organisation specialises in human rights protection in Myanmar and other countries in

the region. Fortify Rights began its operations in Myanmar in 2013 and has since investigated serious human rights violations and mass atrocity crimes.

Fortify Rights' primary focus is documenting arbitrary detentions, extrajudicial executions, torture, forced displacement, attacks on civilians, and other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. To ensure the accuracy of the information, the organisation conducts interviews with survivors, eyewitnesses, and other relevant sources and analyses documentary, photographic, video, and other forms of evidence. It also collaborates with local human rights defenders and affected communities. Fortify Rights describes its approach as combining investigation, engagement with decision-makers, and the strengthening of human rights defenders.

Based on the collected data, Fortify Rights publishes analytical reports, news releases, legal analyses, private submissions, and advocacy materials. These publications are used to inform governments, United Nations representatives, journalists, civil society organisations, and accountability processes. It is therefore more accurate to state that its findings can inform international assessments and accountability efforts rather than that they are automatically used by all international organisations.

A particular feature of Fortify Rights' activities is that the organisation does not provide direct humanitarian assistance to affected populations. In contrast to Médecins Sans Frontières, its contribution to the response is indirect. The main purpose of the organisation is not to satisfy the immediate material needs of the population but to promote accountability through documenting violations, developing an evidence base, engaging decision-makers, and drawing international attention to the conflict. Thus, Fortify Rights' activities are primarily aimed at the political, legal, and human rights dimensions of the crisis.

However, the case study illustrates that documenting human rights violations is still an important component of the broader response to civilian harm. Although such activities do not immediately end violence or provide material assistance to civilians, they serve several important functions. First, independent documentation contributes to preserving evidence of possible international crimes and may support future legal proceedings. Second, it increases international awareness of current events. Third, publication and advocacy can contribute to political pressure and reduce the possibility that serious violations remain undocumented.

Human rights organisations can therefore contribute to the long-term protection of civilians, although their impact differs from the immediate effects of humanitarian assistance. The extent of that impact depends on whether states, international institutions, and judicial mechanisms act on the evidence and recommendations provided.

Unlike international humanitarian organizations, which seek to maintain working relations with relevant parties in order to preserve humanitarian access, Fortify Rights' relationship with Myanmar's military authorities is primarily critical and accountability-oriented. Publication of materials concerning violations allegedly committed by the Tatmadaw limits the organisation's ability to maintain a direct presence in military-controlled areas. Consequently, Fortify Rights relies extensively on research conducted outside inaccessible areas, cooperation with local human rights defenders, and testimony and evidence supplied by affected communities.

This demonstrates an important difference between humanitarian and human rights organizations: while the effectiveness of humanitarian organisations is often determined by their ability to maintain access through dialogue with relevant actors, for human rights organisations a key condition is

maintaining independence and the ability to document and publicly report violations regardless of the position of state bodies.

Such an operational model has both advantages and limitations. The organization's independence contributes to the credibility of its investigations. However, the lack of permanent physical access to some conflict areas, the need for thorough verification of information, and dependence on cooperation with local partners and witnesses complicate the documentation process. Furthermore, the effectiveness of international advocacy is largely determined by the willingness of states, international organisations, and judicial mechanisms to use the collected evidence when making political or legal decisions. Even high-quality documentation does not guarantee the immediate cessation of violations or a change in the behaviour of armed actors.

The Fortify Rights case highlights the distinctive contribution of human rights NGOs in armed conflict. Whereas humanitarian organisations directly mitigate immediate suffering, human rights organisations document violations, support accountability mechanisms, and increase international awareness. This comparison demonstrates that an effective response to civilian harm extends beyond the provision of life-saving assistance and also includes longer-term protection and accountability functions. Fortify Rights therefore performs a function that is distinct from, but potentially complementary to, direct humanitarian relief.

Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG): Local Civil Society and the Localization of Humanitarian Response

Local civil society organizations, whose activities are based on close interaction with the population and a deep understanding of the local context, occupy a special place in the humanitarian and human rights response in Myanmar. Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) is one of the best-known representatives of this category. The organisation began operating in 1992 with the purpose of documenting human rights violations in rural south-eastern Myanmar and supporting the rights of local populations affected by long-term armed conflict. KHRG describes itself as an independent, community-based and Karen-led human rights organisation operating across rural south-east Myanmar.

In contrast to many international organisations, KHRG's activities are carried out primarily by local staff and community members trained to document events in their own areas. This distinctive feature defines the organization's role in the response to the crisis in Myanmar.

KHRG's activities are based on the principle of community-based documentation, which involves the active participation of local residents in collecting information about current events. The organisation trains community members to document human rights violations using standardised reporting formats, conduct interviews with villagers, and prepare updates on conditions in their areas. Through this model, residents of conflict-affected areas become not only sources of information or recipients of external assistance but also active participants in documenting violations and claiming their rights.

Such an approach contributes to building trust between the organisation and the local population and allows KHRG to obtain information in areas where international organizations often have limited access.

Whereas international human rights organisations such as Fortify Rights generally use documentation to support international advocacy and accountability mechanisms, KHRG's work is more explicitly centred on villagers' perspectives, priorities, agency, and self-protection strategies. The collected information is used not only to prepare reports but also to communicate local needs and priorities to national and international decision-makers. KHRG distributes its reports to civil society organisations, United Nations actors, foreign governments, academics, journalists, and other relevant stakeholders.

In KHRG's operational model, documentation is not an end in itself but a means of supporting local communities and ensuring that villagers' perspectives influence humanitarian and human rights responses.

The examined case study illustrates the practical realisation of the principle of localization, which has become a crucial feature of the international humanitarian system in recent years. While international organisations may have limited access, local organisations can often maintain more continuous engagement with affected communities and rapidly adapt to changing conditions (Barbelet, 2018; Harvey et al., 2023). Owing to their knowledge of local languages, cultural characteristics, social structures, and conflict dynamics, KHRG and similar organisations may possess a level of community trust that is difficult to develop through short-term international missions.

This allows the organization to act as a bridge between affected communities and international humanitarian and human rights actors. However, KHRG should primarily be described as a local human rights organisation rather than as a direct humanitarian aid provider. Its main activities are documentation, reporting, advocacy, training, and support for villagers' rights-claiming and self-protection strategies.

However, the local character of the organisation also creates additional limitations. Compared with large international non-governmental organizations possessing greater financial, technical, and human resources, KHRG has more limited institutional resources and depends partly on external financial support. Its field researchers and community members also live and work in conditions of ongoing armed conflict, which increases the risks to their safety.

Their opportunities for evacuation or medical relocation may also be more limited than those available to international personnel (Trócaire, 2024). Hence, the sustainability of KHRG's activities is determined not only by its organizational effectiveness but also by the ability of local staff and communities to continue operating in the face of persistent security threats.

Overall, the Karen Human Rights Group example demonstrates that localization should not be viewed as a replacement for the activities of international humanitarian and human rights organisations but as a complementary model of response. While international NGOs may provide financial resources, technical expertise, and opportunities for international advocacy, local civil society organizations provide deep knowledge of the local context, community trust, and sustained access to information from conflict-affected areas.

The effectiveness of the broader response in Myanmar therefore depends not on the dominance of one category of organisation but on the combination of their different capacities and, where possible, effective cooperation between them. The analysed cases suggest that combining international resources and local capabilities may contribute to more effective and sustainable support for populations affected by protracted armed conflict.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that the current armed conflict in Myanmar is not only a consequence of the 2021 political crisis but also the result of a long historical process shaped by the colonial legacy, unresolved ethno-political contradictions, the institutional dominance of the armed forces, and the limited resilience of state institutions. The military coup intensified pre-existing structural problems, leading to a sharp escalation of the armed conflict and a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

The historical, quantitative, and empirical data examined in the current chapter indicate that, as the conflict evolved, the demands placed on the humanitarian response increased substantially. At the same time, the scale of humanitarian needs continued to grow, which increased the importance of non-governmental organizations as a key element of the humanitarian response system.

The conducted study also revealed that the activities of non-governmental organizations in Myanmar are not limited solely to providing humanitarian aid. Depending on the organisation's mandate, they perform a wide range of complementary functions, including the provision of medical care, the protection of human rights, the documentation of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, and support for local communities. In doing so, they help compensate, to a limited extent, for gaps in the provision of essential services and support to affected populations.

The analysis of individual case studies also suggested that the effectiveness of NGOs' work depends not only on the amount of available resources or the level of professional expertise but also on the specific characteristics of the conflict environment. Restrictions on humanitarian access, fragmentation of territorial control, threats to personnel safety, and administrative obstacles considerably affect the ability of organisations to implement their programmes, regardless of the type of organization. Under these conditions, cooperation between international and local organisations may play an important role, combining international resources and technical expertise with knowledge of the local context and culture, community trust, and more sustained access to conflict-affected areas.

Thus, the material presented in this chapter provides the empirical foundation for the subsequent analysis of the role of non-governmental organisations in the armed conflict in Myanmar. The historical background, humanitarian trends, and findings from the analysis of individual organisations provide a basis for moving beyond a description of the context in which these organisations operate and towards a comparative assessment of different humanitarian response models and an examination of the factors that determine the effectiveness of NGOs operating in a protracted armed conflict.

4. Analysis of the Role and Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in the Myanmar Conflict

The previous chapter examined the historical evolution of the Myanmar conflict, the humanitarian consequences of the 2021 military coup, and the activities of selected non-governmental organisations. Building on these findings, the present chapter moves beyond individual case studies to compare different models of NGO engagement and identify the factors influencing their effectiveness.

Particular attention is paid to the complementarity of humanitarian, human rights, and local civil society organisations, as well as to their broader contribution to humanitarian response in the context of a protracted internal armed conflict.

4.1. Comparative Analysis of NGO Responses to the Myanmar Conflict

The case studies presented in the previous chapter demonstrate that although Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Fortify Rights, and the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG) operate within the same armed conflict, they represent distinct models of NGO engagement. The comparison is structured around a common set of dimensions: organisational type, primary objective, beneficiaries, main activities, operational approach, strengths, challenges, and contribution to the humanitarian response. Given their different mandates, the purpose is not to rank the organisations directly, but to assess the strengths, limitations, and complementarity of their respective approaches.

Table 5. Comparative Characteristics of Selected NGOs Operating in Myanmar

Criterion	Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)	Fortify Rights	Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG)
Type of organisation	International humanitarian NGO	International human rights NGO	Local, community-based human rights organisation
Primary objective	Emergency medical and humanitarian assistance	Documentation of human rights violations and international advocacy	Community-based documentation and support for local communities
Main beneficiaries	Conflict-affected civilians, internally displaced persons (IDPs)	Survivors and communities affected by human rights violations, as well as actors involved in advocacy and accountability processes	Conflict-affected local communities

Main activities	Medical care, disease prevention, treatment of communicable and chronic diseases, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and mobile medical services	Monitoring and documentation of violations, legal analysis, advocacy	Community-based documentation, reporting of villagers' experiences and priorities, human rights training, advocacy, and liaison with international partners
Operational approach	Neutrality and humanitarian access	Independence, accountability and international advocacy	Localization, community participation and local presence
Main strengths	Medical expertise, emergency response capacity	Credible documentation and international influence	Local knowledge, trust and sustained access to communities
Main challenges	Maintaining humanitarian access and staff security	Restricted access, verification of information, and limited direct influence over the conduct of armed actors	Limited financial resources, dependence on external funding, security risks for local staff
Contribution to humanitarian response	Reduces immediate humanitarian suffering	Strengthens accountability and international awareness	Ensures that villagers' experiences, needs, and priorities are documented and communicated to national and international actors

Note: The categories reflect the organisations' primary mandates. Their activities may overlap, particularly in the fields of protection, advocacy, and communication with conflict-affected communities.

Source: *Compiled by the author based on Médecins Sans Frontières (2024a), Fortify Rights (2024), Karen Human Rights Group (n.d.), UN OCHA (2025), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2025).*

The three organisations examined also differ considerably in the geographical scope of their activities and the territorial contexts in which they operate. MSF runs programmes in several markedly different parts of Myanmar, including Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States, Tanintharyi Region, and Yangon. For this reason, the organisation has to adapt its operational approach to different conditions: from large urban centres to remote border areas affected by the military conflict, population displacement, infrastructure destruction, and restrictions on the freedom of movement. MSF's capacity to provide

medical assistance does not only depend on the scale of humanitarian needs, but also on access to specific communities or locations, safety of transportation routes, the conditions of medical infrastructure, and the positions of actors exercising control over specific territories (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024; UN OCHA, 2025).

Fortify Rights, in turn, has a broader thematic and geographical scope; however, its physical access to conflict-affected areas is limited. The organisation therefore relies on interviews with victims and witnesses, cooperation with local human rights defenders, and information obtained through local and cross-border networks. This approach enables Fortify Rights to document violations in different parts of the country even without a permanent presence in certain areas. However, the quality and completeness of the evidence collected depend on the availability of witnesses, the safety of local partners, and the organisation's ability to verify the information received (Fortify Rights, n.d.).

As for KHRG, its activities are predominantly concentrated in rural areas of south-eastern Myanmar, particularly in Karen-inhabited areas affected by prolonged armed conflict. The organisation's local, community-based structure enables it to maintain links with villages located in remote, contested, or non-government-controlled areas. The knowledge of local languages, settlement patterns, transportation routes, and relationship between communities and military actors increase KHRG's capacity to document developments at the local level and convey information about residents' needs (Karen Human Rights Group, n.d.).

Thus, the effectiveness of each of the three organisations is shaped to some extent by geographical conditions. The direct provision of medical assistance, remote investigation of human rights violations, and documentation at the local community level require different forms of territorial access, local presence, and knowledge of the specific context.

These geographical differences are closely connected to the organisations' distinct mandates and operational priorities. MSF is focused on meeting the immediate humanitarian needs of the population through the provision of medical care, treatment of communicable and chronic diseases, sexual and reproductive healthcare, and other essential medical services in areas where access to healthcare is limited. Fortify Rights, in contrast, does not normally deliver direct humanitarian assistance to affected communities, prioritizing the documentation of human rights violations, international advocacy, and the formation of an evidence base for future accountability mechanisms. In turn, KHRG combines community-based human rights documentation with direct engagement with local communities, paying special attention to recording villagers' experiences, priorities, and self-protection strategies and communicating them to national and international actors.

The distinction is necessary because KHRG's principal mandate is human rights documentation and advocacy rather than the direct delivery of humanitarian assistance or systematic humanitarian-needs assessment. KHRG officially describes its work as documenting villagers' testimonies and strengthening locally developed strategies through which communities claim their rights and protect their livelihoods.

The three organisations also differ in their operational approaches. MSF's work is based on medical ethics and the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, which are intended to facilitate humanitarian access, the provision of medical assistance according to need, and dialogue with parties to the conflict. Fortify Rights, in turn, relies primarily on independent, evidence-based investigations to document human rights violations and publicly report on the conduct of parties to the conflict.

KHRG's approach reflects key elements associated with localisation, including the sustained presence of local staff, strong community trust, and extensive knowledge of the local context.

Although neutrality may facilitate dialogue and access negotiations, it does not guarantee access. MSF has experienced movement restrictions, attacks on its facilities, and the suspension of activities in several parts of Myanmar.

However, the analysis shows that despite all the differences, some of the challenges faced by all three organisations are the same, even if to different degrees. Ongoing hostilities, restrictions on humanitarian or operational access, threats to personnel safety, administrative obstacles, and fragmentation of territorial control significantly complicate the work of both international and local non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, some other challenges differ in nature. For MSF, the principal obstacle is ensuring safe access to affected populations while maintaining humanitarian principles. The effectiveness of Fortify Rights is largely determined by its ability to obtain and verify reliable information and by the willingness of states and accountability institutions to act upon its findings. For KHRG, the greatest limitations arise from scarce financial resources, dependence on external funding, and ongoing risks to the safety of local staff and community-based researchers.

The comparison also indicates that the three organisational models are functionally complementary rather than directly competing. Medical assistance provided by MSF helps to reduce the immediate humanitarian consequences of the armed conflict. Fortify Rights contributes to international accountability by documenting human rights violations and drawing the attention of the international community to the crisis. KHRG, in turn, maintains sustained engagement with conflict-affected communities, documents villagers' experiences and priorities, and facilitates communication between local communities and national and international actors.

Together, these organisations illustrate a multi-layered model of response to civilian harm, in which international humanitarian organisations, international human rights organisations, and local civil society organisations perform distinct yet mutually reinforcing functions. Their experience suggests that the sustainability and effectiveness of the broader response in Myanmar depend not only on the volume of assistance provided but also on the ability of different categories of non-governmental organizations to combine their complementary capacities and, where cooperation occurs, work effectively with one another.

4.2. Thematic Synthesis: Sources and Analytical Framework

The comparison of different models of NGO activity makes it possible to identify differences in their mandates, approaches and direct contribution to humanitarian response. However, in order to identify the factors determining the effectiveness of the non-governmental sector in a broader sense, it is necessary to draw on the practical experience of international specialists and local actors directly participating in the provision of assistance in the context of armed conflict. To this end, this section employs a thematic synthesis of findings reported in published studies based on interviews with humanitarian practitioners.

The primary source for this analysis is the *Humanitarian Access SCORE Report: Myanmar*, published by Humanitarian Outcomes. The study combines the results of a telephone survey of 501 respondents affected by the conflict, conducted across all 15 states and regions of Myanmar in December 2022,

with 21 interviews with representatives of national and international humanitarian organisations, donor agencies and the expert community. The researchers also conducted interviews and consultations with staff from ten local organisations engaged in humanitarian activities in Myanmar (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 2).

An additional source for the analysis is a study on the localisation of humanitarian assistance conducted by Tamas Wells, Anne Décobert, and an anonymous researcher from Myanmar. Its empirical base includes interviews with 25 heads of Myanmar civil society organisations and 10 representatives of international aid agencies, conducted between late 2022 and early 2023. Special attention in the study is paid to humanitarian access, relations between international and local organisations, donor requirements and the distribution of responsibilities within the humanitarian system.

The analysis additionally incorporates a written submission by the Karen Human Rights Group, devoted to the humanitarian situation in south-eastern Myanmar. Although this document is not an interview-based study in its own right, it reflects the perspective of a local organisation operating in conflict-affected communities and makes it possible to compare the findings derived from the interviews with the institutional assessment of a local human rights organisation (Karen Human Rights Group, 2022).

