



Research on Development Policies, Perceptions and Recommendations of Political Parties in Myanmar (2013-2014)



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Glossary

AMDP	All Mon Regions Development Party
DPM	Democratic Party Myanmar
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MDR	Myanmar Development Research
MPs	Members of Parliamentarians
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDF	National Democratic Force
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUP	National Unity Party
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

Research on Development Policies, Perceptions, and Recommendations of Political Parties in Myanmar (2012-2013)

Introduction

Since mid-2011, Myanmar has been in the rapid political transaction from a close military authoritarian state to an open democratic society. In the new political arena of Myanmar, new political actors have obviously emerged, putting their efforts and taking their role in pushing the transactional process toward a true democratic society. Among new political actors, the political parties of diverse political and ethnic backgrounds can be seen as building blocks which help shape the political structure of the new democratic society.

After one and a half year in the transactional period, the major actors such as government (both national and local administrative and service providing departments), the CSOs (both NGOs, network and activists), private sector and finally, the media, have started realized each other's significant role in the national building efforts. More obviously, CSOs have taken the strength and leverage of political parties and elected representatives in dealt with conflicting socio-economic interests of the different interest groups, and filling the needs of the vulnerable and grass-root people. The national and international development organizations included elected MPs and leaders of ethnic-base political parties as stakeholders in consultation on the local livelihood, health and infra-structure development programs. On the other hand, the president and other key executive and legislative actors often invited key political party leaders and learn their views on current political, social and economic priorities of the country and the people. Moreover, elected MPs of major political and ethnic-base parties have become more and more involved in the national-level issue-based investigation and negotiation efforts which significantly influences the national engagement, cohesiveness and peaceful democratic transaction of the country. At the same time, external actors such as international organizations and donor agencies are interested to work with political parties in order to support the democratic transaction and multi-party democracy system.

Given the fact that the increased role of political parties and their leaders has become more obvious in the current transitional political context and the national and local development aspects of Myanmar, the major purposes of the study is to understand well on ideologies, approaches and strategies of different political parties and their leaders on the national and local development, and utilization of natural resources for the economic development. In addition, MDR expect that the learning through this study will help increase awareness on the political parties and accessibility to them by various stakeholders who want to work hand in hand.

Specific Objectives

Based on the mentioned purposes, the specific objectives of the study are identified as:

1. To examine the ideologies, approaches and strategies of political parties and their leaders on country economy and economic system, on national and local development, and management of natural resources for national and local development plans
2. To prepare the analysis report in order to serve as the scoping and planning for further knowledge enhancement efforts

Methodology

Key Research Questions

Three key research questions are identified to address the purpose and objectives of the study.

- What are well defined development policies of the political parties in Myanmar?
- What are three most important priorities to be achieved for the development of Myanmar?
- What are important recommendations to achieve/realize these priorities?

Methods and tools

The two qualitative data collection methods are applied in the study- (a) conducting face-to-face in-depth interviews with party leaders and elected MPs of political parties; (b) doing desk-review on the party platform booklets or any other relevant documents collected from the parties during the interviews.

Sampling

The respondents (the study population) were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Among non-ethnic political parties, the respondents were selected from all (non-ethnic) parties which won seats in Hluttaws (either National Assembly or People's Assembly or Local Parliaments or in all these parliaments).
2. Among ethnic-base political parties, the respondents were selected from the parties which won seat either in National Assembly or People's Assembly or Local Parliaments or in all these parliaments. (Considering as exceptional cases, Danu National Democracy Party and Kokang Democracy and Unity Party will be taken into the target population since they are only ethnic-parties representing their own autonomous regions- Danu Autonomous Region and Kokang Autonomous Region)
3. Two respondents from selected parties again were chosen: one is from the party key leaders (can be either elected or non-elected MPs), and one is from the elected MPs (either MPs of National Assemble or People Assembly or local or regional Assembly)

According to the above sampling criteria, 50 respondents were selected from 26 political parties in total, which specifically includes 8 national political parties, 13 ethnic political parties and 5 ethnic political parties representing five autonomous regions¹. (Please see Table 1. For the summary data of

¹ There are ethnic political parties especially represent autonomous regions, except that of Narga Land. (Six Autonomous Regions recognized in the constitutions are PaO, Palaung (Taaung), Danu, Naga Hilly region, Wa and Kokang.

respondents for the in-depth interview and see the Annex-I for the detailed list of political parties and number of respondents for the in-depth interviews)

Table 1. Respondent compositions by different types of political parties (for in-depth interviews)

#	Types of Parties	# of parties in sampling	# of Respondent	Remarks
1	National Political Parties	8	16	
2	Ethnic Political Parties	13	26	
3	Ethnic Political Parties in Autonomous Regions	5	8	There is no elected MP in 2 out of 5 parties
Total number of respondents		26	50	

Key Findings

How do political parties present their party policy or views in published documents?

The well-prepared published party platforms books or booklets can be considered as one of the important indicators which reflect institutional capacity of a political party. The study team collected all relevant documents of party platforms, constitutions and structure and election manifestos during their visit to the political parties covered in the study.

The study found out that only in 13 political parties out of 26 parties studied have well-prepared and published documentations of party platform books or constitutions or election manifestos which descriptively presents party's ideology and policy standpoints (See Table 2 and pictures below). Again, only 7 political parties out of 13 elaborate their policies and views in specific sessions. Notably, the only one party, NUP, has presented clearly on the guiding philosophy, the doctrine, the way and the practice embraced by the party (see the picture below).

