FINAL REPORT

Participatory Research on Community Information Management in Rakhine

NOVEMBER, 2019

Produced by Conflict Management Consulting (CMC)

Contact:

Joseph Mariampillai  
*Country Director*  
*Search for Common Ground*  
No.457 (A) Pyay Road, Ward (A), Kamayut Township, Yangon  
+95 (0) 9 450 058 189  
josephm@sfcg.org

Aung Myo Hein  
*Head of Rakhine Programs*  
*Search for Common Ground*  
No.457 (A) Pyay Road, Ward (A), Kamayut Township, Yangon  
+95 (0) 9 252 301 413  
aungmyohein@sfcg.org
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 4

Abbreviations and Acronyms .................................................................................................. 5

Executive Summary .................................................................................................................. 6

2. Findings ............................................................................................................................... 15
   2.1 Sources for News and Information .................................................................................. 15
   2.2 Differences in Access to Information ............................................................................. 19
   2.3 Trust and Evaluation of Information ................................................................................. 23
   2.4 Negative Rumors about Services ................................................................................... 25

3. Conclusions .......................................................................................................................... 34

4. Recommendations ............................................................................................................... 36

5. Literature ............................................................................................................................... 39

Annex 1: Research Tools ........................................................................................................... 41
   Tool 1: KII with CBO/CSO Representatives ......................................................................... 41
   Tool 2: FGD with Community Members .............................................................................. 51
   Tool 3: KIIs with Local Authorities ...................................................................................... 60

Annex 2: Research Methodology and Limitations .................................................................. 64

Annex 3: List of Interviewees .................................................................................................... 66
Acknowledgements

Search for Common Ground Myanmar would like to acknowledge and thank Conflict Management Consulting (CMC) for leading the research and writing of this report. In particular, Morten Nygaard Christensen as Team Leader and Lead Researcher, Melyn McKay as Senior Advisor, and Tun Lin Khaing as Field Researcher.

We would also like to recognise and appreciate the coordination and contribution from the project team: Lown Pi, Head of Programs at Scholar Institute, Aung Myo Hein, Head of Rakhine Programs at Search for Common Ground, and Thung Gran Aung, Project Coordinator at Search for Common Ground.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the official position of Search for Common Ground nor the European Union.
Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADB  Asian Development Bank
ARSA The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
CBOs Community Based Organizations
CDA CDA Collaborative Learning Project
CDHN Center for Diversity and National Harmony
CMC Conflict Management Consulting
CSOs Civil Society Organizations
DE Department of Electricity
DH Department of Health
DM Department of Municipality
DP Department of Planning
DRD Department of Rural Development
EU European Union
GAD General Administrative Department
IDPs Internally Displaced Persons
IMS International Media Support
Las Local Authorities
NRC National Register of Citizens
PDYO Ponnagyun Development Youth Organization
SCBSD Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery
SFCG/Search Search for Common Ground
SI Scholar Institute
TAF The Asia Foundation
TDAC Township Development Affairs Committee
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
WB The World Bank
WVTA Ward/Village Tract Administrator
Executive Summary

Scholar Institute (Scholar) and Search for Common Ground (Search) have partnered to implement the project, *Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery* (SCBSD). This project takes as its point of departure the observation that shortcomings in people’s access to services such as medical treatment, education for their children, and drinking water, contribute to tensions between communities in Rakhine and with the government. More than lack of services in itself being a driver of conflict, the different ways that services are delivered, and to whom, risks entrenching rifts in Rakhine’s social fabric.

But service delivery – if approached right – is also an area of opportunity which can foster trust between communities and authorities, and create better lives and conditions on the ground. SCBSD aims to contribute to this. With a particular focus on women, youth, and ethnic minority communities, it provides capacity building and trust building to strengthen the relationship between communities and local authorities.

An important part of this is information management, including the ways in which communities receive information about service delivery, and how they engage with it. It has a significant impact on the extent to which citizens can benefit from the services available; knowing about services is a first step to getting them. It is also critical for allowing citizens to play a role in holding authorities accountable to their mandate as service providers. The stories and rumors that go around about service delivery are fundamental to shaping the relationship between authorities and communities. The stories and rumors that flow – positive and negative – help shape how communities and authorities interact, especially the extent to which they are able to engage constructively around addressing service issues.

To support the implementation of SCBSD, Scholar and Search contracted Conflict Management Consulting (CMC) to do *Participatory Research on Service Provision in Rakhine*. Two reports resulted from this process. While the first report focuses on the state of service provision in four townships in Rakhine – Sittwe, Taungup, Ponnagyun, Ramree – this report focuses on information flows and rumors in relation to services in these townships. It engages with communities and authorities alike to understand:

- Which information sources people turn to when they have questions about public services
- How different groups of people’s information seeking behaviors vary, and which sources of information they have available to them
- How people evaluate information and rumors offline and online, and which sources they trust the most
- Which negative rumors exist, where they come from, and how people think they should be dealt with

Based on this and a brief conclusion, it presents a set of recommendations for SCBSD with a view to support its focus, implementation, and posture.
Methodology

A total of 15 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and more than 50 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were held, bringing the total number of people engaged with this research to more than 130 people across target townships. Interviewees were selected to bring together a range of stakeholders, yet with a special focus on presenting the perspectives of women, ethnic minorities, and rural peoples. Field work was implemented in two waves – the first collecting data from community members and civil society organizations, the second interviewing a broad range of authorities across the four townships.

Key Findings

Sources of Information:

**Personal networks are king.** When asked where they turn to with questions about public services, most people said they approach friends and family with prior first-hand experience of the service. As a second port of call, people often approach (in)formal authority figures in their community – for instance teachers, monks, elders, or people who are active in CSOs. Also, people who move much in relation to their work – for instance market traders and drivers - are seen as useful information sources.

**Social media is useful, but often a waste of time.** A large number of people said they get information from social media, either directly or from people who re-tell it. Occasionally, social media is used as a source of information about public services, although very few authorities use it. Information is sought from Facebook, and other social media platforms, in different ways (e.g. through larger group chats, Facebook groups, pages/walls, and via private messaging). Many worry young people spend too much time on social media.

**Traditional media.** TV is the most popular news source, and it was occasionally mentioned as a source one would turn to for specific information about services. Radio and newspapers also remain popular and occasionally provide information about public services.

**Straight from the horse’s mouth – going to authorities.** Going straight to the authorities is an option when seeking information, pending availability and location, but a number of barriers still prevail. People are often scared of authorities, or don’t have the time and resources to see them.

**Authorities communicate with (but mostly to) citizens in a number of ways.** Authorities often communicate to citizens during field visits and office visits, but also through signboards and, in very few cases, websites. Nonetheless, authorities prefer to communicate via phone, where “people can just call”. Though, only a few people call.

**Authorities want to communicate, but often things get in the way.** With a few exceptions (typically the more specialized ministries like health and education), authorities (say they) value communicating with communities, but time and resource constraints, and issues of citizens fearing them, make it difficult. Also, officials often feel that listening to communities goes against their mandate.
Differences in Access to Information:

The biggest difference is urban/rural. The main differences in how people access information were found between people who live in urban and rural locations. Rural people have less access to electricity and phone/data coverage, and they live further away from authorities. They often rely on information provided by village tract/ward authorities. Taken together, this means they have less access to information.

Age also matters. Younger people have more information sources available to them, because they are more tech-savvy than older generations, who often rely on young people to provide them news and information gathered online. On the other hand, services are seen as an ‘adult thing’ and something grown-ups are naturally more informed about through their networks.

Gender is unclear. Men are often seen as having better access to information, “because they work outside and communicate,” and because women “don’t know how to use the internet.” Nonetheless, women are very likely to be engaged in community-level committees, particularly those with religious objectives (parahita, pagoda, gawbaga, etc.), and they often share information through these networks.

Ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority communities often feel they are overlooked and have less access to information, both because content is not available in their native language, but also because authorities simply have less focus on them (because they are ‘ethnic’). It is difficult to conclude when this is true, and when a lack of attention is due to communities being a further distance from larger towns. Authorities openly admit that they can only reach a fraction of the communities they are responsible for.

Trust and Evaluation of Information and Rumors:

Traditional sources are most trusted. Established news agencies and channels are generally the most trusted sources of news, with state-owned platforms like MRTV being seen as the most reliable.

People know information on social media is not always reliable. Facebook is generally an important source of knowledge for many people, but when asked directly, a large number of people say they are skeptical about the veracity of content found on Facebook. A few said that they had stopped using Facebook for that reason.

People (they say) use offline and online techniques to verify information. To evaluate online content, people ask around offline and process information collectively with friends, family, or people who are more knowledgeable about a topic. When evaluating online, people look at the source of information, how widely it is reported, and the completeness of users’ profiles. They also evaluate the veracity of content by how it is received – how many ‘like’ it, share it, comment in favor of or against it, etc.

The techniques are often collective. The techniques used for content verification mentioned above often rely on other people’s judgement. While this deliberation has merit, it makes users vulnerable to the echo chamber effect (i.e. if a person’s acquaintances are like themselves, they are
more likely to share the same opinions and biases/idiosyncrasies, and they are less likely to reflect critically on content). Regardless, there is still an awareness among many to engage more critically with the information later on.

**Negative Rumors about Service Delivery:**

**There aren’t that many rumors about service delivery.** While plenty of grievances around service delivery were shared by communities, fewer negative rumors were encountered than expected (although they were still there).

**Negative rumors often focus on why some people get things and other people don’t.** Because of scarcity, authorities are often forced to make decisions about who to provide services to. These situations, which manifest in very clear and visible differences in living standard, can frustrate communities and create fertile grounds for spreading negative rumors.

**Negative rumors include nepotism, pro-Muslim bias, and indifference.** The negative rumors that circulate around service delivery include allegations of nepotism among officials, not least village tract/ward authorities. They also include the assertion that services are more often provided to Muslim groups in Rakhine – particularly by foreign NGOs. A third suggestion is that officials generally don’t care about communities and just do whatever suits them. More colorful rumors include the idea that doctors kill patients who complain.

**It varies how perceptive authorities are to negative rumors, misunderstanding.** More than half of the officials interviewed said that they had never experienced rumors or misunderstandings about their area. It was also clear that officials varied substantially in how important they thought it was to (or attempt to) detect negative stories about their work. Some appeared to find it insignificant, whereas others were very perceptive to stories in the community. They also recognized that they may have a hard time detecting all the stories, because people might be afraid of them.

**Among officials who detect rumors, some attribute it to greed, menace, or lack of education.** Among the officials who recognize negative rumors exist around their work, some thought it was due to people wanting to make trouble or money, whereas others blame it on lack of education. Those who ascribe to the first explanation tended to think negative rumors were to be dealt with by ignoring rumor makers or threatening them. Those who ascribe to the latter explanation tended to emphasize the importance of awareness raising and education among people.

**Officials also share rumors about communities.** While rumors about services and service providers are often thought to exist among communities, the research also highlights that rumors exist among authorities too. Officials appear to share stories amongst themselves, portraying communities as self-serving, ‘grabby,’ or unqualified to provide input on their work.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings above, the report makes the following recommendations to *Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery* (SCBSD):
 Communicate through multiple channels, including village tract/ward administrators. If SCBSD seeks to communicate with or to the broader community – e.g. to strengthen awareness or recruit program participants – use multiple channels. Use Facebook and other social media (Viber, WeChat), but also use radio. If possible, work to spread information through township level General Administrative Department (GAD) officers, who on a bi-weekly basis call meetings with ward/village tract administrator (WVTA) to provide them with information.

Don’t forget the personal networks. In external engagements, keep in mind that a main source of information for many people is orally shared information from family and friends. Encourage people to share messages.

Selection of influential citizens (‘influencers’): Pay attention to representation. Whenever working with influencers to spread messages, make certain to have representation across different population groups, ensuring the selection of program advocates is diverse.

Support officials’ external communication. Provide support to authorities to strengthen their external communication across different platforms. Emphasize inclusive communication and sensitize officials to how different communities (and different people within them) need to be communicated to/with according to who they are (gender, age, ethnicity, location) and which means of communication they have at their availability.

Support officials’ external communication: Awareness of barriers. To further promote inclusive communication, further sensitize officials to the different barriers around engaging communities, which are described in this report and the other report produced for this research. Focus for instance on barriers relating to time/resources, staff attitudes, fear/apprehension. Highlight barriers related to gender, age, and ethnicity.

Support officials’ external communication: Communication training – messaging. To support information uptake and the strengthening of relations between communities and authorities, provide training to authorities on how to target messaging to different communities and how to present content in ways which engage recipients (sender-message-receiver and other models).

Support officials’ external communication: Communication training – personal communication. Also consider supporting in-person communication skills (relevant for field visits, as well as office visits). Specifically, focus on self-awareness, non-threatening communication, rapport building, and active listening.

Support officials’ external communication: Social media. Hardly any authorities reported using social media, including Facebook, in their work. Consider offering social media training to authorities to strengthen their outreach to communities.

Support citizens’ critical engagement with information: Develop ‘rule(s) of thumb.’ Develop a simple and catchy ‘tool’ or technique to help users evaluate the veracity of information, especially online content. For instance, you could use a mnemonic device (a tool/technique a person can use to help them improve their ability to remember something) to help users remember three to five ‘rules of thumb’ (important rules). You could use the following mnemonic device -
take the first letter of the first word in different phrases and combine them to create one memorable word. Memoization of this word allows for memorization of the associated phrases. This will help users remember all of the important phrases, which can be your identified rules of thumb. For example (but only for illustrative purposes, as the actual phrases must be in Rakhine or Burmese): S. T. O. P. = Stop to think about who benefits from this; Talk to someone who knows about it; Observe others’ reaction; Point out where the information is weak.

