

Skills Development for Youth (SDY) Project

PROJECT OVERVIEW



THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE



- **Funding Agency:** German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
- **Co-Funding:** New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)
- **Target Group:** 7,500 vulnerable youths - with at least 60% women and 40% ethnic minorities and/or internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- **Duration:** December 2017 – March 2026
- **Budget:** 16.9 million Euro (BMZ: 16 million Euro; MFAT: 0,9 million Euro)
- **Geographical Coverage:** Over 100 Communities and IDP Camps in North and Central Rakhine State, Myanmar
- **Partners:** 5 international and 14 national NGOs, alongside 7 training providers and 27 local CSOs

Skills Development for Youth (SDY) is a transitional development assistance project implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. The Project aims at strengthening the social and economic resilience of over 100 vulnerable communities and/or IDP camps, all affected by the prolonged conflict and with very limited access to training and economic opportunities. SDY works closely with civil society organizations, targeting in particular youth, women, minority groups, and IDPs. The project offers technical, social, and business skills training, integrated into a community-based multisectoral approach for improved self-reliance and strengthened social cohesion.

Rakhine State between Challenges and Opportunities



When the SDY Project was launched in 2017, Rakhine State was already marred by centuries of ethnic tensions. That same year, violence escalated to unprecedented levels, forcing over 740,000 Rohingya to seek refuge in Bangladesh and other neighboring countries. In the years that followed, one crisis compounded another, spanning global, national, and regional dimensions: the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2021 coup d'état, the devastating cyclone "Mocha", and, most recently, the collapse of the ceasefire between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar Armed Forces in November 2023. This escalation of conflict resulted in the relocation of SDY Project staff and the closure of its office in Sittwe.

By 2024, the Arakan Army has taken control of most of Rakhine's townships, but at great cost: frequent and arbitrary airstrikes, the multiplication of landmines, and forced recruitment at national level which, all together, have displaced hundreds of thousands. Today, the region is faced by extreme poverty, political instability, and frequent natural disasters, making it one of Myanmar's most challenging areas for development and humanitarian efforts. Communities in Rakhine, especially women, youth, and internally displaced persons, face extremely limited access to education, skills training, and livelihood opportunities. The cumulative effect of conflict, disasters, and repression continues to erode coping mechanisms, leaving millions dependent on humanitarian aid and international solidarity – with the international community unable to address even a fraction of the massive humanitarian needs.

Steering through Unprecedented Challenges



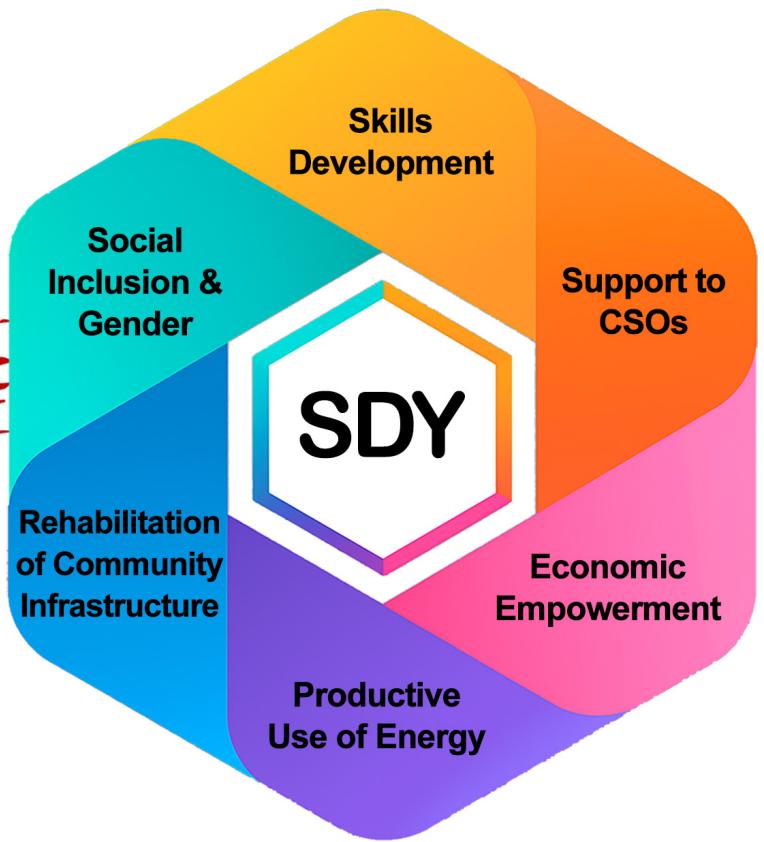
The crises in Rakhine State and across Myanmar have generated a wide range of challenges that deeply affect the lives of the beneficiary communities as well as project implementation. One of the most pressing obstacles is the restriction on travel and transport. Severe movement limitations make it increasingly difficult to access communities, particularly camps for internally displaced persons (IDP). As a result, project staff face significant barriers in monitoring and evaluation, often relying on remote steering and indirect communication. This situation is further aggravated by repeated breakdowns in telephone and internet services, which disrupt contact with implementing partners, field staff, and beneficiaries.

