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EngageMedia visited Chiang Mai, Thailand, and Yangon, Myanmar, in July 2013 to interview organisations and individuals that are using video extensively to support democracy in Burma.

The scoping mission, supported by a grant from the OSF Burma Project, enabled two staff members from EngageMedia to explore:

- The state of video production, distribution, archiving and outreach practices
- Training opportunities in video production, distribution and associated fields
- The skills gap between video producers in Burma and the region
- Online and video security practices
- Availability of resources and needs to create a vibrant video community
- The state of video networks, knowledge sharing and the field more broadly
- The key themes being tackled in the video field.

We also assessed the quality and ease of internet access in Yangon and discussed both online and offline risks that affect the videos and films being produced in Yangon.

This report is based on the interviews with the organisations and filmmakers listed below, on videos and films sourced primarily from The Best Friend Library 1 and on desktop research.

- Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), Chiang Mai
- Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Chiang Mai and Yangon
- Network Media Group/Burma News International (NMG/BNI), Chiang Mai
- House of Media Entertainment (HOME), Yangon
- Equality Myanmar, Yangon
- Myanmar ICT Development Organisation (MIDO), Yangon
- Kamayut Media, Yangon
- Wathann Film Festival Organisers, Yangon
- Yangon Film School, Yangon
- Kyi Phyu Shin (Filmmaker), Yangon
- Aung Zaw Moe (Filmmaker), Yangon
- Yee Nan Thike (Filmmaker), Yangon

For security purposes, we refrain from naming individuals, especially when referring to sensitive topics, to protect them from risks should this report be made public.

Since March 2011, when military rule formally ended in Myanmar, there have been significant advances towards democracy. Under the leadership of President Thein Sein, the government has taken steps to 'open up' Myanmar as a democratic country, indicated by:

- The release of over 500 political prisoners since 2012 2,3
- The relaxing of print media censorship with the removal of the 'pre-publication' law 4
- The ability of the former 'exile media', including the DVB and Irrawady, to operate in Myanmar
- The opening up of the internet and removal of censorship on banned websites.5

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1 The Best Friend Library is a Chiang Mai-based organisation that provides Burmese books and other multimedia content to the public.
In spite of these promising changes, the activists, journalists and filmmakers we interviewed said they were sceptical and wary because there was no guarantee these democratic changes would last without the development of a strong civil society.\(^6\)

Some of them said they believed that ‘democracy’ in Myanmar was a facade used by the government to lift international sanctions.\(^7\) In 2011 the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) announced that it had awarded Myanmar the chairmanship for its 2014 summit\(^8\) despite calls from human rights groups in ASEAN countries to hold off the decision.

US President Barack Obama's visit to Myanmar in November 2012 signified an improvement in the relationship between the two countries.\(^9\) Earlier that year, in July 2012, the US government lifted the investment ban on the country. The European Union has also lifted economic sanctions against Myanmar (with the exception of an arms embargo).\(^10\)

The new ‘democratic face’ of Myanmar has been very effective in lifting sanctions, but scratch beneath the surface of the 'Burmese Spring' and a less than ideal picture of the country emerges.

**'Freeing' Political Prisoners**

Although all DVB video journalists have been released,\(^11\) as well as some bloggers and journalists, the Myanmar government has not released all political prisoners. More alarmingly, they continue to arrest, detain and charge activists.\(^12\)

The government has also not taken steps to provide proper reparation or any kind of social and legal protection to freed political prisoners. The Human Rights Watch 2012 report on Burma says: "Freed political prisoners face persecution, including restrictions on travel and education, and lack adequate psychosocial support."\(^13\)

Groups like the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma) provide social, educational and economic support to political prisoners and their families as well as monitoring the status and location of political prisoners and those that have ‘disappeared’.

At the same time, former political prisoners like Zarganar and Nay Phone Latt have established their own local non-profit organisations (House of Media Entertainment and Myanmar ICT Development Organisation respectively) upon being released.

**Ethnic/Religious Conflict**

Most of the individuals interviewed said the biggest issue in Myanmar right now is the rise of ethnic clashes, particularly between ‘fundamentalist’ Buddhists and Muslims in certain states.

**Against the Central Myanmar Military**

Internal conflict and violent opposition against the Myanmar military continues in the Shan, Kachin, Kayin, and Kayah states. The issues in these states range from land grabbing, territorial disputes, the exploitation of natural resources, the presence of Chinese mining companies, human trafficking and calls for independence from the central Myanmar government.

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\(^6\) Interviews with Network Media Group, DVB, Mido, Kyi Phyu Shin, HREIB, Equality Myanmar, HOME.

\(^7\) Interview with Network Media Group (BNI member) in Chiang Mai.

\(^8\) Burma: A Test that ASEAN May be Failing. East Asia Forum. 26 November 2011.


\(^10\) Gains Need Consolidation in a Landmark Year for Change in Burma. South East Asia Press Alliance (SEAPA). 2 May 2013.