Table 2. The Number of Party with well-prepared documentations

Types of Parties	# of parties in sampling	# of Party with well-prepared published documentations	# of Party elaborately discuss
National Political Parties	8	7	5
Ethnic-based Political Parties	18	6	2
Total	26	13	7

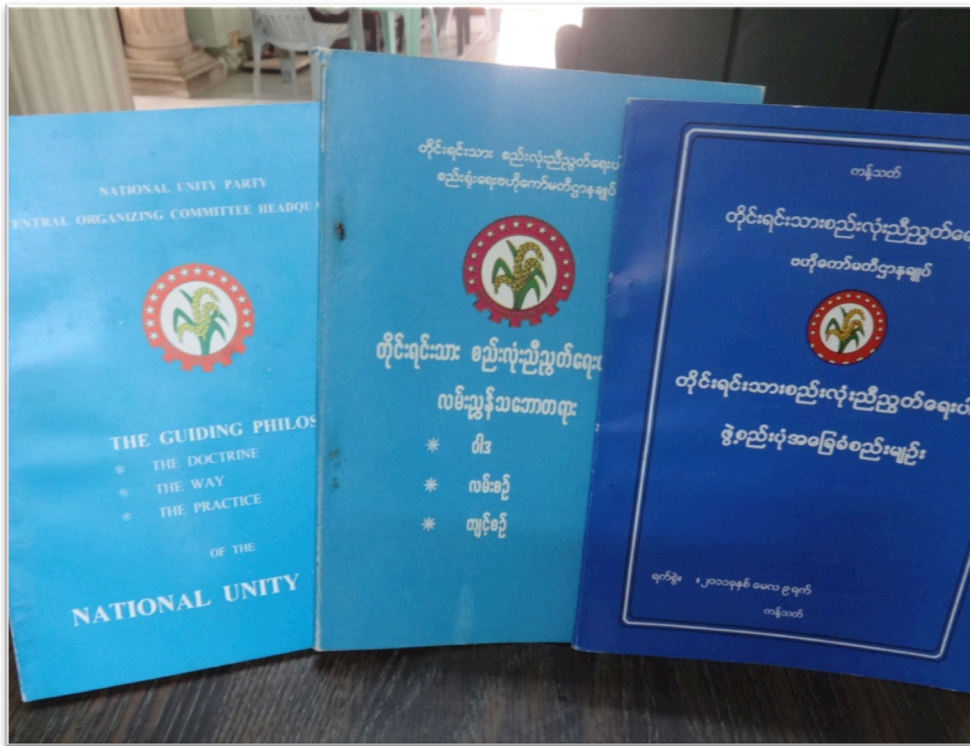
Table 3. Parties which have well-prepared published party policy books

Sr.	Parties with well-prepared published documentatons	Parties elaborately discuss
1	All Mon Region Democracy Party	All Mon Region Democracy Party
2	Chin National Party	Democratic Party Myanmar

3	Democratic Party Myanmar	National Democratic Force
4	Ethnic National Development Party	National League for Democracy
5	Kayan National Party	National Unity Party
6	Kayin State Democracy and Development Party	Shan National Democratic Party
7	National Democratic Force	Union Solidarity and Development Party
8	National Democratic Party For Development	
9	National League for Democracy	
10	National Unity Party	
11	New National Democracy Party	
12	Shan National Democratic Party	
13	Union Solidarity and Development Party	

Picture 1. Well-prepared published party policy books

Picture 2. Party philosophy and policy, and constitution books of NUP



How development policies are described in party platforms?

Political parties covered in the study commonly stated three major policy perimeters- political, economic and social policies. The development aspects are mainly covered by economic and social policies. While economic policies are mostly focus on the national economy and development of national and local enterprises, social policies covered different aspects of human development and social welfare such as education, health, youth and women, environment protection ect. Agriculture sector development and protection of laborers rights are mostly discussed in separate sessions.

Under political policies, the policy aspects, such as types of governance and electoral system, foreign policy, defense policy, ethnic and national race policy are mainly covered in well-developed party policy books.

Common political standpoints or views among political parties

The commonly mentioned statements in political policies of political parties are as below:

- Supporting multi-party democracy system;
- Human rights mostly based in the Universal Declaration of Human rights;
- Promoting national reconciliation and unity among national races;
- Pursuing independent and active foreign policies and/or peaceful coexistence with other countries.

Commitment to basic human rights can be seen as most relevant development aspect mentioned under political policies. All parties which have well-published party platforms books are more or less mentioned their commitment to basic human rights, referring to the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

Social liberalism is identified by the only one party, NDF, as the party's political system or goal to pursue, in the introductory statements of the party political policy standpoints. NDF party clearly states that social liberalism is the foundational political ideology by which the party will shape its political standpoints and views.

“The party believes that social liberalism will serve as bedrock for a society to enjoy freedom and human rights declared in the UN Declaration by addressing ‘social necessities’ and ‘social wants’ of individual people. It is an ideology that would create freedom for people mainly through fulfillment of social needs.” Page 3, The Policy and Action Plans of National Democratic Force (NDF).

Regarding with the rule of law, which is identified as a priority issue by most of the party leaders and MPs, the only two party NLD and NDF elaborates their standpoints on the independence of the judiciary from the executive and legislative pillars, and its important role of check-and-balance against the other two pillars.

NLD states clearly on non-interference in exercising judicial power, and the access to justice by the people. Some significant statements are below.