During the analysis, the published findings and participants' statements were organised into four thematic categories: humanitarian access and operational adaptation; local embeddedness, community trust, and population reach; funding, bureaucratic requirements, and risk distribution; and the criteria used to assess the effectiveness of humanitarian response. As this study did not have access to the original interview transcripts, the analysis does not involve the independent coding of primary interview data. Instead, it is based on the findings, interpretations, and anonymised quotations published by the authors of the selected studies. The four themes and their relationship to humanitarian effectiveness are summarised in Table 6.

Table 6. Analytical Framework for the Thematic Synthesis

Theme	Main analytical question	Key factors identified	Implication for effectiveness
Humanitarian access and operational adaptation	Can organisations reach affected populations in practice?	Territorial control, administrative restrictions, discreet delivery methods, local procurement and cash transfers	Effectiveness depends on actual access and the ability to adapt operations
Local embeddedness, community trust and population reach	How does sustained local presence influence assistance?	Contextual knowledge, social networks, trust, contact with displaced populations	Local embeddedness improves needs identification and enables sustained access
Funding, bureaucracy and risk distribution	Are institutional procedures compatible with conflict	Unstable funding, reporting requirements,	Sustainability requires flexible funding, adapted accountability

	conditions?	financial restrictions and security risks	and risk mitigation
Criteria for assessing effectiveness	How should humanitarian performance be evaluated?	Operational reach, contextual relevance and institutional sustainability	Quantitative indicators should be supplemented by qualitative assessment

Source: Compiled by the author based on Harvey et al. (2023), Wells et al. (2023), and Karen Human Rights Group (2022).

4.3. Humanitarian access and the adaptation of operational approaches

The first recurring theme identified in the published studies concerns the distinction between the formal presence of humanitarian organisations and their actual capacity to reach populations in the most severely affected areas. Following the military coup, registered international organisations continued operating primarily in urban centres, officially recognised internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and areas to which access was authorised by the military authorities. By contrast, a substantial proportion of humanitarian needs emerged in rural, border, and contested areas, where the continuous presence of international staff was constrained by security risks and administrative restrictions (Harvey et al., 2023, pp. 6–11).

To demonstrate how territorial conditions shape humanitarian intervention in practice, the following analysis compares several regions characterised by different configurations of conflict, physical geography, organisational presence, and access mechanisms.

Particularly difficult conditions have developed in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, Kayah, and Karen States, as well as in Sagaing and Magway Regions. In these areas, control over cities, rural areas, and transportation routes is divided between Myanmar’s armed forces, ethnic armed organisations, and the People’s Defence Forces formed after the coup. At the same time, territorial lines of control remain unstable and may shift as a result of military offensives and agreements between armed actors. As a result, humanitarian organisations do not operate within a unified national access system, but within several parallel systems of territorial governance. The ability to deliver assistance significantly depends on which actor controls a particular settlement, road, or border route, as well as on the stability of that control (ACLED, 2026a, 2026b; Harvey et al., 2023; UNHCR, 2026).

In Rakhine State, the territorial balance shifted substantially following the military successes of the Arakan Army from late 2023 onwards. By 2026, the Arakan Army controlled most of the state, including the majority of its coastline and the border with Bangladesh, while the Myanmar armed forces continued to hold several strategically important areas, particularly Sittwe and Kyaukphyu. The confrontation concerns not only military control over territory, but also authority over local governance, population movements, major roads, ports, and access to the coast. Armed hostilities and restrictions on movement significantly hinder the provision of assistance. Nevertheless, Médecins Sans Frontières maintains mobile medical teams in Sittwe and Maungdaw. They provide basic medical assistance and organise emergency medical referrals for patients from different communities, including people forcibly confined in camps. Therefore, international presence in Rakhine State

remains limited and is represented mainly by mobile medical teams whose activities depend on security conditions, movement permits, and the ability to reach specific communities (ACLED, 2026d; Médecins Sans Frontières, n.d.).

In Kachin and Shan States, the conditions for humanitarian intervention are complicated by the mountainous terrain, proximity to the Chinese border, and the presence of several ethnic armed organisations. In northern Shan State, control over cities and transport corridors is divided between the armed forces of Myanmar, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Kachin Independence Army, and other actors. Some of these territories have strategic significance due to their location along roads connecting central Myanmar with the Chinese border. In Kachin State, the conflict between the Myanmar armed forces and the Kachin Independence Army continues, including fighting for control of strategically important settlements and routes. MSF maintains its operations in Kachin and Shan States, including assistance to patients with HIV and tuberculosis. Similar programmes are implemented in Tanintharyi Region. The sustainability of such programmes is greatly dependent on the accessibility of medical facilities, the safety of roads, and the ability to move staff, medicines, and patients across territories controlled by different actors (ACLED, 2026a, 2026c; Médecins Sans Frontières, n.d.).

Mandalay Region, by contrast, represents a somewhat different model of humanitarian presence. In addition to conflict-related needs in its northern townships, the region became a major focus of humanitarian operations following the March 2025 earthquake. Its urban infrastructure and central location also make Mandalay an important logistical and coordination hub from which organisations can support operations in neighbouring conflict-affected areas. Consequently, the relatively high number of formally reported humanitarian partners in Mandalay should not be interpreted solely as evidence of greater direct access to affected communities. It also reflects earthquake-response activities, the concentration of organisational infrastructure, and the region's role as a base for wider humanitarian operations (UN OCHA, 2025; UN OCHA, 2026a).

Another approach to humanitarian intervention has emerged in the rural areas of south-eastern Myanmar along the border with Thailand, including Karen State, much of Kayah State, and parts of Tanintharyi Region. Here, the protracted conflict is related to demands for ethnic autonomy, the activities of ethnic armed organisations, and attempts by the military authorities to preserve administrative and military control. Control over cross-border bases, roads, and sections of the international border plays a key role because it affects the movement of people, military resources, and humanitarian aid. In the context of limited access for international organisations, a substantial share of humanitarian assistance is provided by local organisations, ethnic service providers, and healthcare workers who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (ACLED, 2025; Karen Human Rights Group, 2024).

The Karen Department of Health and Welfare, together with the Back Pack Health Worker Team, Mae Tao Clinic, and the Burma Medical Association, provides medical care predominantly to displaced people. They operate mobile clinics, conduct vaccination programmes, and provide emergency medical services. In remote areas, doctors and other healthcare workers who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement not only provide medical assistance but also train local residents in basic healthcare skills. In Tanintharyi Region, the local healthcare system is partly supported by the Karen Department of Health and Welfare and privately funded clinics. Their activities, however, are constrained by shortages of medicines, transport barriers, military checkpoints, and risks associated with delivering medical supplies from Thailand (Karen Human Rights Group, 2024).

Besides medical care, local organisations also perform other humanitarian functions. The Karen Office for Relief and Development, the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People, and the Karen Women's Organisation deliver food, emergency shelter materials, and other essential support to displaced families. In addition, the Karen Women's Organisation and the Karen Department of Health and Welfare provide specialised assistance to women, mothers, and children. In the field of education, schools affiliated with the Karen Education and Culture Department operate alongside self-funded community schools. Hence, the humanitarian system of south-eastern Myanmar is not represented by a single leading organisation, but by a functionally diverse network of local actors providing medical, food, shelter, educational, and specialised support. At the same time, this assistance remains irregular and insufficient due to limited funding, logistical barriers, and security threats (Karen Human Rights Group, 2025, 2026).

Following the 2021 coup, Sagaing and Magway also became major areas of conflict, although they had not previously been key centres of ethnic armed insurgency. In these regions, the Myanmar armed forces confront numerous local People's Defence Forces and other resistance organisations. Sagaing links the country's central regions with Kachin State and the north-western border, while Magway lies between central Myanmar, Chin State, and Rakhine State. Control over roads, cities, and rural areas allows armed actors to move personnel and resources, maintain their own governance networks, and restrict the activities of the opposing side. Military activity in both regions continued in 2026, with Magway also affected by the expansion of Arakan Army operations beyond Rakhine State (ACLED, 2026b, 2026d).

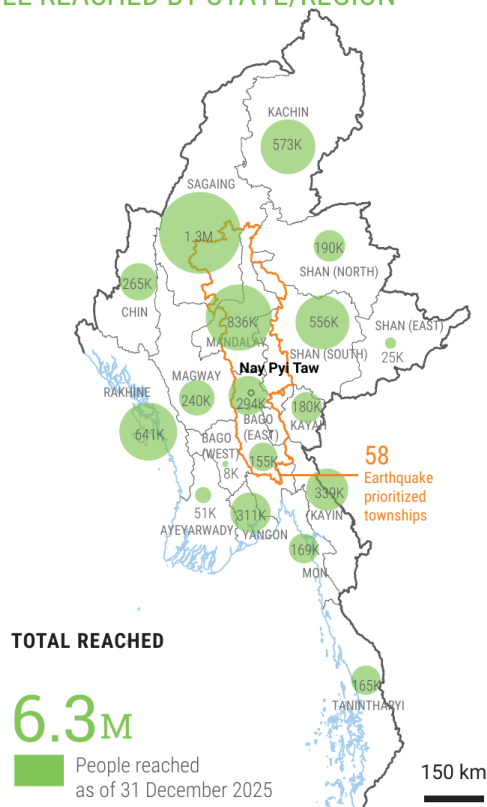
In Sagaing, Magway, and other areas characterised by fragmented or shifting control, officially registered international organisations have limited direct access. In such circumstances, assistance is often provided through community groups, volunteer networks, local businesses, religious organisations, and local intermediaries. Names and activity details of such groups might not be published openly, as disclosure of information about staff, routes, and aid recipients might create risks of persecution or the confiscation of resources. The Humanitarian Outcomes study demonstrates that in areas controlled by resistance forces or contested zones, discreet and low-visibility aid delivery mechanisms are applied, including cash transfers, local procurement, cooperation with commercial actors, and discreet support for local organisations from the international humanitarian sector. Although the study does not limit these practices exclusively to Sagaing and Magway, these mechanisms are likely to be particularly important in areas characterised by intense conflict and limited international presence (Harvey et al., 2023).

Overall, these regional examples illustrate that humanitarian intervention in Myanmar does not constitute a unified national system. In areas where international organisations maintain official or semi-official presence, assistance is primarily delivered through clinics, mobile medical teams, and specialised programmes. In remote border and contested areas, the primary operational role is often played by local organisations, ethnic service providers, healthcare workers affiliated with the Civil Disobedience Movement, and cross-border networks. These actors have deep knowledge of the territory, local languages, and informal routes, but they also bear higher risks and depend on less stable funding. Therefore, the nature of humanitarian assistance is determined not only by the scale of needs but also by the configuration of territorial control, the characteristics of physical geography, proximity to international borders, and the capacity of individual organisations to maintain safe and continuous access to affected populations (Harvey et al., 2023; Karen Human Rights Group, 2024; UN OCHA, 2026b).

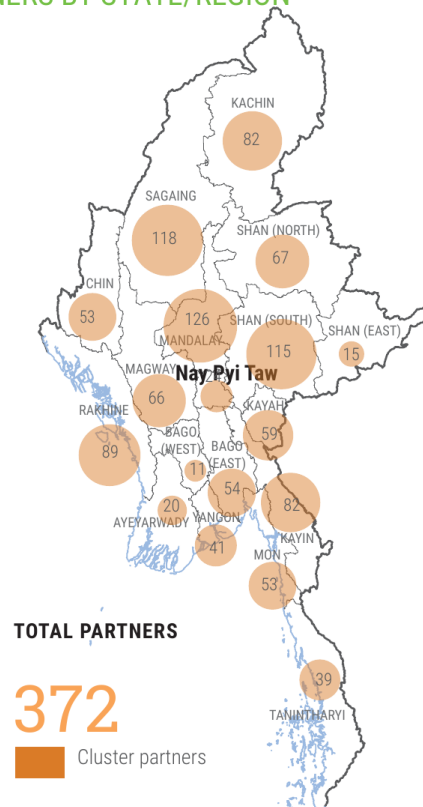
The regional variation in humanitarian access and delivery models described above can be compared with the most recent complete annual data on formally reported humanitarian presence and population reach. Figure 5 presents the number of humanitarian partners and people reached by state and region between January and December 2025. Although the dashboard was published in 2026, the maps refer to humanitarian activities reported during 2025 and should therefore be interpreted as a recent snapshot rather than a complete representation of the situation throughout 2026.

Figure 5. People Reached and Reported Humanitarian Partners by State and Region in Myanmar, 2025

PEOPLE REACHED BY STATE/REGION



PARTNERS BY STATE/REGION



Source: UN OCHA (2026a), *Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025: Quarter Four Dashboard (January–December 2025)*, p. 2.

Figure 5 shows that both reported humanitarian presence and population reach are distributed unevenly across Myanmar. However, the number of partners recorded in a particular state or region should not be interpreted as a direct measure of continuous humanitarian access. The maps do not distinguish between assistance implemented directly by international organisations and activities carried out through national, local, ethnic, or cross-border partners. They may also underrepresent discreet and informal operations in contested or resistance-controlled areas. Moreover, the relatively high reported presence in Mandalay partly reflects the large-scale response to the March 2025 earthquake and the region's role as an important logistical and coordination centre. The maps should therefore be read as an overview of formally reported humanitarian activity rather than as a complete representation of the actors and delivery mechanisms operating in each region.

These limitations are also reflected in the survey evidence concerning the channels through which assistance reached conflict-affected populations. The findings confirm that a significant share of humanitarian aid was provided through informal and local channels. Only 6% of recipients reported receiving support directly from actors belonging to the formal humanitarian sector, including international and national NGOs, UN agencies, and components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Instead, respondents most frequently identified local community groups, volunteer initiatives, and local businesses as their primary sources of assistance (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 13).

These data, however, do not preclude the involvement of international organisations in funding or coordinating individual local initiatives. Humanitarian Outcomes notes that a portion of assistance could be delivered through behind-the-scenes partnerships between international organisations and local groups. For security reasons, information about such arrangements was not always disclosed, which makes it difficult to quantitatively estimate the actual contribution of international actors. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that the registration of an organisation and its inclusion in official operational presence lists do not necessarily indicate that it is able to reach populations in the most dangerous areas on a regular basis (Harvey et al., 2023, pp. 13–14).

Interviews with representatives of local organisations illustrate that maintaining humanitarian access required substantial changes to established operational approaches. The organisations removed identifying signs from their offices, closed their official premises, abandoned formal registration, or minimised direct contact with the military authorities. Depending on who exercised control over a particular area, organisations relied on negotiation, avoided direct engagement, or concealed the humanitarian nature of certain operations. One respondent described the conditions under which humanitarian assistance was delivered as follows:

“It is very dangerous. If they [army] find you, they will kill you. So, we use many different ways. We go by multiple smaller stages.” (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 14).

This quotation suggests that, in this context, operational adaptation was motivated not by a desire to simplify or reduce the cost of humanitarian operations, but by the need to mitigate the immediate risks to humanitarian personnel and aid recipients. The transportation of humanitarian supplies could be divided into several smaller stages, carried out through private companies, or presented externally as ordinary commercial deliveries. In areas where the transportation of humanitarian supplies posed particularly high risks, organisations increasingly relied on cash transfers, vouchers, local procurement, and networks of local financial intermediaries (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 14).

Operational adaptability therefore constitutes one of the central prerequisites for effective humanitarian action. It involves the capacity to adapt organisational presence, delivery routes, resource transfer mechanisms, and communication channels in response to local conditions. However, no single operational approach can be applied equally effectively across all regions of the country, as operational possibilities depend on patterns of territorial control, relations among armed actors, and the level of risk that can be accepted.

These adaptations also create additional methodological and managerial challenges. The less visible a humanitarian operation must remain, the more difficult it becomes to document its scale, monitor the distribution of resources, and apply standard external monitoring procedures. In this context, the absence of comprehensive public information does not necessarily indicate inaction or insufficient accountability. Rather, it may represent a deliberate measure intended to protect humanitarian staff, local partners, and aid recipients.

The Humanitarian Outcomes study identifies several ways in which international organisations adapted to these constraints. Some sought to maintain their registration and official presence while continuing negotiations with the military authorities to expand their operational space. Others adopted a dual-track approach, combining officially authorised programmes with discreet support for local partners. Still others reduced their physical presence within the country and supported cross-border operations and local networks from neighbouring countries (Harvey et al., 2023, pp. 16–17).

Accordingly, humanitarian access should not be understood as a fixed condition that an organisation either possesses or lacks, but as a continuously revised outcome of negotiations, adaptation, and risk management. Effectiveness is determined not only by geographical reach, but also by the ability to continue operational activity when front lines and political conditions change.

4.4. Local presence, community trust, and population reach

Local embeddedness constitutes a distinct source of humanitarian capacity that develops through sustained involvement in the social environment of affected communities. It encompasses knowledge of local languages, social relationships, informal norms of interaction, and shifts in territorial control, as well as established networks connecting organisations with displaced and hard-to-reach populations. Unlike temporary project-based presence, this capacity accumulates over time and enables local actors to identify emerging needs, obtain timely information on new displacement movements, reach groups located outside official camps, and adapt assistance without relying exclusively on lengthy centralised assessment procedures.

The practical importance of such embeddedness is particularly noticeable when comparing the formal geographical distribution of humanitarian presence with the actual displacement patterns of affected populations. In an interview published by Humanitarian Outcomes, a representative of one of the local civil society organisations described the issue as follows:

“Now the NGOs that help are in the city only, but the people are in the forest. As the conflict increases, people are pushed away.” (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 15).

The respondent's statement highlights the importance of sustained connections with displaced communities. Organizations rooted in the local social environment are able to maintain contact with the population even when people have been displaced from their usual places of residence and find themselves outside the formal humanitarian infrastructure. Their advantage lies in maintaining social ties that extend beyond a particular office, an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, or the predefined boundaries of a project implementation area.

In addition, local embeddedness affects the quality of information used when designing humanitarian projects. Formalised humanitarian needs assessments often require considerable time and may quickly become outdated in situations of continuous population displacement. Local organisations obtain data through constant interaction with the population and are able to take into account developments that have not yet been reflected in official statistics. This allows organisations to identify and prioritise community needs more accurately and reduces the probability of mistargeting assistance.