\(^11\) Free Burma VJ. http://www.freeburmavj.org/

\(^12\) Political Prisoner Watch (Burma): March 2013. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma).

Rohingya Conflict

The state of Rakhine in western Myanmar has seen clashes between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslim groups since 2012. As of July 2013, 237 Rohingya had been killed in the clashes and an estimated 14,000 have fled Myanmar.\(^\text{14}\)

The Myanmar government does not recognise the Rohingya as an ethnic group or as citizens, claiming they are illegal migrants from Bangladesh. Human rights groups have called on the United Nations to place them in refugee camps.\(^\text{15}\) Without citizenship, Rohingya face restrictions on their movement.

Most of the organisations we interviewed treaded lightly on the Rohingya issue. DVB are undergoing a process to re-draft their organisational policy to ensure that ethnic issues are covered.\(^\text{16}\) Some BNI members do not recognise Rohingya as an ethnic group, so the network is careful in its coverage of this issue.\(^\text{17}\)

Media Freedom but with Restrictions

With the dissolution of the Press Scrutiny and Registration Division (PSRD) in January 2013, media freedom in Myanmar appeared to be headed in the right direction. The PSRD was the government agency responsible for 'pre-screening' content prior to publication. Furthermore, the Myanmar Writers and Journalist Association (MWJA), the only journalist association sanctioned by the Ministry of Information (MOI), was officially disbanded in March 2012. This meant that journalists could organise without having to be legally sanctioned by the MOI. These steps seemed to show that the government was living up to its promise of relaxing censorship and allowing for media freedom.\(^\text{18}\)

However, press freedom and freedom-of-expression activists have criticised the draft Press Law Bill (2013), created by the newly established Myanmar Press Council (MPC), for not meeting international standards. NGO Article19 have drafted a point-by-point critique and recommendations on the bill.\(^\text{19}\)

To make matters more complicated, the MOI drafted its own version of the press law, called the Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law. The MOI draft, created without any consultation with civil society or journalist groups, is more restrictive than the MPC’s version.

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Article19 have outlined the differences between the MPC draft bill and MOI bill:\(^\text{20}\)

- The Press Council's bill regulates the journalistic profession. The Ministry's bill regulates the businesses that print and publish.
- The Press Council's bill has some positive features such as the empowerment of journalists by recognising certain legal rights. The Ministry's bill has almost no positive features.
- The Press Council's bill recognises the right to freedom of expression. The Ministry's bill ignores 65 years of human rights obligations, with no recognition that regulation of printers and publishers infringes on the right to freedom of expression and media freedom.
- Both bills give the government unjustified and undemocratic power over the press and should be rejected by parliament.

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\(^\text{16}\) Interview with DVB Chiang Mai.

\(^\text{17}\) Interview with BNI/NMG.


Despite criticism from the MPC\(^21\) and wider civil society, the MOI bill was passed by the lower house of Parliament in July 2013.\(^22\)

Beyond the potential legislative restrictions on press freedom, there are also some restrictions on broadcasting at the operational level. One such restriction is on ownership, as explained by the International Media Support (IMS):

Of the six television channels that can be viewed in Myanmar, one (MRTV4) is privately owned while another (Myanmar International) is a joint venture between the government and one of its allies. The rest (MRTV, MWD, MRTV3 and Channel 5) are run entirely by the state, with poor infrastructure and equally poor production quality. However, the exile television broadcaster DVB TV is viewed by many in Myanmar.\(^23\)

Realising that most of the news on TV is controlled by the government, many people turn to DVB as a reliable and un-biased source of news in Myanmar.\(^24\) DVB have about 200,000 registered viewers. Another restrictive practice is related to the location of broadcasting transmitters. All transmitters and satellite dishes that broadcast locally need to be located in the premises of the Ministry of Information.\(^25\) For this reason, DVB have maintained its headquarters and transmitters in Chiang Mai. On a visit to Mizzima, we discovered that the TV team is currently housed in the MOI building, from where they transmit news talk shows.

**What's in a Name? From Exile to Myanmar**

DVB, strategically taking advantage of the 'democratic shift' in Myanmar, have officially registered in the country and setup offices in Yangon and Mandalay. They were, however, not allowed to expand the acronym 'DVB' to Democratic Voice of Burma. DVB said this is because the government does not want organisations to use the words 'democracy' or 'Burma' in their names. While they plan to produce shows in Myanmar, starting with the recently started DVB Debate,\(^26\) most of their operations remain in Chiang Mai.

HREIB have taken a similar, but more optimistic, approach. They have moved most of their operations to Myanmar and registered under the name Equality Myanmar. They said the name will ensure that they will remain 'under the radar' and will not 'alarm' the government due to the focus on human rights in their work.

**Internet Access and Restrictions**

Internet penetration in Myanmar is at 2 - 3 % as of mid-2013.\(^27\) Of the 60 million people in Myanmar, there are 700,000 estimated internet users. Most of these are concentrated in bigger cities such as Yangon and Mandalay.

The current internet service providers (ISPs) include Myanmar Teleport, Yatanarporn Telecom, Information Technology Central Services, Red Link communications, and Myanmar Post and Telecommunications.\(^28\) Access is provided through ADSL circuits, satellite, WiMax and 3G.\(^29\) Most people access the internet at local internet cafes.\(^30\) To upload large files, locals frequent Traders and ParkRoyal hotels to access their free wifi network.\(^31\)

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\(^{24}\) Interview with DVB in Chiang Mai.

\(^{25}\) Interview with DVB in Chiang Mai.

\(^{26}\) DVB Debate Commercial. [https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=hOXGM7sgCX0](https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=hOXGM7sgCX0)

\(^{27}\) Interview with MIDO.

\(^{28}\) Internet in Burma. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_in_Burma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_in_Burma)

\(^{29}\) Interview with MIDO.

\(^{30}\) Interview with MIDO.
Mobile phone access is at 6.5 million users with 250,000 of them using mobile internet. Mobile internet costs 10,000 Kyats (approximately US$12) for activation and 4 Kyats per minute. The standard Chinese smartphone costs about US$100. Android is the most popular smartphone operating system because of the availability of Huawei. According to MIDO, these costs are too expensive for most people in Myanmar.

During our stay in Yangon, we conducted internet speed tests in various locations. The average speed at most of the locations was 874 Kbps (.85 Mbps) as shown in the speed-testing screenshots below:

Illustration 2: This speed test was done in the MIDO office. They are using RedLink WiMax for internet access.
Illustration 3: This speed-test was done in the Bo Myat Tun Hotel.
Illustration 4: Speed test done in ParkRoyal Hotel. This is the fastest internet speed, based on our tests in Yangon.

Distribution of large files is difficult because of the low internet speeds in Yangon, where internet access is the highest in the country. Uploading a three-minute video on YouTube takes 15 to 20 minutes on a 382 Kbps (0.35 Mbps) connection. Sharing files via FTP (File Transfer Protocol) would be faster and reliable as it allows for broken uploads to be resumed; however, YouTube does not provide good support for large file uploads in low-bandwidth environments or for those with fragile connections.

Based on our interviews, FTP is only used when uploading large video files (raw footage and edited videos) to office servers and they do this by going to places like Traders Hotel and ParkRoyal Hotel to use their wifi network. It is a simple and stable technology that could be put to better and broader use.

The most popular website among internet users in Myanmar is Facebook, followed by Google. Most local users are also beginning to shift their social media activities to Squar, a local social networking site.

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24 Interview with DVB in Chiang Mai.
25 Interview with DVB in Chiang Mai.
26 DVB Debate Commercial. https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=hOXGM7sgCXo
27 Interview with MIDO.
29 Interview with MIDO.
30 Interview with MIDO.
31 Interview with MIDO.
32 Interview with MIDO.
33 Interview with MIDO.
34 Interview with Kamayut Media.
35 Interview with DVB Chiang Mai.
36 Interview with MIDO.
In June 2013, the Myanmar government granted 15-year licenses to two telecommunications companies, Telenor (Norway) and Ooredoo (Qatar), to build and maintain the country's mobile service and infrastructure.\(^{38}\) This agreement has been delayed because Telenor and Ooredoo have refused to start operations in the country until the Telecommunications Law, which is currently in the Parliament, is drafted and signed.\(^ {39}\)

### Drafting the Telecommunications Law

The Telecommunications Law is supposed to replace the draconian Electronic Transaction Law (2004), which has been used to justify the arrest of bloggers and other political activists.\(^ {40}\) However, the process for drafting the Telecommunications Law has not been transparent. While groups like Human Rights Watch and MIDO have called for rights-based internet laws in the country,\(^ {41}\) there have been no efforts made to solicit input from civil society and to ensure that the Telecommunications Law will not reflect the Electronic Transactions Law.\(^ {42}\) There are reports that the government consulted with the ITU and the World Bank about this law and the Parliament has said that it has heard 'enough' from the civil society.\(^ {43}\)

The Parliament has made token provisions to accept comments on the draft Telecommunications Law from civil society organisations. On our last day in Yangon (Friday, 12 July 2013), one of the MIDO staff received a call telling them that Parliament will hold a session from 12 - 14 July 2013 (Friday to Sunday) to hear comments from NGOs on the draft bill. This meant that groups like MIDO had to go all the way to Naypyidaw (the government capital) to ensure their input on the draft law was heard. The short notice provided to civil society organisations is also a cause for concern. Clearly, this is a token effort made by the government to be 'consultative' in drafting the Telecommunications Law.

### Internet Censorship and Security Issues

In 2012 previously banned websites such as Facebook, Google, Twitter and YouTube were made available to internet users in Myanmar. Exile media websites such as Irrawaddy, DVB and Mizzima are also now accessible from inside Myanmar. Currently, the ban is limited to hacking, LGBT and porn sites.\(^ {44}\)

The internet is seen to be a free and open space where independent media organisations can publish and broadcast content.\(^ {45}\) However, there have recently been some cases of government surveillance on the internet.

