



# Asia Democracy Research Network

Working Paper Series

Empowering Think Tanks and  
Encouraging Democratization

Young-Hwan Shin  
East Asia Institute

## Empowering Think Tanks and Encouraging Democratization

Young-Hwan Shin\*  
East Asia Institute  
November 2016

### **Background: A New Trend of Development Assistance and Trilateral Cooperation**

Foreign aid, defined as a flow of resources from one country to the other with the goal of assistance, has a long history. Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other private entities have provided assistance to underdeveloped countries for many years. Foreign aid has been mainly focused on development plans, such as economic development assistance, social infrastructure building, medical assistance, emergency relief activities, human development plans, and so on. Although enormous resources have been poured into foreign aid activities and a large number of entities as well as governments have endeavored to help people in devastated circumstances, the world continues to suffer from poverty, hunger, disease, underdevelopment, undereducation, and other issues. With these ongoing problems, some criticize the effectiveness of foreign aid, while others appeal for more active assistance on the part of developed countries.

The effectiveness of development assistance has been one of the main issues of foreign aid communities. Unorganized or blindly directed aid has just a temporary effect, which cannot change the situation and may even reinforce the asymmetric structure between the North and the South. Therefore, donors have sought solutions for constructing an environment of sustainable development. In February 2005, the international community agreed on five principles to encourage sustainable development in developing countries and effective management of assistance resources, including ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness can be regarded as a starting point of a new movement for effective development assistance based on collaborative efforts between donors and developing countries.<sup>1</sup>

---

\* Senior Research Fellow & Director, Research Planning Department, East Asia Institute

Most international aid is focused on economic development, or “development assistance.” However, the concept of development needs to be more comprehensively redefined. The pursuit of economic development alone cannot result in sustainability. If a developing country cannot develop by themselves with decreasing assistance from outside, it will result in the continuation and retrenchment of the structure of asymmetry between the rich and poor. Foreign aid should be a seed, which grows and blossoms to produce fruit. Seeds from the fruit are planted in the soil of the developing country. This is a sustainable cycle of development assistance. During the first phase of assistance, the donor may play the role of farmer. But from the second year or later, the role of farmer should be taken on by the owner of the land. Education and the transfer of technical know-how should be performed alongside the provision of economic aid. Development needs to include human factors.

Politics should not be neglected. For decades, developed countries have provided developing countries with an enormous amount of resources for economic development. Nevertheless, most recipients of foreign aid are still suffering from poverty. One of the main reasons for ongoing poverty is politics. Many developing countries are politically unstable. Governments are incompetent, laws are flouted often, society is insecure, and money flows along corruption lines. Without political development and social stability, international assistance is nothing more than a drop in the bucket.

Governments are leading actors in the community of development cooperation. Most ODA comes from the 29 members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), including the European Union, which acts as a full member of the committee. The role of governments is crucial in building a framework for global development cooperation and initiating humanitarian assistance for genuine purposes. However, when examining what is needed to deliver aid effectively, the role of civil society, especially civil society organizations (CSOs), should also be recognized. A holistic approach to ensure aid effectiveness requires cooperation on the civil society level. Governments do not need to support all kinds of aid programs. Rather, CSOs can play a more effective and productive role in medium and small scale projects or in short-term and specifically themed programs.

Traditional aid flows have been bilateral, from the developed to the developing. Nowadays, a new form of development assistance is gaining attention: trilateral cooperation. The bilateral framework of development cooperation is composed of donor and recipient. In some bilateral approaches, donors seek cooperation with private agencies or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to take advantage of the experience and technical know-how of the private sector. As cooperation between donors and private agencies has grown, the triangular form of development assistance has become an effective model for aid projects. Initially, private agencies and NGOs cooperated with their own governments to provide technical support for that government’s foreign aid programs. However, later on some of these private agencies attracted support from other donor governments, and a triangular form of development assistance was born. This new approach of trilateral cooperation involves developed country donors, technical know-how providers from the developed side, and developing recipients (Mehta and Nanda 2005).

This paper presents a new example of development assistance which primarily includes considerations of effectiveness, private-private cooperation, a focus on human development, encouragement for better governance, development assistance for politics, and a practical model of trilateral cooperation. The East Asia Institute (EAI) has been carrying out a development program focused on the promotion of democratization in Myanmar with financial support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) since 2015, the title of which is “Building Civil Society Capacity in Myanmar through Budget Monitoring.” Therefore, this paper attempts to discuss the requirements and conditions for a successful triangular approach, while presenting EAI’s experiences with its partners in this democracy promotion project as a model for future aid projects.