However, the existence of social ties alone does not guarantee effective engagement with affected populations. A central role is played by trust. It develops gradually and depends on the consistency

of an organisation's actions, its reputation, and its ability to remain accountable to the community beyond the duration of individual funding cycles. As one of the leaders of a Myanmar-based organisation explained:

“Trust-building does not happen overnight ... If we want to support, help, and work together with [communities], we need to go beyond the project.” (Wells et al., 2023, p. 3).

This statement demonstrates that trust cannot be built simply by formally launching a humanitarian programme. A short-term project cycle typically involves predefined timelines, performance indicators, and funding arrangements, while trust-building with local communities requires more consistent interaction. Local organisations therefore often possess a comparative advantage based not on the scale of their available resources, but on their accumulated experience and sustained local presence.

Trust has direct practical significance. It increases the population's willingness to communicate their needs, participate in projects and to provide information on changes in the operational environment. It is especially important when working with people who experience repeated displacement, are not registered in official camps, and are cautious about contact with large organisations. Trust enables local actors to identify vulnerable groups that might otherwise remain beyond the reach of humanitarian assistance.

Moreover, trusting relationships contribute to a more accurate understanding of which forms of assistance are both appropriate and necessary in a particular locality. Standardised programmes do not always account for differences in livelihoods, household structures, local economic conditions, and perceptions of risk. The involvement of organisations with a deep understanding of the local social environment makes it possible to adapt programme design, resource allocation mechanisms, and communication strategies to the specific circumstances of each community.

However, the central role of local organisations in programme implementation does not mean that they occupy an equal position within the international humanitarian system. Following the military coup, international organisations were often unable to operate independently in certain areas and therefore had to delegate greater decision-making authority over day-to-day operational matters to their local partners. Local organisations were responsible for determining safe routes, assistance delivery mechanisms, and modes of engagement with affected communities. However, where their activities were funded through the international humanitarian system, control over resource allocation, overall strategic priorities, and reporting requirements often remained with donors and international intermediaries. Wells et al. describe this contradiction as the *conflict paradox*: while conditions of the armed conflict expanded the operational autonomy of local actors, they did not necessarily lead to a redistribution of institutional power. Organisations integrated into international humanitarian assistance chains may therefore assume greater responsibility for programme implementation without acquiring comparable influence over programme design and funding.

The effectiveness of localisation should not, therefore, be assessed solely by the number of programmes implemented through local actors. A more significant indicator would be the level of their participation in identifying needs, setting priorities, designing programmes, and assessing acceptable levels of risk. Using local networks solely as a mechanism for delivering humanitarian assistance neither ensures equitable partnership nor allows the full benefits of local embeddedness to be realised.

In summary, localisation can enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian response through the combination of context-specific knowledge, strong community ties, and the trust of affected

populations. These characteristics enable organisations to identify needs more accurately and maintain engagement with communities experiencing repeated displacement. However, their practical value depends on whether local organisations have sufficient influence over the decisions that shape the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes. The gap between operational responsibility and participation in decision-making is closely linked to the arrangements governing funding, accountability, and risk-sharing, which are examined in the following subsection.

4.5. Funding, Bureaucratic Requirements, and Risk Distribution

The third theme concerns the financial sustainability of local organisations and the extent to which donor procedures are compatible with the realities of armed conflict. The local organisations interviewed by Humanitarian Outcomes relied significantly on domestic donations, support from diaspora communities, and small informal sources of funding. Only some of them received stable project funding from the formal humanitarian sector. Among the principal barriers, respondents identified complex application procedures, overly restrictive funding conditions, and reporting requirements that were difficult to follow while operating discreetly (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 15).

Unpredictable funding not only limits the scale of programmes but also their continuity. The local organizations reported that the resources available to them were insufficient to meet even the needs of the communities with which they maintained regular contact, while new waves of internal displacement increased the number of potential aid recipients, making the gap even more noticeable. Dependence on small donations rather than stable institutional funding made the continuity of humanitarian activities a major concern (Harvey et al., 2023, p. 16).

The challenge lies not only in the amount of funding available but also in the rules governing its provision. International donors are obliged to monitor expenditures, prevent the diversion of resources to armed actors, and demonstrate compliance with financial accountability requirements. However, procedures designed for more stable operating environments are not always appropriate and may create additional risks under conditions of military control.

The study by Wells et al. shows that standard procurement and reporting requirements, including the maintenance of beneficiary lists, supplier documentation, and procurement records, can expose humanitarian networks to military scrutiny. The authors describe a case in which medicines held in a local pharmacy were destroyed and the pharmacy itself was forced to close after its name was discovered in documentation retained for a project's financial audit (Wells et al., 2023, p. 2).

Such cases illustrate that strict compliance with formal reporting requirements does not necessarily equate to effective humanitarian governance. While fully eliminating reporting practices would increase the risk of resource diversion, the mechanical application of standard accountability procedures may endanger humanitarian staff, suppliers, and aid recipients. Financial accountability therefore remains essential, but its modalities must be adapted to conflict settings, for example by reducing the amount of identifying information collected, introducing more flexible approaches to expenditure verification, and ensuring secure methods of information storage.

Additional challenges arise from the use of formal banking systems. Financial controls, restrictions on bank transfers, and the risk of exposing information about aid recipients often force organisations to rely on alternative mechanisms for transferring funds such as individual transfers, the delivery of

cash through trusted intermediaries, transfers to local agents and vendors, and the use of informal financial service providers. Although these mechanisms enable humanitarian operations to continue, they also make it more difficult to scale up programmes and comply with the standard requirements of international donors (Harvey et al., 2023, pp. 15–16).

The written submission by the Karen Human Rights Group summarises the principal demands of local organisations as follows:

“What they currently need is not capacity building, but funds, inclusion in decision-making, the removal of barriers, and assistance with the mitigation of risk.” (Karen Human Rights Group, 2022, p. 8)

KHRG's position highlights that, for many local organisations, the key challenge lies not in a lack of experience or capacity, but in limited access to resources and decision-making processes. Improving the effectiveness of humanitarian response therefore requires not only capacity-building initiatives, but also more direct funding, the reduction of bureaucratic barriers, and the meaningful participation of local actors in setting humanitarian priorities.

This issue is closely related to the distribution of risk. Where humanitarian activities are implemented through local networks in areas with limited international presence, local actors directly face the risks associated with transporting resources, storing sensitive documentation, interacting with authorities, and operating in contested territories. As a result, increased localisation may involve not only the localisation of humanitarian assistance but also the localisation of risk (Karen Human Rights Group, 2022, pp. 8–9).

The expansion of projects implemented through local organisations should therefore not be regarded, in itself, as evidence of successful localisation. Assessing the quality of humanitarian partnerships requires examining whether the transfer of operational responsibility is accompanied by adequate funding, meaningful participation in decision-making, and the provision of resources necessary to mitigate the risks borne by local actors.

4.6. Criteria for Assessing the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Response

Particular attention should be paid to the applicability of conventional quantitative indicators when assessing the effectiveness of humanitarian response. Indicators such as the number of operating organisations, the volume of funding and the number of beneficiaries reached do not always reflect the actual ability of humanitarian organisations to reach communities in areas with the most acute humanitarian needs.

Operational-presence data may include formally registered organisations that have indicated their readiness to carry out activities in a particular territory but do not necessarily implement programmes there regularly. Moreover, a significant portion of resources may be concentrated in more accessible urban centres, while rural and contested areas remain beyond the effective reach of humanitarian assistance. Consequently, an increase in formal humanitarian presence does not necessarily translate into a proportional expansion of actual humanitarian access (Harvey et al., 2023, pp. 6–7, 13–16).

Based on the materials analysed, three interrelated dimensions of effectiveness can be identified.

The first dimension is operational effectiveness, defined as an organisation's ability to reach affected populations in practice and to sustain the delivery of humanitarian assistance as conditions change. Formal presence without the capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance safely and engage with affected populations has limited practical value.

The second dimension is contextual relevance. The approaches applied to deliver assistance and the content of humanitarian programmes should correspond to local needs, patterns of territorial control, and existing social conditions. A standardised programme may receive substantial funding, but this may not translate into concrete results if it fails to take into account the realities of a particular region.

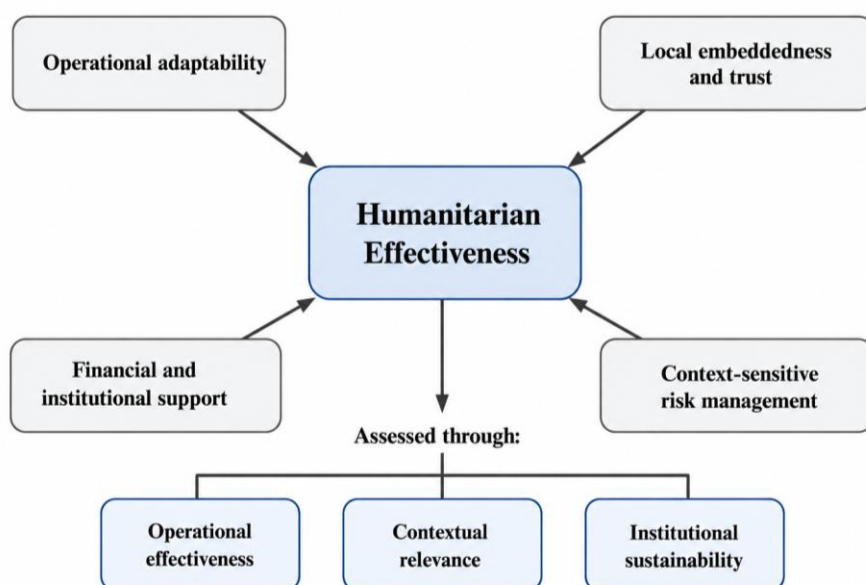
The third dimension is institutional sustainability, which comprises stable funding, the safety of the personnel involved, efficient mechanisms of risk management, and the capacity to maintain operational activity over the long term. A local organisation might successfully reach hard-to-access communities through informal networks while remaining highly vulnerable because of unstable funding. By contrast, large international organisations might possess substantial resources while having limited access to populations beyond government-controlled areas.

In addition, the number of beneficiaries reached should be considered alongside the regularity and comprehensiveness of assistance. According to the SCORE Report, a substantial portion of the aid was delivered in the form of food and cash assistance. Other needs, including medical care, protection, accommodation, education, and sanitation services, were not always met. The number of recipients alone is therefore insufficient to assess the comprehensiveness and sustainability of the humanitarian response.

Finally, the assessment should take into consideration the balance between transparency and security. Standard monitoring requirements imply detailed documentation of operational activity. However, under conditions of repression, disclosure of information about routes, partners, and recipients may increase safety risks. Accordingly, the absence of comprehensive publicly available information should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of a lack of results. Under certain circumstances, limiting the availability of information constitutes a necessary component of risk management.

Taken together, the number of operating organisations, the volume of funding and population coverage remain important indicators, but they are not sufficient to assess effectiveness accurately. It is also necessary to consider organisations' capacity to provide timely, relevant, and continuous assistance under political, territorial, and security constraints.

Figure 6. Factors Shaping the Effectiveness of Humanitarian Response in Myanmar



Source: Author's elaboration based on the thematic synthesis presented in Section 4.2.

4.7. Key Findings from the Thematic Synthesis

The thematic synthesis conducted in this section demonstrates that the effectiveness of humanitarian response in Myanmar depends on several interconnected factors. The capacity to provide humanitarian assistance depends not only on the availability of resources and organisational capacity but also on the ability to adapt operational approaches to the evolving dynamics of the conflict, maintain connections with local communities, and operate under conditions of limited access. None of these factors alone is sufficient to ensure effectiveness. Operational flexibility requires a deep understanding of the local context, while local embeddedness cannot be sustained without adequate financial and institutional support.

The findings reveal a significant gap between the formal presence of humanitarian organisations and their actual capabilities. In the hardest-to-reach areas, assistance is often provided through local civil society organisations, volunteer networks, private suppliers, and other informal mechanisms. Such approaches allow NGOs to maintain operational activity where direct international engagement is impossible. However, they may reduce operational transparency and complicate the application of standard monitoring procedures. The scarcity of publicly available information may therefore reflect the need to protect organisations, their partners, and aid recipients rather than an absence of operational activity.

Local actors play a key role in Myanmar's humanitarian system. Their close ties with the population, combined with a deep understanding of local social networks and established community trust, enable them to identify changing needs more rapidly and adapt assistance to local conditions. Nevertheless, the expansion of their operational role is not always accompanied by greater influence over strategic

decisions. While local organisations may be responsible for day-to-day activities such as selecting routes, determining delivery methods, and interacting with local communities, core elements of humanitarian programmes, including their principal objectives, funding, and reporting requirements, often remain within the remit of international actors. Thus, localisation remains incomplete when the delegation of operational responsibility is not accompanied by a corresponding redistribution of resources and decision-making authority.

Financial and bureaucratic mechanisms also have a direct impact on organisations' capacity to maintain their work. Dependence on short-term and irregular funding limits the continuity of programmes, while standard documentation requirements and financial controls may create additional threats in circumstances of military oversight. This does not entail abandoning accountability but points instead to the need to adapt accountability mechanisms to conflict-affected environments. Likewise, the delegation of tasks to local partners should be accompanied by appropriate risk-mitigation measures rather than simply an expansion of their responsibilities.

Overall, the results of the analysis reveal that the most effective models of humanitarian response are based on the combination of the complementary capacities of different types of actors. International organisations are able to provide funding, technical expertise, and access to international mechanisms, while local actors can rely on a thorough understanding of the context, community trust, and sustained channels of interaction with affected populations. The effectiveness of humanitarian response in Myanmar therefore depends less on the dominance of any single category of actor than on the quality of cooperation between international and local organisations under conditions of ongoing armed conflict.

5. Future Prospects for the Conflict and NGO Engagement in Myanmar

The protracted armed conflict in Myanmar is characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, fragmentation of territorial control, and changing relations between the military authorities, ethnic armed organisations and other resistance forces. In such circumstances, the future development of the humanitarian situation should be examined in close relation to potential changes in the conflict's political and military dynamics.

Building on the findings of Chapter 4, the analysis also considers how different conflict trajectories could alter the relative roles, operational advantages, constraints, and forms of cooperation of international and local organisations.

This chapter aims to analyse possible trajectories of the conflict's development and estimate their potential impact on the humanitarian needs of the population and the activity of international and local NGOs. Special attention is drawn to how shifts in territorial control, intensity of hostilities, institutional potential of various political actors and conditions of humanitarian access may shape aid-delivery mechanisms, the distribution of roles between international and local organisations, and the long-term sustainability of the humanitarian response.

This chapter employs qualitative scenario analysis. The objective is to identify several plausible scenarios and systematically examine their humanitarian and organisational implications rather than forecast a single predetermined outcome of the conflict. Such an approach allows us to take into consideration the complexity and territorial heterogeneity of the conflict, as well as avoid the straightforward projection of current trends into the future.

First, the methodological foundations of scenario analysis and the criteria for comparing possible conflict trajectories are examined. The chapter then analyses the main scenarios for the evolution of the situation and their likely implications for the scale of humanitarian needs and the operating conditions of non-governmental organisations. Based on this analysis, recommendations are formulated for international donors, humanitarian organisations, and local civil society actors.

5.1. Methodological Approach to Assessing the Conflict's Future Development

Scenario analysis is a research method designed not to predict the future precisely, but to structure uncertainty in a systematic manner. It involves identifying the key factors that may shape the future development of the situation, determining the most relevant variables and developing several internally coherent scenarios. Each scenario allows for an assessment of how a particular combination of political, military and institutional conditions might affect the humanitarian needs of the population and the operating environment of international and local organisations. The scenarios are not assigned precise probabilities of occurrence, as their purpose is to examine the implications of several plausible trajectories rather than to identify a single expected outcome (Schoemaker, 1995; Bradfield et al., 2005; Börjeson et al., 2006; Bishop et al., 2007).

Scenario-planning literature distinguishes between different methodological approaches depending on the purpose of the analysis and the type of uncertainty being examined. Börjeson et al. (2006), for

example, distinguish between scenarios addressing what will happen, what could happen, and how a particular objective might be achieved. The approach adopted in this study is primarily exploratory, since its purpose is to examine what could happen under different political, military and territorial conditions rather than to identify the most probable future outcome.

The methodological foundation of this section includes three interdependent elements: qualitative analysis of documents, descriptive analysis of existing trends and scenario construction. By combining these methods, the analysis takes into consideration both changes in quantitative indicators and political, institutional and territorial processes that cannot be represented purely quantitatively (Amer et al., 2013). Scenario construction is based on the findings of the document analysis and descriptive trend analysis, ensuring that the scenarios remain grounded in observed developments and existing evidence.

This approach is also consistent with the use of scenario development in humanitarian planning, where forward-looking analysis is employed to examine possible changes in humanitarian needs, risks and operating conditions and to inform response planning (UNDRR, 2023).

The document analysis involves documents published by international organisations, humanitarian agencies, research institutions, human rights organisations, and Myanmar civil society organisations. Principal sources include humanitarian plans and operational updates by UN OCHA, data and analytical materials by UNHCR, reports by ACLED, publications by International Crisis Group, materials produced by international and local non-governmental organisations, as well as news agency reports on current political and military developments.

Table 7. Documents and Sources Considered in the Scenario Analysis by Category

Category	Documents / sources considered
Conflict monitoring and territorial dynamics	ACLED (2026a, 2026b, 2026c, 2026d)
Humanitarian needs and response	UN OCHA (2025; 2026a; 2026b; 2026c)
Population displacement	UNHCR (2026)
Humanitarian access and operational practices	Harvey et al. (2023)
Local humanitarian response	Karen Human Rights Group (2025, 2026)
Political and financial analysis	International Crisis Group (2022a)
Human rights and civilian protection	Amnesty International (2025); Human Rights Watch (2025)
Current political and military developments	Reuters (2026a, 2026b, 2026c, 2026d)

Source: Author's elaboration.