"In February, local and foreign journalists who regularly cover Burma received warning messages from Google that their email accounts may have been hacked by state-sponsored attackers. Burma-based Associated Press reporter Aye Aye Win, Irrawaddy reporter Saw Yan Naing, and Weekly Eleven Executive Editor Nay Htun Naing—all known for their critical news reporting—were among those who received the warnings, according to CPJ interviews. Government spokesman Ye Htut denied that the government was behind any cyber-attacks and claimed that he, too, had received the Google warning."\(^ {46}\)

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39 Interview with MIDO.
42 Interview with MIDO.
43 Interview with MIDO.
44 Interview with MIDO.
45 Interview with Kamayut Media.
In June 2013, a blogger under the pseudonym Daw Daw Zaipur, wrote a piece criticising the Parliament. The government asked Google to provide the name and identifiable information of the blogger but Google refused to comply. There is currently a government investigation to find out the real identity of Daw Daw Zaipur.47

According to MIDO staff, there has been little restriction on websites but criticising the Parliament still puts bloggers and journalists at risk.

The Rise of Hate Speech on the Internet
One of the emerging concerns about internet use is the rise of hate speech against the Rohingya. According to MIDO staff, fundamentalist Buddhist monks and their supporters have taken to Facebook and other social media to attack Rohingya Muslim.48 As a result, MIDO are planning to start a campaign to counter hate speech on the internet.49

General Recommendations to Support Activism in Myanmar
During the scoping mission in Chiang Mai and Yangon, we found some groundwork was required to spur social activism before we start looking into specific tools like video.

• Policy-making process is arbitrary, vague and lacks transparency. Civil society organisations and activists need to lobby locally and internationally to pressure the government to introduce inclusive and transparent policy-making processes.
• Raise awareness on the importance of policy implementation to support democracy through media channels like DVB, Kamayut Media, HOME and Irrawady.
• Introduce Myanmar-based organisations to counterparts in the regions through exchange programs and forums. Myanmar-based activists can use this avenue to lobby ASEAN.
• Connect exile media to emerging local civil society organisations and other independent media to share lessons learnt and to collaborate.
• Train local journalists to expand their exposure to ethical and professional journalism. Exile media could play a role in this.

Trends in the Use of Video to Support Democracy

Popular Issues and Topics Covered in Video Productions
Ethnic and Religious Issues
Ethnic and religious issues were a top priority for all the organisations and individuals we met. The specific topics covered by the filmmakers include:

• Intermarriage issues related to the demands of fundamentalist Buddhist monks who have called for restrictions on marriage between allowing Buddhists and Muslims.50
• 969 Movement: A movement initiated by fundamentalist Buddhist monks to attack the minority Muslim population in Myanmar (Rohingya).51 This is a risky issue to cover because the movement has been deemed 'untouchable' and above the law.52
• Rising ethnic-based conflict: Groups like BNI, DVB and Kamayut Media have reporters covering the conflict in the ethnic states. The sub-topics here include land-grabbing, separatist movements and federalism.

Videos from Myanmar @ EngageMedia.org

• Peace of Mind by Kyi Phyu Shin
• Still in Dark by Aung Zaw Moe (Winner of the Art of Freedom Film Festival 2012's Best New Face Director Award)
• We, the Creator by Aung Zaw Moe
• Democracy by Aung Zaw Moe

47 Interview with MIDO.
49 Interview with MIDO.
51 Who are the Monks Behind the '969' Campaign? Democratic Voice of Burma. 10 May 2013.
52 Interview with Aung Zaw Moe.
Transition to Democracy

Many organisations are beginning to cover this issue in their videos.

- HOME have a DVD magazine issue that focuses on the challenges of democracy transition and has continued to encourage filmmakers to produce short films on this topic.
- DVB have started a talk show called DVB Debate, where they post a polarising statement that people can reply to about life in Myanmar. They cover topics from politics to lifestyle. This is their effort to observe the transition to democracy and to encourage people to think about how government policies affect daily life.53
- Kyi Phyu Shin, a well known film-maker and an NLD member, has been asked by Aung San Suu Kyi to do a feature film on the rule of law.

The History of Myanmar

Filmmakers and video organisations are also actively producing videos that uncover the history of Myanmar under the military junta.

- Kyi Phyu Shin is currently doing a feature film called Clouds in the Sky about the 88 Generation Student Movement.
- Aung Zaw Moe has produced a documentary film on the life of Nay Phone Latt, a former political prisoner and now the Executive Director of MIDO.
- DVB, through their BurmaVJ site, continue to document the lives of political prisoners after their release.

Feature vs Documentary54

One conversation we had with filmmakers in Yangon was about the effectiveness of feature versus documentary film in raising awareness and contributing to change.