Support authorities’ critical engagement with information. Address the negative rumors that circulate among officials about the communities they serve. This may include specific events (e.g. communities attempting to extract money from the state during expropriation), or it may be more general ideas which exist around citizens (e.g. they are self-serving, un-qualified, looking to foment trouble).

General approach: Be transparent. Negative rumors grow in the dark. Be sufficiently forthcoming and transparent with information about SCBSD to avoid creating the conditions for negative rumors to grow. Systematically share information about SCBSD’s work (so much that potential singular misappropriated facts are ‘watered down’) through Facebook and other social media. Also, produce and distribute written content at meetings, presentations, and events.

General approach: Be transparent II – explain decisions. SCBSD must be transparent about how, and for what reasons, decisions are made by the project – especially decisions which affect communities, which includes decisions about who receives grants and training. These decisions can result in very clear and visible differences in people’s living standards, therefore they have the potential to frustrate communities. To stem such frustrations, SCBSD must be open and precise about the criteria used for making decisions and clear about why the winning proposals won. SCBSD must also be receptive (and perceptive) to the grievances people express around how decisions are made, and then course-correct when it is necessary.
1. Introduction

Scholar Institute (Scholar) and Search for Common Ground (Search) are implementing the project Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery (SCBSD). This project takes as its point of departure the observation that shortcomings in people’s access to services like medical treatment, education for their children, drinking water, and electricity, contribute to tensions between communities in Rakhine and with the government. More than lack of services in itself being a driver of conflict, the way in which services are delivered and to whom risks entrenching rifts in Rakhine’s social fabric. But service delivery – if approached right – is also an area of opportunity. Where communities can see tangible benefits, service delivery may contribute to the reduction of grievances and the building of trust. Getting communities and authorities to work together in constructive ways to address service issues can foster trust and create better lives and conditions on the ground. SCBSD, implemented in partnership between Search and Scholar and funded by the EU, aims to do exactly this. With a particular focus on women, youth, and ethnic minority communities, it provides capacity building and trust building to strengthen the relationship between communities and local authorities to improve service delivery.

An important part of the relationship between communities and authorities is information management, including the ways in which communities receive information about service delivery from a number of sources, and how they engage with it. This may be from official media or from other sources, including through social media and word of mouth, and it may be in verified form or as rumors (positive or negative) that circulate in communities. The ways in which communities receive and process information about services, and how they are delivered, is an integral part of the relationship between authorities and communities. It can have a significant impact on the extent to which citizens benefit from the services available (i.e. knowing about services is a first step to getting them). It is also critical for allowing citizens to play a role in holding authorities accountable to their mandate as service providers. For citizens to be able to provide feedback to authorities, they need to be informed not only about how things are, but also about how they should be (i.e. which services are and should be available, and also how service providers perform and should perform). Finally, information flows and rumors play an important role in shaping the relationship between authorities and communities. The stories and rumors that flow – positive or negative – help shape how they

---

**Box 1: How do we define services?**

“Services” is normally thought to span a range of benefits from water, electricity, education, and health provision, to social services, transportation, justice mechanisms, security provision, clean air, etc. - benefits which are often assumed to be provided, guaranteed or regulated by the state.

This working definition has guided the scope of the research. Nonetheless, this report aims to problematize the concept and its application in Myanmar.

As such, the report also explores how beneficiaries and providers of services alike understand the concept of “services”, and what that tells us about the relationship between communities and authorities as well as the space for strengthening collaborative service provision.
interact, especially shaping the extent to which they are able to engage constructively around addressing service issues.

To support the implementation of SCBSD, Search and Scholar contracted Conflict Management Consulting (CMC) to do Participatory Research on Service Provision in Rakhine. Two reports resulted from this process. Together, these reports contribute findings and recommendations for the implementation of SCBSD. The research also contributed to the building of research capacity with Search’s partner organizations on the ground, whose knowledge, insights, and support have proven a strong resource for the research. The overall approach aimed to embody the principles of collaborative and participatory research.

1.1 Research Overview

Research Questions, Methodology, and Structure

While the first report produced as part of this research focuses on the state of service provision in four townships in Rakhine (Sittwe, Taungup, Ponnagyun, Ramree) this report focuses on information flows and rumors in relation to services in these townships. It draws on existing resources, as well as on field data collected between December 2018 and February 2019. A total of 15 focus group discussions and 42 key informant interviews were carried out ‘in waves’ in Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Taungup, and Ramree:

- During the first wave, community members in urban and rural areas were interviewed – with a special effort to include female and youth participants. Members of CSOs, as well as state parliamentarians, were also interviewed.
- During the second wave, local authorities in the four townships were interviewed, after successfully achieving permission to do so. Interviews took place in the ethnic Rakhine language and/or Myanmar language as necessary.¹

The report details the different ways in which communities receive information about services in the four townships. Where do people turn when they have a question? Where do they get information from? This includes informal in-person sources like family and friends, as well as informal online sources like Facebook groups, Viber, and WeChat. It also includes more traditional and formal sources like TV, radio, and newspapers. In doing so, the report pays special attention to the ways in which different groups use media sources differently, especially urban and rural groups of people but also between other groups. How do people from rural locations differ from people in the towns, and how do these differences affect their consumption of media?

Subsequently, the report looks at the different ways in which people evaluate information they receive. A finding in this - and previous - research is that many communities have limited access to information and to information around services in particular. Effectively, people often rely on unverified information (e.g. rumors re-told on social media, in-person by friends and family, at the market, or in the field). In such situations, how do people evaluate information to assess the extent

¹ For a more detailed account of the study’s methodology, please refer to annex 2. For the study’s research tools which were developed in cooperation between the research team, Search, and SI, please refer to Annex 1.
to which they can trust it? The report discusses which sources people trust the most, but also specific techniques people use to assess whether something is true or not.

Finally, the report hone in on negative rumors about service delivery. Rumors are not in and of themselves negative. In this report, as well as in other work associated with Search, *rumors* are defined as ‘unverified information’ to underscore the important role that rumors can play in a society. For example, rumors can act as a news source to people who don’t have many other sources to turn to. (See the box to the right, which discusses rumors and their role in society.) But rumors can be negative, and in the context of *Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery*, a particular focus is on the ways in which they can have a negative impact on communities’ and authorities’ abilities to work together to facilitate service delivery. The report therefore discusses the prevalence of negative rumors about service delivery, what they are about, and where they come from. It also discusses the extent to which authorities are aware of rumors, and what they think should be done by them.

Finally, the report provides a brief conclusion as well as recommendations for the implementation of *Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery*.

**Box 2: Rumors - A Second-Best, Neither Good Nor Bad**

This report, in keeping with the wider body of literature on rumors, and Search For Common Ground’s previous work on the topic, defines *rumors* as ‘neither bad nor good.’ Rumors are simply unverified information. While rumors often have a bad name because confirmed information is usually seen as better, and rumors are often associated with a hidden agenda, the *non-normative approach* to rumors maintains that rumors can serve both positive and negative functions. As such, rumors are not seen as being inherently false or negative, and they are not seen as inherently contributing to conflict or tensions. The non-normative approach recognizes that rumors may well be a useful source of information, not least for people who have few alternatives when it comes to gathering information. The rumor literature discusses how rumors can be a way of collective sense-making in situations where information is scarce, especially in situations that are threatening or ambiguous, and where there is a push for greater understanding. Some studies even suggest that rumors can have a collectively calming effect. The literature also finds that when people share rumors they do it because they believe they are helpful, although in situations of heightened anxiety, people’s critical evaluation of rumors diminishes. Other factors which contribute to the spread of rumors (including negative rumors), include lack of education, lack of transparency, stories with strong emotions, and people seizing opportunities to pursue hidden agendas.
2. Findings

2.1 Sources for News and Information

Informants referred to a wide variety of sources when asked how and where they seek information, including social media. The information sources identified can be clustered in the following way:

2.1.1. Friends and Family

As a first port of call, many interviewees seek information from the people around them, particularly friends and family. These are often trusted sources, especially friends and family who have first-hand experience with the topic in question. For instance, a family member who has been to see a doctor recently is asked for recommendations about doctors, or a friend who has tried to complain about broken street lights may be asked for recommendations about how to lodge similar types of complaints.

“To get information about service delivery, we ask the person who already experienced the service that we want to get. For example, a person who is suffering from stomach ache asks the person who already experienced that when he doesn’t know which doctor he should see.” (KII, CSO leader, Taungup)

2.1.2 From Influential Community Members

“Our family members told us how to apply for a National ID card. But they want me to go to the Immigration Department on my own. I feel a bit frightened to go there as I have never been there before. In our university, we heard of services provided by the Educational Department from our teachers. They also gave us information about how to apply for a motorcycle driving license.” (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe)

As a second port of call, informants referred to people who can collectively be described as ‘influential’ community members – those who, in one way or another, become seen as knowledgeable or influential and a reliable source of information. The social capital that these influential community members possess may draw on different sources. Influential community members may take up positions in formal or traditional leadership, or they may be religious figures (e.g. influential monks) through which they receive community information. They may for instance be committee members or Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)/Community Based Organizations (CBOs) leaders, who acquire exposure or fame through their community engagement. As a consequence of their position, they may be able to draw on the status of an organization, which allows them to speak to authorities with more weight:

“People don’t go to the department and ask for information. Powerful organizations can go and ask for information. Ordinary folks don’t do this.” (KII, CSO leader 1, Ramree)
Respondents, especially young ones, also frequently saw teachers as particularly insightful. Finally, privileged access to information may also come through frequent travel (e.g. people traveling for work). Market traders and drivers who pick up information during their travels are seen as useful information sources.

### 2.1.3 Social Media

*"We share information among our family members and friends. E.g. services provided by our university. I have shared some information about the training on Facebook and also tagged to my friends who should attend that training. I have also shared information about juices which affect our health on Facebook."* (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe)

Many people use social media as a source of information. However, according to informants, information shared on social media rarely provides insight into social services.

*"Yes, we use Facebook and get a variety of information from friends’ and news agency pages. But we rarely see information related to service delivery."* (FGD, mixed, urban Sittwe)

Only a very few of the authorities interviewed for this research said that they use social media to communicate about their work. One official in Sittwe said that it was cumbersome to communicate online, because they had to receive approval from the General Administrative Department (GAD) before posting.

Topics – apart from entertainment – that are pursued by users on Facebook included health, education, and business (FGD 1, mixed, rural Ponnagyun) from both news agencies and individual pages. Some participants expressed concern that young people waste their time on social media, using it mostly for less-serious things like “actors, actresses, and brands of clothes.” (FGD with female participants, rural Taungup)

Social media is distinguished from other sources of information, insofar as the information which is available – for instance through Facebook – is sourced from a mix of professional and non-professional contributors. Interviewees took particular note of friends’ pages, news agency pages, groups, and particular celebrities or influencers with many followers (who function as a self-appointed form of community information dissemination). Examples of such people:

- the businessman (in construction) U Kyauk Taung,
- the CSO leader U Zeya Kyaw,
- U Soe Thiha,
- and the climate activist U Tun Lwin

---

2 https://www.facebook.com/ukyauk.taung.official

3 https://www.facebook.com/ukyaw.sein.102?ref=search&__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARds8vKORFEEdGOMId5ky09ljkQhHCZkDjIn-u-1z8vYyVXYyEElnnv_Mqdz01-i7r_V4Qswh1DB-bnAGu
Each of these influencers have a large number of followers on Facebook, and they post prolifically about topics ranging from advertisements to health tips to films.

In addition to Facebook, Viber and WeChat were frequently mentioned as sources of information (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe). Here, too, informants described following multiple, different sources like larger Facebook groups and direct, private communication with friends. The different types of sources shared on social media are in turn evaluated somewhat differently. We return to the evaluation of information below.

2.1.4 Traditional Media

A fourth cluster of media sources includes ‘traditional’ media, such as TV, radio, and newspapers. These sources were mentioned relatively little by interviewees when they were asked to talk about which sources they consult for information about services. TV was not identified by respondents as a go-to source for information about services. This is perhaps surprising, as TV remains a popular news source in Myanmar. For instance, in an International Media Support report (IMS 2018),4 which is based on qualitative data, researchers found that half of the 168 interviewed (a fourth some were from Rakhine) watch TV on a daily basis. It could be argued that TV was not identified as a relevant source for information about services, because interviews in this study were focusing the most on who or where people turn when they have specific questions about services. (In that case, consulting a one-directional medium like TV or radio would be less obvious.) It is nevertheless notable that TV was not mentioned more.

Newspapers were mentioned as a source of information about public services by a few interviewees. In the IMS (2018), focus group participants mentioned a handful of newspapers by name: Nirinjara, 7 days, Ayeyarwaddy, Mizzima, DVB, and Weekly.

So-called “town criers” (i.e. individuals on foot, on motorbikes, or in small trucks who move around in the streets, announcing messages to by-passers and residents) were also mentioned as being an important source of information (KII, CSO leader, Taungup).

2.1.5 From Authorities

Finally, informants described going to authorities to collect information about public services, either through ward/village tract authorities (WVTA) or directly from specific authorities, such as sector ministries or institutions (KII, CSO leader 3, Ponnagyun). For instance, the Department of Electricity (DE) may be visited for electricity-related matters, the Department of Roads for transportation, the Department of Municipality (DM) for Sanitation, etc. In some cases it appears that this occurs mostly when licenses (e.g. driver licenses) are involved. Authorities are approached indirectly through so-called “agents,” who are paid a fee to liaise with authorities on behalf of users (referred to as A Kyo Saung) (FGD 1, mixed youth participants, Taungup).

