

CONFLICT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

MYANMAR

Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Contexts Programme

This report summarizes findings from a Peace and Development Conflict-Sensitivity Analysis (PDCA)¹ undertaken as part of the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme (PBEA), funded by the Government of the Netherlands. The analysis provides a framework from which to understand the causes and dynamics of peace and conflict, primarily at the national level. It aims to identify opportunities for the United Nations Country Team in Myanmar and support conflict-sensitive approaches, using a peacebuilding framework, to the development of United Nations programming. This report also summarizes findings from a conflict analysis of the education sector in Rakhine State².

Methodology

The PDCA was developed using data gathered between November 2012 and January 2013, and utilized a standard conflict analysis framework that included context, actors, causal analysis, conflict dynamics and identification of recommendations. Primary and secondary documents and reports were used to inform the background of the report. A total of 172 semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 291 individuals were conducted in Yangon, the Thai-Myanmar border region, and Kachin, Kayin, Mon and Shan States. The process and results of the PDCA were informed by the ongoing conflict in Kachin and the pessimistic perceptions of the prospects for conflict resolution in the region, as well as a detailed sub-national analysis of Rakhine State. It also benefited from the inclusion within the analysis team of technical experts in children, youth and gender.

The PBEA programme, 2012-2016, seeks to build peaceful societies by strengthening the role of education in peacebuilding and integrating peacebuilding within the education system.



¹ McGrew, Laura, Theresa de Langis and Stephen Gray, Peace and Development Conflict-Sensitivity Analysis, United Nations Country Team, Myanmar, March 2013; and Gray, Stephen, Peace and Development Conflict Sensitivity Analysis (PDCA): Child and Youth Framework, 2013.

² Salm, Randall, Conflict Analysis of the Education Sector in Rakhine State for the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Countries Programme, April 2014.

Context

Efforts by the Government of Myanmar to unify people under Bamar control, dating back to pre-colonial times, have historically clashed with the desires of ethnic minority groups for self-determination and freedom of religion and language. These efforts have given rise to ethnically based armed groups that are in conflict with the Government's armed forces (the Tatamada) over political power and control of resources. Protests and struggles for democracy, greater representation for minority groups, freedom of expression and movement, and access to services have led to violent crackdowns by government authorities.

In recent years, the Government has undertaken ambitious political, economic and administrative reforms. These reforms are characterized by greater democratization, the release of political prisoners, ceasefire agreements, strong economic growth and greater freedoms. Despite impressive gains, remote and border areas of the country remain insecure, and reforms have not extended quickly enough to rural and ethnic minorities. Although economic growth offers great potential to improve livelihoods and address poverty, the rapid pace of change can release pent-up grievances and social unrest – and structural inequities and uncontrolled development pose significant risks to Myanmar's progress.

Underlying causes and dynamics of conflict

A number of underlying structural, intermediate and proximate causes of conflict are identified in the PDCA. The identified conflict dynamics are based largely on a national-level analysis. A subregional analysis was conducted in Rakhine State with conflict dynamics detailed below.

SECURITY AND JUSTICE

- **Weak judicial system:** The key sources of conflict include insubstantial or non-existent rule of law; inadequate access to courts, particularly for women; lack of defence lawyers; and corruption in the justice system, which is subject to political influence. Poor legal representation and lack of due process for those arrested after the violence in Rakhine State in 2012 demonstrate a system that does not yet comply with international human rights standards.
- **Transitional justice:** While most respondents recognized that impunity should not continue and that some form of transitional justice is necessary to deal with past abuses, there was disagreement over the extent and timing of reconciliation processes that should take place, such as truth commissions and trials. It was recognized that, in order to prevent recurrences of the conflict, it is important for youth to understand the past.
- **Militarization of society:** Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration is one of the greatest challenges in the peace process, despite recent successes in carrying out reforms. The prevalence of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) in Myanmar, the militarization of political and economic realms, and the need for alternative sources of income for demobilized forces mean that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and the separation of military and government, are major challenges. Changes are being made to reduce the automatic transfer of military staff into senior

civil service positions, but militarization still impacts all aspects of the State and disproportionately marginalizes women by excluding them from many aspects of public life. Armed groups have become part of people's identities, making it harder to systemically dismantle these groups.

