

Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement:

An analysis of the present situation and
a framework for supporting future action

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Executive Summary

Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) is at the vanguard of the anti-junta resistance, and is still hugely popular both inside Myanmar and overseas. At its core, the CDM is a massive public sector strike, in which tens of thousands of civil servants refused to continue working with the government of Myanmar after the 1 February 2021 military coup. The CDM brought Myanmar to a standstill, and had an immediate destabilizing effect on the military junta. However, to date, very little research has been conducted into the actual stated goals of the CDM, the set of challenges that its participants face, and what can be done in the future to address those challenges and help the CDM meet its goals. This paper is an attempt to begin clarifying these three matters.

Our primary data consists of over 40 interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders in the movement, including: CDM participants (CDMers), various CDM supporters (e.g., fundraisers and community organizers), active civil servants (non-CDMers), and a representative of the National Unity Government's (NUG) CDM success committee. We also analysed a wide range of secondary data, including newspaper articles, public statements, and press releases from both the NUG and the military junta. This executive summary will present the four key findings from our research, and the five next steps that we believe are most important for ensuring the success of the spring revolution.

Key findings:

- 1) **CDMers are in desperate need of livelihoods and of a sense of purpose, in exactly that order.** Every CDMer who spoke with us is having trouble making ends meet, and in many cases struggling to have enough food to eat. When they are employed, their new jobs tend to be inadequate for providing long-term livelihoods. CDMers are also a very capable and highly-trained group of people; working odd jobs does not engage their skills. Furthermore, without a clear "next step" in the CDM or the revolution more broadly, CDMers tend to feel like they do not have a longer-term goal.
- 2) **People's Administrative Bodies (PABs, or ပြည်သူ့အုပ်ချုပ်ရေးအဖွဲ့) can absorb CDMers and utilize their skills more effectively than other organizations or businesses.** CDMers have mostly been trained to provide government services, or manage the delivery of government services. Although some CDMers have found temporary employment in other sectors, the CDMers who are currently engaged in PABs feel a stronger sense of purpose than their counterparts who are working in other sectors or unemployed. PABs also provide a crucial window into what post-revolutionary Myanmar could look like, and thus have a stronger sense of "futuraity" than temporary employment in other sectors.
- 3) **The divisions within the CDM and across Myanmar's civil service will be a problem after the revolution unless they are mitigated right now.** Within the CDM, the strongest divisions are: a) between people who remain inside Myanmar and people who have fled the country; b) between low-ranking civil servants and more prominent political actors or high-ranking officials; c)

between those who joined in “liberated areas” and those who joined from the junta-controlled heartland. However, across the civil service, the biggest divide moving forward will be between CDMers who joined in large numbers and government staff who did not join the CDM (non-CDMers). Bridging this divide is an urgent task for the NUG and their supporters.

- 4) **Soldiers do not join the CDM for the same reasons as civilians.** Many civilian public servants joined the CDM for reasons of political convictions, in addition to social pressure. In the police and military, however, there was not massive social pressure to join CDM – soldiers largely join for reasons of political or ethical conviction.

Next steps:

- 1) **The NUG should ensure clear communication around available funding for CDMers, and on alternative support systems available to them (PABs and similar).** The NUG does not have enough of a budget to support every CDMer; the movement is simply too large. At the same time, there are diverse ways that CDMers can support themselves and participate in meaningful work through PABs and other community organizations, but CDMers may not know how to join these. The NUG can facilitate more of these connections.
- 2) **The CDM would benefit from a more centralized strategy and organizational structure.** The CDM is largely a decentralized movement, which has been one of its strengths – decentralized movements are harder to stop than centralized ones. However, the lack of a governing body or central information sources has led to a lot of confusion about the way forward. CDMers could draw on organizational strategies like those used by labor unions (e.g., for electing temporary leadership) in order to increase group cohesion and make clearer strategic plans.
- 3) **Develop creative ways to increase military defections and high-ranking resignations.** Australia has begun offering asylum to defected soldiers; groups like People’s Embrace and People’s Goal have also helped soldiers defect by supporting soldiers’ families and connecting soldiers with People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) and Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs). These strategies should be expanded, and paired with propaganda campaigns that appeal to soldiers’ ethics (rather than social pressures such as social punishment).
- 4) **CDMer-led organizations should explore NGO and CSO status.** Foreign states and aid organizations cannot provide funding directly to the NUG or its departments. For that reason, CDM support organizations may want to consider rebranding as community organizations (rather than government departments), which would enable them to secure foreign funding and develop a more flexible position in the post-coup environment.
- 5) **CDMers should incorporate new tactics of nonviolent resistance.** Using resources such as those provided by Nonviolence International,¹ the

¹ <https://www.tactics.nonviolenceinternational.net/>

International Center on Nonviolent Conflict² and CANVAS,³ CDMers can begin collaborating with anti-coup Non-CDMers to experiment with new tactics to reinvigorate the nonviolent wing of the revolution. These tactics can be used to present an image of an unstable junta regime, to create a weak and divided military, and to damage or hinder businesses that benefit the military.

² <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/civil-resistance-tactics-in-the-21st-century/>
³ <https://canvasopedia.org/>

Introduction

The Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar

The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) was the first mass resistance campaign to emerge in the wake of Myanmar's 2021 military coup, and it has proven to be one of the most enduring. The movement began as a public sector strike, when healthcare workers working in public hospitals, medical institutes, and COVID-19 testing centres left their jobs soon after the coup. The movement gained momentum quickly and they were soon followed by teachers working in public schools and universities, and then by a general strike across both the public and private sectors. Although the "CDM" campaign eventually came to be used as a shorthand for every anti-coup action in Myanmar, including street protests, boycotts, refusal to pay bills, and direct actions such as disrupting roads, the scope of the paper focuses on the original form of CDM that involves thousands of public servants leaving their work and the knock-on consequences of that action.

For this purpose, we conducted more than 40 online and in-person interviews, including a field visit in Thailand. The participants included both active civil servants currently working under the military controlled public administration and CDM civil servants (referred to as "CDMers" in Myanmar) from more than five ministries living inside and outside of the country. Among the interviewees were young civil servants with low rank as well as mid-level officials with over 20 years of civil service experience doing CDM and working under the military. In addition, we interviewed those directly providing financial or other support to CDMers, including the National Unity Government (NUG), and those who are critical of the movement. The majority of interviews have been drawn directly from the researchers' personal contacts and secondary contacts inside the CDM movement. Our questions were primarily directed toward the participants' understanding of the CDM movement and its objectives; the impact of the movement and the military's countermeasures; the issues and challenges faced by individual CDMers; perspectives on tactics and support of the movement; and suggestions for strengthening the CDM movement. We also sought the advice of an expert on nonviolent resistance and regime change strategies, whose advice shaped our framework for future action (section 2, below).

First, we outline how CDMers view their own actions and decisions, and how they frame their political goals. We address their frustrations and the obstacles they face – both the obstacles to CDM participation and the obstacles that have emerged as the coup passes well into its second year. The CDM is also experiencing internal divisions: CDMers gave us some useful insight about where these fault lines are, and what might be done to address them. While we agree that security sector defections are crucial to the success of the CDM, we have found that security sector CDMers defect for somewhat different reasons than their colleagues in the civilian bureaucracy. This implies that recruiting security sector defectors will require a different set of tactics than those employed for the civilian sector.

After presenting our findings and analysis, we offer a framework to guide future action. . It is divided into five parts, each of which address a different challenge as

identified in our “Findings” section. We begin with the most pressing challenge – the lack of funding to support CDMers who are now out of work. From there, we try to address the next most pressing challenges, namely, CDMers’ feelings of listlessness and the lines of division within the movement. The next three parts point toward the evolution of the CDM in the future, namely: how to weaken the military; how to engage the international community (foreign governments and foreign aid organizations); and some new tactics that could help nudge the playing field in favour of the pro-democracy revolution. In some cases, these tactics have already been deployed, but on a small scale or in a disorganized fashion (e.g., highly publicized government leaks); in other cases, we make suggestions that may sound novel, or even far-fetched (e.g., socially engineering a rift between the military and the police). The purpose of these suggestions is to provide a starting point for conversations about future revolutionary action, and to open new pathways for both CDMers and their diverse allies to weaken the SAC and support the goals of the revolution.