## **Trilateral Development Cooperation: Composition and Roles**

Trilateral development cooperation can be regarded as a supplementary approach to the traditional bilateral form of foreign aid between donor and recipient in order to encourage effective aid delivery and secure sustainable development in developing countries. As indicated by the name, trilateral cooperation involves three actors; a traditional donor, usually from the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC), an emerging donor in the North or South, and a beneficiary country in the South. The type of trilateral participation may differ in accordance with the specific development project being conducted, such as North-North-South, North-South-South, or even South-South-South (Ashoff 2010).

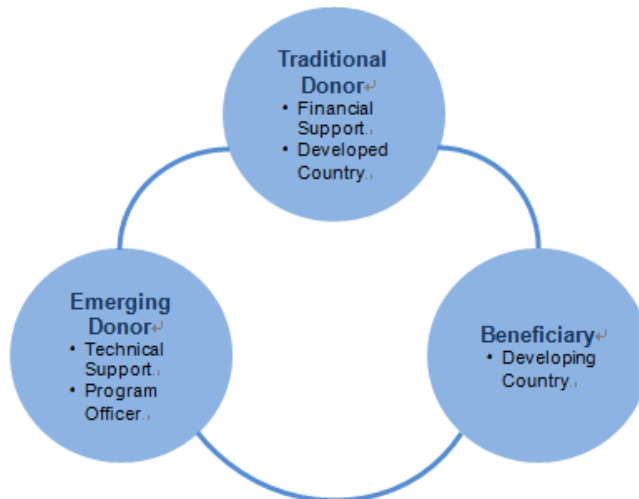
The traditional donor is often described as “North,” and it usually is a developed country, or an institution of a developed country. The traditional donor provides the financial support that is required to conduct the development program. Traditional donors have an initiative to perform a specific development program or to even expand a previously successful experience to another recipient.

The emerging donor can be based in the South, often in a location that is regionally close to the recipient, or in the North. In the triangular format, the emerging donor plays the role of a program officer who provides technical support and manages the whole process of the project. If the emerging donor is a neighbor to the beneficiary, they may share common historical and cultural backgrounds, and the technical donor will understand the current situation of the beneficiary with regard to the development program. Therefore, this donor may be able to customize the program and its implementation to best fit the individual circumstances of the beneficiary country. This is one of the marked merits of the trilateral approach.

The last actor in the triangle is the beneficiary, a developing country. The role and status of a beneficiary are not different in the trilateral development cooperation model. However, the developing country has to work with two donors, which means there will be an additional communication channel. When conducting a project, the beneficiary may communicate primarily with the second actor. However, they must also respond to the first provider at any time the first provider wishes to intervene or check on the performance of the beneficiary. The increase in the number of communication channels is an issue that affects all three actors.

The trilateral approach is based on a partnership between the main actors, who play a specific role and function in a given development project. The composition of the triangle may differ from project to project in order to optimize performance.

**Figure 1. The Composition of Trilateral Development Cooperation**



The program “Building Civil Society Capacity in Myanmar through Budget Monitoring” involved three parties, including the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) of the United States, the East Asia Institute of South Korea, and four civil society organizations in Myanmar. The partner CSOs in Myanmar were the Sandhi Governance Institute, the Renaissance Institute, the Open Myanmar Initiative, and the Yangon School of Political Science.

NED initiated the program and provided financial support as the traditional donor. At the time, NED was already conducting a number of programs in Myanmar with the aim of nurturing nascent private think tanks. As described in its mission, NED supports various projects all over the world in order to promote democratization and to preserve human rights and democratic values.<sup>2</sup> NED was also supporting CSOs in Myanmar, and wanted to upgrade their programs to produce tangible results. With financial support from NED, Myanmar civil society groups had established institutions and were running their own programs. However, they needed a boost to reach the next step of developing into research institutions capable of supporting and leading their civil society out of the military dictatorship and towards democratization, which many anticipated occurring with the general election of November 2015. NED recognized that they needed a new breakthrough program to reach the next level. Therefore, they proposed designing a capacity building program with EAI for CSOs in Myanmar.

At the suggestion of NED, EAI participated in this capacity building project as an emerging donor, taking on the role of organizing and managing the whole process of the program and providing technical support for the partner CSOs in Myanmar. EAI is a small, network-based think tank in South Korea. EAI, as a private and independent think tank, is unique compared to most think tanks in South Korea, which are affiliated with the government, business conglomer-

ates, or universities. What stands out most of all is its impressive performance, as it has been ranked among the top 100 think tanks in the world by the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program of the University of Pennsylvania since 2013.<sup>3</sup> NED identified EAI as a qualified institution to partner with in Myanmar, and EAI was willing to take on the partner role as the NED proposal offered a new model of development cooperation whose success could create new possibilities for a global think tank network to promote good governance.