Authorities reported disseminating information in different ways. As documented in *Participatory Research on Service Provision In Rakhine*, authorities in Rakhine differ substantially with regards to the extent to which they see it as their job to engage actively with communities about the work they do. Some (say they) attach substantial importance to engaging with communities to elicit their input. The research suggests that the bodies which have committees attached to them and are governed locally (e.g. the Departments of Rural Development (DRD) and the DM) are the most willing and able to engage with citizens over their service delivery, whereas agencies who deliver more technical services (e.g. the Departments of Health) are less likely to see community engagement as productive.

This affects how, and to what extent, authorities communicate information to communities. Generally, the form of communication mentioned by officials interviewed for this research, when asked how they stay in touch with communities, was communication through a phone that citizens “can just call.” From the interviews conducted, it appears that only a very few citizens in fact make such calls, which highlights the issues inherent in relying on such methods. While all citizens in principle have access to calling officials, community members may not know they can call, they may not have the right number, or they may be scared of calling. As one informant in Ramree said:

> “Our people are afraid of having anything to do with the government departments. Whether it’s going to hospital or getting a police testimonial, people would deal with the government departments only when it’s absolutely inevitable.” (KII, CSO leader 2, Ramree)

Phones nonetheless remain a channel of communication through which communities can source information, even if only a few do it.

In addition, authorities often push information through field visits. The number of visits done per agency depends on how much money and time they have available, but particularly the DRD appears to do many field visits. Other ways authorities communicate information out to communities involves – although to a lesser extent – the use of different forms of traditional media. Of these, billboards are most frequently used, especially in relation to construction projects. A few agencies use websites, but according to interviewees, they are often too resource heavy to build and manage, and they may be subject to control by the GAD (KII, Assistant Director of Municipal Dep., Sittwe). Participants’ comments suggest that a government official’s individual attitude may greatly influence whether information is broadcast online or not:

> “I don’t know for sure if any government departments post information on Facebook. I know that the last GAD guy did that. But then once he moved to a different location, and I don’t think anyone else did it.” (KII, CSO leader 1, Ramree)

A very limited number of officials interviewed said that they had used radio to communicate with their communities.

Finally, officials interviewed at the township level said, in most cases, that they rely on authorities at the lower level to announce information to communities. On a bi-weekly basis, WVTA gathers
with GAD officials at the township level (KII, Department of Health, Ponnagyun) to be briefed on administrative developments, which they are then relied on to convey to their communities.

2.2 Differences in Access to Information

Not all informants seek information in the same ways. The information seeking patterns that were revealed in this study often differed on the basis of resources people have (or rather don’t have) access to. As a result, the channels through which information flows, are broader for some than for others.

The research did not detect particular differences between informants from the four townships explored. Rather, the most substantial differences in the way people collect information about public services, and how many sources of information they have access to, were found to be between informants’ location (urban versus rural as the primary determinant of access to technology), age, and socioeconomic status.

2.2.1 The urban/rural divide

“I think people living in the communities specifically groups of people or communities living in remote areas lack of awareness and knowledge so they will not understand services - they don't.” (KII, Head of Township Development Management Committee, Ramree)

The biggest differences in information seeking behavior tended to be observed between people who lived in urban versus rural locations. The research team interviewed respondents from urban environments, from villages, and from villages particularly far removed from main roads. The latter – proximity to roads – is often a proxy for overall socioeconomic levels. The research found that whether people live in urban or rural environments has cascading effects, in the sense that people’s urban/rural position also determines other factors which affect the number of sources of information they have access to. These factors include whether people have access to electricity and data coverage (and thereby online content), the type of work people do, how far people are from authorities, etc.

Only around 30% of households in Rakhine are currently connected to the electric power grid (Asian Development Bank 2015), and those who are, are mainly people in urban areas. In the remaining parts of Rakhine, communities – if they have access to electricity – rely on self-supplied electricity, either through solar power or generators, which is less stable. This has an effect on people’s access to information, because communities who have stable access to electricity are better able to use TVs, as well as to charge and use electronic devices like phones. It means that communities with stable access to electricity are better able to access information online – be it on the internet through Facebook or other social apps like Viber or WeChat. Adding to this is the fact

5 A similar finding was made by IMS 2018 who note that “People therefore end up using the media that they have access to”. (International Media Support, 2018: Myanmar audience study 2018. Myanmar’s media from an audience perspective. https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Myanmar-Audience-Study_web.pdf)

6 ADB, 2015. Power Sector Development in Myanmar
that even if communities have access to electricity, they may not have signal coverage, in particular
data coverage. This further adds to the gap in information accessibility between urban and rural
communities (FGD, ethnic minority participants, Ponnagyun).

It should be noted that not all rural community members are without phones, and thus lack access
to online content. The speed with which mobile phones are becoming available to people, also in
rural locations, is remarkable. Since 2013, the share of people in Myanmar who have mobile
phones has increased from less than 10% to upwards of 90% (The World Bank 2019). Of course,
not all who have phones have access to the internet. According to Freedom House, internet
penetration is 25% (Freedom House 2018). Others estimate it slightly higher (e.g. the 2018 Global
Digital suite of reports from We Are Social which estimates it at 34%). For many rural users, the
internet is something they can use when they travel to bigger towns and enter data covered areas
(e.g. “We use Facebook when we arrive in Ramree town.” - KII, CSO leader 3, Ramree). While
internet penetration is increasing rapidly, it nevertheless remains the case that the ease through
which online content is accessed is eschewed in favor of urban communities.

Another cascading effect of urban/rural location manifests through the type of work informants
have, and what that means for how they access (or don’t access) information. Rural life is often
marked by work which takes place in confined spaces and is far removed from information sources.
In the rural context, informants highlight that people who get to travel as part of their
occupation (e.g. traders, business people, others) have more access to information. As they travel
to and from markets and pass through communities, they are able to gather information. Such
‘rovers’ also become sources from which people seek information. On the other hand, people who
work long days in the fields in the mountains, interviewees pointed out, receive information
slower. “Those who work from dawn to dusk don’t know much about what’s going on. We know
it because we spend time browsing on Facebook” (KII, CSO leader 2, Ponnagyun).

A third factor which determines people’s access to information, and which is linked to whether
people live in urban or rural areas, is their proximity to relevant authorities or agencies from which
they can seek information. As described above, many respondents said they go to authorities to
seek information directly, but the feasibility of visiting authorities is contingent on how far one
has to travel. Where urban informants, in many cases, report that they are able to go to the relevant
and specific authority with questions in relation to service provision, rural communities are less
immediately able to speak to authorities, simply because they live further away from them. In the
more rural villages, communities’ access to information is often limited to the local WVTA, or in
lieu of such, even 100 or 10 household heads (FGD with youth participants, urban Ramree). The
WVTAs are in many cases the most significant source of information about government and public
services for rural communities. In other words, the rural communities’ access to information is
often limited to fewer channels through which they can source information.

---

This dependence on a narrower channel for information in turn leaves communities more vulnerable to, or relatively more affected by, the extent to which these channels of communication perform well, with regards to getting and sharing information. The research found that communities’ level of satisfaction with their WVTA varies considerably, which is also consistent with research done by The Asia Foundation (TAF 2018). While some find that their WVTA is attentive and engaged and serves well as a promoter of their interests towards the higher authority levels (township, regional, state, national), others described their WVTAs as more passive and disengaged. Some informants also described how WVTA can occasionally be entangled in difficult village dynamics. Elections to the position of WVTA are somewhat opaque (see TAF 2018 for more about the ways in which WVTA are elected10) and have in some communities contributed to tension (e.g. losing or out-going competitors creating difficulties for in-coming electees).

2.2.2 Differences Across Age

While it is not clear that any age group is better informed, the research found notable differences in the ways in which people of different ages access information.

The data suggests that young people, to a larger degree, use online sources to collect information, including about public services. Informants reported using different Facebook groups for accessing information and receiving it from friends. Some reported ‘tagging’ friends in posts about trainings, for instance, and some reported sharing informative content like health tips (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe). Young focus group participants from Sittwe – when asked who they thought had a harder time receiving information – identified “people who don’t use social media” and elaborated, “for instance, our parents who are not quite familiar with the modern technology” (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe). According to some, this meant older people were generally less able to obtain information about services; “Some people receive service delivery information less than other people, such as older people and uneducated people” (KII, CSO leader, Taungup).

In addition, some interviews suggested that young people are distinguished, insofar as they also use another source for information that they are privileged to have around them, namely their teachers. In discussions, youth participants in a number of cases said that one of their primary points of contact for information are their school teachers, who function as a close authority (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe).

On the other hand, some respondents (mostly youth respondents) thought that adults generally had more information about public services, simply because with age they are seen as more experienced and informed. Specifically, public services are seen as more of an ‘adult thing,’ which grown-ups are naturally more informed about through their networks. At the other end of the spectrum, older people are nonetheless often seen as struggling to get information, because they are less capable of accessing online content, and because they are less mobile. Note that this use of older people should not be confused with elders, who are often seen as particularly knowledgeable. Older people often rely on younger community members to relay information to them from social media and other online sources.

2.2.3 Differences Across Gender

Similar to age groups, there were different opinions on whether women or men are more or less informed, or have more or less access to different forms of information. Some (female) respondents in Sittwe thought, “men get more information than women because they work outside and communicate” (FGD, mixed, urban Sittwe). Another observation made about women’s access to information was that “women are particularly at a disadvantage, because they don’t know how to use the internet” (KII, CSO leader 2, Ponnagyun).

On the other hand, women are very likely to be engaged in community level committees, particularly those with religious objectives (parahita, pagoda, gawbaga). In this capacity, they often act as communications catalysts within communities, spreading information that they have access to through their relations with men (husbands, community leaders, etc.) and religious figures (monks, church pastors, etc.).

2.2.4 Minority / Majority Dynamics

Finally, some informants suggested that minority ethnic communities are disadvantaged to ethnic Rakhine people, with regards to access to information. This comparatively narrower access to information was in part due to language barriers, insofar as news and information is only available to a limited extent in minority ethnic languages. At the same time, minority informants (e.g. Chin informants in Ramree) also described it as an issue of authorities being less concerned with minorities; “They take out their salaries and shirk their responsibilities. I think they have a tendency to discriminate against us because we’re Chin villages.”

Few of the officials interviewed for this research were willing to admit that there were ethnicity-based differences to which they service and inform communities. While officials are generally open to acknowledging that they are unable to reach rural communities. For instance, an official from the DRD in Ramree said quite openly that they “approximately reach 20% of the total villages only. There are 80% of the villages which we haven’t reached” (KII, Dept. of Rural Development, Ramree). In Taungup, an official from the One Stop Shop (an interdepartmental office front established to reduce the number of places citizens have to go to reach authorities) estimated that they reach “only around 10 to 15% of the public in Taungup” (KII, Deputy Township Authority, GAD One Stop Shop, Taungup). Barely any officials thought ethnic communities had particular difficulties getting information from them. The GAD Administrator in Taungup said, “Any groups regardless of languages and ethnicity, they have spokespersons, and those spokespersons can reach me at any time” (KII, Township Officer, General Administrative Department, Taungup).

“I do not think [there are certain groups of people that it is difficult to communicate information to], because any group which has access to a mobile phone, has easy to communicate information to any department in town.” (KII, Head of Township Development Management Committee, Ramree)

It is difficult to establish exactly whether low levels of attention from authorities towards ethnic communities is because of their position as ethnic minority, or whether other factors come into
place. Ethnic communities often happen to be located more rurally, and so it is possible that low levels of attention would, in some cases, be more a question of these villages’ remoteness. This was implied for Acho Chin areas in Taungup by the chairman of the municipal committee, who said that “their areas can’t be covered by service provision of municipal department” (KII, Chairman of Municipal Committee, Taungup), because it was too far remote. It would require further and specific research into this matter to report conclusive findings. It is nonetheless clear that among many minority ethnic community members, including Chin and Hindu informants interviewed, there exists a strong feeling that they are ‘kept in the dark’ by authorities, because they are ethnic minority. For example, focus group participants in a Chin village in Ramree said that they didn’t even have a WVTA (FGD with ethnic minority participants, Ramree), an important source of information for many communities.

2.3 Trust and Evaluation of Information

“In order to know whether particular news are right or wrong, I look at the comments under those news. There are some comments which denounce the post and some comments which support the post. By looking at those comments, I decide whether that Facebook post is right or wrong.” (FGD 1, mixed, rural Ponnagyun)

“When I get information from Facebook, we sometimes talk about it with our friends. We discuss the possibility of authenticity about those news.” (FGD 1, mixed, rural Ponnagyun)

Interviewer: “How do you evaluate the information you hear in order to know if it is right or wrong?”

“I normally follow up and ask the people who I think can confirm the information. Mostly, I use the phone to confirm the information.” (KII, CSO leader 3, Ramree)

Interviewer: “Do you think that it can generally be said that the information you get from Facebook is true?”

“No, generally, I can’t say that, but sometimes it is true.” (KII, CSO leader 3, Ramree)

Trust is generally higher (though not complete) in established news agencies and channels, as well as directly from administrative departments, than it is for user-driven platforms like Facebook. IMS (2018) found that “Many [...] highlight state-owned media as being the most trustworthy and reliable [...] because they have direct access to news and information sources” (IMS, 2018). When asked directly, a large number of informants interviewed in this research indicated a general skepticism of the veracity of information content found on Facebook. A few said they had stopped

using Facebook because of having encountered too much unreliable information, but more often people described engaging with Facebook-sourced content cautiously in the recognition that it may not always be truthful – “It depends. Some news are true but some are fakes.” (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe 1.1.1.2)

One respondent from Taungup talked about difficulties getting a hold of information regarding the escalating conflict between the national army and the Arakan Army:

“No, in the last ten days there have been a lot of fake news on social media. We trust the news posted by people who we have a personal relationship with or from our communities. I, generally, can also say that the news by the credible news agency pages are true. However, there are times when we can’t trust the news. For example, both AA and Tatmadaw are claiming they are defeating the enemies, and it is becoming difficult for us to believe.” (FGD 1, mixed youth participants, Taungup)

Online, respondents said that they evaluate the veracity of content based on the source from which they encounter it. On Facebook – as well as offline – established news agencies are given more credibility than private persons. And if multiple agencies report on a matter, it is seen as more reliable. “It is analyzed depending on whether the news is reported widely or not” (FGD with youth participants, rural Taungup). As a second tier, information which comes from people who are known to users privately, or in the real world, is seen as more credible than information coming from accounts/users that are not previously known to users. Many respondents said that they are members of various Facebook groups, and in these groups, knowing who is the/an administrator of the group factors into an evaluation of the veracity of its information. In some cases, this is not known (FGD 1, mixed, rural Ponnagyun; FGD, mixed, urban Sittwe). Among unknown users, as a third discriminator, accounts which lack detail and data (e.g. real names, profile pictures, ‘friends’) are seen as less reliable (FGD, mixed, urban Sittwe).

Further, interviewees said they evaluate the veracity of content by gauging how others receive it. In concrete terms, users may look at how many people ‘like’ a post, and they may look at how many choose to share it onwards to their own networks. More substantially, users may look at the comments which different posts accrue and make judgments informed by the statements that are presented both for and against the post. In this case, the body of comments on each post may serve as a source-pool for arguments for and against statements made, and for/against the truthfulness of reported incidents or events. While in some ways this could be constituted as the ideal critical and democratic conversation, the issue is that the much discussed echo chamber effect – users being exposed mainly to other users they already agree with – means the source-pools of arguments available for users risks being biased in favor of certain interpretations. Given that most of the information processing techniques described by interviewees are collective, this may be a particular risk. It is nonetheless important to note that the methods and techniques described still indicate an awareness of reliability issues concerning Facebook content. There is, in other words, an immediate awareness of the need to further develop critical engagement with information.
2.4 Negative Rumors about Services

This section presents findings about rumors circulating in relation to service delivery, more specifically negative rumors. This report, as previously discussed, takes a “non-normative approach to rumors” and recognizes that rumors can serve a positive as well as a negative function, and it does “not assume that rumors are necessarily negative or false, or inherently likely to contribute to conflict or violence” (Search, 2015). As a point of departure, it simply takes rumors to be unverified information.

This section, though, specifically looks at negative rumors. As previously discussed, rumors can be positive and negative. Particularly with regards to service delivery, they can be enabling and disabling. In this section, we discuss rumors that circulate in communities around service delivery, which can function as barriers to building trusting relationships between authorities and communities. First, a methodological note:

Because the word rumor often carries negative connotations, or at least is something less preferred than verified/‘true’ information, it comes with certain methodological challenges to research rumors. 1) Because there is a risk of interview bias, interviewees may recount their interaction with rumors in ways that make them appear more cognizant of being critical towards rumors than they actually are. 2) Because what respondents see as a rumor is tied to their (subjective) standpoint, one person’s truth may be another person’s rumor. Similar to Search’s previous research on rumors, particular attention was therefore given to sequencing interviews right. The research team first asked how people share and check information, before introducing questions about rumors. In this way, we were able to get at flows of questionable information from different angles to attempt to develop a picture of what circulates.

2.4.1 Negative Service Delivery Rumors – On the Community Side

With these reservations in mind, our research found that a relatively large number of informants did not find that negative rumors about services were prevalent in their community, or in the case of authority officials (as we will see below) in relation to their professional domain. This correlates with the more general finding (see also the other report on public services produced under this research project) that people in this research generally tended to report that they struggle to receive information about public services. As mentioned previously, this is not least the case for rural communities, who are located further away from authorities and have less web connectivity. It should be noted that there were substantial differences within communities in relation to how much they thought (wrongful) negative information about services circulated in their community. Some thought negative rumors were all around and that “there are a lot of people who said bad things about services” (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe). A focus group participant in a Chin village in Ramree commented:

---

12 Search, 2015: Community Information Flows To Reduce Inter-Communal Violence In Burma
“People talk about all kinds of things such as education, health, difficulties in transportation [...] There are rumors emerging all the time, about everything [...] Some people say rubbish. They hear one thing and say something else. In every village, for every 10 good people, you have 5 bad people” (FGD with ethnic minority participants, Ramree)

While others reported such rumors were largely absent in their areas. It is hardly surprising that the extent to which negative rumors circulate in a particular place is also contextually dependent. A factor to keep in mind is that the data for this research was collected in early 2019, when fighting between the national army (Tatmadaw) and ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) was intensifying. Not least in Ponnagyun, which saw a large influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a consequence of these developments, did rumors most often tend to converge around this conflict.

“Lately, we haven’t heard any rumors that have caused widespread concerns among people other than news about Kalar\(^{13}\)-related matters and fighting. We don’t hear much news about other things” (KII, CSO leader 2, Ponnagyun)

Notably, there were marked differences between government officials as well, with regards to the extent to which they identified negative rumors about their services and also how they engage with them. As one official conceded, this may also be a question of how attentive and/or capable officials are to ‘picking up’ negative rumors.

A number of negative rumors about public services were nonetheless recorded during this research.

### 2.4.1.1 Negative Rumors About Who Gets What

**Interviewer:** “What would you say is the general situation in your area: Do people have misunderstandings about public services?“

“Yes, they do. For example, people who received electricity meter boxes are happy, and people who didn’t are unhappy. People who didn’t receive it think the people who got electricity meter boxes are relatives of the administrator. There wouldn’t be these misunderstandings if all people got the service. It happened because there is a lack of knowledge. They can’t accept that they will receive it in the future but don’t have it now.” (Interview with a female CSO leader, Ramree)

Most often, these negative rumors/stories centered around why some people get things which other people don’t. There are – as documented in the public services report produced under this project and by needs assessments produced by others, for example the Center for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH 2016) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2015) – a number of service areas within which substantial needs gaps exist. For many public agencies, it is often

\[^{13}\] Note that the term “Kalar” is a derogatory term used to smite Muslims in Rakhine. It is included here to illustrate that tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities tend to occupy conversations and be the rumors people talk about. The research team as well as Search for Common Ground has high regards for Muslims in Rakhine and elsewhere.
the case that they are simply not able to reach all areas within the financial constraints they have, meaning service coverage is uneven. Access to the national electric grid is one example. As mentioned above, only around 30% of households in Rakhine have access to stable electricity provided by the State. But while this example is particularly concrete, it is not the only example. As documented in the services report, authority officials in many cases openly state that their offices are unable to reach all communities within their area of operation. Whether due to lack of time, resources/supplies, or means of transportation, authorities are often simply not able to go to communities far away from bigger towns. As an official from the Department of Planning (DP) said:

“We are assigned to go on field trips 24 times per year, but we can make only 12 times with the support we have from DRD or GAD for transportation. We do not have an office car” (KII, Dept. of Planning, Ramree)

At the local level, this means that often the decisions revolve around the question of who gets what? One village might be linked up to the national electrical grid, while the next is not. Even within villages, decisions will sometimes need to be made about who gets what. Sticking to the electricity example, some houses – when resources are scarce – may be provided the necessary boxes to link to the electrical grid, while the neighboring houses are not (KII, CSO leader 4, Ramree). Another example from the interviews includes the DRD’s Mya Sein Yaung Community Development Program, where some communities are selected to receive loans for infrastructure and others are not.

Such situations – which manifest in very clear and visible differences in living standards – unsurprisingly have the potential to frustrate communities. This is the case regardless of whether they are based on formal rules and procedures or on something else. As communities generally have limited knowledge of how government decision-making is done, there is more room for speculation, which in turn may foment negative rumors. In one situation, participants in a focus group in Taungup said two villages – one which had been granted loans from the Mya Sein Yaung program, one which had not – had descended into “arguments and quarrels […] During that time, people started saying bad things about each other, and rumors spread […] These tensions have left the community with hate speech and rumors about each other […]” (KII, CSO leader 4, Ramree).

These situations nurture speculation about exactly what criteria is (or is not) used for making decisions around the distribution of goods. In fact, from the research conducted for this report, it appeared that such speculations constitute one of the main sources of negative rumors about public services.

One set of allegations heard by the research team revolved around nepotism. It is difficult to ascertain whether they are true (officials denied them), but on a number of occasions, focus group respondents speculated that services are distributed based on beneficiaries’ personal connections. Such stories are often centered around WVTAs. Participants in a focus group in Taungup claimed that money coming from the Mya Sein Yaung program tended to “favor the leaders and their relatives […] those who are close to the decision makers and authorities get better services, it’s true” (KII, CSO leader 4, Ramree).

---

14 For an overview of the decision-making processes at the townships and village tract/ward level, see The Asia Foundation, 2018: The Asia Foundation, 2018. State and Region Governments in Myanmar.
Such negative rumors - true or not - might also be part of the explanation for why village elections to the position of WVTA occasionally become contentious. Becoming the ward/village tract administrator is seen as a way to gain access to benefits. Parliamentarians were also in some cases accused of favoring the communities they are from, as opposed to their larger constituency (KII, CSO leader 1, Ramree). It is notable that negative rumors around people in positions of power prioritizing people they know is not reserved to authorities. For instance, a representative of a CSO providing legal counsel said that “there are people who create rumors that our organization is treating people unequally. They said that we are in favor of our close friends and people in power” (KII, CSO leader 3, Sittwe). Rakhine being a predominantly collectivist society, it is perhaps unsurprising that claims of nepotism are often leveraged.

In the case of humanitarian and development support, another negative rumor which continues to circulate is the idea that Muslim communities are favored over Rakhine communities. Since 2012, when the first larger-scale displacement of Muslims took place in Rakhine and resulted in the Sittwe IDP camps, it has been a grievance among the Rakhine that Muslims in the camps are given more attention than poor Rakhine communities (CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA) 2017). Humanitarian actors have defended their priorities, citing humanitarian needs principles, and over the past few years there has been a strong focus on reducing the perception that international organizations favor Muslims. Yet the notion that Muslim communities are favored persists. This favoritism – respondents claim – involves the provision of food and goods but is also seen as manifesting in a general pro-Muslim attitude. As one CSO leader in Sittwe said, “there are some international NGOs who provide some services to the Muslim communities, but only in fewer cases to Rakhines as well.” In Ponnagyun too, focus group participants from a village near a Muslim village noted that “some people receive more services than others” (KII, Department of Rural Development, Ponnagyun).

However, the negative rumor that Muslims are favored also extends to Rakhine authorities. There is a perception among some Rakhine people that authorities wrongfully grant National Register of Citizens (NRC) cards to Muslim groups who are not entitled to them (e.g. non-Kaman Muslims who claim to be Kaman Muslims to achieve ID cards) (FGD, ethnic minority participants, Ponnagyun). This rumor is notable, because it demonstrates that communities in some cases are worried that national authorities are too lenient with regards to Muslims. In Ramree, one CSO leader complained that “Those who govern shouldn’t discriminate and they should do development work where it is really needed. Now, they’re prioritizing Kyauk Ni Maw over all other areas” (KII, CSO leader 1, Ramree). Kyauk Ni Maw is the one area in Ramree where there is a Muslim population.

A third negative rumor which the research team encountered, is the idea that authorities distribute services randomly or without much thought. This claim was not brought up by community respondents, but according to officials interviewed, they often encounter among communities a perception that authorities simply choose any (i.e. convenient) location for provision of services, as opposed to following a strategic plan or objective criteria. These officials highlighted it as a nuisance that their work is seen as arbitrary when in fact – they explained – it follows procedures which community members just don’t know about. For instance, allocation of electricity may be decided by the Township Development Affairs Committee (TDAC). In a number of cases, officials
interviewed for this study generally said that they feel that communities are quick to judge them and to suggest they are not doing their work well enough. “People quite easily blame the government. For example, if there is an electricity cut, they easily blame us. They don’t understand that it is out of our control. What can we do when the electricity cut happens to the whole state?” (KII, Dept. of Health, Ponnagyun, The Planning Department, Ponnagyun). Negative rumors may also revolve around the quality of work undertaken by authorities or their suppliers. Indeed, as one official from the DRD in Ponnagyun said (with some annoyance), a rumor had circulated that some solar panels which were made with German technology but were assembled in China, were in fact made in China (KII, Department of Rural Development, Ponnagyun).

At a higher level – the state of Rakhine versus the Union of Myanmar – a (well-known) grievance, which was aired to researchers around public services, was about its financing. More specifically, it pertains to the extent to which the Rakhine state will be able to get its share of the revenue from the natural resources extracted in Rakhine (FGD 1, mixed youth participants, Taungup). This issue has long been a sore spot in the relationship between Rakhine and the Union, as demonstrated by a disgruntled focus group participant from Taungup:

_Interviewer: “Have you ever experienced fake news on service delivery?”_

_“Yes, we have heard rumors and fake news around service delivery. Rakhine has a lot of natural gas, and they have been extracted by the Union Government, but with little benefit to local people. One time we heard that the government will allocate 30% of the extracted natural gas to provide 24-hour electricity to Rakhine people. However, it turned out to not be true.”_ (FGD 1, mixed youth participants, Taungup)

**2.4.1.2 Other Rumors About Services**

_“There were rumors that a tiger was loose around Ponnagyun, and people were in fear. After discovering these were just rumors, we told people that it was just a rumor and that there was no need to be frightened.”_ (KII, CSO leader 3, Sittwe)

Other negative rumors in circulation that were recorded by the research team included instances of a more unusual nature. In one case, it appeared that rumors were intentionally circulated as part of a fraudulent scheme, which sought to take advantage of people’s knowledge of the DRD’s community development program, Mya Sein Yaung. Focus group discussants in Ponnagyun said that messages had circulated which instructed people to deposit money through Wave Money (a money transfer platform). “There were some messages saying that Mya Sein Yaung program will lend money, and anyone who wants to receive a loan from the program, need to first deposit to the Wave Money account” (KII, Department of Rural Development, Ponnagyun). Of course this defies the purpose of a loan. Less suspiciously, and likely due to misunderstanding, a focus group participant in Ponnagyun said that there was confusion as to whether people with disabilities were to pay for public transportation. There was a rumor that people with disabilities ride for free on buses, which is untrue. Buses that run in Rakhine are privately owned and do not offer such arrangements.
Other rumors which were said to circulate, and could be classified as belonging in the category of public information and awareness, took on a more peculiar character. In Sittwe, focus group participants said rumors would occasionally circulate about fires having started, which turned out later to be untrue (FGD with youth, urban Sittwe). A focus group participant in Ponnagyun said that at one point a rumor circulated that a tiger was loose in Ponnagyun, causing great concern to the local population (see the quote above). It was not clear why or how this rumor started, whether out of a misunderstanding or perhaps as a prank. Rumors outside the realm of services and public awareness include, for instance, the deaths of movie actors (FGD 1, mixed, rural Ponnagyun). These examples demonstrate the power of rumors to mobilize and scare communities, and by extension, how they can be disruptive, including to service delivery.

2.4.2 Authorities’ Approach to Service Delivery Rumors

In the service provision report produced as part of this research, it was documented that there are substantial differences in the ways in which authorities engage citizens, in relation to the production of services. Where some authorities view eliciting feedback and information from communities as a prerequisite for doing their job, others view it as less important. For instance, they may believe that they, with their technical expertise, are better placed to make decisions around the provision of services, or they may simply not have the time and resources to see communities. It is suggested in the report that these differences, beyond reflecting differences between different (types of) offices in different geographic locations, are also related to more fundamental aspects of how the relationship between the state and citizen builds. Historically, the state has been the guarantor of security, more than a provider of services for which it can be held accountable. The research demonstrates that while this may be the case, there are also signs of emerging norms among public authorities which prescribe a stronger emphasis on involving and responding more to citizens’ input. This may include attempts to more systematically collect feedback from citizens, utilizing better knowledge of their experience with services. It may also involve a more open posture towards communities, with a greater emphasis on communicating initiatives and processes better.

In parallel, the research displays notable differences in the extent to which the interviewed officials engaged with negative rumors. E.g., the extent to which they detect them, where they come from, and how to deal with them, differs. As for community members, a first point to note is that more than half of all officials interviewed for this research said that they had never experienced rumors or misunderstandings in relation to (services delivered by) their entity. When asked if they knew of “examples where information about the public services you provide was going round, which was not true,” or whether they had “heard about misunderstandings” about their services, officials in most cases said no, or spoke of largely inconsequential misunderstandings. Like an official from the DRD in Sittwe:

“There are no major misunderstanding about the services we are providing. There are some minor ones like people misunderstanding the name of the project- ‘Mya Sein Yaung’ project and ‘Village Development Planning’. For ‘Mya Sein Yaung’ we provide thirty million kyats loans to each village. For Village Development Planning project, we provide ten million kyats.” (KII, Department of Rural Development, Sittwe)
Of course this cannot necessarily be taken to mean that no rumors circulate in the service domains most officials work in, rather there is indeed some evidence to suggest that rumors, including negative rumors and misunderstandings, do circulate. When one of the officials from a health department, who was interviewed, suggested that no rumors circulate around health services or that “it is not that important” (KII, Department of Health, Ramree), it contrasts with what is known from this and previous research, namely that certain negative stories do circulate. E.g., that nurses steal and sell equipment, that ‘unruly’ patients can get killed, that doctors circulate patients who are dying to keep their death counts down, etc. This perhaps suggests that whether officials perceive that negative rumors exist within their service domain is also a function of whether they are willing and able to detect them. Willing reflects the extent to which they see it as relevant and important to know what citizens are saying, and able takes into account whether they not only have the time and resources to interact with community members, but also whether they are able to get themselves into the spaces where rumors and criticisms are shared. While many officials appeared confident that negative rumors do not circulate about their services (“No, we don’t have any examples of that.”- KII, Dept. of Health, Ponnagyun), others appeared to be more conscious of how their own position affected their ability to detect rumors.

As such, another health official interviewed did indeed recognize that it was “difficult for [them] to know,” because people “are afraid of us,” and that it took a certain amount of interaction between communities and officials (including “taking photos together!”), before community members became confident to speak to them (KII, Department of Rural Development, Ponnagyun). These findings confirm that the feedback mechanisms between the public and government agencies are weak. In the 1960s, the political scientist Robert Dahl introduced the systems model of the state, which suggests that a stable political system requires input mechanisms to the state from the public within which it exists. These inputs are then translated into outputs upon which the public again reacts, and so on and so forth. In Dahlian terms, the findings that demonstrate that officials are not aware of the requirements, demands, frustrations, and rumors that exist around their work, suggests that the input-side of this political system is weak.

2.4.2.1 Rumors About Citizens

“It sometimes happens to some departments like the Department of Planning and the Department of Rural Development. For instance, the department and a community first agree to construct a road, and the community agrees that they would contribute their piece of land for the road construction for some compensation. Later on, when the project has been approved by the State or Union Government, then they come up to claim more compensation!” (Official from the Department of Municipality, Ramree)

Whereas the discussion above centers around negative rumors circulating among the public around services and officials, it is also worth looking at the other side of the story. On authorities’ side, it appears that there are also negative rumors or stories about citizens. As documented in the services report produced under this project, it happened no less than 14 times during this research that officials interviewed independently of one another cited stories with the same motif. Namely that communities, in relation to the construction of roads, had first agreed to a certain price for land expropriation, only to later go to authorities to demand higher compensation. The story portrayed...
citizens as ‘grabby,’ and in some cases appeared to justify a view of citizens as less deserving of support. This story was reported by so many different officials, including by officials who have no role in road construction, that it suggested to the research team that it might exist more as a rumor than a fact-checked story. This of course indicates that rumor-circulation, including negative rumor-circulation, is not something which happens only among citizens about authorities or other citizens. Also among officials there exists certain stories which guide how they think of citizens. For more on how officials see community members as ‘grabby,’ please refer to the services report produced under this research project. This report details how officials interviewed in this research frequently expressed frustration with communities for demanding too much from them and being impatient. It discusses how these perceptions of communities appear to further entrench the relationship between communities and authorities.

2.4.2.2 Where Rumors Come from and What to Do about Them

Among those officials who did acknowledge challenges related to negative rumors, misunderstandings, and negative stories around the services they deliver, there were differing perceptions of why such stories appear. As documented in the services report and as indicated above, the research team learned that there exists among some officials a perception that some citizens spread negative rumors and false information out of personal interest or greed. The issues related to expropriation mentioned above are an example where communities are seen as propagating false information to be able to claim more money. Other officials believed certain people would spread negative rumors with the direct purpose of creating conflict. It was generally unclear with which purpose this was thought to be done. The research team nonetheless encountered the suggestion a number of times - “some people spread fake news to create conflicts” or “intentionally spread wrong information” (KII, Chairman of Municipal Committee, Taungup). The large majority of officials who saw examples of misunderstandings and false information going round about services, nonetheless, thought it was caused by lack of knowledge among citizens. “Whatever problem comes to happens, it first depends on lack of understanding” (KII, Chairman of Municipal Committee, Taungup). This is good news, because it suggests that to some degree most officials recognize the role that an informed public plays in preventing misunderstandings, rumors, and negative stories.

Officials’ understanding of where negative rumors come from in turn informed the way in which they thought these rumors should be handled. When officials thought they came from a desire to create conflict, there appeared to be a tendency to ignore them or let their work ‘prove itself. One official in Taungup explained that when people “spread wrong information in the community […] we don’t respond emotionally […] we ignore them because people will see the truth when projects start” (KII, Chairman of Municipal Committee, Taungup). When disagreements and negative rumors were seen as resulting from competing interests or ‘greed’ on the communities’ side, officials similarly tended to either ignore them or enter into negotiations “to find durable solutions” (KII, Member of Parliament 2, Sittwe). In some cases, officials also said that they would refer to legal texts to change the minds of those who were spreading rumors. In a majority of cases where negative rumors were seen as coming from a lack of understanding, the emphasis was on “explaining” and “making them understand the situation” (KII, Medical Officer, Dept. of Health, Taungup). Or as an official from the Department of Municipality in Ramree said, when asked whether he’d heard of instances of rumors about his department, “No, not really. Because if we
explain and make them understand, they come to understand. That’s the way we deal with them” (KII, Medical Officer, Dept. of Health, Taungup). The Township Officer from the General Administrative Department in Taungup – when asked whether misunderstandings about his department represented a problem – said that he “didn’t think so […] It is just a matter of taking the time to get them understood” (KII, Township Officer, General Administrative Department, Taungup). As previously suggested, the emphasis on the need to explain things to the public “so they understand” is a positive finding, insofar as it indicates an awareness among authorities of the need to engage the public, and to some extent influence the rumors that exist around their services. From the interviews conducted during this research, the research team also learned that it varies substantially between authorities to which extent ‘making the public understand’ involves an element of dialogue, or whether it takes the form of more one-directional communication. As documented in the services report, a frequently encountered attitude among authorities indeed remains one of ‘giving information’ to the public. Nevertheless, this was not the full picture, and the research team encountered a number of officials who expressed sincere commitment to fostering stronger dialogue with citizens. Please refer to the services report for further discussion of this. The following quote from the Assistant Director of the MD in Sittwe also demonstrates a commitment to entering into dialogue with citizens to quell negative rumors, including the importance to do it at local level with citizens:

“There may be misunderstanding among people about our services. It depends on which social backgrounds they come from. We need to think if the receiver of the particular information is a tricycle driver or a grocery seller or an educated person. Educated people tend to examine whether particular news are true or not. If we tell tricycle drivers that we do not have enough resources to provide cleaning services properly, he may not accept that. Another example, local people piled branches of tree in a waste collection point near San Pya Village last year. I think a mentally-ill person set fire to the rubbish pile. Local people criticized that the Municipal Department set fire to the rubbish. They just don’t know what we are doing exactly.” (KII, Assistant Director of Municipal Dep., Sittwe)

Efforts to reach out to citizens to explain policies and stem rumors then takes place through a number of channels, and with varying intensity across the different (types of) authorities interviewed for the research. For a more detailed discussion of the different ways in which authorities reach out to interact with communities, please refer to the service provision report produced under this research. It shows that the most frequent tools for proactive engagement with the public are field visits and sign-posting. In addition, officials rely on the public visiting their offices to seek information, or calling them directly on the phone. It is a central point in the report that only a few citizens actually use these avenues for getting in touch with officials. This again highlights that the input and feedback mechanisms between public authorities and the public are weak. This point emphasizes the need for initiatives that aim to strengthen the connections between authorities and the public.
3. Conclusions

This report has examined information flows in four townships in Central Rakhine – Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Taungup, and Ramree. It builds on Search for Common Ground’s earlier work on Community Information Management in Myanmar, and it complements the report on service provision in Rakhine State, which was also produced under this research assignment. More specifically, it examined the ways in which people access information, differences in information seeking patterns among different population groups, trust and evaluation of information, and communities’ and authorities’ engagement with negative rumors and misunderstandings. It is based on focus group discussions with a variety of communities from urban and rural locations, and with a special emphasis on female, youth, and minority citizens. Furthermore, it draws on key informants’ interviews conducted with representatives of local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), as well as with a number of authority officials. In total, 15 focus group discussions and 42 key informant interviews were conducted.

With regards to sources of information, the research found that people first and foremost consult friends and family when seeking information about services such as health care and education. Beyond immediate family and friends, information is sought from influential community members, which may be CSO/Community Based Organization (CBO) leaders, elders, monks, or elected people to committees. In addition, or in parallel, since a lot of information sharing from influential community members happens on Facebook and through WeChat, information is sought through social media, either from individuals’ own Facebook pages or through edited news agencies. Some interviewees also described being in Facebook groups where information is shared. Few interviewees described using traditional media including TV, radio, and newspapers. Other sources of information included ‘town criers’ who walk (or drive) the streets, using loudspeakers or megaphones to convey messages. Finally, interviewees said they - in some cases - collect information form the relevant authorities, either by going to the relevant institutions (e.g. hospitals, schools, etc.), or when officials come on field visits to speak to communities.

On differences in access to information, the report found that the most important differentiator when it comes to people’s access to information is whether they live in urban or rural locations, and therefore to some extent by socio-economic status, insofar as living (very) rurally is often a proxy for wealth. Urban/rural is first and foremost a differentiator, because rural communities are less often connected to the national electric grid, which means their power supplies are less stable and sparser, affecting the use of electronic devices such as TVs, radios, and phones. In the same way, rural communities’ access to online content is more often restricted by not being able to access data networks. Thirdly, rural communities’ access to information is often restrained in the sense that they have less direct access to authorities, other than their local village tract administrator (if they have one). They are less able to go on visits to other authorities, meaning the performance and attitude of the ward/village tract administrator (WVTA) becomes crucial for their access to information. Finally, rural informants more often work the fields or mountains, meaning they are less often brought to spaces (markets, tea shops, shops) where information is exchanged.

The research also found substantial differences across age groups. Two imperatives in particular were recorded. Where, on the one hand, older people are traditionally known to be more informed about issues related to authorities, services, and other ‘adult’ things, young people more often
understand using social media and web access to search for information. Young people are then often used by older people as a stepping stone for gaining access to information. They may ask their children or grandchildren to report to them what they hear on social media. This reduces their ability to critically assess information.

Finally, a notable difference pertained to ethnicity, where ethnic minority interviewees suggested that they were not only occasionally, comparatively limited in their access to information due to language barriers, but also - in a more general sense - that they are less prioritized as a population group by authorities.

With regards to trust in and evaluation of information, the research found that established news agencies and channels remain the more trusted news source. While many cite Facebook as a source of information, a number of interviewees expressed skepticism about the truthfulness of content found on the platform. Some had stopped using Facebook altogether out of concerns over the veracity of information found there. As such, there appeared to be an awareness of the need to be critical when engaging with information.

Interviewees listed a number of techniques to evaluate information, often of the collective nature. Offline, people reflect on content together with friends, family, and trusted community members who are known to have experience in the relevant field. Online, interviewees evaluate content based on the sources it comes from, including how many sources report pieces of information. Sources’ user profiles are evaluated - for instance how many friends a profile has, whether it is complete with background information, uses real names, etc. In addition, users evaluate the veracity of content by gauging its reception by others - e.g. how many likes and reactions it accrues, but also from the arguments for and against a post made in its comments.

Finally, with regard to the prevalence of, and engagement with, negative rumors the research found that the general picture - that information writ large is difficult to come by when it comes to public services - also reflects in the amount of rumors about it. People nonetheless differed in their assessment, whereas some community members believe negative rumors are very rare or non-existent, others believe they are all over. The research found that negative rumors often spread in relation to questions around who gets what? Authorities are often unable to provide services to the full areas they cover, meaning they must make choices about who gets what. This in turn stimulates negative rumors about distribution of services being done on nepotistic grounds (especially WVTA are seen as being favored). Muslims are also seen to be favored, especially by international actors. Other negative rumors spoke of abuse of power, for instance in hospitals. Generally, the research found that communities are scared of authorities. On the other hand, authorities also appear to circulate negative rumors about communities (e.g. that they are ‘grabby’, attempting to extort money from authorities). More peculiar rumors also existed about events that hadn’t taken place or were 'creative' - e.g. that a tiger was loose in Ponnagyun! Authorities differed in their understanding of why negative rumors emerge. Where some believe it comes from malice on the part of rumor makers, others found it to be a matter of lacking understanding. These understandings in turn guide how authorities think negative rumors should be dealt with. Whereas some prefer to ignore them (or don’t detect them at all), others placed greater emphasis on seeking out communities and countering negative rumors with ‘real’ explanations.
4. Recommendations

The purpose of this report – together with the other report produced as part of this research – is to support Search for Common Ground (Search) and Scholar Institute (SI) in implementing the project Social Cohesion for Better Service Delivery (SCBSD). This report has focused in particular on community information flows and management. Based on the report, the research team wishes to make the following recommendations to the design and content of SCBSD, as well as to its general approach, including its posture towards authorities and communities.

Communicate through multiple channels, including village tract/ward administrators. No means of communication reaches everyone. To the extent SCBSD will seek to communicate with or to the broader community – e.g. to strengthen awareness or recruit program participants, use multiple channels. Use Facebook and other social media (Viber, WeChat). But also use radio and, if possible, work to spread information through township level General Administrative Department (GAD) officers, who on a bi-weekly basis call a meeting with the ward/village tract administrator (WVTA) to provide them with information.

Don’t forget the personal networks. In external engagements, retain a focus on how a main source of information for many people is orally shared information from family and friends. Encourage people to share messages.

Selection of influential citizens (‘influencers’): Pay attention to representation. Whenever working with influencers to spread messages, ensure representation across different population groups, ensuring the selection of program advocates is diverse.

Support officials’ external communication. Most authorities wish to communicate externally, but a combination of time, resource, and skills issues prevent them from doing it. Provide support to authorities to strengthen their external communication across different platforms. Emphasize inclusive communication and sensitize officials to how different communities (and different people within them) need to be communicated to/with according to who they are (gender, age, ethnicity, location) and which means of communication they have at their availability.

Support officials’ external communication: Awareness of barriers. To further promote inclusive communication, further sensitize officials to the different barriers to engaging communities, which are described in this report and the other report produced as part of this research. For instance, focus on barriers relating to time/resources, staff attitudes, and fear/apprehension. Highlight barriers related to gender, age, and ethnicity.

Support officials’ external communication: Communication training – messaging. To support information uptake and the strengthening of relations between communities and authorities, provide training to authorities on how to target messaging to different communities, and how to present content in ways which engage recipients (sender-message-receiver and other models).

Support officials’ external communication: Communication training – personal communication. Also consider supporting in-person communication skills (relevant for field
visits as well as office visits). Specifically, focus on self-awareness, non-threatening communication, rapport building, and active listening.

**Support officials’ external communication: Social media.** Barely any authorities reported using social media, including Facebook in their work. Consider offering social media training to authorities to strengthen their outreach to communities.

**Support citizens’ critical engagement with information: Develop rule(s) of thumb.** While this report details different ways in which people attempt to validate information, there is a need to further strengthen communities’ critical engagement with information. Search and SI could develop a simple and catchy ‘tool’ to help users evaluate the veracity of information, not least online content. The tool could be three-to-five rules of thumb, remembered by their first later, together forming a memorable word. For instance (but only for illustrative purposes, as the actual tools must be in Rakhine or Burmese): **S-T-O-P** = **S**top to think about who benefits from this; **T**alk to someone who knows about it; **O**bserve others’ reaction; **P**oint out where the information is weak.

**Support authorities’ critical engagement with information.** Just as there are negative rumors about service delivery – and more broadly – which circulate within communities, this research has found that there are negative rumors which circulate among officials about the communities they serve. This may include specific events (communities attempting to extract money from the state during expropriation), and it may be more general ideas which exist around citizens – that they are self-serving, un-qualified, looking to foment trouble. In addition to dealing with negative rumors on the community side, SCBSD, content should focus on how negative rumors among officials about communities can be mitigated.

**General approach: Be transparent.** As this research has confirmed, negative rumors have the best conditions when information levels are low. This extends to organizations like Search and SI and projects like SCBSD. In other words, negative rumors grow in the dark. It therefore makes sense to ‘shine a light’ on the dark – that is, to be as forthcoming and transparent as it takes to avoid creating the conditions for negative rumors to grow15. In practical terms, this means SCBSD should systematically share information about its work (so much that potential singular misappropriated facts are ‘watered down’). SCBSD should use Facebook and other social media and should produce and distribute written content at meetings, presentations, events. The GAD One Stop Shops may also be willing to host informational flyers. Content should – at a minimum – be available in Rakhine and Burmese, but also ideally in other ethnic languages (i.e. Mro, Daignet, etc.). Hindu community networks may also recommend additional translations.

15 “NGOs” and other organizations doing work in Rakhine have on occasion suffered from poor reputation and have been accused of secrecy and hidden agendas. These organizations have in turn been reluctant to release information about their work out of (more or less well-founded) fears that it would be misappropriated and used against them (see CDA, 2017). Thus becoming ‘secretive’, they have on occasion fueled suspicions against them. The team recommend that SCBSD ‘goes in the other direction’.
standards and therefore – as described earlier – have the potential to frustrate communities. To stem such frustration, SCBSD must be open and precise about which criteria are used for making decisions and why winning proposals won. SCBSD must also be perceptive to grievances people express about how decisions are made and course-correct where necessary.
5. Literature

- Guess, Nagler and Tucker, 2019: “Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook”. https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/1/eaau4586
- USIP, forthcoming: Rakhine Religious Landscape Mapping (authored by Senior Adviser Melyn McKay)
- Save the Children, forthcoming. ‘Peace and Tolerance through Social Media Initiative: Empowering Myanmar Youth as Changemakers in the Digital Age’ (produced with support from Senior Advisor Melyn McKay)
- PreventionWeb, 2019. Myanmar: Rakhine’s preparedness for disaster 26 cyclone shelters in the pipeline for Rakhine State
- WHO, 2019. List of Health Facilities and Hospitals in Rakhine State
- UNICEF, 2018. UNICEF Results in Rakhine State
- UNICEF, 2018. Community members take the lead to improve sanitation in Rakhine
- The Asia Foundation, 2018. State and Region Governments in Myanmar
- Aron, Gabrielle, 2018. USIP: Reframing the Crisis in Myanmar’s Rakhine State
- ICG, 2018: The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar’s Rohingya Refugee Crisis
- RERA, 2018: NGO Aid Map
- Fortify Rights, 2018. They gave us long swords
- The Asia Foundation, 2017. The Contested Areas of Myanmar
- Rakhine Commission, 2017. Towards a Peaceful, Fair and Prosperous future for the people of Rakhine
- CDNH, 2016: Rakhine State Needs Assessment II
- CDNH, 2016: Conflict Assessment of Five Villages in Rakhine State
- Aron, Gabrielle, 2016. CDA: Reshaping Engagement – Perspectives on Conflict Sensitivity in Rakhine
- Internews, 2016. Rakhine State News and Information Eco-system – An Internews Rapid Assessment Report
- The Asia Foundation, 2015: Municipal Governance in Myanmar: An overview of Development Affairs Organizations
- PLAN, 2015. Joint Education Sector Needs Assessment, North Rakhine State, Myanmar
- ADB, 2015. Power Sector Development in Myanmar
• Search, 2015: Community Information Flows To Reduce Inter-Communal Violence In Burma
• OCHA, 2014. Humanitarian Bulletin
• Pamela Donavan (2007), How Idle is Idle Talk? One Hundred Years of Rumor Research, Diogenes 213: 59–82
Annex 1: Research Tools

Tool 1: KII with CBO/CSO Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My name is … I am an enumerator for a project run by Scholar Institute and Search called (in Myanmar) - collaboration for better public service delivery. We are a CSO who do consultations with people in Rakhine to learn about their conditions. We are interested in learning about you and your community and your access to different forms of public services. We do this as part of a program that aims to support civil society in its collaboration with local authorities. We hope the information you provide will benefit your community, and we will provide the results of the findings in workshops, if you would like to join please stay in touch with us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are no right or wrong answers, and if there are questions you don't wish to answer, then that's fine. If you want to end the interview at some point, then that's also totally fine. We would also like to record the interview. This is only so we can make sure that we don’t miss important answers. The recording will not be given to anybody else. In general, your identity will not be disclosed to third parties. Would you like to participate? And are you ok if we take a recording? If not, we will just take notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finally, if you have any questions you would like to ask us, please feel free to do so - both now and later. I am leaving a leaflet that describes our work, in which you can also find our phone number and email address.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>OPENING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To begin with, please could you tell me a bit about your organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What do you do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How do you work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>As I mentioned earlier, we are interested in understanding more about people's access to different forms of public services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td><strong>First of all: How do you define the term 'public services'? What does it mean to you?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.2 Some public services may be easy to get, and some may be hard, or they may not be possible to get at all.

I’m going to list some public services, and I’d like if you can tell me which you have access to currently within your community, without travelling beyond your village tract.

[Enumerator Instructions: circle accessible services]

Education (basic and higher)
Health care (emergency and outpatient care)
Public transportation
Water
Electricity
Sanitation and/or sewage disposal
Public toilet
Protection against natural disasters
Justice / Conflict Resolution/Security
Funerals and other ceremonial services
Markets
Roads
Ports/water transportation
Street lights

Are there any other services?

1.3 From this same list public services, I'd like to ask you how hard or easy you think it is for people in your community to gain access to them. I'd like you to use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very easy, and 10 is very hard.

For example, if your community can access healthcare only by travelling to the township city, that might mean the service is harder to access.

1.4 Sometimes services may be available, but they may not be of particularly high quality. What is quality public service to you?

Follow Up:

- When is a service delivered in a good way?
- What might be examples of this?
### 1.5 What about 'bad' quality services. What is poor quality to you? Would you have examples of this?

### 1.6 Of the services, you have access to now, what would you say the quality is like of these services on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is extremely good, and 10 is extremely bad?

*Enumerator Instructions: refer to selected services above*

### 1.7 Of these public services you have access to now, which do you most often hear people complaining about?

Follow Up:
- Are there other public services that they complain about as well?
- What do people say?
- How much of what they say is true/accurate?
- Do you think people have a good understanding of these services in your community?

### 1.8 If you could choose five public services – including those you don’t currently have or have difficulty accessing – which would you say it is most important to improve?

Follow Up:
- Why?
- Do you think some groups of people have different priorities?
  - If ‘yes’, who and in what ways?

### 1.9 For each of the five you have selected, could you please explain which problems there are?

Follow Up:
- Why is the current provision of these services not better than it is?
- Who do you think is the appropriate person/organization to improve these services? (i.e. responsible for)
- Who do you think is best able to improve these services? (i.e. most capable)

### 2 CURRENT PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

If you think about the five public services you identified before, who (if anyone) is already providing them?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follow Up:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- If people are looking for these services, who do they go to?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do the providers of these public services provide them on their own, or do they work with other groups/actors, for example NGOs, CSOs or community facilitators?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If ‘yes’:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In which ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you give examples of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If ‘no’:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why not, do you think?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you think about the public service providers, you just mentioned: How satisfied would you generally say that people are with them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What makes you think this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you give examples?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you think about the public service providers, you just mentioned: How satisfied would you generally say that people are with them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What makes you think this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you give examples?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent would you say that people feel free and easy to discuss needs and provide feedback (positive and negative) with these public service providers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why / Why not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you give examples of things that make people feel more or less free and easy discussing with them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What about your own organization? Are you involved in providing these different public services?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3.3 PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND CONFLICT/COHESION

*Sometimes public services is something people get upset about. Sometimes different communities for instance feel that they receive less support than other communities.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What would you say is the general situation in your area: Are people getting into disagreements or even conflicts about services?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In what way? (Can you give examples?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why do you think this happens?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have there been particular events or situations that led to misunderstandings or difficulties about public service?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have there been particular situations that made people angry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In what way? (Can you give examples?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why do you think this happened?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there particular groups or organizations that tend to make things difficult when it comes to the five public services you identified before?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How so? (Can you give examples?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 When we talk about different issues in relation to the five public services you mentioned before, would you say that they affect women and men differently?  

Follow Up:
- Why?
- Can you give examples?

What about people of different age or ethnicity?

Follow Up:
- Why?
- Can you give examples?

People with disabilities?

Follow Up:
- Why?
Can you give examples?

If you think about the CSOs/CBOs that work in public service provision in this area: To what extent would you say they represent or benefit everyone?

Follow Up:
- Do they provide services to all kinds of people, or do they favor / overlook specific groups? (For example: youth? Women? rural or urban communities?)
  - Who?
  - Why are some included/excluded?

4. PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND INVOLVEMENT OF THE PUBLIC

In the following, I would like to understand more about the extent to which ordinary people and CSOs/CBOs are involved in or have influence over the ways in which the different public services are planned and delivered. For instance, through consultations, workshops, and meetings with the public service providers. Or through supporting in delivering the services or giving feedback about them.

If you think about the public services identified earlier, would you say people are involved in the planning and delivery of them?

Follow Up:
- In what way? (can you give examples?)

What happens when citizens that are unhappy with the public services that are provided?

Follow Up:
- What do they do if they are unhappy?
- Are there places where they can complain?
- Can you give examples of this?
- Can everyone complain or just some people?
  - If ‘just some people’: who and why can’t others complain?

4.3 Are there any consultative mechanisms to ensure public/CSO participation in public service delivery decision making process?

Follow Up:
- In what way? (can you give examples)
- Why?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Follow Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What about your own organization?</td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you ever engage with authorities?</td>
<td>- Do you ever engage with authorities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Which?</td>
<td>- Which?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why (not)?</td>
<td>- Why (not)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’:</td>
<td>- If ‘yes’:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is it like to engage with the authorities?</td>
<td>- What is it like to engage with the authorities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are some things that work well?</td>
<td>- What are some things that work well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are some things that work less well? (Can you give examples?)</td>
<td>- What are some things that work less well? (Can you give examples?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do other organizations engage with authorities in different ways?</td>
<td>- Do other organizations engage with authorities in different ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Which?</td>
<td>- Which?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that you are able to affect the authorities in their way of providing public services?</td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In what way? (Can you give examples of this?)</td>
<td>- In what way? (Can you give examples of this?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why?</td>
<td>- Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What about things like the different township committees?</td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are people and/or organizations able to use these relationships to gain influence in the community?</td>
<td>- Are people and/or organizations able to use these relationships to gain influence in the community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’: Can you give examples of this?</td>
<td>- If ‘yes’: Can you give examples of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there particular types of people that the authorities listen to more than others?</td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who are these people?</td>
<td>- Who are these people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why do the authorities listen to them in particular?</td>
<td>- Why do the authorities listen to them in particular?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Do you think it would be possible to involve people more?</td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What would this look like?</td>
<td>- What would this look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10 Do you think that organizations like ours could support in any way?</td>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you think about the five public services you identified earlier, do you think that improving them is something that could make the community come together more?

Follow Up:
- In what way? (Can you give examples of this?)
- Why?

5. PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND INFORMATION

In this part of the interview, I would like to ask you some questions about how people get information about public services in this area.

5.1 Earlier, we talked about the public services that were most in need of improvement. I would like to understand for each of these public services, what people in this community do to get information about them. If people have a question about [service 1], who do they go to get information about it?

Follow up:
- Is this different for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? 

5.2 Are there particular people who know a lot about [service 1] that people ask? For instance, family or friends?

5.3 Are there also other types of people who know a lot about it and that people go to?

Follow Up:
- Who?

 Enumerator Instruction: If necessary, to help respondent think of answers: “For example, in another area, someone told me that bus drivers often know a lot and give people information. Is that the same here? Are there other people who know a lot?”

5.4 Are there other people or places that people in this area get information about [service 1] from?

Follow up:
- What about the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]?

5.5 In general, would you say it is easy or hard to get information about [service 1]?

Follow Up:
- Why?
- If ‘hard’: What are the difficulties?
- Is this different for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]?

*Enumerator Instruction:* If respondent hasn't brought these up: What about [TV? Poster boards? Family? Authorities? Religious leaders? WhatsApp groups? WeChat? VK]? Is this something people use for getting information about [service 1]?

---

### What about Facebook?

**Follow Up:**
- Do people get information about [service 1] from there?
- If ‘yes’: Do they get it from friends? Local reporters? Pages? Which pages?
- Is this different for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? In what ways?

---

### Are there particular people on Facebook who know a lot about [service 1] who people follow?

**Follow Up:**
- If ‘yes’: Who?
- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]?}

---

### 6. TRUST AND EVALUATION OF INFORMATION

**Would you say that the information that goes around about the different public services is generally accurate?**

**Do communities sometimes say things about [service 1] which you think are not true?**

**Follow Up:**
- Do you have any examples?
  - If ‘yes’: why do you think people spread this rumor/believed this information?
- Have you ever encountered information that you did not trust?
  - If ‘yes’: How did you decide that it wasn't true?
- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? Do you hear untrue information about this? How do you deal with it?

**Are there sources of information that you think are generally not reliable?**

**If you hear some information about [service 1] that you think might not be true, what do you do check if it is accurate?**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follow up:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Would you say that the information you can find on Facebook is generally accurate? |

### 7. SHARING OF INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.1</th>
<th>What about your organization? Do you share information with people about public services?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’: Which ones? How do you do this? Who do you aim to share with?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 7.2 | To what extent would you say that people in your community generally share information with each other about public services? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.3</th>
<th>Would you say there are groups in your community who receive less information about services than others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’: Who? What about men/women? Older/younger people?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### RUMORS ABOUT PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there sometimes stories or information about [service 1] that make people worried?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’: What would they be? Can you give examples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? Are there stories that make people worried?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**For example:** Are there sometimes stories about some people receiving benefits and public services that other people don't get? Where do these stories come from? Are they true?

**Follow up:**
- Do these stories exist for the other services we discussed? For [2, 3, 4, 5]?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there other negative stories you hear about public services?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do people feel about that? Is it something you discuss?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tool 2: FGD with Community Members

### INTRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My name is … I am an enumerator for a project run by Scholar Institute and Search called (in Myanmar) - collaboration for better public service delivery. We are a CSO who do consultations with people in Rakhine to learn about their conditions. We are interested in learning about you and your community and your access to different forms of public services. We do this as part of a program that aims to support civil society in its collaboration with local authorities. We hope the information you provide will benefit your community, and we will provide the results of the findings in workshops, if you would like to join please stay in touch with us. There are no right or wrong answers, and if there are questions you don't wish to answer, then that's fine. If you want to end the interview at some point, then that's also totally fine. We would also like to record the interview. This is only so we can make sure that we don’t miss important answers. The recording will not be given to anybody else. In general, your identity will not be disclosed to third parties. Would you like to participate? And are you ok if we take a recording? If not, we will take notes. Finally, if you have any questions you would like to ask us, please feel free to do so - both now and later. I am leaving a leaflet that describes our work, in which you can also find our phone number and email address.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### OPENING

To begin with, please could you tell me a bit about yourselves? What do you do?

### ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF PUBLIC SERVICES (moderator to illustrate)

As I mentioned earlier, we are interested in understanding more about people’s access to different forms of public services right here in your community.

First of all, how do you define public services?

Follow up:
- What does it mean to you?
Some services may be easy to get, and some may be hard, or they may not be possible to get at all.

I’m going to list some services, and I’d like if you can tell me which you have access to currently within your community, without travelling beyond your village tract.

**[Enumerator Instructions: circle accessible services]**

- Education (basic and higher)
- Health care (emergency and outpatient care)
- Public transportation
- Water
- Electricity
- Sanitation and/or sewage disposal
- Public toilet
- Protection against natural disasters
- Justice / Conflict Resolution/Security
- Funerals and other ceremonial services
- Markets
- Roads
- Ports/water transportation
- Street lights

Are there any other services?

From this same list of services, I'd like to ask you how hard or easy you think it is to gain access to them. I'd like you to use a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is very easy, and 10 is very hard.

For example, if you can access healthcare only by travelling to the township city, that might mean the service is harder to access.

**Enumerator instruction: Note down for each how was/difficult it is to access**

Sometimes services may be available, but they may not be of particularly high quality. What is quality service to you?

Follow Up:
- When is a service delivered in a good way?
- What might be examples of this?

What about 'bad' quality services. What is poor quality to you? Would you have examples of this?

Of the services, you have access to now, what would you say the quality is like of these services on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is extremely good, and 10 is extremely
**bad?**

*Enumerator Instructions: refer to selected services above*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of these services you have access to now, which do you most often hear people complaining about?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are there other services that they complain about as well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What do people say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How much of what they say is true/accurate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you think people have a good understanding of these services in your community?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you could choose five services – including those you don’t currently have or have difficulty accessing – which would you say it is most important to improve?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you think some groups of people have different priorities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’, who and in what ways?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For each of the five you have selected, could you please explain which problems there are?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why is the current provision of these public services not better than it is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who do you think is the appropriate person/organization to improve these public services? (i.e. responsible for)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who do you think is best able to improve these public services? (i.e. most capable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CURRENT PROVISION OF PUBLIC SERVICES (moderator to illustrate)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you think about the five public services you identified before, who (if anyone) is already providing them?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If people are looking for these public services, who do they go to?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### To what extent would you say that people feel free and easy to discuss needs and provide feedback (positive and negative) with these public service providers?

Follow Up:
- Why / Why not?
- Can you give examples of things that make people feel more or less free and easy discussing with them?

### What about CSOs/CBOs? Are there CSOs/CBOs that provide public services in this area?

Follow up:
- Do they support with regards to any of the five public services you identified earlier?

### Would you say these CSOs/CBOs take care of everyone?

Follow up:
- Do they care more about some groups than others?

## PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND CONFLICT/COHESION

Sometimes public services are also something that people get upset about. Sometimes different communities for instance feel that they receive less support than other communities.

### What would you say is the general situation in your area: Do people have misunderstandings about public services?

Follow up:
- In what way? (Can you give examples?)
- Why do you think this happens?

### Have there been particular events or situations that led to misunderstandings or difficulties about public service?

Follow Up:
- Have there been particular situations that made people angry?
  - If ‘yes’:
    - In what way? (Can you give examples?)
    - Why do you think this happened?

### Are there particular groups or organizations that tend to make things difficult when it comes to the five public services you identified before?
- If ‘yes’:
  - How so? (Can you give examples?)

**If you think about the five public services you identified earlier, do you think that improving them is something that could make the community come together more?**

Follow up:
- In what way? Why? Can you give examples of this?

## PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND INVOLVEMENT OF THE PUBLIC (moderator to illustrate)

*In the following, I would like to understand more about the extent to which ordinary people are involved in or have influence over the ways in which the different public services are planned and delivered. For instance, through consultations, workshops, and meetings with the public service providers. Or through supporting in delivering the public services or giving feedback about them.*

**If you think about the public services identified earlier, would you say people are involved in the planning and delivery of them?**

Follow up:
- Are they able to affect the ways in which authorities provide public services?
  - In what ways?
  - Can you give examples of this?

**Has anyone ever come to speak to you about public services here? If yes: How did you feel afterwards?**

**What happens when citizens that are unhappy with the public services that are provided?**

Follow Up:
- What do they do if they are unhappy?
- Are there places where they can complain?
  - Can you give examples of this?
- Can everyone complain or just some people?
  - If ‘just some people’: who and why can’t others complain?

**What about things like the different township committees? Can you talk to them?**

Follow up:
- Which ones have you been in contact with?
- What about other people?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are your local leaders responsive to people’s ideas and complaints? Who is most responsive: Religious leaders, elected local leaders, township-level authorities?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there people and/or organizations that become more influential in the community because they have more contact or better relationships with public service providers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you give examples of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there particular types of people that the authorities listen to more than others? Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who are these people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why do the authorities listen to them in particular?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you think about the five public services, you identified: What makes it difficult for individuals and communities to influence how they are provided?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What are the barriers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you give examples of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think it would be possible to involve people more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What would this look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think that organizations like ours could support in any way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’: In what ways?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘no’: Why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND INFORMATION**

*In this part of the discussion, I would like to ask you some questions about how people get information about public services in this area*

*Earlier, we talked about the public services that were most in need of improvement. I would like to understand for each of these public services, what people in this community do to get information about them. If you have a question about [public service 1], who do you go to to get information about it?*

Follow up:
- If you think about last time you used [public service 1], how did you get information about it? Could you give an example of this?
- Is this different for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]??