Defining Myanmar’s Civil Disobedience Movement

The core of Myanmar’s CDM is effectively a public-sector strike. However, it has been influenced by a range of other nonviolent resistance tactics with various genealogies from different parts of the world. Sill, the mass striking, and resignation of public servants has been the defining action at the core of the CDM, and “CDMers” are fundamentally public servants who refuse to work under the junta. Since its emergence, the CDM continues to gain massive popular support at home and abroad and was even nominated for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize. At the peak of the movement, nearly half of the country’s one million civil servants participated in the strike and pledged not to work under the military (The Irrawaddy 2021). The movement crippled Myanmar’s public administration, particularly in the health and education sectors; strikes in the banking and transportation sectors wreaked havoc on Myanmar’s economy. Supporters of the CDM employed both persuasive methods and harsher coercive techniques in order to increase the movement’s participation (Anonymous 2021). The military, stunned by the popularity of the CDM and its impact, took severe action against CDM participants and leaders. Within a few months of the CDM’s launch, the military detained (and suspended) hundreds of CDM participants. In the education sector alone, over 130,000 teachers were dismissed for participating in the CDM – this number represents more than a third of the total teaching staff in Myanmar (BBC Burmese 2022). Many of the CDM leaders, participants and supporters have been charged under Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code, which carries a maximum sentence of three years in prison, and multiple sections under Counter-Terrorism Law which carries a maximum sentence of life in prison.⁴ As of August 2022, around 600 healthcare workers and over 200 teachers have been arrested by the military; over 30 healthcare workers and 27 teachers have been killed during protests or in the military’s custody (Insecurity Insight 2022; RFA Burmese 2022b).

The CDM has been a decentralized movement since its inception. At the same

⁴ Section 505 (a): any attempt to “hinder, disturb, damage the motivation, discipline, health and conduct” of the military personnel and government employees and cause their hatred, disobedience or disloyalty toward the military and the government is punishable by up to three years in prison.

time, it has gained a lot of traction with the National Unity Government, who has committed itself to being a primary sponsor of the CDM movement and taking a lead in the movement's strategy in support of grassroots leaders. With the help of CDM civil servants, the NUG has also been building its alternative governance mechanisms such as schools and clinics. For instance, the NUG recently claimed that more than 70 public schools in central Myanmar covering Sagaing and Magway regions have already been running under its supervision (Frontier Myanmar 2022). Although hundreds of thousands of CDMers continue to refuse to participate in the military's administrative mechanism, CDM participation decreased significantly after almost two years of the dictatorship due to extreme repression and dwindling financial support amidst widespread economic hardship. It is estimated that more than 40% or more than 150,000 members of the CDM movement have quit and decided to return to their jobs under the State Administrative Council (SAC) formed by the military after the coup (RFA Burmese 2022a). However, an official of the NUG-CDM Support Committee confirmed that the latest number of CDMers registered with the NUG as of September 2022 is around 350,000, 60 percent of whom are females (personal communication with the authors, 24 September 2022). The Ministry of Education has the highest number of CDMers with more than 200,000 participants, according to the Myanmar Teachers' Federation. The military-controlled media announced in August 2021 that CDM participants would not be punished if they returned to work. Although there are people who have returned to work, many have no faith in the claims made in the announcement as CDMers are still being chased down and imprisoned. For instance, as of June 2022, only about 3,000 teachers had been reappointed (RFA Burmese 2022d).

Section 1.

Findings

For this brief, we conducted more than 30 interviews with a wide range of CDMers and people who have provided integral support to the movement (e.g., people directly involved in managing financial or other support to CDMers). We have also interviewed 12 active government staff, i.e., non-CDMers (those who have never joined the movement) and CDMers who returned to work. Finally, we spoke with one NUG official from the CDM success committee, who has requested that their name be kept confidential. The majority of these interviews have been drawn directly from the researchers' personal contacts. CDMers are an extremely diverse group, with participants coming from every ministry and a wide swath of ranks. We aimed for an equal balance of interviews with men and women, although in some sectors this ratio has been skewed – e.g., the overwhelming majority of education CDMers we spoke with were women. Most of the CDMers we interviewed were relatively young (age 40 and under). It is worth noting that this is partially due to the lack of senior-level civil servants in the CDM. The lack of high-ranking CDMers in the movement is a point of contention and a source of resentment for many of the rank-and-file civil servants we interviewed for this brief.

We intentionally tried to target CDMers from a variety of different sectors – agriculture, education, finance, health, and police, among others – and CDMers at a variety of ranks, from new hires up to mid-level ministry officials. CDMers from different ministries face different challenges: some interviewees employed by the Ministry of Education have received little to no pressure from their former employers or from the military; in some cases, teachers and Ministry staff returned to their jobs with minimal consequences. Security personnel (soldiers and police), on the other hand, know that they are being actively hunted by their former colleagues and would face brutal retaliation if they were found. Due to security and logistics concerns, most of the CDMers who spoke with us were located outside of Myanmar, with a smaller number speaking to us from undisclosed locations inside the country. We attempt to account for both of these groups (those inside and those outside) in our analysis and recommendations. Both groups have important roles to play, and different resources available to them. At the same time, we acknowledge that CDMers will have the greatest impact if they are able to remain inside the country and actively participate in the rebuilding of Myanmar from within.

CDMer self-conceptions: Who are they, and what are their goals?

Every CDMer we interviewed gave roughly similar definitions of the CDM and explained their basic goals in roughly similar terms. All identified the CDM as primarily a public sector strike, whose goal was to cripple the junta's ability to rule the country. Where respondents differed significantly is in their analysis of what is happening now, and in their ideas about what should happen next. A few respondents spoke about a "quality over quantity" ethos, explaining that the CDM should focus on long-term strategies to target high-priority areas of the government; others expressed dismay, openly calling CDM ineffective, incapable of bringing down the government.

Most CDMers remain proud of their decision to defect and have remained in the movement. Many of the respondents we spoke with were also proud of their

resourcefulness and their ability to find ways to avoid detection by the junta and, when applicable, by foreign authorities allied with Myanmar. This resourcefulness is one of the key attributes that should be emphasized about the currently underemployed CDM civil servants: they reminded us again and again that they are capable of providing a wide range of essential services, and still have a great deal of skills. They want to be seen as agents of the revolution, not as passive individuals who simply stood down when the military seized power.

At the same time, CDMers engaged in quite a lot of potentially productive self-criticism about the movement. The role of force and coercion within the CDM was a frequent topic of conversation during this research. CDMers, we interviewed generally disapproved of the more aggressive tactics employed to force people into participation – including the widely-reviled tactic of “social punishment” for non-participants, which will receive further discussion in 3.C.a. – and argued that such coercive tactics do more harm than good. CDMers also mentioned the need to emphasize highly targeted strikes and defections in the future, such as those from security sector personnel and high-ranking officials, since the mass movement has died down. Although internal critiques of the CDM such as these are useful for planning future action, they do relatively little to ease the frustrations of the moment, and perhaps the strongest characteristic of all CDM participants is that they are extremely frustrated in the present moment. It is to those specific frustrations that we now turn.

Challenges: security, economic survival, disconnection

Both inside and outside of Myanmar, CDMers face enormous challenges in their daily lives. Some of these challenges are fairly visceral, e.g., threatened and actual violence, which are directed not only at CDMers themselves but also at their families. Other challenges are much more subtle (but no less damaging): across every interview we conducted, CDMers’ lack of income and the feelings of uselessness they have experienced. These challenges are the source of much frustration within the CDM, which has driven CDMers to take a range of actions, including fleeing Myanmar or returning to work. These frustrations are exacerbated by various social pressures, including peer pressure to continue striking and, conversely, peer or family pressure to return to work. Section 3B will enumerate these challenges and the frustrations that they cause, which we will attempt to address in our framework for future CDM action (Section 2).

Before we continue with our own findings, it is worth mentioning that CDM participation carries heavy risks: CDMers have faced jail time, violent punishment, and extrajudicial execution at the hands of the Myanmar military. The total number of civilians arrested, sentenced, tortured, and killed due to CDM participation is not yet known. However, several sources commonly indicate that those who join CDM are hunted down by the military regardless of their rank, location, and ethnicity, and are punished severely if they are caught. Many CDMers were interrogated and subjected to torture before being transferred to jails. There are instances where civil servants have been convicted on the grounds that they turned a blind eye to CDM participation by those below them, even when they themselves continued to

work. While many have been charged with Section 505 (A), some prominent CDM leaders and participants have been charged under the Counter-Terrorism Law which carries up to life in prison (or a death sentence). For example, a young CDM teacher who is also a former students' union leader was charged with Section 52 (a) of the Counter-Terrorism Law in Meiktila town and sentenced to 7 years in prison, the maximum penalty for the section (RFA Burmese 2022c). A well-known CDM doctor in Mandalay and his family members were detained in April 2022. He was charged with the same section of the Counter-Terrorism law and his properties were cordoned off by the junta (Myanmar NOW 2022).