Four civil society based institutions in Myanmar participated in this project. These institutions were the Sandhi Governance Institute (SGI), the Renaissance Institute (RI), the Open Myanmar Initiative (OMI), and the Yangon School of Political Science (YSPS). Prior to joining this program, SGI's main activities were the operation of leadership programs for women and youth. RI was conducting field reviews on the government's construction projects, OMI was focused on the parliamentary process at the local and national level, and YSPS was providing political science education, which was banned at universities by the military government. They were all action-oriented organizations, and they lacked resources to engage in their own research activities as think tanks. However, preliminary discussions among the three participating parties of the trilateral partnership resulted in a shared agreement on the importance of possessing research capacity in order to be able to advocate for the democratization process in the future.

This project did not follow the typical model of trilateral development cooperation. The traditional donor, NED, is based in the United States, but, strictly speaking, it is not a government or a government-based agency. Legally, it is an independent foundation. Therefore, the volume of funds NED was able to provide for this project was limited. Usually, an emerging donor is geographically close to the recipient. But EAI is based in South Korea, which is not close to Myanmar. Similarity between the emerging donor and the recipient is an important factor in the trilateral aid model. The similarities between EAI and the four Myanmar partners were relatively weak. Broadly speaking, they may share some "Asian values," but beyond this, their shared characteristics included being private and civil society based institutions and a common vision of human rights and democratic values.

## Risks and Responses

The trilateral development cooperation is a new model, but it will not substitute for the traditional form of development cooperation between the North and South. The trilateral format is a complementary approach to promote aid effectiveness and sustainable development. Trilateral cooperation has risks which should be addressed and overcome to ensure a successful performance (Mehta and Nanda 2005, 5-6). These risks stem from the unique composition of the triangle, which differs from the traditional form of bilateral cooperation.

## Sharing a Common Vision

Trilateral cooperation should be constructed on a common vision that is shared by all three participants. A project cannot be successful if all three actors do not share common objectives and interests. However, we cannot realistically expect that the interests of all three parties will coincide with one another perfectly. Each actor has their own role and status, generating different visions and interests within the triangle. This is the problem of increasing the number of participating actors. Therefore, participants need to agree on a core vision for the project. Furthermore, their different interests should be coordinated to meet the shared core vision and accommodated to match the objectives (Ashoff 2010, 23-24).

The three parties who participated in the Myanmar Project each established their institutions under their own missions. A review of their individual mission statements revealed that they shared the common value of democracy promotion. Fortunately, it was not difficult for them to agree on the initial idea of the project. However, their interests differed from one another. NED wanted to build up their supporting programs in Myanmar, EAI expected to extend their scope of activities regionally to Southeast Asia, and the Myanmar organizations considered their existing relationship with NED to be satisfactory, and were initially skeptical about the capacity building program.

In the preliminary meeting attended by all three parties, the main issue was to share the necessity for a CSO capacity building program in Myanmar and determine the roles of each participant in such a program. NED's initiative was especially important and helpful in reaching a common vision among participants. EAI and the Myanmar partners were meeting for the first time. NED played the role of a bridge, as they had been supporting the Myanmar CSOs from their infancy and were also the sponsor of the Asia Democracy Network (ADN) and the Asia Democracy Research Network (ADRN) that EAI was actively participating in. During the preliminary meeting, the Myanmar partners agreed that the role and capacity of think tanks will be of greater importance in the future as Myanmar had an opportunity for democratization with the general elections planned for November 2015. In addition, the three parties agreed to focus the project on "Government Budget Monitoring in Myanmar," which was primarily at the request of the Myanmar CSOs.

## A Qualified Emerging Donor

In trilateral cooperation, the role of emerging donor is particularly important, as the emerging donor is responsible for managing and organizing the whole project from start to finish. If the emerging donor does not have the experience and capacity to deliver qualified development assistance to the recipient, then the quality of the program cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, the traditional donor needs to find a "good" emerging partner who can provide high-quality technical support for the program using the financial sponsorship provided by the traditional donor (Ashoff 2010, 21).

From this perspective, EAI may not have been an optimal choice for NED. EAI is a small, independent, and private think tank, and it does not have experience in capacity building programs or training. Before the Myanmar project, EAI's expertise was focused mainly on research activities, including offering policy recommendations, reporting the opinions of Korean society on specific issues, and acting as a liaison between Korean opinion leaders and experts from abroad. Nevertheless, through NED's prior experiences working with EAI, they identified EAI as a qualified partner for this project. NED played a pivotal role in the set-up phase of the project, as EAI did not have any prior experience or information about Myanmar, much less CSOs in Myanmar. Therefore, NED invited its beneficiary organizations to a preliminary meeting, and introduced them to EAI to discuss potential cooperation. Face-to-face and straightforward dialogue in the meeting revealed that EAI's qualification as an emerging donor for this project lay not in its resume, but rather in the unique institutional characteristics that it shared with the CSOs from Myanmar. EAI's small size and private status were favored by the Myanmar partners, and its successful performance was considered to be a good example for them to follow.

