(VI) Regional Non-state Actor Networks in the Field of Environment Policy and Natural Resources Exploitation

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Introduction and Method

The Eastern Himalayan region is rich in biodiversity and its natural resources as well as in its cultural heterogeneity. To promote fair and sustainable development, the empowerment of the civil society is an important factor, since major economical development decisions are often made in the capital far from local communities. For India and China, this region offers big economical opportunities, as it provides additional power supply through hydroelectric power production\(^1\), natural resources like wood\(^2\) or minerals as gold and copper. Furthermore, the region is geo-strategically important for future overland trade routes between South Asia and Southeast Asia. However, major water projects or mineral mines are often insensitive to local cultures and vulnerable ecosystems, and negative impacts on local traditions or neighboring states are not taken seriously into account. This is also a major problem for the riparian states Myanmar and Bangladesh, which have minor political opportunities against the two regional hegemons, China and India. In addition, due to the political situation and the limitation of civil rights, participation is even more difficult.

The regional scope of this chapter is the Eastern Himalayan region, which includes the Northeastern Indian (NE India) states, the Chinese (SW China) province Yunnan, as well as Myanmar and Bangladesh. The thematic focus lies on the respective civil societies and its organizations, its activities, and its cross border cooperation regarding natural resources. Because the Eastern Himalayan region has commonalities beyond its national boundaries and the effects of major economical projects on the region are plenty, civil societies could especially gain additional power through transborder cooperation. This chapter deals with three particular questions: (1) Which civil society actors currently exist in the Eastern Himalayan region, working predominantly on natural resources? (2) Which cross border cooperation do already exist and which potential can be identified for establishing new and broaden existing networks between civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Eastern Himalayan region? (3) Finally, how can further successful cooperation be achieved among CSOs with regard to country specific conditions?

The chapter describes three steps for building new cooperation between non-state actors:

(1) First the existing CSOs are researched on the basis of intensive literature and internet research\(^3\) as well as online interviews with experts.\(^4\) The research resulted in a database with local and international CSOs, which provides a wide range of information that can be used for further cooperation.

(2) Building on the database, the second step identifies the cooperation potentials in the region. The intensity of existing cooperation across borders and their additional value for further activities are illustrated, as well as information about important characteristics of the collaborating CSOs.

(3) Step three explores four important dimensions for successful civil cooperation along with country specific information. The four dimensions law, politics, structures and communication are crucial aspects for CSO activities. Considering given limits but as well potentials, expertise can be developed, which enables long-term successful cooperation.

This way provides important tools for future work for and with NGOs and other CSOs. They offer a structured method for analyzing existing cooperation and enhancing (further) empowerment of civil society actors.

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1 In following, hydroelectric power production is subsumed under the term water, though water also includes other kinds of water management or water protection.
2 The term ‘wood’ is used as a category for different aspects: it subsumes the natural resource wood as well as the problem of land-grabbing, nature protection and biodiversity.
3 The internet research includes databases, blogs, homepages and annual reports of CSOs, as well as governmental information.
4 Two interviews were conducted with members of NGOs in Bangladesh, one with an INGO in China and one with a NGO member in Germany, who is an expert on the Eastern Himalayan region (see questionnaire in Annex).
1 Building up successful cooperation between civil society organizations (CSOs)

1.1 Instrument I: CSO database

The Eastern Himalayan region is characterized by a myriad of various civil society organizations. An increasing number of CSOs tackle the issue of limiting the effects of misused natural resources, which impacts development of society and nature alike. As a response, the CSOs across the region mobilize actors of the civil society to make use of their rights and to make politicians on all levels aware of the effects of abusing natural resources. Especially the NGOs’ proximity to the local level and access to the international arena enables the NGOs to have an extensive expertise for approaching an issue. This profound knowledge empowers the NGOs to use their broad repertoire of exerting an influence to hold the state and other actors accountable. Despite of the great capacities among the civil society, many CSOs hesitate in collaborating with each other.

