

Teaching the Teachers

Canadian project hands power to local stakeholders

Tara Lee



Teachers working on the project. Photo: Tara Lee/Mizzima

“Our approach is, teaching the teachers,” said Ambassador Mark Mcdowell.

The concept of bottom-up development and sustainability is all the buzz in international development circles today, both for idealistic and practical reasons.

It can be more cost-effective to expand local human capacity than to outsource the project to qualified personnel from abroad who expect higher salaries. Moreover, training local human resources ensures the ownership of projects stay within the community.

With this in mind, the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) is one example of an initiative for local empowerment. CFLI is a fund available in countries around the world in which Canada has a diplomatic



presence.

CFLI's programmes in Myanmar are now into their third year. The Canadian Embassy, which manages the grant disbursement, has received over 50 applicants this round. On average, it gives out four to five grants a year after it accepts applicants annually in May. The proposals are reviewed by a committee of local and external experts who assess the compatibility of the project with the guidelines of the Canadian Embassy.

The selection process prioritizes projects of short cycle, with high impact and focus on capacity building. The recent Human Rights Film Festival is an example of locally-led initiative funded by the CFLI. As part of film institute's aim to increase dialogue on human rights in Myanmar, a Canadian documentary producer trained aspiring Myanmar film makers. The CFLI funded the expert's travel.

As opposed to hiring established, foreign film producers to make

documentary films on human rights, equipping local film makers with the skills gives them autonomy over content, and a chance to further train other aspiring Myanmar film makers.

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Another such example is a workshop where the Canadian Embassy invited young local journalists for training on the coverage of political elections. Canadian elections take place in late November. When the landmark 2015 election was to be held in Myanmar, the Canadian election of 2015 was held just two weeks prior. The training session used the live broadcasting of the Canadian election as reference material. Again, instead of outsourcing the labour, the training session built the capacity of the local human resources, whose improved knowledge and new skills set can be leveraged long term.

Director of the local NGO Ca-

capacity Building Initiative (CBI) Mr. NgweThein agrees with the approach of CFLI. Originally funded by Ox-fam as a project, CBI is now a local independent organization. "This idea of giving money or material and physical assistance to organizations I actually do not like, because this is contrary to our traditional culture of helping each other," said NgweThein.

"Maybe I can give my labour in exchange for a house, instead of just having it built. Giving money is telling someone that they are poor and helpless," said NgweThein, in the spirit of the popular adage, "teach a man how to fish."

Teaching the teachers makes sense.

"You have to do it on your own. Only then is it yours. Others should complement and support a project, but one must build it himself. That's what self-sustainability means," said NgweThein.



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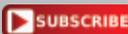
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