### Focusing on the Needs of Beneficiaries

In trilateral cooperation, it is expected that each of the three parties has their own interests and needs. Sometimes these interests may conflict. But, in principle, three parties seeking trilateral cooperation with one another must look for a common vision for the project. One thing that must be kept in mind is that the project is conducted on the land of the beneficiary, and the project is not for the donors. The donors, both traditional and emerging, do not have as deep an understanding of the real situation on the ground in the beneficiary country as their partners do. Therefore, the triangle must respect the needs, priorities, and strategies of the beneficiary country (Ashoff 2010, 21).

As stated above, the main topic for this project, monitoring the government budget process, was selected by the Myanmar partner CSOs. In determining how to best provide technical support, EAI reflected on the needs and opinions articulated by the Myanmar-based CSOs, and recommended modifying both the scope and objective of the project with the consideration that in the current situation in Myanmar, information about the government budget was not officially available to the public. In Myanmar, the Sandhi Governance Institute took the leading role in managing the project. EAI consulted with SGI in planning each step of the program, including agenda setting and the scheduling of workshops, inviting trainees, role allocation, and other logistical issues. EAI also designed the format of the project, which dictated active participation by all partners in each workshop. The role of the Myanmar partners was not merely limited to that of trainees. Recognizing that each CSO has experience in the process of modernization and democratization in Myanmar, EAI incorporated "Sharing Experiences" sessions into the workshops to allow all participating institutions to make a presentation sharing their past success stories as well as the challenges they are facing today.



## Minimizing Communication Costs

With more parties involved, it is natural for trilateral cooperation to have increased communication costs in comparison with bilateral cooperation. In a bilateral relationship, only one communication channel is required, while trilateral communication requires three such channels. Requiring regular communication among all three parties in every step of the project raises communication costs enormously. Trilateral cooperation must be based on mutual trust among participants. But, in the event of a communication problem that provokes a misunderstanding among the actors, the project will be at risk.

In the Myanmar project, the communication costs were relatively low, as the traditional donor was not involved in the day-to-day management and activities of the project. In the initial stages of program design, NED played an essential supporting role and led communication among the participants. When the project got fully underway, the main communication channel was between the emerging donor and the Myanmar partners. SGI was the main contact point for the Myanmar CSOs. As EAI is based in Seoul, its staff was able to spend a limited amount of time in Yangon. Therefore, most communication took place via email. Email communication has its merits, including that all stakeholders can see the emails if cc'ed, clarifications can be made more easily than with verbal communication, and writers may be more careful and sincere in their messages.

However, there was an additional communication cost, which was that of language and translation. The Myanmar and the Koreans had to communicate in English as it was their only common language. However, not all workshop participants spoke English, so EAI had to hire Myanmar-Korean translators. However, translation is imperfect, and prolongs the time needed for communication. Occasional misunderstandings arose as a result of language difficulties. Still, EAI was unable to reach a better solution to the language problem, so they simply asked participants to be patient.

## The Role of Think Tanks in a Nascent Democracy

Though there are many definitions and descriptions of what democracy is, its core principles include a separation of power and checks and balances between the administrative, legislative, and judiciary branches of a government. These principles prohibit the despotic possession and exercise of political power by one person or group. These rules need to be extended to the relationship between the state and the civil society to encourage democratic participation and accountability in the government.<sup>4</sup> Civil society must be capable of monitoring what the government is doing and pushing the government to be responsible for its people.

The role of think tanks in civil society can be found in its basic function of providing knowledge for good governance. Think tanks are devoted to producing ideas for policy recommendations, disseminating these ideas to the public, and pushing policy makers to adopt their ideas when devising policies. These activities are based on a detailed diagnosis of the current problems facing society and groundbreaking research that allows think tanks to put forward potential solutions to these problems.

Along with their mission and expertise, experienced scholars and experts participate in idea exchanges and the think tank production cycle.

There are many kinds of think tanks today, differing in size, function, affiliation, role, and so on. In the context of this article, the author is discussing the role of think tanks from the perspective of democracy and civil society, and thus the term “think tank” is used to denote private, civil society based, and independent research institutes. With this in mind, the role of civil society think tanks can be summarized as follows (de Boer 2015).