In the first step, we compiled a database, which does not reflect a complete evaluation of the situation itself but represents a starting point for further complementing research. The database embraces numerous CSOs and their context specific characteristics. The database is also useful as an instrument for practical work, to engage with new CSOs and it facilitates in building relations, such as to cooperate with CSOs on certain natural resources, to join networks, to build synergies with INGOs or to enlarge collaborations. Before focusing on specific examples and illustrating the results of the CSO database, definitions of various CSO types are described. The identification of different CSOs helps to understand which CSO types are usually dealing with natural resources. In addition to defining CSOs, this supports a more distinguished comprehension on country specific understandings of CSOs. A table in the annex lists such different types with additional detailed explanations, additional results, such as in which country this type is common and examples are listed. The definitions have been developed during our research.

As a whole the database consists of 87 national, local and international civil organizations, research bodies and several state and semi-public organizations. 37 percent of them work in the field of water management, nine percent in the rights of minorities and 54 percent in the exploitation of natural resources like forests (32 percent) and raw materials (22 percent). From this amount, 29 international organizations can be identified. They research and participate in development projects or even implement them on their own in the region of SW China, Bangladesh, NE India or Myanmar. “Climate Himalaya” is one of them. It is an international, non-state network, which has its headquarters in Uttarakhand in India and works on issues like climate change, natural disasters and sustainable water and environmental management. Besides this organization, the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation (BCIM) can be mentioned. Some think tanks and state actors of these four countries are involved in this forum, which assisted the establishment of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM EC) by the four governments in 2013.

In addition to the international CSOs the database contains 58 national and local organizations. 15 of them work in SW China, 11 in Bangladesh, 16 in NE India and 16 in Myanmar. Out of this, we identified 15 networks, which include inter alia the Burma Environmental Working Group (BEWG) and the Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF). While BEWG unites ten central NGOs in Myanmar, that are committed to the management of natural resources, the protection of human rights or the transparency in the energy sector, INSAF represents more than 600 Indian non-governmental organizations that work on similar issues. Both can, therefore, be regarded as large organizations in their countries. Along with such networks that exist in different forms in the entire Eastern Himalayan region, the database lists numerous single NGOs that work on specific topics. In this context, the Chinese organization Green Watershed can be mentioned. It wants to enforce the integration and participation of the local population in the planning of large hydropower constructions like dams and the management of several river basins in the Kunming region. To achieve this objective, the organization implements advocacy as well as research projects. Furthermore, it does not only work together with other local partners, but also cooperates with NGOs.

5 The database is publicly available and can be downloaded under http://tiny.cc/2440cx.
from other states in Eastern Himalaya. One of these is Salween Watch from Myanmar that is similarly interested in environmental protection and the reduction of dam projects.

While it is possible to extract detailed information on such leading non-state as well as government related INGOs and networks that are working on ethnic minorities and the management of natural resources in Eastern Himalaya, the usefulness of the database becomes evident. It can be uses as an instrument for building up cooperation between development organizations and for identifying potential partners in this region. In this context, the listed INGOs can play a crucial role. They are potential direct partners, but can also be seen as intermediaries that are able to link different local or international organizations with each other by using their networking skills. Following this, they form the basis for new cooperation and therefore can be catalysts for the creation and implementation of new projects.

1.2 Instrument 2: Cooperation potential

Cooperation between different non-state actors is not completely unusual in the Eastern Himalayan region. This chapter refers to the aforementioned investigation on active CSOs in the Eastern Himalayan region. The table “cooperation in the Eastern Himalayan region” (see below) accumulates the results of the CSO database and aims to illustrate two aspects: Firstly, it gives an overview of existing and missing cross-border cooperation between local CSOs, which work in Bangladesh, SW China, NE India or Myanmar. The focus lies on cross-border cooperation between CSOs from two different countries. Cooperation between two actors was identified when the CSOs organize a common event (e.g. workshop, panel discussion) or linked each other on their websites. Dark grey colored squares indicate that at least one cross-border cooperation was investigated. White colored squares show that our research has given no results regarding non-state cooperation.

