A Society's Resilience to Conflict: An Analysis of Its Key Determinants in Conflict-Prone Rakhine State of Myanmar

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored contributors to a society's resilience to conflict in a multiethnic community in Rakhine State of Myanmar. It examined how a society's resilience to conflict was related to economic and sociocultural interactions between diverse communities, presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas, physical isolation from outsiders, people's rumour verification practices, presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs), and efficient community leadership. A survey of 1,668 respondents in 27 conflict-unaffected and conflict-affected villages and interview with 1,200 respondents was conducted among members of diverse ethnic groups across Rakhine State. Results suggested that there was a significant and positive correlation between a society's resilience to conflict and each of 'economic interactions' (P = .000), 'sociocultural interactions' (P = .000), 'presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas' (P = .000), and 'efficient community leadership' (P = .000). Despite each individual of these independent variables being weakly correlated with the dependent variable, their combined effect strongly correlated with the dependent one. On the other hand, a society's resilience to conflict negatively correlated with each of 'physical isolation from outsiders' (P = .001) and 'people's rumour verification practices' (P = .000). However, a society's resilience to conflict hardly correlated with 'presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and

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community based organizations (CBOs)', with only less than 1% of respondents in both conflict resilient and vulnerable areas articulating the significant role of these organizations in preventing intercommunal conflict in their areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rakhine State has been mired in a recurrent intercommunal conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities for decades. A widespread sectarian violence between the two communities in June 2012, followed by subsequent violence incidents, has worsened the formerly unsettled socioeconomic and conflict situation in Rakhine State. Eight years after the 2012 conflict, the effects of intercommunal tensions are still perceptible across much of Rakhine State. Relations between Buddhist and Muslim communities in both conflict resilient and vulnerable areas have deteriorated, exacerbating mistrust, tension, confusion, fear and exclusion, while poverty remains deeply entrenched across the state.

A great many of scholars and policy makers have covered the drivers of communal violence in Rakhine State. While some claim ethno-religious factors to have contributed to intercommunal conflict, other argue economic and geopolitical factors have also convoluted the conflict situation in Rakhine State [1]. Regardless, they have held a common view that 'Buddhist nationalism, fear of islamification and demographic besiegement, historical stratification in wealth and land ownership, and weak proper rights and lack of access to justice' [2] have justified protracted conflict in Rakhine State. Despite such a considerable attention to the causes of conflict, very few scholars have probed why conflict did transpire in a number of areas where both Muslims and Rakhine live alongside each other.

A study of how a society is resilient to conflict is salient, as a stronger understanding of the dynamics that contribute to conflict resilience is a critical element in developing policies and designing programs to address how conflict could be averted and/or mitigated in Rakhine State in the future. The objective of this study is to examine contributing factors to a society's resilience to conflict that took place in many regions of Rakhine State since 2012. Thematic areas of investigation and analysis would be (i) economic interactions, (ii) sociocultural interactions, (iii) presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas, (iv) physical isolation from outsiders, (v) people's rumour verification practices, (vi) presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs) and (vii) efficient community leadership.

1.1 Research Question(s)

Q1: Why has a society resilience to conflict been successful in some areas while not in others across Rakhine State?

Q2: What factors have contributed to a society's resilience to conflict?

1.2 Null Hypothesis (Ho)

There is an independent relationship between 'a society's resilience to conflict' and each of (i) economic interactions, (ii) sociocultural interactions, (iii) presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas, (iv) physical isolation from outsiders, (v) people's rumour verification practices, (vi) presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs) and (vii) efficient community leadership.

1.3 Alternative Hypothesis (Ha)

There is a dependent relationship between 'a society's resilience to conflict' and each of (i) economic interactions, (ii) sociocultural interactions, (iii) presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas, (iv) physical isolation from outsiders, (v) people's rumour verification practices, (vi) presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs), and (vii) efficient community leadership.