The basic function of think tanks is to produce policy ideas for both the public and political leaders. Good policy recommendations will be supported by the people and eventually be adopted by policy makers. Secondly, think tanks provide an arena where scholars and experts can exchange ideas and opinions regarding current social problems and policy recommendations. One expert’s idea may not be sufficient to satisfy social and political needs. Sharing ideas may lead to better ideas, and think tanks encourage collective efforts in the intelligence arena. The third function performed by think tanks is education. Think tanks disseminate their products through various publication channels including print, electronic, conferences, and social networks in order to win the support of the public. In turn, the public gains important knowledge regarding current social issues and has the opportunity to engage with opinion leaders through these publications and conferences. The educational role played by think tanks is a necessary element in fostering the capacity of civil society. Finally, think tanks are a provider of democratic human resources. As we can see from examples of established democratic states in developed countries, experts on specific issues affiliated with a think tank will often have the chance to participate in government and serve as technocrats. Their participation is generally pragmatic, and after leaving their technocratic office, they return to the institute they were originally affiliated with or move on to another. In other words, think tanks maintain a pool of experienced policy experts that the government is able to draw on for expertise as needed.

In a nascent democracy, or in the initial stages of democratization, civil society is usually very weak in comparison with the state. People do not yet have a solid grasp of what democracy and its values mean and will look like, because they have not had a chance to learn about it or they remain primarily concerned with making a living. Civil society does not have the capability to act as a check and balance on the political system. Therefore, during the first phase or transition period toward democracy, the process is very fragile, with a large potential for backsliding. Political leadership may play a leading role in democratization in a nascent democracy, and democratic institution building and policy making are highly dependent on one leader or leadership group, which means that the process can easily be overthrown by one person’s bold decision.

Even though the Myanmar rose up strongly against the military dictatorship twice in 1988 (the 8888 Nationwide Popular Pro-Democracy Protests) and in 2007 (the Saffron Revolution), civil society in Myanmar is not yet strong enough to support its historical chance for democratization. This is because the majority of Myanmar’s population has not had the chance to receive an education, struggle with poverty, and are not conscious of what it means to have citizenship in a modernized democracy. The people of Myanmar, who hail from a diverse array of ethnic backgrounds and re-

gions, are not organized or mobilized to form a conscious civil society capable of leading to sustainable democratization.

Myanmar CSOs are mainly action-oriented organizations. When EAI staff first visited Yangon to conduct project preparation in 2014, some of the participants at the meeting table stated that they needed to engage in action rather than research for the time being. They considered research activities a step to be taken in the future. At the time, all of the Myanmar CSOs in attendance were mainly concerned with the upcoming general election to be held in late 2015, which would be a turning point with historical momentum for their country. Writing a research paper to provide policy recommendations was not an urgent issue at that time. Presentations and discussions in a conference room were not regarded as an effective way to change or influence the regime. In addition, the CSOs considered the possibility of actually having regular exchanges with government officials and parliament members to be quite low.

Their opinions had merit and were completely understandable. However, EAI stressed the role of research institutes in paving the way for democratization in the country by nurturing civil society, networking opinion leaders and experts, and providing policy ideas. As Myanmar was approaching the phase where democratization could begin with the upcoming general election, the action-oriented CSOs in Myanmar needed to transform themselves into research based think tanks. Under the military regime, democratic movements motivated by CSOs are necessary and important. However, the momentum for democratization, which was a possibility through the general election, was fast approaching, and when it arrived the CSOs would need more than action. With these points, EAI persuaded the Myanmar CSOs to join the project and start building up their research capacity.

In addition, if democratization begins on the right course, experts and qualified persons from civil society need to participate in the government, parliament, and official agencies to lead the change for better governance. But, if civil society cannot afford to provide human resources, then political power remains in those hands of despotic leaders. This is why nascent democracies struggle to promote democratization and backslide to authoritarianism. Even though South Korea established a government based on a “democratic constitution” after liberation from Japanese colonialism in 1948, the country was unable to achieve democracy until 1987, almost 40 years after the first election. Lacking a capable civil society which can afford to successfully take power, a country’s chance for democratization can easily be lost.

When discussing the capability of civil society, the role and function performed by think tanks is very important in a nascent democracy. This is closely connected with the roles of think tanks in general mentioned above. A weak civil society is not able to provide qualified human resources and policy inputs to sustain the democratization process in partnership with participation of the people and provide a balance to those who have political power. Therefore, a strategic approach is required to push democratic consolidation ahead, and think tanks can take on this role.

Local CSOs in a developing country are comprised of a group of educated persons who have the aim of developing their own country. In Myanmar, as the military government abolished higher education, particularly at Yangon University following the 8888 protests, universities are restricted in their ability to provide qualified human resources. After the liberation measures by Thein Sein, politi-

cal exiles who received higher education abroad returned to their homeland and began to establish civil society organizations. As a result of this, CSOs in Myanmar are groups of educated people who have networks that extend to Western countries. These CSOs will play an active role in the new regime, both in the government itself and in civil society. The role that think tanks play of providing human resources will be of the utmost importance in transitioning Myanmar.