Conversely, some CDMers have been lucky to face relatively little direct retribution from the junta. Several teachers we spoke with said that their superiors and administrators did not even comment on their disappearance. The enormous size of the CDM has meant that it has been impossible for state organizations to document and track who has left. There are also other reasons that CDMers might experience a lack of consequences: in some cases, it was because their superiors led the way in joining CDM and made for more prominent targets. In other cases, the lack of threat perceived by some CDMers may be due to the Myanmar military deciding that the education sector is not a high priority (compared to, say, healthcare). One university professor reported that the extent of the pressure she faced to return to work consisted of a single letter sent to her by her university's rector; one CDM teacher from Yangon told us that pressure for teachers to return to work was stronger in rural areas than in urban areas: this is because rural teachers provide a range of important community functions that are less visible (or less integral) in Yangon, where more government services are available. Although her family had been harassed by the junta troops looking for CDM teachers, she explained that the level of threat she felt was considerably lower than her friends from university who taught in rural areas, who felt that they were under intense scrutiny.

These stories of relatively lower pressure are the exception, not the rule. Every CDMer we spoke with has faced some type of hardship as a result of their decision, whether in the form of lost income (an issue faced by all CDMers) or direct violent retaliation. Civil servants from the health department, which experienced some of the earliest and most massive strikes, were specifically targeted by the junta. This targeting ramped up significantly in the middle of 2021, when the delta variant of COVID-19 began to overwhelm Myanmar's hospitals. According to CDM health officials and hospital employees we interviewed from Bago city and northern Shan State, hospitals became intensely politicized and militarized. CDM doctors who had stopped working at government hospitals (but continued to provide care from private clinics or from their homes) were violently forced to return to work under threat of physical harm; the SAC made a point of publicizing the names and faces of CDM doctors, demanding they return to work (Global New Light of Myanmar, 26 April 2021). Hospitals were occupied by the military and other security force personnel, who were there in part to enforce work attendance in those public health employees who had not yet become CDM.

The CDMers who spoke with us frequently spoke about feeling lost, abandoned, or neglected since leaving their posts. The two biggest problems are a lack of income and a lack of clear direction for how they should occupy their time. Some more

active individuals have taken up odd jobs (e.g., reselling bamboo scaffolding) and started small businesses, but these odd jobs do not engage CDMers' qualifications. Where there are opportunities for CDMers to participate in activities that match their experience and qualifications – for example, a Ministry of Agriculture extension worker was teaching communities in liberated areas how to cultivate bamboo and food in more efficient and productive ways – these arrangements are typically unpaid, and those CDMers are forced to live on small gifts and donations from the people around them or hope for remittances from CDM support organizations or friends and family abroad. Even those who have extensive savings in banks (or access to Wave Money or Kpay accounts) are afraid to use these funds as the military is known to be actively hunting for financial transactions carried out by the CDMers and CDM supporters. The financial situation is not any easier for CDMers who have fled the country. CDMers in India reported that they have received no contact from the NUG and have been forced to work menial jobs at a fraction of the local market rate for daily labour. The same situation is playing out in Thailand, where CDMers are often abused by Thai employers, who pay non-survivable wages (and in some cases do not pay Burmese migrant workers at all). There is also growing resentment amongst rank-and-file CDMers that they have given up much more than the political leadership, who they observe living (relatively) comfortable lifestyles (driving in cars, eating in restaurants) while CDMers themselves live in cramped or makeshift accommodation and struggle to find enough food to eat.

The NUG has supported CDMers to some extent, although that support seems to be running low. According to respondents from People's Goal and People's Embrace – two organizations that help facilitate security force defections – the extensive support they received in the early days of the revolution has now slowed to a trickle. The same goes for support to other CDMers: Ko Min, a high-ranking CDM government lawyer from Mandalay who slowly withdrew from his post over the course of 2021, at first received rice and medical care from the NUG Office of the Prime Minister, but this has also stopped coming due to a shortage of NUG resources. Ko Min decided to leave the country, and fled to Thailand, where he was brutally beaten and severely injured by the Thai military upon his entry to Thailand; his injuries require ongoing treatment that he now cannot afford (because his injuries also prevent him from working). Ko Min had a relatively senior decision-making position in the NLD government; rank-and-file CDMers are even worse off.

Divides within the CDM

The gap between senior political leadership and junior CDMers is not the only dividing line contributing to frustration and resentment within the movement. Based on our data, we have identified three major divisions within the movement: a) the division between “strong” CDMers, who have remained away from their jobs, versus CDMers who have returned to work and those who chose not to participate in the strike at all; b) the division between people who have remained inside Myanmar, in hiding or in the open, versus those who have fled to border areas or other countries; c) non-Bamar CDMers versus Bamar CDMers, and the related division of English-speaking CDMers versus those who cannot speak English. We

believe it is important to analyse these dividing lines quite closely, because one of the key tasks for the future is figuring out how to mend the internal fractures and disagreements within the CDM movement. These divisions are not insurmountable but overcoming them will be an enormous task for CDM leadership and the leadership of the revolutionary movement more broadly. As we will discuss further in our framework for future action, clear communication around CDM goals and strategy will help ease the tension caused by these divisions. These divisions could also be bridged by learning from labor organizers and labor organization strategies, another point we will revisit in the framework.

“Strong” CDMers versus “returnees” and non-CDMers

The purpose of this section is to consider the different categories of CDMers, and how they relate to non-CDM civil servants. An enormous number of CDMers have fled to “liberated areas,” places held by Ethnic Resistance Organisations (also known as Ethnic Armed Organisations) or Defence Forces (also known as People’s Defence Forces or Local Defence Forces); still more are in hiding inside Myanmar, and many of those are still actively participating in revolutionary actions. For one example, one interviewee told us that she is part of a group of over 700 CDM teachers in southern Myanmar who are trying to form an alternative education system. They are currently providing educational services to several thousand students, completely independently of the government school system, with strong local support. Even though these teachers are not technically in a liberated area, and they run this organization at enormous personal risk, they have managed to stay away from the government and maintain their CDM status. CDMers like these, and their counterparts in hiding in the liberated areas or outside of Myanmar, are what we will call “strong” CDMers.

At the same time, some CDMers – people we will call “returnees” – have chosen to go back to work. In many cases, they were coerced to do so: one university professor reported that her family had been threatened with violence if she did not return to her posting; some of her family members are elderly and unable to travel, so there was no chance for her to leave her region (let alone the country). She had a fairly public administrative position in the university but was still subordinate to the top-ranking university administrators which put her in an awkward situation of being highly visible both as a striker and as a returnee. The pressures that she faced are common to mid-ranking and senior CDM staff. Ko Min, the lawyer mentioned above, nearly considered returning to his post: after moving from Mandalay region to a small apartment on the outskirts of Yangon, groups of dalans (SAC/military informers) who had identified him as a CDMer would repeatedly vandalize his apartment, cutting off his electricity and water supplies and forcing local vendors not to sell him food. In the end, his family decided that they would all flee the country together. The health officials and government primary care workers we spoke with during research for this brief were often torn in a different direction: although some of them were suffering the same types of coercive tactics just mentioned, many felt a calling to assist with the delta outbreak of COVID-19 in mid-2021, and some did return to their posts at this time.

Strong CDMers’ views of returnees are not as harsh as one might expect. Amongst CDMers and in public media about the movement, former CDMers

who have returned to work are sometimes considered to be “payethi” (ပရဲထီး), or “watermelons” – green on the outside and red on the inside, publicly performing civic duties for the SAC (“green”) while still internally sympathizing with the pro-democracy (“red”) movement. This is a somewhat accurate description of the returned university professor we spoke with, who maintains a relatively public profile as a university professor but privately donates money to CDMers in the liberated areas. According to respondents in the education sector in southern Myanmar, when former CDMers have returned to their teaching posts, administrators have described them as “returning from a long vacation” and they have been welcomed back into the school as though nothing happened. It is possible that this relatively mild reaction on the part of school administrators is an indication of tacit support of the movement from within a government-run institution.

More problematic than the divide between CDMers and returnees is that between CDMers and those who have never left their jobs at all. This is probably the widest gulf within the civil service itself and will require serious reconciliation work in the aftermath of the revolution. We spoke with several civil servants who never joined CDM, not necessarily because they support the coup but because of secondary or tertiary responsibilities (e.g., in cases where they were the primary income earner; or, where it was agreed that one family member would join CDM and one would not, etc). These non-CDM civil servants generally felt frustrated with the movement. Even if they agreed with the political goals of CDM, what they experienced inside their ministries was an ever-increasing workload with ever-decreasing staff, an increasingly hostile and embattled administration, and widespread derision from their pro-democracy peers. In extreme cases, non-CDM civil servants were threatened with “social punishment,” which is one of the coercive tactics within the CDM. Social punishment began as a campaign to release the personal details of soldiers’ families, in order to pressure soldiers to join CDM, but it was also used as justification to harass the families of non-CDM civil servants.