The question of documentary film effectiveness came from the first filmmaker we interviewed in Yangon, Kyi Phyu Shin. She thought that documentary film assumed an audience that was educated and has a higher social status. She has been exploring the idea of embedding social, political and progressive messages in fiction films. She also said that because Korean soap operas are the most popular content on TV, feature films that follow that style but have progressive messages are more effective at changing attitudes and behaviour.

This was supported by Aung Zaw Moe’s work of creating fictional videos based in social realities. In his fictional videos, Aung covers topics such as youth oppression, human rights violations and government transparency. He said that one has to be educated and able to attend film festivals to appreciate documentary films, and that fiction talks more directly to people and makes them think rather than just providing answers.

We took this to Wathann Film Festival organisers and Yangon Film School. Given that both focus on documentary films, we had expected to get a different perspective from them on this topic. The Watthan Film Festival organisers agreed that documentary films assume a specific audience (educated and middle class), but it does not invalidate the value of documentary films to tell stories.

Instead, they focus on increasing local people's appreciation of documentary films. Through their Traveling Cinema they bring documentary films to rural areas in Myanmar and have local filmmakers from those areas screen their films in a tea shop setting. By doing this they are able to hold discussions about the films and increase the appreciation of documentary.

53 Interview with DVB Chiang Mai.
54 Interviews with Kyi Phyu Shin, Aung Zaw Moe, Watt Than Film Festival Organisers and the Yangon Film School.
The Yangon Film School disagreed with the statement that documentary films were for audiences with higher social status. They said that the value of documentary is that it allows the viewers to see themselves in a story. It is easier to relate to real people, instead of actors and actresses, in their environments and contexts on screen.

From this debate we can learn, however, that there is a healthy and diverse moving image culture in Yangon. Filmmakers are not subscribing to one type of genre and are thinking critically about engaging their audiences.

Film and Video Capacity Building

Yangon Film School (YFS)

YFS was established in 2005 as a Berlin-based non-profit organisation to support and encourage an independent film community in Myanmar. They have offices in Yangon and Berlin. Berlin staff members are responsible for ensuring that the films their students produce are entered into international festivals. Each year, they select 12 students (six male, six female) from around 50 applicants to enrol in a three-year-long documentary filmmaking programme. Applicants are not required to have film or technical skills and can range from 22 to 40 years old.

YFS works with international tutors for the beginners' course in the first year. The course covers editing, film history, film analysis, sound editing and working with video cameras. This is followed by a year of practical film production where the students are expected to make their films. They separate the 12 students into four teams, and each team produces a documentary or docu-drama at the end of the course based on the year's theme. In the third year, the students undergo a 'training of trainers' to become tutors for the next batch of students.

YFS also rent filmmaking equipment to their alumni.

Many YSF alumni are among the most active independent filmmakers in Yangon and frequent participants in local film festivals.

House of Media Entertainment (HOME)

HOME, aside from organising the The Art of Freedom Film Festival and producing a monthly DVD magazine, run a programme on advanced filmmaking. They work with international and established film editors, screenwriters, cinematographers and directors to train 10 young filmmakers to enhance their skills in these areas. From that training programme, they select two filmmakers to attend further training in Germany and the USA.

They also invite international filmmakers to run short courses. Later this year, Stephen Goldblatt, a cinematographer who has worked on the Batman, Lethal Weapon and other Hollywood franchises, will conduct a short course on cinematography at HOME. They will also run a short course in Computer Generated Imagery (CGI).

HOME have post-production equipment that is available to workshop participants. Workshops and
assist offline distribution and engagement e.g. uploading larger files via FTP for download for screening or broadcast.

Live streaming was only used by DVB, who use the technology Live Station to continually stream their content.

- HREIB use YouTube
  - to store their videos. They back-link to their website using Clip Bucket
- BNI also have a YouTube channel
- Network Media Group on YouTube
- Kamayut Media publishes their videos on YouTube and link them back to their website
- DVB also use Live Station to stream their programmes.

In general, there is a large gap between the possibility of the technologies and how they are being employed, even with the limitations of bandwidth and infrastructure. A number of strategies could easily improve the use of online technologies as a means to distribute video files and to reach and engage audiences. We discuss these further in the recommendations section.

**Offline Distribution Channels**

**DVD**

DVD and even VCD remain the most popular offline form of distribution. Given limited internet access, they provide the most accessible means to share content cheaply. Sellers of both locally produced and pirated international content can be found easily on the streets. From our observations, social change video-makers did not appear to be making use of this network of market sellers.

HOME provide a typical example of DVD distribution. They produce a monthly DVD Magazine called *Motion Magazine*. It is currently on its third issue. Each issue features short videos on specific themes such as the ‘Art of Democracy’ They call for submissions of short videos (documentaries, docu-dramas, animated videos) and then curate them based on the theme of that month. Their distribution is nationwide and generally done through NLD offices across Myanmar.

With the exception of HOME, no one else we interviewed was producing DVDs regularly. This included the film festivals, although the Watthan Film Festival is planning to produce a DVD during the festival this year.

**Film Festivals**

Film festivals are a new phenomenon in Myanmar. Prior to 2011, such events were banned or heavily surveilled. Since the declaration of democracy, film festivals have become a popular way for independent and amateur filmmakers to distribute their content. At the same time, they have become a channel for local audiences to watch progressive, activist films from both in the country and outside. However, from what we could gather, they are not producing festival DVDs or distributing any of the content online to capture larger audiences.

There are three annual film festivals in Myanmar:

- **The Art of Freedom Film Fest**
  - Started in 1 – 4 January 2012. The two-year local film festival has been organised by filmmakers and local comedian, Zarganar.\(^\text{56}\)
- **Human Rights and Dignity Film Festival**
  - This is an international film festival that accepts short, documentary and animated films. It was last held from 15 – 19 June 2013 in Yangon. They featured international films from Indonesia, Denmark and Austria\(^\text{57}\) as well as local films.\(^\text{58}\)
- **Watthann Film Festival**
  - In its third year, the festival used to only accept films from local filmmakers, but this year they are accepting films from across Southeast Asia.

More than a distribution channel, these film festivals provide impetus for local filmmakers to create films.

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\(^{56}\) Art of Freedom Film Festival 2013 Award Ceremonies. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XyUhhbr_04

\(^{57}\) International Films at the Human Rights and Dignity Film Festival. http://www.hrhdiff.org/international-films/

screenings can be held on the ground floor of their office

**Kamayut Media**

Kamayut Media have started a video journalist (VJ) training programme. Until now, they have only done one round of their six-month training programme and they are planning to run another training programme in September this year.

Their VJ training covers both journalism ethics and news production. Kamayut Media also see this training as a way to bring promising video journalists into their pool of reporters.

A video interview with Kamayut Media is available on EngageMedia.org.

**International Film Education Opportunities**

The two main organisers of the Wathann Film Festival attended a three-year Masters Program in Prague, Czech Republic. This Masters Program also offers scholarships to other filmmakers from Myanmar. This programme is designed for experienced filmmakers to gain advanced film production skills.

**Self-Learning**

There are independent filmmakers in Yangon that are self-taught. Usually they buy their own cameras and production software, and experiment with shooting and editing. Two of the filmmakers we interviewed were self-taught.

**Observations and Recommendations on Video Capacity Building**

**Access to video-making equipment is limited.**

Based on the interviews, there is a scarcity of video-making equipment available to amateur filmmakers. Beside HOME and YSF, equipment for video production and software for post-production is limited to the ability of local filmmakers to afford such tools.

**Most of the capacity building initiatives for filmmakers and video makers in Myanmar focus on production.**

Based on our experience in Myanmar, there is a wealth of video production skills available. This makes Yangon a healthy environment to begin initiatives that elevate video production skills into video advocacy skills to promote democracy in Myanmar.

In order to do this we recommend the following:

- Organise video distribution training workshops for those who already have video production skills training
- Build capacity among local filmmakers and video-producing organisations in offline and online video distribution strategies, including subtitling of content
- Archive management training (see Archiving Practices section)
- Capacity building on the use of mobile tools for video production and distribution.

**Distribution Practices**

**Broadcasting**

DVB television is currently the most important distribution channel for many groups and filmmakers:

- HREIB produce a weekly show focused on human rights for DVB
- Burma News International/Network Media Group produces a monthly show on ethnic issues in Myanmar for DVB
- Winning films in the Human Rights and Dignity Film Festival have been broadcasted on DVB.

DVB said they would welcome more content from other organisations as long as the content fits their editorial policy.

**Online Distribution**

Most of the organisations interviewed used YouTube as their main site for distributing content, with videos then embedded into the organisation's own site. The use of other services such as Vimeo, Facebook or DailyMotion for video hosting was not observed, though Facebook was used frequently for promotion.

There generally was little relationship between online and offline distribution, and a lack of knowledge on how online technologies could
Each of these film festivals requires original content from local filmmakers. The bulk of the content at these film festivals comes from local filmmakers.

**Traveling Cinema**

Traveling cinemas are one of the ways that Wathann and Human Rights and Dignity Film Festival organisers are extending the benefit of their Yangon-based film festivals to rural areas in Myanmar.

The Wathann Film Festival takes the films from the festival to screenings in various towns of Myanmar. They prioritise locations where participating filmmakers come from. They stay in a town for a week and screen the films on their mobile screening truck in a common area where discussions can be held with community members.

**Observations and Recommendations on Video Distribution**

*Local filmmakers and video-producing organisations can learn from the experience of exile media.*

Kamayut Media produces five to seven three-minute-long news videos everyday, and one five-minute-long feature story every week. It publishes videos on ethnic issues in Myanmar on YouTube and on their website, and promotes them through Facebook. However, the videos are not subtitled for an international audience.

Kamayut Media aims to be a credible and reliable online news portal. While their current targets are a local audience and the Burmese diaspora, they could learn from DVB to provide a service to both local and international audiences.

For example, DVB’s news report on the Myanmar government's nuclear ambitions was picked up by Al Jazeera. This led to pressure on the government from international bodies and activists that ultimately resulted in a denial from the government and a pledge to sign an international agreement to allow nuclear inspectors into the country.

DVB have managed to target both local and international audiences effectively. Their TV broadcasting is aimed towards people in Myanmar, but their use of Live Station and YouTube channel (where content is subtitled in English) makes it accessible to a larger audience.

Local filmmakers focus their distribution on local audience as well. Some of them have published their videos on YouTube and subtitled in other languages, making it accessible to an international audience. For subtitling, they use video editing software to hardcode or 'burn' the subtitles into the video.

In order to facilitate dialogue between local video-makers and 'exile' media, we recommend the following:

- Host workshops and events where formerly exiled media organisations can share experiences with local filmmakers and video-producing organisations.

A lack of strategic thinking on video publication, distribution and promotion is limiting audience and engagement.

While most individuals and groups are using YouTube to publish their videos, there is very little strategic thinking behind video promotion. The formula for distribution and promotion from most of the organisations and individuals we interviewed is:

**Post the videos on YouTube ---> Promote the YouTube link on Facebook and on their websites.**

For videos to be effective, organisations have to employ a stronger video distribution, promotion and engagement strategy. Goals, clear target audiences, networking and connecting to campaigns and movements can ensure that the people who need to see it will see it and make use of it.

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59 Sample of Open Call for The Art of Freedom Film Festival. www.wathannfilmfest.net/Wathann_Filmfest/Welcome.html
60 Interview with DVB Chiang Mai.
In order to improve the capacity of distribution and audience engagement to achieve advocacy goals, we recommend:

- Workshops on video advocacy and distribution strategies
- The creation of forums and spaces (both offline and online) where local filmmakers and video-producing organisations can learn from activists and organisations using video for advocacy, particularly those from Southeast Asia
- Secure online distribution training for local filmmakers and video-producing organisations
- Ongoing regional and international distribution support to assist filmmakers to reach and engage their audience
- Improve the subtitling practices of local filmmakers and video-producing organisations by:
  - Making films and videos available on platforms that allow for online subtitling (e.g. EngageMedia.org have Amara embedded in all videos and we work with a volunteer community of subtitlers who translate subtitles into different languages)
  - Conduct subtitling workshops for local filmmakers as well as those in the diaspora
  - Improve distribution to make films and videos easily available to southeast Asian media networks.

There is a lack of connection between local filmmakers and video-producing groups and activist groups working on the same issues.

There is potential for local and international activist groups to use the videos produced by local filmmakers and video-producing organisations to support their work. With the exception of HREIB, who are producing videos to support their human rights awareness training workshops, most producers do not strategically work with existing campaigns or advocacy initiatives. While there appears to be some coordination, it is mostly happening in an ad-hoc manner.

There are strategies and tactics to make sure this cooperation can happen more systematically and purposively. We recommend the following:

- Create online and offline spaces where producers and activists can discuss issues and spark collaborations. This could in the form of camps, festivals or online discussions.
- Conduct training workshops to enhance the interest and understanding of activists in the different ways video can support their advocacy work.
- Support a concrete collaboration on a particular issue between filmmakers and campaigners.

There are great examples of offline distribution strategies being employed but they are rarely mixed with online tools.

HOME’s *Motion Magazine* is one of the best examples of offline distribution and promotion strategy. However, their work is purely offline and therefore targets local audiences only.

The Wathann Film Festival has been successful in facilitating the production of high-quality documentary films. They have also been successful in promoting the work of local filmmakers. However, beyond the film festival (and the upcoming Traveling Cinema), they are not producing festival DVDs, although they are planning to do so for this year’s festival.

These good practices of offline distribution are not linked to any online distribution strategies. The offline distribution strategies could be extended online to develop wider audiences and increase accessibility e.g. allowing people to download high-resolution, translated content outside Myanmar for screening and broadcast. A limited amount of online distribution via FTP is also possible in Myanmar itself.

In order to do this, we recommend:

- Training workshops on hybrid (offline and online) video distribution tactics and strategies
- Training in the use of online subtitling systems such as Amara and the development and maintenance of regional and international subtitle communities. The diaspora with better internet access could be mobilised to assist with this in particular.
Ownership of films is ‘uncertain’

When asked ‘who owns your film?’, most of the local filmmakers replied ambiguously. Some said the film belonged to the film festival they submitted it to. Some replied that they belonged to the people who financed the film. None of the filmmakers we spoke to claimed copyright on their films.