The educational role played by think tanks should also be recognized. Many CSOs in Myanmar have devoted themselves to providing education. During the general election period in November 2015, most Myanmar CSOs conducted voting education for people in the countryside because the process and methods of voting were so complicated that ordinary undereducated people could not vote properly and were unwilling to visit the polling booths. With these voting education activities, Myanmar CSOs were able to bring forth people's concerns regarding and interest in democracy.

The CSOs in Myanmar are a good foundation for a strategic approach that will supplement the relatively weak existing civil society. If they are able to transform themselves into qualified think tanks, they will have the corresponding power to provide checks and balances against the current political leaders and provide policy ideas for better governance. Active civil society-based think tanks are required to keep the democratization process on the right track, especially in a nascent democracy.

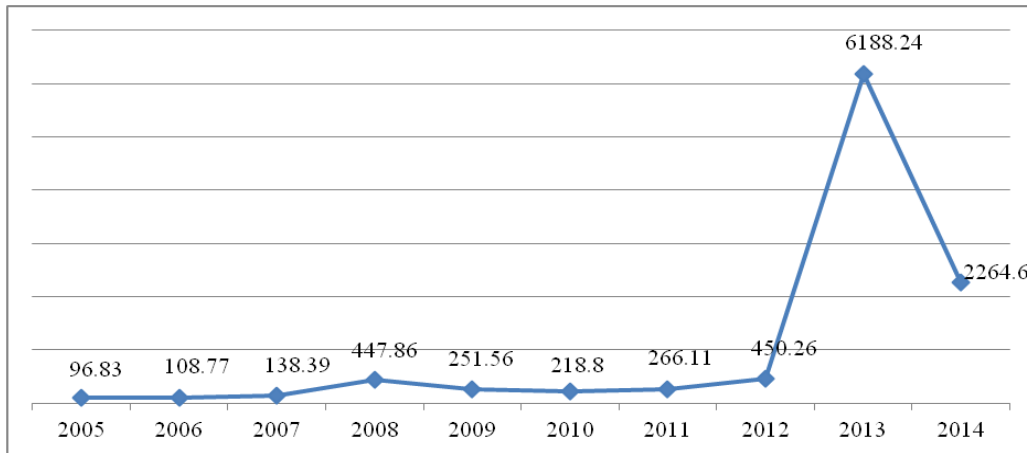
## **Opportunity for Myanmar: Liberation Measures in Politics and the Economy**

There are a lot of controversies regarding the relationship between economic development and democratization. Traditional modernization theory says that economic development leads to democratization by creating a growing middle class who in turn support an open market economy and political participation (Lipset 1959). This theory simply links economic liberation with political liberation, or democracy. Others suspect a causal relation between development and democracy (de Mesquita and Downs 2005). Empirical data do not support the theory that economic development inevitably encourages political liberation and democratization (Robinson 2006). Even though controversy continues to swirl around whether there is a causal or correlative relationship between economic development and political democratization, we should recognize that economic failure poses one of the greatest risks to democracy and human rights. In other words, there must be a certain level of economic development and social wealth for the growth of civil society to encourage democratization and sustain democratic values (Thin Thin Aye 2015).

With changing economic conditions, Myanmar is facing a new opportunity for democratization. Following the 2010 elections, the Myanmar government embarked on a series of reforms towards liberal democracy, a mixed economy, and reconciliation. With this series of political changes, the U.S. and European countries have begun to gradually suspend sanctions against Myanmar. Restoring diplomatic relations with Western nations has resulted in the rapid expansion of ODA to the country. As described in Figure 2, the level of ODA committed to Myanmar increased rapidly after 2012. Under the previous military regime, Myanmar was excluded from the international market economy and its

economic activities were limited to dependence on China and a few other neighboring countries. However, Myanmar is now seeing an opportunity for economic development, which will lead to the growth of civil society.