- The Supreme Court of Justice shall have authority to freely supervise all the courts under its mandate.
- The executive pillar shall not form any special court, and anybody under the mandate of the executive pillar shall not be vested judicial power.
- Except some exceptional occasions allowed by law, the court's investigations and decisions are to be carried out only before the public.
- All the accused/defendants have all rights to defend and take the appeal at the court.
- Any act of investigation or penalties is not to undermine human dignity, and to encourage corrections.

***Under Economic Policies,* almost all national and ethnic-based political parties commonly define free market economy as a suitable economic system they will ensure the country to pursue.** At the same time commitments to support national firms and entrepreneurs are mentioned. All major political parties, including USDP, NLD, NDF, DPM, SNDP, AMDP, elaborates the party's economic policy standpoint in a separate sessions.

Common economic policy standpoints or views among political parties

The commonly mentioned statements in economic policies of political parties are as below:

- Equal opportunity for all to work and invest in the country economic sector is to be encouraged

- SMEs and national firms are to be supported to thrive
- Fair competition is encouraged
- Price stability, social security and living standards are to be enhanced
- Property rights are to be guaranteed
- To narrow the development gap between rural and urban area
- To eliminate the poverty rate across the country

‘Market-oriented mixed economy’ is identified, by only one party, NDF, as an economic system recommended by the party for the country to pursue. The party suggested that the economic system they propose is especially suitable for the country in transition like Myanmar. It also briefly discuss how the party will implement the mixed system in a separate session, again confirming how the party define and measure the national development.

“To develop a market-oriented mixed economy which can lead to a state of equilibrium between sustainable economic development and the welfare of citizens.The welfare of citizens is not guaranteed only if per capital income alone is increased. It is now measured by ‘Human Development Index’ which includes such indicators as real income, health index, education index, life expectancy ect. In implementing the mixed economy, the role and space of private sector is to be large and the role and control of government is required to be smaller, though it is still necessary. The government is responsible to manage in huge domestic enterprise until the national firms have had capacity to run those huge businesses such as health care. The party also see the mixed economic system is also consistent with the social liberalism which is the main political ideology embraced by the party.” Page 38, The Policy and Action Plans of National Democratic Force (NDF).

‘The Independent National Economic Policy’ is defined, by NUP, as the economic policy the party follows and recommends for the country. Confirming its belief that economics is a bed-rock of a country and only when the economic base is firmed will there be political stability and social development, the NUP broadly explains strong ideological background and objective of its economic policy standpoints. Significant notions and points can be briefed as below.

“The Independent National Economic Policy” aims at the provision of the opportunities for the entire populace to participate voluntarily I the nation’s endeavors for economic and social development. The independence and sovereignty of a state can be well-defined only when it is able to establish its political, economic and social systems in accordance with its historical trend and the aspiration of the people. It is true that a nations needs to have international cooperation for development. However, if she is under the influence of another nation politically or economically or if she becomes a satellite state or if she has to depend on another for her own existence, then she cannot be regarded as a truly independent and sovereign state. Therefore, it is imperative for the nation to formulate the Independent National Economic Policy so as to uphold her independence and sovereignty....NUP lays down the Independent National Economic Policy as follows-

*To encourage free and extensive participation of the entire populace for the nation’s economic and social progress;
To provide a free and equal basis of opportunities to the four economic sectors in their pursuit for the economic progress;*

*To lay down plans and projects for sustained growth of the natural resources for prosperity;
To protect the interests of the peasants, the workers, the intelligentsia and the technicians;
To accelerate the economic and social progress of the less advanced indigenous races by giving top priority to lay down special projects for them.”* Page 82, The Guiding Philosophy, The Doctrine, The Way, The Practice of the National Unity Party.

In terms of cooperation with international institutions, NLD clearly states its commitment of cooperation with such international actors as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the International Financial Corporations (IFCs), while all other political parties express their willingness of cooperation with international organizations in general.

Agricultural sector is recognized as most important sector in promoting the country’s economy by almost all parties. Most of the parties pay attention to important policy agenda of advancement of the agricultural sector and protection rights of farmers, confirmed the fact that the sector has been contributing 30%-40% in the country’s GDP, and 70% of the population still depends directly or indirectly on it. Almost all major parties, both national and ethnic-based parties, discuss about the sector in a specific session. Several important policy advices they made can be brief as below-

- Access to land and land ownership is to be guaranteed;
- Free to choose profitable crops and markets to sell their products;
- Provision of support/subsidies, especially to small and medium farmers;
- Promotion of agricultural system from traditional farming techniques to small-scale mechanized farming, and then to fully-mechanized farming system;
- Land improvement and development schemes are to be implemented;
- Promoting agricultural research to upgrade the seed quality in order to increase productivity and competitiveness in the international markets.

Natural resource management aspect is well discussed in the party platform of the only one party, the NDF. NDF clearly states in its policy commitment to avoid resource curse and negative impacts on environment and socio-economic life of the people. Linking with statements by the party leader of NDF with the discussion points in the party policy book, two main approaches are observed- (a) efforts to reinforce the existing laws for protection, and (b) keep watching the national budget to make sure doing reinvestments in the public sector.

Energy and fuel policy is briefly discussed in a specific session by the only one national party, DPM. DPM notes the importance of fuel and energy in development of the country economy and life of every citizen. Thus, stressing citizen’s rights to access the energy and fuel they need for improvement of their life, the party warns extracting and exporting huge amount of natural gas, oil and other fuel sources without systematic planning policies and process, and calls for strategic ways of energy management.

Under social policies, several social aspects such as health, education, social security, and policies for specific target groups such as youth and women, are included by most political parties. Some major national political parties such as USDP, NLD, NDF, NUP and DPM, and only three ethnic-based parties, SNDP and AMDP and MDP, widely discuss their views and commitments on these different social sectors and groups in separate titles in their party platform booklets. In these different aspects, commitments made up political parties are observed quite similar.

Regarding with the health sector, the common commitments made by major political parties are-

- Universal access to basic health care system, ensuring health care system in remote area;
- Health care system and services to be promoted to keep pace the international standard;
- Public and private cooperation in health care services;
- Effective health and hygiene education for the public.

At least 10% of GDP is recommended to be allocated annually for the national health care system by the only one party, NDF.

Social security and health insurance system are commitments made by NLD, NDF and DPM.

‘Health Management Information System’ or ‘Health Care Data Bank’ is the commitment made by the only two parties, NLD and NDP.

Regarding with the education sector, the common commitments made by major political parties are-

- Universal access to primary education;
- Upgrading the education system to international standards;
- Promoting vocational and tertiary education;
- Provision of regular financial support to poor and marginalized children, and merit-based scholarships.

Detailed plans and supports for advancement of national education are discussed by the only two parties, NDF and NLD, in separate sessions in their party platform booklets. The plans proposed by NDF more widely covered short-term and long-term education policies and programs of both basic and higher educations, which are observed relevant with its current policy efforts by the party’s elected MPs.

Youth and women are also identified as prioritized target groups for support in promoting rights and building capacity while their roles are recognized as important in development of the nation.

Protection rights and promoting life of Farmers and workers are also observed as common commitments made by major political parties. Social support and welfare system, the right to formation of unions, and promoting technologies and extension support are mainly recommended by most parties.

Environmental protection is discussed by only two major parties, NLD and DPM, and by one small ethnic-based party Danu National Democracy Party (DNDP). NLD and DPM discuss elaborately, providing their commitment to actions to help reducing deforestation, land and soil degradation, air and water pollution, extinction of wild life. Some preparatory actions are also suggested by NLD- a systematic water resource management in order to avoid shortage of drinking and for agriculture, and promoting foreign markets for value-added forest goods ect.

How do party key leaders and elected MPs define development?

The study significantly finds that party leaders and elected MPs of major political parties or ethnic parties define the development, in a common sense, as a state of people enjoying all basic needs mainly identified as food, clothing and shelters. In addition they have a common notion that building infrastructure and providing all amenities that leads to such a state of people enjoying social wellbeing is seen as doing development of a state which is mostly responsible by the government.

Most of the ethnic-based parties commonly see a very narrow gap between hilly regions of ethnic states and Burma proper in a state of development. They see that local development would lead to a sustainable national-level development.

Human security or sense of security is mentioned as important indicator of development by 14 out of 48 (30% of) respondents. Though they have different rhetoric, the common understanding or perception on human security or sense of security can be obtained only through secured access to foods, shelters and clothing, and other social needs such as health care, education and livelihood opportunities. Some ethnic party leaders see sense of insecurity as one of the sources of existing arms conflicts in ethnic area which again leads to underdevelopment of these states.

“Sense of insecurity or security is important for everyday life of the people and development of a state as well. If we measure development in such a way of human security, we need to look at how much secured access people are having to foods, shelters and clothing and others important resources for their livelihood such as land and other natural resources. If people have secured and easy access to these things, they can work their own for development and the country would become develop. If they loss these things, they lose everything. The current arms conflicts even have its source in people losing security to get access to things necessary for their survival”. A party leader of an ethnic-based political party

Human Development Index is mentioned by only five respondents that is 3% of total respondents. Some of them stated that they have recently learned about the index through their learning trip to Europe and other countries in the region. Some of them stated that they learned about it through seminars and workshops provided by international organizations. They stated that the HDI indicators- education, life expectancy and income- well reflect the development which needs to be human-centered and is much more than economic growth.

Gross National Happiness or Happiness Index is mentioned by only one respondent, the party leader of Chin National Party, stating that the development is in fact all about of a quality of

life or an enabling environment that people of a county can have. Thus, he stated that doing a development of a county is creating such an environment for the people by a government.

What do they identify as most important issue priorities?

Issue areas to be prioritized and needed to be improved significantly for the development of Myanmar are also identified by the respondents. **They ranked ending of arms conflicts and promoting rule of law as first priorities, providing basic needs and doing infrastructure development as second priorities, and promoting rights of farmers and agricultural sector as third priorities.**

Peace and rule of law as first priorities

Peace and ending of all arms conflict is mentioned as an important priority by all respondents. They see existing arms conflicts as barriers to all channels or opportunities towards development of the country. While ethnic party leaders mainly points out that the strengthening of local governments and efforts on local development are hindered by arms conflicts, party leaders of major political parties stressed on the delay in foreign direct investment.

The leaders and MPs of major political parties such as USDP, NLD, NUP and NDF stressed on promoting rule of law which they considered very significant to be emphasized by the government at this stage of democratic transition.

What do they recommend on first priority issues of Peace and Rule of Law?

The respondents commonly stated that power sharing and resource sharing defined by the current constitution needed to be reconsidered as the power granted to States and Regional governments has so many limitations. The ethnic party leaders stressed that the current constitutions is the most important channel in approaching towards peace and ending ethnic conflict, expecting more power and authorities would be vested with State and Region governments if the Constitution is revised.

