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Ref: SUBMISSION BY THE RIGHT TO THRIVE (RT<sup>2</sup>) ON THE FOOD  
INSECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN MYANMAR

1. What processes are at your disposal to propose change regarding food systems transformation? Do you have adequate mechanisms to raise your concerns and your grievances regarding any shortcomings or obstacles at the national level?

Myanmar's food system faces significant challenges shaped by recent changes in socio-political dynamics, economic uncertainty and prolonged impacts of climate change. As of writing, there are no meaningful processes at the national level at our disposal to propose changes to the national food systems. Nor are there any adequate mechanisms on the national level to raise grievances concerning food accessibility and availability.

Since the February 2021 military takeover, gaps in institutional responsiveness have posed a key concern. Measures to address any grievances regarding food insecurity are not accessible to the general public as the military continues to suppress most forms of civil society activities such as protests, public hearings, demonstrations, consultation sessions and more. Civilians who participated in such activities have been fined, imprisoned, or worse, executed. All of these civilians were arbitrarily charged under false claims, often as terrorism, incitement or sedition. As of writing, the military has thus far arrested 27.969 civilians since its illegal takeover of civilian institutions in Myanmar, whilst another 21.399 civilians remain detained and 170 have received the death penalty. Absurd examples of civilians arrested for receiving food rations from anti-military armed groups have been recorded, further detailing how the military has intentionally limited opportunities for stakeholders to meaningfully address their food insecurities.

As the military is often the main perpetrator against its civilian population, the military's effective control of Myanmar's most populous regions has also allowed them to pillage and raid any houses or farmland for its resources. Farmers cannot access their farmland to harvest crops or tend to their livestock. In some instances, civilians are expected to cook and/or provide food for the military, often at their expense, even when they do not have sufficient food for themselves or their families. Not only does this violate the civilians' land rights, but it worsens the existing food insecurities. Accountability for the military's actions is non-existent; instead, it is sometimes covered up or even condoned by their superiors. Thus, with the military being in control of civilians' houses and food supplies, no adequate food complaint mechanism exists in Myanmar.

2. How do you share knowledge about the cultivation and preparation of local food?

Knowledge of local food cultivation and preparation is disseminated mainly through informal channels. Aside from word-of-mouth, digital platforms like Facebook remained the most dominant social media platform in Myanmar since its introduction in the early 2010s. Amongst its users, farmers access Facebook to share and exchange agrarian knowledge such as their farming techniques and practices, stories of their challenges in farming, and market information. With the military imposing movement restrictions and censorship, farmers have even used Facebook to carry out commerce for their goods that could not have otherwise been sold via traditional methods. Aside from these, online groups exist that provide real-time updates on staple food prices, such as rice, cooking oil and vegetables, that are essential to making local food.

As the conflict ensues, community networks through local civil society organisations remain vital in accessing local needs and subsequently responding to their needs by providing food aid. Their actions are often life-saving for the civilian population as the military continues to employ siege-like tactics to restrict the delivery of food aid both domestically and internationally. With local organisations being vital in providing food aid to their communities, there would likely also be some transfer of knowledge regarding the cultivation and preparation of local food.

3. How do civil society organisations in your country organise amongst themselves for advancing an equitable and sustainable national food system, and how do they support one another?

Civil society organizations in Myanmar are pivotal in advancing equitable and sustainable food systems. Under the current political climate, coupled with environmental and financial obstacles to farming such as prolonged flooding and farmer's lack of access to loans, food is often not available or accessible to the civilian population. As more armed clashes erupt, internally displaced persons remain an additional concern as their movement to another location often puts pressure on the local food system. More often than not, local food systems in one village are not designed to withstand the sudden influx of demand.

Noting this, in territories where the military does not have effective control or refuses to send aid, civil society organisations instead access the needs of their local communities. When delivery of aid is required, they would either collaborate with the political wing of their localised ethnic armed organisations, the ousted-civilian-led national unity government, or both. Depending on their capacity, relief committees and funds could be set up to address emergencies. Civil society organisations would thus coordinate efforts with other stakeholders to distribute food aid, illustrating their ability to mobilise resources effectively in times of crisis. In the recent aftermath of Typhoon Yagi, the national unity government, alongside several ethnic armed groups and civil society organisations, not only led relief operations, but also went beyond in their relief coordination by issuing guidelines for international organisations in their provision of aid. These further cement how even in the absence of the military; civilian-led civil society organisations are the focal point of multi-stakeholder relief operations for their local communities.