**Figure 2. ODA Commitment to Myanmar (2005-2014)**

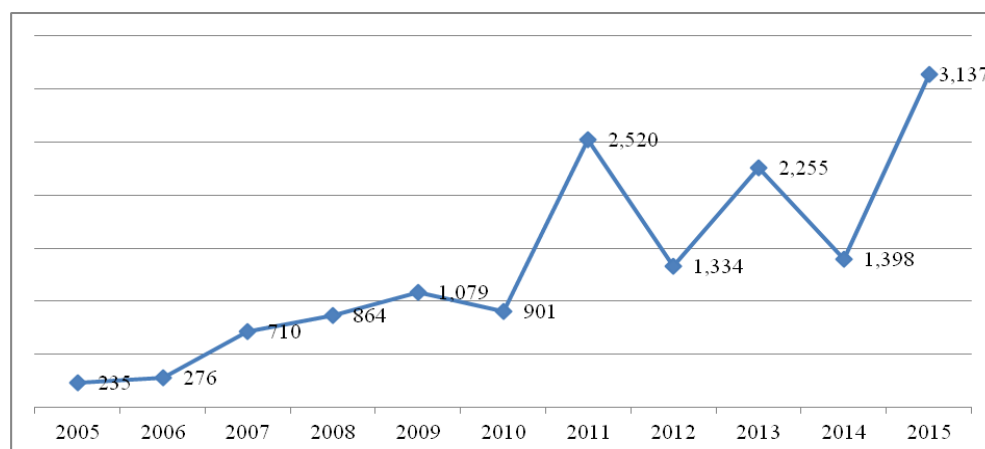


Figures in millions of USD

Source: OECD

FDI inflows have also been increasing, and this change accelerated after reforms were launched in 2012 by President Thein Sein. Myanmar received \$4.1 billion in FDI in 2013/2014, and it announced a target of \$5 billion for fiscal year 2014/2015 as foreign firms won oil and gas concessions and international hotel chains started moving in. The lifting of most Western embargoes has allowed foreign access to sectors from banking, property and tourism to factories, infrastructure, airports and agribusinesses (Aung Hla Tun 2015). Although Myanmar’s economy is still at the bottom in terms of GNP, it is approaching a new stage and is poised to drive its development with the inflow of international resources.

**Figure 3. Net Inflow of Foreign Direct Investment into Myanmar (2005-2015)**



Figures in millions of USD

Source: World Bank

Political reforms need to be considered alongside a discussion of the economic conditions for development. Thein Sein's reforms were extended to the political realm after he took office in March 2011. Censorship was lifted and the media was opened to the private sector. Major media outlets are still owned by and have strong connections to the military, but the opening of private media corporations has been a symbolic step toward political freedom. In addition to this, political prisoners continue to be steadily released from jail. Of course, the political reforms thus far remain insufficient and rather limited. Laws and regulations still preserve the privileges of the military in Parliament and the government. Sometimes, the political situation can be summed up as a "disciplined democracy," a hybrid system designed by the Myanmar army to guarantee its role (Fisher 2016). However, no one believes that political reform will stop at the current level. Measures taken by the military leadership toward limited liberation will find their own way to fully expand. However, this transition will require the role of a qualified civil society in Myanmar, and private think tanks will play an important role in the democratic transition.

Economic development is required for democratization in that it provides people with more opportunities for education, through which they may grow as independent entities and demand freedom. Education makes people conscious, which is the nutrition needed for the growth of civil society. For more than 50 years, the Myanmar have not had the chance to become modernized "citizens" in the democratic sense of the word due to economic poverty, lack of education, and suppressive deprivation through despotic rule.<sup>5</sup> But, with economic opening and liberation measures, Myanmar is coming into a new phase of economic development and social enlightenment. Recently, Yangon University reopened in a limited capacity. This is a starting point for normalizing the higher education system, and it will eventually result in an increase of educated citizens in Myanmar society.

Myanmar experienced the recent success of winning the general election in November, 2015, which was finally achieved after and owing to the two great movements in 1988 and in 2007, despite these first two movements having failed following repressive and violent measures by the military government. With experiences of both failure and success, Myanmar has demonstrated their will for freedom and human rights, and they should have confidence that their ceaseless pursuit of democracy will finally succeed.

## Epilogue

With the success of the pilot program "Building Civil Society Capacity in Myanmar through Budget Monitoring," EAI and its Myanmar partner organizations were able to extend the program to a second phase in 2016, which is more focused on building the research capacity of think tanks and is a more extensive partnership. The success of the 2015 program was possible owing to the collaborative efforts of the three parties through the trilateral cooperation model. More importantly, the unique and strong role played by the Myanmar CSOs should be emphasized.

The prototype of trilateral cooperation is composed of a sponsor, a technical donor, and a recipient. But EAI's program in Myanmar was different in that it encouraged the active participation of Myanmar CSOs, the recipients, in the program. In the program, the Myanmar attendees played the dual role of trainer and trainee. The program was composed of two tracks, research capacity building and institution capacity building. In the research capacity building workshops, experts invited by EAI led lectures where most attendants were trainees. But, in the institutional capacity building sessions, everyone acted as trainers. Attendees were required to make presentations about their own organizations, including personal success stories and challenges they were facing. The aim of institutional capacity building was for both Myanmar and South Korea to learn from one another. EAI suggested a unique successful model of network-based small think tanks, and the Myanmar partner organizations shared their experiences under military rule in making a breakthrough for civil movements.