Ethnic partly leaders see **vesting residual power with State and Region governments necessary if a true federal system is aimed to develop in Myanmar.** Comparing the Schedule 1, the Union Legislative List, and the Schedule 2, the State or Region Legislative List, they recommend more power sharing to State and Regions. The most common areas they stressed are:

1. Right to natural resource extraction and management under item (4) of Energy, Electricity, Mining and Forestry Sector where all valuable and high-revenue resource extractions are under the management of the Union Government.
2. In providing access to economic sector, the sector like tourism should be under the management of State and Regions.
3. The right to develop Industries and industrial zone are granted only to the Union Government

4. The management of General Administration is controlled by the Union Government
5. According to Schedule 1 and 2, almost all high revenue sectors are under the management authority of central government, the list of sector and items where the States and Regions governments can collect revenue include only small and unimportant sectors.
6. This unbalanced power distribution and resource sharing interpret that the central government will be more responsible to do both national and local developments which again will result in reducing capacity and interest of local governments in developing their own states and regions.

“The current system is hard to tell ‘what system’. Though they called it ‘federal’, the power decentralization is not well reflected a federal system. The list of Schedule 1 is too many and Schedule is 2 is too small, and there is no such things as “Concurrence List”. Thus, the list for revenue collection by Schedule 5 is not significant and States and Regions have very limited sectors to collect tax, leading to very limited budget for the States and Regions’ governments. This means that the burden to do development is mainly on the shoulder of the central government and the States and Regions governments would be looking forward to central government”. A party leader of a national political party based in Yangon.

A resource sharing mechanism is recommended to be based on a systematic targeting where underdeveloped and needy states are given more chance to manage the resources in order to create efficient and effective benefits from resource extraction. In this sense, the traditional notion of equal allocation between and among States and Regions as the saying goes “Kayin one Kyat, Burma One Kyat” is to be changed, and resource allocation is suggested to be need-based and prioritized to underdeveloped States and Regions. Most of the respondents did not mention detail mechanism which they prefer to be defined on the current Constitution. One of the respondents suggested forming a Resource Sharing Management Committee as a national level body with technical experts, the representatives from both Union and State and Region Governments. The main purpose of the committee is to provide official advice on the resource sharing by reviewing the type of resources, how valuable they are and the development status of the State or Region where the resource is located.

Well established “institutions” are recommended in order to make sure revenue come from resource extraction to reinvest effectively in public services and development. The respondents stress the importance of making institutions ready to guide the States’ government to use resource revenue in important public services and development of their respective States while they are suggesting more power to be vested with the States and Regions in terms of natural resource extraction and management.

Transparency is also commonly recommended by respondents in planning, contracting and implementing large-scale resource extraction and development projects. Some of the respondents expressed the importance of the environmental conservation and the procedural steps including EIA and SIA in managing natural resource extraction. Some of the ethnic-based political party leaders stressed the procedural steps of public review on the contracts signed between governments (of local and national level) and companies for resource extraction and

development projects such as special economic zones. However, some of them openly admitted that they need to learn more about EIA and SIA in order to well utilize these mechanisms in their advocacy efforts.

Ministers of (specific) Ethnic Affairs should have a designated ministry and specific budget allocation should be provided to the ministry so that they could not only take the role but also carry out duties and responsibilities mandated by their role in cooperation with other relevant ministries of the executive branch.

“Including me, Ministers of Ethnic Affairs (such as Minister of Chin Affairs or Minister of Rakhine Affairs) are only attached to the Executive Branch and they don’t have specific Ministry, and thus, they don’t have access to a separate budget allocation, which limits our efforts and role”. A Minister of Ethnic Affairs as well as the party leader of an ethnic-based political party

Elected system, instead of appointed system of Chief Ministers of States and Regions, is recommended. They suggested electing the Chief Minister of State and Regions by State and Regions Parliament which could have more opportunities for those who can truly represent the local people. In addition, some ethnic party leaders see the elected system more in a sense of federalism, and thus, they believe it as one of the facts contributing to fair distribution of political power.

“Distribution of power, distribution of resources, and even distribution of job opportunities are very limited. In Parliaments, the representation by ethnic parties is still very limited. In terms of executive branch, the State Governments are appointees by the Presidents. To be fair and more in the sense of federalism, they should be elected”. A MP and party leader of an ethnic-based political party

Basic needs and infrastructure as second priorities

Filling a huge need of basic needs of majority of the population is significantly seen as essential in order to have a peaceful transition. As several items are covered under the basic needs, the respondents stressed provision of social safety nets or social security to the lowest income people and the policy to ensure rights, job securities and minimum salary of laborer class. Provision of quality public services in public health care is commonly recommended.

As a necessary infrastructure for development, reliable electrification is commonly identified by respondents. Some respondents pointed out its important to attract foreign investment and develop manufacturing sector while some are pointed out general socio-economic development of people and communities in remote area.

What do they recommend on second priority issues of providing basic needs and infrastructure?

Budget increase for health care services and infrastructure is commonly recommended by most of the respondents. The ethnic-based political parties usually mentioned importance of transportation to get access to facilities at town centers for their rural communities.

Fulfilling basic needs and infrastructure of local community is seemed to be best served by the local governments of each State and Region. Thus, health care, transportation and education are suggested to be under the direct management of State and Region's government. In liking with provision of authority over budget and service management to local governments, some respondents suggested to extend authority of local governments to the area of taxation which is currently limited to municipal taxes such as taxes on buildings and lands, water, street lightings and wheels. Some of ethnic party leaders also suggested reconsidering on allocation of revenue gained from border trades.