Secondly, the table of cooperation shows the amount of INGOs which operate across borders and are having projects in one of the Eastern Himalayan countries. The table of cooperation is educed from the local NGOs and INGOs in the generated database. Obviously, an INGO can work in several countries simultaneously, e.g. the WWF, Climate Himalaya or ICIMOD. These international actors are especially important because of their potential function as intermediaries that interconnect local CSOs in various countries. INGOs have the personnel and financial capacity to fulfill this role, and are therefore able to offer a platform, e.g. in form of workshops and conferences, where interested partners have the opportunity to share their knowledge with each other. The most important results of each country are summed up below.

**Table 1: Cooperation in the Eastern Himalayan Region**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Cross-border Cooperations of Local Actors</th>
<th>Amount of International Actors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
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</table>

**Bangladesh.** All in all, the civil society in Bangladesh is very active and consists of various local NGOs that are mainly financed by foreign donors (Asian Development Bank, 2008). They carry out almost as many activities as the state and are quite autonomous. Primarily, research institutes and think tanks in NE India and Bangladesh cooperate with one another. Relations between the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) and the two Indian organizations Development Alternatives (DA) and the Centre for Environmental Education (CEE) have been analyzed. Sharing knowledge and presenting new research results are the main aims of this cooperation. However, establishing contact with Chinese NGOs is still a challenge. As one interviewee from a Bangladeshi NGO said, ideas of working methods and the understanding of civil society are frequently at odds with each other. Our investigation has not found any cooperation with CSOs from Bangladesh’s neighbor Myanmar.

**China.** According to our database, there are no SW Chinese CSOs that cooperate with NGOs from NE India or Bangladesh. A potential for more cooperation between SW China, NE India and Bangladesh is
obvious. In the aforementioned interview, it has been explained that cooperation with Chinese GONGOs is especially complicated. GONGOs are working on national and social topics but often act according to the state’s ideology. This is contradictory to a common self-conception of NGOs outside China as an opposing power to state control. This makes cooperation with Chinese GONGOs difficult and to get in contact with Chinese NGOs is also not easy. Many members of the older Chinese NGOs have worked in the former state’s administration and have still strong ties to the apparatus of the state.6 We have investigated the cooperation between the Chinese NGO Green Watershed and Salween Watch, a NGO from Myanmar. This could be a good model for further cooperation. Salween Watch is especially very well connected to INGOs, like Earth Rights International, International Rivers Network and Burma Rivers Network.

**India.** There exist cooperation between Indian and Bangladeshi CSOs in the field of scientific research, which sometimes are also funded by the state. Think tanks and research institutes share their knowledge with each other regarding topics related to natural resources and climate change. For example, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), a public interest research and advocacy organization conducts and implements workshops, seminars and training programs, inter alia with Wateraid Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Institute of Planners as well as other non-state and state actors. A reason for this kind of highly qualitative cross-border cooperation lies, among other aspects, in the culture of the country itself. Social commitment is part of the Indian culture;7 this might explain the high number of NGOs which are working on almost every political and social topic. On the other hand, the relations to Myanmar and China on a civil society level could be broadened. The already mentioned Shwe Gas Movement, which works out of Thailand with activities mainly in Myanmar, also has counterparts and members in India. The NGO Aaranyak with its office in Guwahati (Assam) contributes research towards the protection and management of biodiversity in the Eastern Himalayan region and works hand in hand with CSOs from Bangladesh, China and Myanmar.

**Myanmar.** All in all, few cooperation have been investigated, like the already mentioned cooperation of Green Watershed, Salween Watch and Shwe Gas Movement. The civil society in Myanmar consists of a huge traditional part and a smaller modern part. The traditional civil society in Myanmar is mostly represented by faith-based organizations that are led by monks. Since 2011, when the democratization process in Myanmar started, the modern civil society has gained self-confidence and is seen by western INGOs as a potential, open-minded cooperation partner.8 Interesting results of the investigation were the well-linked networks in Myanmar. The Burma Environmental Working Group (BEWG) functions as an umbrella organization for other networks and CSOs in Myanmar with focus on the sustainable use of natural resources. Different types of members belong to this network, e.g. the aforementioned Shwe Gas Movement, the NGO Arakan Oil Watch – which applies political pressure through research, awareness-building and their public relation department – but also the CBO network Bridging Rural Integrated Development and Grassroots Empowerment (BRIDGE) with environmental projects supporting initiatives on a local level in Kachin state. The networking function of BEWG could serve as a starting point for interconnecting more CSOs with each other, especially across borders. Myanmar particularly lacks a higher amount of research institutes that focus on the sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity.

In conclusion, a high potential for cooperation among CSOs in the Eastern Himalayan region can be identified. Think tanks and other research institutes have the possibility to build up relations to the existing cross-border cooperation between NE India and Bangladesh. Further expertise from new actors could bring an additional value for these existing collaborations and would be beneficial for all actors. In every country, active local CSOs working on natural resources have been investigated. Some of them are already interconnected, but many still do not have cross-border cooperation partnerships. An exchange of knowledge and different working methods could encourage synergies for the region. But for building up new networks and strengthening existing ones, country-specific conditions also play a crucial role.

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6 Hsu 2010: 273.
7 Kuhn 2006: 1.
8 IrinNews 2011.
1.3 Instrument 3: Framework conditions

Knowledge about the status quo of cross-border cooperation is the basis for further activities. However, it is also important to know about the country-specific conditions regarding CSOs if cross-border cooperation are to be built. Certain country-specific limitations, advantages and commonalities have to be taken into account. For this purpose, four dimensions to cover the most important aspects are useful. Firstly, the legal dimension was examined, which deals with aspects of registration, monitoring or evaluation of CSOs as well as other laws that influence civil participation. The second dimension is the political dimension and covers aspects such as the relationship between state and society and ways of political participation of local communities. The third dimension is a structural one: it subsumes the local infrastructure and typical organizational aspects of local CSOs. The final dimension covers all kinds of communicational aspects: what has to be considered if a CSO is being contacted, what kind of specific cultural aspects have to be considered. In the following, these four dimensions are surveyed relating to each country.

1.3.1 Bangladesh

The NGO sector in Bangladesh is one of the largest in the world. In 2011 more than 220,000 registered NGOs were counted, which also included religious and charitable institutions. The NGOs are established and registered under Societies Registration Act of 1869, Trust Act of 1982, the Companies Act of 1913, The Voluntary Social Welfare Agencies (Regulation and Control) 1960 and with the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Agencies) Registration Ordinance 1982. It requires that organizations are not only financed by foreign funds, but also provide annual reports on foreign funded projects. The registration takes place at the NGO Affairs Bureau (NAB) which is attached to the office of the Prime Minister. With the NAB, the government is trying to control some areas of NGO activities, and therefore, every single project has to be applied to the NAB. Due to the shortage of human resources in the NAB, the processing of applications takes up a long time and this causes dissatisfaction among the NGOs. In the event of an infringement the registration can be revoked. The government supports the activities of NGOs as long as they are not in political fields and not against the government. However, the Bangladeshi NGOs are advanced and organized and tend to direct criticism and movements against the government when their work is related. One cannot necessarily assume that the government does not interfere. Although the state has declared its support of NGOs, it is a fact that many projects will not be approved and thus conflicts arise. Furthermore, there are strict rules concerning travel. For instance, each organization must obtain permission from the authorities to take part in regional events. In the areas of gender discrimination, the disabled and the disadvantaged as well as countless other areas, the state and NGOs try to work complementary.

The majority of the population in Bangladesh are Muslims, followed by Hindus, Buddhists, and a small percentage of Christians. Although religions may be practiced freely, it is important to be sensitive in this regard. In the local greetings it is not common to shake hands, unless it is a business partner. Despite this, men should avoid shaking hands of females. Also, there are certain places where it is advisable to follow the dress code. Moreover, corruption is one of the most important problems in Bangladesh and in the NGO landscape. On the Corruption Perceptions Index 2011 of Transparency International, Bangladesh is ranked on 120 out of 182 countries. Furthermore, the underdeveloped infrastructure in Bangladesh is an important point which has to be noted when seeking cooperation. The poor road conditions, the insufficient power supply and the low level of education are some of the main obstacles NGOs have to deal with. Except the executives, NGO employees scarcely have a high level of education or university degrees. In addition, it is always important to develop a personal relationship and build trust, before discussion business proposal is appropriate. Bangladeshi are proud of their culture and their language. In this respect showing appreciation and support by learning a few sentences in their local language is an asset. All these aspects and determining factors should be considered and are essential for building a long-term and dynamic cooperation.

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9 Zingel 2013.
1.3.2 China

During the reform process in China, new possibilities and needs for civil engagement arose with the withdrawal of the state from many social issues.\(^\text{10}\) The Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA) identifies three categories of CSOs: Social organizations, private non-enterprise units and foundations.\(^\text{11}\) CSOs in China are often organized as GONGOs like the All-China Women’s Federation. They play an important role in Chinese society, as they function as a connection between state and society and typically have a close relationship with the state.\(^\text{12}\) However, the focus in this chapter lies on genuine civilian forms of CSOs like grassroots NGOs, regarding the aim of civil empowerment in order to oppose large-scale projects by the government. The legal system in China limits the diversification of CSOs through different kinds of restrictions, like the limitation of one organization per topic, or the zoning of the working area on the province, where the organization is registered. To become registered, a CSO has to be sponsored by the government, the party or a mass organization. Additionally, financing is restricted and only the government and a few GONGOs are allowed to raise funds.\(^\text{13}\)

The Chinese state supports civil engagement, not in the sense of individual rights but as the strengthening of collective rights – mainly through mass organizations. The term NGO is often mentioned in a negative relation to destabilization and external influence on Chinese society. In contrast, an INGO is much more accepted when it cooperates with an existing Chinese partner instead of working on its own – like Greenpeace who is registered as a scientific institute at a university. CSOs fulfill important tasks in the field of social welfare and are supported by the state. But often, they are not allowed to articulate sensitive political topics. Besides, the cooperation with state or semi-governmental activists is seen as an important factor regarding the efficiency of CSOs. Instead of confronting the state, the CSOs often work closely with the state and maintain close ties to the authorities.\(^\text{14}\) It is also expected that CSOs prove their efficiency and act proactively in reporting.

If we look at the NGO landscape in Yunnan, we can see a growing confidence in their work which goes along with a growing expertise. This became especially evident after the Sichuan earthquake in 2008.\(^\text{15}\) Since the 1990s, grassroots NGOs are becoming more active. But still, many NGOs are not registered at all and therefore do not have any legal protection; some use the label of an enterprise unit to work in China – e.g. the WWF.\(^\text{16}\) Established Chinese NGOs and their internal structures are shaped by founders who came from governmental organizations. However, the younger generations of NGOs are often more classical grassroots NGOs. This influences their way of work and their ability for cooperation. As mentioned above, cross-border cooperation is not easy with Chinese organizations because of their close relation to the state, but also because of their focus on Chinese topics and the limitation to specific social issues. Therefore, it is important to identify common problems and the additional value of a regional cooperation. And, instead of taking a position of opposing the state, it may be helpful to partner with governmental organizations and to establish contacts with officeholders.\(^\text{17}\)

In the last aspect regarding communication, it is important to consider the cultural background. Long-term and personal relationships are viewed as valuable – while on the other hand short and superficial contacts are not. Other important aspects are the principle of seniority and to maintain honor and dignity. To deepen one’s relationship, it is common to spend time at business dinners, to get to know each other more personally, and to bring gifts. Only on a long-term basis of trust, contacts are seen as reliable.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{10}\) Hsu 2010: 159, Yang 2005: 47.
\(^{11}\) Shieh/Deng 2011: 183.
\(^{12}\) Xie 2009: 30.
\(^{13}\) Lehrack 2004: 12, Shieh/Deng 2011: 184.
\(^{15}\) Shieh/Deng 2011: 194.
\(^{18}\) Heberer/Senz 2013: 58.
1.3.3 Northeast India

Social commitment can be seen as a central value of Indian society. Therefore, it is not astonishing that official claims of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs refer to a number of 1.2 million NGOs which are registered in the country.\(^{19}\) Although it now could be supposed that the Indian NGO sector can develop freely and without any control, the activities of civil organizations are strongly observed by the state administration. The Indian government uses several political and legal instruments\(^ {20}\) of which the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FRCA) is one of the most effective one to prove intentions of NGOs and to collect data from them. Originally enacted to prevent the funding of subversive organizations, the FRCA obligates all NGOs to register at the Ministry of Home Affairs and to submit audited annual accounts and details of each financial transfer from foreign partners. In addition to this financial control, Indian NGOs have to accept numerous guidelines which, inter alia, do not allow them to criticize political issues in public or to publish magazines or newspapers with political comments.\(^ {21}\) Relying on these aspects, the situation in Northeast India is even more complex. Here, the central government has proclaimed several areas like states of Assam and Nagaland as well as parts of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Tripura as “disturbed”. This status leads to a limitation of human rights like the freedom of assembly, and gives the Indian army special powers.\(^ {22}\)

Nevertheless, the relationship between the state administration and NGOs has improved in the last decades. Despite the aforementioned difficulties, their cooperation on sensible issues like child labor, corruption and the rights of women could be deepened. This circumstance should not belie the fact that several NGO projects on these topics repeatedly lead to conflicts between state authorities and civil organizations.\(^ {23}\)

As previously described, legal and political conditions in India and the Northeastern region have to be considered in the process of cooperating with and contacting potential Indian partner NGOs. Moreover, local particularities and cultural characteristics also have to be taken into account. The infrastructure, especially the road, rail and internet sector, is not highly developed in the Northeastern region or in most of the rural areas. Nevertheless, these sectors improved in the context of India’s “Look East” policy. The internet market presently has a growth rate of 30 percent.\(^ {24}\) Even if a large amount of NGOs in Northeast India can be contacted via E-mail, it cannot be guaranteed that the process of contacting a potential partner organization will become easier. Direct contact and personal relations are quite important. Regarding this, it is not unusual that E-mails or written requests from an unknown person are not answered the first time.\(^ {25}\) Therefore, it is necessary to visit a potential partner to have a deeper contact and to build up long-term cooperation. Another characteristic of Indian culture is a flexible attitude to time, where it is not always impolite to be late at an arranged meeting.

1.3.4 Myanmar

The conditions for cooperation with NGOs in Myanmar are mainly influenced by political aspects of democratization, which are important to know if new cooperation is aimed at. The choice of the cooperation partner is especially crucial for the possible success or failure of cooperation. Myanmar’s civil society consists of a variety of different organizations.

The military junta institutionalized the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) 1988 as the country’s main GONGO, which complies with the Chinese concept of GONGOs. It still exists and deals with various topics. Its employees are former members of the military government. Another organizational form in Myanmar is that of professional organizations. They are similar to the organiz-

\(^{19}\) Jalali 2008: 8.
\(^{20}\) These include, inter alia, the Societies Registration Act (1860), the Indian Trusts Act (1882), the Charitable and the Religious Act (1920). Additionally, NGOs as well as charity foundations can register under section 25 of the Companies Act (1956) at the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs.
\(^{21}\) Jalali 2008: 8.
\(^{23}\) Kuhn 2006: 3.
\(^{24}\) Auswärtiges Amt 2013.
\(^{25}\) Oppel 2008: 1–2.
tional and personal structure of GONGOs but differ in that they are experts in just one topic. Because of their well-connected members, professional organizations have a high potential for mass mobilization in Myanmar. The Myanmar Health Assistant Association consists of members of the state’s health ministry, but like other professional organizations they do not call themselves GONGOs. The competition with non-state activists is quite imbalanced because GONGOs are preferred by the state’s financial contribution.

Non-state organizations either belong to the traditional civil society or to the smaller modern civil society. The main part of traditional civil society are represented by faith-based organizations (FBOs), whose number increased significantly after the military junta’s prohibition of social movements in 1964. FBOs enjoy a high reputation among the population, which is why they are almost never criticized in public. There is a huge amount of Buddhist initiatives, but Christian, Muslim and Hinduist ones can also be found. They take on the job of welfare tasks in the health and education system and have expansive nationwide networks. Their attitude is rather conservative as they do not work on topics regarding sexual health for example. Associations are focused on social and religious topics, they have well established organizational structures and some of them have existed since before the colonial history, whereas the modern local NGOs were founded in the last two decades. They are often dependent on international donors. CBOs are mainly civil grassroots organizations that work voluntarily. Volunteers come from their local community and dedicate their work for the beneficiaries. Examples could be microcredit groups or committees on rural development. INGOs usually offer training, credits and funds. International donors usually prefer working with modern CSOs because of their “open-mindedness” and their commonalities with western standards. But, on the other hand, religious CSOs are already well-connected and have a high potential influence on the local level. Their opinion is highly respected, which is why the traditional CSOs should especially be taken into account as cooperation partner. As Walter Davis, program manager for Paung Ku, a consortium of international and local organizations to strengthen civil society in Myanmar stated correctly: “Myanmar has a long history of using accountability mechanisms related to religious donations, with Buddhist monks playing a key check and balance role. Strengthening these existing frameworks may ultimately be more effective in building accountability than continuing to use imported concepts.”

2 Conclusion and recommendation

This chapter particularly focused on cooperation and networks, predominantly among non-profit oriented activists in the civil society in the Eastern Himalayan region. In this context, the question was raised of how to achieve greater cross-border cooperation among the civil society actors, dealing with the extraction of natural resources and its impacts on society and nature alike. Using the three practicable instruments, effective information on the potential of civil society cooperation can be gathered.

Along with the financial significance of natural resources in the Eastern Himalayan region for the economy, the increasing expertise and activities of the civil society is noteworthy. Civil society often opposes large-scale projects from the state, which wishes to predominantly accommodate economic interests. In every country various CSOs use a wide range of activities as entry points into discussions and into policies to inform the responsible actors about the consequences of their decisions.

Referring to the instruments, the database identifies activities of CSOs on the topic of natural resources within the national borders of the countries. Large NGOs as well as INGOs act as intermediaries for local NGOs in order to work in a win-win cooperation. While INGOs offer access to knowledge, financial and personnel capacities, local CSOs can offer access to the local population, cultural knowledge and legitimacy, as well as accountability.

Furthermore, the second instrument ‘Cooperation Potentials’ signifies that most of CSO activities are concentrated on the local and provincial level and barely take place on the national or international lev-

26 Kramer 2011: 8–9.
27 IrinNews 2011.
28 Hsu 2010: 259.
el. Thus, it is less likely to observe coherent cross-border collaborations in the form of institutionalized networks. The lack of cooperation is not necessarily a sign of insufficient capacities but rather a result of lacking mutual knowledge. Positive signs of synergies are registered between local NGOs who are close at the borders of the respective other country.

Finally, the third instrument – the country-specific conditions – offers the respective knowledge about difficulties due to cultural and communicational differences, as well as legal and political discrepancy. Using this knowledge can pave the way for new successful cooperation. Above all, sensitivity for cultural considerations pays off and gives networks a chance to develop. Considering the third instrument helps to empower CSOs to take the chance for cooperation.

Recommendations. Cross-border networks are exceptions rather than the norm, but the Eastern Himalayan region holds a big potential. The analysis clearly calls for sharing knowledge among the CSOs in order to empower a civil society which is equipped with a full reservoir of expertise and which is sensitized for political and cultural aspects of its neighboring partners. Using this knowledge, the Eastern Himalayan civil society can be a strong voice for the marginalized. This could be achieved through using INGOs as intermediaries and building up new networks on the basis of existing CSO capacities. Besides, in some cases, the degree of CSOs’ impact can be expanded and deepened sustainably if the CSOs’ activities complement, rather than provoke, politics.

The three instruments are not complete. Moreover, they need to be developed continuously for the steady identification of new potentials. The Eastern Himalaya’s CSO landscape is getting off the starting blocks for more collaborative synergies.

Bibliography


## Annex: Types of Civil Society Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSO type</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>BD</th>
<th>CH</th>
<th>IN</th>
<th>MY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CBO (community-based organisation)</strong></td>
<td>A NGO that operates within a single local community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td>Bridging Rural Integrated Development and Grassroots Empowerment (BRIDGE) (Myanmar), Yunnan Mountain Heritage Foundation (China)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DIS (Department / Institute of Science)</strong></td>
<td>An institute with scientific working groups dealing (scientifically) on issues and which are embedded at a university.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td>Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>FBO (faith-based organisation)</strong></td>
<td>A NGO based on religious beliefs.</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Pa-Oh Youth Organization (PYO) (Myanmar)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GONGO (governmental non-governmental organisation)</strong></td>
<td>A GONGO is a NGO with governmental influences. The influence can be a financial one, in the decision-making process by people from the government on the board, or the organisation is fully accountable to a governmental body. Thus, GONGOs are not solely run by the civil society and are not comparable with the “western” understanding of NGOs (see NGO). They are attached to the current government.</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Friends of Nature (China)</td>
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<td><strong>INGO (international non-governmental organisation)</strong></td>
<td>A NGO operating across borders and having projects in at least one other country (one INGO can operate in all the countries of the region).</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Example:</td>
<td>Bridging Rural Integrated Development and Grassroots Empowerment (BRIDGE) (Myanmar) and Yunnan Mountain Heritage Foundation (China)</td>
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<td><strong>Network/UBO (umbrella organisation)</strong></td>
<td>An institutionalised collaboration of different NGO types working for a common aim by using the different available capacities.</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Indian Social Action Forum (India), Burma Environmental Working Group (BEWG) (Myanmar)</td>
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<td><strong>NGO (non-governmental organisation)</strong></td>
<td>A NGO is solely run by the civil society and indifferent from political interests in the country it operates. NGOs are financially relying on themselves and they finance their projects by donations or by the help from the ministry through a specific proposal. Thus, NGOs are accountable to their members and their donors. NGOs are not profit-orientated and mostly based on voluntary work.</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Arakan Oil Watch (Myanmar), Coastal Development Partnership (CDP) (Bangladesh)</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td><strong>SM (social movement)</strong></td>
<td>A large, informal group of individuals or organisations, campaigning for a social issue.</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Save the Mekong (Myanmar)</td>
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<td><strong>SO (social organisations)</strong></td>
<td>A Chinese understanding of an NGO (see NGO).</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Volunteers’ Association for the Protection of Black-Necked Cranes (China)</td>
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<td><strong>TT (Think tank)</strong></td>
<td>An institution with scientific working groups that uses scientifically elaborated issue for political consultancy.</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Yunnan Health and Development Research Association (China)</td>
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<td><strong>VO (voluntary organisations)</strong></td>
<td>A Bangladeshi understanding of an NGO (see NGO).</td>
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<td>Example:</td>
<td>Surjodoy Somaj Unnayan Foundation</td>
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Compiled by authors.