1.4 Literature Review

Resilience has proved to be one of the most discussed topics in today's academia. However, its meaning may slightly vary depending on types of academic discipline where it is used. While it is very simply defined as 'a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event'

[3], it is also identified to be 'the capacity of a group of people – usually at the community level – to monitor, anticipate, respond to and manage both know risks and future uncertainties' [4]. When it comes to a particular study of conflict, conflict resilience is identified to be 'the ability to sit with and be fully present around those with whom we have fundamentally different views on critical issues' [5].

Across other areas of study, resilience generally occur 'at the level of the individual, family, community, nation, or global system as well as in ecosystems' [6]. However, it usually applies at the level of community, nation, global or ecosystem rather than at that of individual or family, when it comes to a specific realm of conflict studies. In this particular study, resilience only refers to the community level, where the study will focus on how a particular society or community is resilient to conflict in times of violence. Moreover, conflict resilience also conceptually refers to what Aall & Crocker [7] claims to be 'the ability to resist or recover from conflict and support social cohesion by preserving institutions, relationships and patterns of behavior that form the foundation of cohesion'.

A complex study framework designed with theoretical and analytical constructs are critical to gaining deeper insight into a resilience phenomenon. Theoretically, 'determinants of resilience include a host of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors that interact with one another to determine how one responds to stressful experiences' [3]. Moreover, there is also a theoretical debate among scholars on whether resilience is endogenous or exogenous – i.e. whether resilience is built in a society on its own or facilitated by external factor(s)? Many argue that resilience emerges within a society rather than from the outside. According to the proponents of 'endogenous resilience factors', resilience exists as a result of the interaction between the society at large and its institutions or ways of managing stress, while external donors' training and aids can only help encourage it [7]. By this, a core value of assessing resilience happens to lie in 'uncovering the endogenous assets, attributes, qualities, resources and actions embedded within communities and societies which can potentially serve to protect them from violent conflict' [8]. In parallel, many scholars have also advanced a study and discussion of exogenous resilience factors. Breisinger et al. [9] stresses that individuals and groups choose to participate in conflict depending on their opportunity costs which are substantially governed by many socioeconomic conditions including levels of income and households' access to food and services.

Despite such a theoretically or conceptually diverse concept, resilience factors usually come in many forms even within the same society, demanding a combined package of different policy instruments. While the factors emerge in the form of endogenous characteristics such as 'political tradition, social cohesion, value systems, cultural practices and strong civil society' [10], they also emerge as exogenous characteristics like 'community members' equal access to resources and services' [11]. As a result, a society's resilience to conflict calls for strategic policies targeted to promote community members' equal access to not only humanitarian and development resources (e.g. food, health, education, employment, land, infrastructure, etc.) but also governance and sociocultural institutions (e.g. security, rule of law, conflict management, interfaith, and social cohesion, etc.), which need to be developed within a society on its own and/or by the government or intercommunal community.

In Rakhine State context, behind a society's resilience to conflict lies no significant exogenous factors. For several decades, neither the government nor international community has secured the Rakhine community's satisfaction in terms of humanitarian and economic development. While the Rakhine community has been resentful of the (Union and State) government's enduring 'political control over their own affairs, economic marginalization, human rights abuses and restriction on language and cultural expression' [12], they have also developed substantial grievances toward the international community due to humanitarian relief largely targeted to the Muslim community at the expense of the Rakhine [13]. Therefore, external factors (either the government or international community) have gained no influential power to facilitate a society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State. On the other hand, some endogenous factors are believed to have contributed to a society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State.

It was not until a Myanmar's political transition in 2010 that intercommunal tension between the Rakhine and Muslim communities became noticeably rife. Only after the 2010 general

election where a few Muslims in Rakhine State were elected to be members of parliament (MPs) at the Union Parliament of Myanmar, and when a controversial debate around the term of Rohingya began to arise in public, the Rakhine have begun to worry that the Muslim community will gain 'political and representational rights in the name of Rohingya ethnicity and influence over local policies, resources, and culture in Rakhine State' [13]. Despite this worry, decades-long social contract, and sociocultural and economic institutions between the two communities are believed to have not eroded, while still serving as endogenous characteristics to a society's resilience to conflict in some areas in Rakhine State during times of conflict since June 2012.