“The local governments are best to fulfill the needs of local communities. So, they need to have more authority to manage these needs and budget...The tax policy itself needed to extend. Currently, the area where local governments can collect tax and revenue are very limited in the tables (the table (B) of the constitutions). For example, the revenue gained from border trade is needed to reconsider for the allocation towards local governments.” The party leader of an ethnic-based political party as well as

Social security or social safety net system which can cover the grass-roots workers, not only government workers, but also workers working for private companies, is suggested by several respondents. They also suggested that the system is to be inclusive and wide-spread in order not to leave rural population and workers working in the informal sector.

Government understanding and cooperation with non-governmental organizations, of both international and national bodies, is pointed out as important for filling the needs of local communities. Some of them well recognized the effectiveness and improvements resulted by local development and empowerment projects implemented by non-governmental organizations. Significantly, they suggested local government should have authority to direct communicate and accept the aids if it is intended for local development. Currently, foreign aid is covered by the list of authority (the Table (A) of the Constitution) only given to the Union Government by the Constitution.

Transparency and consultation with local leaders in designing and planning of development projects funded by huge foreign aid organization, is also recommended by some respondents. They stated that these development projects were mostly implemented by agreements between the government and these organizations. They expressed that political parties and MPs represented to respective local communities should be informed and included in the process of planning and implementation.

“It is used to be quite difficult for NGOs to come and do local development in Kayin State as the local (State) government does not understand and allow those projects, even though the President encourage local development projects and support from NGOs and CSOs. Actually, capacity building and knowledge trainings provided by

NGOs are very helpful for local communities to voice up and put their own effort for their development. However, some organizations which have MOU for health project were not easily allowed...But at the side of foreign aid organization and project, it should be transparent. In my area, JICA has entered and we don't know anything about the project. It would be great if we are informed about these projects and consulted so that we can also work with local communities and these organizations.” An women MPs of an ethnic-based political party.

Electricity is defined as important as top priority for both local development and national development. While almost all respondents understand the burden on the government from a huge electricity subsidy, they recommended better service quality and extended grid network for the remote area. They also stress the current situations which they see as barriers for development of SMEs and rural communities, for instance, industrial zones in the small and medium cities are still undersupply of electricity; hundreds of villages across the country located only within two miles from where the grid connection pass through have no access to electricity.

Though self-reliant electrification projects in some sub-urban and rural area seemed effective for national electrification objective, some respondents expressed their concern on the extremely huge cost of these projects demanded to poor communities. They also questioned the inclusiveness of these projects as very poor households are always left out from these schemes as they are not affordable the shared cost by no means.

“While the ministry is seeing self-reliant electrification projects are quite successful, we have heard back the weak points of these projects. They are not really remedies for communities without electricity as these projects are extremely expensive and government provide nothing, but permission to get connected with national grid line. As these project cost about 200,000,000 to 300,000,000 MMK (approximately 200,000-300,000 USD), most of the rural households are not affordable. So, some indebted and some totally left out from the village scheme.” A party leader of national political party based in Yangon.

Some innovative green technology is recommended by a national party based in Yangon. Generation of electricity from the natural gas extracted from waste compiled in big cities. The NDF party expressed that it has been preparing a motion to propose at Pyithu Hluttaw (House of Representative). Some other party sees the electricity generated from gas turbines as the best solution as the production system can be set up quick and environmentally friendly. However, they also disappointed that the government sold out all natural gas at the stage of raw materials to neighboring China and Thailand.

“We want to introduce such kind of technology to the public. We have a huge waste dumping ground in cities like Yangon. First we need to collect waste of three separate category- organic, inorganic and chemical waste. Then we need to have incineration plants to burn these waste, and smoke release can be stored and extracted Methane gas or linked with boilers and then generate electricity. The second is the one we want to propose. Now, the party is preparing a motion and submitted soon in Hluttaw.” A party leader of national political party based in Yangon.

Promoting agricultural sector and life and livelihoods of farmers as third priorities

Agricultural sector is identified as the most important sector in order to quickly enhance the country's GDP as well as to have local development. Pointing out the facts that 70% of the country's population currently reside in rural area and their livelihoods hugely depends on the agricultural sector, all respondents agree that uplifting the agricultural sector means uplifting the economy of the country. While most respondents welcome the promulgation of 2012 Farm Land Law and the Farmer's Protection Law (Protecting Rights and Enhancing Economic Welfare of Farmers Law) of 2013, they pointed out the practical problems farmers have been facing with.

"The government has been trying to reduce the portion of agricultural production in GDP, expecting to be 29% of GDP, and the 35% each from the services and manufacturing sectors. Actually, it cannot be changed quickly as it will take much time to promote manufacturing and service sector and a huge population have been depending much on the agricultural sector. So, drastic changes may have negative side-effects. So, it should expect 35% from agricultural sector and the rest should be from the other two sectors." The party leader of a national political party based in Yangon.

What do they recommend on third priority issues of promoting agricultural sector and life and livelihoods of farmers?

The performance and the authority given to the important national bodies in the land governance are questioned by most respondents, especially MPs and party leaders of national political parties. The two bodies they mentioned are the Land Investigation Commission of Pyithu Hluttaw and the national level Land Management Committee. The Commission was formed in 2013 under the mandate of Hluttaw to handle the land complaints. According to some respondents who are members of the Land Investigation Commission, initial success stories of the land commission included exclusion of village lands- over 340,000 acres of some 1,213 villages- from the forest land record. However, most of the statements made by party leaders and some MPs who are members as well of the commission and sub-commissions reflected the statics- only 9.5% of the cases had been investigated out of 26,371 complaints received. In additions, based on its findings across the country, the Commission has advised in the report that confiscated lands be returned to original owners if projects are halted or no longer operational. Another important body in the land governance which the respondents pointed out is the Land Management Committee of national-level and other administrative level. The Land Management Committees have also been facing with significant challenges in the process of land registration due to complicated land disputes². The respondents viewed that the land management committees not really have power and resources to solve thousands of land disputes even in a township, delaying the process of land registration. The respondents also

² Generally, land disputes are separated into three main categories- 1. Land disputes resulted by land confiscation by the government and the military; 2. Land disputes between relatives; 3. Land disputes between farmers who used to share the plot or benefits or whose lands are located adjacently.

expected a report to be issued by the national-level committee in order to learn the progress and barriers of the process. Most of the respondents, thus, expected these important bodies of the land governance to fully exert power and authorities vested to them, and their advices to be taken up into actions.

Negative externalities of mechanize farming and contract farming are the concerns for some respondents while they agreed with its benefits such as mass production and quality products. Given agricultural context of Myanmar where most of them are small-scale farmers who mostly own 5 acres and less, and the biggest population depend on the agricultural sector are landless laborers. Thus, they recommend developing a specific policy and law to transform consolidated land structure and mechanized farming and waiting for a good timing of development in manufacturing sector which would absorb most of laborers currently depending on the farming sector, but losing their jobs soon at the wake of mechanized farming.

“Quick transformation to mechanized farming will not always bring benefits for all. It can wipe out small farmers and agricultural laborer and make them unemployed, leading to social unrest which again could lead to economic unrest. Thus, the government needs to have a well-prepared policy agenda and a good time management between developing service and manufacturing sector in urban areas and totally transforming into mechanized farming in the rural area. I think it may take at least 10 to 15 years to get a smooth-transfer.” The party leader of a national political party based in Yangon.

The Farmer Protection Law (2013) is mostly seen as a good-enough legal framework as it is meant to fulfill the second point of article 23 of the Constitution³ - to assist peasants to obtain equitable value of their agricultural produce, and its protective umbrella includes landless agricultural laborers who are also taken into account in the definition of “farmers”. Some of them commented that the control system over the price support scheme and the committee authorized to implement the purchase of agricultural commodities in support of the scheme is better than the system exercised in Thailand where the government manipulate the system with political interest. However, respondents still have concern over the wide definition of “farmer” which also covers middle and rice traders.

“It will surely have benefits for farmers if it is exactly followed to the law. The landless are also taken into account in the law....They revised the first draft, including “the leading committee” besides the product purchasing committee⁴. In the leading committee, people who represent farmers will be included. We expect this system to be better implemented than Yinluck’s rice purchasing programs”. The party leader of a national political party based in Yangon.

The land tax collection is recommended reconsidering to be consistent with the current context in terms of production cost, the market opportunities and the market price of the commodities. Only one of the respondents, the party leader of National Unity Party (NUP),

³ Article 23 of the Constitution guaranteed two points: “The Union shall (a) enact necessary laws to protect the rights of the peasants; (b) assist peasants to obtain equitable value of their agricultural produce.”

⁴ Agricultural Product Management Committee (APMC)

discussed detail about the tax has to be paid by farmers. He stated that the current land tax rate, i.e 1% to 7% per acre over its products, should be reconsidered as it is the tax rate set in the pre-Independence era. These tax rates were reasonable when they were first introduced last 75 years ago when the production cost per acre was not quite low. In these days, the production cost per acre is quite high while the market price of commodities is generally not good and sometime much fluctuate. Thus, farmers in these day have less profit margin and not much affordable for tax if it is only 1% over products per acre. So, he suggested reconsidering the land tax rate for farmers who also paying some other tax such as water tax, crop tax and income tax.

Creation of more credit sources, establishment of effective agricultural research center, and provision of quality seeds are common and general suggestions made by most of the respondents.

How do political parties learn people needs?

The study briefly explored how political parties in Myanmar learn people needs. As the study is only in qualitative nature, it tells only about the current trend, but not statistically represent.

The parties mostly learned when people approach and contact them for their help and advice. 80% of respondents, both party leaders and MPs, stated that people or groups normally approach to the party or MPs through a medium such as local leaders or simply a connection to the party or MPs.

Another significant way they learn is when they reach out to the people in their constituencies. 70% of respondents stated that they have a regular visit to their constituency and meeting with communities. The elected MPs expressed that they have a very limited times to make a visit to their constituencies and meet with people due to the consecutive Hluttaw sessions and works. However, the role they take in Hluttaw committees and commissions give them more confidence to handle the issues and address the needs of people.

The local CSOs or activist network are seen as a channel between political parties and local people, especially in sensitive issues such as land grabbing.

Hluttaw Support Committees or the unit or department within a party served as a bridge between elected MPs and the party head offices. Mostly the MPs and their head office have communication gap. In order to fill that gap, most of the parties have formed the committee, called 'Hluttaw Support Committee' which have regular coordination with MPs and help prepare proposal or bill that MPs have to submit in Hluttaw sessions on behalf the party.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings and learning through this study, one significant conclusion point we can make is that most of the political parties mainly focus on the current political issue such as armed conflicts and constitutional amendments in which most of them cannot influence and actively advocate. In fact, only few parties understand well on the development aspect and country economy, and thus, present their policies with in-depth explanation on different sectors.