This can be problematic for distribution as it is unclear who can and cannot make use of the content. By not claiming ownership, they rely too heavily on film festivals to distribute and promote their films, and are open to anyone using it without their consent. This happened to one of Kyi Phyu Shin’s feature films, when someone from Singapore posted one of her films online.61

As a result it is also unclear to potential distributors and consumers, be they citizens or commercial entities, how they could assist with distribution.

Our recommendations include:

· Raise awareness on copyright options, Creative Commons specifically, among local filmmakers and video-producing organisations. This can be done through a Creative Commons workshop.

While Creative Commons is not adapted to Myanmar law, it is valid in more than 70 other countries and can still provide a level of protection. It is also a powerful symbolic signal to allied organisations that they are free to share this content.

Storage and Archiving Practices

Archiving and back-up practices are, for the most part, extremely limited. Some storage occurs, but there is very little that allows the content to be easily indexed and searched. Generally, even basic tools like spreadsheets and text documents are not in use.

This presents multiple problems including vulnerability to losing important content due to accidents, deterioration or government raids; the loss of collective knowledge; and the inability to improve day-to-day production quality via the use of previously shot footage.

Most of the organisations and individuals we talked to had similar responses when asked about their archiving system in that they:

· Use YouTube for archiving
· Use computer hard disks and external hard disks to store raw footage
· Maintain an inconsistent back-up system.

There are some exceptions:

· Kamayut Media store their external hard disks of raw footage and finalised videos in a fire proof safe
· HREIB have an office server in Chiang Mai, where Equality Myanmar video staff members submit completed productions to an archive via FTP. The raw footage is kept in the Equality Myanmar office on laptops and external hard disks
· YSF have an archive of finished films in hard disks and in DVDs in Yangon. Raw footage archiving is left to the individual filmmakers. Finished films are also sent to Berlin for entry into film festivals.

DVB have the most complex and sophisticated archiving system. In the DVB headquarters in Chiang Mai, there is a dedicated Archive Room (see previous picture) and a dedicated staff member in charge, along with two interns. They offer a DVB archive retrieval service for other media groups and organisations.

Their archive is a work-in-progress. They have 1000+ hours of raw footage archived; however, there is much more to do.

Illustration 9: DVB Headquarters Archive Room

Illustration 10: DVB Digital

61 Interview with Kyi Phyu Shin.
DVB have digital copies of raw footage. They are not using a specific software for their archives but their filing system is systematic. They categorise raw footage and final videos according to year, month and location.

Based on the availability of interns and staff, they also conduct timed-transcription of raw footage and finalised news videos to make search and retrieval of video content more efficient.

**Observations and Recommendations on Archiving Practices**

**Archive management is not a common practice.**

With the exception of DVB, none of the groups and individuals that we interviewed and visited have thought about archiving their raw footage or finalised videos in any systematic way. Even the DVB Archive Manager mentioned that he would benefit a lot from some training on information and database management.

In order to improve archiving practices, we recommend:

- Development or adaptation of a guide to archive management based on affordable and appropriate solutions. As needs and contexts vary, the range of solutions should address specific challenges. The solutions can range from customising a PHP/MySql database for video archiving, to a spreadsheet system, and online and offline storage solutions, as well as secure storage and back-up strategies.

- Capacity building (from beginners to advanced) on archive management. This could include workshops on archive management and having volunteers or consultants with the necessary skills working with video-producing organisations to set up their archives.

**Recommendations for a Vibrant Video Culture and Community**

**Connect local filmmakers and video-producing organisations to regional and international audiences, and to each other.**

This could be done through:

- Holding regional Southeast Asia events or camps where filmmakers from Myanmar can meet and develop collaborations with filmmakers from other countries
- Training in strategic online distribution planning and subtitling
- Participation of international and regional groups in local film festivals, and the participation of Myanmar filmmakers in regional and international film festivals
- Ongoing curation, distribution, subtitling and outreach of Myanmar content internationally to citizen, social and mainstream media.

**Connecting local filmmakers and video-producing organisations to specific social movements in Myanmar and in the region.**

Local filmmakers and video-producing organisations can support social movements by producing videos on the advocacy issues and strategically engaging audiences with them. This could be done through:

- Initiating training workshops or events where teams of filmmakers, citizen journalists and NGO representatives could be formed. Each team could produce videos on social issues and that can be used to support campaigns.
- Thematic screenings where filmmakers and activists can meet and begin collaborations on specific issues.
The Burmese video production field is strong and growing and its achievements should be celebrated. Its distribution in the form of Democratic Voice of Burma and films like Burma VJ also show significant strength.

We believe the use of civic video is set to increase significantly as the means of production become more accessible and media regulations are relaxed. While the means of distribution, particularly online, are more limited at this time, they are also set to grow. It makes important strategic sense to develop the distribution and engagement capacity of individuals and organisations as access grows. It will increasingly be a hybrid mix of online and offline strategies adapted to the local context that will prove most effective.

Such work is critical in developing and expanding civil society, pressuring institutions and holding them accountable, and ensuring Burma’s ‘opening up’ is not just a facade but secures a long and deep commitment to democracy.