

SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

**Skills Development for Youth (SDY) Project
Skills for Employment in Northern Shan (SENS) Project**



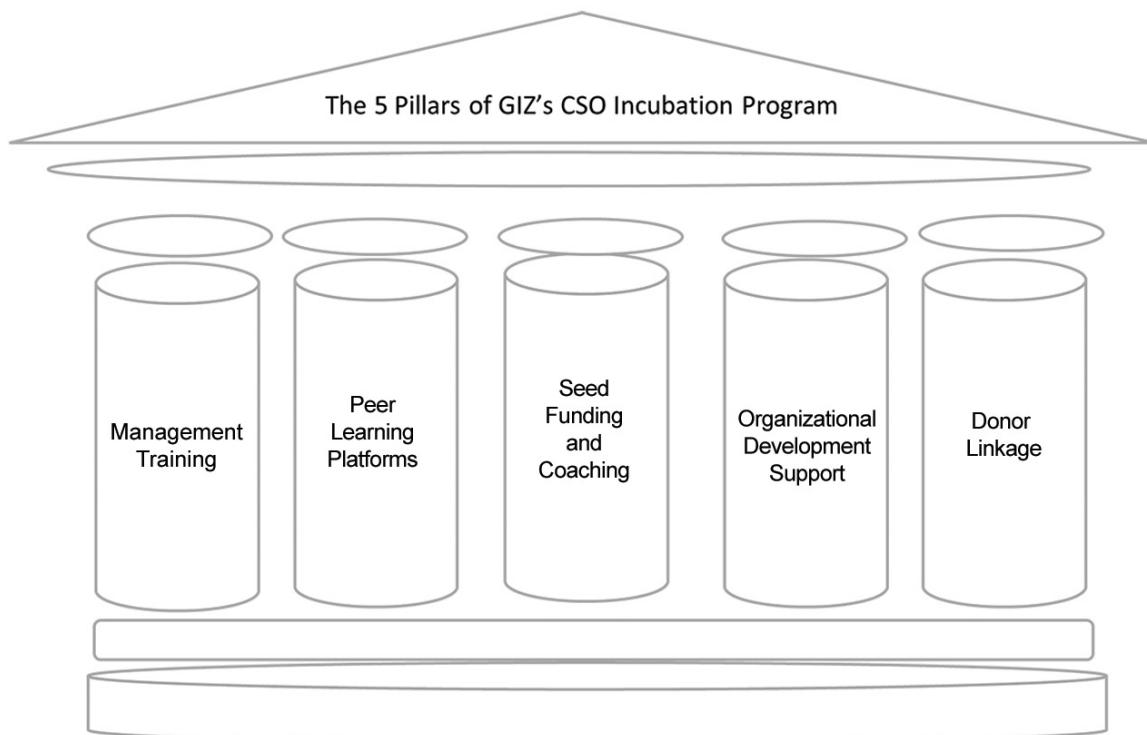
CAPITALIZING ON THE STRENGTHS AND POTENTIALS OF LOCAL CSOs

GIZ's projects, Skills Development for Youth (SDY) and Skills for Employment in Northern Shan (SENS), both funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), work side-by-side with 56 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operating in Rakhine and Shan States, all of which are active in empowering war-affected groups and engaged in peacebuilding. These CSOs, thanks to their proximity to isolated and exposed communities, are familiar with the local cultures and languages, have access to the most vulnerable populations and are moved by a strong commitment to improving their living conditions. This makes them an invaluable asset, particularly to international donors.

However, in many cases, these CSOs do not fulfill the eligibility criteria and/or compliance standards of multi- and bilateral funding agencies. GIZ's incubation program in favor of local CSOs intends to upgrade their level of performance in meeting the multiple needs of the most disadvantaged communities, whilst at the same time responding to the institutional requirements set by these funding agencies. To address both their technical and managerial gaps, the Project's incubation program combines modular training with seed funding and individualized coaching to ensure that the acquired or enhanced skills are applied in favor of the neediest.

FIVE PILLARS OF GIZ'S CSO INCUBATION PROGRAM

GIZ is committed to enabling its numerous local and regional implementing partners to continue growing as change-agents and peacebuilders. With a view to strengthening their technical, managerial and institutional capacities in the most effective way, GIZ has structured its incubation program around five complementary offers: (1) a cycle of management training modules; (2) two learning platforms, one on social inclusion and the other on economic empowerment; (3) a seed funding scheme to implement innovative projects while benefitting from individualized coaching. During the small grant project implementation, (4) organizational development support was provided to the winner CSOs to strengthen their internal systems, management capacity, and sustainability. (5) Donor networking and engagement events are organized for CSOs and shared funding opportunities from other donors, helping CSOs expand their access to resources and partnerships. The entire incubation cycle covers a period of approximately 12 months: 6 months for the training component and additional 6 months for the pilot implementation coupled with coaching, whereas the participation in the learning platforms is an ongoing process.



First Pillar: Management Training

The first pillar of GIZ's CSO Incubation Program delivers integrated and tailored capacity building support to strengthen the institutional, managerial, and technical capacities of CSOs. Going beyond standard training, this pillar provides a holistic learning experience that combines essential areas for effective project implementation and organizational growth. It includes Project Cycle Management (PCM) training, Financial Management, CSO Leadership & Wellbeing Programs, Humanitarian–Development–Peace (HDP) Nexus Approach training, gender mainstreaming, online facilitation with digital tools and AI for project management, and data management training. Each module is designed with specific objectives and learning outcomes, offering participants practical skills, hands-on exercises, and interactive sessions to translate knowledge into action. Through this comprehensive approach, CSOs are empowered to strengthen their effectiveness, sustainability, and impact within their communities.



Second Pillar: Peer Learning Platforms



The second pillar of the CSO support scheme features two learning platforms on social inclusion and economic empowerment. These in-person exchange sessions promote peer-to-peer knowledge sharing on technical and managerial topics linked to the operational challenges identified by GIZ's partners. Through interaction with national and international NGOs and experts, CSOs learn about best practices, innovative approaches, and jointly develop implementation standards and operational guidelines. The platforms aim to strengthen CSOs' technical and structural capacities, supported by GIZ's financial assistance to apply these skills for the benefit of vulnerable communities. Each platform runs a cycle of six sessions held every two to three months, culminating in "pitching contests" where CSOs present innovative ideas inspired by shared best practices. A jury of national and international partners selects the most promising proposals, which receive seed funding for pilot implementation in Rakhine State.

THE SOCIAL COHESION PLATFORM

This learning platform was launched with the aim of enhancing the implementation capacity of grass-roots organizations based in Rakhine engaged in the promotion of community cohesion, peaceful coexistence, gender mainstreaming and the integration of disadvantaged groups. Moreover, given the fragile context as well as the various governance structures and diverse population groups at local level in which the projects are operating, it is a fundamental part of the implementation to ensure the application of the do no harm principles and a conflict-sensitive design of all project activities. The topics prioritized for peer-to-peer exchange, among others, are: soft skills training for youth, developing institutional strategies and innovative approaches for gender mainstreaming, promoting community-based gender and intercultural dialogue, fostering the inclusion of persons with disabilities and offering psycho-social support to disadvantaged beneficiaries of skills training programs.

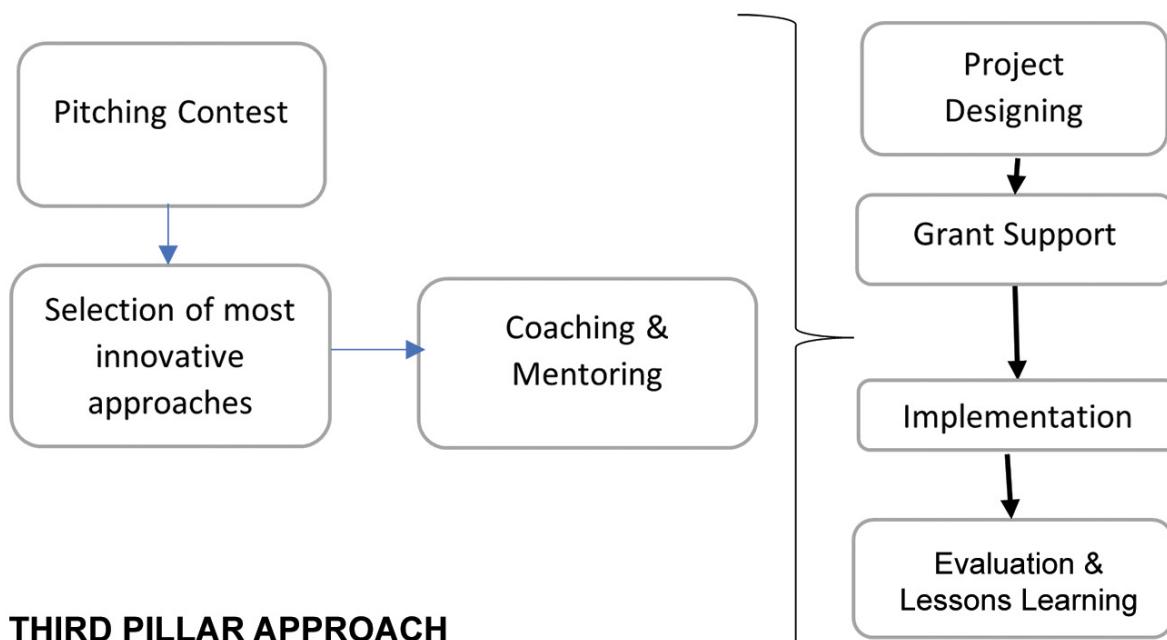
THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PLATFORM

This learning platform was launched with the aim of facilitating a peer-to-peer exchange on common challenges and best practices in supporting youths and women to find employment or self-employment opportunities in their villages and/or IDP camps. Also in this platform, sharing experiences and success stories, but also technical and managerial challenges is at the heart of the various sessions. CSO participants as well as resource persons from the private sector across a variety of economic areas are encouraged to present their operational challenges as well as practical solutions, engaging in technical discussions on how to further improve on standards and delivery mechanisms, and, most importantly, on how to link with markets to optimize the sale of products and services. Amongst the topics prioritized by the platform members are: value chain promotion in the agricultural and fishery sectors, facilitating market linkages in favor of the community-based enterprises, promoting local cooperatives and local business associations, as well as offering customized business coaching.

Third Pillar: Seed Funding and Coaching

The CSOs selected through the “pitching contests” by an independent jury formalize their project idea and sign an implementation contract for a duration of approximately six months. The pilot projects are expected to fulfil a pedagogical objective within an “incubation” scheme that reflects all stages of project implementation: As the CSOs engage in a practical learning process, they are expected to apply the skills and competencies acquired from the PCM training modules as well as the practical know-how from the thematic platform sessions.

During this process, the selected CSOs are closely guided and coached by qualified expert(s) throughout their project implementation, from the designing and planning to the evaluation and lessons learning stage. The coaching is expected to ensure maximum coherence between the innovative approach proposed by the CSOs and international implementation standards. Overall, the combination of management training, peer-to-peer technical exchanges and individualized coaching is expected to significantly enhance their institutional capacity and their level of compliance to the requirements of Donors. At the end of the process, moreover, the most competent and committed CSOs are expected to qualify for larger funding opportunities either within the GIZ Projects or with international donor agencies. The overarching scope behind this CSO incubation program is that they can continue responding to the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population in their own region, hence contributing to enhanced socio-economic resilience of conflict-affected communities on a larger scale. The continued presence of CSOs at local level is also expected to sustainably embed the various processes and approaches initiated in the social and economic patterns within each community.

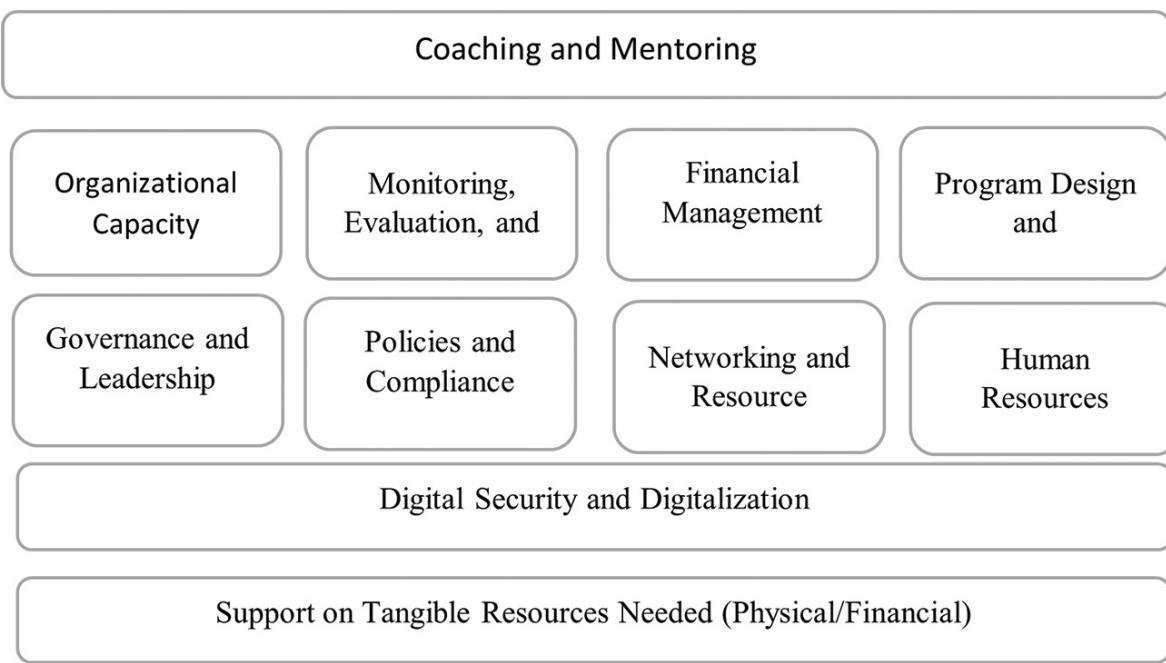


Fourth Pillar: Organizational Development Support

The fourth pillar of the CSO Incubation Program focuses on Organizational Development (OD), a core component aimed at strengthening CSOs both institutionally and operationally, supporting them to become systematic, accountable, and sustainable actors capable of driving localization and long-term community development. While many local CSOs demonstrate strong community engagement, they often struggle with donor compliance, fund management, and maintaining internal systems. This pillar addresses these gaps by enhancing both organizational capacity and infrastructure.

Through participatory capacity assessments and tailored coaching, CSOs receive guidance on improving governance, human resources, and financial systems, while developing or updating key policies on finance, procurement, safeguarding, and gender equality. Physical support, such as essential office equipment and digital tools, further boosts operational efficiency.

The OD support also emphasizes leadership development, strategic planning, and fundraising. Mentoring sessions build decision-making and management skills, enabling teams to apply learning effectively. By the program's end, CSOs are equipped to meet donor standards, ensure transparent operations, and act as credible community change agents—ultimately fostering stronger local ownership and sustainable development.



Fifth Pillar: Donor Linkage

The fifth pillar of the CSO Incubation Program focuses on strengthening linkages with donors, a vital step toward ensuring the long-term sustainability of local CSOs. Recognizing that access to funding and strategic partnerships is essential for growth, this pillar helps CSOs connect with national and international donors, UN agencies, and INGOs to expand their financial resources and scale up their initiatives.

Through donor networking and engagement events, GIZ provides platforms where CSOs can showcase their achievements, share success stories, and present their innovative project ideas directly to potential donors. Activities such as project pitching contests and final evaluation workshops allow CSOs to demonstrate their capacity, accountability, and building donors' confidence in their ability to manage larger-scale projects.

In addition, GIZ regularly shares funding opportunities with its CSO partners, encouraging them to explore new and more ambitious avenues beyond GIZ's financial support.

By connecting local CSOs to broader funding networks, the Donor Linkage pillar not only enhances their financial sustainability but also promotes local ownership and leadership in humanitarian and development initiatives. Ultimately, it empowers CSOs to become proactive and credible partners driving inclusive and sustainable change in their communities.

Success Story: YCDN's Growth through the CSO Support Program

Youth & Community Development Network (YCDN) has been part of the full cycle of the CSO Support Program since 2022. As a two-time small-grant winner in the first cycle, YCDN was later awarded nearly €400,000 to implement an emergency response and community-focused, multisectoral program in Northern and Central Rakhine State.

Through the CSO Support Program, YCDN strengthened its organizational and staff capacity in project management, budgeting, and human resources:

- **Organizational and Staff Capacity:** Staff who once managed small grants now lead large-scale donor-funded projects. For example, a project officer who handled a mini-grant is now managing EU-funded projects with budgets of USD 300,000–500,000 as a project coordinator.
- **Budget Capacity:** YCDN has grown to manage project budgets ranging from USD 60,000 to USD 9 million, with durations of up to three years, across five sectors: Youth Empowerment, Food & Livelihoods Security, WASH, Health & Nutrition, and Emergency Response.
- **Donor Engagement:** Today, YCDN manages a portfolio worth over USD 20 million across 15 projects funded by partners such as WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, IOM, FAO, UNHCR, MSF, ABC, and LIFT, reaching 15 of 17 townships in Rakhine State.
- **Human Resources Capacity:** YCDN leads these projects with a team of 490 staff and 300 volunteers. While only 20 staff are based at the Head Office, the majority work directly in the field, ensuring strong local impact.



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“At YCDN we view GIZ as a strategic partner for youth capacity empowerment. Staff trained under the CSO Support Program have advanced to higher leadership roles, successfully coordinating large donor projects and achieving greater impact in Rakhine State.

GIZ's training programs are of high quality, and we are very satisfied with the knowledge and skills our staff gained through them. GIZ project support has influenced YCDN's donor expansion and new project awards, both directly and indirectly. Indirectly means that even without further conversations, the inclusion of GIZ's project experience in YCDN's profile often serves as a strong reference for potential donors,” shared by Mr. Khaing La Mum, Founder/Program Director from YCDN.





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