The escalation of armed conflict has also led to a fundamental shift in project operations. Since November 2023, fighting between the Arakan Army and the military intensified to such an extent that all project staff had to be relocated to Yangon by August 2024. Shortly after, the project office in Sittwe was permanently closed, cutting off direct access to beneficiaries and partners in Rakhine. This physical withdrawal has continuously forced the project to adapt to an operational environment where local presence and field engagement are no longer possible.

Taken together, these challenges illustrate the multi-layered consequences of the crises in Rakhine State. Restricted access, recurring emergencies, massive displacement, economic collapse, and the breakdown of education systems have resulted in an environment of instability and vulnerability, making project interventions more relevant than ever. By focusing on economic participation, social cohesion, and strengthening local service provision, SDY and its many implementing partners have been able to provide crucial support to affected communities, hence ensuring crucial pathways for livelihood recovery and resilience-building. To ensure the greatest level of effectiveness in the over 100 target communities, the Project combines six components tackling the technical, social, economic, structural, energy-related and institutional challenges.



SIX-PRONGED EMPOWERMENT



SIX COMPONENTS AT WORK FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC RESILIENCE BUILDING



(1) SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The Project is offering formal and non-formal skills training courses to over 7,500 vulnerable youths. All courses are community-based and cover occupational trades responding both to the local market needs and opportunities such as food-processing and value addition in the fishery and agricultural sectors, as well as in construction and agri-related trades such as small engine repair, bamboo handicrafts production, solar installation among others. The beneficiaries also undergo training on life skills, social cohesion, gender awareness and career guidance to acquire the necessary social competencies as well as practical know-how that can facilitate and sustain their economic integration.



(2) SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Through its incubation program, SDY has supported 27 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operating in Rakhine State with a view to strengthening their technical, managerial and institutional capacities. The CSO support scheme is structured around five complementary pillars: (1) project management training modules; (2) peer learning platforms to promote the exchange of best practices and foster cooperation; (3) seed funding scheme to implement innovative projects while benefitting from individual coaching, (4) organizational development support; and (5) donor-linkage, enabling CSOs to access international funding beyond the Project's duration and thus enhance their contribution to resilience-building.



(3) ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Skills development is complemented by concrete measures to facilitate the beneficiaries' economic integration through three pathways: (i) the employment pathway ensures that trainees are linked with local enterprises and employers through internships or on-the-job training e.g. in construction or catering companies; (ii) the income-generation pathway offers trainings in productive areas such as fruit preservation, soap-making or fish-cracker production that enable the youth to become economically active within a short period of time; (iii) the entrepreneurship pathway is centered on business development training coupled with coaching or mentoring, and complemented by the provision of start-up kits and/or capital. Beneficiaries are encouraged to form community-based business groups or to adhere to existing cooperatives and micro-enterprises that are supported by the Project through coaching, the provision of tools, equipment and, access to renewable energy.



(4) PRODUCTIVE USE OF ENERGY

SDY's interventions in the energy sector, co-funded both by the German and New Zealand governments, have been centered mainly on the electrification of basic education and health facilities in Rakhine State. As of 2022, the project has shifted towards the productive use of energy, combining renewables with the enhancement of livelihoods and local micro-enterprises in market-relevant value chains particularly in the agriculture and fishery sectors. In parallel, the Project has ensured that village electrification committees (VECs) are empowered to sustainably manage the installations by providing them with basic maintenance training and by upgrading the technical competencies of locally established electricians.



(5) REHABILITATION OF COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

The Project's rehabilitation activities respond to the dire situation of community infrastructure in numerous Rakhine villages and IDP camps, aggravated by the devastating effects of Cyclone Mocha, converging towards four objectives: (i) restoring basic living conditions for the neediest households, (ii) reviving basic social services especially in education and health, (iii) boosting economic potentials and (iv) rehabilitating training facilities. Social and economic community infrastructure such as multipurpose halls, training centers, markets, bridges, jetties, feeder roads, as well as WASH facilities and shelters etc. are rehabilitated with the participation of the community members through cash for work. In parallel, the Project offers to interested community-based technicians and unskilled workers basic training or upgrading courses in a bid to enhance local technical expertise. Wherever needed, the selected structures are equipped with solar systems.



(6) SOCIAL COHESION AND GENDER

The inclusion of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups as well as the promotion of gender equality is at the center of SDY's implementation strategy. The project has been implementing a two-pronged approach mainstreaming, on the one hand, social cohesion and gender-awareness training for the majority of its core beneficiaries, while, on the other, community-based dialogues on gender and intercultural cooperation build on the communities' resourcefulness to foster peaceful co-existence and cooperation.

Peer Learning Platforms

With the active participation of 19 partner organizations totaling 72 individual members, the SDY project has created and supported five Peer Learning Platforms covering the following themes:

- Social Cohesion and Gender
- Economic Empowerment
- Vocational Training
- Rehabilitation of Community Infrastructure
- Productive Use of Energy

Peer Learning Platforms are collaborative spaces where practitioners from humanitarian and development organizations – whether international, national or local – get together on a quarterly basis, mostly in person, to share knowledge and experiences, and hence contribute to more impactful implementation on the ground. Each Platform falls within a thematic framework that allows its members to:

- Capitalize on their own operational know-how and experiences
- Exchange on common challenges and practical solutions
- Jointly define standards, operational guidelines and best practices
- Promote geographical and sectoral complementarity amongst the member organizations
- Identify opportunities for innovation as well as impactful change
- Foster partnerships and economies of scale amongst partners

A total of 28 approaches have been shared, analyzed and discussed by their members, with more than 21 partners having already integrated at least one of these approaches into their work with some applying as many as eight. Amongst its achievements, the Platforms contributed to the establishment of a technical trainers' network, the promotion of collective businesses at community level, the introduction of clean energy for community-based economic ventures, the application of international safety, building and maintenance standards in the local, the mainstreaming of social cohesion measures to boost intercultural dialogue. By turning shared knowledge into practical action, the Peer Learning Platforms strengthen the capacity of local organizations, promote innovation, and ensure that projects are more effective, inclusive, and sustainable.



THE 2.0 APPROACH : Combining Emergency Response with Skills Development

When Cyclone Mocha struck Rakhine State in May 2023, the immediate effects on the lives and livelihoods of the region's inhabitants, including the Project beneficiaries, were devastating. Without exception, all of SDY's interventions had to be suspended to allow the beneficiaries to cope with the new situation and in many cases restart their lives. Directly or indirectly, they were all faced with severe needs ranging from drinking water and food, to shelter and medicines. To help them address their most essential concerns and allow them to gradually come back to the various training programs the Project had rolled out for them, the "2.0 Approach" was collectively designed within SDY's network of implementing partners.

In an acute crisis, the "2.0 Approach" combines cash or in-kind support with long-term oriented skills development in economic sectors with a strong market demand such as agriculture, fishery, construction or trade. The approach ensures that emergency response in favor of particularly vulnerable beneficiaries is complemented by measures offering concrete perspectives for social and economic stability. As such, the approach embraces the core principles of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus strategy within a single integrated intervention. For conflict-affected and disaster-prone regions like Rakhine State, this approach integrates emergency response in the form of livelihood recovery, and comprehensive skills development into a single cohesive framework that contributes to sustainable resilience.

Through the 2.0 approach, the SDY Project empowers marginalized women and youth, not just to overcome crises but to rely on new or enhanced skills and become active, resilient members of their communities. Through cash or in-kind assistance coupled with vocational skills training and business development support, beneficiaries can rebuild their livelihoods on a higher and stronger platform, which opens doors to new economic opportunities. This integrated approach transforms emergency assistance into a foundation for a more reliable future. Applied across all intervention areas, the project has delivered tangible results such as the increase of household incomes, improved food security and employability, as well as more resilient communities, proving if emergency aid is strategically blended with socio-economic skills development, recovery and resilience can grow hand in hand.



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