Are there particular people who know a lot about [public service 1] that you ask? For instance, family or friends?

Are there also other types of people who know a lot about it and that people go to?

Follow Up:
- Who?

*Enumerator Instruction:* If necessary, to help respondent think of answers: “For example, in another area, someone told me that bus drivers often know a lot and give people information. Is that the same here? Are there other people who know a lot?”

Are there other people or places you get information about [public service 1] from?

Follow up:
- What about the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]??

In general, would you say it is easy or hard to get information about [public service 1]?

Follow Up:
- Why?
- If ‘hard’: What are the difficulties?
- Is this different for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]??

*Enumerator Instruction:* If respondent hasn’t brought these up: What about [TV? Poster boards? Family? Authorities? Religious leaders? WhatsApp groups? WeChat? VK?]. Is this something people use for getting information about [public service 1]? What about Facebook?

Follow Up:
- Do people get information about [public service 1] from there?
- If ‘yes’: Do they get it from friends? Local reporters? Pages? Which pages?
- Is this different for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? In what ways?

Are there particular people on Facebook who know a lot about [public service 1] who people follow?

Follow Up:
- If ‘yes’: Who?
- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]??
If respondent is part of local WhatsApp/Viber or Facebook group for news: ‘Do you know who manages the group/chat? Do you know everyone in the group personally? How did you come to join the group?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRUST AND EVALUATION OF INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you say that the information you can find is generally accurate? Can you trust this information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does information sometimes appear about [public service 1] that you think is not true?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you have any examples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o If ‘yes’: why do you think people spread this rumor/believed this information?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have you ever encountered information that you did not trust?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- If ‘yes’: How did you decide that it wasn't true?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? Do you hear untrue information about this? How do you deal with it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there sources of information that you think are generally not reliable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Or maybe sources of information where you think you have to check if the information is correct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you hear some information about [public service 1] that you think might not be true, what do you do check if it is accurate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? Do you hear untrue information about this? How do you deal with it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you say that the information you can find on Facebook is generally accurate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Can you trust this information?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Is there information on Facebook about [public service 1] that you think is not true? Why/why not? Do you have any examples of information that you did not trust?
### SHARING OF INFORMATION

**What about yourself - do you also give information to other people about public services?**

Follow up:
- Is it something you talk about?
- Which ones?
- Can you think of some information you thought was important to pass on to someone else?
- Who did you share this information with?
- Do you share information about the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]??

**To what extent would you say that people in your community generally talk about public services?**

**Would you say there are groups in your community who receive less information about public services than others?**

Follow up:
- Who?
- What about men/women?
- Older/younger people?

### RUMORS ABOUT PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

**Are there sometimes stories or information about public service delivery that make people worried?**

Follow Up:
- If ‘yes’: What would they be? Can you give examples?
- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? Are there stories that make people worried?

**For example: Do you sometimes hear stories about some people receiving benefits and public services that other people don't get?**

Follow up:
- Where do these stories come from?
- Are they true?
- What about for the other services we talked about – [service 2,3,4,5]? Are there stories about them?

**Are there other negative stories you hear about public services?**

**How do people feel about that? Is it something you discuss?**
### Tool 3: KII with Local Authorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thank you for agreeing to speak with me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My name is ... I work for the Scholar Institute. I am interested to learn about basic services in this area. We would like to understand if there are ways in which we can be helpful for the government and the communities. To do this, we would like to learn about your perspective on services. We know that it is a complex area, and we would like to understand more about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If it is okay with you, I would like to take some notes – just so I can remember better what you have said. Please also feel free to only answer the questions you are comfortable with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>OPENING</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To begin with, I would like to understand a bit more about your work. Please could you tell me what your organization does? What are the things that you are mostly involved in? Can you give examples of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE ORGANISATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>One of the things we are interested in is the many ways in which the different government institutions support the population, for example with different forms of public services.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is your experience of public services? How do you define public services? How is it understood in this organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Which public services is your organization involved in delivering to the public?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there other organizations that are involved in delivering these public services to the public? Which ones? How are they involved? Could you give examples of this? What could support you and your department in working with these organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there other organizations that you coordinate with?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**AREAS OF SUPPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In general, would you say it’s quite easy to deliver these public services to everyone, or are there particular people or locations that are a bit less easy to reach? If yes, why? Could you give examples of this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are some of the things that make public service delivery challenging? Which issues do you face as an organization when it comes to public service delivery? Can you give examples of this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you solve these problems? Any examples?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being an organization with great responsibility requires a lot of skills. It also requires support - funding, training, materials/logistics, etc. Would you generally say that your organization gets the support it needs to work well? Are there particular forms of support that would make a positive difference? How could it make a difference? Are there ways in which we could be helpful as an organization?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS AND COMMUNICATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I would like to understand how your organization stays in touch with different communities.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How important is it to you to hear the perspectives of communities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you consult with communities about services very often? Are there meetings or consultations where your organization discuss different needs with the public, or explain how services will be delivered, and how decisions have been made? Specific examples would be really helpful, if you could share them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What if community members have specific ideas about public services? How do they usually inform you about this? Is there a formal communication mechanism or channel to inform communities about availability of public service provisions? Could you explain a bit about how they work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What about committees? Are there committees that give some input? Which ones? Do they always work well? If so, what kind? Are there ways in which they could be improved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do most community members know that they can connect with you? How often does this happen (monthly?). Are there particular members of communities that are more difficult to communicate with than others? What about women and youth? How about communities that speak different languages, like Mro or Meramawgyi?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you think the input that community members come with is useful, or would you say they don’t understand services very well? Could you give examples of this? If not useful, why not? any examples?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### GIVING INFORMATION TO COMMUNITIES

*Finally, I would like to understand better how your organization gives information to the communities.*

Your organization is doing important work for the communities of Rakhine. How do you make sure that the communities know about this work?

Do you send out information in some way? Do you use billboards, radio, TV or similar things? What would you say are the most effective ways of communicating service delivery information to people?

Is it generally easy to reach people with information? Why? Why not? What might be some of the difficulties?

Would you say that the public are generally aware of the work you do? Why (not)?

Would you say there are certain groups of people that it is difficult to communicate information to? Who? Why?

Do you know if there are certain types of people or stakeholders who play an important role in sharing information to their communities? How do they share information? Do you speak to them?

### CSOs and CBOs

*I’d also like to ask some questions specifically about CSOs and CBOs and whether you think they are useful in your work.*

Do CSOs and CBOs sometimes offer input/feedback to enhance your service delivery work? What kind of input/feedback do they offer?

Is it helpful? If yes how?

Are there ways in which you think CSOs and CBOs could support or better support the work of your organization? Could they be helpful somehow?

What about religious authorities? Do you consult with them? In which ways? Do you find this useful? And how?

Do CBOs and CSOs also involve themselves in service delivery work either independently or in collaboration with NGOs? If yes, how?
### MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT SERVICES

*Sometimes there might be information going around which is not true or wrongly interpreted as a result of rumor or fabricated information.*

Do you know of examples where information about the public services you provide was going round, which was not true? Which? What were the misunderstandings? Do you know how it happened?

Have you ever noticed wrong information or misinterpretation of information about existing public service delivery provision, process, or mechanisms?

Who was involved in communicating such misleading information? How did you overcome it?

Are these misunderstandings a problem? How do you deal with them?

Have you ever heard about misunderstandings making people get into disagreements about services? In what way? Can you give examples of this?
Annex 2: Research Methodology and Limitations

In response to the research questions stated, a qualitative research process was carried out, structured in stages. For an overview of the process, please refer to the figure to the right.

**Existing knowledge and identifying research questions.** As a first activity, a review of published and unpublished research was conducted to secure that the research conducted was *cumulative*, i.e. that it added to, rather than replicated already existing knowledge. The review took its departure in the questions listed in the previous section. Based on the literature review, the team identified remaining questions, honing the research focus.

**Developing research tools.** Informed by the literature review, the team produced draft research tools for primary data collection, consisting of semi-structured interview guides. Different research tools were developed for interviewing different types of informants. The tools were discussed with Search For Common Ground and Scholar Institute at a point-of-departure workshop and tested with field staff to ensure clarity and appropriateness. Subsequent revisions were made iteratively during field work to adapt to learnings from initial interviews.

**Research permissions and mobilization.** During and after the finalization of the research tools, a phase of mobilization took place, during which preparatory work was undertaken before data collection. Most importantly, the work to secure research permissions was initiated. The research team managed to secure approval from local authorities to carry out research, including interviews with a range of authorities in all target townships. While achieving research permissions occasionally proves challenging, the research team believe it is necessary where possible to follow procedures to avoid causing authorities to (further) limit the space available for organizations to conduct research activities.

**Data collection – when, where, who?** Total of 15 focus group discussions and 42 key informant interviews were carried out. Interviews took place in the four target townships of the study – Sittwe, Ponnagyun, Taungup and Ramree – and took place in two ‘waves’. A range of stakeholders from different ‘sides’, including producers, facilitators and not least recipients (communities) were interviewed/consulted in each township. Interviews took place in ethnic Rakhine language and/or Myanmar language as necessary. Interviews with ‘foreigners’ (e.g. NGO staff) took place in English. The presence of ‘foreigners’ from the research team was kept at a minimum to maintain a discreet profile and to minimize interviewer bias. Remote backstopping was provided.

**Wave 1 took place between December and early January.** During this wave, CSO/CBO representatives were interviewed in key informant interviews, and varied groups of community members were interviewed in focus group discussions. Because of SCBSD’s particular focus on engaging women (groups) and youth, informants from these groups were prioritized in each township. In addition, focus groups were held with groups of community members who live close to minority areas. This group of people was targeted in an effort to explore the potential complications arising between majority and minority communities in relation to public service delivery.
Based on preliminary findings from wave 1, interviewees for wave 2 were selected. Wave 2 took place between January and early February. It targeted representatives of local authorities within each of the four target townships. Interviewees included – inter alia – representatives from the GAD, from municipal authorities and committees (urban), from rural development authorities and committees, and from line ministries. It also targeted local MPs and other influential figures.

Alongside wave 1 and 2, interviews with international NGOs and UN organizations were carried out in Yangon and Sittwe. For a full overview of the interviews conducted as part of this research, please refer to annex 4.

Data analysis and reporting. Having collected data, the team examined and analyzed its empirical evidence. In analyzing the data, the team used computer software to ensure high levels of transparency and systematicity. All data was coded, using the project’s research questions as tentative coding trees. Based on this, the team produced a findings matrix showcasing the major findings of the study. These emerging findings were shared with Search For Common Ground and Scholar Institute for reflection during a workshop in Yangon. Informed by these discussions, the team produced the present document.
Annex 3: List of Interviewees

- FGD, mixed gender, urban Sittwe
- FGD with youth, urban Sittwe
- FGD with ethnic minority participants, Sittwe
- FGD, mixed gender, rural Rakhine
- KII, CSO leader 1, Sittwe
- KII, CSO leader 2, Sittwe
- KII, CSO leader 3, Sittwe
- KII, Head of Dep. of Rural Development, Sittwe
- KII, Assistant Director of Municipal Dep., Sittwe
- KII, Dep. Officer, Dep. of Education, Sittwe
- KII, Senior Assistant Engineer, Construction Dep. (rural roads), Sittwe
- KII, Member of Parliament 1, Sittwe
- KII, Member of Parliament 2, Sittwe
- FGD 1, mixed gender, rural Ponnagyun
- FGD 2, mixed gender, rural Ponnagyun
- FGD, youth participants, rural Ponnagyun
- FGD, ethnic minority participants, Ponnagyun
- KII, CSO leader 1, Ponnagyun
- KII, CSO leader 2, Ponnagyun
- KII, CSO leader 3, Ponnagyun
- KII, Department of Rural Development, Ponnagyun
- KII, Planning Department, Ponnagyun
- KII, Dep. of Electricity and Power, Ponnagyun
- KII, Dep. of Health, Ponnagyun
- FGD 1, mixed gender youth participants, Taungup
- FGD 2, mixed gender youth participants, Taungup
- FGD with female participants, rural Taungup
- FGD with youth participants, rural Taungup
- KII, CSO leader, Taungup
- KII, Township Officer, Dep. of Information, Taungup
- KII, Dep. Education Officer, Dep. of Education, Taungup
- KII, Dep. of Planning, Taungup
- KII, Medical Officer, Dep. of Health, Taungup
- KII, Township Officer, Dep. of Rural Development
- KII, Member of Parliament 1, Taungup
- KII, Chairman of Municipal Committee, Taungup
- KII, Ministry of Construction (road and bridges), Taungup
- KII, Deputy Township Authority, GAD One Stop Shop, Taungup
- KII, Township Officer, General Administrative Department, Taungup
- FGD with ethnic minority participants, Ramree
- FGD with female participants, rural Ramree
- FGD with youth participants, urban Ramree
- KII, CSO leader 1, Ramree
- KII, CSO leader 2, Ramree
- KII, CSO leader 3, Ramree
- KII, CSO leader 4, Ramree
- KII, Dep. Officer, Department of Education, Ramree
- KII, General Administrative Department, Ramree
- KII, Head of Township Development Management Committee, Ramree
- KII, Dep. of Social Welfare, Ramree
- KII, Deputy Authority, General Administrative Department, Ramree
- KII, Department of Health, Ramree
- KII, Chairperson, Municipal Committee, Ramree
- KII, Department of Municipality, Ramree
- KII, Dep. of Planning, Ramree
- KII, Dep. of Rural Development, Ramree
- KII, Department of Rural Roads, Ramree