While the ethnic-based parties are focus only to represent the interest of their respective ethnic population, their learning efforts and capacity in the constituencies and people they represent are very limited. Most of the party policy books present generally and not well cover the needs of their people and how to address those needs.

At the same time, the study significantly learned some political parties effectively filling the needs and representing the voice of the people they represent in Hluttaw, even though their strength and capacity is limited, and number of seats they obtained is small. Thus, it will be valuable to learn how these political parties working closely with the people, preparing the bill and proposal with sound evidence, and make policy influence in Hluttaw. Recommended parties to be learned are NDF, NUP and DPM.

The review workshop on party policies and practices between like-minded political parties should be conducted as they can learn how far their policy objectives are realized and how they can reframe their policy goals and commitments based on feasibility, current needs and their expertise.

It is also important for small but effective and active parties to learn some case examples of how small parties in other democratic countries became successful, for instance the case of the Green parties in Germany and some other European countries.

Annex I. The detailed list of political parties and number of respondents (for the in-depth interviews)

#	Name	Type	Party Chair	Party Base in	Date of registration	PA	NA	LP	Total	# of Respondents to be selected
1	88 Generation Student Youths (Unoin of Myanmar)	NP	Ye Tun	Rangoon	26-May-10	0	0	1	1	2
2	Democracy Party (Myanmar)	NP	Thu Wai	Rangoon	29-May-10	0	0	3	3	2
3	National Democratic Force	NP	Than Nyein	Rangoon	9-Jul-10	6	2	2	10	2
4	National Democratic Party for Development	NP	MaungMaung Ni	Rangoon	4-Jul-10	0	0	2	2	2
5	National League for Democracy	NP	DawAdung San SuuKy	Rangoon	5-Jan-12	37	5	2	44	2
6	Natiional Unity Party	NP	Tun Yin	Rangoon	29-Apr-10	12	5	46	63	2
7	New National Democracy Party	NP	Kyaw	Rangoon	4-Oct-11	2	1	2	5	2
8	Union Solidarity and Development Party	NP	Shwe Mann	Naypyidaw	8-Jun-10	220	123	493	836	2
#	Name	Type	Party Chair	Party Base in	ateof registratic	PA	NA	LP	Total	# of Respondents
1	All Mon Region Democracy Party	EP	Ngwe Thein	Moulmein, Mon State	24-May-10	3	4	9	16	2
2	Chin National Party	EP	ZamCliin Pau Aka ZoZam	Rangoon	27-May-10	2	2	5	9	2
3	Ching Progressive Party	EP	No ThangKap	Rangoon	1-Jun-10	2	4	6	12	2
4	Ethnic National Development Party	EP	Hipa	Matupi chin State	16-Jun-10	0	0	1	1	2
5	Inn National Development Party	EP	Win Myint	Nyaungshwe, Shan State	1-Jun-10	1	0	3	4	2
6	Kayan National Party	EP	Khu Yu Jin	Pekon, Shan State	20-May-10	0	0	2	2	2
7	Kayin People's Party	EP	Tun Aung Myint	Rangoon	21-May-10	1	1	4	6	2
8	Kayin State Democracy and Development Party	EP	That Htoo Kyaw	Hpa-an, karen State	19-Aug-10	0	1	1	2	2
9	Lahu National Development Party	EP	Kyahar She	Lashio Shan State	29-Apr-10	0	0	1	1	2
10	Phalon-Sawaw Democratic Party	EP	Khin Maung Myint	Hpa-an, karen State	4-Jun-10	2	3	4	9	2
11	Rakhine National Progressive Party [aka Rakhine Nationalities Development Party]	EP	Aye Maung	Akyab Arakan State	1-Jun-10	7	7	19	33	2
12	Shan National Democratic Party	EP	Ai Pao	Rangoon	26-May-10	18	4	36	58	2
13	Unity and Democracy Party of Kachin State	EP	Khet Htein Nan	Myitkyina, Kachin State	2-Aug-10	1	1	2	4	2
#	Name	Type	Party Chair	Party Base in	ateof registratic	PA	NA	LP	Total	# of Respondents
1	Danu National Democracy Party	EP/Autonomous	Mya Than	Ywanga Shan State	3-Jul-12	0	0	0	0	1
2	Kokang Democracy and Unity Party	EP/Autonomous	Lo Xing Guang	Lashio Shan State	7-May-10	0	0	0	0	1
3	PaO National Organization	EP/Autonomous	Aung Kham Hti	Taunggyi Shan State	13-May-10	3	1	6	10	2
4	Taaung (Palaung) National Party	EP/Autonomous	Aike Mone	Namhsam, Shan State	24-May-10	1	1	4	6	2
5	Wa Democratic Party	EP/Autonomous	Tun Lu	Lashio, Shan State	2-Jun-10	2	1	3	6	2
Total # of Respondents										50
Abbreviations:										
Types of Parties: NP= National Political Parties; EP= Ethnic Political Parties, EP/Autonomous= Ethnic Political Parties in Autonomous Regions										
Types of Parliaments: PA= People's Assembly (Pyi Thu Hluttaw); NA= National Assembly (Ahmyo Thar Hluttaw); LP= Local Parliaments (State and Regional Hluttaw)										