However, frustrating it must be to work in ministries that are increasingly short of employees and resources, CDMers’ feelings of resentment towards non-CDM civil servants is extremely high. Some of our interviewees wanted non-CDM employees banned from ever working in government again; some of our interviewees proposed things like loyalty tests for non-CDMers who want to remain in the government after the revolution. More still simply said that they did not know what to do about this group. It is also possible that non-CDMers will take much of the blame for the slow grind of the Spring Revolution – this sentiment was only expressed twice during our interviews, but it is entirely possible that it could be more widespread. Repairing the trust between non-CDM and CDM civil servants – or, in the most extreme case, figuring out how to replace non-CDM civil servants with those not aligned to the previous government – will be crucial to constructing a functional government in the wake of the revolution.

Inside Myanmar versus outside Myanmar

There are very different risks and benefits for CDMers who choose to leave Myanmar and those who stay inside the country. Those who leave are much safer from the military but are mostly left without reliable support networks; those who stay inside the country may be able to be closer to friends and family (although

this is not always the case) and are at much greater risk of persecution by the military. Neither option is categorically “better.” For most CDMers who choose to flee Myanmar proper, there are three main options: India (primarily Mizoram), Thailand (primarily Mae Sot, Mae Hong Son, Chiang Mai, and Chiang Rai), and Myanmar-China border (primarily the area around Laiza). We have not yet had a chance to speak with anyone based in Laiza, the administrative capital of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), and will therefore focus on the situations in northeast India and northern Thailand, before returning to the general consequences of choosing to remain inside Myanmar. CDMers with solid connections to EROs generally have the highest chance of successfully fleeing the country; CDMers with solid connections to the NUG, on the other hand, have not found those connections useful for crossing borders, but have been able to rely on those connections useful when they arrive in border countries. Both groups (the EROs and the NUG) are necessary support structures for the CDM, but EROs’ experience with transborder operations and wartime logistics means they’ve played a particularly important role in addressing the material needs of CDMers.

According to the head of a Mizoram-based CDM support organization formed by the CDMers themselves, there are between 1,000 and 1,200 CDMers in Mizoram – there may be more in the region who the organization has not yet had a chance to contact and account for. CDMers there have been forced to live on extremely small incomes (500 Indian rupees a day or less; approximately USD 6) to do odd jobs such as house cleaning and construction. This is largely because they do not have any Indian citizenship documentation, and thus have little recourse if employers should choose to exploit them. That said, the state government of Mizoram has been very accommodating to CDMers, other pro-democracy activists, and politicians and has been working with Indian CSOs based on the border to help welcome them while still keeping out drug traffickers and other more “destructive” border-crossers (Times of India). According to that CDM support group, even though the CDMers in Aizawl are fairly well-organized, and they are aware of Dr. Zaw Wai Soe’s CDM support team inside the NUG, they have not yet made direct engagement with the NUG or received financial support.

This situation stands in contrast to that in Thailand, where there is a much larger Myanmar diaspora and much stronger presence of Myanmar political actors. Compared to India, CDMers in Thailand have received some direct NUG support (especially those who have defected from the security forces and those with good connections to NUG decision-makers). However, the Thai government – which remains a military-controlled junta with close ties to the Myanmar military – has been openly hostile to CDMers in Thailand. Although the work and income situation for CDMers in India is exploitative, the situation in Thailand is arguably worse, where several interviewees reported not being paid at all for several weeks of factory work. The daily minimum wage of 345 Thai Baht per day (about \$10 USD) is out of reach to anyone without some form of Thai documentation. The forms of Thai documentation available to migrants are vast and confusing: the most common form of protection that CDMers in Mae Sot have been so-called “police cards” issued by the Mae Sot police, which carry a monthly fee of 600 Baht (about \$18 USD – an enormous expense for CDMers), which only prevents migrants from being deported or extorted within Mae Sot city. If they cross the border into a different district, they

can be arrested and extorted for money, with the possibility of being sent back to Myanmar.

For CDMers who have remained inside Myanmar, the risks are much more varied. As noted above, some former CDMers have returned to work without particularly heavy consequences; some have returned to work under intense duress and coercion. For any CDMer with a high enough profile to be known by administrators in Naypyidaw, leaving the country through official channels is impossible, as immigration officials hold lists of CDMers' passport numbers. The feelings of hopelessness and listlessness felt by many in India and Thailand are also felt by tens of thousands of CDMers within Myanmar who are now left without viable career options as long as the SAC remains in power. For CDMers with skills that are directly applicable to the armed conflict – health care providers, security force defectors, and to a lesser extent food and agriculture specialists – there are some opportunities to carry out meaningful work inside Myanmar, but this work comes with very limited compensation. Those who do support the armed struggle through direct action do so at direct risk to their own lives. Of course, there are also CDMers who have tried to get employment in the private sector, but they have also faced challenges. Due to the continuing pressures of the military, CDMers often face difficulties in re-entering the workplace outside. In some cases, the military permanently closed down businesses or revoked their business licences if they were found to employ CDMers. However, such measures do not apply equally to all CDM participants, but mostly prominent CDM participants or those who have been reported, said a CDMer working with a local organisation. Since there are still hundreds of thousands of CDMers out there, it is impossible for the military to compile the list of everyone's names and backgrounds, but the point is that even CDMers changing over to the private sector are not immune to persecution.

Survival is the main reason that CDMers flee Myanmar. Overall, supporting CDMers inside Myanmar is perhaps the greatest immediate problem for the movement to resolve. The CDMers who remain inside Myanmar are in a much better position to take direct action against the SAC (or to build alternative governance and service provision structures) than those who are outside of the country. Conversely, all the CDMers we spoke to who are currently outside of Myanmar are aware that their absence will make it more difficult to overthrow the junta in any kind of immediate future. Nevertheless, majority of CDMers in India and Thailand are waiting on refugee applications to third countries – indeed, one of the reasons that Mae Sot has a larger draw than Aizawl is the presence of a UNHCR office there and the possibility of direct applications for asylum. The bottom line is that daily life is barely tenable for many CDMers regardless of where they live. Fleeing the country may solve some of the direct risks of remaining in the literal line of the military's fire, but it comes with other risks and burdens.

Ethnic and linguistic divisions within CDM

Ethnicity and language play significant roles in the opportunities available to CDMers. This is especially apparent amongst CDMers with ties to the Chin and Karen communities. The border areas with India are much more easily navigable

for CDMers with Chin heritage or strong connections to Chin State, which has many cultural and linguistic overlaps with Mizoram. The same goes for CDMers with Karen heritage or strong ties to Karen communities: the KNU and its affiliates play an enormous role in hosting CDMers fleeing from other regions of Myanmar; KNU-affiliated armed groups are also helping to support and train PDFs. CDMers with Karen heritage have found it much easier to make connections in Thailand, which has an enormous Karen population (both from recent refugees and from indigenous populations who resided in Thailand before the modern Thai-Myanmar border was established). In Thailand, migrants who 1) can credibly claim (or perform) non-Bamar and non-Thai “ethnic-ness” and 2) who can competently speak Thai are eligible for “highland resident’s cards,” which afford much more flexibility than the aforementioned “police cards” and other more limited forms of Thai residency permission.

CDMers who are quite distant from these communities – examples from our interviewees include Bamar civil servants from upper Myanmar, or from strongly Bamar communities in Yangon – often have trouble accessing these border spaces and are subject to more predatory brokers than those who are already inside ethnic groups with transborder populations. However, Bamar-speaking CDMers have much better access to counselling and advising materials and services than those whose primary language is not Burmese. Mental health support is an urgent need for nearly all CDMers, but it is generally not available in languages other than Burmese or English. Almost all online-based services, training, and materials provided by the NUG, and other CDM support groups are either in Burmese or in English.

Similarly, CDMers who speak English have an easier time leaving the country than those who do not; their access to support resources is also greater than those who do not speak English. One CDMer from a large ministry based in Naypyitaw was able to flee the country quite easily by getting a similar role in a private company in the middle east, a role that they were able to attain based on their English language skills. Another CDMer that we talked to is doing a fellowship in a European based research institute. Countless education and training opportunities have been offered to CDMers by foreign organizations, but these are frequently limited to English (Myanmar-led education and training opportunities more often tend to provide Burmese language content, and more rarely, content in the other languages of Myanmar). Like the divisions between the NUG leadership and junior CDMers mentioned above, this language gap is a reflection of pre-coup class and educational disparities. It is not a new dynamic in the wake of CDM, but a disparity that has been exacerbated quite intensely by the coup.

Security sector defectors: A relatively small but extremely important group

Although security sector defectors only make up a small number of the total interviews we conducted as part of this project, they receive special attention because security sector defections have been found to be possibly the most important factor for the long-term success of nonviolent resistance movements (Stephan and Chenoweth 2008). Although this fact is somewhat complicated in Myanmar by the prevalence of military and police defectors joining PDFs as trainers and in other

roles – thus supporting the violent opposition movement as well as the nonviolent movement – we still maintain that encouraging security sector CDM participation should be a top priority for the NUG and other proponents of the Spring Revolution. In this section, we discuss the factors that have led to security sector defections. In the next section of this analytical brief, we will consider ways to encourage more security sector defections in the future, and some ways that CDMers from the security forces might be useful in reforming the security sector in Myanmar's eventual post-revolutionary landscape.

We interviewed one former soldier, one former police officer, and a volunteer with one of the support organizations set up to help security force defectors adapt to their new lives. Although defector support organizations like People's Embrace report defections numbers in the thousands (The Irrawaddy), both defectors interviewed for this project acted alone. This stands in stark contrast to employees from the health and education sectors: while CDMers from those two sectors reported instantaneous and massive social pressure to join the CDM, the defectors we spoke with both stayed in their positions for several months after the coup. In both cases, those defectors made individual choices to defect and join CDM based on their observations of their colleague's brutality in the wake of the coup. It is worth briefly recounting each of their trajectories:

- **Defector 1** was a military soldier stationed in Yangon and had been posted to Yangon's traffic control centre as soon as the coup occurred. After witnessing police brutality and military atrocities through the CCTV cameras he was monitoring, he realized that he could no longer remain a member of the military. He fled the country directly without the aid of any EROs or PDFs, and made contact with an NUG representative in Thailand, who helped him arrange housing but was unable to provide other forms of support.
- **Defector 2** was a criminal investigation officer, who had been re-assigned to protect a hospital and prevent health workers from striking and joining CDM. He began considering defection after the hospital he was guarding became full far beyond capacity by victims of military violence and police brutality but remained at his post through most of the rainy season in 2021. When a close friend's brother was murdered by police during a street protest, he decided to take a break from his job and consider CDM participation. He took sick leave, and returned to his hometown; during that time, some of his colleagues asked him if he had become CDM. Although he was tempted to pressure them to join him, he was worried about his family's safety, and told his colleagues that he had contracted COVID and needed more time at home. Then, he slowly made his way to a KNU-controlled area where he joined a PDF as a trainer.

We want to highlight the fact that both of these defectors left their positions for specific ethical reasons. They were aware of the existence of CDM as a broad public movement, but the pressure they felt to leave their posts crucially came from their own ethical reasoning. This is both a serious challenge and an indication of how democracy proponents could help encourage more defections and collaborate more strategically with those who have already defected. The fact that soldiers feel an ethical (rather than social) pressure to join CDM is a challenge because ethical

pressure by itself cannot easily translate into a broad-base movement of the type driven by social pressure. However, stories of soldiers like these (and the thousands of others who have joined People's Goal and People's Embrace) are a reminder that soldiers still have personal values and ethical beliefs that are not wholly dictated by the military, and thus provide a potential locus for putting pressure on them to join the CDM.

Support systems already in place

In this section, we will consider the support initiatives that already exist, some of the risks and problems associated with them, and some of the good ideas they present that could be a basis for improvement. Specifically, we will consider a) alternative employment mechanisms for CDMers (e.g., private clinics and independent educational organizations), b) the role of the NUG, and c) the role of EROs. The data discussed here comes largely from CDMers themselves, as well as an array of secondary sources. Although many of these initiatives are grassroots in nature, the CRPH/NUG also has its own CDM support systems in place; those initiatives will be discussed in further detail in section "*Alternative governance structures: The role of Ethnic Resistance Organisations*" below.

Fundraising for CDMers

To financially support the CDM civil servants, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, composed of lawmakers elected in 2020 general election, formed the CRPH-Official Fundraising Program (CRPH-OFP) in April 2021. Member organisations and individuals, mostly from Myanmar diaspora communities, received official fundraiser certificates from the committee and run weekly or monthly fundraising activities in their respective countries (Anonymous 2021). In August 2021, the NUG's Ministry of Planning and Finance initiated an online-based lottery program called "Spring lottery" with an aim to raise 20 billion kyats (USD 11 million) to support CDMers. The NUG announced that 70 percent of the lottery income will be used to fund CDMers, and 30 percent as monthly prizes. Although the program was temporarily halted due to security reasons and accounts were frozen by the military, it has raised USD 8 million (Abuza 2022). The official page of the Spring lottery indicates that over 180,000 CDMers have been connected with the program, around 50 percent of them are from the Ministry of Education, and more than ten thousand CDMers received funding through the program as of 3 August 2022. Apart from the NUG initiatives, there are some well-known fundraising programs such as One-to-One CDM campaign and Wine Gyi Chote (WGC) Campaign. These programs received hundreds of millions kyat in donations and were able to support thousands of CDMers. However, due to the military's strict control over online payments and increasing public interest on funding armed movement, funding for the CDMers has decreased significantly in 2022.

Education and Health Initiatives: Successes and Setbacks

A member of the People's Administrative Body (ပြည်သူ့အုပ်ချုပ်ရေးအဖွဲ့) based in Chin state stated that more than five thousand teachers, including CDM teachers, are voluntarily running schools and a couple of CDM healthcare workers are doing

mobile clinics in villages under its controlled. Only some of these volunteers received regular donations or telephone bills from locals or diaspora communities. Health workers, notably in Kayah State and northern Shan State, have been absorbed into further People's Administrative Bodies and ERO health provision structures (respectively). In TNLA-controlled areas of northern Shan, for example, CDM doctors and nurses have been provided with accommodation and (albeit limited) incomes and provisions in exchange for working alongside TNLA medics. Although opportunities for healthcare CDMers such as these do exist, education initiatives have thus far had the greatest success in absorbing large numbers of CDM staff and providing alternative services – but have also led to some serious disasters. We will provide one example of a successful CDMer absorption initiative, and one example of how these initiatives can go wrong.

During interviews for this project, we became aware of a community organization in Mon State⁵ that has been able to successfully absorb more than 700 teachers and health department workers. This organization supports approximately 700 CDM teachers and health department workers, among other measures. They also provide small grants for those CDMers to start small businesses, and act as an informal coordinating body to help CDMers move from one place to another, help them find safe houses, and find ways to use their skills. Healthcare providers supported by this organization offer telehealth services, to prevent the risks associated with running in-person clinics; they also provide online teacher training and seminars for students, which are held via secure online platforms. Since this organization takes intensive security precautions and operates only over secure channels, it has been able to conduct its activities with relatively little pressure from the military despite its relatively large size. It is also important to note that it is operating on a community scale, focusing on particular regions of one state. Given that it is funded directly by regional community members, its fundraising efforts and operational structure have been able to maintain a low profile.

Higher-profile union-wide efforts appear to have had less success. Kaung For You Federal Private School (K4U), another online-based education initiative, was initially a major site of employment for hundreds of CDM education staff; it even received official approval from the NUG's education ministry. K4U was meant to run as a fully online education system, allowing CDMers and students to participate from anywhere inside or outside the country. Although it provided employment for hundreds of CDM teachers and education for many thousands of students, the organization was destroyed by a data breach. The data breach led to the arrest of K4U's founders, arrests, and threats of many K4U teachers, and military and dala blackmailing of students' parents. It had looked like online education systems could be a useful temporary replacement for Myanmar's collapsing education system. But unless the people running online education systems have adequate data security knowledge and systems, future online education initiatives will risk facing the same fate as K4U. This incident hurt the image of the NUG, which had been vocally promoting online education as a solution for the post-CDM education crisis, as it specifically gave K4U its stamp of approval. A major part of K4U's demise was its large scale and public profile, which made it far too easy to target and dismantle. Lower-profile and genuinely community-based organizations will make much more

⁵ We have withheld the organization's name in order to protect their safety and privacy.

durable and sustainable sites for CDM employment going forward.

Some CDMers have chosen to develop entrepreneurial solutions to their lack of support from outside organizations; in places where CDMers have the latitude to collaborate with one another without military knowledge – such as in Aizawl and Mae Sot – some groups of CDMers have started small businesses, generally in fields unrelated to their training and experience, but enough to find ways to survive on a day-to-day basis. For one example, a group of CDMers in Chiang Mai have started a business making lwal ate (traditional shoulder bags) for the Thai tourist market; another group in Mae Sot has been experimenting with fabric printing techniques to produce t-shirts sold through Facebook and TikTok. There are dozens if not hundreds of small initiatives like these. These small businesses are not a permanent solution to the problem of CDMer unemployment and underemployment, but they are worth specifically pointing to as a temporary measure, and as evidence of CDMers' flexibility.

Alternative governance structures: The role of the National Unity Government

A member of the NUG, speaking to us on the condition of confidentiality, was able to clarify the NUG's official position on CDMers, and what role the NUG should play in supporting them. The NUG formed a CDM Success Committee in April 2021 with an aim to sustain CDM movement and support CDMer across the country. The committee includes all NUG ministers, the current NUG Prime Minister being the chairperson, and Health and Education Minister Dr. Zaw Wai Soe being the secretary. This committee also includes representatives of the CRPH and two civil society networks that have been supporting the CDMers since the beginning of the movement. In addition to ministers, all NUG ministries have designated one focal person in the committee. One of the core members of the CDM Success Committee said that each ministry has established five CDM task forces: financial support, healthcare support, emotional support, income generation, and data security support. These task forces have regular meetings and have provided capacity building and psychosocial support programs such as Psychosocial First Aid (PFA) for CDMers. The NUG also plays a coordinator role between CDMers and other third parties that provide counseling services. The committee official said that while the NUG does not prioritize among different CDMers as individuals, police and soldiers' defection are given priority as a strategy to quickly end armed violence.

So far, the committee has more than 350,000 people registered as CDMers, more than 60 percent of whom are females. According to the information obtained from local sources, Chin State and Karenni State are the regions with the highest participation in CDM, estimated at about 90 percent of government employees. These regions, including Kachin, Karen, Sagaing and Magway where the local defence forces and/or the EROs have enjoyed territorial controls, seem to have the most developed systems for absorbing former CDMers. Several CDMers are also actively involved in parallel administration of NUG and other local resistance groups. Although it is difficult to know the exact number, an official of the CDM Success Committee stated that in one health sector alone, there are more than 40,000 healthcare workers working with the NUG Ministry of Health, all of whom are volunteers. The NUG, which has been criticized for not having a clear policy on CDM for nearly two years since the coup, is now in the process of drafting a CDM policy which will be

announced before the end of the year. Before making it public, the policy, which also includes definitions of CDM and the NUG's plan towards non-CDMers, will be submitted to the NUCC for approval.

Alternative governance structures: The role of Ethnic Resistance Organisations

EAOs play an important role in facilitating the safe passage of CDMers around, out of, and back into Myanmar; they have also played a key role in assisting the PDFs who form the armed wing of the anti-coup resistance. As we will explain in our recommendation framework (section 4), maintaining strong ties to EROs will be crucial for the success of CDM and the revolution in general; however, EROs are not a perfect solution to the challenges that face the CDM. Some EROs have their own specific histories and political goals, which are not necessarily aligned with the interests of the CDM or its proponents in the NUG. Many EROs have been fighting for autonomy for decades and have seen relatively little progress at the union (Myanmar-wide) level. ERO leadership may not necessarily want to collaborate with NUG via the NUCC, which may bring back the same frustrations (from EROs' perspectives) as the NCA consultations and the "21st Century Panglong Conference," neither of which seem to have had a lasting or positive impact on the role of EROs in relation to the central government of Myanmar.

The level of support for CDMers from particular EROs⁶ has been remarkable, especially given that EROs do not necessarily stand to benefit from an alliance with the CDM. There is no obvious political reason for EROs to trust or support the CDM, which consists largely of former civil servants; indeed, the presence of Myanmar government health or education staff in ERO-controlled areas has often been seen as an attempt to "Burmanize" areas or bring culturally autonomous areas into the fold of state hegemony. Therefore, the present alliance between former civil servants and EROs is an important relationship to maintain and develop. From our perspective, formed by our conversations with CDMers, the mutual support arrangements between EROs and CDM civil servants that have emerged in places like Kayah State and KNU-controlled territories could provide a kind of starting point for structuring a post-revolutionary federal administration. This is especially true in areas of Karen State and Shan State that were already administered by EROs before the military coup.

Unintended Consequences of the CDM

As we have stated above, the CDM continues to be extremely popular, and is still viewed as the vanguard of anti-junta revolutionary action. However, the near-total shutdown of government services caused by the CDM has led to both negative and positive unintended consequences, especially in the health and education sectors: CDM strikes coincided with Myanmar's third (and most virulent) wave of coronavirus infections; the education system, already severely hindered by COVID-19, continues to have a catastrophic teacher shortage and thus a lack of

⁶ Notably the Karen National Union (KNU), Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Chin National Front (CNF), Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP), and Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), who are publicly supportive of the CDM and the NUG.

instruction for students.

In June 2021, as health care sector strikes and walkouts reached peak participation, a new and much more virulent variant of the coronavirus emerged: the “delta” variant of the coronavirus, responsible for Myanmar’s third and largest wave of infections. Thus, CDM healthcare strikes – i.e., the depletion of Myanmar’s government health services – coincided with possibly the largest public health crisis in Myanmar’s recent history. The delta wave was a disaster even in countries with comparatively robust public health systems; in Myanmar, it was catastrophic. Due to CDM strikes, state hospitals were largely shut or working at greatly reduced capacity during the delta wave (Nikkei 2021). However, very few inside Myanmar voiced any criticism for CDMers’ decision to strike; instead, anger surrounding the delta wave was directed towards the SAC. For the junta, the emergence of the delta variant presented an opportunity to further politicize healthcare. As the third wave began, the junta arrested the head of Myanmar’s vaccination rollout (Associated Press); they also closely monitored oxygen sales in order to identify where and when CDM health professionals had established non-government clinics. Having identified private or voluntary clinics, military personnel would arrest and detain the doctors employed in them (Public Services International).

The education sector was also badly damaged by CDM strikes, leaving huge gaps in students’ educations. That said, there is slightly more room for optimism in the education sector compared to the health sector. The sudden large-scale disappearance of state-led education in Myanmar has caused the emergence of an enormous range of alternative education systems across the country, both in the liberated areas controlled by Ethnic Resistance Organizations and even in the ostensibly junta-controlled heartland. Although these programs do not provide educational services at the same scale as the government school system, they are extremely important as a political counter to the SAC-run department of education. These alternative education programs are also likely to gain a lot of support from parents of school-aged children: in the early days of CDM, many parents joined the movement by refusing to send their children to school. Having an alternative educational system in place would allow them to continue to support the movement.

The SAC is now desperate to bring teachers back to its schools and has begun to beg for CDM teachers to return to the classroom (Mizzima 2022). At the same time, many teachers and education administrators in Myanmar have taken their sudden joblessness (as CDM participants) as an opportunity to experiment with new pedagogies and new technological advances in distance education. The new educational landscape has also allowed space for new conversations about educational projects that seemed politically impossible in the pre-coup era: for example, there have been proposals to start universities and other large-scale educational projects in the liberated areas, i.e., territories held by the KIA and KNU. In our analysis, this is a positive development – albeit one that has come at an enormous human and educational toll. Still, it is unlikely that these conversations would be happening right now without the colossal shock of the coup. Myanmar’s students are certainly suffering right now – as a primary knock-on consequence of the CDM – but in the long run, the vast array of educational initiatives that have emerged in post-coup Myanmar could present an opportunity to build a

more equitable, widely distributed, and responsive education system in post-revolutionary Myanmar.

We do not intend to unfairly criticize CDMers by pointing out the movement's potential to inflict unintended damage. All revolutionary action carries the potential for harm, and the CDM has generally done a remarkable job of repairing its own damage, for instance in the way that CDMers have made enormous contributions to the emergent underground health and education systems. Across Myanmar and its diaspora, CDMers also play a crucial role in distributing resources and money to where they are most needed. Our ultimate purpose is to strengthen the CDM specifically and the pro-democracy movement more broadly. Considering the unintended consequences of the movement is an important part of this process and will inform more strategic decisions in the future.

Section 2.

Framework for the Future

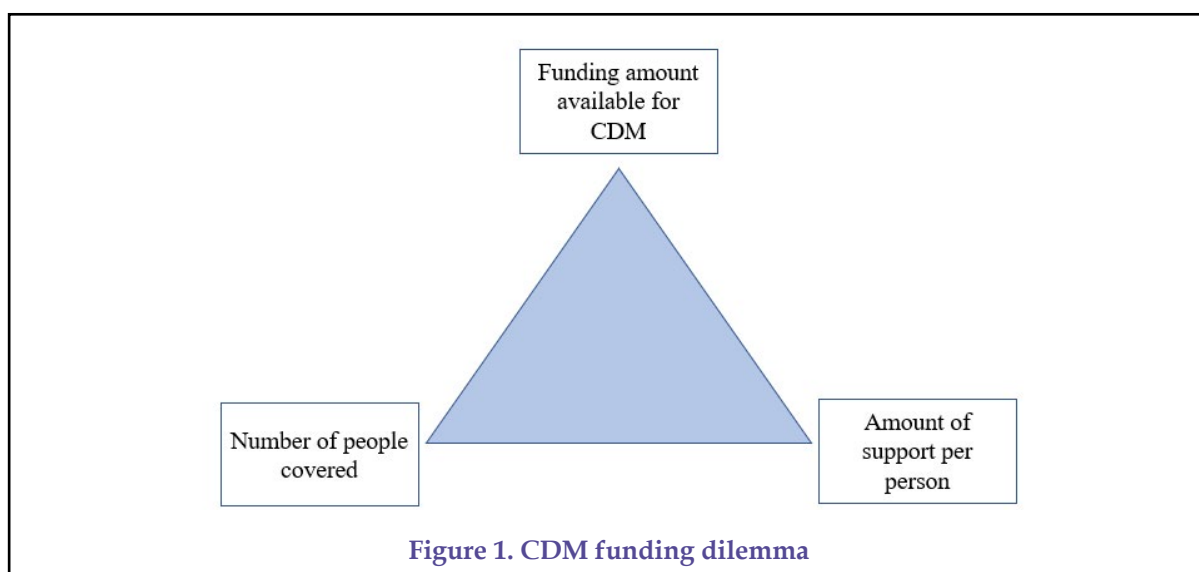
This section is intended to provide guidance for CDMers and their allies as the counter coup revolution approaches its second year. It is divided into five parts, each of which address a different challenge as identified in our “Findings” section. We begin with the most pressing challenge – the lack of funding to support CDMers who are now out of work. From there, we try to address the next most pressing challenges, namely, CDMers’ feelings of listlessness and the lines of division within the movement. The next three parts point toward the evolution of the CDM in the future, namely: how to weaken the military; how to engage the international community (foreign governments and foreign aid organizations); and some new tactics that could help nudge the playing field in favour of the pro-democracy revolution.

Navigating the CDM funding dilemma

The most significant reason behind people leaving the CDM is the lack of financial stability that CDMers have experienced. The “money problem” may seem relatively straightforward for CDMers, given most are not asking for much. Yet the early success of the CDM movement means that the funding needs are large. Yet fundraising either directly for CDM, or indirectly through wider NUG fundraising efforts, is difficult.

- Recognize that the CDM movement faces a funding and support dilemma.**

At the moment the NUG finds itself in a situation where it is receiving requests for additional support from people who currently receive some support and requests for support from CDMers who currently receive no support. And yet the funds for CDM support are very limited. As such, it has few options (and difficult choices to make). If it chooses to expand the number of people covered, it must raise more funds or decrease the amount of funding each person receives. If it wants to increase the amount of funding available per person, then if it cannot increase the amount of funding available, then it must reduce the number of people covered by the support.



- **Explore whether to adopt a strategy of “contract to expand”.** NUG strategy and this brief both identify the high potential value of increasing funding to support certain groups (e.g., funding security force defections) as a means to achieve the goals of the revolution faster. Yet if funding amounts are constrained, then the only feasible means to achieve this may be to reduce funding going to other groups. Deciding which groups to receive more funding and which receive less could depend on the sector the group is part of, the locations of the individual or group, or the seniority of the CDMer. For instance, the NUG might want to give additional funding to CDMers of newly liberated areas since, in addition to receiving support, the CDMers here are more able to directly apply their capabilities for the benefit of communities.
- **Ensure communication around funding reflects the difficult funding situation the movement is in.** CDMers’ disillusionment is largely from their lack of income and lack of other opportunities. During the early phase of the CDM movement announcements were made by NUG around CDMers staff salaries being paid that may have helped encourage people to join the CDM but which have proven impossible to honour. The research has found that people understand there are financial constraints and can be more understanding if the situation is properly explained to them. The NUG should openly talk about these challenges to help manage expectations and avoid making commitments that are difficult to keep. While no one wants to be the “bearer of bad news”, receiving a clear answer can be better than not knowing, as it at least gives people information they can use to plan their lives. The NUG has good reasons why it is currently impossible for them to support all CDMers.
- **CDM can support parallel efforts to collect taxes to sustain the resistance.** This recommendation may not sound urgent; however, it can help fund CDMers in newly liberated areas and provide a vision for what the future could be. One of the complaints we heard many times is that there is no clear sense of a goal for CDM in particular and the revolution in general, and a lack of vision for what the future will look like. In local areas where the NUG has greater territorial control, there are ongoing efforts by PABs to raise revenues through donations, fees and taxes. While the amounts collected as taxes (i.e., regular and predictable involuntary payments to a governing entity) are likely to remain small, even small tax collection can help make the larger political point that CDMers and the NUG are the legitimate civil servants and government of the country. Greater tax paying is one more way to give CDMers a sense of what a future might actually look like in material terms. CDMers with a historical experience collecting taxes or fees could also play a role.

Clarifying strategy, communication and collaboration

After funding, the two biggest challenges faced by the CDM are a lack of strategic direction and a wide range of internal divisions. These challenges can be mitigated

by clearer communication systems from the NUG and from CDM leadership, and also by identifying how CDMers can collaborate with one another and with their supporters to strengthen the movement and improve the revolution's chances of success.

- **The NUG needs to communicate its CDM strategy more clearly and more publicly.** The NUG does have a strategy for making use of CDMers and continuing to develop their skills; furthermore, as stated above, the NUG's decision to prioritize security force defections is in line with research on nonviolent regime change. However, this logic is not made clear to CDMers who are feeling frustrated right now. In particular, the NUG's CDM support committee should use the widest possible variety of channels (press releases, Facebook pages, pages on the NUG's own website, etc) to explain their rationale behind their CDM priorities: e.g., why are they targeting security force defections? What should non-security CDMers do in the meantime, and how can the NUG help them with those activities? What role will CDMers be asked to play in areas where the SAC exercises limited territorial control. If the NUG can answer questions like these, they will be better positioned to guide the activities of those involved in CDM and preserve the morale of the CDMers who are already on their side.
- **Develop and communicate mechanisms for CDMers to know and access what grassroots support may be available for them.** This is a high-risk action, because it would entail compiling lists of local CDM support organizations, which could very easily serve as a list of targets for the SAC. However, it would be useful for the NUG (for example) to maintain a some kind of directory of CDM support groups, so that the NUG CDM Success Committee could direct lost or struggling CDMers towards local groups who would be able to help them.
- **Mental health has not received enough attention by support groups but is an emergency necessity for CDMers.** The NUG/NUCC recognizes this issue and has made it part of their strategy for supporting CDMers. That said, this is an area here external (i.e., international) actors could provide support of various kinds. Support group style seminars (whether pre-recorded or in real time) and online counselling services could be donated; the former could be conducted in Burmese by Burmese-speakers with relevant counselling experience, but the latter are generally only available in English.
- **Data security support should be a priority for everyone – but especially for donors and other external CDM supporters.** As demonstrated in the example of Kaung Education Network, the highly-online nature of the opposition movement will only be sustainable as long as its members recognize the importance of digital and data security and have systems and tools in place to understand and manage data security threats and risks. Specific tools e.g., high-quality VPNs and Intrusion Detection/Prevention Systems (IDSs and IPSs) can help, but organizations will benefit from regular data security training and support to design systems that manage risks while meeting organizational needs. This is especially important for public organizations that employ a large number of CDMers (e.g., Spring University Myanmar).

It has already been shown that data breaches can result in harm and quickly erode public trust and the confidence of CDMers who are considering collaborating with such institutions.

- **CDMers and labor organizers explore how to collaborate on future actions.** CDMers could learn from labor organizational strategies. Labor organizers and union members are still active in protests and strikes within Myanmar, at enormous personal risk. CDMers and laborers could work together to manipulate production of certain commodities in order to put pressure on Myanmar's business community. The General Strike Committee and GSC-Nationalities regularly called for this during the peak of public protests in early to mid-2021, and two labor organizers we interviewed are still interested in collaborating with public sector CDMers. The CDM could also meaningfully adopt some labor union organizational strategies, such as electing representative leadership and developing robust dispute-resolution mechanisms internal to the CDM and its various support organizations. These organizational strategies may help solve the problems that have arisen from upper-level ministerial officials refusing to join CDM. They could also play a key role in bridging some of the divisions within the CDM.

Encouraging military defections and weakening the military

Right now, the NUG is prioritizing military defections, which is a strategy that is in line with research on the success of nonviolent revolutions. According to Chenoweth and Stephan (2008), the strongest indicator of a resistance movement's likelihood of causing regime change or significant political concessions is its ability to induce security sector force defections. The reasons for this are somewhat obvious: security sector force defections tip the balance of power away from the entrenched state in very material ways. Gaining a critical mass of security defections can also provide leverage for creating divisions within the military, which will weaken its ability to resist the PDFs and EROs and weaken its hold on power more broadly.

- **Support People's Goal and People's Embrace.** For democracy proponents within Myanmar, this might mean conducting fundraising activities that specifically target defectors; it also might mean working behind-the-scenes by speaking with members of the family who are in the military. For donors and those outside the country, especially foreign governments, providing technical support to People's Goal and People's Embrace is a very concrete way to draw more troops out of the military and into the pro-democracy and revolutionary movements. People's Goal in particular has been publicly requesting technical assistance for experts in the production of propaganda and social media marketing. We know from our research that security personnel who defect are likely to do so due to ethical commitments rather than partisan ones; this fact can be used to target potential defectors.
- **Develop clear and positive roles that defectors can play – either in an unarmed or armed capacity.** Beyond material concerns like salaries, the biggest problem faced by CDMers is a feeling of listlessness and uselessness. There are already initiatives attempting to address these issues for CDMers

from the health and education departments, but there is not apparently a comparable initiative for defectors. Defectors have already played important roles in the PDFs as trainers and advisors on the military's tactics; however, there is a risk that PDFs may see defectors as dalans; there is also a risk that defectors may want to eschew violence, if they left their original post on ethical grounds. In that case, it is important to capitalize on defectors' other capabilities. Many military personnel have at least rudimentary skills in logistics and planning; these skills could be used to support distributing humanitarian aid. The roles offered would need to be adjusted according to the sensitivity of the task and the degree to which the defector is seen as trustworthy. Infiltration is always a risk in the CDM, and doubly so with military CDMers.

- **Appeal to security personnel's ethics and values through open propaganda and "backchannels."** As mentioned in our findings, security personnel tend to join CDM based on shifts in (or new realizations of) their personal ethics or values. The social pressures that helped galvanize the CDM in other branches of the civil service do not necessarily apply to the security forces, where obedience is harshly enforced. One key area where foreign governments could usefully assist the NUG in general and the CDM in particular is to help design propaganda campaigns to encourage soldiers to defect by appealing to their ethics and civic values.
- **Create internal divisions in the armed forces.** Although the SAC has brought the police more tightly under direct military control, the various branches of the Myanmar military can be divided and weakened. This is a classic revolutionary strategy, and it has played a key role in successful anti-military revolutions (most prominently in the Philippines). CDMers could, for example, target police battalions that are being drawn into the guerrilla wars in the dry zone and convince them not to fight; CDMers could also focus on infiltrating police or military units in particular areas. The more internal divisions that can be created, the weaker the military will be.
- **Additionally, prioritize new high-ranking strikers:** The lack of high-ranking CDMers has given lower-ranking CDMers the sense that their superiors have abandoned them. Many of the NUG's former colleagues are still in high-ranking positions within the SAC; if several of those high-ranking bureaucrats or military officers can be persuaded to leave their posts, it could renew enthusiasm for the CDM mission and demonstrate to junior CDMers that their struggle has not been pointless. The most effective way to accomplish this is probably for NUG members themselves to put direct pressure on their former colleagues. This applies to both military officers and high-ranking bureaucrats alike – it is also related to our next sub-section, because the international community can play an important role here. Australia, for one example, has developed a creative plan to drive military defections by offering ex-soldiers asylum in Australia. This would not work for every soldier and bureaucrat in the country, given the enormous number of strikers and other countries' limited abilities to absorb asylum seekers, but programs like Australia's could provide a means to target high-ranking individuals,

whose defections could renew morale amongst current CDMers and drive new defections as well.

Engaging Foreign Governments and Aid Organizations

The NUG, and the CDMers who align themselves with it publicly, are in an awkward position. They represent the legitimate government of Myanmar, but are unable to receive foreign government aid or engage in direct collaborations with major foreign organizations. Some governments, most notably Czechia and Australia, have undertaken foreign policies that give the NUG a degree of formal standing. These steps are important, but as long as the NUG claims to be a government in exile, it may be a good idea for both foreign governments and CDMers to consider creative or alternative arrangements for strengthening the CDM. If CDMers received termination letters (or retirement letters) from their respective departments after participating in CDM, they have less difficulties in finding jobs and going abroad. INGOs/NGOs may not appoint CDMers as full-time employees, but as consultants or paid volunteers who are excluded from their formal organisational structures to reduce the likelihood that the SAC discovers the support. One of the NGOs we interviewed said that they prioritized recruiting CDM civil servants and now employed five of them. We make two recommendations, one to CDM-led organizations and one to international aid organizations:

- **CDM-led organizations should explore whether establishing themselves as NGOs offers a means to attract foreign aid funding.** One way to work around this is for CDMers to rebrand their organizations as NGOs or CSOs, and distance themselves somewhat from the NUG, given the current challenges NUG faces in receiving direct funding from donors. CDMers are skilled workers and capable of carrying out development programs if the resources and support are provided to them. CDMers need jobs and things to do – ideally, jobs that relate to their skill sets developed within government.
- **International aid organizations should maintain ties to their partner organizations within Myanmar, many of which are still active and could usefully absorb CDMers.** In this case, it would be best for international aid organizations and governmental aid bodies to prioritize organizations that are truly community-based and community-supported: those types of organizations are likely to be working on projects that direct resources to the areas that need CDMers most, and will likely already be working with them to fill gaps in health, education, or other government services. One example of a truly community-supported organization is the Backpack Health Worker Team (BPHWT), a local NGO based on the Thai-Myanmar border that has historically been an aid partner of health organizations and provided health care to people in conflict regions. Since the coup, the BPHWT has stepped in to provide primary care services on a voluntary basis to communities impacted by the post-CDM shutdown of government medical facilities, as well as in areas controlled by the PDFs or other groups. Organizations like BPHWT could benefit tremendously even from small donations and play an active role in giving CDMers (and others impacted by the coup) a sense of

purpose.

New Tactics: Presenting an Uncontrollable Bureaucracy

As described in section “*Defining Myanmar’s Civil Disobedience Movement*” above, the notion of “civil disobedience” has become synonymous in Myanmar with a public sector strike. However, nonviolent resistance encompasses a vast range of tactics beyond striking – some of which could be readily employed even by active civil servants. Two valuable resources to draw on include Michael Beer and Gene Sharp (1978), which can be found at <http://tactics.nonviolenceinternational.net>; and the Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS – see also Popovic 2007, cited below).

Crucially, if tactics like the following can become a regular part of the repertoire of CDM going forward, they could possibly heal some of the rift between non-CDM civil servants and active CDMers. Furthermore, if the anti-coup movement can give the impression that any active civil servant might potentially be a secret CDM ally, there will no longer be the need for the social punishment campaign. Rather than engaging in social punishment, the anti-coup movement could put pressure on active civil servants (and their families) to engage in the non-violent tactics we outline below.

- **Leaks can be a (relatively) low-stakes way for “non-CDM” civil servants to hurt the military and heal divisions.** The emergence of tactics like “social punishment” have created a toxic “us-them” dynamic between CDMers and active civil servants. If leaks are publicized as a way for non-CDM civil servants to participate in the anti-coup movement, it could possibly be a way to reconcile the rifts created by violent campaigns like social punishment. Non-CDM civil servants could be encouraged to maintain evidence of their leaks as a kind of “job application” material for the post-revolutionary government (e.g., CDMers could tell their former colleagues, “if you’re in a ministry now, and you want to participate in the NUG civil service, there’s no need to strike at this point – join CDM in secret, and leak a sensitive document”). Shifting to active civil servants leaking information also has the benefit that these officials continue to be paid by the state and so do not require financial support from the movement, illustrating an example of a way to get around the CDM funding dilemma.
- **CDMers could run propaganda campaigns that present an unstable government.** As an example, the NUG could announce that 130 police officers in Yangon and Mandalay had agreed to work as moles, and that more are joining every day. This would need to be backed up with evidence – i.e., the CDM and the NUG would need to have some leaks already in hand to use as proof – but it is likely that there are already sensitive SAC documents floating around amongst dissident groups. We note that great care must be taken to ensure that the leakers of these documents are not targeted or arrested. CDMers themselves may in some cases still have access to internal government information that could be released in order to embarrass the SAC. The NUG (for example) could announce that it has decided to reconcile

with non-CDMers by employing them as moles, who provide the NUG with inside information. This would give the SAC the impression that their own bureaucracy is unstable, even when civil servants have largely stopped publicly joining CDM.

- **Employees of any ministry could damage, destroy, or falsify information designated for the SAC.** For a more specific example: many ministries are known to maintain lists of anti-military activists or CDMers, in order to pressure them to return to work or extort money from them to make up for the sudden collapse in government revenue. Anti-coup civil servants who remain inside their ministry could replace these lists with lists of bogus names and made-up NRC numbers; activists could also replace the names of CDMers with known military informants, or strategically destroy or lose lists like these.

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