However, very few scholars have focused on studying such critical endogenous or exogenous factors contributing to a society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State. To fulfil this knowledge gap, the researcher is determined to carry out this particular research probing for factors behind a society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State. Before this project, the researcher also led a preliminary research as an initial exploration of issues directly related to this particular academic interest in 2017. The preliminary project helped the researcher a lot in identifying possible key determinants of conflict resilience, understanding what kind of sources are useful to answering his research questions, and narrowing his topic in order to have a clear focus. The preliminary study found out that conflict resilience was mainly attributable to 'capable and respected leadership', 'economic, social, and religious interactions between diverse communities', 'trust and composition of security forces', 'isolation from outsiders', 'majority-minority demographics', 'access to information and rumour verification', and 'community based organizations and civil society' at different levels of association. The study, however, revealed that conflict resilience was strongly associated with 'capable and respected leadership' independent of other individual factors, while it was minimally related to other factors only under the influence of 'capable and respected leadership' [14]. These preliminary findings were used to structure the course of this research, informing the design and formulation of primary and secondary research questions, thematic research priorities and both the quantitative and qualitative tools. This study was purposefully designed to check whether there might be some variations in research

outcomes depending on the size of population and locations of study areas and to confirm or necessarily disconfirm the preliminary findings. To fulfil this objective, this study quadrupled the sample size and included some additional areas which were not covered in the preliminary study.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach in order to capture the varied local contexts across target areas. The approach was informed by the overall design of the research which required a need for comparative analysis between villages that were and were not resilient to conflict since 2012.

The collection quantitative data was carried out in 27 conflict resilient and vulnerable villages where one, two, or more than two ethnic groups were living side by side for a long time. The villages were selected from each of the most conflict-prone townships in Rakhine State using stratified and random sampling. The quantitative tool was a survey of 1,668 individuals across all study villages. The survey sample size was calculated using a concrete sampling frame that listed household populations in each sampled village. Simple random sampling was used to select households in each village, while respondents were purposefully selected based on gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in order to ensure they were representative of their households and willing to answer complex and often sensitive questions needed for this study.

The qualitative tools used for this study were mostly key informant interviews, informal interviews and telephone interviews. These tools were used to provide a deeper, more explanatory understanding of the conflict prevention factors identified by the survey. Respondents were chosen using purposive and quota sampling to ensure the inclusion of key and well-informed persons from each of the target populations – Village Tract Administrators (VTAs), Heads of Hundred Households (HHHs), Heads of Ten Households (HTHs), Ward Administrators (WAs), Township Administrators (TAs), elders, businessmen, health workers, International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) staff, immigration officers, area police and Border Guard Police (BGP). In total, 1,200 participants from a number of sampled villages and townships were interviewed based on a semi-structured interview guide.

3. RESULTS

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine whether a society's resilience to conflict was associated with each of (i) economic interactions, (ii) sociocultural interactions, (iii) presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas, (iv) physical isolation from outsiders, (v) people's rumour verification practices, (vi) presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs), and (vii) efficient community leadership. The Cramer's V test was also incorporated into the chi-square test in order to measure the relative strength of an association between the two variables.

Table 1 shows a significant relationship between a society's resilience to conflict and frequency of economic interactions between diverse communities, X^2 (5, N = 1668) = 38.3, *P* = .000. However, the correlation between the two variables was relatively weak, V = .15. The percentage of respondents who engaged in economic interactions with member of another community on 'daily' or 'often' basis is slightly bigger in conflict resilient areas (14%) than in conflict vulnerable ones (12%).

Table 2 also shows a significant relationship between a society's resilience to conflict and frequency of sociocultural interactions between diverse communities, X^2 (5, N = 1668) = 30.2, *P* = .000. Despite its significance, the correlation was also weak, V = .13. A slightly bigger number of respondents in conflict resilient areas (17%) than in conflict vulnerable ones (16%) engaged in sociocultural interactions with members of another community on 'daily' or 'often' basis.

Table 3 illustrates a significant association between a society's resilience to conflict and presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas, X^2 (5, N = 1668) = 49.9, *P* = .000. The association between the two variables

was also weak, V = .17. A relatively bigger number of respondents in conflict resilient villages (79%) than in conflict vulnerable ones (75%) assessed presence of security forces to be 'very important' or 'important' in preventing conflict in their areas.

Table 4 also illustrates a significant relationship between a society's resilience to conflict and physical isolation from outsiders was also statistically significant, X^2 (4, N = 1668) = 18.1, *P* = .001. While the two variables negatively correlated with each other, the correlation was also weak, V = .10. The number of respondents witnessing more frequent (daily or sometimes) arrival of outsiders in their areas was even greater in conflict resilient areas (52%) than in conflict vulnerable ones (44%).

Table 5 reveals that there was a statistically significant relationship between people's resilience to conflict and people's rumour verification practices, X^2 (5, N = 1668) = 60.7, *P* = .000. The two variables also negatively correlated and the correlation was also weak, V = .19. Even a greater number of respondents in conflict vulnerable areas (60%) than in conflict resilient ones (46%) used to verify online and offline rumour with their community leaders such as village elders, religious leaders, and VTAs.

Table 6 depicts a significant relationship between a society's resilience to conflict and the role of stakeholders, X^2 (7, N = 1668) = 57.1, *P* = .000. Despite a weak correlation between the two variables (V = 0.18), the number of respondents articulating a critical role of community leaders was significantly bigger in conflict resilient areas (35%) than in conflict vulnerable ones (27%). Moreover, a significantly greater number of respondents in conflict resilient villages (15%) than in conflict vulnerable ones (10%) articulated a critical role of security forces (i.e. police and Tatmadaw) in conflict prevention. However, very

Table 1. Test results for the association between conflict resilience and economic interactions

Conflict resilience	Frequency of economic interactions between diverse communities						
	Daily	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Do not know	Total
No	24	41	126	42	288	12	533
	4.50	7.69	23.64	7.88	54.03	2.25	100.00
Yes	46	114	151	64	745	15	1,135
	4.05	10.04	13.30	5.64	65.64	1.32	100.00
Total	70	155	277	106	1,033	27	1,668
	4.20	9.29	16.61	6.35	61.93	1.62	100.00
Pearson chi2(5) = 38.3552, Pr = 0.000, Cramér's V = 0.1516							

Table 2. Test results for the association between conflict resilience and sociocultural interactions

Conflict resilience	Frequency of sociocultural interactions between diverse communities						
	Daily	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Do not know	Total
No	35	56	152	64	215	11	533
	6.57	10.51	28.52	12.01	40.34	2.06	100.00
Yes	57	138	230	102	596	12	1,135
	5.02	12.16	20.26	8.99	52.51	1.06	100.00
Total	92	194	382	166	811	23	1,668
	5.52	11.63	22.90	9.95	48.62	1.38	100.00
Pearson chi2(5) = 30.2517, Pr = 0.000, Cramér's V = 0.1347							

Table 3. Test results for the association between conflict resilience and presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas

Conflict resilience	Presence of security forces in a community's neighboring areas						
	Very important	Important	A little important	Unimportant	Absent	Do not know	Total
No	206	192	59	46	25	5	533
	38.65	36.02	11.07	8.63	4.69	0.94	100.00
Yes	538	366	48	62	101	20	1,135
	47.40	32.25	4.23	5.46	8.90	1.76	100.00
Total	744	558	107	108	126	25	1,668
	44.60	33.45	6.41	6.47	7.55	1.50	100.00
Pearson chi2(5) = 49.9946, Pr = 0.00, Cramér's V = 0.1731							

Table 4. Test results for the association between conflict resilience and physical isolation from outsiders

Conflict resilience	Physical arrival by outsiders					
	Daily	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Do not know	Total
No	56	180	64	190	43	533
	10.51	33.77	12.01	35.65	8.07	100.00
Yes	112	476	165	317	65	1,135
	9.87	41.94	14.54	27.93	5.73	100.00
Total	168	656	229	507	108	1,668
	10.07	39.33	13.73	30.40	6.47	100.00
Pearson chi2(4) = 18.1652, Pr = 0.001, Cramér's V = 0.1044						

Table 5. Test results for the association between conflict resilience and people's rumour verification practices

Conflict resilience	Rumour verification practices						
	With village elders	With religious leaders	With VTAs	Newspapers	Social media	Do not verify rumour	Total
No	149	70	104	24	24	162	533
	27.95	13.13	19.51	4.50	4.50	30.39	100.00
Yes	262	58	202	42	37	534	1,135
	23.08	5.11	17.80	3.70	3.26	47.05	100.00
Total	411	128	306	66	61	696	1,668
	24.64	7.67	18.35	3.96	3.66	41.73	100.00
Pearson chi2(5) = 60.7275, Pr = 0.000, Cramér's V = 0.1908							

few respondents in both conflict resilient and vulnerable villages (<1%) witnessed the important role of CSOs, CBOs and INGOs in conflict prevention in their areas.

Table 6. Test results for the association between conflict resilience and the role of stakeholders in conflict prevention

Conflict resilience	Role of stakeholders in conflict prevention								
	TAs	Community Leadersz	CSOs/ CBOs	INGOs	Police	Tatm adaw	Union/State governments	Do not know	Total
No	129	147	0	2	22	31	201	1	533
	24.20	27.58	0.00	0.38	4.13	5.82	37.71	0.19	100.00
Yes	141	399	5	8	83	91	388	20	1,135
	12.42	35.15	0.44	0.70	7.31	8.02	34.19	1.76	100.00
Total	270	546	5	10	105	122	589	21	1,668
	16.19	32.73	0.30	0.60	6.29	7.31	35.31	1.26	100.00
Pearson chi2(7) = 57.1195, Pr = 0.000, Cramér's V = 0.1851									

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Economic Interactions

Compared to conflict affected villages, those that successfully averted conflict in 2012 and/or later years saw a comparatively stronger economic interactions between members of diverse communities in Rakhine State. Even when communal pressure is detectable, interactions in conflict resilient villages have still remained fairly powerful since 2012, at least in private exchanges. Moreover, the condition of economic interactions between diverse communities entering communal conflict in 2012 and/or later years has also gradually improved since late 2015 [15], leading to a marked decline in tension and incidents of communal violence between them.

However, economic interactions did not solely contribute to a society's resilience to conflict. It contributed to conflict resilience in combination with other factors – mainly efficient community leadership. It was evidenced in conflict resilient villages where community leaders and business elites were able to dominate a large portion of business sector in their areas. Community leaders such as VTAs, HHHs, HTHs, township or village elders, and well-off businessmen usually led the process of hiring Muslim labourers for the Rakhine's farms. They were found highly influential over their own communities and capable of defending themselves against their fellow community members' intra-communal pressures over their economic relations with members of another community.

4.2 Sociocultural Interactions

Members of diverse communities in many areas of Rakhine State were found to have mutually engaged in some degree of social interactions before 2012. The interactions ranged from 'short conversations while buying goods in a shared market, to regular conversations at teashops, to deeper social relations such as inviting a member of another community to one's home' [14]. Moreover, Buddhists, Islamists, Christians, and Hindus in Rakhine State have attended each other's nonreligious events, such as weddings, funerals, and post-funeral ceremonies across a number of generations. However, they have rarely paid visits to each other's religious events such as novice, Eid, Easter, or Diwali. Of all the communities in Rakhine State, the Muslim community is said to be the least inclined to participate in quasi-religious events like the Myanmar New Year (Thingyan) festival, in which other non-Buddhist communities are willing to participate. Muslims said that their participation in the Myanmar New Year festival was not in line with their religious principles. For instance, Muslim women cannot be seen wet in public. The nature of religious principles is believed to have led the Muslim community to have fewer sociocultural relations not only with the Rakhine but also with other non-Rakhine ethnic groups in Rakhine State since the pre-2012 conflict period. This has contributed to the Rakhine's majority perception that Muslims do not value and even disrespect local Rakhine sociocultural norms.

Since 2012, sociocultural interactions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities have nearly dissolved, despite fairly powerful economic interactions. Despite such a relative decrease in sociocultural interactions between the Rakhine and Muslims, the Rakhine were found to have continued to develop sociocultural relations with the Kaman, who identify as following the same religion as Muslims albeit with slight differences in principles and practice. Moreover, Rakhine village leaders like VTAs or Rakhine businessmen were found to have still attended social (but not religious) events like the

wedding held on the Muslim community in villages that successfully warded off conflict, while no such a similar condition in conflict affected villages.

4.3 Presence of Security Forces

The presence of regional police as well as the timely intervention of military, necessarily combined with the working community leadership, enabled efficient conflict prevention in conflict resilient villages in times of conflict since 2012. 'Both Rakhine and Muslim communities had strong expectations of the military and police and more broadly, the government to prevent violence and improve security' [16] during times of conflict. In villages where security forces were readily accessible, people were found comparatively more reluctant to assail members of another community than in villages where security forces were not present at all. The permanent deployment of security forces, whether their higher or lower capacity of conflict management, also helped reduce people's defensive mood and heavy reliance on their self-help security mechanism deemed more prone to tensions and clashes based on communal distrusts between diverse communities. In villages where no security forces were primarily present, the timely arrival of security forces (especially the military), under the urgent request of efficient village leaders, ensured the effective conflict prevention during the conflict incidents.

4.4 Physical Isolation from Outsider

Outsiders were usually identified by respondents to be *agitators* they claimed to persuade their ethnic members to fight against members of other ethnicities, *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)* they perceived to segregate the host diverse communities who lived together for a long time, and *racial or religious extremists* they believed to impose hostile attacks over local communities. Villages, whether geographically distant from other villages or not, never succeeded to stay away from outsiders who had travelled across all places where they could instigate people to wage conflict with members of another community. Given this context, both conflict resilient and vulnerable villages were prone to the arrival and threat by external mob [14]. However, some villages where leaders' strategies used to protect their villagers against external agitations were efficient successfully averted communal violence in times of conflict since 2012.

4.5 People's Rumour Verification Practices

Rumours are often cited to have heated up social tension that leads to communal conflict in Myanmar since the initial outbreak of communal conflict in Rakhine State in 2012. Spreading information about an inciting incident, rumours that demonize Muslim populations in Myanmar and elsewhere, and perceptions of Buddhist decline and threats to Buddhism have widely been perceived to have contributed intercommunal conflict and violence in many areas across the country [17]. However, a collective mechanism of rumour verification was found to be enough powerful in both conflict resilient and vulnerable areas to prevent community members from being dissuaded by rumours, provoking hatred towards members of another community, and inciting violence with them. During critical times of conflict since 2012, people in conflict affected villages were found even more active in verifying rumours with their respected leaders than those in conflict resilient ones. It could therefore be argued that people's rumour verification alone was not successful to fostering a society's resilience to conflict.

4.6 Efficient Community Leadership

The village leadership is usually 'highly centralized, with power concentrated in the hands of exclusively male village or village tract administrators, accompanied by small groups of village elders and occasionally religious leaders' [18]. Although they can represent only a handful of key actors, they are able to convince most networks in society to follow a particular course of action [19]. Community leaders, mainly VTAs, in conflict resilient villages were found more outstanding than those in conflict vulnerable ones in keeping stability through fostering better economic and sociocultural relations and trust between members of diverse communities in their villages. A number of Rakhine VTAs led the process of hiring Muslim labourers for the Rakhine's farms, necessarily taking advantage of their role as VTAs to defend themselves including their fellow elites against intra-communal pressures over their economic relations with members of another community. The VTAs and religious leaders also held frequent meetings where leaders of diverse communities had agreed to pursue strategic steps for conflict prevention such as the proscription of suspected outsiders' approaches to their villages, the promotion of people's spirits

of reconciliation by highlighting the profound history of peaceful coexistence between diverse communities in their villages and the village leaders' timely cooperation with regional security forces in case of conflict emergency during critical times of conflict since 2012.

However, community leaders in Rakhine State proved to be incapable of pursuing these strategic steps on their own. As Abdow [20] suggests, community leaders are required to address the situation by encouraging peaceful co-existence, initiate peace and dialogue among the communities, resolve the emerging conflict, and increase security situation in the region and peace mediation during times of conflict. However, community leaders in Rakhine State would not have been able to promote a society's resilience to conflict unless they were supported by the government's authorities such as TAs, police, and the military. It was evidenced in most conflict resilient villages where community leaders led by VTAs were able to seek to forge conflict prevention measures in coordination with security forces. In villages where security forces had not been readily present, community leaders were able to efficiently coordinate with TAs in seeking help for a timely deployment of security forces in their villages.

Despite its importance in any conflict prevention mechanism, community leaders' effort to develop positive relationships between members of diverse communities was not also enough functional to bolster a society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State. It was evidenced in many villages where community leaders proved to be outstandingly active in fostering better intercommunal relations and conflict was not averted, and where community leaders were not enough active to promote better relationships between diverse communities and conflict was successfully averted. Behind this occasion was how community members had differently expected their community leaders to be. Some members were willing to rely on community leaders who had tended to bolster intercommunal reconciliation, while other members did not want leaders who had prioritized reconciliation measures.

Reflecting this reality on the ground, a disproportionate number of respondents in many conflict resilient areas across the study unanimously identified good leaders to be those who 'were respected and trusted within their own communities' [14] and could prepare the best for

defending their areas against external hostilities that may presumably be imposed by members of another community. Only a few of those in conflict resilient areas advocated leaders with the capacity to gain respect and trust from members of another community. Such a poorly held belief in community leaders' reconciliatory efforts was also likely to lead community members' tendency to rely on security forces in conflict prevention sector. In turn, such an instantaneous request for the presence of security forces even in some uncritical conflict situations seriously affected community leaders' confidence in bringing about a sustainable conflict resilience in their villages.

4.7 Presence of CSOs and CBOs

Before 2012, there were a number of self-help community-based organizations purposefully formed by diverse communities to serve basic community welfares at both urban and rural levels in Rakhine State. Despite their presence, the organizations used to represent only a particular ethnic or religious community and served for their own community's sake. When investigated how those organizations helped promote conflict resilience, people in both conflict resilient and vulnerable villages reported that there was no community-based organization which facilitated better communal relations, helped reduce communal tensions and prevented diverse communities from waging conflict with one another. The organizations were formed along their ethnic lines and failed to prioritise the common welfare of diverse ethnic or religious communities.

Since 2012, the number of newly-formed community-based organizations and other civil society organizations has increased mainly on the Rakhine side. A number of Rakhine community-based organizations formed after 2012 have proved so nationalistic and politically-driven that their objectives have become to help protect their own ethnicity and religion against other community's hostility rather than to fulfil their own community's socioeconomic development needs. Moreover, Rakhine civil society organizations have come up with the intention to scrutinize the activities of foreign humanitarian organizations perceived and even accused of being biased against the Rakhine and prioritizing the Muslim community's welfare in Rakhine State. It was evidenced in the situation that more than forty Rakhine civil society groups formed 'the NGO Watch Team, to scrutinise the activities of international aid agencies' [12].

On the other hand, organizations with similar nature have not developed on the Muslim community's side since 2012. Muslims are believed to have not established CBOs or CSOs probably because they could easily mobilise their community members to engage in any sort of socio-religious occasions. Moreover, the government's restrictions on the opening of Islamic religious schools since the 2012 communal violence are also believed to have humiliated the Muslim community's capacity to initiate or reinvigorate the formation of efficient CBOs and CSOs in their areas. Moreover, the failure of Muslim community to initiate efficient CBOs and CSOs is also highly attributable to the existence of so many INGOs in Rakhine State. On one side, the role of INGOs is of tremendously importance in providing the deprived societies of any kind with necessary humanitarian and development assets and bringing about better socio-economic and political changes to these societies. On the other hand, a crowded population of these organizations for a long time has likely been to diminish pre-existing CBOs' and CSOs' capacity to promote community welfares and undercut the growth of new organizations on the Muslim community's side. As INGOs have stretched extensive hands in all community development programmes, but with their little role in capacitating local communities to be able to run these programmes on their own, have undermined the development of efficient civil society in particular regions.

In the absence of Muslim CBOs and CSOs, a few Rakhine organizations were found to have advanced in promoting positive intercommunal relations since 2012. However, these organizations were found to have faced serious intra-communal pressures over their communications with members of the Muslim community. As a result, they have gradually become reluctant to continue to promote intercommunal reconciliation and conflict resilience across diverse communities in Rakhine State. Given this context, 'the network of CSOs and CBOs that work towards a pluralistic and peaceful society have still remained underdeveloped' [14] and failed to foster society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State since 2012.

5. CONCLUSION

The study examined factors contributing to a society's resilience to conflict in Rakhine State.

Across the study, conflict resilience was significantly associated with economic interactions between members of diverse communities. However, economic interactions were more frequent and dependent between diverse communities in villages where community leadership was enough powerful. In conflict resilient villages, community leaders and business elites were able to dominate a large portion of business sectors and lead the process of hiring Muslim labourers for Rakhine regardless of their villagers' consent. Sociocultural interactions were also supportive of building a society's resilience to conflict, in combination with economic interactions and efficient community leadership. In conflict resilient villages where community leaders could facilitate business relations between members of diverse communities, sociocultural interactions were also found fairly powerful.

The presence or timely intervention of security forces, necessarily combined with the working community leadership, enabled efficient conflict prevention in conflict resilient villages during times of conflict. The military forces were much more likely than the local police to gain deeper trust from the local population across the study, despite local communities' objection to their permanent presence for conflict prevention in their areas. Physical isolation from outsiders did not contribute to conflict resilience. Rather, conflict prevention strategies used by a particular community led by their community leaders to protect their villages against outsiders' instigations were found critical to fostering a society's resilience to conflict. It was not also evident that people's rumour verification practices could lead to a successful society's resilience to conflict. Despite their capacity and willingness to verify rumours, they were not successful in conflict prevention unless their leaders were not committed to keeping stability in their villages.

Efficient community leadership was found to be a significant contributing factor to a society's resilience to conflict. However, community leaders would not have been able to promote conflict resilience if they were not supported by the government's authorities such as the TAs, police, and the military. Presence of civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) were seen as not playing a critical role in bolstering conflict resilience in Rakhine State at all. Since 2012, CSOs and CBOs have not developed on the Muslim

society's side at all. Despite the increase in the number of CSOs and CBOs on the Rakhine society's side, they have been reluctant to foster a society's resilience to conflict due to the intra-communal pressure over their efforts to promote intercommunal reconciliation.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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