

## **Myanmar: Voter Education Initiatives**

Myanmar is a country with 33.4 million eligible voters, where exclusion of many minorities such as persons with disabilities, elderly voters, youth voters, voters from ethnic regions, and women, was felt in the 2015 Elections. The need of the hour was to spread awareness regarding voting procedures as well as motivating people to vote, on a mass scale.

A voter education strategy incorporating mass media and voter education materials for the same, in a target-oriented approach, was developed. In order to build the strategy, the “National Voter Inclusion Survey” was conducted six months prior to election day, cataloging responses from over 3,000 eligible voters throughout the 14 regions of Myanmar, to determine the types of messages that people needed, regions where voters had less information about procedures and greater engagement was required and so on. A “Voter Education Working Group” was also set up, which in consultation with Civil Society, developed strategies, messages and materials. 12 FAQ guides on technical procedures, 11 posters, 10 radio PSAs, 4 newspaper advertisements, 2 videos, a billboard and 2 pamphlets were designed successfully.

Voter education was divided into three phases in the pre-election period ranging from focus on supplying information on the preliminary voter list display and the national voter list display to providing relevant information about voting and Election Day procedures.

Mass media such as television, radio, newspapers, billboards, SMS messaging and social media (for the youth) were used in the pre-election period to spread voter awareness regarding information and procedures in all areas. For instance, local telephone networks sent eight individual SMS messages motivating voters to check the voter list during the national display and to vote on election. Videos demonstrating the technicalities of voting were aired on regular basis on national television as well as adapted to radio. Facebook pages with voter education material in the form of videos, posters and FAQs were actively promoted to target the youth. With an extensive coverage of **29 million citizens**, these measures were indeed extremely successful.

Despite the success of mass media campaigns, some aforementioned groups still felt excluded, a solution to which was provided in the form of 17

Civil Society Organizations. These CSOs received training that included technical information on elections, training on developing original voter education materials to target communities, a module to conduct trainings, and brainstorming activities to develop engaging methods to reach communities. Following this, they conducted surveys and trained the people regarding the technical know-how of elections. Not only that, CSOs also distributed voter education materials throughout local communities and motivated individuals to vote on Election Day. Flash mobs, cascade trainings, Facebook campaigns and songs were also used to spread awareness.

The efforts of CSOs in spreading voter awareness can be seen clearly in their impact on the successful 2015 elections in Myanmar. “Pandita Development Institute (PDI)” posted a series of graphics under its “Vote for Myanmar” Facebook campaign, targeting the youth, while Mon Youth Progressive Organization organized education workshops, motivating the youth. Women-centric organizations like Creative Home, Yaung Chit Thit (YCT) and Share Mercy played a major role in encouraging women to become informed voters. Many CSO’s like Mawduklae Social Development Association (MSDA) targeted ethnic groups, and motivated them to vote. Myanmar-Independent Living Initiative (MILI) worked to advocate the inclusions of persons with disabilities in the electoral process successfully. Not only was a physical and online resource center of electoral materials called Myanmar Electoral Resource and Information Network (MERIN) set up by “The Serenity Initiative”, but they also played a crucial part in getting fake ballots out to CSOs and communities.

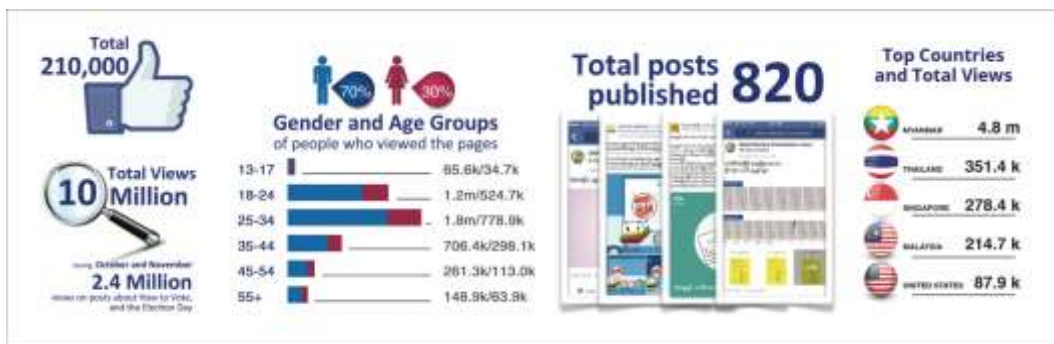
The impact of such initiatives can be seen in the overall turnout on Election Day i.e. 69.82% of the voters. Moreover, a post-elections period follow-up national survey found that the participants demonstrated a much greater knowledge of elections, proving that the measures were extremely successful.

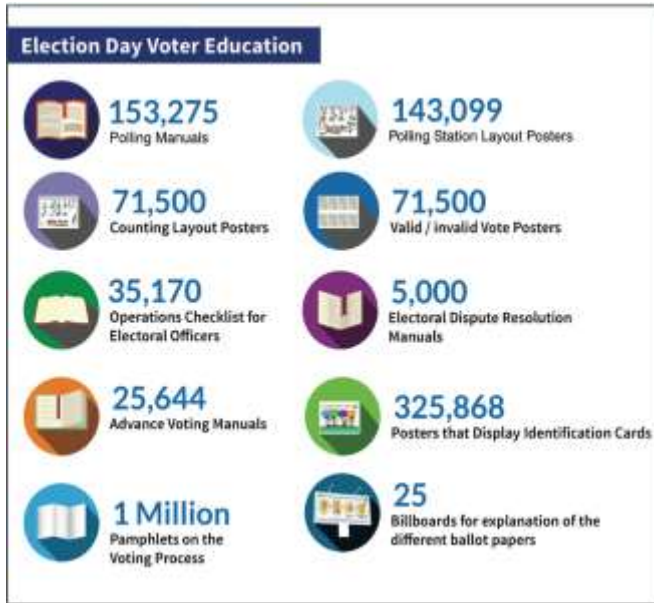
However, work is being done on important topics like democracy, representation and citizenship in target areas where the voter turnout of the 2015 elections was low, through CSOs, for even better results.

Source: IFES



UEC's outreach on Facebook and social media (below).





Mon Youth Progressive Organization's voter education workshop (below).



Mawduklamae Social Development Association's polling simulation provided Kayah voters a chance to practice how to cast a valid vote (below).





MILI's mobile get-out-the-vote concert (below).



YCT training women voters (below).