- **Illegal weapons and drugs:** The prevalence of both legal and illegal weapons is a cause for deep concern. Drug production and use is a serious issue at the regional level, especially in Shan State and in the border areas. Closely linked to youth underemployment, drugs have historically funded conflict and NSAGs, as well as provided livelihoods, while also perpetuating cycles of violence, poverty and lawlessness.

POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

- **Limited political dialogue and weak governance capacity:** While the Government has made significant advances in reforms to the political, economic and administrative systems, weak governance is still a potential risk factor for igniting conflict. Some of the major governance shortfalls are demonstrated in the prevalence of corruption, the conflict between and within political parties, and the lack of rule of law. There has been a history of zero sum politics and no encouragement of vocal opposition groups engaging in constructive dialogue. The lack of experience in political dialogue is slowing down reform efforts. Other challenges to good governance include limited capacity, lack of qualified personnel, incomplete policy frameworks, lack of political will, weak dialogue and collaboration, and low capacity of civil society networks. Low capacities and high levels of fear are especially apparent at the local levels.
- **Migration and displacement:** More than 400,000 people are internally displaced within Myanmar and there 1.3 million migrant workers; in addition, more than 128,000 refugees from Myanmar are living in Thailand. Movements of these populations can drive conflict, depending on whether they are forced or not and the extent to which host communities are prepared for their presence. Women and children are disproportionately affected by migration and displacement, and comprise the majority of those who are internally displaced and refugees. Employment and economic development are seen as key mitigating factors.
- **Poverty and unequal economic development:** Historical grievances around ethnic divisions and inequalities are closely linked to control of, and thus unequal access to, natural resources. Rural areas are particularly underserved in terms of social services and economic development. Populations in rural and peripheral areas are vulnerable to natural disasters, economic shocks and being recruited into armed conflict. The large populations of ethnic minorities in these areas feel the effects of inequality and discrimination.

SOCIAL ISSUES

- **Ethnic and religious discrimination ('Burmanization') and stereotyping:** Previous government policies of Burmanization promoted the Bamar majority as superior and resulted in institutionalized discrimination against ethnic minorities and ingrained ethnic

stereotyping from all sides. Ethnic discrimination against the Bamar majority was also mentioned as a conflict driver, particularly in Kayin and Kachin. Anti-Muslim and anti-Rohingya attitudes are also apparent in some areas, and these groups are disproportionately affected by a lack of citizenship and insufficient birth registration procedures. The Constitution does not provide full rights for ethnic minorities, nor for women or opposition political parties. The Government is inadequately representative of these groups. The over-promotion of Bamar history, culture and language in the education system was criticized for promoting intolerance and inequalities, and inciting violence. Ethnic and sub-ethnic conflict is one of the single largest conflict drivers in Myanmar today.

- **History of isolation:** Having lived under a series of repressive military governments and relative isolation, people in Myanmar have not been exposed to democracy, human rights, tolerance and openness. Restriction of movement and information, and segregation of different ethnic groups have resulted in inequalities, mistrust, poor understanding, stereotyping and fear.
- **Inter-group intolerance, fear and mistrust:** Ongoing conflict at varying levels (sporadic in some areas, sustained in others), fear of prosecution, and outdated laws that perpetuate institutionalized discrimination have kept tensions high and trust levels low. Government efforts to be participatory could be deepened, which might help engage all groups and improve relationships between them.
- **Media:** While there are some codes of conduct in use by the media in Myanmar, there is no regulatory oversight or enforcement agency ensuring that journalism standards are met. As a result, the media are often inaccurate, inflammatory and biased, which can incite violence.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

- **Environment and natural resources:** Competition for access to resources between the Government and the NSAGs is a major conflict driver in Myanmar, especially in Kachin State, where there are many mining and hydroelectric projects. Government handling of natural resource management, extractive industries, land and the environment are all issues of public concern and a source of conflict. Fighting occurs near key resource projects or along major trade routes, particularly to neighbouring China. Uncontrolled development, unsustainable and environmentally damaging extractive industries, and laws that favour business strip local communities of their rights and resources, and contribute to high levels of displacement, as well as hostilities around land grabbing. Industries fail to adequately demonstrate corporate social responsibility and development dividends, and there are fears that the Government is planning for future development without consulting local communities.
- **Illegal natural resource trading:** 'Lootable' resources such as timber, jade, opium and amphetamine-type substances are subject to illegal exploitation, especially in areas where the rule of law is weak. Conflict actors, particularly in Kachin, Kayin and Shan, derive revenue from the illegal trade of natural resources, providing incentives to maintain fighting and driving violent competition between government, militia, other NSAGs, and other conflict actors.