Special attention is given to materials containing assessments of the conflict dynamics, changes in territorial control, humanitarian needs, the scale of internal displacement, access constraints, and the institutional capacities of different actors. Using diverse sources allows us to examine the conflict from different analytical perspectives, avoiding excessive reliance on a single category of organisations.

Materials produced by organisations specialising in conflict monitoring provide information on the geography of armed violence, changes in the intensity of hostilities and interactions among different armed groups. Documents of humanitarian agencies contain data about population displacement, humanitarian needs, access to essential services, and the conditions under which assistance is delivered. Publications by international and local non-governmental organisations provide insight into the practical constraints encountered during programme implementation, as well as the role of local networks, informal delivery mechanisms, and transborder assistance.

The aim of **descriptive trend analysis** is to identify the general direction in which key indicators are evolving rather than build a precise quantitative forecast. The indicators examined include the scale of internal displacement, the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance, the volume of funding required, the geographical expansion of armed violence, and changes in humanitarian access (ACLED, 2026a–c; UN OCHA, 2025, 2026b; UNHCR, 2026). Where geographical variation in conflict intensity is considered, States and Regions are used as the principal comparative units, while more localised evidence is incorporated when necessary to reflect subregional developments within these administrative units.

Descriptive analysis helps identify long-term trends, structural changes, and regional variations. Importantly, quantitative indicators are interpreted considering political, military and territorial context. For instance, a decline in the number of recorded armed clashes in one region doesn't necessarily indicate an overall improvement of the situation in the country as it might be accompanied by the geographical displacement of hostilities to other areas, a temporary ceasefire between some of the parties, an increased reliance on airstrikes, or a shift towards other forms of violence. Similarly, an increase in the number of displaced persons may reflect either an expansion of the armed conflict or the repeated displacement of people who had already been forced to leave their homes before.

Based on the identified trends and the assessments presented in the examined sources, four plausible scenarios for the future development of the conflict are constructed. The process of the scenario construction includes four consecutive stages:

1. The identification of key factors influencing the conflict and the humanitarian dynamics
2. The assessment of main uncertainties
3. The determination of four distinct but plausible trajectories for the future development of the situation
4. The examination of the humanitarian and organisational implications of each scenario

Scenario development is limited to trajectories grounded in observable trends and the existing balance and configuration of political and armed actors. Excessively speculative outcomes, which are not based on factual evidence of the situation's development after 2021, are not taken into consideration. The presented scenarios are not treated as mutually exclusive: individual elements of various scenarios might be simultaneously found in different regions of Myanmar.

For the purposes of this study, eight analytical variables were developed by the author on the basis of the methodological framework outlined above and the main conflict and humanitarian factors

identified through the document and trend analysis. These variables are presented in Table 8 and are used consistently to compare the four scenarios.

1. **The degree of the territorial fragmentation and the pattern of territorial control.** It reflects the extent to which authority is concentrated in the hands of a single actor, divided between multiple actors or the control is still unstable and contested. This factor has a direct impact on humanitarian operational activity as it determines administrative requirements, route safety, functioning of the basic services, and the range of authorities with which non-governmental organisations have to engage.
2. **The intensity and geographical distribution of armed violence.** For the purposes of regional comparison, the analysis primarily considers variation at the level of Myanmar's first-level administrative units (States and Regions), corresponding to ACLED's Admin1 level. More localised information at township or settlement level is used where relevant and available. The variable takes into account not only changes in the number of recorded clashes, but also emergence of new fronts, the use of air power and artillery, attacks on civilian infrastructure, and the spread of hostilities to areas that were previously relatively stable.
3. **The degree of political and military coordination among the forces opposing the military authorities.** The resistance includes the National Unity Government, the People's Defence Forces, ethnic armed organisations, and other local armed groups. Their objectives partly intersect; however, they differ in organisational structure, territorial interests, and visions of the future political order.
4. **Institutional capacity of actors exercising control over particular territories.** Control over a territory in itself does not equate to the presence of effective civilian governance. Thus, it is necessary to assess the capacity of governing institutions to maintain the functioning of healthcare and education services, local administration, infrastructure, markets, and civilian protection mechanisms.
5. **The scale and the nature of humanitarian needs.** The analysis examines the possible dynamics of internal and repeated displacement, food insecurity, restricted access to healthcare and education, loss of livelihoods, infrastructure destruction, and risks to the civilian population.
6. **Humanitarian access.** It is considered a dynamic factor which depends on multiple variables such as territorial control, administrative decisions, intensity of hostilities, the condition of transport infrastructure, and the possibility to use official, informal, and cross-border channels for assistance delivery. Although humanitarian access is part of the broader operating environment, it is examined separately because it is a key factor determining effective reach of humanitarian assistance.
7. **The operating environment of international organisations.** It encompasses the capacity to maintain direct presence in the country and individual regions, access to official registration and coordination mechanisms, relations with the authorities, staff safety, the possibility of remote management and cross-border support, as well as constraints arising from international funding, sanctions regimes, and donor requirements.
8. **The operating environment of local organisations.** Similarly to international NGOs, their effectiveness depends on sustained funding, staff safety, and access to the affected populations. However, due to close ties with the local communities, they are able to use more flexible mechanisms of assistance delivery. At the same time, they often face the lack of direct funding, greater direct exposure to risk, limited access to evacuation and legal protection, and less involvement in resource allocation and strategic priority-setting.

The distinction between international and local organisations is used for analytical purposes and does not imply that they operate separately. In practice, humanitarian response in Myanmar often involves cooperation between these actors through funding arrangements, partnerships, local implementation mechanisms and intermediary networks.

Distinguishing between the operating environments of international and local organisations allows for a more precise assessment of how resources, responsibilities, and risks are distributed within each scenario. Shifts in political and territorial control might affect the two types of actors in different ways. For instance, the consolidation of control in the hands of military authorities might expand official access of some registered international organisations, simultaneously increasing risks for local actors. In contrast, the consolidation of control in the hands of ethnic armed organisations and the resistance forces might lead to more beneficial operating environments for local civil society organisations, while preserving direct access constraints for international NGOs.

Table 8. Analytical Variables Used in the Scenario Assessment

Variable	Main analytical question	Relevance to humanitarian response
Territorial control and fragmentation	Is authority becoming more centralised, divided, or contested?	Determines access arrangements, administrative requirements, and the authorities with which organisations must engage
Intensity and geographical distribution of violence	In which areas is the conflict escalating, declining, or changing form?	Affects displacement, staff security, delivery routes, and programme continuity
Coordination among resistance forces	Are resistance and ethnic actors cooperating, competing, or becoming more fragmented?	Influences the predictability of the political environment, access negotiations, and engagement with local authorities
Institutional capacity	Are the actors controlling particular territories able to provide civilian administration and basic services?	Determines whether NGOs complement existing institutions or temporarily substitute for them
Humanitarian needs	How might the scale and composition of humanitarian needs change?	Shapes programme priorities, resource requirements, and target populations
Humanitarian access	Can organisations reach affected populations safely and continuously?	Determines the practical coverage and operational effectiveness of assistance
Operating environment of international organisations	Can international organisations maintain a formal presence,	Influences programme scale, international coordination,

	obtain sufficient funding, comply with regulatory and donor requirements, and engage with relevant territorial authorities?	technical support, and funding channels
Operating environment of local organisations	Can local organisations maintain staff security, organisational capacity, stable funding, and meaningful participation in operational and strategic decision-making?	Influences contextual relevance, the sustainability of local networks, and the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and risks

Source: Author's elaboration based on the analytical framework developed in Section 5.1.

The assessment of the humanitarian implications of each scenario also draws on the approaches to humanitarian effectiveness discussed in Chapter 2.6. The OECD-DAC framework emphasises criteria including relevance, effectiveness and sustainability (OECD, 1991; OECD, 2019), while broader humanitarian evaluation literature also draws attention to coverage, appropriateness and connectedness (Beck, 2006; Abdelmagid et al., 2019), as well as to the timeliness of response and the capacity to adapt to changing conditions (ALNAP, 2022). These criteria are not applied here as a formal programme-evaluation framework, since the analysis concerns possible future operating conditions rather than completed humanitarian interventions. Instead, they inform the three qualitative assessment dimensions used in this study: operational effectiveness, contextual relevance and institutional sustainability.

The eight analytical variables describe the political, territorial, institutional and humanitarian conditions characterising each scenario, while the three assessment criteria are used to evaluate how these conditions would affect the performance and sustainability of humanitarian organisations. Each scenario is therefore assessed not only in terms of political and military dynamics, but also in terms of its implications for the future humanitarian response.

Operational effectiveness is based on the ability of organisations to reach affected populations and provide timely and consistent assistance. It depends on physical access, staff safety, sustainability of delivery routes and the capacity to adapt aid delivery mechanisms to changing conditions. When evaluating this criterion, attention is also drawn to the possibility of direct presence of international organisations and to the role of local connections and community networks for local actors.

Contextual relevance refers to the extent to which humanitarian programmes are aligned with the actual needs and conditions of a particular community. It requires consideration of regional differences, patterns of displacement, and local socio-economic situation. Particular importance is attached to the involvement of local organisations in identifying needs and designing programmes, rather than merely in their subsequent implementation.

Institutional sustainability reflects the capacity of international and local organisations, as well as humanitarian networks created by them, to maintain long-term operational activity. It depends on funding stability, staff safety, the preservation of organisational capacity, the appropriateness of accountability mechanisms, and the distribution of risks between international and local actors. The

sustainability of international organisations may depend on maintaining their registration, donor funding, and access to the territory, whereas that of local actors is more closely linked to staff security, access to direct funding without intermediaries, and the capacity to sustain operations beyond short-term project cycles.

Applying these criteria makes it possible to assess not only the likelihood that non-governmental organisations will maintain their presence, but also the potential quality of their activities under each scenario. An organisation might formally continue its work, but its effectiveness would be limited without consistent access to the territory, adaptation of its programmes to the local context, and sustainability of its institutional capacity. Moreover, the overall volume of humanitarian assistance might remain steady in spite of unequal distribution of resources and risks between international and local actors. Therefore, the evaluation of each scenario should consider not only the aggregate outcomes of the humanitarian response, but also which type of organisations actually secure access, make operational decisions, and bear the greatest risks.

The selected methodological approach also has several limitations. First of all, the analysis is based on secondary sources such as published interviews, statistical data, analytical materials, previously conducted interviews with representatives of humanitarian organisations and local communities. Therefore, the findings depend on the completeness, quality, and availability of published information.

Secondly, the availability of data from conflict-affected areas remains uneven. Information about displacement, shifts in territorial control and humanitarian needs may be incomplete, may become available only after a delay or be subject to repeated revision. Moreover, different organisations might apply diverse methods of data collection and classification.

In addition, data on conflict-related events require cautious interpretation. Changes in the number of recorded incidents might indicate the actual dynamics of the conflict, however, they might also reflect limited access to information on the ground and difficulties in independently verifying it. For this reason, quantitative indicators are viewed alongside qualitative evidence on the political, military, and operating environment.

Thirdly, scenario analysis inevitably simplifies the geographically uneven nature of the conflict. It is very unlikely that the whole territory of Myanmar will develop along the same trajectory. Different regions may simultaneously face a partial consolidation of military control, the dominance of ethnic armed organisations and other resistance forces, or the persistence of contested territorial governance.

Hence, the scenarios should be treated as ideal analytical models reflecting prevailing trends rather than mutually exclusive forecasts for the whole country. Humanitarian organisations might therefore have to operate under conditions associated with several scenarios at the same time, applying different access arrangements, partnerships and programme modalities across regions. The scenarios should consequently be understood as analytical representations of conditions that may coexist within Myanmar rather than as separate national outcomes.

They do not make it possible to assign a precise probability to each outcome, but they enable a systematic assessment of how different political and military conditions may alter humanitarian needs, access to affected populations, the operating environment of international and local organisations, and the distribution of functions between them.

The separate evaluation of international and local organisations also makes it possible to account for differences in their resources, territorial access, institutional capacity and exposure to risks. Together, these elements provide a framework for assessing the humanitarian implications of alternative conflict trajectories.

5.2. Possible Trajectories of the Conflict and Their Humanitarian Implications

The following section applies the analytical framework developed in Section 5.1 to four plausible trajectories of the conflict.

Scenario 1: Protracted and Territorially Fragmented Conflict

The first scenario envisages the continuation of a protracted conflict without a decisive nationwide victory for either the military or the resistance forces. Territorial control would remain divided among the military authorities, ethnic armed organisations, other resistance groups, and administrative structures established at the local level. Some areas might experience temporary ceasefires or continued relative stability, while violence in other regions could intensify or spread to new fronts.

Current developments are broadly consistent with this trajectory. According to ACLED, the number of clashes between resistance forces and the military declined by 17% in 2025 compared with 2024, while in Sagaing Region the decline reached 37%. However, this overall quantitative trend did not indicate uniform de-escalation across the country. Hostilities intensified in southern Myanmar, including Ayeyarwady Region and Karen State, while the advance of the Arakan Army contributed to the emergence of new fronts in Bago, Magway, and Ayeyarwady Regions. Thus, de-escalation in some areas was accompanied by the geographical displacement of hostilities to other parts of Myanmar (ACLED, 2026a).

Coordination among resistance forces would also remain uneven. In some areas, they might coordinate their actions against the military, while in others they could compete for administrative authority, resources, taxation rights, and political influence. February 2026 recorded the highest number of fatalities resulting from clashes among anti-coup resistance groups since the 2021 coup. A major confrontation between forces aligned with the National Unity Government and the Burma National Revolutionary Army demonstrated that shared opposition to military rule does not preclude competition over administrative control and resources (ACLED, 2026c).

The institutional capacity of territorial actors would also vary considerably across regions. The military authorities might preserve existing administrative structures and continue providing basic services in relatively stable areas under their control. Ethnic armed organisations, other resistance forces, and local administrations might likewise maintain their own healthcare, education, and taxation systems. However, in areas affected by intense hostilities or disputed control, the capacity of all actors to provide essential services continuously would probably remain limited. As a result, humanitarian organisations would operate within a fragmented institutional environment, complementing existing service-delivery systems in some regions while partly assuming functions normally performed by state or local authorities in others.

Under this scenario, humanitarian needs would remain extensive and geographically dispersed. The destruction of infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, and deterioration of healthcare, food security,

protection, and education would generate both immediate and long-term needs. Repeated displacement would also be likely to continue. The plausibility of this scenario is further supported by current humanitarian trends. According to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, 16.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, while the number of internally displaced persons exceeds four million, many of whom have been displaced multiple times (UN OCHA, 2025).

Under conditions of continued territorial fragmentation, humanitarian access would probably remain dependent on negotiations and agreements with the different actors controlling particular territories. Existing patterns already show that formal authorisation from the military authorities does not automatically guarantee access to all conflict-affected areas, while assistance to territories beyond their control is frequently delivered through local organisations and informal networks (Harvey et al., 2023). If this configuration persisted, staff movement and aid delivery would continue to depend on shifts in front lines, checkpoints, local administrative procedures, and informal connections. The persistence of fragmented territorial control could therefore gradually institutionalise a humanitarian response based on parallel delivery arrangements, separate access negotiations, and uneven levels of direct organisational presence across different regions.

For international organisations, a protracted and territorially fragmented conflict would mean continuing to operate in a restricted and uneven environment. From the perspective of operational effectiveness, their ability to reach populations in the most severely affected areas would depend on flexible delivery arrangements, including partnerships with local organisations, remote programme management, local procurement, and cross-border delivery channels. These approaches could enable programmes to continue despite limited field presence. However, monitoring, quality control, and independent needs assessment would remain challenging.

The contextual relevance of international programmes would depend on the extent to which local partners and affected communities would participate in identifying needs, designing programmes, and making decisions. If local actors were only weakly involved, there would be a greater risk that priorities would be shaped primarily by generalised needs assessments, donor requirements, or incomplete information.

The institutional sustainability of international organisations would rely on their ability to secure stable funding, retain qualified staff, preserve long-term partnerships, and continue operating across successive project cycles. Diversified donor networks, technical expertise, and international coordination mechanisms could support organisational continuity under prolonged conflict conditions. At the same time, restrictions on registration, staff deployment, banking operations, procurement, and formal engagement with different territorial authorities could increase administrative costs, delay programme implementation, and disrupt the continuity of field operations.

International organisations might therefore retain a formal presence while becoming increasingly dependent on temporary arrangements that limit their capacity to sustain programmes and organisational structures over time.

For local organisations, operational effectiveness would be supported by their knowledge of local routes, sustained physical presence, and ability to operate under changing territorial and security conditions. These advantages could enable them to continue providing humanitarian assistance in areas where international organisations have limited direct access or no presence at all. Their flexibility could also allow them to adjust delivery routes, distribution methods and communication channels more quickly when front lines or access conditions change.

The contextual relevance of their activities would be supported by their knowledge of local languages, cultural norms, and the political and social characteristics of particular territories. This would enable them to identify the needs of affected populations more accurately, including changes in displacement patterns and emerging needs that may not yet be reflected in formal assessments, and to adapt forms of assistance to regional conditions.

The institutional sustainability of local organisations would rely on their ability to retain qualified personnel, maintain internal administrative procedures, secure sufficiently stable funding, and continue operating beyond individual short-term projects. Close ties with local communities, region-specific experience, and established partnership networks could support organisational continuity.

Nevertheless, limited access to direct donor funding, dependence on international intermediaries, insufficient administrative resources, and serious risks to personnel could hinder long-term planning and organisational development. These challenges could be further aggravated by financial restrictions aimed at limiting funding flows to resistance actors, as such measures may also affect humanitarian organisations and complicate the transfer of resources to local partners (International Crisis Group, 2022a). Under these conditions, local organisations might continue to implement a substantial share of humanitarian activities while remaining institutionally vulnerable and dependent on unstable project-based arrangements. Their growing operational importance would therefore not necessarily be accompanied by a comparable strengthening of their position within funding and strategic decision-making structures.

Overall, this scenario would allow humanitarian assistance to continue, but largely through fragmented, indirect, and locally adapted approaches. Operational effectiveness would depend on flexible aid delivery arrangements and close collaboration with local actors, while contextual relevance would be greater where local organisations and affected communities were fully involved in decision-making. At the same time, the institutional sustainability of both international and local organisations could remain limited by prolonged access constraints, unstable funding, administrative barriers, and the uneven distribution of risks. Thus, a protracted and territorially fragmented conflict would probably allow the humanitarian response to remain functional in the short term, while gradually embedding fragmented and locally differentiated operating arrangements and limiting its overall coherence and long-term sustainability.

Scenario 2: Strengthening of the Military Authorities' Position in Strategic Areas

The second scenario assumes a partial consolidation of military control over strategically important areas of Myanmar. It would not necessarily mean a complete military defeat of ethnic armed organisations or other resistance forces. The military could restore or stabilise control over large cities, transport corridors, border routes, economically important areas, and selected administrative centres, while armed resistance would continue in peripheral, rural, and mountainous areas.

Such a consolidation could result from the intensification of military operations, the increased use of air power, the mobilisation of additional personnel, improved control over supply routes, or expanded access to military equipment and financial resources. The military authorities might also seek to weaken the resistance through a combination of coercive pressure, local ceasefire agreements, political incentives, and administrative constraints. Against this background, military operations aimed at regaining control over cross-border routes, rare-earth mining areas, and other strategically important territories would be particularly significant. As of May 2026, the military had intensified

its operations in these areas, seeking to strengthen its logistical and economic position (Reuters, 2026c).

Within this scenario, territorial control would become less fragmented in some regions, but would not be fully centralised nationwide. The military authorities could strengthen their presence along major transportation routes, in urban centres, and around critical infrastructure, while remaining unable to exercise sustained control over remote areas. Resistance groups would preserve their operational capacity outside key administrative and transport centres, while continuing guerrilla attacks, acts of sabotage, and targeted operations. The resulting territorial configuration would therefore be characterised not by the restoration of uniform state control, but by a clearer distinction between areas of consolidated military authority and peripheral or contested territories where resistance activity persisted.

The intensity of armed violence might decrease in some areas where the military established more stable control. However, such a decline would not necessarily mean a sustained improvement in conditions for civilians. The reduction in open hostilities could be accompanied by tighter administrative control, restrictions on freedom of movement, increased surveillance of local communities, arbitrary detention, and repression targeting individuals suspected of links to the resistance. Thus, the possible consolidation of military control should be assessed not only in terms of changes in the number of armed clashes, but also in relation to its broader implications for civilian protection and humanitarian access.

Reports of arbitrary detention, persecution of civilians and restrictions on humanitarian activities illustrate that greater administrative control may coexist with continued insecurity for civilians (Amnesty International, 2025; Human Rights Watch, 2025; UN OCHA, 2026c).

Coordination among resistance forces would remain one of the key sources of uncertainty under this scenario. On the one hand, the strengthening of the military authorities' position could encourage closer cooperation among the National Unity Government, the People's Defence Forces, and ethnic armed organisations. Having a common threat could lead to a higher degree of coordination of military operations, information exchange, and the pooling of resources. On the other hand, territorial losses, reduced access to funding and disagreements about military and political strategies might increase competition within resistance forces. Some groups might accept local ceasefire agreements or informal arrangements with the military authorities, while others would continue armed resistance.

As a result, the strengthening of the military's position could lead not only to a shift in the overall balance of power, but also to further differentiation in the strategies adopted by different resistance groups. This differentiation could, in turn, reinforce the territorial unevenness of the scenario: some areas might become subject to negotiated arrangements, while others would remain sites of continued military confrontation.

The institutional capacity of the military authorities might increase in the areas where they manage to establish a more sustained territorial and administrative presence. Existing administrative structures might resume or expand their functions related to population registration, taxation, transport, healthcare and education. In addition, more stable control over urban centres might lead to greater consistency in certain administrative procedures and facilitate the movement of goods between controlled territories.

However, the restoration of an administrative presence would not necessarily result in the effective and legitimate provision of public services. Destruction of infrastructure, a lack of qualified specialists, deterioration of the economic situation, and public distrust of the military authorities might continue to limit the functioning of state institutions. Moreover, administrative structures might be used not only for providing services, but also for population surveillance, political control, and restrictions on the activities of civil society organisations. Consequently, a stronger institutional presence cannot in itself be taken as evidence of the restoration of fully functioning state governance. The relevant distinction would therefore be between the expansion of administrative reach and the actual capacity of institutions to provide accessible and legitimate civilian services.

Under this scenario, the scale of humanitarian needs might decrease in certain urban centres and along transport corridors where the intensity of armed clashes declined while commercial activities partly resumed. More regular movement of goods could improve access to markets and contribute to the restoration of certain public services. Nevertheless, such improvements would likely remain geographically uneven.

Rural, mountainous and border areas where resistance maintained their presence would continue to face military operations, air strikes, infrastructure destruction and repeated displacement of the population. Furthermore, civilians returning to areas that have come back under military control might face loss of property, a lack of livelihood opportunities, increased surveillance, restrictions on freedom of movement, and the risk of detention.

Consequently, under this scenario, even if the intensity of open hostilities were to decline in urban centres and along major transport corridors, this would not necessarily lead to a comparable reduction in humanitarian needs, particularly in remote rural, mountainous, and border areas, where conflict and restrictions on humanitarian access could persist. Humanitarian needs could therefore become increasingly differentiated geographically: conditions might improve in some strategically controlled areas while remaining severe, or even worsening, in territories located outside consolidated military control.

Humanitarian access might become more formalised in areas where the military authorities establish sustained administrative control. Registered international organisations could benefit from clearer procedures for issuing travel permits, approving projects, registering staff, and importing and transporting humanitarian supplies. More sustained access to large cities and transport corridors might improve the continuity of medical programmes, food assistance, shelter provision, and livelihood support. At the same time, formal access would still depend on the approval of the military authorities and might be accompanied by restrictions on the geographical scale of programmes, recipient selection, cooperation with local partners, and the collection and publication of information.

Access to contested territories or those under the control of resistance forces would be significantly more limited. The military authorities could hinder the provision of assistance to populations perceived as being linked to the resistance, while humanitarian supplies transported outside officially authorised channels might be confiscated or destroyed. As a result, international organisations would have to balance the need to maintain officially authorised programmes in military-controlled areas with the necessity to support populations beyond these areas through remote, discreet, or cross-border mechanisms.

The principal change under this scenario would therefore concern the form rather than the disappearance of humanitarian access constraints. Greater administrative regularity in military-

controlled areas could reduce some forms of operational uncertainty, while simultaneously making access more dependent on political approval and on the authorities' decisions regarding particular organisations, partners, territories and population groups. Formalisation of access would therefore not necessarily translate into broader or more impartial humanitarian reach.

Operational effectiveness of international organisations would increase primarily in large cities, along main transport corridors and in areas under stable military control. Clearer travel procedures, access to logistics infrastructure, and the ability to maintain an official presence could reduce delays in staff movement, procurement, and programme implementation. However, the provision of assistance in contested areas and territories under the control of resistance forces would still face significant constraints. International organisations could continue to cooperate with local organisations and authorities linked to resistance forces in some areas, but the scope of such cooperation could remain limited by regulatory, financial, and security constraints. Their operational effectiveness could therefore improve within formally accessible territories without producing an equivalent expansion in the overall geographical coverage of humanitarian assistance.

From the perspective of contextual relevance, consolidation of the military authorities' positions in strategic areas might lead to a dual effect. On the one hand, a more consistent administrative environment in large cities and along main transport routes could facilitate needs assessment, programme planning and interaction with institutions operating in areas of sustained control. On the other hand, the strengthening of formal administrative control could limit the capacity of international organisations to independently define the most vulnerable population groups and adapt programmes in accordance with their needs. Access to information about the humanitarian situation would depend on the approval of the military authorities, while collaboration with local organisations present in areas linked to resistance forces could become more sensitive from both a political and legal perspective.

In such circumstances, the contextual relevance of international programmes would significantly depend on the extent to which international organisations were able to take into account the needs of populations across different types of territories. If regular access were maintained largely in areas under military control, information about the needs of communities living in remote, contested areas or territories under the control of resistance forces might remain incomplete. Therefore, in order to develop programmes that accurately reflect the realities of the humanitarian situation, it would be essential for international organisations to maintain engagement with local partners who would have direct access to such territories. Accordingly, the central challenge would not simply be obtaining more information, but preventing formally accessible areas from becoming disproportionately represented in humanitarian assessments and programme priorities.

Under this scenario, the institutional sustainability of international organisations might also increase in areas where the military authorities established a sustained administrative presence. Clearer registration rules, greater staff mobility, the import of humanitarian supplies, and the processing of banking transactions could reduce some of the administrative and transaction costs. International organisations could maintain offices, personnel and long-term programmes in areas where security conditions and administrative procedures became more consistent.

However, these improvements would remain fragile and conditional. Formal authorisation to operate would not guarantee organisational autonomy, while programme continuity would depend on political decisions of the military authorities. Additional constraints on partnerships, monitoring, data

collection, information publication and work with certain population groups could gradually shrink the operational space available to humanitarian organisations.

Moreover, international NGOs would have to simultaneously carry out programmes in military-controlled areas while finding ways to assist populations beyond them. This would result in greater operational complexity and could require organisations to rely simultaneously on direct presence, remote management, local partnerships, and cross-border mechanisms. Institutional sustainability would therefore depend not only on the ability to preserve formal registration and offices, but also on maintaining sufficient organisational flexibility to operate across territories governed by fundamentally different access conditions.

For local organisations, the implications of stronger military control would be more ambiguous. From the perspective of operational effectiveness, some local organisations, officially registered and operating in areas under sustained control, could have more regular access to populations, transport infrastructure and local markets. Where the intensity of hostilities declined, this could facilitate humanitarian aid delivery and enable the continuation of ongoing programmes.

At the same time, local organisations regarded by the authorities as affiliated with opposition groups, ethnic armed organisations, or other resistance forces could face greater scrutiny and higher risks. Their activities could be constrained by registration requirements, staff screening, restrictions on movement, and limitations on financial transactions. As a result, some local organisations would probably have to reduce the public visibility of their activities and rely more heavily on informal networks, local supply mechanisms, and intermediaries. The consequences of military consolidation for local actors would therefore depend strongly on their perceived political position and relationships with the communities and territorial actors with which they worked.

The contextual relevance of local organisations in many regions would remain high. Their knowledge of local communities, social ties, languages and informal interaction channels would allow them to identify the population's needs more accurately. A key advantage of local actors would lie in their ability to identify not only formally documented humanitarian needs, but also less visible forms of vulnerability related to displacement, loss of livelihoods, mobility restrictions, and fear of political persecution.

However, stronger administrative and security control could reduce the space for independent engagement with local populations. If the activities of local organisations became increasingly dependent on permissions and control of the military authorities, this could limit their capacity to freely define assistance priorities and engage with groups operating outside officially recognised channels. Therefore, a deep understanding of the local context would not necessarily translate fully into effective and independent humanitarian action. In this scenario, contextual knowledge could therefore remain one of the principal strengths of local organisations while their ability to act on that knowledge became increasingly constrained.

The most serious challenges in this scenario could arise in relation to the institutional sustainability of local organisations. In areas under intensified military control, some local organisations could preserve or even strengthen their administrative structures if they managed to maintain registration, access to funding and engagement with government institutions. However, organisations working with communities on both sides of the lines of control would continue to face significantly higher risks.

Dependence on short-term funding, stricter reporting requirements, the need to protect staff, and the risk that financial or programme-related ties with international partners would be viewed by the military authorities as politically sensitive could constrain organisations' capacity for long-term planning. Consequently, local organisations would remain highly relevant in operational terms, but institutionally vulnerable. Increased formalisation could therefore have unequal institutional effects: it might strengthen organisations capable of operating within the authorised system while further marginalising those whose work depended on maintaining access to populations outside it.

Overall, the consolidation of military control in strategically important areas would not necessarily translate into a proportional increase in the effectiveness of the humanitarian response. A reduction in territorial fragmentation and greater consistency in administrative procedures could create more stable conditions for the activities of some humanitarian organisations. At the same time, the strengthening of political and administrative control would constrain their capacity to independently define priorities and reach populations beyond officially accessible territories.

As a result, operational effectiveness could increase locally, while the contextual relevance and institutional sustainability of the humanitarian response would remain significantly dependent on the nature of interaction with the military authorities and on the preservation of autonomous local humanitarian networks.

Thus, this scenario would more likely alter the structure of the constraints faced by humanitarian actors rather than eliminate them. The defining humanitarian feature of this trajectory would be the coexistence of greater administrative regularity with increasingly selective access. The primary issue would lie in the selective and politically conditioned nature of humanitarian access, rather than in the lack of formalised procedures. This would create a more regulated, but also more controlled humanitarian environment in which formal stability would not necessarily be accompanied by broader effective access to the most vulnerable population groups.

Scenario 3: Expansion and Consolidation of Resistance and Ethnic Armed Organisation Control

The third scenario assumes a further weakening of the military authorities' territorial position and an expansion of areas under the sustained control of ethnic armed organisations, the People's Defence Forces, and other resistance structures. At the same time, this scenario would not necessarily imply the complete military defeat of the Tatmadaw or the establishment of unified resistance control over the entire territory of the country. The military authorities could retain control over Naypyidaw and Yangon, large urban centres, separate transport corridors and facilities of strategic importance, while a significant portion of rural, border and peripheral territories would come under more stable control of the forces opposing them.

Such a trajectory is grounded in the changes already observed in the territorial balance. Rakhine State is particularly illustrative in this regard, where the military successes of the Arakan Army since late 2023 have led to a substantial shift in the configuration of territorial control. By 2026, the Arakan Army controlled most of the state's territory, including a significant portion of the coastline and the border with Bangladesh, while the Myanmar armed forces retained control over several strategically important areas, most notably Sittwe and Kyaukphyu. At the same time, the activities of the Arakan Army expanded beyond Rakhine and began to influence conflict dynamics in neighbouring regions, including Magway, Bago, and Ayeyarwady (ACLED, 2026a, 2026d). These processes illustrate that the expansion of territorial control by some resistance forces is now a realistic possibility.

Under this scenario, territorial fragmentation could decrease in some regions. Instead of numerous small and unstable zones of control, larger territories governed by individual ethnic armed organisations or resistance-affiliated administrative structures could be formed. However, at the national level, political and institutional fragmentation would persist, as different resistance actors could continue to maintain distinct administrative systems, territorial interests, and political priorities. Thus, the consolidation of control within individual regions would not necessarily result in greater institutional integration across the country.

One of the most significant factors in this scenario would be the degree of coordination between the National Unity Government, the People's Defence Forces, and ethnic armed organisations. Military successes could create additional incentives for resource sharing, operational coordination, and the development of mechanisms for political cooperation. However, the expansion of territorial control could also exacerbate differences between resistance actors. Their political objectives partially overlap in their opposition to the military regime, but they differ when it comes to organisational structure, territorial interests and visions of Myanmar's future political system.

The key uncertainty would therefore concern whether military cooperation among resistance actors could evolve into sustainable mechanisms of political coordination and inter-territorial governance. Individual ethnic armed organisations could seek to maintain a significant degree of autonomy in territories under their control, while structures affiliated with the National Unity Government could focus on developing a broader federal model. The transition from cooperation against a common military opponent to the development of mechanisms for governing and coordinating relations between separately administered territories would therefore become a central challenge under this scenario.

The institutional capacity of the forces that had established territorial control would play an important role. The transfer of territorial control from the military authorities to resistance actors would not, in itself, automatically result in the restoration of effective governance. New authorities would have to find a way to maintain the functioning of healthcare and education systems, local administration, markets, transport infrastructure and mechanisms for the protection of the civilian population. Their capacity to perform these functions would determine whether territorial control developed into a relatively stable system of civilian governance.

In some ethnic areas, such a transformation could rely on already existing governance structures and mechanisms for the provision of social services. In south-eastern Myanmar, for instance, local and ethnic organisations already provide various forms of medical, food, educational, and other assistance. The Karen Office for Relief and Development, the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People, the Karen Women's Organisation, and health and education systems affiliated with ethnic structures form a network of services partly functioning beyond the formal state system. Nevertheless, the capacities of these structures remain limited due to the lack of funding, logistical challenges and security threats (KHRG, 2025, 2026).

In terms of humanitarian consequences, this scenario would have mixed effects. In the short term, the further expansion of territories controlled by the resistance would probably be accompanied by military operations by the Tatmadaw, including air strikes, artillery shelling and attempts to regain control over lost areas. Hence, during the shift in the territorial balance, the scale of displacement, infrastructure destruction and restrictions on access to essential services could increase.

In the long term, the situation could improve in areas where the new territorial control became more consolidated. A reduction in the intensity of armed clashes and the strengthening of local administrative structures could contribute to the recovery of markets, the more regular provision of basic services, and a reduction in repeated displacement. However, such improvements would significantly depend on the ability of local authorities to maintain civilian infrastructure and on whether the threat of airstrikes by the Myanmar armed forces would persist. Therefore, the establishment of resistance control would not, in itself, eliminate humanitarian needs, but would gradually transform their structure. Alongside emergency assistance, the restoration of basic services, livelihood support, education, healthcare, and long-term assistance to displaced populations could become increasingly important.

The structure of humanitarian access would also change. For local organisations and ethnic social service providers, more stable control by resistance forces would reduce the necessity to constantly adjust transport routes, adapt to changing front lines, and conduct parallel negotiations with a larger number of armed actors. Having established relationships with local administrative structures, they could gain more regular access to communities and expand the scale of their programmes.

Existing approaches to humanitarian assistance demonstrate that in zones under resistance control or areas characterised by limited international presence, a significant portion of assistance is delivered through community groups, volunteer networks, religious organisations, local businesses, and other intermediary structures. Local procurement, the provision of cash assistance to the population, and less visible forms of support for local organisations by international humanitarian actors are also used (Harvey et al., 2023).

For international organisations, the implications would be significantly more ambiguous. Even though resistance forces and ethnic armed organisations could be more open than the military authorities to cooperation with international humanitarian actors, greater political willingness to cooperate would not, in itself, necessarily translate into an expansion of direct access.

From the perspective of operational effectiveness, the planning and implementation of humanitarian programmes could become less difficult. Greater consistency in local administrative mechanisms and transport routes could reduce some of the operational uncertainty related to constantly shifting front lines. International organisations could also establish more regular engagement with local authorities and humanitarian partners operating in territories controlled by resistance forces. In some areas, this could lay the groundwork for the gradual expansion of their direct presence.

Nevertheless, such an expansion would still depend on factors beyond the position of the authorities controlling a particular territory. International organisations would have to comply with their own legal, administrative and donor requirements. Moreover, banking restrictions, difficulties in transferring resources and humanitarian supplies, as well as institutional risks related to formal engagement with non-state armed actors could continue to constrain their activities. As a result, improved access conditions on the ground could initially lead primarily to an expansion of assistance through local partners and cross-border mechanisms, rather than to a comparable increase in the direct presence of international organisations.

In terms of contextual relevance, closer cooperation with local organisations and administrative structures could improve international actors' understanding of humanitarian needs in areas that had previously been difficult to access. Local partners could more regularly provide information about displacement, sources of livelihood, access to basic services and specific forms of vulnerability

affecting particular communities. This could allow international organisations to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the situation on the ground and facilitate the adjustment of programmes to different regional conditions.

The quality of this process would depend on the extent to which local organisations were involved in setting priorities and designing programmes, rather than being used primarily as implementing partners. If decision-making and resource allocation remained concentrated in the hands of international organisations and donors, the expansion of access would not inevitably lead to a comparable increase in contextual relevance.

As for institutional sustainability, the stabilisation of territorial control could contribute to the development of more sustainable mechanisms of cooperation between international organisations and local partners, while also facilitating longer-term planning of humanitarian programmes. A higher degree of consistency could allow the development of multi-year programmes, capacity-building initiatives and more regular forms of cooperation with local humanitarian networks.

At the same time, the persistence of different administrative systems across resistance-controlled territories could complicate such cooperation at the inter-regional level. International organisations might have to adapt their procedures and modes of cooperation to different local rules, complicating coordination and long-term planning across territories.

For local organisations, such a scenario could create a more favourable operational environment, especially in areas where they already maintained close ties with local communities and administrative structures affiliated with the resistance forces.

With regard to operational effectiveness, local organisations could benefit from greater continuity of access to conflict-affected communities, more consistent transport routes, and closer coordination with local administrative structures and social service providers. Programmes that had previously depended on temporary or less visible mechanisms for the delivery of assistance could become more regular. In addition, local organisations could gradually expand their activities beyond emergency aid and devote greater attention to healthcare, education, livelihood support and other longer-term areas of assistance.

Nevertheless, these advances would remain contingent on the security situation. Continued airstrikes, artillery shelling, and attempts by the Tatmadaw to regain lost territories could hinder programme implementation even in areas where resistance forces had sustained control on the ground. Therefore, more stable local governance would not completely eliminate the need for flexible aid delivery mechanisms and contingency planning.

In the area of contextual relevance, this scenario could further reinforce the advantages of local organisations. Their proximity to communities, knowledge of local languages and social structures, as well as direct involvement in service provision would enable them to identify changes in the population's needs more rapidly and adapt programmes to local conditions. Local actors could also gain an opportunity to participate more actively in programme design and priority setting, rather than function primarily as intermediaries in implementing decisions made by international organisations.

At the same time, the consolidation of territorial control by individual ethnic or other resistance forces would create a need to preserve the inclusiveness of the humanitarian response. Territories under the control of ethnic armed organisations might include politically and ethnically heterogeneous

populations, whose needs and interests would not always align with the priorities of the authorities controlling the territory. Hence, contextual relevance would depend not only on the proximity of humanitarian organisations to local communities, but also on their ability to identify and support vulnerable groups regardless of their political or ethnic affiliation.

Consolidated territorial control by resistance forces could contribute to greater institutional sustainability among local organisations by strengthening their internal structures, supporting staff retention, and enabling a shift toward longer-term planning. Reduced political pressure could also allow some organisations to operate more openly and develop more formalised cooperation with international partners.

However, the long-term sustainability of local organisations would still depend largely on the allocation of humanitarian funding. If local actors were to assume an increasing share of programme implementation without gaining broader access to direct and stable funding, their institutional vulnerability could persist despite improved operational access. Increased responsibility could create additional pressure on organisations with limited financial and administrative resources. A more sustainable outcome would require the expansion of the operational role of local organisations to be accompanied by long-term funding, institutional support and broader participation in strategic decision-making.

Overall, this scenario could facilitate humanitarian access in specific areas where resistance forces had consolidated territorial control, but the continued coexistence of distinct administrative systems across resistance-controlled territories could hinder the development of common rules for engagement with humanitarian organisations. As a result, working conditions might differ significantly across regions. The long-term effectiveness of the humanitarian response in such a case would depend on whether different resistance forces could develop more coordinated administrative mechanisms and apply them consistently across the territories under their control.

Scenario 4: Partial De-escalation and Political Negotiations

The fourth scenario assumes a partial reduction in the intensity of the armed conflict and a gradual expansion of political dialogue between the main parties. Such a scenario would not mean an immediate comprehensive peace agreement, the cessation of armed confrontation across the entire country or the establishment of a unified political system. Rather, it could involve local ceasefire agreements, temporary arrangements between the military authorities and individual ethnic armed organizations, as well as broader negotiations with mediation or diplomatic support from regional and international actors. Unlike the first scenario, in which local ceasefires would remain isolated elements of a predominantly protracted and fragmented conflict, this trajectory assumes that de-escalation and political dialogue would become a more significant feature of the broader conflict environment.

Such a trajectory is supported by certain developments observed in 2026. In April, an attempt was made to initiate peace negotiations, which was rejected by representatives of resistance forces. In July diplomatic activity continued: the ASEAN Special Envoy held meetings with opposition groups in Thailand, while representatives of regional states indicated a certain willingness among the opposing parties to engage in dialogue (Reuters, 2026a, 2026b, 2026d). These events, in themselves, do not indicate that a political settlement is approaching, but they illustrate that negotiation mechanisms remain one possible direction for the development of the conflict.

Under such a scenario, the structure of territorial control might not change significantly in the initial stage. The military authorities, ethnic armed organisations, People's Defence Forces and other resistance actors would continue controlling various parts of the country. A major change would not be territorial redistribution, but a reduction in frequency of attempts to shift control lines through military means. Some areas could effectively move toward a relatively stable division of spheres of influence, while others would remain a matter of negotiations.

Therefore, territorial fragmentation would be in place even if the intensity of hostilities reduced. However, in contrast to the first scenario, the boundaries between zones of control could become less fluid, as individual agreements limited military operations and created mechanisms of interaction between the opposing parties. At the same time, ceasefire agreements would likely have a limited territorial and political scope and might not extend to other parts of the country. A ceasefire in one state or region could co-exist with ongoing clashes in another one, meaning that de-escalation at the national level would consist of an uneven combination of relatively stabilised and actively contested territories rather than a uniform transition away from conflict.

The level of armed violence could decrease primarily in areas covered by ceasefire agreement. A reduction in ground clashes, airstrikes, and artillery shelling could reduce immediate threats to the civilian population and create conditions for the restoration of transport routes and elements of infrastructure. Nevertheless, even in case of negotiation advances, the risk of renewed armed violence would persist. Agreements could be violated, while the lack of a comprehensive political settlement would leave open the possibility of a return to hostilities if the military or political balance were to shift.

Coordination between various resistance forces would be a key factor, as being in opposition to the military authorities would not mean having a common position about the future political system of the country. The National Unity Government, the People's Defence Forces, and individual ethnic armed organizations could have different views on federalism, territorial autonomy, the future role of the armed forces, and the distribution of political authority.

Consequently, the negotiation process could both encourage coordination among resistance forces and deepen existing differences between them. An attempt to develop a common negotiation position could lead to the creation of additional mechanisms for political cooperation, although some ethnic armed organisations could opt for bilateral agreements that directly protect their territorial and political interests. Thus, political de-escalation between some resistance forces and the military authorities would not necessarily lead to a higher degree of political unity within the resistance itself. In this sense, negotiations could shift part of the competition among resistance actors from the military to the political sphere without necessarily resolving underlying disagreements over territorial authority and the future structure of the state.

The institutional implications would also depend on the nature of the agreements reached. A decline in armed clashes could increase the capacity of administrative institutions to maintain healthcare, education, transport infrastructure and local markets. In areas where lines of control became less fluid, local administrative bodies could gradually shift from emergency response toward more regular provision of basic services.

However, partial de-escalation would not resolve the problem of the existence of multiple parallel administrative systems. The military authorities, ethnic organizations, and structures affiliated with the National Unity Government, would likely continue applying their own governance rules and

mechanisms contributing to institutional fragmentation at the national level. The issue of integration of these systems into the future political structure of the country could become one of the most complex elements in the negotiation process. At the humanitarian level, this would mean that a decline in violence could occur without an equivalent harmonisation of the administrative rules governing humanitarian activity.

The scenario could have a positive effect on the humanitarian situation. The amount of newly displaced persons could decrease, while some previously displaced people could return to their places of origin. Improved transport connectivity would contribute to the recovery of local markets, a more reliable food supply, and more consistent provision of healthcare and educational services.

Humanitarian needs would nevertheless remain significant. Even after active hostilities had ceased, the population would continue to face the consequences of years of conflict, including destroyed housing and infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, debt, limited access to healthcare and education, as well as prolonged displacement. De-escalation would therefore be more likely to transform the composition of humanitarian needs than to eliminate them. Thus, the structure of humanitarian needs could gradually shift from emergency assistance alone toward infrastructure recovery, livelihood support, the return and reintegration of displaced persons, and the restoration of social services.

Large-scale returns of displaced persons could also place additional pressure on local infrastructure, services, and resources. Furthermore, in areas where the political status of the territory remained contested, returns could be complicated by distrust of the authorities, the risk of detention, or the continuing threat of renewed conflict. Consequently, the reduction of new displacement could coexist with growing needs related to safe return, reintegration and the recovery of communities affected by prolonged conflict.

Humanitarian access would probably become one of the areas where the positive effect of the de-escalation would be most noticeable. A reduction in hostilities would reduce risks for the personnel, make the transportation of humanitarian supplies less dependent on shifts in the front lines and allow the restoration of some routes previously unavailable due to security reasons. Where ceasefire arrangements included provisions on humanitarian access, they could provide more regular channels for coordinating the movement of personnel and humanitarian supplies. However, the practical effect of such provisions would depend on their implementation by the actors controlling particular territories.

A more favourable security situation, however, would not mean the automatic removal of administrative barriers. Humanitarian organisations would still have to engage with several governing authorities and obtain permission to operate in various zones of control. In addition, political disagreements related to which organisations should be allowed to operate on a particular territory could still be present. The principal change would therefore concern the reduction of constraints generated directly by active hostilities, while the political and administrative structure of humanitarian access could remain fragmented for a considerably longer period.

The operational environment would probably become more conducive for international organisations, even though the scale of changes would depend on the geographical scope and durability of the agreements reached.

Operational effectiveness of international organisations would likely increase as the intensity of hostilities declined, expanding direct access to affected communities. International organisations

could deploy staff to areas that had previously been accessible primarily through remote management and local partners, conduct monitoring activities on a more regular basis and independently estimate the population's needs. Reduced risks to personnel and transport routes could also minimise delays in programme implementation and facilitate the delivery of medical supplies, food, and other humanitarian assistance.

However, these benefits could be unevenly distributed. In areas where agreements covered only specific territories, international organisations would have to simultaneously apply different operating models: direct presence in relatively stable zones and remote, local or cross-border mechanisms in zones with ongoing hostilities. Therefore, even in the context of a broader trend toward de-escalation, a unified national model of humanitarian access might not emerge. The ability to combine several operational models within the same country would consequently remain important even under an overall improvement in the security environment.

In terms of contextual relevance, partial de-escalation could expand the opportunities for international organizations to directly assess conditions in areas where ceasefires had been reached or where the level of armed violence had significantly declined. More consistent presence on the ground would allow for better monitoring of changes in the structure of needs, including the return of displaced persons, the restoration of livelihoods, and the resumption of basic services. This, in turn, would facilitate the revision of programs initially focused primarily on emergency response. The comprehensiveness of such an assessment would still depend on the geographical coverage of ceasefire agreements and on whether access was maintained to areas where armed confrontation continued. International organizations could therefore gain a more accurate understanding of the situation in specific regions, but not necessarily of the country's humanitarian context as a whole.

Institutional sustainability of international organisations could be strengthened in areas where the ceasefire was sustained over an extended period of time. Improved security conditions for the personnel and fewer operational disruptions would facilitate the planning of multi-annual programmes, greater staff continuity and the development of more sustainable mechanisms for cooperation with local partners. However, these advancements would remain very fragile. Renewed hostilities could lead to suspension of programmes and return to remote and emergency modes of operation, so long-term planning would have to be combined with the ability to rapidly adapt to the possible worsening of the situation.

As with international organizations, partial de-escalation could create more favourable conditions for humanitarian activities by local actors and expand their ability to operate in conflict-affected areas. At the same time, their continuous presence within communities and existing local networks could enable them to adapt more quickly to changes in the nature of humanitarian needs. For local organisations, the main change would therefore concern not only easier day-to-day operations, but also the possibility of gradually broadening their role as communities moved from immediate emergency needs toward recovery and return.

Operational effectiveness of local organisations could increase primarily in areas where the ceasefire was effectively observed. A reduction in hostilities would facilitate staff movement, the transportation of resources, and access to the population. Organisations, which used to resort to discrete and informal ways of assistance delivery, could shift toward more regular forms of operation. At the same time, damaged infrastructure, landmine risks, and potential violations of ceasefire agreements would continue to constrain their activities.

Contextual relevance of local organisations could gain particular importance as the structure of humanitarian needs change. Their proximity to local communities would enable them to identify more quickly the consequences of displaced persons' return, changes in access to livelihoods, the condition of basic services, and emerging forms of vulnerability. In territories where armed clashes ceased or declined significantly, local actors would also be able to better account for differences in needs of the returning population and those who remained in the area throughout the conflict. Yet, the political and social environment following a ceasefire could remain sensitive, particularly with regard to property issues, access to assistance, and trust in local administrative structures. These issues could make local knowledge particularly important in identifying tensions that would not necessarily be visible through conventional assessments focused primarily on material needs.

Institutional sustainability of local organisations could also enhance as a result of lower immediate risks to personnel and the possibility of shifting toward longer program cycles. A more favourable environment could facilitate the retention of qualified staff, the strengthening of internal administrative procedures, and the development of cooperation with international partners. Nevertheless, financial constraints would still remain in place. Reliance on short-term funding and limited direct access to resources could still hinder organisational development, even if security conditions had improved. Therefore, a reduction in the level of conflict would not, in itself, guarantee a stronger institutional position for local actors. Moreover, if donor priorities shifted away from emergency response faster than humanitarian and recovery needs actually declined, local organisations dependent on short-term humanitarian funding could face new financial pressures during the transition.

Overall, this scenario would represent a transitional rather than a stable post-conflict model. Even with the expansion of the negotiation process and the achievement of individual ceasefires, the humanitarian situation would significantly differ across regions. In some areas, conditions for gradual recovery could emerge, while in others the needs for emergency humanitarian assistance would remain. Thus, a key challenge for humanitarian actors would be the necessity to simultaneously operate within various phases of the conflict adapting their approaches to rapidly changing conditions. The central humanitarian implication of this scenario would therefore lie in the coexistence of emergency response, recovery and return-related needs within the same national context. The further development of the situation would be defined by whether local arrangements became a foundation for a broader and more sustainable political settlement.

More broadly, the scenario illustrates that even a reduction in armed violence would not eliminate the territorially differentiated nature of humanitarian operations, but would instead change the balance between emergency response, recovery, and longer-term institutional engagement across different regions.

5.3. Comparative Assessment of the Four Scenarios

The comparison of the four scenarios demonstrates that changes in the political and territorial configuration of the conflict could affect the conditions of humanitarian activity in different ways. Nevertheless, several common patterns can be identified among the scenarios. In particular, more stable territorial control in itself would not necessarily lead to broader humanitarian access, while improved operational effectiveness would not automatically guarantee improvements across all

aspects of the humanitarian response. To a large extent, this would depend on which actors controlled specific territories, how effectively local administrative structures functioned and under what conditions international and local organisations could continue their activities.

The main differences between the scenarios are presented in Table 9. It allows us to compare changes in territorial control, the level of violence, the institutional environment, humanitarian needs and humanitarian access.

Table 9. Comparative Overview of the Four Conflict Scenarios

Dimension	Scenario 1: Protracted Fragmentation	Scenario 2: Military Consolidation	Scenario 3: Resistance Expansion	Scenario 4: Partial De- escalation
Territorial configuration	Continued fragmentation and unstable or overlapping control	Partial consolidation of military control in strategic areas, while peripheral and contested territories remain outside sustained control	Larger areas under more sustained resistance control, while political and institutional fragmentation persists nationally	Existing territorial divisions become less fluid in areas covered by ceasefires
Armed violence	Remains uneven and geographically shifting	May decline in some consolidated areas, while repression and armed violence persist elsewhere	May intensify during shifts in territorial control, before declining in more consolidated areas	Declines primarily in areas covered by ceasefire arrangements
Institutional environment	Multiple parallel and uneven administrative systems remain	Military administrative structures become stronger in controlled areas, but effective and legitimate service provision is not guaranteed	Local and resistance-affiliated administrative structures expand, but differ considerably in capacity and governance arrangements	Existing parallel systems remain, although reduced violence may allow more regular provision of services
Humanitarian needs	Remain extensive, geographically dispersed and shaped by repeated	Become increasingly differentiated between relatively stabilised	May increase during territorial shifts and later move gradually towards recovery and restoration of	Gradually shift from emergency response towards recovery, return, livelihoods and restoration of

	displacement	strategic areas and conflict-affected peripheral zones	services in consolidated areas	services
Humanitarian access	Fragmented and dependent on multiple negotiations, local networks and changing security conditions	More formalised in military-controlled areas, but more selective and politically conditioned	Potentially more regular in resistance-controlled areas, although administrative differences between territorial actors persist	Improves where ceasefires are sustained, while political and administrative barriers remain
Principal humanitarian challenge	Normalisation of a fragmented humanitarian response	Politically conditioned access despite greater administrative regularity	Coordination across different resistance-controlled administrative systems	Coexistence of emergency, recovery and return-related needs

Source: Author's elaboration based on the four scenarios developed in Section 5.2. The table synthesises the analysis of territorial control, violence, institutional capacity, humanitarian needs and humanitarian access presented across the four scenarios.

The most significant distinctions are related to the nature of humanitarian access. Under conditions of prolonged fragmentation, it would continue to depend on numerous local agreements, changing control lines, informal networks and various channels of assistance delivery. With the strengthening of the military's position, some procedures could become more formalised and structured in territories under their control. However, access itself would remain selective and dependent on political approval. The expansion of control by resistance forces could facilitate operations in certain areas, but differences between regional administrative systems and legal, donor, financial and institutional constraints on international organisations would continue to limit broader access. In the case of partial de-escalation, constraints directly related to hostilities could decline first, while political and administrative barriers would persist for longer.

Therefore, although each scenario assumes a different configuration of access restrictions, none of them implies a complete resolution of the access issue. The principal constraint would instead change from territorial fragmentation and multiple parallel access mechanisms to politically conditioned access, administrative differences between resistance-controlled regions combined with additional legal, donor and financial constraints for international organisations, or uneven improvements under partial de-escalation.

The issue of institutional capacity requires particular attention. More stable control over a particular territory would not automatically lead to effective governance. This is particularly evident when comparing the second and third scenarios. Military consolidation could be accompanied by the restoration of some administrative functions and transport routes, but, at the same time, could increase the risk of stricter control over the population and civil society. In areas under sustained control of

resistance forces, a reduction in territorial fragmentation would also not guarantee fully functioning healthcare and education systems, infrastructure, or local administration. In both cases, humanitarian implications would depend not only on the fact of territorial control itself, but also on the capacity of the relevant authorities to maintain basic services and provide conditions for humanitarian organisations to operate.

The differences between international and local organisations under each scenario are presented in Table 10. Their positions could evolve differently; for this reason, operational effectiveness, contextual relevance and institutional sustainability should be analysed separately for each of the two groups.

Table 10. Comparative Implications for International and Local Organisations

Scenario	Type of organisation	Operational effectiveness	Contextual relevance	Institutional sustainability
Scenario 1: Protracted Fragmentation	International organisations	Constrained direct access; reliance on local partners, remote management and cross-border mechanisms	Dependent on local participation and availability of reliable information	Limited by access restrictions, funding instability and fragmented operating arrangements
	Local organisations	Strong local access and adaptability	High due to community proximity and local knowledge	Vulnerable due to short-term funding, staff risks and limited influence over strategic decisions
Scenario 2: Military Consolidation	International organisations	Improves in formally accessible military-controlled areas	Risk of bias toward accessible territories and politically filtered information	More formal presence possible, but autonomy remains conditional
	Local organisations	Highly uneven; some gain regular access, others face greater scrutiny	Local knowledge remains strong, but ability to act independently may decline	Particularly vulnerable for organisations seen as politically sensitive
Scenario 3: Resistance Expansion	International organisations	Potentially improves through more regular engagement and local partnerships	Can improve through closer access to local information and actors	Better long-term cooperation possible, but donor/legal constraints

				remain
	Local organisations	Stronger continuity of access and wider operational role	Particularly high, including greater role in programme design	Could improve, but remains dependent on direct and stable funding
Scenario 4: Partial De-escalation	International organisations	Greater direct presence and monitoring where ceasefires hold	Better direct assessment of changing needs	Improved where agreements are durable, but vulnerable to renewed conflict
	Local organisations	Easier movement and more regular operations	Strong role in identifying return, recovery and social tensions	Improved security environment, but financial vulnerability may remain

Source: Author's elaboration based on the scenario analysis in Section 5.2 and the assessment framework established in Section 5.1. International and local organisations are compared according to the three criteria of operational effectiveness, contextual relevance and institutional sustainability.

The comparison demonstrates that improved operating conditions would not necessarily be accompanied by a stronger institutional position for organisations. International organisations could obtain more regular access to areas under strengthened military control or covered by stable ceasefire agreements. Nevertheless, they would remain dependent on political decisions, donor requirements, and administrative restrictions.

The situation for local organisations could develop in a similar way. Their role in programme implementation could expand under protracted fragmentation or strengthened control by resistance forces. Across several scenarios, local organisations would continue to carry out a substantial share of practical humanitarian activities in areas with limited international presence. Increased responsibility, though, would not automatically result in broader access to direct funding or greater involvement in resource allocation and priority setting. Therefore, an increase in the share of programmes implemented through local actors would not, in itself, indicate a stronger position for them within the humanitarian system.

International organisations, in turn, would retain advantages in accessing larger volumes of funding, technical expertise, international coordination mechanisms and the capacity to sustain large-scale programmes. At the same time, their direct presence in the most challenging areas would be limited under all four scenarios. Local organisations would have different advantages, including closer ties with communities, deeper knowledge of the local context and greater flexibility in terms of access. Yet, they would more frequently face direct risks to their personnel, financial vulnerability and limited capacity for long-term planning.

The balance of roles between international and local organisations could shift depending on how the conflict evolved, but the complementary nature of their activities would be maintained across all four

scenarios. The effectiveness of the humanitarian response would depend not only on which organisations were able to continue operating, but also on how resources, operational responsibilities, risks, and participation in decision-making were distributed among them.

Taken together, the analysis of all four scenarios suggests that the humanitarian situation in Myanmar would be unlikely to develop along the same trajectory across the country. Different regions could simultaneously experience active hostilities, more stable territorial control, or a gradual transition toward recovery and the return of displaced populations. In such circumstances, humanitarian organisations would have to combine various approaches and adapt them to regional differences. The long-term effectiveness of the response would depend on whether access to affected populations could be maintained, local conditions adequately taken into account, and the institutional sustainability of both international and local actors preserved.

5.4. Cross-Scenario Humanitarian Needs and the Future Role of NGOs

Regardless of which of the scenarios considered becomes predominant in individual regions, humanitarian needs in Myanmar would likely continue to be significant and become increasingly differentiated in nature. In some regions, emergency assistance related to ongoing hostilities, new displacement and limited access to basic services would remain a priority. In other regions, where the level of violence declined and territorial control became more stable, the nature of needs could gradually shift towards housing and infrastructure reconstruction, the return of displaced persons, livelihood recovery, healthcare, and education. Consequently, the humanitarian system would have to operate simultaneously in areas at different stages of conflict and recovery.

Such variation in needs would mean that a single humanitarian response model for the entire country would remain unrealistic. Even if the overall situation in Myanmar improved, access conditions would still differ significantly across regions. In some cases, international organisations could preserve or even expand their direct presence, while in others, operations would continue to depend on local partners, remote management, cross-border assistance, or less formalised delivery channels. Therefore, one of the key tasks would be to combine several operational models and adapt them to specific political, territorial, and administrative conditions.

The contribution of international organisations would nevertheless remain substantial. They would continue to provide access to major sources of funding, technical expertise, international coordination mechanisms and support for large-scale programmes. In more stable zones, their direct participation could expand, especially in the areas of service restoration, needs monitoring, and longer-term humanitarian planning. However, in territories with limited or politically conditioned access, their opportunities would still depend on cooperation with local partners and the ability to use different forms of presence.

The future role of local organisations could expand both in the context of continued conflict and during a gradual transition toward recovery. Their proximity to communities, knowledge of the local context and capacity to maintain a presence in hard-to-reach areas would enhance their relevance not only for the delivery of emergency assistance, but also for needs assessment, support to returning populations, and the restoration of basic services. At the same time, an increase in operational responsibility would not automatically mean a stronger institutional position. Limited access to direct

funding, short-term project cycles, risks to personnel and limited participation in strategic decision-making could persist even where local organisations carried out an increasing share of practical humanitarian work.

Therefore, further development of the humanitarian response would depend on how effectively international and local actors could work together across different operational environments. The quality of such cooperation would be determined not only by the existence of formal partnerships, but also by how resources, risks, operational responsibilities and participation in decision-making were distributed across different levels of the humanitarian system.

Overall, the future role of NGOs would be shaped by their ability to respond to different humanitarian conditions across Myanmar, including the simultaneous need for emergency assistance, recovery and longer-term support. This would require sufficient operational flexibility while maintaining access, contextual relevance and institutional sustainability.

5.5. Policy Recommendations

The analysis suggests that future humanitarian action in Myanmar would require, above all, greater flexibility from international organisations and donors. Persistent regional differences in territorial control, levels of violence and access conditions make the use of a single operating model across the country unrealistic. International humanitarian organisations would have to combine direct presence, programme delivery through local partners, remote management and cross-border assistance depending on conditions in a specific area. Such an approach would allow them to adapt to changes on the ground more rapidly and maintain the ability to provide assistance even when one access channel is restricted.

Particular attention should be given to the funding of local organisations. Although their contribution to humanitarian response is particularly important in areas where international presence is limited, an expanded operational role is not always accompanied by more sustainable funding. Reliance on short-term and unstable funding limits local organisations' ability to engage in long-term planning and preserve organisational capacity. Thus, broader access to direct and multi-year funding could strengthen the institutional sustainability of local actors and enable them to sustain their activities beyond individual project cycles. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Chapter 4, where access to direct funding is identified as one of the key factors influencing the sustainability of local organisations.

An increase in funding should be accompanied by more substantial involvement of local organisations in decision-making. Their role should go beyond the implementation of programmes designed at the international level. Through their continuous interaction with communities, local actors often have more up-to-date information on population movements, changing needs, and access conditions. Thus, their participation is essential at the stages of needs assessment, priority setting, programme design and resource distribution. The findings in Chapter 4 demonstrate that localisation remains incomplete when the transfer of operational responsibility is not accompanied by a redistribution of resources and decision-making authority.

At the same time, an expanded role for local organisations should not result in a disproportionate transfer of operational and security-related risks to them. In contexts of limited international presence,

local staff and partners are more often directly exposed to risks associated with the transportation of humanitarian supplies, the storage of sensitive documentation, engagement with actors controlling a particular territory and work in contested areas. Thus, greater localisation should be accompanied by additional resources for risk mitigation, including staff protection measures, secure information management and support for organisational sustainability. Otherwise, an increase in the share of programmes implemented through local partners may mean not only the localisation of humanitarian assistance, but also the localisation of risks.

Equally important is adapting reporting and oversight requirements to the conditions of armed conflict. Standardised procedures for financial reporting and documentation remain necessary to ensure accountability, but their rigid application may create additional risks for humanitarian networks, suppliers and assistance recipients. In such circumstances, control procedures should preserve sufficient transparency while also taking into account security concerns and limited access to formal financial systems. More flexible approaches to expenditure verification, personal data collection and the secure storage of sensitive information could reduce these risks without compromising the principles of accountability.

Finally, humanitarian planning should take into account that emergency needs, recovery, and longer-term support can exist simultaneously in different parts of the country. An overly rigid distinction between emergency response and recovery programming could limit the capacity of organisations to respond to rapidly changing conditions. Funding and programming mechanisms should be flexible enough to allow humanitarian priorities to shift from emergency assistance toward recovery in areas where conditions stabilize, while maintaining emergency support in regions where acute needs persist.

Table 11. Summary of Policy Recommendations

Policy area	Recommendation	Main rationale
Operational flexibility	Humanitarian organisations should combine direct presence, local partnerships, remote management and cross-border assistance depending on regional conditions.	A single operating model is unlikely to be effective across Myanmar because access conditions, territorial control and levels of violence differ significantly between regions.
Funding for local organisations	Donors should expand access to direct and multi-year funding for local organisations.	Greater funding stability would strengthen long-term planning, staff retention and institutional sustainability, reducing dependence on short-term project cycles.
Participation in decision-making	Local organisations should be more actively involved in needs assessment, priority setting, programme design and resource allocation.	Their proximity to affected communities gives them access to context-specific information that may not be fully captured through international or centralised assessment mechanisms.

Risk sharing and protection	An expanded operational role for local organisations should be accompanied by greater support for staff protection, secure information management and other risk-mitigation measures.	Greater localisation can otherwise result in a disproportionate transfer of security and operational risks to local actors.
Reporting and accountability	Donors and international organisations should adapt reporting, documentation and oversight requirements to conflict conditions.	Excessively rigid procedures may create additional risks for humanitarian staff, partners and recipients, particularly where sensitive information could expose local networks.
Flexible humanitarian programming	Funding and programme design should allow organisations to move between emergency response, recovery and longer-term support according to regional developments.	Different parts of Myanmar may simultaneously experience active conflict, stabilisation and early recovery, requiring different forms of assistance at the same time.

Source: Author's elaboration based on the analysis presented in Sections 5.2–5.5.

Taken together, these recommendations are intended to strengthen the humanitarian system's capacity to operate under conditions of continued territorial and political heterogeneity. A more sustainable combination of international resources and local capacities would require diverse access mechanisms, more predictable funding, meaningful participation of local actors in decision-making and more balanced risk distribution. It is the quality of this cooperation, rather than the dominance of any one type of organisation, that remains one of the key conditions for an effective humanitarian response in Myanmar.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to analyse the role of international and local non-governmental organisations in the humanitarian response to the conflict in Myanmar, and to identify the factors determining the effectiveness of their activities in the context of fragmented territorial control, limited humanitarian access, and a changing political environment.

The analysis shows that the humanitarian response in Myanmar cannot be adequately assessed using quantitative indicators alone, such as the number of organisations operating, the overall volume of funding, or the number of aid recipients. What matters is not only the scale of available resources, but also organisations' actual ability to maintain access to affected populations, adapt programmes to regional and local needs, ensure continuity of operations, and function under heightened political, administrative, and security-related risks. In this context, the effectiveness of the humanitarian response is analysed through three interrelated dimensions: operational effectiveness, contextual relevance, and institutional sustainability.

The comparison of international and local organisations demonstrates that neither category has a universal advantage. International organisations retain significant advantages in access to large-scale funding, technical expertise, international coordination mechanisms, and the capacity to implement large-scale programmes. However, their activities may be limited by registration requirements, administrative procedures, legal and donor constraints, as well as limited direct access to territories controlled by various military and political actors. Local organisations, by contrast, more often maintain closer ties with local communities, have a better understanding of the social and political context, and are able to use more flexible mechanisms for delivering assistance. At the same time, they are more exposed to security risks, more dependent on short-term funding, and often have limited influence over resource allocation and strategic decision-making.

Therefore, the central finding of the study is that the effectiveness of the humanitarian response is determined not by the superiority of international or local organisations as such, but by the extent to which their different resources and capabilities can complement one another. International resources and institutional capacities gain practical significance only if they can be translated into actual access and assistance adapted to the conditions of specific areas. In turn, the advantages of local organisations related to access, trust, and contextual knowledge do not guarantee sustainability if sufficient funding, staff security, and participation in decision-making are not provided. Consequently, the quality of interaction between international and local actors is one of the key factors determining the effectiveness of Myanmar's humanitarian system. This finding is also directly reflected in the study's recommendations, which emphasise that the quality of cooperation matters more than the dominance of any one type of organisation.

Another important finding concerns the territorial heterogeneity of the humanitarian environment. The research demonstrates that the humanitarian situation in Myanmar cannot be treated as homogeneous across the country. The fragmentation of political and territorial control creates diverse operational environments across regions. Different forms of territorial control may simultaneously create more favourable conditions for one category of actors while increasing constraints for another. For instance, the consolidation of control by the military may expand formal operating opportunities for some registered international organisations, while also increasing risks for local actors. By contrast, more stable control by ethnic armed organisations or other resistance forces may improve

the operational environment for local organisations without removing the legal, financial, and administrative constraints faced by international actors.

The scenario analysis further demonstrates that none of the possible trajectories of the conflict fully eliminates the problems of humanitarian access and institutional sustainability. Even with a partial reduction in the intensity of hostilities or more sustained territorial control, the humanitarian system will continue to face regional differences, politically conditioned access, and varying capacities among different organisations. In some areas, the need for emergency assistance will persist, while in others attention may increasingly shift towards restoring basic services, supporting returning populations, and longer-term recovery. Therefore, a single model of humanitarian response for the entire country appears unrealistic.

This leads to several broader practical implications. International organisations and donors require greater flexibility when selecting operational models, combining direct presence, collaboration with local partners, remote management, and cross-border mechanisms. Strengthening the sustainability of local organisations requires broader access to direct and multi-year funding, while increased financial support should be matched by their meaningful participation in needs assessment, priority setting, programme design, and resource allocation. At the same time, reporting and oversight mechanisms should take into account the context of armed conflict, since overly rigid documentation and disclosure requirements may create additional risks for partners, humanitarian staff, and recipients.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's limitations. The analysis is largely based on secondary documentary sources, while the availability of information varies significantly across regions. The most inaccessible and insecure areas are also those where reliable data are most difficult to obtain. In addition, different organisations apply different data collection methodologies, reporting periods and categories, which limit the direct comparability of individual indicators. Finally, the dynamic nature of the conflict means that territorial control, humanitarian needs, and organisations' operating conditions can change rapidly.

Future research could build on this analysis through more extensive use of primary data. In particular, interviews with representatives of international and local organisations, staff of humanitarian networks, and members of affected communities would allow for a more detailed examination of differences in perceptions of effectiveness, localisation, risk distribution, and participation in decision-making. Further attention could also be given to comparisons among individual regions of Myanmar, since variations in territorial control and the institutional environment may shape significantly different models of humanitarian response. Another promising area for research would be the examination of how the balance between emergency humanitarian assistance and longer-term recovery priorities changes across areas with different conflict dynamics.

Overall, the analysis conducted in this study shows that humanitarian effectiveness in Myanmar is determined primarily by the system's ability to adapt to the political and territorial heterogeneity of the conflict. International and local organisations perform different but complementary functions, and the sustainability of the humanitarian response depends on whether resources, access, local knowledge, operational responsibilities, risks, and influence over decision-making are distributed among them in a way that supports both the practical delivery of assistance and organisations' long-term ability to sustain their activities. In the context of continued uncertainty, it is precisely the flexible combination of international resources and local capacities that represents the most sustainable basis for humanitarian response in Myanmar.

7. References

- Abdelmagid, N., Checchi, F., Garry, S., & Warsame, A. (2019). Defining, measuring and interpreting the appropriateness of humanitarian assistance. *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*, 4, Article 14. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s41018-019-0062-y>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Al Jazeera. (2017, March 14). Myanmar: Major ethnic groups and where they live. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/3/14/myanmar-major-ethnic-groups-and-where-they-live>. Accessed July 27, 2026.
- ALNAP. (2022). The State of the Humanitarian System 2022. ALNAP. https://alnapp.org/documents/18685/alnap-2022-sohs-report_0.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Amer, M., Daim, T. U., & Jetter, A. (2013). A review of scenario planning. *Futures*, 46, 23–40. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016328712001978>. Accessed May 18, 2026.
- Amnesty International. (2025). The state of the world’s human rights 2024/25: Myanmar. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/report-myanmar/>. Accessed June 23, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2024). Between cooperation and competition: The struggle among resistance groups in Myanmar. <https://acleddata.com/report/between-cooperation-and-competition-struggle-resistance-groups-myanmar>. Accessed June 25, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2025). Asia-Pacific overview: July 2025. <https://acleddata.com/update/asia-pacific-overview-july-2025>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2026a). Asia-Pacific overview: January 2026. <https://acleddata.com/update/asia-pacific-overview-january-2026>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2026b). Asia-Pacific overview: July 2026. <https://acleddata.com/update/asia-pacific-overview-july-2026>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2026c). Asia-Pacific overview: March 2026. <https://acleddata.com/update/asia-pacific-overview-march-2026>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2026d). From state to nation: The Arakan Army’s ascent in post-coup Myanmar. <https://acleddata.com/report/state-nation-arakan-armys-ascent-post-coup-myanmar>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. (2026e). Myanmar’s military elections will not lead to peace or improvement in the political crisis. <https://acleddata.com/report/myanmars-military-elections-will-not-lead-peace-or-improvement-political-crisis>. Accessed July 18, 2026.
- Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. (2026). Daily briefing in relation to the military coup. <https://aappb.org/daily-briefing/>. Accessed July 16, 2026.
- Barbelet, V. (2018). As local as possible, as international as necessary: Understanding capacity and complementarity in humanitarian action. Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute. <https://odi.org/en/publications/as-local-as-possible-as-international-as-necessary-understanding-capacity-and-complementarity-in-humanitarian-action/>. Accessed September 1, 2026.

- Barbelet, V., Davies, G., Flint, J., & Davey, E. (2021). Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: A literature study. ODI. <https://odi.org/en/publications/interrogating-the-evidence-base-on-humanitarian-localisation-a-literature-study/>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Barnett, M., & Weiss, T. G. (Eds.). (2008). Humanitarianism in question: Politics, power, ethics. Cornell University Press.
- Beck, T. (2006). Evaluating humanitarian action using the OECD-DAC criteria: An ALNAP guide for humanitarian agencies. Overseas Development Institute. <https://odi.org/en/publications/evaluating-humanitarian-action-using-the-oecd-dac-criteria/>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Bennett, M. M., & Faxon, H. O. (2021). Uneven frontiers: Exposing the geopolitics of Myanmar's borderlands with critical remote sensing. *Remote Sensing*, 13(6), Article 1158. <https://www.mdpi.com/2072-4292/13/6/1158>. Accessed July 26, 2026.
- Betts, A., Easton-Calabria, E., & Pincock, K. (2021). Localising public health: Refugee-led organisations as first and last responders in COVID-19. *World Development*, 139, 105311. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7685637/>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Bishop, P., Hines, A., & Collins, T. (2007). The current state of scenario development: An overview of techniques. *Foresight*, 9(1), 5–25. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/14636680710727516/full/html>. Accessed September 11, 2026.
- Börjeson, L., Höjer, M., Dreborg, K.-H., Ekvall, T., & Finnveden, G. (2006). Scenario types and techniques: Towards a user's guide. *Futures*, 38(7), 723–739. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016328705002132>. Accessed May 20, 2026.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://www.emerald.com/qjr/article-abstract/9/2/27/360733/Document-Analysis-as-a-Qualitative-Research-Method>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Bradfield, R., Wright, G., Burt, G., Cairns, G., & Van Der Heijden, K. (2005). The origins and evolution of scenario techniques in long range business planning. *Futures*, 37(8), 795–812. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016328705000042>. Accessed September 11, 2026.
- Callahan, M. P. (2003). *Making enemies: War and state building in Burma*. Cornell University Press.
- The Carter Center. (2020, November 10). Preliminary statement: Election observation mission Myanmar, general election, November 8, 2020. <https://www.cartercenter.org/publication/preliminary-statement-election-observation-mission-myanmar-general-election-nov-8-2020/>. Accessed May 20, 2026.
- Centre for Humanitarian Leadership. (2021). Myanmar: Post-coup scenarios and implications for humanitarian actors. <https://www.centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/research/publications/myanmar-post-coup-scenarios-and-implications-for-humanitarian-actors/>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- COAR Global. (2021). Myanmar February Coup: Kachin State Scenario Plan. <https://coar-global.org/publications/myanmar-february-coup-kachin-state-scenario-plan>. Accessed September 1, 2026.

- Coppel, N., & Chang, L. Y. C. (2024). Myanmar's digital coup: How the world responded. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-58645-3>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Danish Refugee Council. (n.d.). Myanmar. <https://drc.ngo/where-we-work/asia/myanmar/>. Accessed June 10, 2026.
- De Geoffroy, V., Grunewald, F., & Ní Chéilleachair, R. (2017). More than the money: Localisation in practice. Trócaire & Groupe URD. <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/more-than-the-money-full-report.pdf>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Dean, K. (2005). Spaces and territorialities on the Sino–Burmese boundary: China, Burma and the Kachin. *Political Geography*, 24(7), 808–830. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S096262980500065X>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Duffield, M. (2001). *Global governance and the new wars: The merging of development and security*. Zed Books.
- Egreteau, R. (2016). *Caretaking democratization: The military and political change in Myanmar*. Oxford University Press.
- Faxon, H. O., Goldstein, J. E., Fisher, M. R., & Hunt, G. (2022). Territorializing spatial data: Controlling land through One Map projects in Indonesia and Myanmar. *Political Geography*, 98, Article 102651. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629822000658>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Fortify Rights. (2024). Annual report 2023. <https://www.fortifyrights.org/annual-report-2023/>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Fortify Rights. (n.d.). About Fortify Rights. <https://www.fortifyrights.org/about/>. Accessed June 13, 2026.
- Grundy-Warr, C., & Wong Siew Yin, E. (2002). Geographies of displacement: The Karenni and the Shan across the Myanmar–Thailand border. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 23(1), 93–122. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9493.00120>. Accessed July 26, 2026.
- Harvey, P., Stoddard, A., Czwarno, M., Breckenridge, M.-J., & Aung Naing. (2023). Humanitarian access SCORE report: Myanmar—Survey on the coverage, operational reach, and effectiveness of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian Outcomes. https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/score_myanmar_april_2023.pdf. Accessed June 18, 2026.
- Hu, Z., & Konrad, V. (2018). In the space between exception and integration: The Kokang borderlands on the periphery of China and Myanmar. *Geopolitics*, 23(1), 147–179. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14650045.2017.1306777>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021, December 13). Myanmar: Junta blocks lifesaving aid. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/13/myanmar-junta-blocks-lifesaving-aid>. Accessed June 21, 2026.

- Human Rights Watch. (2025). World report 2025: Myanmar. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/myanmar>. Accessed June 23, 2026.
- Huntington, S. P. (1957). *The soldier and the state: The theory and politics of civil–military relations*. Harvard University Press.
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee. (2016). *The Grand Bargain: A shared commitment to better serve people in need*. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/sites/default/files/migrated/2017-02/grand_bargain_final_22_may_final-2_0.pdf. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2023, November 27). Humanitarian access: What the law says. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/humanitarian-access-what-law-says>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- International Crisis Group. (2021, February 16). Responding to the Myanmar coup (Asia Briefing No. 166). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b166-responding-myanmar-coup>. Accessed May 25, 2026.
- International Crisis Group. (2022a). Crowdfunding a war: The money behind Myanmar’s resistance (Asia Report No. 328). International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/328-crowdfunding-war-money-behind-myanmars-resistance>. Accessed September 11, 2026.
- International Crisis Group. (2022b, January 12). Myanmar’s coup shakes up its ethnic conflicts (Asia Report No. 319). <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/319-myanmars-coup-shakes-its-ethnic-conflicts>. Accessed May 27, 2026.
- International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (n.d.). Myanmar House of Representatives 2020 general election. ElectionGuide. <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/3319/>. Accessed July 18, 2026.
- Karen Human Rights Group. (n.d.). *About us*. <https://khrh.org/about-us>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Karen Human Rights Group. (2022). Denied and deprived: Local communities confronting the humanitarian crisis and protection challenges in Southeast Burma. <https://www.khrh.org/2022/06/denied-and-deprived-local-communities-confronting-humanitarian-crisis-and-protection>. Accessed June 20, 2026.
- Karen Human Rights Group. (2024, December 28). Emergency lifeline: Challenges to the right to healthcare, and local efforts, in Southeast Burma (January–October 2024). <https://www.khrh.org/2024/12/24-5-bp1/emergency-lifeline-challenges-right-healthcare-and-local-efforts-southeast-burma>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Karen Human Rights Group. (2025, November 28). Dooplaya District situation update: SAC shelling and air strikes caused casualties, displacement, and health and education challenges in Kruh Tuh Township (April 2025). <https://khrh.org/2025/11/25-162-s1/dooplaya-district-situation-update-sac-shelling-and-air-strikes-caused-casualties>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Karen Human Rights Group. (2026, July 22). In spite of fear: Women’s experiences navigating the compounding challenges of displacement and insecurity in Southeast Burma. <https://www.khrh.org/2026/07/26-1-tmt/spite-fear-womens-experiences-navigating-compounding-challenges-displacement-and>. Accessed July 29, 2026.

- Loong, S. (2025). More-than-rebel territory: War, resistance, and relations in the Salween Peace Park. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 115(5), 1165–1184. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/24694452.2025.2478262>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Loong, S. (2026). Decolonising civil war: Warscapes as relational conjunctures in post-coup Myanmar. *Geopolitics*, 1–30. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2026.2659598>. Accessed September 13, 2026.
- Maung, P. P., Wells, T., & Scott, A. (2026). Locating the “local” in aid localisation: The case of humanitarian response in Myanmar. *Development in Practice*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09614524.2026.2711253>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Médecins Sans Frontières. (2024a). International activity report 2023. <https://www.msf.org/international-activity-report-2023>. Accessed June 8, 2026.
- Médecins Sans Frontières. (2024b, June 27). MSF suspends medical activities in northern Rakhine State, Myanmar. <https://www.msf.org/msf-suspends-medical-activities-northern-rakhine-state-myanmar>. Accessed June 8, 2026.
- Médecins Sans Frontières. (n.d.). Myanmar. <https://www.msf.org/myanmar>. Accessed July 29, 2026.
- Myanmar National Portal. (n.d.). Geography. <https://myanmar.gov.mm/en/geography>. Accessed July 27, 2026.
- Norwegian Refugee Council. (2025). NRC in Myanmar. <https://www.nrc.no/countries/asia/myanmar>. Accessed June 11, 2026.
- OECD. (1991). Principles for evaluation of development assistance. Development Assistance Committee, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [https://one.oecd.org/document/OCDE/GD\(91\)208/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/OCDE/GD(91)208/en/pdf). Accessed September 1, 2026.
- OECD. (2019). Better criteria for better evaluation: Revised evaluation criteria definitions and principles for use. OECD. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/better-criteria-for-better-evaluation_15a9c26b-en.html. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2025, February 18). 2025: Update on the human rights situation in Myanmar in 2024. <https://www.bangkok.ohchr.org/reports/2025-update-human-rights-situation-myanmar-2024>. Accessed June 24, 2026.
- Reuters. (2026a, July 14). ASEAN envoy meets Myanmar opposition groups in Thailand. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/asean-envoy-meets-myanmar-opposition-groups-thailand-2026-07-14/>. Accessed July 17, 2026.
- Reuters. (2026b, April 21). Myanmar president seeks peace talks within 100 days, rebels reject offer. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-president-seeks-peace-talks-within-100-days-rebels-reject-offer-2026-04-21/>. Accessed May 30, 2026.
- Reuters. (2026c, May 25). Myanmar military steps up fight for rare earth area and border routes. <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/myanmar-military-steps-up-fight-rare-earth-area-border-routes-2026-05-25/>. Accessed June 2, 2026.

- Reuters. (2026d, July 15). Opposing sides in Myanmar conflict open to dialogue, Thai foreign minister says. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/opposing-sides-myanmar-conflict-open-dialogue-thai-foreign-minister-says-2026-07-15/>. Accessed July 18, 2026.
- Roepstorff, K. (2020). A call for critical reflection on the localisation agenda in humanitarian action. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(2), 284–301. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01436597.2019.1644160>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Rotberg, R. I. (Ed.). (2004). *When states fail: Causes and consequences*. Princeton University Press.
- Schoemaker, P. J. H. (1995). Scenario planning: A tool for strategic thinking. *Sloan Management Review*, 36(2), 25–40. <https://shop.sloanreview.mit.edu/store/scenario-planning-a-tool-for-strategic-thinking>. Accessed May 19, 2026.
- Schreter, L., & Harmer, A. (2013). Delivering aid in highly insecure environments: A critical review of the literature, 2007–2012. *Humanitarian Outcomes*. <https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/delivering-aid-in-highly-insecure-environments-a-critical-review-of-the-literature-2007-2012>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Slim, H. (2015). *Humanitarian ethics: A guide to the morality of aid in war and disaster*. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, M. (1999). *Burma: Insurgency and the politics of ethnicity* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- South, A. (2008). *Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict*. Routledge.
- Stoddard, A., Harmer, A., & Renouf, J. S. (2010). Once removed: Lessons and challenges in remote management of humanitarian operations for insecure areas. *Humanitarian Outcomes*. <https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/publications/once-removed-lessons-and-challenges-remote-management-humanitarian-operations-insecure>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Stoddard, A., Jillani, S., Caccavale, J., Cooke, P., Guillemois, D., & Klimentov, V. (2017). Out of reach: How insecurity prevents humanitarian aid from accessing the neediest. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 6(1), Article 1, 1–25. <https://stabilityjournal.org/articles/506>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Stokke, K., & Nyi Nyi Kyaw. (2024). Revolutionary resistance against full autocratization: Actors and strategies of resistance after the 2021 military coup in Myanmar. *Political Geography*, 108, Article 103011. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629823001890>. Accessed September 1, 2026.
- Taylor, R. H. (2009). *The state in Myanmar*. NUS Press.
- Thant Myint-U. (2001). *The making of modern Burma*. Cambridge University Press.
- Union Election Commission of Myanmar. (2020, November 30). Figures and percentages of the 2020 multiparty democracy general election (Announcement No. 268/2020). Myanmar Digital News. <https://www.mdn.gov.mm/en/figures-and-percentages-2020-multiparty-democracy-general-election-be-published-newspapers>. Accessed July 18, 2026.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2026a). Myanmar emergency. <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/myanmar-emergency>. Accessed July 12, 2026.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2026b, July 9). Myanmar UNHCR displacement overview: 6 July 2026. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/123247>. Accessed July 13, 2026.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2023). Strengthening risk analysis for humanitarian planning. UNDRR. <https://www.undrr.org/publication/strengthening-risk-analysis-humanitarian-planning>. Accessed September 11, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2021). Myanmar humanitarian response plan 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-response-plan-2021-january-2021>. Accessed May 22, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2022). Myanmar humanitarian response plan 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-january-2022>. Accessed May 24, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2023a). Myanmar humanitarian needs and response plan 2024. <https://myanmar.un.org/en/256164-myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december-2023>. Accessed June 2, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2023b). Myanmar humanitarian response plan 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-response-plan-2023-january-2023>. Accessed May 26, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2024). Myanmar humanitarian needs and response plan 2025. <https://myanmar.un.org/en/286727-myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-december-2024>. Accessed June 5, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2025). Myanmar humanitarian needs and response plan 2026. <https://myanmar.un.org/en/308519-myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2026>. Accessed July 16, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2026a, February 27). Myanmar: Humanitarian needs and response plan 2025, quarter four dashboard (January–December 2025). <https://myanmar.un.org/en/310786-myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-quarter-4-dashboard-jan-dec-2025>. Accessed July 29, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2026b, May 27). Myanmar: Humanitarian needs and response plan 2026, quarter 1 dashboard (January–March 2026). <https://myanmar.un.org/en/316291-myanmar-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2026-quarter-1-dashboard-jan-mar-2026>. Accessed June 16, 2026.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. (2026c, March 9). Myanmar humanitarian update No. 51. <https://myanmar.un.org/en/311498-myanmar-humanitarian-update-no51>. Accessed June 10, 2026.

Vrieze, P. (2024). Movement escalation and mobilization for resistance: From anti-coup protest to “People’s War” in Myanmar. *Political Geography*, 114, Article 103165. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629824001148>. Accessed September 13, 2026.

Wall, I., & Hedlund, K. (2016). Localisation and locally-led crisis response: A literature review. *Local to Global Protection*. <https://www.local2global.info/wp->

[content/uploads/L2GP_SDC_Lit_Review_LocallyLed_June_2016_revisedJan_2017_online.pdf](#). Accessed September 1, 2026.

Walton, M. J. (2017). Buddhism, politics and political thought in Myanmar. Cambridge University Press.

Wells, T., Décobert, A., & Myanmar researcher. (2023, September 20). Aid localisation amidst revolution in Myanmar. Development Policy Centre. <https://devpolicy.org/aid-localisation-amidst-revolution-in-myanmar-20230920/>. Accessed June 19, 2026.

Willitts-King, B., Majid, N., Ali, M., & Poole, L. (2018). Funding to local humanitarian actors: Evidence from Somalia and South Sudan. Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute. <https://odi.org/en/publications/funding-to-local-humanitarian-actors-evidence-from-somalia-and-south-sudan/>. Accessed September 1, 2026.

Zhou, C., Wu, S., & Su, X. (2022). Cross-border livelihood: Trade, labor, and internal displacement at the Myanmar-China border. *Geoforum*, 129, 49–59. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0016718522000033>. Accessed September 13, 2026.