Secondly, when planning the program, EAI was willing to listen to the needs expressed by the Myanmar CSOs. The topic of "government budget monitoring" was adopted by the Myanmar partners. Because EAI staff did not have expertise in public finance, it was decided to invite outside experts in this field to supplement the program. EAI was able to include two top experts who had experience in participatory budgeting, both academically and in the real world. EAI also suggested a training program of quantitative data analysis to the Myanmar partners. EAI had learned through its own research experience that data analysis and research performed by think tanks should begin from an objective analysis of data, and policy reports based on data have more appeal to the public. Therefore, the finalized program topic was government budget monitoring, and quantitative data analysis was selected as the methodology for the research capacity building track.

Lastly, private-private cooperation needs attention in development cooperation for democracy promotion. Democracy is a political issue. So, assistance for democracy at the governmental level is limited and difficult, particularly assistance for civil society. Most development assistance at the government level has been focused on the economy. However, we must also place a focus on the need for good governance in developing countries because this is intimately related to both the effectiveness of foreign aid and the sustainability of development. Governance issues include government accountability, transparency, anti-corruption measures, civil participation, equitable distribution, and others. These issues cannot be addressed without the growth of civil society. This requires encouraging private-private development cooperation for civil society capacity building in order to lead the promotion of democracy.

EAI's program in Myanmar is not a perfect model. Despite this, it provides a successful example of a new type of development cooperation, with a trilateral composition, assistance to civil society, a strategic approach targeting CSOs for democracy promotion, and private-private cooperation. Along with liberation measures, a great number of resources have flowed into Myanmar from abroad from both governments and private sources. These inputs are certainly building the ground for development in Myanmar. For balanced development in both politics and the economy, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development, assistance for democracy and good governance should be continued and strengthened. ■

## References

- Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2015. "Civil Society Briefs: Myanmar." Publication Stock No. ARM147009-2.
- Ashoff, Guido. 2010. "Triangular Cooperation: Opportunities, Risks, and Conditions for Effectiveness." Special Report in *Development Outreach* October, World Bank Institute.
- Aung Hla Tun. 2015. "Myanmar 2014/15 FDI Swells to \$8.1 Bln – Govt Agency." *Reuters* March 25. <http://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-investment-idUSL3N0WR25Q20150325>
- de Boer, John. 2015. "What Are Think Tanks Good for?" Sustainable Development March 17. Center for Policy Research, United Nations University. <http://cpr.unu.edu/what-are-think-tanks-good-for.html>
- de Mesquita, Bruce Bueno and George W. Downs. 2005. "Development and Democracy." *Foreign Affairs* September/October.
- Fisher, Jonah. 2016. "Myanmar: Thein Sein Leaves Legacy of Reform." BBC News March 30. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35916555>
- Jaysawal, Neelmani. 2013. "Civil Society, Democratic Space, and Social Work." *SAGE Open* October-December: 1-12.
- Lipset, Seymour Martin. 1959. "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." *American Political Science Review* 53, 1: 69-105.
- Mehta, Pradeep S. and Nitya Nanda. 2005. "Trilateral Development Cooperation: An Emerging Trend." *Briefing Paper* No.1/2005. CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment.
- Mercer, Claire. 2002. "NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization: A Critical Review of the Literature." *Progress in Development Studies* 2, 1: 5-22.
- Prezeworski, Adam. 2004. "Democracy and Economic Development." In *The Evolution of Political Knowledge: Democracy, Autonomy, and Conflict in Comparative and International Politics*, ed. Edward D. Mansfield and Richard Sission, 300-325. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Robinson, James A. 2006. "Economic Development and Democracy." *Annual Review of Political Science* 9: 503-527.
- Thin Thin Aye. 2015. "The Role of Civil Society in Myanmar's Democratization." Paper presented in international conference titled "Burma/Myanmar in Transition: Connectivity, Changes, and Challenges," at University Academic Service Center (UNISERV), Chiang Mai University, Thailand, 24-25 July 2015.
- Walker, Christopher. 2013. "Democracy Think Tanks in Action: Translating Research into Policy in Young and Emerging Democracies." *Democracy Think Tanks in Action: Translating Research into Policy in Young and Emerging Democracies*. The International Forum for Democratic Studies at National Endowment for Democracy. June.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ned.org>

<sup>3</sup> <http://gotothinktank.com>

<sup>4</sup> For the role of civil society in ensuring democracy, refer to Jaysawal (2013: 4-7).

<sup>5</sup> 10% of children in Myanmar, about 400,000, have no school to attend. Just 1% of Myanmar's GDP is spent on education, less than almost any other nation in the world.