- **Land-related conflicts:** Issues of landlessness and the need for land reform were cited by the majority of respondents as a major source of conflict. Land conflict is related to agricultural business development, extractive industries and military seizures of land for “reasons of national security.” In addition, land access is a major concern for refugees and internally displaced people, who fear having lost their land due to corruption or land grabs.

Key conflict drivers at the subregional and community levels

The Rakhine State analysis is based on a desk review of relevant studies as well as interviews and focus group discussions with a representative cross-section of stakeholders in Yangon and in the townships of Sittwe, Pauktaw, Mrauk Oo and Minbya. Findings were validated with various stakeholders.

Historic patterns of social stratification between Burmese, Rakhine and Rohingya ethnic groups, with Rohingya (or Muslims) at the bottom, is at the root of ongoing conflict in Rakhine State. Religion is closely associated with ethnic identity, with Buddhist monks advocating for restrictions on Rohingya rights. Discrimination and marginalization of the Rohingya, through restrictive citizenship and mobility laws, the inequitable distribution of resources and lack of political representation, are key conflict drivers. Citizenship, in particular, is seen as a major threat to the Rakhine, particularly as the growing Rohingya population is seen as a significant threat to Rakhine interests. The Rohingya, in turn, feel disempowered.

Politically, the Rakhine seek greater autonomy, resource sharing and other rights. The Rohingya seek citizenship rights and economic development. The Burmese (Arakan ethnic group) are accused of fuelling tensions and divides between these two groups to maintain political advantage. Arakan and Rohingya tensions have also persisted over time. Both the Rakhine and Rohingya have sought political autonomy at various times from the national Government. Widespread poverty and disparities in access to employment and differential pay are also sources of tension.

Relations between ethnic groups are characterized by widespread fear and distrust. Inter-group hatred and negative stereotypes are propagated, and the poor quality of education fails to equip youth with the critical thinking skills necessary to challenge these views. The Rakhine perceive the Rohingya as receiving preferential treatment in the distribution of humanitarian aid. The Rohingya perceive inequities in the distribution of land, resources and economic development opportunities. Poor government control and protection and perceived corruption breed an environment of insecurity. There are few opportunities for inter-group dialogue, and traditional conflict resolution processes have broken down. Inaccurate and inflammatory media reporting escalates fear and conflict.

Education in Rakhine State plays an important role in conflict dynamics. Discriminatory education policies against ethnic minorities have been a feature of the education system since independence. Burmese-language policies in schools marginalize non-Burmese-speaking ethnic groups. Curricula reinforce Burmese identities and marginalize ethnic group identities and histories. Ethnic tensions extend within the school environment. The quality of education is low

in comparison with the rest of the country. Weak education governance systems reduce capacity to resolve conflicts.

Within Rakhine State, disparities in access and quality of education exist, particularly for Muslims and in camps for the internally displaced. The low quality of education is reflected in low enrolment, completion and learning rates, particularly for girls and ethnic minorities. Lack of birth registration due to costs, travel or availability of information is a unique factor in Rakhine State that drive inequities in education access. No curricula on citizenship education exists. There is a need for more critical thinking to challenge divisive rhetoric and language.

The role of education in peacebuilding

Ongoing isolation, marginalization and conflict in Myanmar have significantly impacted on the education system. Access to education for children in conflict-affected areas of the country is limited. Education is not seen as reaching rural and ethnic minority populations equitably. Even when education is available, teachers face overcrowded classrooms that limit the quality of education provided. The promotion of Bamar history, culture and language through the education system is a source of ongoing grievance that promotes intolerance and contributes to inequities. Non-state actors are increasingly establishing parallel education systems that provide instruction in ethnic minority languages. These systems reinforce ethno-linguistic divides and are characterized by poor teaching quality, underpaid instructors and weak administrative and information management capacity.

The absence of political and civic curricula and the predominance of teacher-centred approaches undermine the ability of teachers to acquire and utilize the skills they need to promote tolerance, political engagement and peace. In early childhood education, the failure to help develop attitudes of tolerance is considered to be especially damaging.

Despite these challenges, education in Myanmar offers significant potential to contribute to conflict mitigation and peacebuilding, particularly by serving as a peace dividend that demonstrates government commitment to overcome marginalization and reduce inequities. As a result of the long isolation of the Myanmar people, education can contribute to teaching human rights principles, including international experiences with genocide, political transition, peacebuilding and reconciliation/transitional justice practices. Peace education, particularly in primary schools, offers the potential to build trust between communities, overcome intolerance and bridge ethnic divides. Early childhood development education was identified as being an important sector for investment in order to combat stereotypes and build trust in communities from the earliest ages.

As part of the current reform effort, the Government is managing a curricula review to remove institutionalized discrimination against ethnic minorities, languages and cultures. Curricula will need to be translated into the various languages of ethnic minorities in Myanmar to ensure equitable access. Histories and content that honour and acknowledge the culture of minorities will also need to be written and incorporated into curricula, with intensive consultation and dialogue with actors from each group. The Government and ethnic minority and civil society stakeholders have identified comparative politics, human rights, critical thinking and civic duty as topics and skills that can be important educational content to support peacebuilding.

Convergence projects in education and other social service sectors, such as dialogue and exchange between social services agencies in order to merge services for returnees, are also seen as important and sustainable solutions for refugee return and reintegration.

Peacebuilding entry points in education and learning

Peace dividends in education alone will be insufficient to make real changes to conflict dynamics in Yemen. New and innovative approaches that focus on opening up dialogue, supporting advocates for peace and fostering a sense of inclusion, trust and opportunity are needed. Potential peacebuilding entry points in education and learning include:

Political and policy responses

- **Develop and implement conflict-sensitive and culturally aware national education** and language policies that adequately reflect the history, languages, cultural and religious identities of Myanmar's different ethnic groups.
- **Develop and implement an education reform plan** that is conflict-sensitive and promotes peacebuilding, respect for others, tolerance, non-violence, human rights and citizenship education at an early age. Address gender identities/equality and violence in society through education. Include national- and local-level curricula on conflict transformation, peacebuilding, trust-building, dialogue and reconciliation.
- **Improve the Government's capacity** to support policy reform using international standards, especially with regard to land and citizenship laws, dispute-resolution mechanisms, constitutional reform and public assembly. Strengthen the rule of law and associated institutions to protect human rights and build trust within and across all ethnic groups.
- **Support initiatives that promote identity and citizenship**, including the issuing of identity cards, revision of citizenship laws, and improved representation in government and the military.
- **Develop plans and policies to discharge children from armed groups** and support their reintegration and rehabilitation within education through accelerated learning programmes, psychosocial support and vocational training.
- **Increase education services in ethnic-minority and conflict-affected areas**, such as Kachin, to reduce inequities and serve as immediate peace dividends for the population. Provide training and support to teachers and school administrators. Support opportunities to bring together state and non-state education providers, such as through joint training programmes. Strengthen government capacity to provide management and oversight of all education services. Support state and non-state actors to adequately deliver education services to internally displaced people, refugees and migrants.

Structural reforms

- **Expand peace education** within and outside of formal education for both children and youth. Emphasize early childhood education to build inter-ethnic understanding and trust

from the earliest age. Establish a national forum for peace education and consult local-level civil society in the design of peace education materials and programmes.

- **Build and incorporate a vocationally relevant curriculum** into national curricula and teacher training modules to prepare all students for livelihoods as part of an inclusive development framework.
- **Incorporate disaster risk reduction** into the national curriculum to build students' and teachers' capacities to prepare for and respond to disasters, prevent and reduce conflict, and share this knowledge with their communities.
- **Incorporate environmental education and sustainable** development into curricula to promote responsible management of natural resources, environmental protection, and effective civil society responses to environmental policies. Promote joint management of natural resources by partners that have been in conflict to increase trust between groups and reduce the misuse of resources.
- **Support joint landmine risk education programmes** for children, parents and community members to ensure that people in high-risk areas have adequate knowledge to protect themselves. Support the removal of landmines through collaborations to improve trust across groups and ensure higher levels of safety for citizens and military.

Individual and interpersonal changes

- **Support youth peacebuilding efforts** through coordination and strengthening of youth peacebuilding organizations and networks. Ensure groups and networks transcend ethnic and identity divides. Provide leadership training for youth and support inter-ethnic youth exchanges. Encourage non-violence and ensure youth are not placed at risk. Bridge divides between experiences of conflict among youth to create understanding and empathy.
- **Support international development and humanitarian actors** to improve coordination of programmes and share information to reduce mistrust in communities, and to use education and health as entry points for community and peacebuilding. Ensure staff participate in training on conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity.