



PEACE IS LIVING WITH DIGNITY

VOICES OF COMMUNITIES FROM
MYANMAR'S CEASEFIRE AREAS
IN 2016

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*Voices of Communities from Myanmar's ceasefire
areas in 2016*

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Karen Development Network (Kayin)

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AA	Arakan Army
BGF	Border Guard Force
CBO	Community-based organization
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	Civil society organization
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
EAG	Ethnic armed group
HRP/MRP	Hongsawatoi Restoration Party/Mon Restoration Party
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KNU	Karen National Union
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNPLF	Karenni National People's Liberation Front
KNG	Kayan National Guard
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
MAMD	Mon Army Mergui District
MDWA	Mon Democratic Warrior Army
MNDA	Mon National Democratic Army
MNLA	Mon National Liberation Army
MPG	Mon Peace Group
MPF	Mon People's Front
MTA	Mong Tai Army
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NLD	National League for Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party

NGOs	Non-government organisations
NSAG	Non state armed group
PNLO	Pa’O National Liberation Organisation
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSA	Shan State Army
SSA-N	Shan State Army - North
SSA-S	Shan State Army- South
TNLA	Ta’ang National Liberation Army
USDP	Union Solidary and Development Party
UWSA	United Wa State Army

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



For over sixty years, Myanmar has been the site of violent conflict between the central government armed forces, called the Tatmadaw, and multiple conflict actors. Since the Myanmar government initiated the peace process in 2011, bilateral ceasefire agreements with fifteen ethnic armed groups have been signed. These agreements carried the great hope that Myanmar would finally see the end to the violent conflict that has affected most parts of the country.

Table 1. Ceasefire groups			
Armed Group	Main Area	Bilateral Ceasefire Agreement	NCA Signatory?
1. United Wa State Party (UWSP)	Wa Special Region 2, Northern Shan	6 September 2011	No
2. National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA)	Eastern Shan	7 September 2011	No
3. Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)	Kayin	3 November 2011	Yes
4. Restoration Council of Shan State/Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-South)	Southern Shan	2 December 2011	Yes
5. Chin National Front (CNF)	Chin	6 January 2012	Yes
6. Karen National Union (KNU)	Kayin	12 January 2012	Yes
7. Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army-North (SSPP/SSA-North)	Northern Shan	28 January 2012	No
8. New Mon State Party (NMSP)	Mon	1 February 2012	No
9. Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council	Kayin	7 February 2012	Yes

10. Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	Kayah	7 March 2012	No
11. Arakan Liberation Party (ALP)	Rakhine	5 April 2012	Yes
12. National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang	Sagaing	9 April 2012	No
13. Pa'O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO)	Shan	25 August 2012	Yes
14. All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF)	Border areas	5 August 2013	Yes
15. Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)	Kachin/Northern Shan	30 May 2012 ¹	No
16. Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)	Northern Shan	No agreement	No
17. Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA, "Kokang group")	Northern Shan	No agreement	No
18. Arakan Army (AA)	Rakhine	No agreement	No

The bilateral ceasefire agreements served as the foundation for the central government, the Tatmadaw, and the different ethnic armed groups to begin negotiations for a nationwide ceasefire agreement. Throughout Myanmar, there are calls for a peace process that not only stops the fighting and ends the violence, but also seeks to address the longstanding issues that affect all communities. The forging of a nationwide ceasefire agreement in October

¹ The KIO and the central government signed an agreement on 30 May 2012 that, while not a formal ceasefire, contained a commitment to "efforts to achieve de-escalation and cessation of hostilities".

2015 was seen as the first step in a long process that needs to address decades of deep-seated resentment, marginalization, and mistrust from the different ethnic groups throughout the country. Decades of counter-insurgency tactics have created conditions of severe socio-economic underdevelopment in the different ethnic states. Most of the rural areas have very limited access to basic social services such as schools and health care facilities. And as communities competed over limited resources, majority-minority group tensions arose. These are only some of the issues that need to be raised in the political dialogue process and addressed in the comprehensive peace agreement.

As the country prepares for the third Union Peace Conference, the peace process is at a precarious juncture. Fighting continues in Kachin between the Tatmadaw and the KIA, and in Northern Shan between the Tatmadaw, the RCSS, and the TNLA. There have also been skirmishes between the Border Guard Forces and a splinter group from the DKBA, while sporadic clashes broke out between the NMSP and the KNU. Not only are these clashes putting the lives of communities in the surrounding areas at risk, they are also undermining national trust in the sustainability of the peace process.

Other challenges to the peace process are the issues of inclusivity and representation at the peace dialogues. Apart from the exclusion of three ethnic armed groups, the dialogues have also been faulted for limiting the participation of civil society organisations and women. In the course of negotiations, it became clear that the peace process would mainly be a top-level process, primarily involving chosen representatives from the central government, the Tatmadaw, and the leadership from the ethnic armed groups.

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) recognises the importance of involving the communities in the peace process. The communities are necessary partners in creating a robust and sustainable peace process. As stakeholders who have been living at the frontlines of violent conflict, the communities have valuable insights to share about the grievances that drive conflict. Listening to how they are affected by the bilateral ceasefire agreements being implemented in their areas also serves as a significant source of feedback on the positive and negative effects the ongoing peace process is having at the community level.

This publication is based on research and direct engagement with communities in six ceasefire areas of the country. The overall aim of the project is to amplify the voices of communities to allow their experiences to inform and influence decision-makers, including negotiators and other key stakeholders in the country's peace process.

Structure of the Publication

This publication is divided into ten chapters. **Chapter 1** contains the introduction and conflict context. It also contains the summary of main findings across all the states and the similarities and differences noted between the first and second rounds of the listening project. **Chapter 2** contains the recommendations to key stakeholders based on the main findings. **Chapter 3** explains what listening methodology is and how it is used to gather the data. **Chapter 4** covers the experiences and reflections of the listeners as they travelled to different parts of their state and conversed with the residents. **Chapter 5 to 10** contain more in-depth discussions of the main themes identified in the six areas covered by the research.

Between March and August 2016, seventy-five listeners carried out 459 conversations with 1,663 participants in six areas with existing bilateral ceasefire agreements: Kachin, Northern Shan, Southern Shan, Kayah, Kayin, and Mon states.

Using listening methodology, people who are familiar with local contexts and speak the local languages in the covered areas travelled to various townships and had conversations with a cross-section of residents. These conversations aimed to capture their opinions and experiences with the ongoing peace process, their daily challenges, as well as their hopes as aspirations for the future.

Recurring main themes in all areas: 2016 results

An examination of the main themes identified by listeners during the processing workshops at each of the covered locations reveals nine main themes that consistently appear as community concerns.

Table 2. Main themes identified in processing workshops across all areas	
1	The communities would like to have a comprehensive and inclusive ceasefire agreement. They also want to attain genuine and sustainable peace. No one wants to experience violent conflict again.
2	The communities acknowledge some positive changes since the central government embarked on a peace process in 2011.
3	The communities express the desire to experience greater freedom of movement.
4	The communities do not want to be burdened by the informal taxation levied on them by different armed groups.
5	The communities express that they need more job opportunities and better livelihood conditions.
6	The communities wish the government would improve the provision of health care and education services. They would like to see improvements in the quality and accessibility of these social services.

7	The communities wish that the decision makers and policy makers hear their voices. They expect the elected representatives in government to visit and consult with them as well as address their needs and challenges.
8	The communities are concerned about the rising number of drug users, particularly among young people. They also worry about social issues that arise in connection to drug abuse such as negative effects on family relations and increasing instances of theft, robberies, and drug-related violence.
9	The communities are concerned about land disputes. Some members of the community raise concerns about the rising number of land confiscations happening in their areas. These confiscations call into question their right to occupy land. Others worry about land they left behind when they ran from the fighting.

Similar main themes in all areas in 2015 and 2016 results

Although this round of listening research covered different villages, and occasionally different townships, as compared to the listening research in 2015, a number of similar main themes consistently emerged. These common concerns, feelings, and experiences that communities shared in relation to the peace process are discussed briefly in the following section.

Land disputes

Issues associated with land disputes are a common theme in the findings that appear in both 2015 and 2016. Communities that took part in this round of listening had their own experiences of land disputes. These were generally disputes arising from the application of newly crafted land ownership laws that were different from the customary land use/land occupation rules that communities practice. This means additional restrictions are imposed on the use and occupation of land, which confuses communities who are already facing diminishing economic opportunities and challenging livelihood conditions.

The different manifestations of land disputes that emerge from the listening results fall under two general categories. The first is land grabbing that occurs in the wake of large-scale development projects, such as construction of hydropower dams, roads, hotel zones, or highways. Communities narrate experiences with developers who are able to acquire land without consulting or informing communities about these projects. In other instances, communal land, through defective or dishonestly applied land registration processes, is confiscated and sold to large business owners. Consequently, communities find that they become displaced or that the land they utilized for subsistence farming or other communal purposes becomes inaccessible. As a result, communities have grown resentful and wary of any large-scale development projects that might take place in their areas. Instead of viewing these projects as sources of employment opportunities, or boosting development in their areas, they consider these constructions as the cause of even greater hardships.

The second category of land disputes is related to how the communities understand land registration processes. Each state has its own set of traditional ways of determining land use and occupation. Unfortunately, the recently enacted national land ownership laws deviate greatly from these traditional practices and require those who want to register their land to undergo complicated processes and produce a plethora of documents. Unsurprisingly, community members are left confused as to how to meet the level of proof required by law to verify land ownership. While there are efforts to educate communities about land registration processes, overall, communities express great dissatisfaction with these efforts, complaining that they do not have adequate redress to address the immediate effects of losing their land.

Drug issues

Community concerns over drug related issues, from cultivation, production to use, remain widespread in all areas from 2015 to 2016.

For most communities, the commonly cited concern is the increasing number of residents becoming addicted to drugs, and the corresponding effects on community and family lives. In several areas, communities observe an increase in incidents of property crime and domestic violence that they associate with drug use and users. Some participants share instances when parents have to ask law enforcement or village authorities to put their children in jail to force drug rehabilitation. Recognising the negative impacts drug use have on social

cohesion and community relations, several ethnic armed groups have set up rehabilitation programmes and operate rehabilitation camps.

In other areas, communities consider the negative effects of drug trafficking in their areas to be of greater concern. Trade consists of the distribution and smuggling of drugs within or through any particular area. Problems emerge because of the associated corrupt business practices that are used to facilitate illicit activities. These practices include giving bribes and paying “taxes” to different authorities for access to particular areas. The lucrative drug trade makes several communities suspect that conflict actors involved in the drug trade have a motive for keeping the security situation unstable to guarantee uninterrupted income from illicit activities.

The final aspect to drug issues is around the links between cultivation of opium poppies and the local economies. In several areas, farmers depend on their poppy harvest for their livelihoods. This dependency is only compounded when communities are caught in the cycle of drug production. In these areas, groups involved in the drug trade would outlay the costs for the poppy harvest, while ethnic armed groups or community groups working to eradicate drugs would come to destroy the crops. Farmers therefore become caught in the middle of groups that have a vested interest in the production of drugs, and groups that seek the destruction of drugs. Farmers’ livelihoods are most often negatively affected by being caught in-between the two sides.

Unity and equality of ethnic groups

Calls for equality and non-discrimination between ethnic groups continue to be a common pattern in communities. Communities consistently mention feeling friction and tensions that they perceive to be based on ethnic, sub-ethnic, minority, and majority groupings.

There are two levels of understanding these concerns. The first is on the national level, where the ethnic groups are represented either politically by elected officials or through ethnic armed groups that purport to represent their interests. The actions of these groups are thus projected onto the entire ethnic group, for better or worse. In this regard, the communities make consistent demands on the central government to implement policies that guarantee equality for all ethnic groups. They expect the ethnic groups to have better political representation, especially at a national level of governance. This

appears to be the outcome of the awareness raising efforts on the political process, in the lead up to the national elections in 2015. Interestingly, some communities consider ethnic armed groups as representing their interests. They, therefore, demand that the central government give equal treatment to the ethnic armed groups in political processes.

The second level is on the community level. All communities share stories to illustrate their experiences of discrimination. They would like to find means to address communal tensions that are often exacerbated by local and national political developments. Some participants explain that they are often stopped and searched by the Tatmadaw or ethnic armed groups while travelling because they belong to a particular ethnic group. Some suspect that their ethnicity is a consideration when authorities decide to approve loan applications. The communities also find themselves caught in the middle of fighting between different ethnic armed groups as soldiers passing through their villages target particular members of the community because they are of the same ethnicity as the rival armed group. These rising tensions promote discord between residents from different ethnic groups. In some cases, the insecurity results in the formation of small militias along sub-ethnic lines.

While aware of these divisions in their areas, the communities express hopes and aspirations for greater unity among the ethnic groups. Some suspect that Tatmadaw officials encourage discord between ethnic groups as a strategy to disempower them. They recognise the need for all residents to work together on common advocacies, such as calls to increase representation in government institutions or in the peace talks to ensure that their perspectives are heard. In response to community level tensions between ethnic groups, some communities mention the need for local efforts to encourage inclusion through dialogue processes to increase interaction and integration between the different ethnic groups. Others note that these divisions could be bridged once the fighting between different ethnic groups stop.

Livelihood opportunities

Another recurring theme across covered areas is the challenges associated with securing sustainable livelihoods. The communities recognise that these challenges arise in large part due the long standing violent conflict in their area.

One aspect of this theme is how conflict directly causes economic hardship. As the fighting transforms villages into frontlines, the communities are forced to flee their homes and resettle in other areas. This means leaving behind farmlands, harvests, property, and means of livelihood. Generally, relocation areas provide limited employment or livelihood opportunities, leaving IDPs reliant on humanitarian agencies for sustenance.

Areas not directly affected by fighting are also beset with problems of underdevelopment due to the decades-long conflict. The military's preoccupation with fighting wars in the ethnic states has allowed for an atmosphere of corrupt business practices, unregulated labour practices, and lingering cronyism that obstructs equal socioeconomic growth. It is therefore unsurprising that many communities across the covered areas equate peace with the ability to earn enough so that they can provide for their families and live with dignity.

Another aspect to this theme is related to the lasting effects of the lack of employment opportunities. Apart from people not having sufficient means to sustain themselves, the communities also see high unemployment rates as a factor contributing to the rise in drug abuse and addiction. This is also seen as a factor to the increase in incidents of crime. The communities also worry about the effect that the lack of employment opportunities have on young people. To earn enough money to support their families, they have to leave the country to search for employment, most often in China or Thailand. This creates additional concerns about the impact of having entire segments of their society become either disengaged (due to drug addiction) or be completely absent (due to migration) on long-term prospects for social cohesion. Some also raise concerns about the young people who work abroad forgetting their culture or losing their traditions.

To address these concerns, the communities state that the central government needs to intervene and regulate markets to ensure fair prices. They expect the government to build more markets to increase trade opportunities. The communities in several areas reflect that they do not have sufficient access to markets because most markets are located in the towns and the conflict has severely restricted their ability to travel. Even in areas where they have access to markets, the lack of government regulation over prices means middlemen and brokers can take advantage of farmers and buy their produce at very low prices. Meanwhile, these same brokers can sell to the same farmers other goods at high prices.

Need for social development

Another common refrain heard from communities in all areas covered in listening rounds both in 2015 and 2016 is the need for more social development. The communities readily acknowledge the efforts of the government to provide some social development. They often cite that more roads or telecommunication infrastructure make travel and communication better and easier. Likewise, they also note improvement of accessibility to education and health care services.

The communities are quick to point, however, that more developments are needed to counter the severe underdevelopment in their areas. The most often cited are the need for a sufficient number of skilled and highly trained teachers and health care workers to provide services, and to ensure consistency in the service delivery. Likewise, communities note that in some villages there are neither schools nor health care centres and thus they need authorities to build those facilities in their areas. Overall, there is a recognition that there needs to be a stop to the fighting to enable the central government to commit the time, energy and resources needed to fulfil the community demands for equitable, consistent, and sustainable social development across the country.

Environmental Concerns

The results of the 2015 and 2016 listening rounds further reveal consistent community concerns about environmental degradation and its negative effects on residents. These concerns focus almost exclusively on the effects of large-scale development and extraction projects on the environment. These include concerns over polluting surrounding agricultural land, community water sources, and the air. The environmental damage that results from the construction of hydropower dams also comes up regularly in conversations across most states. In other cases, the communities recognise that they contribute to the environmental degradation by engaging in unsustainable practices, such as transforming entire forests into agricultural land.

The communities fear the lasting effects that these actions will have, noting in some cases that massive deforestation contributes to climate change and causes severe weather conditions, or severe flooding. The construction of hydropower dams floods entire villages, reduces water flows and causes salt water to mix with fresh water drinking sources. In most areas, these effects are convincing communities to push back against planned or implemented large-scale development projects.

Taxation

Another key theme that remains consistent from 2015 and 2016 is that the communities face informal taxes imposed by multiple authorities. Though there are a few variations to this theme depending on the area covered, the communities mainly mention informal taxes being collected in areas where ethnic armed groups and militias operate. The community responses to these taxes vary, again depending on the area. In some areas, the communities see the taxes as their contribution to the cause and they are willing to provide material support for their respective ethnic armed group. In others, there is an element of imposition as intimidation accompanies collection, particularly where taxes are collected from the communities belonging to a different ethnic group. Some militia groups also collect taxes or other material contributions from the communities.

In some areas, the communities point out the added heavy economic burden caused by multiple authorities or armed groups collecting different taxes on the same villages. In other places, the communities have to pay ethnic armed groups and various militias operating in the area, including the Border Guard Forces. Apart from the economic burden, the communities also worry about the possibility of clashes breaking out should different armed groups find themselves in the same area.

Notably, the collection of “taxes” is informal and highly unregulated. People do not know where this money goes. Some communities say they would be happy to pay these contributions as long as the groups collecting them account for the expenses.

Differences in all areas in 2015 and 2016 results

Awareness of Political Process

In all areas covered, there is a discernible increase in awareness of political process among communities. We can account for this change in part due to the awareness-raising campaigns and efforts carried out by civil society organisations and activists in the lead up to the 2015 national elections. Another contributing factor is that the communities have greater access to information as a result of more open media and improved telecommunications services that allow internet connectivity.

This greater political awareness is demonstrated by the increasing clamour among the communities to shift to a federal system of government. These demands appear to increase in 2016, as the central government engaged more openly with the idea of federalism in the public sphere. A vast majority of the participants believe that shifting to a federal system is the best way to address inequality and give minorities the right of self-administration. Notably, there seems to be little understanding as to what kind of federal system would work best in the country or how federalism might take place. Depending on the area covered, the communities mention wanting to make pre-existing geographic divisions the basis for creating federal states, or making new ones to accommodate different ethnic groups.

What is clear to the communities is that the 2008 constitution needs to be amended to guarantee the civilian nature of the government. Several participants observe that the central government and the Tatmadaw do not seem to share a common political agenda. Communities worry about the three government ministries still under the Tatmadaw control. They believe there should be a clear distinction between the central government and the Tatmadaw, and that the Tatmadaw should confine itself to issues on national defence against external threats. These perspectives persist very strongly in the northern states currently experiencing violent conflict because the communities suspect that the Tatmadaw are acting unilaterally in mounting attacks, without direction from the central government.

The final aspect is regarding representation in government. The 2015 elections saw the successful handover of power between the USDP and the NLD. Nevertheless, the communities still continue to be apprehensive because they

are not sure whether their elected officials, either at the national or the state level, truly represent their interests. In most cases, the communities express a “wait and see” attitude, expressing a modicum of hope as the government is “continuing to learn”. There are other communities that voice frustration over being politically unrepresented, or not having their perspectives heard. These communities yearn to have the elected politicians visit their villages and hold consultations with them to enable those elected representatives to become aware of the challenges faced by the communities.

Awareness of Peace Process

Another change expressed in listening rounds between 2015 and 2016 is the increasing community awareness about the peace process. This is attributable, not only to the information campaigns carried out by civil society organisations, non-government organisations, and activists, but also the efforts of the government to increase the national profile of the peace process in the lead up to the signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement as well as the first two Union Peace Conferences in 2016. Notably, the communities have made specific demands for the central government, the Tatmadaw, and ethnic armed groups to hold more dialogue and discussions. These demands are not surprising given the timing of conversations for the second round of listening, which took place in the months leading up to the second Union Peace Conferences, dubbed the “21st Century Panglong Conference.”

On a final note, it bears reiterating that the communities have acknowledged the positive changes that have occurred in the last few years since the peace process began. There appears to be a consensus that political space is opening. The 2015 elections and the peaceful transition from the USDP to the NLD clearly illustrate this. The communities also recognise that they have more space to engage in political activities and hold discussions about political issues in public spaces. Infrastructure developments also make it on the list of discernible progress. Unfortunately, the escalating conflict between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups in the northern part of the country has cast a shadow over these changes and tempered the communities’ optimism. This could explain the recurring call from the communities for the central government and the Tatmadaw to make the peace process more inclusive by allowing the excluded ethnic armed groups to participate.

MAIN FINDINGS IN EACH AREA

The following section summarises the key themes listeners identified during the processing workshops in each of the areas covered. These themes are divided into two main categories: the key themes listeners identified as overarching issues throughout the state or area covered, and the key themes responding to the guide questions. A brief discussion of the recurring themes as well as notable differences between the first round of listening activities in 2015 and the second round in 2016 follows. The main themes from each area are discussed in greater detail in the separate state chapters.

KACHIN STATE

Table 3. Kachin State – Main themes from processing workshop

1. The communities express their desire for genuine and sustainable peace. Some express not feeling any positive changes since the beginning of the peace process.
2. The communities expect ceasefire agreements to be genuine and sustainable, and that there is no fighting during ceasefires
3. Some communities continue to feel the negative effects of the ongoing fighting such as restrictions on their freedom of movement, insecurity, loss of livelihood, displacement, and land confiscation due to military occupation.
4. The communities expect the leaders in political dialogue to consider the experiences and opinions of communities.
5. The communities expect that the 2008 constitution is amended and the provision reserving 25% of parliament seats for the Tatmadaw is removed. This step is necessary to ensure complete civilian control of government.
6. The communities express desire for justice, basic human rights, and civil rights. They recognise the importance of a fair justice system to ensure community welfare. They do not want to experience any more discrimination.
7. The communities voice concern that tensions between ethnic groups are intentionally provoked to cause division and conflict.
8. The communities expect that there are more active and effective campaigns on road regulations and rules to limit accidents.

9. The communities voice concern about cronies and corrupt officials who take advantage of the poor economic conditions to retain power as well as influence and limit business opportunities. In areas where there are few economic opportunities, prices of produce are low, while prices of basic goods are high. This makes the communities struggle to make ends meet.
10. The communities desire more development in transportation and electricity infrastructure. They expect construction of more roads as well as access to affordable electricity.
11. The communities have poor health care facilities and there is a lack of skilled health workers.
12. The communities expect to know more about peace and the peace process.
13. The communities perceive discrimination due to their ethnicity. This discrimination limits their job opportunities and affects their freedom of movement.
14. The communities would like to have more job opportunities. They expect the government to regulate labour practices of businesses to ensure better protection of workers. They also voice the need for more markets where they can sell their produce and products.
15. The communities expect the government to develop comprehensive policy to address illegal drugs issue and ban the militias from operating opium plantations. They also expect the government to offer substitute crops to enable farmers who rely on planting opium to grow other crops to guarantee their livelihood.
16. The communities express hope that the military will return the land they confiscated to the rightful owner.
17. The communities need the central government to recognize and give credit for students who attended KIO-administered schools. They perceive this recognition necessary to increase education opportunities for young people in Kachin State.
18. The communities expect the government to increase investment in education including employing more teachers and building more schools to accommodate the increasing number of students.
19. The communities desire to have more access to the land occupied by extractive industry companies.

Table 4. Kachin State – Main themes under guide questions

1	<p>What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express desire for a successful peace process. • Several communities note with concern that while peace talks are happening, fighting continues in Kachin. Some of them state that they would like to see an improvement in this ceasefire. • A few communities state that they do not know much about the peace process.
2	<p>What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities voice that they need freedom of movement in Kachin. • The communities recognise the importance of political dialogue and expect that there will not be any fighting by 2017. • The participants want to include the political and economic situations in the peace dialogues. • They want the talks to cover the proper implementation of existing agreements. The people who are participating in the peace dialogues should make sure that they have a real commitment in building peace.
3	<p>For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities speak of their desire to have the two conflicting parties (the Tatmadaw and the KIA) reduce tensions between them. They expect each side to be more involved and keep their promises to show mutual respect and understanding. • The communities also would like to include the issue of land and natural resources in Kachin that they feel are being exploited by Chinese businesses. • Some community members mention the need to address their perceived partiality of the media when it comes to reporting events in Kachin.

4	<p>What do you expect from a successful peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities believe the country can become well-developed when there is peace. They will have more job opportunities, and every family will have decent living standards. • They also expect that they will no longer suffer from discrimination because all ethnic nationalities will have equal rights.
5	<p>What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that there have been some positive changes such as improvements in education, government providing free education and school materials, some improvements in health care system and communication infrastructure (availability of mobile phones). • The communities state that there is more free media which facilitate access to information to more people. Fighting is decreasing on a national scale, but not in Kachin.
6	<p>Now, what is a concern for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that drug issues (production/use) are very serious. • The communities are concerned about the presence of religious tensions, particularly between the Baptists and the Catholics. • The communities state that many big companies in Kachin are taking land from local people and extracting natural resources which cause great environmental destruction. • The communities state that the fighting in Kachin greatly affects the ability of people to make a living and that it should stop. • The communities express that there is increasing tension between ethnic groups in Kachin: between Kachin and Shanni as well as among Jingpaw, Rwang, and Lisu. • The communities also express that there are serious economic problems, primarily the high prices of basic commodities. • The community state that the ongoing fighting makes construction of new roads hard to do.

7	<p>What changes do you want to see in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like to see comprehensive development in education and health service provision, more/better road infrastructure, and electricity provision. They also expect better conditions for livelihood, more markets to sell their goods, and more business/employment opportunities. This is to enable them to have decent living standards. • They expect to have freedom of movement without any restrictions. • They expect that soldiers/armed groups to reside in camps that are far from villages. • They request that the Myitsone dam project be permanently halted.
8	<p>What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They need help with technical development/skills and substitute crops. • They need efficient local government staff from the village to township level. • They need big businesses working in jade mining in Hpakan to reserve small plots of land for local residents to mine. • They need the government to help them resolve land issues to enable them to obtain proper documentation (land titles) to secure ownership.
9	<p>How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like to help by contributing labour, and any skills and knowledge that they have. • They can act in advocacy roles to raise awareness of human rights issues to the government.

10	<p>What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no job opportunities or other money generating activities to engage in. • Easy availability of illegal drugs is a big challenge in the communities. • Clashes between Tatmadaw and KIA that are happening near the communities. • The discrimination that communities feel from authorities. • Most people are illiterate, so they feel intimidated by authorities and cannot talk to them. • The Myitsone Dam, which has not been permanently halted, makes the communities worry about being displaced if the project restarts.
11	<p>What would help you overcome these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that the educational system needs to be upgraded to provide high quality of education. • The communities state that the central government needs to provide more opportunities for ethnic communities to participate and work in government roles to better represent the needs of ethnic groups. • The communities state that the government officials and administrators need to communicate properly and work together to address community concerns. • The communities express that foreign advisers would be useful to help the government provide for the needs of communities. • The communities express that there needs to be more drug eradication programmes.

Similarities between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

The communities continue to express a strong desire for genuine and sustainable peace. To attain genuine peace, most of the communities perceive that it is necessary for decision makers to listen to and prioritise their needs. Compared to last year, the desire expressed this year appears to be marked with greater impatience as most IDP communities who share their experiences have been living in the camps for four or five years now. They voice their strong desire to return to their villages and homes so they can resume their lives, something they cannot do at the moment while living in IDP camps.

The negative effects of ongoing fighting also reappear as a strong theme, although with notable differences in their manifestation. In 2015, the communities spoke more about their expectation to see the proper implementation of agreements related to the cessation of hostilities at the community-level. They also mentioned that they expect to see less troops and soldiers near or around villages.

In this round, perhaps because several IDP communities are included in the conversations, there is more pronounced anxiety about feeling trapped due to the location of the IDP camps between the positions of the Tatmadaw and the KIA. As one of the participants put it, 'if war breaks out again, there is no more place to run'. Several participants also mentioned the fear of their villages being destroyed by the shelling, or of getting injured or killed because of the landmines in their areas.

This would explain the consistency of wanting demilitarisation of communities as a main theme that comes up in both rounds of listening. There is, in both rounds, a general sense of insecurity in the presence of soldiers. This year, the communities note that while some parts of the state saw less troop movements, other areas saw a considerable increase. Of note is the observation of communities that soldiers are being deployed near jade mines, farmlands, and plantations, which are seriously impacting the communities' freedom of movement and their ability to earn a living. Once again, the importance of freedom of movement and the communities' desire to be able to travel between villages without fear or insecurity is a recurring theme.

The production and use of illegal drugs continue to be a pressing issue for the communities in Kachin. In 2015, the communities cite a number of social issues

they believe are connected to the use of drugs such as unemployment, and rising incidents of domestic violence and petty crime. The communities also mention the drug eradication programs in their areas, generally led by the Patjasan group. While some speak of their fears of violent clashes between the Patjasan and the poppy farmers or the militias guarding these crops, others praise the group's efforts as they note a decrease in drug use in their areas.

Additionally, similar to last year, several community members recognise that farmers rely on poppy crop to provide for their families. They thus recommend the government to implement a crop substitution program and assist farmers to transition from poppy growing.

Other concerns that continue to trouble the communities are those related to land occupation and ownership. These concerns appear to be rooted in the discrepancy between the customary or traditional land use and the current land laws being implemented that require registration based on proof of ownership.

They also register concerns related to the large companies engaged in extractive and other large projects in Kachin. One of the projects often cited is the suspended Myitsone dam, which continues to cause anxiety to many communities who would be negatively affected if the government restarts the project. Apart from noting that the people of Kachin do not receive benefits from these projects, they also cite the negative effects these projects have on the communities, including the restrictions placed on them from accessing resources in areas covered by these projects.

The communities reiterate their hope for better social services, as well as more road and electricity infrastructure. They also continue to ask the government to assist in providing employment or improving economic conditions for livelihood assistance.

Differences between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

One of the big differences in this year's results can be explained by the change in the communities covered. Because more IDP camp communities are covered this year, the concerns of IDPs are more prominent in the results.

A strong current that runs through IDPs' concerns is the feeling of their lives being suspended. Several of the IDPs spoken with have been living in the camps since the violent conflict started in 2011. A common refrain is their sense of helplessness; of desiring to be self-sufficient and not having to rely on humanitarian aid. Unfortunately they do not have such options given the limited livelihood opportunities available. Others share concerns over how their situation is affecting their children, especially in terms of stunting their education and limiting exposure to the world outside of IDP camps. Some IDP communities also voice their feelings of greater anxiety due to the ongoing fighting, particularly those living in IDP camps that are close to Tatmadaw or KIA positions.

In juxtaposition to the dominant theme of IDP concerns, there is greater acknowledgment from communities of the positive effects of the peace process. One of the most often cited changes is related to the opening of political space. The communities note that they have more freedom to speak on political issues and there are fewer restrictions for media. They also cite some instances where the local government held consultations with the communities as a positive development. Other slight positive changes are the improvements of the quality and delivery of social services in some areas, specifically education and health services.

More community members share that they would like to have a civilian government in a genuine federal union. They made strong calls for the amendment of the 2008 constitution to allow this to happen. Several communities specifically mention their desire for a liaison office to open in their areas to serve as a coordination point between KIO, Tatmadaw, and the government. These results showcase better-informed communities on the peace process as well as on issues related to governance and politics.

NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Table 5. Northern Shan State - Main themes from processing workshop

1. The communities express dissatisfaction with the peace process. They are worried that the central government does not have control over the military.
2. The communities expect the new government and the military to first hold a dialogue before engaging the ethnic armed groups in the peace process.
3. The communities are worried about social issues caused by drug addiction and drug abuse. They observe that drug abuse and production are affected by cycles of conflict.
4. The communities desire a genuine nationwide ceasefire agreement. They are concerned about the increase of violent conflict during the NCA negotiations.
5. They would like an inclusive peace dialogue that reflects community perspectives and opinions.
6. The communities are worried about human rights violations, such as kidnapping, torture, forced labour, displacement, and landmines as a result of the renewed fighting between ethnic armed groups and military.
7. The communities are worried about their safety and security around soldiers from both the military and the ethnic armed groups.
8. The communities would like to have equal treatment regardless of ethnicity. They feel that there is discrimination within communities based on ethnicity that limits their economic opportunities, creates mistrust between them, and can result in physical harassment.
9. The communities perceive that education opportunities are negatively impacted by the ongoing violent conflict. Education is disrupted as a result of school closures and teachers leaving. Some students also have to drop out from school to work and contribute income for their families.

10. The communities share that the ongoing conflict is negatively impacting their livelihood conditions. It is limiting their trade opportunities, resulting in low sales of produce. It is also reducing job opportunities for labourers. Merchants and business owners have taken advantage of the situation by buying produce from farmers at low prices, offering loans with high interest rates, and selling basic goods at high prices.
11. The communities expect the fighting to end to enable them travel freely within or between villages, without having to fear for their safety and security.
12. The communities desire access to higher education facilities. They want to have well-trained teachers, especially those who understand the difficulties students encounter when learning in Burmese.
13. The communities would like to have improved access and dependable provision of water, electricity, and telecommunication services. They do not want the military to interfere with services when they are in the area.
14. The communities expect to have more health care facilities manned by skilled health care workers, and to have greater access to adequate health care services.
15. The communities state that lack of economic opportunity limits income, affects livelihood, and limits community building activities, such as festivals and social welfare.
16. The communities desire more employment opportunities that match education level for graduates.
17. The communities appreciate NGO programmes that support their villages, and expect more social welfare programmes from the government.

Table 6. Northern Shan State – Main themes under guide questions

1	<p>What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities worry about the increased fighting and displacement occurring while there is a peace process. • They worry that the peace process is not genuine.
2	<p>What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of a permanent nationwide ceasefire agreement and not just in Northern Shan. • They want an end to the armed conflict, and want to find a way to prevent armed groups from moving into each other's territory because it causes instability and tension.
3	<p>For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities expect to see ethnic equality and to be able to exercise the right to ethnic self-determination. • The communities state that the peace dialogues should include community perspectives and experiences.
4	<p>What do you expect from a successful peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To see an end to all armed conflict and to have genuine peace nationwide. • To have equality among all ethnic groups.
5	<p>What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities have witnessed an increase in fighting and ethnic tension after the signing of the NCA. • The communities have also seen an increase in NGO presence, with development projects that help provide communities with basic health services and other services such as water and roads. • The communities also note that the government is now providing free elementary education, though mostly in non-conflict areas.

6	<p>Now, what is a concern for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They worry about personal security and safety because of increasing tensions between ethnic groups and the ongoing armed conflict. • The increase in drug use among community members and the corresponding social issues that arise such as crime. They also worry about the drug production and cultivation in their state, as well as the drug eradication efforts of certain groups that could result in violence. • The communities are worried that if the armed conflict does not stop in Northern Shan, they will have to face a similar situation as in the militarized zone in Kokang.
7	<p>What changes do you want to see in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like to have stability, so that they do not have to flee from the fighting or experience the consequences of fighting. They do not want to be recruited into the ethnic armed groups, or be forced to act as porter for soldiers. • They would like to have more freedom of movement to enable them to travel and have access to more employment opportunities.
8	<p>What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The armed conflict needs to end and there has to be peace. These communities understood that peace is limited to the absence of armed conflict. • The military should not be involved in politics. For this to happen, the 2008 constitution needs to be amended to remove the provision that guarantees 25% of parliament seats to the Tatmadaw.
9	<p>How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities can share their opinions and raise their voices on issues that affect them to the decision makers and conflict actors involved in the peace process • The communities can sponsor or hold educational programmes in their areas to raise awareness about political issues among themselves. • The participants also want to advocate on these issues through sharing their opinions and perspectives at public events and organised demonstrations.

10	<p>What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities are very worried about the ongoing armed conflict. • They are also anxious about the increasing drug production and drug use among community members. • They also mention the heightened tensions between ethnic groups that lead to distrust among members of the community. • The communities are concerned about the poor state of road infrastructure. • The communities are anxious about the interruptions to education services affecting young people. • The communities also worry about the poor access to health care facilities and services.
11	<p>What would help you overcome these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cessation of hostilities is the only way that any of the challenges can be addressed. • All groups such as central government, EAGs, NGOs, INGOs, CSOs, and the communities need to collaborate and work together to address these challenges.

Similarities between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

Overwhelmingly, listening results from both 2015 and 2016 reveal the persistent dissatisfaction of the communities with the peace process. In 2015, the communities expressed their desire for trust building between parties to the conflict. Since then, the communities have seen little progress in the building of trust and it seems that the conflict situation in Northern Shan is getting worse. This could explain the increasing pessimism that participants voice in relation to the peace process. The communities demand, as they did in 2015, that there be a decrease of violent conflict and an increase of efforts to advance the peace process.

Another recurring theme is the communities' desire for equal ethnic rights. This was already a resounding call from the communities in 2015 for a peace process that could address the problems of discrimination based on ethnicity and that guarantee equal ethnic rights. In 2016, this call has become even more insistent as communities experience greater ethnic tensions in their villages associated with the fighting between TNLA and RCSS.

After recounting the economic hardship that besets them on a daily basis, the communities reiterate urgent calls for the government to provide better employment and livelihood opportunities. The participants believe that peace, understood here to mean cessation of hostilities, is a precondition to socioeconomic development. They share that if they were involved in the peace process, they would have included the issue of regulating market prices in the agenda. Some participants also observe the continuing trend of young people leaving for China or Thailand because of conflict conditions and lack of the employment opportunities. There is also a continuing demand, consistent with that observed in 2015, for improvements in the provision of health and education, as well as for more infrastructure developments in Northern Shan state.

The communities continue to experience debilitating restrictions on their movement between and within villages due to the presence of armed groups in the area. They are aware of the ongoing violent clashes happening around them. They also emphasize how these clashes negatively impact their livelihoods and way of life.

Similar to the results from 2015, the communities remain alarmed over the proliferation of illegal drug use, particularly among young people. They also note the continuing production and trade of illegal drugs within the communities to be one of the critical challenges faced in Northern Shan.

Differences between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

The differences between the listening results in 2015 and in 2016 have to be understood in the context of the escalating violence between TNLA, RCSS, and the Tatmadaw since signing of the nationwide ceasefire agreement in October 2015. Unsurprisingly, in the listening project in 2016, the communities express more urgently concerns over human rights violations in the state such as increasing incidents of kidnappings, arrests, landmine accidents, and even killings. These conditions, as well as the greater troop movements around villages, consequently mean greater restrictions on movement and travel. These concerns translate to louder calls among participants for greater inclusivity in the peace process so that TNLA can be recognised as a negotiating party, as well as a genuine NCA that reflects ethnic views.

Another unfortunate consequence of the escalation in violence is the deepening suspicion within communities that the government does not have control over the military. This in turn causes many to lose faith in the sustainability of the peace process. Many voice concern that the peace process cannot continue unless the central government holds a dialogue with the Tatmadaw and agrees to approach the process and the EAGs with sincerity.

The communities display an increased awareness of political processes. This manifests mostly in demands made for government officials and elected representatives to better represent their needs. The communities appear to have a clearer understanding of their rights to political representation, especially in the wake of the 2015 election.

They also articulate clearer demands in relation to the peace process. They want their perspectives and opinions to be heard and considered in the course of the peace process. They also make specific demands for a federal system, which they believe will address ethnic inequality and ensure proper political representation.

Listeners also hear stronger and more specific demands for authorities (whether the central government or the conflict actors) to stop the fighting so that children are able to go to school without interruption. This highlights one of the troubling effects of violent conflict – as fighting continues, schools in conflict areas have to close down and students are left without access to education. Likewise, communities also see increasing problems with access to health care services.

As the central government signed the NCA with other ethnic armed groups in October 2015, violent conflict has escalated in Northern Shan. This explains why there are more widespread and urgent fears voiced by communities on issues relating to personal security. Apart from fears about physical harm due to violent clashes between armed groups, communities also voice anxiety about experiencing harassment, discrimination, and abuse from the soldiers passing through or stationed near the villages. The majority of the Ta'ang participants express that they see an ethnic component to these experiences. They state that Shan soldiers from the RCSS usually harass Ta'ang community members. This explains the intensifying tensions between Shan and Ta'ang communities in the past year.

SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

Table 7. Southern Shan State – Main themes from processing workshop

1. The communities worry about drug trafficking and the resultant negative effects of drug use within the community, particularly on young people.
2. The communities are concerned about land issues.
3. The communities are worried over the unstable prices of their produce. They expect the responsible government agencies to regulate prices to avoid them having to sell their crops at very low prices.
4. The ethnic minority groups want more support from the government for more social development and better road infrastructure.
5. The communities express the desire for the fighting to stop.
6. The communities perceive some degree of trust between the parties to the ceasefire agreements. Nevertheless, they expect both the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups to continue efforts to strengthen trust between and among them.
7. The communities are concerned about the shortage of water, both for drinking and for agriculture, because their water sources have been polluted as a result of environmental destruction.
8. The community members express that they need help in getting access to affordable and reliable electricity. Some need their villages to be connected to the grid. Those who have access to the grid want electricity to be more affordable and for the connection to be more reliable.
9. The communities face unemployment and other livelihood problems because severe weather conditions negatively affect their harvest.
10. The communities are concerned with widespread deforestation due to land conversion for agriculture, lime production, and other uses. They are worried about the negative consequences of the land conversion to the environment.

11. The communities are worried about the presence of big businesses in their areas.
12. The communities express desire for better education, emphasizing the need for more teachers and school supplies.
13. The communities voice the need for better, accessible, and convenient health services.
14. The communities wish to have a community leader who they can trust and will protect their interests and ensure that residents can benefit from the natural resources in their state.
15. The communities in remote areas feel isolated due to poor development of telecommunication infrastructures.
16. The community members perceive the disparity of development and social service provision between big towns and villages as evidence of discrimination.
17. The communities are concerned about transparency issues in what they see as a gap in information dissemination between concerned administrative departments and the community.
18. The communities express that they are exploited by politicians who make election promises that they do not fulfil.

Table 8. Southern Shan State – Main themes under guide questions

1	<p>What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express the desire for the peace process to be more transparent. • While they acknowledge that the peace process has brought some physical improvements in terms of infrastructure and roads, most of the communities still struggle with their means of livelihood. • They express concerns about the negative effects of the stability brought by the ceasefires: while the central government prioritizes certain places for development, other places get left behind.
2	<p>What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that they want all ethnic armed groups to be included in the peace talks. They also observe the need to reduce hierarchies and top-down governance. • The communities insist that the fighting in Northern Shan needs to stop. They desire to ask the negotiating parties, “Do you really want peace? Then talk about the difficulties of the communities.”
3	<p>For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express the desire to have equal participation in the peace talks. The communities from the villages and the hillsides perceive they should have a representative to present their needs. They also expect local authorities to visit and see their actual living conditions. • The communities also voice the need for negotiating parties to soften their positions so they can have more fruitful discussions.
4	<p>What do you expect from a successful peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They express the desire for the fighting to stop to enable everyone to contribute to the discussion on how to develop the country.
5	<p>What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities note that travel has become much easier and safer now that there is less fighting. This has improved the livelihood situation of the participants. • The communities also indicate that there are a lot of infrastructure changes like constructions of new roads.

6	<p>Now, what is a concern for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities perceive that the new central government is very open to foreigners coming into the country, particularly companies and investments. This openness can have good and bad effects on communities. • The communities express other concerns such as increasing drug use among communities, land disputes over occupation and ownership, high rates of unemployment, and fast rate of deforestation in the state.
7	<p>What changes do you want to see in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express the desire to see more social development and a better governance system. They would like to have improvement in infrastructure development as well as in psychological wellbeing that will enable them to live in peace and harmony. • They express the need for more livelihood opportunities.
8	<p>What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like all levels of government to work together with communities and NGOs to provide development assistance. They also would like to have more trainings and opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills.
9	<p>How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They express that what they can contribute to the development in their communities is their skills, time, and collective energies.
10	<p>What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rising drug use among communities and the instability of local markets are the main challenges. • Other challenges are deforestation and its effects, as well as severe weather conditions such as drought, which was quite challenging this year. • High rates of unemployment further add to the challenges.
11	<p>What would help you overcome these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and assistance between members of the community and actors outside the community such as NGOs and government are essential.

Similarities between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

Similar to the findings from 2015, the need for socio-economic development dominated most conversations in Southern Shan state. Repeatedly, the communities define peace as going beyond cessation of hostilities between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups. Genuine peace includes improvement of access to social services such as health care and education, construction and improvement of road and communication infrastructure, and access to electricity and water sources. For the communities to experience genuine peace, they should all be able to earn decent livelihoods that allow them to support their families. They should also be able send their children to school to allow them to improve their future. Essentially, genuine peace means that the communities can all live dignified lives.

With a sizeable number of participants coming from the Kayan ethnic group who live in remote hilly interiors, a related theme that came out is their strong feeling of isolation from the rest of the state. Members of these communities share their desire to know of what is going on in the rest of the country. They also express their expectation to have government officials, development agencies, and NGOs visit them; either to help them with development efforts or to conduct knowledge-sharing activities.

Issues related to land encroachment and confiscation have been a regular feature in the 2015 round of listening. This same issue also arises in this round of listening. The listeners report that the communities still face this problem, and that powerful groups (ranging from groups connected to the Tatmadaw, big businesses, or government officials) are taking their land without providing them proper compensation. The powerful group then sell it for exorbitant amounts, usually to large business owners.

Gender discrimination is another challenge that continues to appear prominently in conversations, particularly with the female community members. Women still have fewer chances to improve their lives, and girls have fewer opportunities to go to school or to find jobs or start businesses. Women also mention that they have limited opportunities to participate in public discussions about politics. They relate instances of being disrespected when they are in positions of local power.

Another similar finding from the 2015 listening project is the recognition that ethnic groups in their area need to be more united and to learn to cooperate. Communities observe growing tensions between some ethnic groups such as Pa'O and Shan, and Shan and Lahu. They identify this as an issue of particular concern in their state.

Differences between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

The main difference between the findings from 2015 and 2016 has to do with the communities' focus of how conflict shapes their lives. In 2015, the communities concentrated on the effects of violent conflict on their daily lives, speaking at great length about the trauma and fear that they felt. During this round, while some mention the effects of militarisation and previous experiences of providing forced labour or of portering, for the most part, the communities concentrate on the positive changes they note since the peace process began.

In discussing challenges, the communities speak more about the hardships due to lack of both development and government support for their livelihoods. Still, there are some community members who cite continuing fear due to the presence of armed groups (the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups) in their areas.

Although in both the 2015 and 2016 rounds of listening, environmental destruction came out as a main theme, a key difference between the two lies in the forms of environmental destruction they discussed. In 2015, the communities spoke of environmental destruction related to mining projects, hydropower dams, and construction of hotel zone. In the 2016 round, the main concern is the spreading problem of deforestation. This shift could be explained because of the changes in the townships covered by the listening round. Another key distinction in this round is that although several communities mention timber companies cutting down entire forests, they now also recognise their complicity in making deforestation worse. Because of dire economic conditions, lack of resources, as well as lack of electricity, communities express that they do not have any choice other than to cut down trees to use as charcoal for cooking. Communities displaced by the dam projects add that they do not have any choice other than to clear forests to use the land for agriculture after they lost their farmlands.

Another major environmental concern is the scarcity of water, particularly during the most recent summer, when large areas experienced drought. Traditional water sources such as lakes, ponds, and springs dried up. Other communities associate water scarcity to the upper Paunglaung dam, which they say has polluted their water source.

While increasing drug abuse was a concern raised in 2015, it became a more prominent challenge this year. The listeners report that the communities are overwhelmed by the problem. The communities are particularly concerned about the young people because the easy availability of cheap illegal drugs coupled with the lack of job prospects increases the likelihood of drug addiction.

KAYAH STATE

Table 9. Kayah State – Main themes from processing workshop

1. The communities notice the positive effects of the ceasefire agreement that manifested in evident cessation of hostilities, more freedom of movement, and minor developments such as better road infrastructure.
2. The communities perceive fears over the movement of the military in their areas. The communities think they may pose a security threat.
3. The communities still lack confidence that the peace process will be successful. Due to breakdown of past peace processes, the communities fear that there might be renewal of conflict between the ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw. The communities express their desire for sustainable peace.
4. The communities express a desire for the ethnic armed groups from their state to sign a ceasefire agreement.
5. The communities voice the need for unification of all ethnic armed groups in Kayah state. They believe that if all groups are at peace with each other, the peace will extend across the country.
6. The communities express worry about food security due to the recent natural disaster that damaged their harvest.
7. After 2012, the communities observe improvements in public infrastructure such as better roads, communication, and transportation. They also note that there is improvement of freedom of movement that allows better access to their farms.
8. The communities express concern that changes in governance structures will affect their traditional administrative systems.
9. The communities expect the new civilian government to foster a closer relationship with them by having official government visits to their villages.
10. The communities express the need for government support for health services in terms of human resources (doctors, nurses, etc.) and supplies (medicine).

11. The communities request that the government do not prevent refugees from returning. They ask the government to provide support for their repatriation.
12. The communities expect the parties in the peace process to pay more attention to their concerns.
13. The communities voice discontent over ethnic armed groups imposing taxes on them.
14. The communities state that different ethnic armed groups impose different rules over the same area, which confuses communities as to which rules apply. The communities expect clear demarcation between the areas controlled by different armed groups.
15. The communities observe that while Kayah state produces electricity from hydropower dams, Kayah residents still live without electricity.
16. After the bilateral ceasefire agreement was signed, the communities notice an increase in drug trafficking and drug use, particularly amongst the youth. The communities voice the need for drug awareness campaigns and training.
17. The communities express worry about the lack of employment and request the government to provide solutions. They expect the government to utilize the communities to work in infrastructure and construction projects in the area rather than bringing in workers from Yangon.
18. The communities expect the government and ethnic armed groups to collaborate with them to combat environment and natural resource destruction.
19. The communities express desire for equality. They do not want to experience discrimination based on religious or ethnic affiliations.
20. The communities state that although there are schools in Kayah state, there is a lack of materials and human resources to operate them.

Table 10. Kayah State – Main themes under guide questions

1	<p>What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities perceive that the peace process should have a strong foundation built on trust and understanding. The communities state that the pursuit of peace needs to be genuine and that conflicting parties need to stay true to ceasefires agreements.
2	<p>What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities would like to make the discussion on the situation of IDPs and refugees a priority. • They also would like to talk about human rights, with an emphasis on the rights of women and the rights of citizenship. • They expect stakeholders to prioritise the drug abuse issue and to implement effective campaigns against drug abuse and drug production. • They expect decision-makers to ensure affordable education. They also ask for an increase in the number of teachers in state schools and improvements on the quality of education. • They desire their state to have access to affordable and stable electricity.
3	<p>For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express the need for reconciliation and unification of ethnic armed groups operating in their area. • They request that the decision-makers hear their voices and demands. • They desire to have a successful national ceasefire agreement.
4	<p>What do you expect from a successful peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities expect more freedom of movement and freedom of expression as well as improvement of security and development. • They expect that the military budget will be decreased and that available funds will be channelled to development projects for the community.

5	<p>What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities indicate there are slight improvements in transportation, communication, education, and living standards. • They also report positive improvements in freedom of movement and security. • The communities also note that there is increasing prevalence of drug abuse and production. • They also observe that there is an emergence of additional security checkpoints imposed by the military and the ethnic armed groups.
6	<p>Now, what is a concern for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that they fear that there will be a renewal of conflict. • They also worry about the rise in drug abuse, production, and its effects on the youth. • They state that they worry about the change in government; its leadership style and how it will be able to help the communities. • The communities express concern about the recent drought and the shortage of water. • The communities also express concern about the youth's addiction to technology and social media.
7	<p>What changes do you want to see in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities would like to have improvements of service provision in their villages. • They expect to have food security and better employment opportunities. • The communities expect that the quality and accessibility of education will be better for the next generation. • They express expectation that all fighting will stop.

8	<p>What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order for this to happen, the communities feel that it is imperative that those in power listen to their voices and consider their needs in the planning and implementation of development projects. • The communities state that these goals will be achieved when the youth are properly educated. • The communities express that community inclusiveness needs to be incorporated in political dialogue.
9	<p>How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that they can help by participating in collaborative efforts with other communities across the state. • The communities also state that they can contribute by supporting the youth to become better educated.
10	<p>What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that the most prominent challenge is the low value of goods that they produce and sell compared to the high cost of basic goods that they need. • The communities express that the lack of markets in their immediate vicinity is also a burden. Since there are no markets in their areas, they have to travel to Loikaw to sell goods and this trip adds to the costs that they need to cover. • The communities state that their small income diminishes because they have to pay multiple taxes to the military and ethnic armed groups.
11	<p>What would help you overcome these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that sincere commitment to peace from the government would be a starting point. • The communities state that if the whole country unites and helps each other, they will no longer suffer from ethnic and religious discrimination.

Similarities between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

When comparing findings in 2015 to those in 2016, a pattern of similar themes emerges. The first are themes related to the desire to see more infrastructure development. Communities are still challenged by their inability to access electricity whilst living in an energy producing state. Although the Lawpita Dam produces sufficient electricity, most of it is channelled to Yangon and other parts of the country. This leaves Kayah townships without electricity even though they already have electric poles and wires in place. The communities share that they often have to pay an exorbitant amount of money for generators and to connect to the electricity grid and still experience inadequate access to electricity.

As in 2015, the health care system remains inadequate to meet the needs of communities in 2016. The communities also perceive huge gaps in medical access when comparing rural and urban areas.

In both listening rounds in 2015 and 2016, the communities continue to express a strong desire for better education services. According to official statistics, Kayah state has the lowest number of public schools in Myanmar. This problem is exacerbated by the short supply of qualified teachers, likely due to the meagre salary paid in government schools. These situations pose a challenge to the availability of education facilities. As a result, the children have to travel to villages that offer education in Burmese. However, the language barrier is another challenge for these students, who are often not familiar with Burmese.

In the listening round in 2016, the communities explain how they seek to address the low quality of education by sending children to after school tutorials. Nevertheless, attending after school tutorials can be hard for the children because they have to spend many hours studying. The fees of the tutorials are an additional burden for parents because they have to spend more for these services. A theme related to education is an observation that women do not enjoy the same educational opportunities as men. As a result, women have limited opportunities for employment.

Lack of employment opportunities is a recurring issue. The 2016 findings show that those who receive high school qualifications are still unable to find work. The communities also continue to express concerns over the high price of

commodities, low wages, and low value of the products that they sell in the market.

Just like in 2015, the economic condition of the communities worsens because they are still subjected to a multitude of taxes imposed by armed groups and the Tatmadaw soldiers. While checkpoint taxation and household tax have decreased from 2015 to 2016, the communities who work in the logging industry still have to pay taxes for logging activities to ethnic armed groups as well as the forestry department.

Similar to the findings in 2015, in the listening round in 2016, the communities continue to report improved freedom of movement. Road construction and repairs have improved access to hospitals that allow the communities to receive medical support. Road construction also provides easier access to markets that result in the increase in trade. Furthermore, these roads make remote areas more accessible to NGOs and INGOs and enable them to further assist with development programmes by constructing schools and low cost houses.

Similar to last year, the communities are still worried about the increasing incidents of land grabbing. In 2015, the communities within Kayah state shared their perception that government officials or ethnic armed groups confiscated their lands to secure natural resources. This year, the communities add that some land disputes arise because there is no clear demarcation between public and privately owned land. These land disputes cause some families to lose their farmlands. An additional cause of land loss is the displacement caused by previous fighting which forced the residents to flee to neighbouring countries.

The communities continue to express fears that the conflict will once again breakout between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups. This concern is caused by the lack of trust in either the government or the armed groups. Specific to the listening round in 2016, the communities say they are concerned about the ethnic armed groups that have not signed the ceasefire agreement because this might be the reason for fighting to occur in the future.

Another recurring theme is the desire for inclusivity of the peace process. The communities reiterate their desire to better understand the peace process. They recognize that the lack of knowledge about the contents of the ceasefire agreements and other details about the peace process leave them powerless and unable to participate in the process. They want the central government

to provide them with more information to enable them to participate in discussions surrounding the peace process. The communities also expect the decision-makers in the peace process to consult with them and listen to them so that they can voice their concerns on aspects affecting their daily lives.

The communities consistently raise the theme on the need for more trust building between the government, the ethnic armed groups, and the Tatmadaw. The communities perceive that a successful peace process can only be achieved when the conflict actors show understanding, compassion, and trust. They advise the peace process decision makers to work together to achieve the common goal of improving the lives of residents.

The communities across Kayah also reiterate the need to address the issue of widespread drug abuse and production. The communities perceive a growing sense of urgency in view the fact that young people are very prone to drug addiction. The communities also note that there is an increase of crime rates. The communities remark that while the peace process generates positive changes, it also fosters conditions that encourage drug smuggling and production. This increase of drug smuggling and production is an unintended consequence arising from the improved freedom of movement seen since the initiation of the ceasefire.

The communities repeat their appeal to the central government to include crop substitution programmes that will allow farmers who are economically dependent on poppy plantations to transition to cash crops.

Differences between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

The results of the listening round in 2015 and 2016 show that there are deviations in community perspectives regarding the peace process in those two years. In 2015, the communities spoke of reduced militarisation and fewer outbreaks of fighting between the military and the armed groups. In 2016, the findings indicate that the military and the armed groups still maintain a presence near and around certain villages. On some occasions, soldiers continue to harass communities for food, shelter, and other resources.

In the previous year, there was a strong desire to learn more about the peace process. While this continues to be a strong theme in 2016, there is a change of perception among some participants about what is needed in the peace

process. While in the past they concentrated on the conflict actors, at present they recognise the importance of changing mind sets among all residents about how they relate to each other. They mention the need to start with change in individuals, then the family, and eventually the state – a bottom-up approach. The communities also express a strong desire to contribute to the peace process. Some of them offer to contribute money to development projects in the community to support the peace process.

Overall, the communities face the same challenges in 2016 that they did in 2015. There are nevertheless some notable differences. Firstly, the participants seem to be more vocal about reporting the range of abuses they endured, which were inflicted upon them by the government and the armed groups. Some participants spoke on how armed groups would point weapons at them and in some instances torture them. Likewise, the communities also raise the issue of losing family members due to forced labour, to serve as guide and porter imposed by the military. The situation of those who had to provide forced labour worsens when the armed groups discover that they aided the military. The armed groups will put them in danger because they consider these individuals as traitors. Furthermore, the communities have voiced cases of destruction of their private property, and that they do not receive any compensation for the destruction.

As in the case of the challenges faced by communities, the aspirations expressed in the listening round in 2016 remain very similar to those shared in 2015. With regards to the recent change in government, the communities mention numerous times about their hopes for the new administration. The communities express a strong desire for the new government to be more compassionate towards them, to govern fairly, and to implement policies with caution. They believe this can be achieved if a genuine leader who prioritizes peace and democracy emerges. Conversely, other community members voice concerns over the transfer of power from the previous administration to the current. The communities comprehend that the new administration will have to face the arduous task of bringing harmony to the country.

KAYIN STATE

Table 11. Kayin State – Main themes from processing workshop

1. The communities expect a genuine and comprehensive ceasefire to bring peace to everyone.
2. The communities notice a decrease in conflict since the signing of the NCA, even though the conflict has not completely ended yet.
3. The communities express concerns that without a stable peace process, there will be limited development in their communities. Furthermore, they state their fears that if the peace process becomes unstable, there will be violent conflict and the communities will be forced to flee.
4. The communities express a lack of understanding and faith in the peace process.
5. The communities perceive that increased informal taxation by armed groups and the government is unfair and unreasonable. The community expect that because they have to pay tax, the armed groups and the government have to respect their views.
6. The communities express concerns about landmines in their areas that limit mobility and accessibility to agricultural land.
7. The communities voice demands for the KNU and the government to come up with consistent approaches to eradicate illegal drugs. They perceive that drug addiction and related issues should be addressed in the peace process.
8. The communities desire a society that is free from social issues arising from drug abuse and drug trade such as increased crime.
9. The communities express demands for an increase in the number of health care facilities and skilled health care personnel, as well as more access to the facilities.
10. The communities request to have more skilled education workers to match the increasing demand for education.
11. The communities would like to have infrastructure projects to compensate those who are displaced from their land or whose livelihood sources are affected by construction activities.

12. The communities perceive that genuine peace will generate increase of job opportunities. They expect the central government to find means to increase job opportunities to match increasing demand for employment.
13. The communities expect to have fair and equal access to lands that they previously used to perform agricultural and livestock grazing activities. Those lands are currently blocked by armed groups or the Tatmadaw.
14. The communities want to find ways to reclaim lands that they previously occupied and used for livelihood activities that unfortunately have been confiscated by the government.
15. The communities desire to have more representation of their needs and views within the community.
16. The communities express that out of fear of reprisals, they do not know which political parties and armed groups to support.
17. The communities perceive that the government discriminates on the basis of ethnicity. They expect fair and equal application of laws.

Table 12. Kayin State – Main themes under guide questions

1	<p>What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities communicate about what the peace process means in their daily lives and how thankful they are for the ongoing peace process. The participants are almost unanimous in expressing their desire to have a genuine, mutually acceptable, and sustainable peace process. • The communities perceive that the peace process changed the way they live. In the past, they lived in fear and had very low expectations for the future. Thanks to the peace process, they are hopeful.
2	<p>What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities would like to address drug and drug related issues as a part of the peace dialogues. • The communities state that they would like to bring their needs and aspirations to the peace talks.
3	<p>For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities would like to incorporate and address community-based issues in the ongoing peace process. These issues include problems related to drug abuse as well as the need for infrastructure development.
4	<p>What do you expect from a successful peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities share a common belief that a successful peace process will give them “normal lives”. • They expect to have a successful peace process which can bring development and guarantee safety in the community. • They also expect to have more job opportunities and financial security in their personal lives.

5	<p>What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities perceive that there are positive changes since the start of the peace process, such as infrastructure development, freedom of movement, and better safety and security. Now, the communities can access their farmlands. • The communities, however, also observe that drug abuse and trade have increased greatly since the peace process began. • The communities explain that multiple governing authorities, from armed groups to militias, collect informal taxes in areas where the communities already face severe economic hardships.
6	<p>Now, what is a concern for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that drugs and drug-related social issues, particularly those that disturb the wellbeing of the communities especially the younger generations, remain a main concern for them. • The communities state that lack of health care facilities is a one of the main issues for them. The communities explain that although they have clinics, they lack skilled health workers and medicines. • The communities express that the availability of high quality education and education infrastructure also remains a challenge for them.
7	<p>What changes do you want to see in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities expect to see more socio-economic development. • They also would like to see that their communities are safe and secure from violence, and free from drug abuse. • They would like to have jobs and earn sufficient incomes to fulfil their basic needs. • They would like to have equal access to the lands that are cleared from landmines.

8	<p>What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities would like to see harmony between the different ethnic and religious groups. • They desire to have a ceasefire agreement that is generally acceptable to all of the conflict parties. They expect that this agreement is properly implemented down to the community level.
9	<p>How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities would like to help development in their areas by contributing their labour, skills and knowledge. • They are willing to work on programmes that contribute to the ethnic harmony.
10	<p>What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that they are struggling with livelihood and unemployment issues. They state that there have not been any changes to the unemployment situation and this affects their daily life. • The communities state that environmental destruction is another main challenge. There have not been any improvements on the vast scale of logging and mining issues. • The communities state that the lack of infrastructure developments, such as good quality roads, health care and education facilities, remain a heavy burden for them. • The communities state that as the peace process progresses, there has been an increase in drug trafficking which makes various illegal drugs easily available. This situation negatively affects communities, especially the younger generations. • The communities express that the informal taxation carried out by the different armed groups and multiple governing authorities are a burden.

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What would help you overcome these challenges?

- The communities wish to have ethnic and religious unity among all of the ethnic communities.
- The communities expect that elimination of illegal drug is considered as an important issue that needs to be addressed in the peace process.
- The communities would like to have an inclusive ceasefire that is accepted by all parties. They would like this ceasefire to be implemented at the community level.
- The communities express the need to have all their lands cleared of landmines.

Similarities between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

The communities in Kayin State are still struggling with livelihood and unemployment issues. According to the majority of the conversations held, similar to what was expressed in 2015, the communities are still concerned about the lack of job opportunities and the persisting issue of unemployment situation. This situation causes hardship to both the unemployed community members as well as their families.

Environmental destruction is another recurring theme. The vast scale of logging and mining in Kayin State remains unchanged, and communities are suffering from the effects of ongoing environment destruction. Most of the community members associate these mining activities leading to environment destruction with the ongoing peace process. They perceive that the bilateral ceasefire agreement has resulted in relative stability that allows mining companies to come to the state and engage in extraction projects.

Similar to the listening round in 2015, in this year round, the communities also perceive a pattern of land grabbing in their state. The communities remain concerned about the instances of land grabbing. They report cases where both the Tatmadaw and the KNU confiscated lands from them.

The lack of infrastructure development, such as good quality roads, health care facilities, and education facilities, is another recurring theme. The communities still face the same conditions as the ones in 2015. They reiterate that they

still do not have any medicines, hospitals, or sufficient health care workers. The communities believe that skilled doctors are afraid to come to their townships due to the unstable security situation. This condition demonstrates how the unstable security situation affects the communities both directly and indirectly. Directly, the unstable security situation makes the community feel insecure; while indirectly, the situation restricts access to social services and limits infrastructure development.

Differences between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

The listening round in 2016 shows that awareness of the peace process has dramatically increased within communities. In the previous round, most of the participants revealed they had limited knowledge about the peace process. In 2016, the majority of the participants demonstrate increased knowledge of the peace process by raising critical points about the progress of the process. They also share their own proposals on how to improve and advance the peace process in Kayin.

Another noticeable difference is that the communities seem to have more positive impressions of NGOs and their staff members working in Kayin. This is in contrast to the findings in 2015 where certain communities expressed concerns that NGO workers and their organizations discriminate against the communities. In 2015, some communities perceived that NGOs chose to help some villages and exclude others on the basis of their ethnicity and religion.

The communities also note that the issue of drug abuse and drug trade has become more alarming in 2016. The communities perceive that drug trafficking increase along with the progress of the peace process. They worry that their villages and towns are exposed to greater availability of various types of illegal drugs. This situation has a particularly devastating effect on the younger generations.

Another issue that comes into view quite prominently during the listening round in 2016 is the experiences of the communities with informal taxation carried out by various ethnic armed groups and militias operating in their area. The communities explain that these groups act as multiple governing authorities and collect different types of taxes. These additional taxes exacerbate the already devastated economic situation of the communities.

MON STATE

Table 13. Mon State – Main themes from the processing workshop

1. The communities express concern over the rise in instances of drug abuse since the peace process began, particularly amongst the youth. They expect the government to focus on arresting the drug traffickers and producers instead of the users.
2. The communities believe that for the armed groups to sign the NCA for true peace, the peace process needs to be a process that all armed groups trust. The ethnic armed group leaders and Tatmadaw leaders need to go beyond their own interest and build mutual trust.
3. The communities expect both the government and the armed groups to maintain the ceasefire. These parties need to maintain discipline within their troops and make sure their soldiers follow the policies stipulated in the NCA.
4. The communities report that they have difficulty accessing electricity because the government has not yet established a power station in their area.
5. The communities state that the government needs to ensure inclusivity of the peace process by allowing all ethnic armed groups to participate. The government should make sure that the process does not discriminate against any parties due to their ethnicity. The government also needs to guarantee the equal rights of the armed groups.
6. The communities acknowledge that the peace process has brought some improvements such as better road infrastructures, health care, and education facilities and services.
7. The communities wish that the peace process will be successful and result in genuine sustainable peace. They are afraid that if the peace process fails, the fighting will start again.
8. The communities worry that the peace process will not progress. This anxiety persists because they see that while the government and ethnic armed groups are holding peace talks, the Tatmadaw is still fighting with other armed groups.

9. The communities state that there is lack of employment opportunities, and as a result, many community members have to go abroad to find work. The communities look to the government to provide job opportunities especially for returning migrant workers.
10. The communities in rural areas would like to have more improvements in road infrastructure and bridges to cross rivers.
11. The communities express frustration because they are subjected to multiple authorities, namely the government and the ethnic armed groups. They expect that when developing policies, both the government and ethnic armed groups consult with them about their needs and experiences.
12. The communities would like better access to free adequate health care facilities.
13. The communities express that they do not fully understand the peace process and expect the government, as well as CBOs and CSOs, to inform them about it. The communities request that the government keep them updated on the peace process. They express their sincere support for the process.
14. The communities request the government to provide high standard education. They expect the government to provide teachers with a higher salary to avoid students to have to pay extra fees for tutoring.
15. The communities appreciate that the country is developing, but they are concerned about the negative impacts of development. They worry that affluent individuals or companies will come to their communities and raise tensions, as well as extract natural resources out of the state that can cause environmental damage.
16. The communities expect that the government and the armed groups consider their needs and wants in the peace process.
17. The communities perceive that the national budget is not equally distributed to various states. They also do not agree that the national budget should be heavily invested into the military. They maintain that the budget instead be invested in social services.
18. The communities voice concern over perceived rampant corruption in the government.

19. The participants believe that political parties have created divisions and tensions within the communities.
20. The communities express the need for self-determination, a federal union, and a democratic system for the country. They express concern that if the peace process does not continue, the country will not become a federal union.
21. The communities state that the 2008 constitution needs to be amended in order to facilitate a successful peace process.
22. The communities acknowledge some positive changes since the peace process started. Before the peace process, the villages faced various difficulties due to the violent conflict between the armed groups and the military. They also had to deal with instances of forced labour (porter) specifically for the construction of fences for military barracks.
23. The communities state that due to the low price of rubber and the high prices of basic commodities, those who cultivate rubber are unable to afford basic necessities.
24. The communities state that the construction of a dam over the Thalwin/Salween River cause serious environmental damage.
25. Mon communities expect that Mon language is officially recognised and taught in the government schools.

Table 14. Mon State – Main themes under guide questions

1	<p>What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that peace depends on individual attitudes. In the community, people should not feel discriminated against. • The communities perceive that the peace process only affects the “top level” or the leadership, while at the same time the soldiers are still fighting on the frontlines in the north. • The communities recognise that a peace process will take a long time to bring peace.
2	<p>What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that they would like to include the drug issues in Mon State in the peace dialogues, and expect that the authorities go after the big drug producers and traffickers. • The communities state that the peace process should include voices from the youth.
3	<p>For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The community express that for the peace process to be successful, the negotiating parties need to respect and recognise equal rights of all ethnic armed groups. They need to include all the ethnic armed groups in the country, otherwise the fighting will continue. • They would like to include the importance of social development in communities such as road and telecommunications infrastructure, electricity, and better health care services. They also would like to see improvements in the education services through provision of better quality textbooks and revision of the curriculum. • The communities express that a process of decentralization is necessary to allow transfer of political powers entrusted to the central government to the state level. • The communities express that there are a lot of cases of domestic violence in the communities and these cases need to be addressed. If there is no peace at the community level, peace cannot prevail in the country.

4	<p>What do you expect from a successful peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities expect that the government will keep their promises and act with sincerity throughout the peace process. • The communities desire that the entire country is at peace. They want different ethnic groups to reduce their ethnocentric behaviour. • The communities expect that there will be a real federal form of government and that there will be a Union army that is composed of soldiers from all ethnic groups.
5	<p>What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that there is a reduction in instances of “taxation”, especially by the village administration, as well as a decrease in instances of forced labour/portering. Although community members are still asked by the Tatmadaw to act as guides, this is now more of a request rather than a command. • The communities state that they have more space to engage in civic activities as NGOs are allowed to enter communities to provide various trainings and workshops. The communities can now hold political discussions in public spaces. • The communities also express that travel to other places has been a lot easier due to the fact that there are fewer checkpoints, and that the communities are no longer subjected to questioning by the soldiers. • The communities state that there is less fighting between different armed groups.
6	<p>Now, what is a concern for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities express that the increase in illegal drug users, especially among young people, is the biggest concern in communities. • The communities continue to worry about the sustainability of the peace process. • They are also concerned about the land confiscation and land disputes arising in the state, which they believe come from the lack of understanding about the land registration process. • The communities worry about the possibility of religious tensions. • The communities also concern over high prices of basic goods.

7	<p>What changes do you want to see in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like to see better transportation and road infrastructure to make travel a lot easier. • The Mon communities would like to improve Mon literacy and make Mon language learning more accessible to all Mon communities. • They would like to have access to and receive benefits from the state's natural resources such as prawns, fish, timber, and teak. • They wish that one day they will be able to have a peaceful life with a stable economy, good job opportunities, and economic security.
8	<p>What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They believe that a true federal union will help make these changes happen. • The communities maintain that the government needs to address corruption in its ranks and ensure good governance. • The communities request that the government assist in reducing inequality and providing better livelihood opportunities for everyone. • The communities state that the government needs to propose policies that address the issue of domestic violence.
9	<p>How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like to contribute by giving suggestions and advice to decision makers on aspects that need to be developed in the communities. • They would like to support the negotiating parties who are part of the peace process.

10	<p>What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communities state that illegal drug use, and drug producers and sellers are on the rise. • The communities state that there are no good job opportunities in Mon State. A number of communities rely on rubber plantations to earn a living, even though the price of rubber is very low. Another issue is that work on rubber plantations is seasonal. • The communities express that the gold mining occurring in Mon State is polluting their water sources. • The communities state that some of their leaders look after their own interests instead of the interests of the communities they represent.
11	<p>What would help you overcome these challenges?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They need improvements in health care services, education services, roads, and access to electricity. • They would like government officials, political parties, and the village administration to listen to their needs and help them to address their daily challenges. • They would like to help clean up the polluted water sources. • They expect that the rule of law is applied in the entire country.

Similarities between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

Similar to the previous year, in 2016, the communities also acknowledge the positive changes that they have seen in their villages since 2011 following the signing of the bilateral ceasefire with NMSP. Notably, this year, there is an added improvement where the communities living in former black areas are no longer classified as such. This means that the participants from these areas experience less harassment and questioning, and that they are no longer required to engage in forced labour. They also enjoy greater freedom of movement. This improvement is also noticeable through an increase in NGO presence in the communities.

Another theme that came up consistently in both the listening round in 2015 and 2016 is the desire that the communities express for unity among the different ethnic groups in Mon State. There is still a strong sentiment of the need for

solidarity among the different communities. Notably, several participants say that there is a need for different ethnic groups to stop focusing only on the needs of their ethnic groups and start thinking about the needs of all ethnic groups.

A recurring theme is the need, according to communities, for the negotiating parties to build trust and act with sincerity throughout the peace process. The communities, both then and now, voice the need for all fighting to end during the peace talks. They state that this is one clear way to demonstrate sincerity to the process.

The communities continue to hope for government assistance in job creation and in improving livelihood conditions to enable them to live with dignity. Closely related to this issue is that the community acknowledge the need for the government to regulate prices of basic commodities so they can afford to buy basic necessities. They also would like the government to regulate the selling price of goods produced in Mon State, such as rubber, which often sold at very cheap prices.

The communities maintain the demand to have a more representative central government through the inclusion of non-Bamar officials. In the same manner, the participants from Karen villages in Mon State and Mon villages from Kayin reiterate their desire to have proper representation because at this moment they cannot vote for their own representatives in parliament.

The recognition of rising illegal drug use continues to be of great concern to communities throughout the state. There is also continuous acknowledgment of the NMSP as a legitimate actor in the fight against drugs.

The communities throughout the state also reiterate their desire for improved access to adequate social services. There is a continuous acknowledgement that poor health care and education services are barriers to better quality of life. The communities expect the government to provide these services. Similarly, the communities repeat the need for better road and electricity infrastructure.

Mon state continues to be the only area engaged where a sizeable number of participants express a strong desire for Mon language, Mon culture, and Mon literature to be officially recognised. They also express that they need

the government's help to preserve the Mon language, culture, and literature. Very often, they express that the language and culture preservation efforts can come in the form of allowing Mon language to be taught in government schools and providing Mon language teachers with a proper salary.

Differences between listening results in 2015 and in 2016

One of the concerns that came out as a strong theme this year and not previously mentioned in 2015 is the challenge that the communities face given the fact that they are subjected to two governing authorities: the state government and the NMSP. This situation might persist due to the inclusion of different townships in this round of listening, Kawkareik township in Kayin and That on township in Mon, where overlapping governing authorities are found.

Another theme that comes out is the challenge of the high monetary contributions, or "taxation", that communities are regularly subjected to by groups of soldiers (Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups). While this does not seem to be a new occurrence that only emerged between 2015 and 2016, its appearance this year may also be due to the different villages or townships covered.

Still another theme that manifests only now is the expressed desire among communities for a civilian democratic government that governs over a federal union. In the conversations on this theme, another commonly cited theme is the need to amend the 2008 constitution in order to ensure a civilian government. Several communities also note that amending the constitution is necessary to transition to a genuine federal union. The appearance of these themes demonstrates one of the biggest differences noted between the results in 2015 and 2016. The presence of this issue shows an apparent increase in awareness among communities of the current political issues as well as the peace process.

Other concerns that appear in 2016 but not in 2015 are the challenges related to incidents of land confiscation and landlessness. The communities also raise concerns over businesses coming to their areas for natural resource extraction projects and causing environmental destruction.

Chapter 2

RECOMMENDATIONS



CPCS has come up with the following recommendations based on the suggestions made by partner organisations and communities, as well as the observations made by the listeners. A number of the recommendations made here are similar to those presented in the publication, *We Want Genuine Peace*.

To the Myanmar Government

- The government and the Tatmadaw should work towards and share a common vision and principles for nationwide peace. They need to work together to ensure that the provisions of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and the bilateral ceasefire agreements with ethnic armed groups are respected.
- The government needs to ensure that there is regular sharing of information between government officials, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed groups.
- The government needs to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the National Reconciliation and Peace Center.
- The government is encouraged to increase its engagement with civil society organisations and the community throughout the peace process.
- The government needs to regularly share information on the peace process with civil society organisations and the communities. Expanding avenues of communication with CSOs and communities will encourage local ownership of the process.
- The government needs to find ways and means to ensure perspectives and voices of the community are a vital part of the peace process. The government needs to implement regular consultations with civil society organisations and the communities in order to discuss issues related to good governance, socio-economic development, as well as the peace process.

- The government needs to formulate a comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy that prioritizes creating employment and livelihood opportunities for everyone. This strategy should include improving agricultural productivity, building new markets to increase trade opportunities, and regulating the prices of basic goods to guard against unconscionable undercharging or overcharging. The government also needs to regulate employment conditions to ensure the safety of workers.
- The government needs to increase national investments in improving the quality and accessibility of social services in all states and regions. The priority should be given to remote areas that have the least access to social services.
- The government needs to improve road infrastructure by constructing more roads and bridges, and improving the quality of roads that have already been built.
- The government needs to improve access to stable electricity and safe drinking water for the communities.
- The government needs to establish and implement systems to regulate natural resource extraction activities to protect the environment against degradation, and protect communities from the harmful effects of these projects. Transparency and accountability need to be established in business and investment processes and practices that affect communities.
- The government needs to promote information-sharing initiatives on land registration processes. There also needs to be measures that aim to help communities transition from traditional land ownership practices to the national land registration process, keeping in mind that different states have different practices.
- The government needs to come up with an effective national strategy to address widespread drug addiction and rehabilitate illegal drug users in a safe manner. The government should look into sustainable agricultural alternatives for farmers who rely on poppy production for their livelihoods.

- The government needs to find durable and sustainable solutions to improve the quality of life for internally displaced people and refugees due ongoing conflict.

To the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups

- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups need to recognise their duty and responsibility to the peace process and to communities. They need to decrease militarisation of communities and reduce the presence of armed soldiers in villages.
- The Tatmadaw needs to show its commitment to the peace process by de-escalating violence in Kachin and Northern Shan.
- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed group leadership need to create additional avenues and spaces for dialogue.
- The Tatmadaw needs to clarify the extent of its role in government and the peace process.
- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed group leadership must ensure that their soldiers are aware of their responsibilities under the bilateral ceasefire and nationwide ceasefire agreements. They need to make sure that everyone in their organisation properly implements these agreements.
- The Joint Monitoring Committee needs to take a more active role in monitoring conditions of ceasefire at a union, state, and local level.
- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups need to increase engagement with civil society organisations and the communities throughout the peace process. They need to work together with civil society organisations and communities to ensure that the signed agreements are translated into actions that improve relations with civilian populations.
- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups need to remain focused on the overall outcome of meaningful and sustainable peace.

- More liaison offices need to be opened throughout the country. These offices have to be accessible to all community members. These offices can help improve relations between the ethnic armed group soldiers and the civilian populations by providing opportunities for productive social interaction with soldiers.
- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed group leadership need to work to eliminate or reduce the informal taxation imposed on local communities.
- The Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed group leadership need to cease all instances of forced labour, portering, or forced recruitment among the communities. They should also cease all instances of any abusive behaviour towards the communities.

To civil society actors (national civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and international non-governmental organisations)

- Civil society actors are encouraged to assist communities by providing information awareness campaigns to increase community knowledge on the land registration process. They can also help by providing legal assistance for communities beset with problems related to land disputes or land confiscation.
- National and local civil society actors are encouraged to drive the agenda for work on the peace process.
- National and local civil society actors, as well as international non-governmental organisations need to work strategically with the central government on key issues such as improvement of social service delivery and poverty alleviation initiatives.
- All civil society actors need to cooperate, collaborate, and share information about their work with each other to avoid duplication of efforts and become more effective in their work.
- International non-governmental organisations and donors need to be more flexible in terms of program design to accommodate the local context and nature of peace work and the peace process.

Chapter 3

LISTENING METHODOLOGY



Sustainable peace processes depend upon wide legitimacy and local ownership by multiple stakeholders. To foster inclusivity and promote local ownership in the peace processes it supports, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) seeks out avenues to provide ways for less-heard stakeholders to participate in on-going national conversations.

One of these avenues is to employ listening methodology (*listening*) to access and elevate voices of those living in situations of violent conflict, post-conflict, and on-going peace processes in various locations across Asia. Listening methodology is a comprehensive and systematic exploration of ideas and insights of people living in and affected by a conflict. *Listening* engages participants to hold flexible and informal open-ended conversations in their own language and with people who come from their own or similar communities. This helps to create safe spaces for communities to share their views on particular issues, situations, and plan. The methodology creates a collective voice by identifying main themes from the non-prescriptive conversations conducted with a cross-section of people with diverse viewpoints. By presenting these voices in publications, CPCS endeavours to contribute to policy discussions and promote wider representation in governance and decision-making processes.

CDA-Collaborative Learning Projects originally developed this methodology, known as the Listening Program, to listen to communities receiving humanitarian aid based on “the notion that the people best placed to evaluate the impacts and effectiveness of international aid are those who receive it.”¹ CPCS adapted this methodology, believing that oftentimes, communities living in conflict-affected areas can provide a better understanding, not only of the underlying causes of conflict but also of durable solutions.

Elevating community opinions about the peace process

In 2013, CPCS produced listening publications that sought to include the voices of non-ranked or rank-and-file soldiers from six ethnic armed groups (EAGs) and the Tatmadaw in discussions on the peace process.² By asking these soldiers similar questions about their hopes for the future, experiences, and challenges, these publications offered additional perspectives and opinions

¹ CDA, CDA's Listening Program, 2014. Available from: <http://cdacollaborative.org/cdaproject/the-listening-project/http://cdacollaborative.org/cdaproject/the-listening-project/>

² These publications are available at <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Tatmadaw-layout-30.6.15.pdf>, and: http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Listening-to-voices_Myanmar_Foot-Soldiers-Speak.pdf

of issues that need to be addressed in the peace process. More importantly, these publications demonstrated the shared humanity and the similarities in the experiences, aspirations, and challenges of soldiers, despite being on opposing sides of the conflict.

In early 2014, another listening exercise was undertaken with a cross-section of community members living in Kayin (Karen) State to understand their opinions, experiences and desires for the future, against the backdrop of the bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Myanmar government. This exercise served as the inspiration for the current listening methodology activities, which has the primary objective of capturing community opinions, perspectives, and experiences of the on-going peace process, specifically how ceasefire agreements positively and negatively affect communities. CPCS intends to monitor community experiences of the ceasefire agreements in different states in Myanmar every twelve months so that these opinions and experiences can be examined for changes and consistency over time.

CPCS initially sought to conduct listening conversations in all ethnic states where varying forms of peace agreements (bilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding (MOU) or ceasefire agreements) were being implemented. However, only six areas were covered in the first year of implementation, namely: Kayin (Karen) State, Kayah State, Mon State, Kachin State, Northern Shan State and Southern Shan State. The decision to limit the scope to these areas was guided by time and funding considerations as well as the availability of local partner organisations. Emphasis was placed on speaking with a cross-section of people living in these areas, who were recognised as relevant participants for this monitoring exercise because they directly experience the effects of the Myanmar peace process.³

For this second year, CPCS worked in close collaboration with six civil society organisations that provided on-the-ground logistical and planning support for trainings, shared their expertise in their states, and worked in an on-going advisory capacity in their respective states to determine the areas covered by the listeners. These partner organisations were also essential in identifying individuals from target areas to volunteer as listeners who would conduct conversations in the communities. These organisations are:

³ CPCS, We Want Genuine Peace Voices of communities from Myanmar's ceasefire areas, 2015., Available from: <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/We-Want-Genuine-Peace-FINAL-ENG-WEB.pdf>

Table 15. List of Partner Organisations

State	Partner
Kachin	Karuna Myanmar Social Services
Northern Shan	Ta'ang Student and Youth Union
Southern Shan	Pyi Nyein Thu Kha
Kayah	Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network
Kayin	Karen Development Network
Mon	Mon Women Network

For the listening conducted in 2016, CPCS enlisted the help of seventy-five listeners, forty-five female and thirty male, from a diverse range of ethnic groups – from Ta'ang, Lahu, Shan, Pa'O, Bamar, Pindanu, Kayan, Manu Manaw, Karenni, Ying Taleh, Shadaw, Posoh, Deemawsoe, Mese, Jingpaw, Mon, Karen. The listeners were chosen because of their familiarity with the local context and their ability to conduct conversations in the local language. This facilitates more flexible conversations where participants feel comfortable sharing concerns and opinions that are most important to them.

Table 16. Gender of Listeners

State	Female listeners	Male listeners
Kachin	8	6
Northern Shan	7	6
Southern Shan	5	3
Kayah	6	4
Kayin	9	7
Mon	10	4
Total	45	30

Listening Methodology Process

CPCS connected with listeners through listening workshops held in collaboration with partner organisations in the state capitals. These two and a half day workshops covered the conceptual basis of listening methodology, active listening, conversational and practical listening skills and bias-mitigation techniques, and included practical exercises to equip listeners with the necessary skills to carry out conversations with community members.

During the listening workshop, the listeners were given a set of guide questions covering topics that they had to cover in their conversations to ensure consistency across conversations. The listeners were given the flexibility to paraphrase questions and to determine the order and flow that these topics are discussed. The listeners were instructed not to have the guide questions out in front of the participants while they are having conversations, and were asked to give their participants the space to discuss any issues or concerns related to the topic that the participant chooses. The listeners conducted conversations in the language that participants felt most comfortable speaking, and were trained not to take down notes during conversations. The topic areas and sample guide questions used during conversations are listed below:

Table 17. Guide Questions		
NO.	Guide Questions	Key Words
1	What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process?	Opinion, peace process
2	What would you talk about if you were at the peace dialogues?	Topics, peace dialogues
3	For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process?	Peace process, issues of importance
4	What do you expect from a successful peace process?	Outcomes, peace process
5	What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process?	Changes, peace process
6	Now, what is a concern for you?	Concerns, personal
7	What changes do you want to see in your community?	Present changes, community/personal
8	What needs to exist to help you achieve that in your community?	Needs, future
9	How can you be involved to achieve that in your community?	Your role
10	What is the biggest challenge now in your state or community?	Challenges, Present
11	What would help you overcome these challenges?	Overcome, challenges

The listeners formed teams of two or three and travelled to various villages and townships in their respective states immediately following the training workshop. They were asked to hold fifteen conversations, with emphasis placed on speaking with a cross-section of people living in different villages who were recognised as relevant participants because they directly experience the effects of the bilateral ceasefire agreements.

Four tools were used to record data from the conversations: **notebooks**, **logbooks**, **quote banks** and, where possible, a **photo diary**. While the listeners were asked not to take down notes during the conversation, the details of each conversation were recorded in a **notebook** immediately after every conversation, using their memory to identify the main themes and topics discussed. Each listener recorded conversations in separate notebooks, giving CPCS the opportunity to validate data and guard against possible bias by going through the two or three recorded notebooks for each conversation.

At the end of each day, the listening teams met and discussed what they had heard over the course of multiple conversations. They used a **logbook** to record what they heard the most from all conversations that day. The use of logbooks as a daily debriefing and processing exercise acted as a preliminary stage of analysis for listeners to identify trends or patterns in the conversations.

When the listeners heard a phrase they think captured the essence of a main point, they added it to a **quote bank** immediately after the conversations finished. This captured direct quotations from participants that could be used to cite direct voices in the publication. A **photo diary** was also used for the listeners to capture images of the locations where they conducted conversations and provided visual examples of the topics discussed during the conversations.

After conducting conversations, the listening teams reconvened for a two-day processing workshop facilitated by CPCS. Through a series of synthesis and analysis exercises, the listeners identified the main overall themes in relation to each topic area/guide question, as well as differences and observations heard from conversations, to provide a snapshot of listener analysis of results in each state.

After all materials used to record data (notebooks, logbooks and quotes) were translated from their original language to English, the CPCS Research Team carefully went through these documents. The Research Team triangulated the findings from the notebooks and logbooks by coding findings from the translated documents based on the main themes and categories that the listeners identified during the processing workshops.

Once the Research Team had written the findings, it held an analysis and validation workshop with representatives from the partner organisations. The workshop took place over a three-day period, and provided a space for the

partner organisations to provide an update on events in each area that had occurred after the research concluded. This helped to contextualize the main themes that communities mentioned in the conversations. The workshop also provided an opportunity to validate findings with the partner organisations, and to integrate the analysis and recommendations of the partners based on their more nuanced understanding of their communities.

The findings in this publication are based on the collaborative analytical efforts of CPCS and the partner organisations. The validation workshop served as an integral part in analysing the conflict on a macro and micro level. With the help of the national partners, cross-cutting themes were identified and nationwide recommendations were established. Quotations and detailed insights of participants were taken from the translated notebooks, logbooks, and quote banks to support the results, serving as a direct and illustrative voice from community members.

Scope and limitations of Monitoring Community Opinions

Between March to August 2016, seventy-five listeners conducted a total of 459 conversations with 1,663 participants. This exceeded the target number of 728 participants. This target number of participants for listening conversations in each location was calculated proportionally based on the size of the state population, using Kayah State with a population of less than 300,000 as a baseline of eighty participants. The baseline figure was determined in consideration of the following factors:

- (a) size of the state population;
- (b) estimated number of in-depth conversations that the listeners could hold on a daily basis, taking into consideration the necessary travel time to reach the different villages; and
- (c) time constraints.

Target numbers in each state, as well as the actual number of participants whom the listeners were able to converse with and the number of conversations they had, are summarised in the table below. To reach these targets, the Research Team modified the number of the listening teams depending on the population of the area to be covered. While the listeners were asked to hold a total of at least fifteen conversations, the number of participants in each conversation varied.

Table 18. Locations covered and number of participants

State/Area	Population	Target Number of Participants	Actual Number of Participants	Number of Conversations
Kachin	1.68 million	128	290	132
Northern Shan	1.8 million	128	187	67
Southern Shan	2.4 million	136	406	49
Kayah	286,627	80	256	62
Kayin	1.57 million	120	200	61
Mon	2 million	136	324	88
Total		728	1,663	459

The listeners were asked to access a cross-section of individuals living in each state, with the aim of capturing the voices of participants representing the diverse ethnicity, gender, age, profession, and religious affiliations in each state. In some cases, the teams were not able to access a representative sample of some demographic groups. Relevant demographic data (gender, age-range, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and occupation) are summarised in the demographics section of each of the state chapters.

The following tables summarise the details on the gender, age-range, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and occupation of the 1,663 participants.

Table 19. Gender of participants

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	1,007	60.5%
Female	642	38.6%
Unspecified	15	0.8%
Total	1,663	99.9%

Table 20. Ethnicity of participants

Ethnic group	Number of Participants	Percentage
Kachin	228	13.7%
Palaung/Ta'ang (Includes Shumae and Shan Ta'ang)	158	9.5%
Karen	290	17.5%
Mon	121	7.2%
Kayah	125	7.5%
Danu	19	1.1%
Pa'O	131	7.8%
Shan (including Shan-Bamar)	41	2.5%
Bamar	108	6.5%
Intha	10	0.6%
Kayaw	5	0.3%
Kayan	170	10.2%
Lahu	9	0.5%
Lhavao	20	1.2%
Lachid	13	0.7%
Others (including Hindu, Muslim, Lisu, Naga)	21	1.3%
Not available	194	11.6%
Total	1,663	99.7%

Table 21. Age range of participants

Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
20 years and below	76	4.6%
21-30	302	18%
31-40	375	22.5%
41-50	363	22%
51-60	244	15%
61-70	100	6%
71-above	17	1%
Not Available	186	11.2%
Total	1,663	100%

Table 22. Educational background of participants

Educational background	Number of participants	Percentage
None	123	7.3%
Primary	462	27.7%
Middle School	300	18%
High School	224	13%
College	175	10.5%
Other (monastic)	5	0.3%
Not available	374	22%
Total	1,663	98.8%

Table 23. Livelihood of participants

Livelihood	Number of participants	Percentage
Farmers	800	48.1%
Community leaders and local administrators	83	5%
Teachers, education	91	5.5%
Priests and religious leaders	34	2%
Vendors/Brokers/Merchants	100	6%
Labourers/drivers/tailors	74	4.4%
Civil society and non-governmental organisation workers	16	0.9%
Health workers	23	1.4%
Youth leader	15	0.9%
Student	43	2.6%
Government worker	24	1.4%
Fishermen	4	0.2%
Childcare/Dependent	39	2.3%
Unemployed/Retired	29	1.7%
Domestic Helper	19	1.1%
Lawyer	1	0.06%
Photographer	1	0.06%
Secretary	6	0.4%
Not available	257	15.5%
Other	4	0.2%
Total	1,663	99.7%

Table 24. Religion of participants		
Religion	Number of Participants	Percentage
Buddhism	1,002	60%
Catholic	278	17%
Christian	233	14%
Takhontai	4	0.2%
Traditional/Animism	19	1.2%
Hinduism	1	0.06%
Not Available	118	7%
Muslim	2	0.12%
Other	8	0.5%
Total	1,663	100%

Challenges

The strength of listening methodology lies in its ability to access more remote areas in conflict settings, though there remain quite a few challenges. One of the challenges is related to inclusivity and ability to reach and include communities that represent the broad spectrum of ethnicities, gender, religion, and age ranges living in the area.

The range of communities covered by this round of listening was influenced by various factors. Financial and time constraints as well as logistical challenges due to the rainy season played a large role in determining which areas were covered. With safety and security as the primary consideration, local partners and listeners had liberty in deciding which areas were safe to include in the scope of the listening. In some areas, weather and road conditions prevented listening teams from reaching remote regions.

On-going violent conflict, particularly in Kachin and Northern Shan at the onset of the conversation period, made it difficult for many listeners to venture into areas where clashes were happening, or areas with a large presence of Tatmadaw or armed groups. While the listeners were encouraged to speak with communities from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, they were also given the discretion to decide whom they felt comfortable approaching. In some cases, this meant that listeners could not go to certain communities

where they had no contacts, which would explain the meagre representation of Hindu and Muslim communities in this publication.

Another challenge is guarding against bias. This methodology places trust in the listeners' ability to avoid biases. This is highlighted through activities conducted with the listeners during the training workshop on self-awareness, perceptions and selection of participants. Facilitators identify biases that may appear in primary data by reminding the listeners of their personal biases as they are sharing main themes during the processing workshop. Reading through the notebooks and logbooks gave opportunities for the research team to detect and exclude inconsistent findings and clearly biased data from internal analyses.

Given that memory is an important component of the Listening Methodology, there will always be a question of how to ensure reliability of results. The daily debriefing sessions that listening teams held in the course of listening were designed to reinforce their memories. To preserve as much detailed information as possible, CPCS conducted processing workshops as soon as possible after the listeners had finished data collection. During the processing workshops, listeners were asked to put away their notes and to rely on their memories to identify the main themes that regularly emerged throughout the process. The heavy reliance on listeners' memory works on the assumption that recurring themes in conversations will most easily be remembered. Triangulating the data obtained during the processing workshop with the data in the notebooks and logbooks, and the analysis workshop conducted with local partners also serve as safeguards to validate information.

There is also the ongoing challenge where translations are needed during the training and processing workshops, as well as during analysis of the notebooks and logbooks. Accuracy of language continues to be an on-going concern, particularly given the aim of the activities to contribute to the inclusion of unheard community voices to the ongoing dialogue inside Myanmar. To address this concern, the research team has sought, as much as possible, to work with translators who have established strong working relationships with CPCS through previous engagements. This collaboration ensures an understanding of CPCS approaches and values, particularly the over arching approach of conflict transformation.

Perhaps the biggest challenges when conversing with conflict-affected communities is people's reluctance to share information. The use of conversations in the listening methodology aims to overcome this challenge by creating a more relaxed environment where conversations can flow organically. Through unscripted listening conversations, information is gathered from key informants who can share their views based on their direct experience of a situation. This is crucial when working in conflict contexts, as participants who are engaged in more formal interview-based research have a tendency to censor their views. The process also protects the anonymity of participants without compromising the integrity of the data by avoiding attributing statements directly to individuals; age, ethnicity, profession, township, and more general characteristics are instead used to describe participants.

Chapter 4

LESSONS FROM LISTENING



At the heart of the listening process are the listeners. As volunteers, they engaged in the whole process with whole-hearted commitment and dedication, inspired by the need to contribute to the peace process and transition in their country. They dedicated their time to travel to remote areas in their state and approach unfamiliar communities, driven by the desire to engage fellow residents in conversations and hear their stories. These stories contain opinions and experiences, sorrows and pain, and hopes and dreams of those who have, for decades, lived with the detrimental effects of violent conflict.

Overcoming Challenges

In this undertaking, the listeners had to navigate an array of challenges and difficulties. The listeners from every state recounted difficulties to travel from towns to reach villages. Most of the listeners shared stories of traveling on pothole-ridden asphalt or mud roads, navigating through treacherous passes beside deep ravines or winding mountain roads. Incessant rains, strong storms, and flooding made travel even more taxing as mud roads became almost impassable. Terrible road conditions sometimes caused damage to motorbikes, delaying travel considerably. A few listening teams had to travel via ferry boats to cross rivers, with one listening team recounting how they witnessed, right after crossing the river, an overloaded ferry sink in the water. Navigating these difficulties sometime proved too taxing, and some listeners became sick in the course of the research.

Several listening teams spoke of suffering severe anxiety from traveling in areas where the Tatmadaw or the ethnic armed group soldiers, or even armed militias, maintained a presence, as they had to answer questions about the purpose of their travels at checkpoints. Some listeners were required to travel for long hours to reach remote villages, and some even had to cross the border into China to avoid hostilities and reach parts of northern Kachin. Other listening teams had to modify their travel plans to avoid the roadblocks set up by the Tatmadaw or the ethnic armed groups, particularly in Northern Shan State. Occasionally, listeners could not reach contacts in remote villages that had no mobile reception so communication was problematic.

Upon reaching the villages, most of the communities initially met listeners with suspicion, even if they spoke the same or a similar language and came from the same state. Some listening teams had to visit villages twice to build rapport with community members before they could hold conversations to discuss

about the peace process. Other listening teams had to deal with the language barrier, as communities spoke in different dialects or languages. There were also scheduling challenges to overcome – since they came to farming villages in the midst of harvest season, they could not speak to residents during the day and had to set appointments to hold conversations in the evening.

The listening teams also raised concerns related to research outcomes, reporting that they often heard community members say, *“now you have come to our village and discussed our problems, what can you do to help us?”* Some community members mentioned previous encounters with other NGOs who did nothing to improve their situation. Listeners thus worried about raising the expectations of communities. Other listeners described being confronted by villagers who thought the whole exercise was pointless – *“we cannot gain anything by talking to you.”*

Fear is reflected in the face of the villagers. If they see the notebooks or guide questions, they become very afraid, but if they do not see the notebooks or any papers, villagers talked more freely and openly and were not afraid.

– Listener from Kayah State

Several listening teams noted some community members were afraid to talk about the peace process, believing that they might get in trouble with authorities for talking about political issues in public spaces. The listeners mentioned the communities are reluctant to talk to them because they suspected that the listeners are members of political parties or sent by the government to obtain information from the communities. Other listeners validated the effectiveness of the listening approach to carry out this research by observing how villagers reacted with fear when they saw notebooks or guide questions but felt more at ease to hold conversations when these notebooks or questions were out of sight.

The common reaction that the communities had to questions related to the peace process, according to the listeners, was that they did not know enough about the peace process to contribute to the discussion. Some community members felt they had no authority to voice their opinions and would refer the listeners to the village leaders. To get around this, the listeners chose to talk about the challenges they faced, and how their lives had changed since 2011, when the peace process began following the signing of several bilateral ceasefire agreements.

Listeners recounted that once these initial challenges had been overcome, most of the villagers became excited at the prospect of sharing their experiences and could talk continuously for long periods of time. Some members of the community became agitated and aggressive in the course of the conversation as they recounted their negative experiences living in conflict-affected areas. Some angrily questioned the listeners for talking about the peace process.

Some participants became very aggressive and argued with us because villagers in the past had experience with being caught in the middle of fighting between the KNU and the military.

- Listener from Kayin State

Female listeners, noticing that female community members had a tendency to remain silent and defer to the opinions expressed by men, tried to elicit more answers from them during the conversations. Several young female listeners shared experiences of being challenged by older male community members who questioned their ability to understand and talk about the peace process. Other listeners shared they felt that some villagers did not respect them because of their young age.

Exploring alternative narratives, creating spaces for dialogue

Despite these challenges, the listeners were proud of the research that they had done. They are interested in exploring other regions and townships with the hopes of creating a more robust snapshot of the peace process throughout the country. They also appreciate the value of conversation and the importance and the power of listening.

Even though at the beginning of the conversations most listeners were greeted with suspicion by the community, at subsequent instances they were treated quite warmly by the members of the community who were very excited to share their stories and experiences. Oftentimes, after the conversations, residents thanked the listeners for speaking with them, asking them about their lives and the problems that they faced, and for giving them the opportunity to share their opinions and feelings. Overall, the listeners felt that the experience of conversing with the communities gave everyone involved the opportunity to feel more reflective and they were grateful for that.

The listeners also expressed their appreciation for the listening process, noting how conversations became a venue for a mutual exchange of knowledge and learning. They recounted being surprised at the information they obtained from the communities, particularly the severity and kinds of hardship that they faced. These conversations added texture to their understanding of the complicated relationship between the armed groups and the communities, for instance. It also deepened their empathy for the communities who have to face various challenges. In exchange, the listeners were happy to share what they knew about the peace process with the communities, who said that they knew little about the technicalities and details of the process. Several listeners recounted feeling hopeful as they shared what they knew about the peace process and reflected on the possibilities of peace that this process presented.

By participating in these conversations and learning to listen deeply to understand, the listeners felt more connected to their communities. Several listeners expressed their renewed commitment to contributing, in any way that they can, to support the transition period and improve the lives of these communities.

Chapter 5

KACHIN STATE

We want to go back home quickly as it has been five years that we have been staying in the camps. Before, we thought that fleeing the war would be temporary, but now it has been going on for so long, we desperately want to go home. Now, it is more difficult for displaced people.

- Kachin male from Waingmaw Township



Kachin state lies in the northernmost part of Myanmar. It shares borders with India on the west, and China on the north and east. Within Myanmar, it shares borders with Sagaing Division and northern Shan State.



Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit [1]

According to the 2014 nationwide census, Kachin State has a population of 1,689,441, although people living in Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) administered areas did not participate in the census. [2] The majority of Kachin residents are from the Kachin,¹ Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups.

Kachin State has four administrative districts: Myitkyina, Bhamo, Mohnyin, and Putao, which are divided into 18 townships. The central government and the KIO have administrative control over different areas of the state.

The longstanding conflict in Kachin State is rooted in a disagreement between Kachin leaders and the central government in the 1960s over the intent and interpretation of the Panglong Agreement. The Panglong Agreement is an agreement brokered by General Aung San between the central government and representatives from the “Frontier Areas”, covering the Shan, Kachin and Chin Hills. The agreement required the Frontier Areas to recognise that they are part of the Union of Burma in exchange for a guarantee from the Burmese government that they would have autonomy in the internal administration of the Frontier Areas, as well as the entitlement to an equal share of the country’s wealth. General Aung San, still seen as the architect of the Panglong Agreement, was assassinated not long after the signing of the agreement. [3]

The Kachin are predominantly Christian. The central government’s decision to recognise Buddhism as the state religion in 1961, under the central government’s wider *Burmanisation* policy throughout the country,² further heightened their feelings of marginalisation. The KIO and its military counterpart, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), were formed that same year. The KIA has since become one of the largest and most well organised ethnic armies in Myanmar. [4]

The KIO reports to have up to 10,000 troops and 10,000 reservists, and the KIO controls areas of Kachin State, as well as stations troops in Northern Shan State. In areas of Kachin state under the KIO control, the KIO operates like a state within the state. It has its own ministries providing social services such as law enforcement and a fire brigade, and administering an education and health care system.

¹ The term “Kachin” refers to diverse subgroups inhabiting Kachin State and neighbouring areas of Myanmar, China and India. The majority of the Kachin are known as the Jingphaw. Other Kachin groups are the Rawang, Lisu, Lashi, Maru and Azi.

² Burmanisation refers to the policy of the previous military governments of promoting Bamar culture, language, and historical perspectives, leading to the marginalisation of the cultures, religions, and languages of the other ethnic groups.

Kachin State is abundant with natural resources – timber, gold, rare earth metals, jade - and fertile agricultural land. The armed conflict and the lack of systematic regulation in active conflict areas have allowed massive exploitation of these resources with minimal benefits accruing to the residents. The KIO, certain members of the Tatmadaw leadership, and a wide spectrum of business elites have been able to generate massive revenue from the extraction and sale of these natural resources in the reigning environment of instability and little oversight. Similarly, militia groups and drug syndicates have taken advantage of the minimal oversight and limited livelihood options for rural farmers to promote opium cultivation and drug production. This has increased the prevalence of drug abuse in Kachin State. [5]

The KIO was the first ethnic armed group to enter into negotiations and sign a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the central government in February 1994. The ceasefire emerged from significant political changes in the 1980s, which saw the dissolution of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), and the creation of the New Democracy Army (NDA-K) out of the KIA members who defected. In the midst of these changes, the KIO leadership took the opportunity to push towards a nationwide ceasefire agreement. Despite being unsuccessful in convincing other ethnic armed groups to negotiate with the central government, the KIO secured its own bilateral ceasefire agreement, as well as the promise of political dialogue. [6][7]

The KIO participated in the National Convention process for the drafting of the new constitution. However, KIO proposals were largely ignored in the drafting of the 2008 Constitution. This, as well as the central government's push for the KIA to become border guard units under Tatmadaw control,³ and the refusal of the Union Electoral Commission to allow the main Kachin political parties and independent candidates to run for the 2010 elections, are believed to have been the main factors that led to the breakdown of the ceasefire. [8]

In 2011, three months after the new Thein Sein led government assumed power, fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KIA resumed. Unlike previous confrontations, however, there was a pronounced escalation in the hostilities as the Tatmadaw utilised heavy artillery and gunships against the KIA positions. Although there were several attempts to stop the fighting, all were unsuccessful and fighting continued throughout 2012 to 2013.

³ In 2009, the central government exerted pressure on ceasefire groups, including the KIA, to join the Border Guard Forces (BGF) under Tatmadaw control. This was seen by the KIA as a scheme to force them to demobilise by being absorbed into the Tatmadaw without any corresponding commitment from the central government to negotiate their political demands.

In May 2013, the KIO and the central government reached an agreement for the cessation of hostilities, but chose not to call this a ceasefire. Since then, clashes between the KIA and the Tatmadaw continue, and the Tatmadaw has mounted several large offensives against KIO positions. The most significant fighting resumed in the lead up to the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015. While the KIO is a non-signatory to the NCA, it remains in negotiations with the central government and took part in the 2nd Union Peace Conference, also known as the 21st Century Panglong Conference, in August 2016.

Communities in Kachin State have had to live with the effects of violent conflict for almost six decades. Although there was some respite offered during the 1994-2011 ceasefire period, communities also had to contend with an increase in large-scale economic projects that focused on resource extraction, such as jade and gold-mining, and logging. Illegal extraction and smuggling remain rampant due to the lack of regulation and instability caused by the conflict. [9]

Among the more controversial central government-led development projects in Kachin State is the Myitsone dam project. Before being suspended in September 2011 after widespread opposition and protest from communities in Kachin, the Myitsone dam project was initially approved by the central government in the early 2000s and construction was started in 2009. Although the project is still suspended, it remains a point of contention between the KIO and the central government, as well as the communities in Kachin. Central among complaints is the perceived unfairness in the distribution of generated electricity to Kachin State in contrast to the effect of the construction on Kachin communities. [10]

Overall, it has been Kachin communities who have suffered the most from the resumption of conflict in 2011. Since fighting has restarted, more than 100,000 people have been displaced and live in IDP camps. Most IDPs have to remain in camps as their villages and homes continue to be in conflict zones.[11] The instability generated by the conflict has caused lack of development across the state, as well as compounding the unsustainable economic conditions of many communities. As a result, social problems such as drug addiction are among the issues that currently beset Kachin communities. [12]

Violent conflict between the KIA and the Tatmadaw continues with heightened offensives and the use of stronger artillery. Since the change in government this year, the Tatmadaw has been able to seize several KIA outposts near Laiza. The fighting has caused the displacement of several villages, including those along the Bhamo-Myitkyina road. This has also negatively impacted freedom of movement, restricting access to main roads such as the road from Laiza to Myitkyina.

At the time conversations were held with communities, the new government had just assumed office and there was more confidence, greater hope, and expectation that things would improve for the general population. Given the continuous fighting between the Tatmadaw and the KIA, these hopes have gradually declined. Organisations involved in humanitarian response have also been affected by restrictions on access to IDP communities. This has added to the negative community perceptions of the government.

Another issue of concern are the growing tensions between different ethnic groups in Kachin, particularly between the Shanni and the Kachin, and the Lisu and the Kachin. These tensions are broadly related to the aspirations expressed by both the Shanni and the Lisu for recognition of their rights to self-determination.

Apart from the negative effects of the fighting, communities in Kachin have also been affected by the large-scale resource extraction. There has been an increase in deadly landslide incidents in Hpakant caused by the flattening of vast mountain areas to extract jade. Communities around the Myitsone dam area also continue to fear news of the resumption of the project.

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KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Between June and July 2016, seven listening teams held 132 conversations with 290 participants in Kachin State. These conversations took place in various locations in the townships of Mansi, Moemauk, Mogaung, Waingmaw, Myitsone, Putao, Machanbaw, Mohnyin, Chipwi, Tanai, and Hpakant.

55% of the participants are male, while 45% are female. Most of the participants (80%) are married, with only 12% single. The rest (7%) did not provide any information on their marital status.

Table 25. Gender of participants

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	159	55%
Female	131	45%
Total	290	100%

A significant number of participants (76%) identify as Kachin, with Lhaovo and Lachid making up 7% and 4% respectively. The details of the ethnic makeup of the participants are found in the table below.

Table 26. Ethnicity of participants

Ethnicity	Number of participants	Percentage
Kachin	220	76%
Lhaovo	20	7%
Lachid	13	4%
Bamar	6	2%
Shan (including Shan-Bamar)	4	1.3%
Muslim	1	0.3%
Not available	24	8%
Total	290	99.3%

Most of the participants are between the ages of 31-40 (25%), 41-50 (23%), 21-30 (14.1%), and 51-60 (13%). The remaining participants are within the ages of 61-70 (7.2%), 71-above (2%), and 18-20 (1.7%). 14% of the participants did not give their age.

Table 27. Age range of participants		
Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
18-20	5	1.7%
21-30	41	14.1%
31-40	72	25%
41-50	66	23%
51-60	38	13%
61-70	21	7.2%
71 - above	6	2%
Not available	41	14%
Total	290	100%

A large number of participants (21%) attended middle school, primary (20%), or university (15%). The remainder attended high school (14%) or had no formal education (7%). 23% did not provide any information on their educational background.

Table 28. Education background of participants		
Educational background	Number of Participants	Percentage
None	19	7%
Primary	58	20%
Middle School	61	21%
High School	41	14%
College	44	15%
Not available	67	23%
Total	290	100%

Majority of the participants identify as Catholic (44%) or Christian (39%). The rest identify as Buddhist (2%) or Muslim (0.68%). 14% of the participants did not state their religion.

The participants hold a wide variety of jobs – from farmers, teachers and religious workers, to government workers, small business owners, labourers, and students. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the participants based on their livelihood.

Table 29. Livelihood of participants

Livelihood	Number of participants	Percentage
Farmers and animal breeders	96	33.1%
Dependents	25	8.6%
Vendors/Brokers/Merchants	21	7.2%
Students	19	6.5%
Community leaders and local administrators	19	6.5%
Priests and religious leaders	16	5.5%
Teachers/education	15	5.2%
Labourers/IDPs	24	8.2%
Miners	7	2.4%
Health workers	2	0.68%
Youth leader	1	0.11%
Not available	45	15.5%
Total	290	99.59%

MAIN THEMES

1. On the Peace Process

Strong desire for genuine and sustainable peace

We do not know what to say about peace as we have never felt peace. But I think that if all ethnicities live together in harmony, we could achieve genuine peace.

- Conversation between five middle-age Kachin men and women from Mansi Township

The most commonly expressed sentiment in the conversations held across Kachin is the desire for genuine and sustainable peace. In several conversations, communities note that genuine peace can be achieved only when those involved in the peace process hear and prioritise the voices and needs of the local people. They express great hope that peace will bring freedom of travel and freedom of expression. IDP communities emphasize their desire for peace so that they can return to their villages, homes, and farms.

We want to be able to go home, to have justice and human rights.

- Conversation between four male and female IDPs from Mansi Township

Communities define peace as a state of equality where people do not feel discriminated against because of their ethnic group or religious affiliation. Other conditions needed for genuine peace are mutual respect and trust among different ethnic groups. Communities also spoke of the need for authorities (the government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed groups) to respect the human rights of everyone.

Several community members mentioned the situation in some areas of the state and stated the difficulty of “talking peace” when fighting is still ongoing. Others added that they still feel insecure in their areas because of the news of the fighting in nearby areas.

Freedom of movement

If we were to go home, we want to see our areas free from landmines or bombs. We want to move freely. We want every citizen to have civil rights.

- Conversation between five male and female IDPs from Mansi Township

Closely linked to the desire for genuine peace is the desire to have freedom of movement. An idea often repeated is that while several communities no longer hear gun fire in their area, they still cannot travel freely because of the presence of armed groups in neighbouring areas or because they are afraid of getting caught in the crossfire should fighting occur.

The presence of soldiers, from both the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, also causes great anxiety for communities and prevents them from travelling. Several communities mention the fear of Kachin men to travel because they are often suspected by Tatmadaw soldiers of being members of ethnic armed groups and are thus subjected to questioning at checkpoints. As one Kachin man observed, *"We are all considered rebels so we do not have freedom of movement. We feel very insecure."* In addition, the presence of landmines as well as armed men who rob people on the road also cause apprehension among communities.

Communities express a strong desire to be able to travel freely so that they could make a decent living for their families and live dignified lives. For most, the ability to move freely throughout Kachin State is essential to access their farms, trade and sell their produce, or avail of other livelihood opportunities to make a decent living. The ongoing fighting has severely limited the ability of communities to travel to other places, which also impacts their ability to earn a livelihood or to trade goods. Some community members observe how this has caused an increase in the prices of basic commodities like rice. IDP camp communities also mention that their limited livelihood opportunities have caused them to become dependent on NGOs and CBOs for basic food needs. They yearn for a time when there would be peace in their state so they could go back to their farms to earn a living and be self-reliant.

Effects of ongoing fighting

Before, we had to live with the sound of gunfire... we saw with our own eyes the burning of our houses, killing of our relatives. That is why we want to end the war and attain peace as soon as possible. We think we will be better off with peace in terms of making a living and traveling. If we do not have to worry about portering, the students can study peacefully.

- Mature female Kachin civil servant from Mogaung Township

Communities continue to feel fear and anxiety that the fighting might happen in their areas. While several communities say they no longer hear gunfire, they often hear news about the fighting and corresponding displacement of communities in other parts of the state. This has resurfaced fears that they might be forced to leave their homes and land if fighting breaks out in their area. Other communities, particularly those living in IDP camps, share their experiences of leaving their villages and having to hide in the jungle to escape the fighting. They mourn the loss of their homes and their land. This has left everyone feeling very insecure in Kachin.

Some communities disclose that they feel trapped because they are located between the camps of different armed groups. The increased presence of soldiers both from the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups make many communities fear the possibility of being “arrested” and forced to act as a porter for the soldiers passing through their village. They are growing increasingly apprehensive about the landmines that continue to be planted in different parts of Kachin State. Some communities mention road infrastructure such as bridges being damaged or destroyed by shelling. This has heightened concerns about the possibility of villages also being shelled and destroyed.

Positive political changes

Things have changed. We have now received the national ID cards. Before, it was almost impossible to apply for the ID cards. Now, the government has been providing services for us. We are not asked to pay for road construction by households, as we did before. The government is using its own budget for the road construction. Before, whenever we went to our rice fields, we were scared when we encountered Tatmadaw soldiers on the way. But now it is getting better. Before, we were not able to afford school fees for our kids, but now it is better because we have free education until the secondary [middle] school.

- Conversation between five Kachin men and women from Myitkyina Township

While ongoing fighting causes great concern and anxiety, communities also acknowledge positive developments since the peace process began. Most of these relate to the opening up of the political space. Communities often cite the release of political prisoners and instances when the government have engaged and held consultations with local people. They also perceive that

government offices have become more transparent and efficient, particularly when it comes to providing national identification cards to Kachin residents.

One positive change is that we can now use the Kachin national flag publicly. Before, it was very dangerous if we are found with the Kachin National flag.

- Middle aged Kachin man from Hpakant Township

Communities further note they are under less strict surveillance, and law enforcement authorities have become less strict in requiring registration of overnight visitors. Many communities also mention that media is a lot more open now and newspapers have greater freedom to report news or comment on government affairs. Some participants say they are able to express themselves more freely, whether in the form of openly displaying the Kachin flag or being able to discuss political issues in public spaces.

A few community members point out that having the ethnic armed group leaders and the government and Tatmadaw representatives talking and negotiating with each other is an improvement over the fighting. In some communities, they notice a visible decrease in the presence of soldiers. They also mention better relations with soldiers and fewer restrictions in travel, fewer instances of forced portering and harassment. Some community members say that some landowners were able to get back land confiscated by the Tatmadaw.

We like peace. Since the peace process began, some places became peaceful, while other places became worse.

- Three Kachin IDP men and women in Mansi Township

Slight improvement in delivery of social services

Other positive developments across different communities in Kachin are the slight improvements in access and quality of education. Several participants cite the slight increase in salaries of teachers, schools offering free primary education, distribution of free uniforms, textbooks and school supplies as notable developments. Communities describe that newly built clinics and hospitals in their villages, as well as roads and bridges are benefiting them. Communities express appreciation for these changes, but note that their villages need more social developments to improve their quality of life.

Desire for proper implementation of ceasefire agreement

Although, they (government and ethnic armed group leaders) are talking about peace, we are seeing more military offensives. We just want to live peacefully without the armed clashes.

- Two Kachin men from an IDP camp in Mansi Township

Communities all agree that they want ceasefire agreements signed by the government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed groups to be genuine and sustainable. They also want these agreements to be fully implemented in Kachin State, meaning that no fighting should occur while the ceasefire is in place. They ask for the offensives in Kachin to stop, and a corresponding decrease in troop movements and deployments in different parts of the state.

Communities talk about the ongoing fighting in different parts of Kachin, and how these offensives are forcing people to flee their homes and increasing the number of IDPs. While a lot of communities are not directly affected by the ongoing fighting, it is leaving them uncertain about the peace process.

We need liaison offices between the government and the ethnic armed groups. Having the liaison offices can secure freedom of movement.

- Conversation between two Kachin men from an IDP camp in Mansi Township

Several community members also refer to the importance of establishing liaison offices in Kachin. They expect that relevant decision makers in the peace process open liaison offices as soon as possible so that there can be better communication and coordination between the government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed groups, which would reduce the outbreak of violence.

Demilitarisation

For there to be peace, the Tatmadaw troops should withdraw, and then the Kachin armed group should sign the ceasefire agreement. They should end the hostilities first and then sign the agreement. As war continues, we always worry for our lives. If they cannot end war, we will not be in peace even if the armed group signs the peace agreement.

- Mature Kachin man from Hpakant Township

While some communities note fewer soldiers being deployed in their areas, other communities mention an increase in troop movements in their villages. According to some community members, because armed groups are being deployed near jade mines, farmlands and plantation fields, people are afraid to go to these areas. This restricts their ability to travel and to buy and sell goods.

We worry that war will resume because the armies from both sides are stationed close to the camps.

- Five Kachin men and women from an IDP camp in Mansi Township

Some communities continue to dread being conscripted or recruited by the Tatmadaw or different armed groups in the area. “Tax” collection also continues to occur at checkpoints set up by armed groups. They plead for the different armed groups fighting in Kachin to disarm and retreat from the villages where people live. These participants want to make sure that there are no more army deployments in the villages.

Desire for decision makers to consider community voices

Genuine peace will be achieved only when the leaders of the country listen to the voices of the people across Myanmar and respect these voices.

- Two mature Lhaovo men from Chipwi Township

Communities expect that leaders and decision makers taking part in the political dialogue to consider their experience and opinions. They want the government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed groups to listen to their concerns and challenges, and to consider their needs in the course of formulating policies and drafting agreements. They believe that the government should act with compassion towards the people and keep the benefit of the people of Myanmar in mind. They hope to see an inclusive peace process, not just in terms of a process that includes all the different ethnic armed groups, but also one that incorporates consultation and engagement with communities.

Sincerity, understanding, and compromise between negotiating parties

It is difficult to change someone's mindset. Unless we can change the mindset of people, it will be difficult to attain peace. We are desperate for peace. If only our leaders can change their mindsets, we can initiate the peace process. The leaders should have an understanding of the people and find a way to achieve peace, followed by practical (actual) implementation of the agreements. Both sides should reach ceasefire agreements.

- Female Kachin assistant pastor from Myitkyina Township

Communities believe that continuity and sustainability of the peace process requires better understanding and patience from the different negotiating groups. All sides to the peace process need to be able to compromise and to work on building trust amongst them. One way of doing this would be to stop all offensives while the negotiations and peace talks are happening which will enable all parties can negotiate without any added tension.

The peace process requires forgiveness, sacrifice, tolerance, and compassion from the different parties.

- Young Kachin woman from Hpakant Township

Several community members believe negotiating parties hold the solution to resolving the conflict and that they just require a process that allows them to come up with solutions together. One suggestion to help keep the peace process going is for all sides to respect the rule of law. Another suggestion is for different parties to stop seeing each other as enemies and to instead observe mutual respect and forgiveness. As a common starting point, the negotiating parties also need to feel sympathy and understand the hardship that the local people experience due to the violent conflict. Communities also suggest that all parties keep their promises and strictly abide by the provisions of the ceasefire agreements.

More information about the peace process

Several communities say they want to know more about the peace process. This is a serious issue for the participants who live in more remote communities who do not have access to information about the peace process because they do not even have radios. For other participants, although they have access to news about the peace process, they want to have a better understanding

about the developments. They explain that because most of their time is spent trying to earn a living, they do not have the time required to understand the implications of what is happening in the peace process.

Amendment of 2008 constitution

Communities believe that the amendment of the 2008 constitution is necessary for genuine peace to prevail. Some members of the communities consider amending the constitution as necessary to form a federal union, which in turn is necessary to ensure peace. Similarly, several participants express the view that a constitutional amendment is vital to ensuring complete civilian control over the government. Additionally, others say they want the constitution to be amended so it can articulate the equal protection of the rights of all ethnic groups

2. Challenges

Transportation and electricity infrastructure

Due to poor roads, there are many obstacles to go to and work in other cities or villages. We cannot travel freely. Landslides along the mountains are also destroying the roads.

- Six Lachid and Lhaovo men and women from Chipwi Township

Communities very often cite the lack of roads and electricity as their current challenge. They repeatedly speak of dirt roads or roads with large potholes hampering their ability to travel to other villages to conduct trade, look for work opportunities, or visit relatives. Several communities recount how roads become impassable during the rainy season. They also cite the need for more roads and bridges to be built to connect Kachin to other states and make travel easier.

Another main challenge is the lack of electricity in many villages. Communities mention that they expect the government to connect their villages to the national electric grid so that they can have access to electricity. For those areas with electricity connections, they express the hope to get more stable electricity access so they can have electricity for more than a few hours a day.

Production and use of illegal drugs

When talking about peace, I understand it is not only about the war, it is also about drug eradication and the conservation of natural environment. The government should not be the only party to implement peace, it is also important to have the public participation.

- Middle-age Kachin man from Hpakant Township

Another challenge that affects all communities is the easy availability of illegal drugs in Kachin such as opium and heroin. Communities raise their concerns about the high levels of drug abuse among their youth, particularly the use of heroin, which is causing drug addiction. They perceive drug addiction to be the reason why some young people no longer attend school or look for jobs.

Drug addiction also causes great strain on family relationships. Some parents have resorted to sending their children to prison to address the problem. Drug addiction is also linked to the rising levels of crime in communities such as domestic violence, robberies, and theft.

In these conversations, several communities also bring up the anti-drug campaigns and poppy eradication programs of ethnic armed groups. While many communities express satisfaction with the efforts exerted to address the drug problem, some express apprehension over the possibility of fighting breaking out between these groups and the militias guarding poppy plantations.

Patjasan is campaigning to eradicate illegal drug use and the number of drug-users is decreasing as a result of their actions. But in the hillsides, many grow poppy for their livelihood, so they can send their children to school. It is their business, their means of survival. If the poppy plantations are destroyed, their livelihood and their children's education will be affected. Therefore, we have to raise awareness of other options and job opportunities for them.

- Young female Kachin government school teacher from Myitkyina Township

Communities also bring up the anti-drug campaigns carried out by Patjasan and praise the organisation's drug awareness campaigns. Several community members believe illegal drug use is decreasing because of Patjasan actions.

We support our family and pay for our children's education with the money we earn from the poppy plantation. Those poppy destruction groups

provide neither the substitute crops nor the technology to help us grow other crops. Even if they did, we still need to have the wholesalers for the goods. They do not pay for the compensation. Where could we get our lost capital back?

- Seven Kachin and Naga men and women from Tanai Township

Communities are aware of the dilemma that poppy plantation farmers face that while they recognise the danger of planting poppies and the negative effects of drugs on their people, they also rely on farming poppies for their survival. Some participants who are poppy farmers explain that they need significant government support so they can stop growing poppy. They ask the government to provide substitute crops for them so that they can plant those crops instead of opium. They also express their concern over the actions of anti-drug groups like Patjasan that destroy their crops and say do not want to see violence break out.

Overall, communities express hope that the government can develop a comprehensive drug policy that bans opium plantations run by militias, provides alternative livelihood for farmers, and addresses drug addiction among young people in their communities.

IDP concerns

If war breaks out again, there is no more place to run.

- Conversation between two adult Kachin men from Momauk Township

IDP communities speak of their strong desire to return to their villages and homes. Several narrate how the fighting destroyed their homes, farmlands, and villages. They have been living in IDP camps for five years since the fighting began. They share their great fear that they will have to live in IDP camps their entire lives. One person said that living in an IDP camp for years makes him feel like *“they have fallen behind”* other communities, while another said he feels like *“they have no future”*.

These participants yearn for a time when the fighting will stop and the armed groups and soldiers will withdraw so they can return to their lands without fear of being recruited or conscripted. They also want the government to clear landmines so that they can return safely to their villages and homes.

If all the humanitarian groups leave us now, we do not know what to do and how we would survive.

- Conversation between four Kachin men and women IDPs from Mansi Township

These communities voice the difficulties they face living in IDP camps. They explain that they do not have land to farm or raise livestock. They also lack opportunities to make money to support their families and their children. For this reason, most of the IDPs rely heavily on NGOs and INGOs for food and basic necessities.

Living in IDP camps, they believe, has also adversely affected their children by limiting their children's exposure to the world. They also worry about their children's education since the state government does not recognise the IDP schools. Some parents also observe that teachers at IDP schools are only volunteers and are not trained to be teachers.

Issues related to land rights and ownership

Issues related to land are also quite common challenges for communities throughout Kachin. Several communities bring up instances of the Tatmadaw taking and occupying village land. They hope the military returns these occupied lands to the villages once the troops withdraw from their areas.

Many participants say they encounter problems with the land registration process because it is too complicated for them to follow. Because they have not registered their lands, some government officials are able to confiscate land that appears to be public land, even though communities have occupied these plots for generations. And even though there are some participants who received compensation for their land, most of them believe that the compensation is not commensurate to the actual value of the land taken.

IDP communities are also very concerned about the land that they have left behind. They share that they do not know whether they can reoccupy these lands or whether other people or armed groups have already occupied them. If they cannot return to their land, they hope the government can help them by providing them with other plots of land where they can set up farms for their livelihood.

Extractive industries and large companies

Finding gemstones in mines is like eating leftover food from others. We find jade from the dumped soil that the companies do not need.

- Middle-age Kachin man from Hpakant Township

Communities also express great concern over the different large companies engaged in extractive industries or building hydropower dams in Kachin. Many communities perceive these companies to be exploiting the natural resources of Kachin without sharing any benefits with the residents. The natural resources they mention are jade, mineral-rich soils, timber, and amber. As summarised by one participant, *“areas rich in mineral resources like jade and amber remain poor, and only the rich business owners benefit from these resources.”*

According to different communities, when these companies begin operations in their areas, they fence off large tracts of land, forests, and bodies of water. This restricts the communities’ access to areas that they traditionally use as sources for food or water. Where access has not been restricted, the activities of some companies destroy forests, which reduce food sources that communities previously used to supplement their diets. Communities also cite the environmental damage that mining companies cause. The trucks used by these large companies also cause damage and destruction to the roads.

Communities in areas that will be affected by the planned Myitsone dam are particularly anxious about the possibility that the project would continue. They are afraid that they will have to leave their ancestral lands if the project continues. Other communities are afraid of the environmental damage that the dam would cause to the rest of the state, obstructing the natural flow of water and restricting access to water down river, and flooding other areas.

3. Hopes and Aspirations

Livelihood Assistance

We struggle to make a living for our families, but we have no knowledge on how to start a business. We do not know about the agriculture and animal husbandry techniques and we have no farmlands or lands to grow crops. The road used to transport goods is not good so the commodity prices are very high and that affects our livelihoods. Since we cannot afford to buy good

food, our children are not well-fed. Not having a market for crops makes our lives harder although we grow crops and want to sell them to support our children's education.

- Conversation between six Kachin men and women from Putao Township

The strongest theme that emerges from all conversations is the hope all communities express that they will obtain livelihood assistance from the government. Communities describe the challenges they face to earn a living due to limited job opportunities. They look to the government to create job opportunities for them. They also ask for vocational skills training to make it easier for them or their children to find jobs.

For participants who are working, they ask for better government regulation to make sure they have safe working environments. They also require government support in developing agricultural industries as well as in building markets to facilitate trade.

Some community members cite the current microfinance loan programs that are imposing a heavy burden on many farmers as they still have to pay for the loans even when their crops are destroyed by natural disasters like typhoons or drought. They hope the government could look into improving the system to address these problems. To help consumers, they request the government to regulate prices of basic commodities, particularly the price of rice, as some unscrupulous traders sell these products at very high prices.

Better education services

Each village should have a school.

- Conversation between two Bamar women living in Myitkyina Township

Communities hope their children can have proper education so they can have a better future. Some communities explain that residents paid for the construction of their school and the salaries of the teachers. They hope the government can increase investment in education infrastructure and take on the responsibility of building schools and paying the salaries of teachers in their villages.

Communities report the need for better-trained teachers, noting how most teachers are volunteers who are not properly trained to teach. They specifically

mention wanting access to English classes and vocational skills trainings to make sure that students can find jobs after studying. They also cite the need to change the curriculum used so that it can include the histories of other ethnic groups.

IDP communities raise the difficulties that the children living in IDP camps have in accessing schools in the host communities. Communities living in areas under the administrative control of ethnic armed groups also voice the need to resolve the different requirements of KIO-run schools and government schools to ensure that there is proper recognition of educational qualifications. This would address the current problem faced by children who received primary education from KIO-run schools when they want to attend government schools for higher education and increase education opportunities in Kachin State.

Desire for equality

If the government could redraft some of the laws so that it protects the rights of all ethnicities and ensures equality, I think we all would be ok.

- Conversation between four men and women from an IDP camp in Mansi Township

Communities continue to face discrimination based on their ethnicity and religious affiliation. They perceive this discrimination in terms of limits on access to job opportunities as well as in the exercise of freedom of movement. To illustrate, some narrate how they feel discriminated against when it comes to access to social services as most Kachin villages are underdeveloped.

Several community members also cite their experiences with gender inequality. They ask government officials to create measures to protect women against violence and harassment.

Another form of discrimination they mention is based on class standing. Several community members note that richer residents are treated with better regard than poorer residents.

Communities look to the government and other decision makers to address ethnic, religious, and class discrimination and guarantee equality. For several community members, this means that government officials have to initiate programs to promote respect for human rights equally, regardless of ethnic group or religious affiliation. This also translates to equal distribution of aid,

government assistance, and development particularly in terms of availing of socioeconomic development in remote rural areas and not just in the towns.

Desire for genuine federal union run by a democratic civilian government

We want a genuine democracy from the peace process. We need human rights for everyone. The Tatmadaw should be composed of all ethnic nationalities. It should defend and protect us all from outside threats.

- Middle-age male Kachin Christian leader from Myitkyina Township

Communities speak of their desire for a truly democratic government. They share that for the country to be truly democratic, it has to be ruled by civilians. They add that the government needs to ensure that there is rule of law that apply to all, including to the Tatmadaw.

Some community members voice the need for the government to address corruption and ensure transparency and accountability when it comes to the actions and programs of government.

Communities also convey their desire for a decentralised form of government so that leaders from Kachin State who know and understand the challenges faced by the residents can govern them. They also convey the hope that they will have good leadership in government with leaders who are sincere in prioritizing the needs of the local people.

We want local people to serve in the government.

- Conversation between six Kachin men and women from Tanai Township

They want to see different ethnic groups represented in the government and members of different ethnic groups become part of the civil service. They voice the hope that if different ethnic groups are well represented in the different branches of government, this will lead to better protection of the human rights of all ethnic groups.

Several community members share their support for and desire to contribute to the democratisation and peace process transition the country is going through.

Creation of a true Union Army

Another strong theme that emerged in relation to a democratic civilian government is the desire for the formation of a genuine Union Army, which includes soldiers and officers from different ethnic groups. Participants share their vision of having a union army that protects the country and its residents against external threats, and is not used against the people of Myanmar.

Better health care services

People have died unnecessarily because of lack of the healthcare workers and medical equipment. I see similar cases happen, because there are no doctors and medicines.

- Middle age Kachin woman from Putao Township

Communities also voice their expectation that the government improve the quality and accessibility of health care services. They narrate the poor health care facilities in the villages and the dearth of skilled staff. Some villages do not have any physicians, nurses or health care workers to meet the daily needs of residents. When residents become seriously ill, they have to travel to far villages or towns to go to hospital. Some communities have to travel to China to look for health care services. Family members then have to bear the burden of expensive travel costs on top of the expensive medical expenses. The long travel has also caused many patients to die because they are unable to get the necessary health care in a timely manner.

Chapter 6

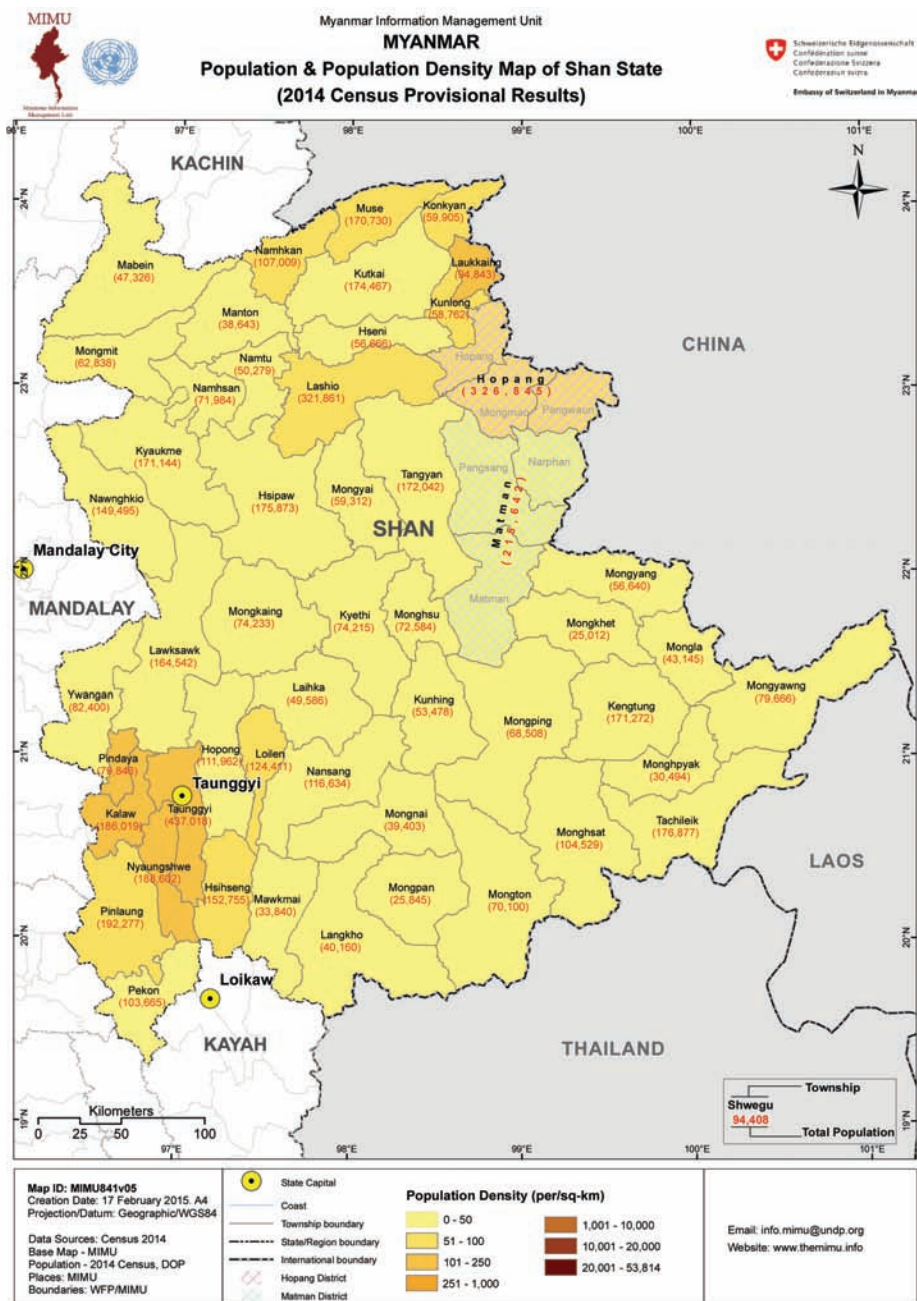
NORTHERN SHAN STATE

*All problems need to be solved with discussion,
not with weapons.*

- Male and female farmers from Lashio Township



Shan State is the largest of Myanmar's states and contains great ethnic diversity. It is divided into three administrative sections: Shan State North, Shan State South, and Shan State East, which comprise of eleven official districts: Taunggyi, Loilem, Lyaukme, Muse, Laukkaing, Kunlong, Lashio, Keng Tung, Mong Hsat, Mong Hpayak, and Tachileik.



Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit [1]

Shan State contains 55 townships, and includes five self-administered areas: the Wa self-administered division, the Kokang self-administered zone, the Palaung self-administered zone, the Danu self-administered zone, and the Pa'O self-administered zone. The 2014 census puts the population of Shan State at 5,824,432 people, representing 11.3% of the country's total population [2].

Shan State is largely rural and has three densely populated cities – Lashio (Shan State North), Kengtung (Shan State East), and Taunggyi (Shan State South). It has two main bodies of water - the Salween River, which flows through the entire state, and Inle Lake, the second largest lake in the country. Shan State's cool climate and varied topography allow for a variety of crops and fresh produce such as rice, wheat, chili, cotton, corn and tea. It is rich in natural resources such as gold, silver, lead, zinc, copper, and teak forests. Shan State also forms a part of the Golden Triangle as one of Asia's largest drug cultivating and smuggling areas. [3]

Northern Shan State shares a border with China while, domestically, it borders Kachin State, Sagaing Division, and Mandalay. There are seven districts within Northern Shan State: Muse, Kyaukme, Mongmit, Laukkaing, Hopang, Matman, and Lashio, which is considered its centre, as well as three self-administered zones: Palaung, Kokang, and Wa.



Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit [4]

Northern Shan State's population is approximately 1.82 million people.[5] The most prevalent ethnic groups are the Shan, Palaung (Ta'ang), Kachin, Lisu, Kokang, and the Maingtha people.

Northern Shan State has a long history of conflict. Since the 1950s, it has served as the background for a wide variety of ethno-nationalist and communist insurgencies. Its close proximity to China means that it has been influenced by domestic conflicts across the border, particularly the Chinese civil war between the Communist and Kuomintang forces, when the defeated Kuomintang forces nearly occupied Shan State in 1953. [6]

Subsequently, Shan State became the backdrop of domestic rebellions with the formation of various non-state and ethnic armed groups such as the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) and the Shan State Army (SSA). Among the more established armed groups currently active in Northern Shan State are the United Wa State Army (UWSA), a large and well-equipped ethnic army in their own self-administered zone; the Shan State Army - North (SSA-N), the armed wing of the Shan State Progress Party fighting for greater autonomy within Shan State; the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the armed group formerly allied with the Communist Party of Burma and claiming to fight for ethnic Kokang; and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), claiming to fight for ethnic Ta'ang/Palaung [7]. These three ethnic armed groups are active in self-administered zones in Northern Shan State.

Since the 1960s, the Tatmadaw had been engaged in suppressing these armed insurgencies in Shan State until ceasefire agreements were concluded with several armed groups between the late 1980s and the 1990s. These ceasefires brought relative stability and calm to the region, but fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and the MNDAA in Northern Shan State in August 2009. [8]

Between 2011 and 2012, the central government signed bilateral ceasefire agreements with the UWSA and the SSA-N. While the bilateral ceasefire agreement with the UWSA remains intact, sporadic fighting has broken out between the Tatmadaw and the SSA-N.

In October 2015, eight ethnic armed groups signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Notably, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), the Shan State Progressive Party (SSPP), and the United Wa State Party (UWSP), all large ethnic armed groups that have armed forces in parts of Northern Shan

State, abstained from signing the NCA. In the lead up to the signing of the NCA, the Tatmadaw launched heavy offensives against the MNDAA, leading to the MNDAA declaring a unilateral ceasefire with the central government. [9]

Since the signing of the NCA in October 2015, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), an ethnic armed group based mostly in Southern Shan and a signatory to the NCA, has increased its presence in Northern Shan State, resulting in clashes with the TNLA.[10] There have also been skirmishes involving the Tatmadaw and the TNLA, and the Tatmadaw and the SSA-N.[11]

The central government and the Tatmadaw still refuse to allow the TNLA and the MNDAA to join the peace talks or sign the NCA unless they promise to disarm. Their exclusion is despite the membership of both ethnic armed groups in the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC). [12]

As a result of conflict, Northern Shan has severe governance problems. Most residents lack access to basic social services. Most families make a living by selling crops they harvest from small farms but the low prices of tea leaves and other cash crops mean they usually do not make much profit. Residents are also subject to various 'taxes' by different armed groups and militias operating in their areas. These conditions have made opium farming a lucrative alternative for many farmers, fuelling drug production in the area. But this has also meant drug addiction is a serious concern across the state. In some cases, private militias form to protect opium crops. The pervasive drug problem has prompted ethnic armed groups like the TNLA to operate opium crop eradication and drug addiction rehabilitation programmes. [13]

In recent years, Shan State has been the site of several large-scale foreign projects, including the Salween River dam, and the Shwe gas and oil pipeline. In the wake of these projects, there has been an increase in the reported cases of land confiscations, as well as concerns over lack of community consultation about the potential impact and outcomes of the projects.[14] In 2016, a number of hydropower projects in Shan State were delayed by the central government until a cost-benefit and impact analysis could be completed.

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KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

In July 2016, six teams of listeners held sixty-seven conversations with 187 participants in communities across Northern Shan State. Conversations were held in the townships of Kyaukmae, Lashio, Namtu, Namhkam, Namhsan, and Manton. The teams consisted of seven female and six male listeners.

The participants are mostly male (66%), with one third female (33%).

As all listeners are Ta'ang, it is unsurprising that majority of participants (85% combined) are also Ta'ang. A breakdown of the ethnicity of the participants is set forth below to show how community members self-identify within the conversations.

Table 30. Ethnicity of participants		
Ethnic group	Number of Participants	Percentage
Ta'ang	118	63%
Ta'ang (Pa Laung)	18	10%
Ta'ang (Shu Mae)	21	11%
Ta'ang (Shan)	1	1%
Bamar	8	4%
Kachin	8	4%
Not available	13	7%
Total	187	100%

Participants mostly fall within the age ranges of 21-30 (19%), 31-40 (19%), and 15-20 (14%). A large section of participants did not disclose their age (19%).

Table 31. Age range of participants		
Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
15-20	26	14%
21-30	35	19%
31-40	35	19%
41-50	21	11%
51-60	25	13%
61-70	8	4%
71 - above	1	0.5%
Not available	36	19.2%
Total	187	99.7%

There is an even spread of education levels throughout the participants. The majority (21%) identified only having a primary level of education. However, there is a significant number who reached college level (19%) and a number of participants did not disclose their educational background (20%).

The participants identify almost exclusively as Buddhist (94%), with a small fraction (4.8%) identifying as Catholic. Very few (1%) did not provide any information about their religion.

Occupations of participants varied from farming, which included tea leaf, corn, and hillside cultivation, to working as educators, vendors, or in service provision.

Table 32. Livelihood of participants		
Livelihood	Number of participants	Percentage
Farmers	87	47%
Community leaders and local administrators	8	4%
Teachers/education	18	10%
Monks and religious leaders	4	2%
Vendors/Brokers/Merchants	13	7%
Civil society and non-governmental organisation workers	7	4%
Health workers	7	4%
Student	9	5%
Not available	34	18%
Total	187	101%

MAIN THEMES

1. On the Peace Process

Lack of satisfaction with the progress of the peace process

The government does not want to get peace and does not provide equal rights to the ethnic groups in this peace process. People believe that the government plays a systematic game to expand conflicts and to have problems and conflict among ethnic groups.

- Group of male farmers in Namhkam Township

The most prevalent theme throughout conversations is that communities lack faith and confidence in the peace process. In particular, community members say they are not satisfied with the progress of the peace process. They continually link the peace process to their livelihood conditions, which are negatively affected by ongoing conflict.

The two most commonly cited experiences communities share illustrate their negative and positive experiences with the peace process. While communities acknowledge seeing community development, they also bring up the ongoing violence that erupted after the signing of the NCA.

Communities agree that there have been some improvements in social services and infrastructure developments since the peace process began, especially in terms of telecommunication services. These changes include social development initiatives that have benefitted their community. Parts of the peace process are also seen as steps that could reduce conflict in their region, such as ongoing negotiations.

But they also point out that their situation has become worse since the signing of the NCA because of the fighting. In a majority of conversations, community members cite the exclusion of the TNLA from the NCA, and ongoing fighting between the RCSS and the TNLA as evidence that more needs to be done for the peace process to progress.

When we look at the overall trend of the peace process, the situation is getting worse and worse.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang and Kachin farmers in Namhkam Township

More dialogue is needed

There is no peace in our mountainous regions. Although they are working on the peace talks, the situation is getting worse.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang in Namtu Township

When reflecting on the peace process, community members believe that more dialogue between the military, government, and ethnic armed groups is necessary. In particular, community members want more inclusive dialogue at a national level. As a majority of the community members are Ta'ang, they strongly believe that the TNLA has been unfairly excluded from the NCA negotiations. This exclusion makes any further dialogue between the TNLA and central government extremely difficult. A majority of the community members also recognise the importance of having the Tatmadaw and the central government have their own dialogue so that the Tatmadaw could be held to account for its actions.

Throughout the conversations, the 21st Century Panglong Conference is identified as a specific opportunity for ethnic armed groups to have constructive dialogue. Several community members also stress their hope that a federal system of governance would give the Ta'ang greater self-determination and a more prominent position from which to have dialogue with the government.

More importantly, throughout communities there is a desire for greater dialogue between different ethnic groups to help resolve negative perceptions and tensions within communities, especially between the Ta'ang and the Shan. In several conversations, community members worry that there is a growing tension between the two ethnic groups that is not being properly addressed because of the ongoing conflict. Community members explain that more dialogue and discussion at community level would address these concerns.

There is no trust. There is fear only among people.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang Farmers in Namhkam Township

Human rights violations by warring parties

There were some threats to the women who got injured when a landmine went off. The Shan group forced one woman to say that landmines are laid by the TNLA group.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang in Namtu Township

Although community members have generally optimistic outlooks for the future of the peace process, there are concerns about human rights violations because of the ongoing conflict. In several conversations from across all the areas visited, community members mention experiences of discrimination and harassment by all armed groups in their areas. This discrimination and harassment, community members believe, is due to their ethnicity.

In other conversations, community members share that they are fearful of landmines that have been laid around their villages and in the forests where they sometimes gather bamboo shoots. In one case, a community member explained that a landmine in the forest had injured someone. While receiving treatment at a health clinic, the victim was harassed by members of an armed group to lay blame for the landmine on another armed group.

There are also concerns about the increasing numbers of IDPs in parts of the state, and how they will be supported. Community members describe having to flee their villages and losing their homes and belongings when armed groups torched their village. These hardships are compounded by constant fear of forced portering by armed groups, as well as fear of arrests, kidnappings, and disappearances if community members are caught outside of their village areas.

We moved here after 2015 due to the conflict. We have run twice from the previous village due to the fighting between the Tatmadaw and the TNLA. We have run together with children.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang farmers in Kyaukmae Township

Genuine and inclusive nationwide ceasefire agreement

There was freedom in the region before the NCA. However, after signing the NCA, there has been no security and other socio-economic problems, and war becomes more frequent.

- Two young female Kachin students in Manton Township

The NCA features prominently throughout the conversations as an aspect of the peace process that needs to be more genuine and inclusive. Although community members acknowledge that the NCA is an important part of the peace process, they could not see the benefits of the NCA as it currently stands. In most of the conversations, there is a distinction between conflict and conditions before and after the NCA. This distinction comes out very strongly in conversations with Ta'ang community members, who note that the TNLA has been excluded from NCA negotiations.

Community members feel that the NCA is not genuine because the TNLA is not allowed to sign the agreement. In some conversations there is suspicion that the central government and the Tatmadaw are using the NCA to deliberately exacerbate conflict in their area and promote inter-ethnic conflict. Community members observe that the RCSS, a signatory to the NCA, started coming to Northern Shan and fighting against the TNLA after the NCA was signed. These perceptions reinforce the perspective that the NCA is not genuine or inclusive.

Nevertheless, communities expect the conflict to end in their state and they believe that a nationwide ceasefire agreement that is inclusive of all ethnic groups, a political system that allows for representation of all ethnic groups, and a genuine dialogue between all armed groups, would make the NCA effective. As a number of community members explain, they simply want the war to end.

Conflict became more frequent due to the NCA. All the ethnic groups are not going to sign if the agreement is not fair enough.

- Middle-age female Ta'ang healthcare worker in Namhsan Township

Government does not have control of the military

The ethnic groups will accept the NCA if the government and the military have the same outlook towards peace.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang in Namhkan Township

There are some positive suggestions that the change in government in 2015 is an opportunity for change in the conflict situation in Northern Shan. However, several community members add that they have seen minimal policy changes thus far from the new NLD-led government. There is a perception that the central government does not have control over the Tatmadaw and, in one conversation, community members still refer to the central government as being controlled by the military. This perception reflects the community experiences of the government through their present and past experiences of the Tatmadaw, and the ongoing conflict in Northern Shan.

Communities believe that there has to be dialogue between the central government and the Tatmadaw so that both are pursuing the same goals in the peace process. In a number of conversations, community members express their pessimism toward the Tatmadaw and its actions toward the peace process, believing that the military does not want the peace process to be successful.

Other community members, however, say that they do not have any issues with the Tatmadaw, with some community members giving them shelter and hosting them when they are present in their area. Those community members, however, express their fears of the RCSS because they attribute a greater number of abuses and human rights violations in their region to this ethnic armed group.

People should not say “not good, not good”. We have to think about how we can make it better. To get the federal system we all need to have a good administrative approach. For example, if the army is under the control of the president, it does not mean that military is bad. It means the military should work on national defence and security. The main importance is the need to discuss this with each other.

- Male and female Ta'ang in Namtu Township

2. Challenges

To overcome these challenges, all of us are responsible - the government, the administrators, the armed groups, and the civilians - for the development of the region. The government and ethnic groups should discuss peacefully during the 21st Century Panglong Conference.

- Mature male Ta'ang farmer in Namtu Township

Effects of ongoing conflict

The Burmese military always comes and stays in our village. We allowed them to stay here because they do not have any problem with us. They said they come for security reasons. We have nothing to say about them because they live politely. RCSS came here once but we did not allow them to stay here because we have heard news about them. They scolded and shouted at us when we do not allow them to stay here. They also said "we do not set your village on fire because it is not your turn yet". We are so afraid of RCSS now.

- Male Ta'ang farmer in Namtu Township

Communities are concerned about an intractable conflict in Northern Shan, and community members find it difficult to see an end to the conflict. Notably, the NCA, which communities see as part of the peace process, is associated with an increase in conflict due to the presence of RCSS in Northern Shan, which displays pessimism about the NCA. In some conversations, community members suggest that a federal system is necessary in order to better represent ethnic groups in the peace process.

Concerns over ongoing conflict, however, have very real consequences for community members. In one conversation, a community member explains that they work in the media and often have to travel to conflict areas. The community member worries about what would happen to their family should they be injured in the conflict, yet they understand that their work is important to raise awareness of the conflict in Northern Shan.

In other conversations, community members worry that there is greater misunderstanding between Ta'ang and Shan communities because of the conflict between RCSS and TNLA. They worry that this would create greater ethnic tension in Northern Shan should the conflict continue.

With limitations on freedom of movement, community fears of armed groups, ethnic tensions within communities, and affected livelihoods, community members cite the continuous fighting as the greatest challenge facing communities.

Everyday, everywhere there are more conflicts, and people are afraid to go and do their work. When we meet the soldiers, we need to work as a guide to show them the way.

- Group of male Ta'ang farmers in Namhkam Township

Illegal drug use and production

We are trying to solve the drug issue but when we communicate with middle-aged users they are difficult to talk, and the youth threaten us.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang farmers in Lashio Township

Illegal drug use and production continue to be of great concern for communities, especially the effects of illegal drugs on youth. In many of the conversations, community members express their support for TNLA policies and programs related to drug eradication, especially the arrests and rehabilitation of drug users. Nevertheless, illegal drug eradication is singled out as a challenge for the peace process and for communities.

In some conversations, community members link the use and production of drugs to the cycles of conflict in Northern Shan. They explain that although the TNLA are active in illegal drug eradication, they suspect other armed groups are involved in the drug trade. According to one conversation, in one hand a member of an armed group held a weapon, and in the other hand they held drugs. They feel that as long as drugs continue to be present in communities, there will also be conflict.

In a number of conversations, community members also bring up the impact drugs have on families and relationships within communities. One community member in particular explains that when a husband is a drug addict, the wife is left trying to secure income for the family, and the children cannot obtain an education because the family cannot afford it. In another conversation, a community member explains that if drug addicts cannot get drugs in their village they simply travel to a different village where drugs are still available.

Given the widespread effects of drugs on both the ongoing conflict and on the social fabric of the communities, community members elevate drug eradication as among the issues that need to be addressed by the peace process.

People are struggling not only from war but also from the opium problem. In one family, the father is a drug user. Due to the war, the mother cannot go to the farm to work and that affects the children's education and livelihood.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang farmers in Manton Township

Fears of rising crime

The Myanmar judiciary system is "money is above the laws".

- Female Ta'ang merchant in Namhsan Township

There are grievances concerning the increase in social issues that communities are facing in the midst of the ongoing conflict. In particular, communities worry about crime associated with drug abuse and production. There are also concerns about cases of unsolved murders occurring across Northern Shan State. These issues present challenges not only for communities, but for local authorities as well, who are expected to effectively address them.

Murders are a particular source of concern for community members. The unsolved nature of murders and the perceived ethnic dimension to the killings have caused tensions to rise within communities. Community members also fear possible acts of retribution. In these cases, community members appear to lack faith in the ability of law enforcement authorities and the government to solve these crimes and help reduce tensions.

This lack of efficient law enforcement authority is considered a challenge amidst on-going conflict. In its place, communities have to turn to ethnic armed groups to address social issues, especially in the case of drug abuse and production.

We have found one dead body in the Ta'ang region and the dead person is Shan. No one knows why he died. His brother said that he would continue pursuing the case to find the truth. He died in a Ta'ang area so that it seems they do not like me because I am Ta'ang and also head of the village. This is a recent problem for us.

- Mature male Ta'ang farmer in Namtu Township

Fear for safety and security around soldiers

People fear to go to the workplace, landmines are planted under the road, and there are human rights violations, persecutions, and death threats, not only from the government side but also from the ethnic armed groups.

- Group of male Ta'ang farmers in Muse Township

Communities express fears for their safety and security when armed groups pass through villages and towns. A majority of the Ta'ang community members in the conversations express their concern about the RCSS soldiers passing through their villages, although several community members in particular worry about all armed groups. In particular, they fear being subject to forced portering, harassment, arrests, and abuse at the hands of armed group members. These fears force community members to hide when soldiers are around, or to reduce travel between and within villages to avoid running into them.

These fears are reinforced by the growing perception that the RCSS are singling out Ta'ang communities. Community members are always conscious of when the RCSS is nearby, and are very careful of their movements if they hear that RCSS soldiers are in the area. Some listeners share that they had to remain in one village simply to avoid travelling in an area rumoured to be occupied by the RCSS.

These fears are mostly directed toward the RCSS, and appear to be influenced by the ethnicity of the community members. In one conversation, the community member said that they have no issue with the Tatmadaw, only with the RCSS when they came to their village and threatened their safety. In another conversation, a community member shares how the TNLA harassed villagers because they had accommodated the Tatmadaw. Caught between so many armed groups who require communities to provide shelter, supplies, or services, there are concerns about safety and security should conflict remain ongoing.

I do not know why the army does not like us. They question the boys and if they could not answer, they hit them. Thus, there is fear in the community.

- Middle-age male Ta'ang teacher in Lashio Township

3. Aspirations from the Peace Process

Mutual understanding and unity are important for discussions during the peace process. If citizens are considered, our nation will be developed like others.

- Group of young male and female Ta'ang and Bamar in Lashio Township

Communities want equal ethnic rights

Previously, we could go freely to each other's village but now we do not feel comfortable because we do not speak to each other although we see each other. We do not want this situation because we all are ethnic groups that live here.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang farmers in Kyaukmae Township

Another prominent theme in most of the conversations is the desire for equal rights for all ethnic groups. The issue manifests in two ways. Firstly, communities speak of the ethnic discrimination they experience as a consequence of ongoing conflict. Secondly, communities express the desire for ethnic equality and equal representation. In both cases, these themes are contextualized by the fact that a majority of community members in the conversations are Ta'ang.

Community members share their perceptions of Shan communities discriminating against Ta'ang communities in their region. Even the listeners appear to share this view as they explain how uncomfortable they feel approaching Shan community members, concerned about how they would be received or welcomed. The listeners add that they often felt unwelcomed or ignored by Shan community members in the towns and villages they visited, and they believe it is because they are Ta'ang.

These concerns are repeated in the conversations. A number of community members explain that there is misunderstanding and distrust between Ta'ang and Shan communities that is exacerbated by recent murders of Ta'ang and Shan villagers, and is further compounded by the presence of the RCSS in Northern Shan, who are fighting the TNLA and reportedly harassing Ta'ang communities. In one conversation, a community member explains that the RCSS prevents them from selling to Ta'ang buyers.

Although ethnicity is seen as a divisive factor in most of the conversations, there is optimism that the peace process can include efforts to guarantee equal treatment of all ethnic groups. Some community members ask for autonomous areas covering ethnic areas under a federal system of government. Other community members suggest including all ethnic armed groups in peace dialogues and allowing them to participate equally. As one community member explains, there is more to gain when all the ethnic groups work together for peace, rather than fight against each other.

The creation of a federal state is an issue that has been requested by people. The future federal system of self-administration must guarantee equal rights and respect for all ethnic groups.

- Group of male Ta'ang from Namhkam Township

Communities want their voices to be heard

Parliamentary representatives are not coming to hear what people need or what you want to say. To listen they should come to the community. They need to investigate and interrogate. Previously, they were not chosen through people's vote, but now they cannot cheat the civilians. We need to speak if we do not like something. We need to point out the weaknesses of the system, and we need to remove officials if that is the case.

- Middle-age male Ta'ang teacher in Lashio Township

The national elections at the end of 2015 opened communities to the possibility of having their voices heard and their interests represented. To demonstrate the opening up of political space, while the listening team was in Lashio to conduct the training workshop, communities held a large demonstration to protest the unsatisfactory investigation into the murders of local villagers. The demonstration went ahead without incident throughout downtown Lashio.

The growing awareness among communities of the right to organise or participate in these activities shows in the conversations. In one conversation, a community member shares the belief that the community's role in the peace process is to organise protests if necessary to achieve peace. Another community member wants to focus on campaigns and awareness raising activities to involve communities and make sure they are better informed about current events.

There is a particular focus on the need for better representation at both community and national level. Some conversations focus on the poor representation by parliamentary representatives of community concerns and opinions. In one conversation, community members demand to know why the TNLA can communicate clearly and easily with the communities while parliamentary representatives could not. Communities are willing to embrace and exercise a greater role in holding their elected representatives to account.

Significantly, communities seem hopeful about the possibility of having a fairer system of government. Throughout the conversations, they refer to the belief that having a national federal system would offer them a greater degree of control and authority over development in their state. Communities also believe that a federal system should be based on ethnicity, as this would level the playing field in national dialogues and discussions.

I will motivate people in the region to join protests if it is necessary for peace.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang farmers and chairman of the village

Community members want increased economic opportunities

Our business is not good. The tea leaf price is low, thus, we changed our business to charcoal. However, the RCSS prohibits selling charcoal to China and we still have to pay tax for charcoal.

- Male Ta'ang village leader in Namhkam Township

The need for improved economic conditions features prominently throughout the conversations. As a majority of participants are farmers, their livelihood is affected directly by the ongoing conflict in their area because it greatly restricts their freedom of movement and access to agricultural lands. This restriction also limits their ability to travel to buy and sell produce. Several community members also want tea leaf prices discussed as part of the peace process. They believe that the fluctuations in the tea leaf market, with suppliers buying tea at very low prices and selling supplies at high prices, are connected to the ongoing conflict and instability.

Community members are also worried about the limited employment opportunities for both themselves and their children. Several community members explain that the youth are leaving villages to work in China because

they do not have employment and economic opportunities in Northern Shan. Others associate the vulnerability of community members to illegal drug use and addiction to lack of opportunities for economic advancement. Therefore, communities believe that the peace process needs to focus on development in Northern Shan to ensure sustainable peace. This development should centre on the creation of employment and economic opportunities.

In some areas, participants acknowledge some positive development, such as construction of telecommunication infrastructure, and easier job application processes because of less stringent education requirements. However, the threat of conflict is always present, and communities are concerned that without an effective peace process that addresses the effect ongoing conflict has on economic welfare and livelihood, there will be no improvement in economic conditions.

Most of the youth are going to find jobs abroad, such as Thailand and China because of the conflict.

- Group of male and female Ta'ang in Kyaukme Township

Desire for more freedom of movement between and within villages

We are afraid to use the main roads because of fighting. We use small village roads and it's difficult for us because those are muddy earth roads.

- Female Ta'ang tea leaf seller in Namhsan Township

Community members constantly mention limitations on accessibility and mobility in and around villages. Those who work in agriculture explain that they have had to either stay on their farmland, or move to other villages close to their farmland because of fear of encountering armed groups while traveling.

In other conversations, community members explain how landmines placed in forest areas injure community members who collect bamboo shoots. Even the listeners, when travelling between villages, explain that they are stopped by different armed groups for questioning, or to provide help, such as guiding armed group members. In one case, two community members travelling with the listeners were arrested after leaving the listeners to travel to another village. According to the majority Ta'ang community members, the restrictions on movement have gotten worse since the RCSS moved to Northern Shan.

Community members want to be able to travel freely in Northern Shan. They want the peace process to address the limitations and restrictions placed upon their movement during the conflict. A successful peace process for these community members means moving freely around their villages and between other villages, without harassment, intimidation, or restriction by armed groups.

Yesterday there was a fight, and today the Burmese military blocked the road. The military threatened us with guns to stop our motorbike on the way to Namhsan this morning. They asked us questions and if we do not know the answer, they say, 'you Ta'ang people always say that you do not know'. They have guns but us, civilians, have no right to use them.

- Female Ta'ang trader in Namhsan Township

More consistent and improved provision of social services

We had electricity and water in 2010-13. After 2013, we got the water and 24-hour electricity through support from Central Plan for People (Kabawza bank) but no one wanted to take care of the facilities. Thus, they need to repair again and again.

- Female Ta'ang farmer in Namhsan Township

In several conversations, community members explain that there has been some development since 2011 in their communities. In particular, the central government had encouraged the provision of microfinance loans to support local business initiatives and employment. Similarly, the KBZ bank had been involved in community development programmes. As a result, there had been infrastructure built that improved service provision of communication, transportation, electricity, and water. However, the ongoing conflict has caused instability in providing services and restricted further improvements.

It is apparent that community members understand that the peace process is capable of delivering development of important infrastructure for their communities. They desire more consistent development in their region. Although there are some improvements in villages away from city areas, several community members explain that water and electricity services are still inconsistent or underdeveloped. While roads have improved, communities are unable to use them due to fear of armed groups in the area. In one case, a community member added that whenever the Tatmadaw are close to the village, telecommunication networks are jammed until they have moved away.

The consensus from the conversations is that consistent development can only occur once there is a successful peace process. Therefore, communities demand that the decision-makers prioritize securing the peace process so that Northern Shan can focus on more developments.

There are some changes in the region such as better telecommunication (available near the city) and efforts to create job opportunities (previously to get the job you need to pass the exam but now you do not need to). I think that it is their strategy but it is a good change at least.

- Female Ta'ang salesperson in Namhkam Township

Uninterrupted education and better education infrastructure

There are some family issues such as the parent telling their children to buy alcohol for them. The teachers mention the consequences to the parents that if the teachers find out they need to pay a fine (50000 kyat) and that there are consequences (100000 kyat fine) for dropping out of the school in the middle of school season. However, parents agree to the rules, but in reality, they do not follow.

- Group of young male Bamar teachers in Kyaukme Township

There are a number of references within the conversations to the state of education in communities, and the desire for better education infrastructure and uninterrupted education. In a number of conversations, community members are worried about school closures caused by ongoing conflict and the effect this will have on their children's education. Likewise, community members are concerned about the lack of schools in all villages, with children having to travel to other villages to attend school.

In one conversation, a community member explains that schools throughout the state are being closed because of armed groups who come through villages, especially Ta'ang schools. In this case, the community member is involved in an initiative to open up charity schools for children who are unable to attend their normal schools. However, the initiative is under constant threat of closure by armed groups. As a result of these difficult conditions, community members notice that dropout rates have increased, and young people are turning to drugs or leaving school to find work abroad.

As a solution, communities want better infrastructure and resources for education. In several conversations, education is identified as key to ensuring that future generations remain committed to the peace process, and to community development in Northern Shan State. Most importantly, ending conflict in Northern Shan is necessary to ensure that education would not be interrupted and young people can have greater opportunity to get an education.

There are no schools in our region. Children are going to school in other villages and parents are worried about their kids because there is no safety on the roads. Furthermore, this option is only available for middle school. We have so many difficulties for sending them to high school.

- Male and female Ta'ang farmers in Lashio Township

More skilled health care workers and health infrastructure

There is no good road transport in the region. War has become frequent and that makes it difficult for us to go to the villages for health care services.

- Group of Ta'ang females, including a health care worker, in Namhkam Township

In several conversations, particularly with health care workers, provision and access to health care is a main concern. There is a lack of clinics in villages and, where there are clinics, there are only few skilled health care workers available. Community members explain that with increasing demand for health care, more pressure is exerted on the existing services.

These deficiencies are exacerbated by the consequences of ongoing conflict, such as the restrictions on freedom of movement due to fears of encountering armed groups while travelling between and within villages to reach the clinic for treatment. Similarly, fighting in or near village areas is constantly putting communities at risk of being injured. Communities therefore, hope that the peace process will be successful so that the fighting can stop and they can travel more easily to other places. They also acknowledge that only a successful peace process will provide the conditions for more clinics to be built and health care workers to be available in their areas.

We do not have any clinic in this region so if we have health problems we have to go to a different village.

- Female Ta'ang farmers in Namhsan Township

Chapter 7

SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

*There is real peace when there is social development
in the region. (Real peace) is measured by
people's happiness.*

- Nine Pa'O and Danu male and female farmers from
Yetsout Township



Southern Shan State shares an international border with Thailand, and domestic borders with Northern Shan State, Eastern Shan State, Kayah State, Kayin State, Mandalay Division, and Naypyidaw. It is divided into three main districts: Loilen, Langkho, and Taunggyi, where the state capital, Taunggyi, is found. It also contains two self-administered zones, Danu and Pa'O.



Source: Myanmar Information Management Unit [1]

There are approximately 2.4 million people living in southern Shan State.[2] The most sizeable ethnic groups in this area are the Shan, Pa'O, Danu, Intha, Taungyoe, Bamar, Kachin, and Karen. People of Chinese and Indian ethnicity also reside in southern Shan State.

Communities living in southern Shan State have experienced violent conflict for over six decades. During World War II, Japanese forces occupied this region. After the defeat of the Japanese, Shan State found itself affected by the domestic affairs of China. Having suffered heavy losses in the Chinese civil war,¹ groups of armed Kuomintang members entered eastern Shan State in the early 1950s. Burmese troops were assigned to combat the presence of Kuomintang forces, resulting in heavily militarisation of this area from the mid-1950s to the 1960s. [3][4]

The negative impact of increased violent conflict on the civilian population greatly influenced Shan nationalist groups. At a meeting in 1957, these groups advocated for secession from the Union of Myanmar.² In 1959, the Shan rebellion broke out as the Shan nationalist movement sought to build a united, independent, and democratic Shan State. Several Shan ethnic armed groups formed to pursue this cause. [5][6]

In 1964, the Shan State Army (SSA) was formed with the merger of the Shan State Independence Army, the Shan National United Front, and the Kokang Revolutionary Force. This became the most influential ethnic armed group in southern Shan. The Pa'O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO) established in 1968 to fight for the rights of the Pa'O, was another major ethnic armed group. [7]

The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) also had a significant presence in Shan State during this period, and from the 1970s to the 1980s engaged in hostilities with the Tatmadaw. The CPB, which had been providing the SSA with supplies and ammunition, dissolved in 1989. This contributed greatly to the SSA's decision to enter a ceasefire agreement with the central government. [8]

Several SSA soldiers subsequently joined the Mong Tai Army (MTA), another well-organised armed group in southern Shan State.[9] Soon after, the

¹ From the late 1920s, the nationalist Kuomintang forces loyal to the government led by Chiang Kai-Shek fought against the Communist Party of China in a civil war that affected the whole country. During World War II, these forces stopped fighting to repel the Japanese Army. The civil war resumed in 1946, after hostilities with Japan ended.

² In keeping with the 1948 Constitution of the Union of Burma that recognized the right of Shan State to secede from the Union ten years after the Constitution comes into operation.

Tatmadaw concentrated its forces on the MTA. When the MTA surrendered to the Tatmadaw in 1995, factions within the MTA who did not want to surrender formed the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S). In 1999, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) was formed to act as the political wing of the SSA-S. [10]

From 1996 to 1998, clashes between the Tatmadaw and the SSA-S intensified and resulted in the mass displacement of approximately 300,000 civilians in southern Shan State.[11] The SSA-S and the central government signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement in 2011 but clashes broke out in 2014.

The RCSS is among the ethnic armed groups that signed the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). However, after the RCSS signed the NCA, it engaged in violent clashes with the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and the Tatmadaw in northern Shan. While the violent conflict remains in northern Shan, there has been spillover effects in southern Shan, as some IDPs from the north have moved to the south. [12]

Shan State contains vast reserves of timber, coal, and precious stones. The state's economy relies heavily on natural resource extraction. However, decades of violent conflict have limited the livelihoods and living conditions of the residents. While their main economic activities are mining, forestry, and agriculture, the Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment of 2009-2010 shows that Shan State has the fourth highest poverty index in the country, with 33% of residents living below the poverty line. [13]

Illegal drug trade also serves as an important source of funds for the state's economy, particularly through the production and sale of opium, heroin and methamphetamines. As a result, illegal drug use is prevalent in this region.

The Salween River runs through Shan State and it is the longest free-flowing river in mainland Southeast Asia. Inle Lake, the country's second largest lake, is located in Shan State and creates fertile soil for agriculture. Since the signing of the bilateral ceasefire agreements between the RCSS and the central government in 2011, these areas in southern Shan State have become more accessible and the government has agreed to several large-scale development projects such as mining and hydropower dams construction in the area. Several foreign companies maintain a presence in Shan State, working on these development projects. [14]

At present, the large-scale hydropower dam projects on the Salween River and the mining projects are among the top concerns for residents in Southern Shan State. One of the biggest projects is the upper Paunglaung dam. Several villages have already reported being evicted from their land, and suffer from the resulting unemployment and displacement serving to increase their hardship. Other villages have complained about the environmental impact of these projects, specifically the pollution of land, water sources, and the corresponding effects these have had on the health of residents. Another major issue affecting residents of southern Shan State is the El Nino phenomenon which has caused a severe drought in the area during the dry season.

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KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Between March and April 2016, four teams each consisting of two listeners travelled to villages in the townships of Hseising, Nant Sam, Kholan, Pinlaung, Youk Saw, and Pekhoh. These five female and three male listeners had forty-nine conversations with 406 participants.

62% of the participants are male, while 36% are female. 1% did not provide any information.

Table 33. Gender of participants		
Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	253	62
Female	148	36
Not available	5	1
Total	406	99

A significant number of participants (33.7%) identified as Kayan, with Pa'O and Burmese making up 16% and 12.8% respectively. The details of the ethnic makeup of the participants are reflected in the table below.

Table 34. Ethnicity of participants		
Ethnic group	Number of Participants	Percentage
Kayan	137	33.7
Pa'O	65	16
Burmese	52	12.8
Danu	19	4.7
Shan	17	4.2
Innthar	10	2.5
Lahu	9	2.1
Not available	97	24
Total	406	100

Most of the participants are between the ages of 21-30 (28%), 31-40 (23.4%), 41-50 (23%), and 51-60 (14%). The remaining participants are within the ages of 61-70 (4.4%), 18-20 (4.2%), and 71-above (1.5%). 1.2% of participants did not provide information about their age.

Table 35. Age range of participants		
Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
18-20	17	4.2
21-30	114	28
31-40	95	23.4
41-50	93	23
51-60	58	14
61-70	18	4.4
71 - above	6	1.5
Not available	5	1.2
Total	406	99.7

A large number of participants (45%) attended primary school, middle school (23%), or high school (16%). The remaining attended college (6%), attended classes in a monastery (1%), or had no formal education (5.7%). 3.3% did not provide any information about their educational background.

Table 36. Educational background of participants		
Educational background	Number of participants	Percentage
None	23	5.7
Primary	183	45
Middle School	92	23
High School	65	16
University	24	6
Other (monastic)	5	1
Not available	14	3.3
Total	406	100

The majority of the participants identify as Buddhist (75%) while the remaining identified as Catholic (18%), Christian (2%), or other (2%). 2.7% of the participants did not state their religion.

More than half the participants (55%) work as farmers. Other participants work as local administrators (5%), in education (2.5%), as vendors (3%), or as youth leaders (2%). A sizeable number (30%) did not give any information about their occupation. The different occupations of the participants are listed in the table below.

Table 37. Livelihood of participants		
Livelihood	Number of participants	Percentage
Farmers	222	55
Community leaders and local administrators	20	5
Teachers/education	10	2.5
Priests and religious leaders	2	0.5
Vendors/Brokers/Merchants	13	3
Civil society and non-governmental organisation workers	1	0.2
Health workers	2	0.5
Youth leader	8	2
Student	2	0.5
Not available	122	30
None	4	1
Total	406	100

MAIN THEMES

1. On the Peace Process

Positive developments since the peace process

After the ceasefire agreement, villagers were no longer required to act as porters and there was no more suffering from the fighting. The community can live, work, and travel more safely and freely. Most of the men from the community experienced having to porter [in the past] and sometimes, they were gone for years.

- Conversation between five Pa'O men from Hseseing Township

One of the strongest themes to emerge is acknowledgment of the positive changes that have occurred in communities since the peace process began. Several community members mention past difficulties, when they had to live with the effects of violent conflict. They bring up feelings of insecurity and living in fear of being caught in the middle of the fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, and being separated from their families. They also mention the trauma that they experienced.

With the ceasefire, fighting has stopped in their areas. This ceasefire enables community members to travel more freely to go to their farms or other villages, and to work in a more secure environment. Children are also able to travel to school. Communities also notice more freedom to talk about politics in public spaces, and there are several villagers who acknowledge a slight improvement with the human rights situation.

Communities also mention slight improvements in provision of social services from the government, such as construction of new schools and health care clinics and better access to electricity in several communities. Villagers also observe the construction and repair of roads, which has significantly improved their lives and allowed for greater freedom of movement.

These new roads also grant access for development agencies and NGOs to reach previously isolated villages.

Improved armed group and civilian relations

I want the Tatmadaw to protect the community and be an army of dignity. Then, I want to see the community being able to go freely, live, and work in peace and safety.

- Conversation between five Pa'O men from Hseseing Township

Communities narrate past experiences where soldiers from the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups passing through their villages would take their property, or require them to pay “war tax”, give food, or provide free labour. With the ceasefire in place, several communities notice that there are less soldiers traveling through villages. This coincided with a reduction in cases of villagers being forced to serve as porters or required to provide free labour. A community observes soldiers still pass through their village to take materials and water, and require villagers to work for them without compensation.

Some communities talk about how relationships between armed groups and civilian have improved, with one community describing how different armed groups and some Tatmadaw officers joined their cultural celebration. Another community shares that the RCSS opened a liaison office in their area and invited residents to come and talk about their needs.

Communities repeatedly mention their hope for the Tatmadaw to become a national army that protects them. Some admit they still feel anxious about the possibility that fighting will happen again. They also fear that fighting could break out between different armed groups in their areas, particularly over the issue of their territory.

Genuine and sustainable peace

We do not want the new generation to suffer like us.

- Six Kayan men and women from Pekhonn Township

Communities unanimously agree that they want to experience genuine and sustainable peace. This peace is necessary for their state to prosper and for their lives to improve. For the country to attain this peace, communities emphasise the need for the government, the Tatmadaw, and the ethnic armed groups to strengthen the trust between and among them.

Communities also expect the government to share more information about the progress of the peace process. Several community members said that they would like to contribute and support the peace process though they would need to know about the peace process in order to do so.

Negotiating parties fully committed to peace

Some communities are concerned about the sustainability of the peace process due to continued fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups in Northern Shan State and in other states. Their previous experience with violent conflict has made them fearful that armed groups may fight again.

To this end, communities request the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups to fully commit themselves to peace and to listen to each other's needs during the negotiations. They also express their desire for these parties to go beyond their own interests and consider the needs of the communities they represent.

The question “do you really want peace?” should be raised to every group that is part of the peace process. They need to build trust among them. We want to live, work, and travel safely and freely.

- Conversation between two Shan male farmers from Namt San Township

Communities also mention the need for the leadership of the Tatmadaw and the different ethnic armed groups to make sure their soldiers strictly follow the conditions of the ceasefire. As one participant expressed, *“soldiers should deeply understand the essence of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, and everyone should have a desire to stop the civil war.”*

Equality and non-discrimination

If I had a chance to participate in the peace process, I would tell them to treat every ethnic group equally, to value all individuals, and to make sure that there is no more discrimination or marginalization.

- Conversation between two female Lahu from Namt San Township

Communities recognise the importance of showing respect for different cultures and religions. There is a recognised need to address the tensions between the different ethnic groups in their area. In order to reduce this tension,

communities request the government to promote equality among different ethnic and religious groups by providing more opportunities for minorities to participate in government. They also mention the need for the government to ensure that there is equal social development between the different states and regions.

This theme resonated strongly with the Kayan communities who live in remote mountainous areas. They perceive the lack of government social welfare initiatives such as unavailability of access to electricity and lack of schools, health care centres, teachers and health care workers in their areas as a form of discrimination. The lack of high quality roads particularly makes these communities feel isolated from other communities.

Self-administration

Several community members believe that self-administration is a key component to genuine peace. They believe that this will be addressed by having a true federal union that will allow all ethnic groups in the country to govern themselves. They believe that a true federal union will give them the space to find leaders who know what their challenges are and who can find solutions to these challenges. Such leaders will also ensure the right of residents to manage the natural resources found in their state and to obtain a fair share of the profits from their extraction.

2. Challenges

Challenging economic conditions

Our community's livelihood very much relies on agriculture. We have to suffer from low prices for our local products. The water we use for farming comes only from the rain and when there is less rain, the quantity and the quality of our produce decreases. It would help if we have proper area for farming, high quality seeds, better farming techniques, sufficient capital, and access to the markets.

- Conversation between twenty-five Kayan men and women farmers from
Pinlaung Township

Overwhelmingly, communities identify the present economic conditions as their biggest challenge. According to them, most of the residents rely on farming and agriculture for their livelihood. Unfortunately, most of the farms have no proper irrigation systems and rely on rain where erratic weather conditions affect their ability to grow crops. They expect support from government to modernize agricultural practices to help farmers increase production.

Farmers also cite their need to borrow money from local businessmen to buy expensive fertilizers and pesticides. When they sell their produce to brokers at low prices or when they do not have any harvest because of natural disasters, they still have to pay off these debts. As a result, they are left with very little profit to support their families. They thus ask for government support to regulate market prices for their goods so that they can get a fair price for their products. They also asked the government to build markets closer to their areas so they have a place to sell their goods.

Another challenge they commonly raise is the lack of job opportunities in southern Shan State. Communities are particularly concerned about the high unemployment rates among young people and women. Some communities assume that the lack of opportunities for economic advancement is the primary reason for young people leaving their communities to find work abroad.

Imposition of “taxes” by different authorities adds to the communities’ economic concerns. Several community members spoke of authorities requiring villagers to pay a “timber tax” anytime they cut down wood from the forests for personal use.

Pervasive drug use

We are deeply concerned about young people in our community because they are using drugs.

- Seven Shan men and women farmers from Pinlaung Township

Another issue that greatly affects southern Shan State is the prevalence of illegal drug use in the communities. Communities identify young people as the group most at risk from illegal drug addiction and they see this as a serious threat to their future. Several community members connect the lack of jobs and high unemployment rate to the increasing incidence of illegal drug dealing and abuse among young people.

Communities thus ask the government to formulate and implement effective policy measures to address this issue and rehabilitate drug users. They also spoke of the need for government to implement a proper crop substitution program so that farmers growing poppy have viable livelihood alternatives and can stop producing opium.

Environmental concerns

Electricity is very important to reduce forest depletion.

- Conversation between five young Kayan males from La Pin Lon Township

Communities also recognise the environmental destruction happening in their state. They would like to see social development that is in harmony with nature in their communities. The main concern they identify is deforestation caused by residents who have to use wood to meet energy needs as they do not have access to electricity.

Several communities also cite the agricultural practice of swidden farming or burning down forests to clear land for agriculture. Communities also burn down trees for charcoal production. Some communities note how these practices sometimes cause wildfires that lead to even greater destruction in the forests.

While recognising these negative effects, communities explain that they have no choice but to continue cutting down forests to meet their daily needs for cooking. They want the government to address this issue by ensuring access to electricity. They also want the government to help by prohibiting groups from engaging in large-scale logging operations and smuggling timber. They also ask for better regulations for logging companies operating in their areas.

Water scarcity

It is just like feeling deadly thirsty in the sea. Because this Paunglaung area is close enough to the Paunglaung dam, and yet the water from this dam is not clean at all for us to use.

- 26 male and female Bamar farmers from Paunglaung Township

Another serious environmental challenge is water scarcity, particularly the lack of drinking water. Communities say rivers in southern Shan State are drying up

and making it impossible for residents to use the water to irrigate their rice paddies. Several villages also have to travel very far to obtain drinking water.

Various communities cited the upper Panglaung dam construction as the reason for water scarcity in their areas. Communities believe that the dam polluted the water so it could no longer be used for drinking. They also attribute the scarcity of water to the presence of the dam, which blocks the water from flowing down river.

Land issues

Because the price of land is increasing, we are facing issues of land grabbing.

- Conversation between two Lahu female farmers from Namp San Township

Communities also cite land grabbing as among the challenges they face. Some believe because they do not have legally recognised and registered farming areas, they are vulnerable to groups who can force them to leave their land at any time. They talk about the hardships they face in understanding and availing land ownership and registration procedures.

Communities around the Paunglaung area mention that the dam construction has resulted in the mass relocation of several villages. Apart from losing their homes, these villagers also lost their farmlands. The loss of these lands has meant that entire villages have had to resort to burning down forestland to convert to farmland, which contributes to the environmental destruction and deforestation.

Gender discrimination

The rate of educated women is so low. Poverty prevents women from getting sufficient access to health care services, education, and job opportunities. Whatever plans the government has come up with to ensure that women have equal access to government employment, in reality, women continue to be marginalized. Government policies still do not address the problems that women face. People still believe that women should not be involved in government. Sometimes, husbands prevent women from getting involved in micro-financing initiatives by community-based organisations.

- Conversation between Kayan female and male farmers from Pinlaung Township

Several female community members also raise the challenges they face as a result of gender discrimination and the imposition of strict gender roles. Women have insufficient access to health care services and have even less employment opportunities, resulting in higher unemployment rates for women in communities. Female participants also cite low rates of educated women in communities because there are fewer opportunities for girls to go to school. This, they believe, is what makes women feel less confident to speak up in public forums or to participate in discussions relating to governance.

Some community members cite the case of a female village administrator whose abilities to lead is constantly questioned by people from other villages because she is a woman. They also shared instances when husbands prevent their wives from pursuing micro-financing opportunities offered in their communities so they can open their own businesses.

These community members ask for government assistance so that women can have more opportunities to participate in formulating social development and economic plans and policies.

3. Hopes and aspirations

More social development

The most important and necessary issues are to have good roads for transportation and communication infrastructure, electricity supply, schools and health care services in the region, and equal spending from the government between the cities and rural villages. (The government) needs to improve the education sector with adequate teachers for the region. We also need to get electricity.

- Conversation between five Kayan men and women from Pekhon township

Repeatedly, communities note that while they no longer experience fighting in their region, they continue to suffer due to lack of social development. They believe that an important part of the peace process is having government authorities listen to the needs of the communities. They express their hope that the new government would provide more support to the communities.

The issue participants most often cited is the need to build or improve roads to help residents to travel, transport produce, and stimulate trade with other villages and towns. This issue is essential for those living in remote mountain areas and feel cut off from other villages.

Other concerns they mention are the need for villages to be connected to the electric grid so that they can have access to electricity, improvements to communication infrastructure and facilities, and government assistance in addressing the water scarcity problem, particularly during the dry season.

Better education and health care

In various conversations, communities speak of the need for more school facilities to be built in their villages. They also request for government support in providing better training for teachers and in assigning trained teachers to teach in the schools, especially in the most remote areas. Several villagers also recognise the importance of improving the economic situation of families to ensure better-educated children as some parents had no choice but to pull their children out of school so they can work to help the family survive.

Villagers share the belief that provision of better education and job opportunities are keys to addressing the increase of illegal drug use among young people. They also spoke of educated young people as being an integral component to building a better nation.

Communities also ask for government assistance in improving health care services, particularly by building clinics. They also expect authorities to ensure that health workers are sufficiently trained and assigned to run these clinics. They also require assistance in making sure that these clinics are properly stocked with necessary medical supplies.

Equal development between towns and villages

Our village is not too far from the city, and yet the local administrative offices are neglected in our village. This seems to be discrimination.

- Seven Danu and Pa'O men and women from Yetsout Township

Closely connected to the desire for more social development, communities observe the large disparity of levels of development between towns and villages. In their view, the government allocates a higher percentage of the national budget to develop the big towns and ignore remote villages. While the towns have good roads, strong mobile phone reception, and access to electricity, villagers have to travel on dirt roads, do not have the ability to use mobile phones, and do not have access to electricity. They interpret the large gap in development as evidence that the previous government discriminated against them.

Accountable, civilian government

We must know about the government that we voted for.

- Young male Pa'O village leader from Hseseing Township

Communities repeatedly speak of wanting to see a reduction of the military's power and participation in government processes. Many community members want to ultimately see a civilian government that will pursue real democracy. They also want the government to strengthen rule of law throughout the country.

Communities share their perceptions of corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power by officials from different levels of government, which explains why most villagers mistrust government officials. Villagers note that even in self-administered areas, there is still corruption. They ask the government to seriously address this issue.

Even if they say there is peace in the country, there is still instability. There is a lack of transparency when it comes to the government development budget and a need for this budget to be implemented for the community (real action).

- Five male Pa'o farmers, youth leaders and elders from Hseseing Township

In this vein, community members mention their desire for greater transparency when it comes to the national budget. Several villagers said they want elected officials to properly implement the national budget, particularly the amounts allocated for social development, so that they can benefit from the effects of national spending.

Unity among ethnic groups

When the government development project came, the price of land increased and this caused a conflict over land. Then, many conflicts occurred – between the Shan and the Lahu ethnic groups, the government and the community, and the Shan and local people.

- Conversation between five Lahu men from Kholan Township

Communities express that they feel disconnected from other communities within their state. They refer to the tensions currently affecting some ethnic groups, particularly the Pa'O and the Shan, as well as the Shan and the Lahu. Some of these tensions arose because of competition over resources such as land. Others explain the tensions as a result of ethnic groups expressing aspirations for having their own self-administered areas. Whatever the reason, many communities convey their hope that the different ethnic groups can develop stronger relationships, respect each other, and become more united.

Chapter 8

KAYAH STATE

We want the government and the armed groups to discuss human rights, equality, freedom of movement and the removal of restrictions on travel. We want to live and work without fear and we want a peace process. We want them to discuss these issues at the negotiating table.

A ceasefire is the most important.

- A man from Demoso Township



Kayah State borders Shan State to the north, Kayin State to the south and Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand to the east.



Source: The Myanmar Information Management Unit [1]

Kayah State, previously known as Karenni State, is the smallest state in Myanmar, both in terms of geographic size and population. The 2014 Myanmar Census records that the population of Kayah State is 286,627. The majority of residents belong to the Karenni ethnic group, also known as the Red Karen. There are also sizable populations of Bamar, Shan, Karen, Pa'O, Intha, mixed races, and other groups living throughout the state.

The state is composed of two main districts, Loikaw and Bawlakhe, and seven townships: Bawlakhe, Demoso, Hpasawng, Hpruso, Mese, Shadaw, and Loikaw. The state capital, Loikaw, is located in Loikaw township.

The main ethnic armed organisation based in Kayah is the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and its armed wing is known as the Karenni Army. Pro-independence groups formed the KNPP in 1957, seeking to protect the rights of the Karenni people and fight for state autonomy. Other ethnic armed groups that operated in the state are the Kayan National Guard, the Karenni National People's Liberation Front (both groups subsequently transformed into Border Guard Forces under the control of the Tatmadaw), and the Kayan New Land Party. Between 1957 and 2013, the Tatmadaw was engaged in low-intensity armed conflict in Kayah against these armed groups. [2]

Six decades of violent conflict between the KNPP, other ethnic armed groups in Kayah, and the Tatmadaw have forcefully displaced thousands of people, many of whom sought refuge in camps on the Thai side of the border. The longstanding violent conflict has uprooted approximately 10-15% of the state population, with 34,600 people internally displaced in Kayah, while 16,074 refugees are living in camps in Thailand.[3] Those who remained living in Kayah State while the conflict was ongoing were subjected to "tax" and forced labour by the different armed groups operating in their areas.

The enduring conflict has also caused uneven economic development and access to social services within the state. This disparity in living conditions is particularly stark between the capital, Loikaw, which has generally been under the control of the Union Government, and the remote villages, especially those under the control of the NSAGs. [4]

Different ethnic armed groups in Kayah State agreed to a ceasefire with the Myanmar government in 1994 and 1995 but the agreements fell through as fighting resumed later in the year. The KNPP continued to engage in armed

conflict throughout the 1990s until the 2012 round of peace talks. The KNPP and the central government agreed to an initial state level ceasefire agreement in March 2012. The KNPP and the central government subsequently signed another ceasefire in March 2013. [5]

The KNPP is one of the 17 founding members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT). Meetings between the parties through an on-going peace process have taken discussions further over subsequent years in developing agreement points on important issues in the state. One of the more challenging issues that remain unresolved in talks between the central government, the ethnic armed groups, and the communities is the management and profit-sharing arrangements of the state's natural resources. Another issue pertains to the withdrawal of Tatmadaw forces. [6]

After the 21st Panglong conference, clashes broke out between the Tatmadaw and a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) on the border areas of Kayah State. Consequently, thousands of civilians were forced to temporarily relocate to neighbouring Thailand. These clashes have revived fears in Kayah that they will again be drawn into the conflict. [7]

Kayah is a very mountainous state, rich in natural resources such as teak and minerals. Much of the population depends on farming for their livelihoods. The major crops are rice, corn, sesame, garlic, and vegetables. Despite the state's rich soil, unstable market prices, poor agricultural productivity due to flooding and drought, and poor irrigation systems have left many residents struggle to meet their subsistence needs. [8][9]

These unsustainable economic conditions have caused Kayah residents to plant opium and engage in the manufacturing of illegal drugs. Other residents are involved in small-scale mining and logging activities, which have caused deforestation, pollution, and environmental degradation in parts of the state. Most recently, there have been occurrences of illegal logging despite a nationwide logging ban. [10][11]

Kayah produces hydropower via the Lawpita dam, initiated in the 1950s through a bilateral war reparation agreement between Japan and Myanmar. The Lawpita dam was the first large-scale hydropower dam project in Myanmar. It produces 24% of the country's hydropower capacity and is an important source of energy for the capital.[12] Plans for the construction of the Thanlwin (Salween)

dam are underway with objections from the committee of Shan State Unity (CSSU) collaborating with the public, CSOs, and environmental organizations. The reasons for the objection are concerns over the potential environmental damage and possible relocation for communities living in the area [13].

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KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

From March to April 2016, five listening teams comprising of two listeners per team travelled to villages in the townships of Bawlakhe, Ywar Thit, Shadaw, Mese, Demoso, and Hpruso. These ten listeners, consisting of six female and four male listeners, conducted forty-two conversations with 256 participants.

64.1% of the participants are male, while 35.9% are female.

Table 38. Gender of participants		
Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	164	64.1%
Female	92	35.9%
Total	256	100%

The majority of participants (48.8%) identify as ethnic Kayah. Other ethnic groups represented are the Kayan (12.9%), Shan (6.3%), Karen (3.5%), Kayaw (1.9%), and Bamar (1.2%). Other participants come from the Lisu, Manaw, Shan Yin-tale, Inthar, and Kachin ethnic groups. Due to their small numbers, these groups are classified under the category “others”.

Table 39. Ethnicity of participants		
Ethnic group	Number of Participants	Percentage
Kayah	125	48.8%
Kayan	33	12.9%
Shan	16	6%
Karen	9	3.5%
Kayaw	5	1.9%
Kayah-Kayaw	7	1.6%
Burman	3	1%
Others	8	5.8%
Not available	46	18%
Total	256	100.8%

The ages of participants range from 18 to above 70. These are broken down as follows: 41–50 (31.3%), 31–40 (28.1%), 51–60 (14.5%), 21–30 (13.3%), 61–70 (7.0%), and 18–20 (1.9%). The remaining participants (2.7%) did not disclose their age.

Table 40. Age range of participants		
Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
18-20	5	1.9
21-30	34	13.3
31-40	72	28.1
41-50	80	31.3
51-60	37	14.5
61-70	18	7.0
71 - above	3	1.2
Not available	7	2.7
Total	256	100

Most participants had a primary school education (16.4%), with those attending middle school at 17.6%, and high school at 14.8%. 4.7% say they attended university. A significant number of participants (16.4%) did not receive any formal education, while 18.8% did not disclose this information.

Table 41. Education background of participants		
Educational background	Number of participants	Percentage
None	42	16.4
Primary	71	27.7
Middle School	45	17.6
High School	38	14.8
University	12	4.7
Not available	48	18.8
Total	256	100

A majority of participants (37%) are of the Buddhist faith, followed by Christianity (31%), Catholicism (25%), Animist (6%) and Takhontai (1.2%).

Table 42. Religion of participants		
Religion	Number of Participants	Percentage
Buddhism	94	37%
Catholic	63	25%
Christian	79	31%
Takhontai	3	1.2%
Animist	15	6%
Not available	2	0.7%
Total	256	100.9%

More than half of the participants depend on farming and agricultural work (61.7%), or act as community leaders and local administrators (11.7%), teachers (4.3%), religious leaders (3.5%), or work as vendors (3.1%). A small percentage works for civil society, non-governmental organizations (1.2%), or in health care (1.2%).

Table 43. Livelihood of participants		
Livelihood	Number of participants	Percentage
Farmers	158	61.7%
Community leaders and local administrators	30	11.7%
Teachers	11	4.3%
Priests and religious leaders	9	3.5%
Vendors	8	3.1%
Civil society and non-governmental organisation workers	3	1.2%
Health workers	3	1.2%
Others	4	1.6%
Not available	30	11.7%
Total	256	100%

MAIN THEMES

1. On the peace process

Genuine strides towards peace

People want genuine peace. People hope that they all would be benefited when peace is achieved.

- A conversation between six Kayah men in Loikaw Township

Throughout conversations, the yearning for progress towards peace is consistently raised. They repeatedly say, *'we want genuine peace, we do not want to hear the sound of guns.'* Often times, communities equate genuine peace with reconciliation between the government and the ethnic armed groups, not only in terms of a ceasefire but *'a ceasefire within their own hearts'*. They emphasize the need for a sincere desire from all actors to stop fighting and to reconcile their differences.

They also call on the government and the armed groups to act in accordance with what they say and comply with the ceasefire agreements. According to the participants, there used to be soldiers (from the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups) stationed close to their villages who caused them fear and anxiety. These soldiers used to demand that the villagers provide food and shelter. If the negotiating parties are talking about peace, they need to act more peacefully towards communities.

Participants also equate peace with stability, which in turn translates to having a livelihood that provides for their needs and the needs of their families. They frequently call for the development of Kayah State, specifically in the economic, education, and health sectors.

Improvements in freedom of movement

For people, the freedom of movement is a measure of success. For armed groups, if there is no fighting, they would not lose people or ammunition, so it would be their victory too.

- A conversation between six men and eight women in Bawlakhe Township

Communities constantly mention improvements on the freedom of movement that is a result of the ceasefire. Participants relate how the construction or repair of roads has brought easier access to hospitals and clinics. These roads also make it easier for villagers to buy basic necessities such as rice, oil, and salt, whereas in the past, they could not even '*buy batteries for their flash lights*'. Another beneficial outcome is that NGOs and CSOs are able to reach their villages, bringing aid, helping with the construction of schools and low-cost houses, and providing training. Although there have been positive steps with the construction of roads, communities expect more and sturdier roads to be built.

Additionally, participants mention they feel more secure when traveling because of a decrease in instances of checkpoint taxing, harassment, and intimidation. There are also fewer landmines on roads.

Improvements in delivery of social services

The current political situation, educational facilities, social and economic situation, health care facilities, and road transportation have improved to some extent. We expect more improvement in the future.

- A middle-aged Karen woman in Bawlakhe Township

There are also improvements in the delivery of social services. Participants repeatedly mention experiencing improvements in access to health care, education, and electricity although at a very a minimal level. Most notably, participants say, '*since 2015 the government has built 15 houses that they call low-cost housing*' to provide basic shelter for communities. Participants express appreciation for these improvements but note that there are still considerable steps to be made to improve the level of development in communities.

Renewal of conflict

All armed groups mistrust each other. We worry about the possibility of renewal of fighting as troops have not been withdrawn yet.

- From a group of Kayah participants in Shadaw Township

While communities acknowledge improvements since the implementation of the bilateral ceasefire agreement, the relative peace and development they are currently experiencing is also a source of anxiety. Many participants feel

that they are teetering on a precipice and are worried about the fragility of the current peace. A recurring theme in conversations is the fear of the renewal of conflict given that some armed groups have not signed the nationwide ceasefire agreement. Communities express that the trauma of conflict has taken its toll on their society and discern that if conflict were to erupt, they would bear the brunt of the consequences.

Community contribution to the peace process

We support the groups who make peace and hold the ceasefire. When there is peace, we will have a better economy. We all want peace.

- A Kayah woman in Bawlakhe Township

Communities want to contribute to peace in their state. Often times, they indicate that peace requires people to look inward and transform themselves first, then the family unit, the village, state level, and eventually the country. Community members believe that each person is responsible for creating a safer country and that the responsibility rests upon the actions and or inactions of the individual. These actions or inactions in turn affect or influence the macro level, from individuals in the villages all the way to groups or political parties that implement policies. Communities stress that understanding the needs of the people is at the core of becoming a peaceful country.

Communities want to contribute physically and monetarily in developing their villages and in support of the peace process. They also want to contribute by making sure that the younger generation is properly educated with the aim of 'opening their eyes' and making them more aware of what is happening in the country so they can help improve the situation.

If the war resumes, they must come and fight the people first.

- An older man in Bawlakhe Township

Ethnic armed groups have come to stay at my house when they travel. We support and welcome them as they make peace. One of my relatives is a member of the military, but we do not discriminate against any group.

- A woman from Demoso Township

The desire for a peaceful community is so unwavering that some participants commit to openly oppose those who advocate war. They also commit to supporting those who want a ceasefire and who propose economic development for their villages. Many people say they do not discriminate between soldiers whether they are from armed groups or the Tatmadaw. As long as these soldiers want peace, they will support them by giving them food and shelter.

2. Challenges

Poor electricity and road infrastructure

Are we too naïve or is our government bad? Lawpita hydropower dam (located in Kayah) generates electricity but we are living with candles. Our Kayah State – our region produces electricity from our areas but we are stuck in the dark.

- A conversation with one Kayan man and woman in Bawlakhe Township

When discussing the most immediate necessity for communities, participants unanimously agree that providing villages with electricity is the most vital need. Time and time again participants voice the same complaint that while Kayah State generates a substantial amount of hydropower energy, the residents still live by candle light at night. What makes it worse for participants is knowing that most villages have electrical poles and the electrical connection, while they do not have access to power. Further exacerbating the situation are the high costs that residents have to pay in order to access electricity. To illustrate this, participants spoke of the exorbitant costs of purchasing a personal generator for their homes. Over and above that, community members also need to invest in the electric grid to link the village's generators. These are all expenses borne by the villagers. To make a difficult situation even worse, some participants note that other villages in Myanmar pay less for the same electrical infrastructure.

Another concern they raise is the need to build more roads or improve the quality of the ones already constructed. They specifically request for an extension of a main road to Taunggoo. Participants also express discontent over the expensive transportation costs and unsafe roads.

Prior community consultation for projects

While they desire development, Kayah residents also want to be consulted prior to the implementation of development projects. For example, members of the community have noticed that with development such as road construction, destruction of the environment is the cost they must incur. There is a growing realisation that the environment must be respected and they want the government to be conscious of this too.

Drug abuse

Peace process brings with it good and bad for the people. We have more drug-addicted people as a result of the peace process. Because of drug addiction, people become poorer and take the wrong path. We need to make sure that there is a safe environment so children and young people are protected.

- An older male participant in Maesot Township

Community members further note a rise in drug proliferation and abuse following the implementation of the bilateral ceasefire agreement. The general consensus is that the stability brought about by the bilateral ceasefire agreement has allowed for greater freedom of movement within the state and country. This in turn provides drug traffickers with opportunities to transport drugs more easily. Communities also report that some armed groups allow villagers to grow opium to earn a living.

The easy availability of illegal drugs in villages has obvious detrimental consequences to the population. Communities note the elevated crime rates and the rising number of illegal drug addicts, especially amongst the youth. They observe a correlation between low employment rates and dependence on illicit substances; they fear that if the younger generation are not employed, they may seek solace in illegal drugs.

As addicts pose a security threat to the community, with rising instances of theft and other violent behaviours, the community asks the government to provide rehabilitation and job opportunities to thwart the prevalence of drugs abuse. They need illegal drug awareness campaigns in their villages. They also ask the government to provide substitute crops for the farmers who rely on growing opium for their survival.

Informal taxation is a heavy burden

As there is extortion, taxation, as well as oppression, the local people do not trust them.

- A conversation between six men and one woman in Demoso Township

Villagers throughout the state share that they are subject to various forms of taxation by multiple authorities. These authorities are either the Tatmadaw or ethnic armed groups. Some participants narrate witnessing how these taxing authorities demonstrate preferential treatment towards their own families at checkpoints by either giving them a free pass or charging them less, creating even more resentment amongst the community.

Participants further report instances of 'taxation' connected to logging activities for personal consumption, such as building a house or starting a fire. They are expected to pay 'taxes' to the Tatmadaw, ethnic armed groups, or forestry department officials. This level of rampant corruption has created an environment of fear that 'tax collection' by different armed groups in the same area can cause a renewal of conflict. They fear that armed groups will start fighting over taxing rights and territory.

Communities feel frustration for being taxed even though they have little money to spare. They recount instances in the past, during times of fighting, when they had to provide food and shelter to combatants. They believe it is time for the government and the armed groups to pay their dues, to help their state and country.

Communities endure abuse by multiple forms of authority

I had five guns pointed at me. I defended myself as armed men questioned me about whether I had a boyfriend or not. They suspected I was connected with the rebels. I told them anyone can have a boyfriend and they should know with whom they are dealing with: the people or the soldiers. I told them if they want to kill someone, they could kill me but not my parents.

- Disclosed by a Kayah woman in Demoso Township

These instances of abuse extend further and include threats by either the Tatmadaw or armed groups. Some participants narrate cases of soldiers brandishing weapons and using coercive language to intimidate and harass

people. Some participants recount how in the past, incidents of torture were inflicted on their relatives. However, when victims seek justice, they are punished - either they are made to pay a fine or they are assaulted by those in power such as the military.

People were killed because of unproven accusations. My father-in-law was also killed. He died from stepping on landmines on his way to Boe Mae Ywar Thit market in Kyauktai. The armed group killed my friend when he had to guide the military in the jungle.

- A Kayah man in Bawlawke Township

Some participants share how they lost family members who were forced by the Tatmadaw to act as porters and walk through mine fields or act as guides. Being seen as assisting the Tatmadaw puts them in jeopardy as armed groups see them as helping the enemy. These instances of abuse go further, with the military demanding permission letters that need to be produced over trivial matters such as sleeping in the jungle, causing much frustration and making daily life harder. Some members of the community report the injustice of having their property destroyed by soldiers, and rather than receiving compensation when they tell the authorities, they would be beaten.

Unclear land demarcation

The unclear land demarcations (what is private land, what is public or communal land) restrict local people from using land for their livelihoods.

- Four men and two women in Loikaw Township

Communities within Kayah state are heavily reliant on agriculture for their livelihood. They share the hardships they encounter because of the unclear demarcation of which land is privately owned and which land is communal or accessible to the public. They explain how they farmed a piece of land and then later learned that they actually encroached on privately owned land. There is also a concern of intruding on land claimed or occupied by armed groups. Participants resolutely believe that land disputes will be a cause for future conflict.

Forced displacement

I do not want our villages to relocate. I want to have a guarantee for the existence of our village.

- Unidentified participant in Loikaw Township

Communities further share experiences of forced relocation due to fighting that occurred in the year 2000. This clash caused a great number of people to disperse to neighbouring states and countries. It also meant several villages had to leave their homes and farmlands behind. This incident is a commonly cited source of anxiety as people continue to live in fear of being relocated again.

Leaders need to go beyond self-interest

The armed groups say that their struggle is for the people. But when they make peace, it is for them and their relatives.

- Overheard during a conversation in Demoso Township

Communities have expressed concerns over the motivations of armed groups that operate in Kayah state. To illustrate, participants speak of how armed groups impose taxes on them and note the double standard where relatives of the armed groups are taxed less or not at all. This inequality is a source of friction between communities and the armed groups that impose the taxes.

Community members also feel that some members of the armed groups that claim to represent them can be motivated by self-interest. They cite the number of businesses that some members of the armed groups owned and started operating following the start of the peace process, and note that the benefits go only to these members. They express the perception that some armed groups are taking advantage of the peace process. Participants have become jaded, saying that armed groups take advantage of the peace process by starting businesses and other money making schemes and contributing nothing to the development of their village. They expect these members of armed groups to take the needs of the communities into consideration.

Leaders at each level exploit and the public suffer.

- A conversation between one man and four women in Demoso Township

Communities further share their perception of being continually victimized by corruption in their interactions with government officials or members of the armed groups. Communities report being on the losing end as the gap between the rich and the poor widens, where rich business owners are granted concessions from the government, while they remain without opportunities for economic advancement.

3. Hopes and aspirations

Unification, trust, and understanding

They need to build trust amongst, and understanding between the government and the armed groups. They need to set aside their differences and work together on a common goal.

- Unidentified person from Demoso Township

As long as the armed groups hold different positions and objectives and work in parallel to each other, peace will never be achieved.

- Four male participants and two female participants in Demoso Township

Overwhelmingly, themes related to the need to unify the country, especially to unite the military and the ethnic armed groups, are a consistent hope for the future. Communities are battle-fatigued and do not wish to hear the sounds of gunfire. They yearn for all warring parties to set aside differences and to work towards a common goal of unification, harmony, and security.

Currently, the presence of different armed groups in the same areas translates to numerous policies, rules, and taxes that have to be followed. This not only confuses communities as to which authority they should follow, it also puts a strain on their resources. It also makes them anxious about the possibility of these groups clashing with each other over territory. This explains their strong belief in the need for these different armed groups to unite for peace to be realised.

Communities also recognise the need, not only for armed groups, but also for all ethnic and religious groups in general to put aside their differences, unite, and work for the betterment of Myanmar. They call on their leaders to push for understanding and reconciliation among the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the country. They also want to see cooperation between the different

INGOs, ceasefire monitoring teams, and the newly installed central government as they believe that this will make them more effective in helping communities. Finally, several participants call on their elected representatives to think of the needs of their constituencies and discard motivations of self-interest.

Hope for the new government

The new government must prioritise peace building as their first task, and to make sure that the government will be democratic and peaceful.

- Two young men in Hpruso Township

Most participants share their belief that the new central government will achieve peace and bring development to the country. Many participants are quoted saying that they have hope in the new government and believe that this government will accomplish peace for the country. However, they want the new government to be sympathetic towards them and to govern fairly and implement policies carefully. Moreover, they want to have a genuine leader that will be responsible, prioritise peace, and continue the peace process that the former government initiated. They request the new government to adhere to the recommendations of the international community and monitoring groups with regards to the country's peace process.

I hope that a genuine leader will emerge.

- Unidentified individual from Hpasawng Township

Likewise, communities want to see their own representatives in positions of influence such as in the central government. With this, they believe that a true democracy will be established and employment opportunities will grow.

Of course, some participants voice worries that the new central government will not change anything. While they voice these concerns, they have also adopted a 'wait and see' attitude, and have expressed a willingness to give the new government a chance.

Community welfare a priority

In building peace, the people's needs and feelings must be prioritised.

- A conversation between four men and one woman in Hpruso Township

Communities emphasize the need for the ethnic armed groups and the government to prioritise their voices and concerns. Many times over, community members recall how they helped soldiers from both the Tatmadaw and the armed groups during the war by providing them with shelter, food, and other resources. Now, these communities believe the time has come for these groups, particularly the ethnic armed group that are supposed to represent their interests, to think about their needs and prioritize their concerns in the peace talks. They expect their representatives to ensure equal rights for all ethnic groups in the country. They also want to see amendments to the 2008 constitution to remove the requirement of the 25% reservation of parliamentary seats for the military.

Community members voice a strong desire to see socio-economic development in the rural areas where they reside. They want to see improvements in government service provision, particularly in terms of health care and education. They also want better access to affordable electricity and better employment opportunities for all. They believe that this can be achieved if military spending in the national budget is reduced and channelled into development projects for the people. Communities observe how most development projects they see in their villages are projects by INGOs and NGOs, and want to see development projects initiated by the government.

More information and transparency about the peace process

There is a lack of transparency about what the government and the armed groups are doing.

- Four men and two women from Loikaw Township

Communities share that they feel like they do not have ownership over the peace process, due in part to their lack of knowledge on the subject. Some participants go so far as to say they feel powerless about the peace process because they have little knowledge about it, and therefore are unable to contribute. It does not help that they perceive ethnic armed organizations to be denying them any space to participate in the peace process. Some members of the community refer to incidents in 1995-1996, when attempts at making peace failed due to the lack of inclusivity.

People were saying 'peace and peace' but when asked if we really have peace, they cannot answer. People do not know the definition of peace either.

- An unidentified participant from Demoso Township

Communities have a resolute desire to participate in the peace process. There are frequent calls for awareness and information about the peace process. Communities expect negotiating parties to be transparent on all matters relating to the peace process. They want instances of ceasefire violations to be made public. They also would like to learn about the agreements made between the government and the armed groups. They also expect the government to educate people on human rights issues, civil rights, and the laws of the nation. Community members stress the need to know these matters so that they can be vigilant and report irregularities with the implementation of agreements when they arise.

Inclusivity and equality in peace process

We want our leaders to build solidarity regardless of race or ethnicity

- An older Karen man from Loikaw Township

Unsurprisingly, the demand for equality and equal treatment is a popular aspiration that emerged during conversations with communities. Participants express the need for equal status between the military and ethnic armed organizations.

They share that they continue to feel discriminated against by government officials because of their ethnicity or religious affiliation. They attribute the discriminatory behaviour to the lack of ethnic diversity among government officials. These experiences account for the distrust that they feel towards the government. They therefore express a strong desire to see fairness and equality reflected in the outcomes of the peace process. They hope the peace process will include discussions on how to ensure equal rights for all, regardless of ethnic or religious identities. This includes ensuring equal land distribution and employment opportunities.

They also recognise the importance of inclusivity in the peace process, and call for the central government and the Tatmadaw to rethink the exclusion of some ethnic groups because they are afraid this could cause ceasefire breakdown.

Having equality and justice only brings success for the peace process.

- A conversation between twelve men and three women in Hpruso Township

A demand for their voices to be heard

To the current government and the future government, please listen to the people's voices, acknowledge their demands and fulfil their needs.

- An unidentified person from Demoso Township

Unsurprisingly, communities continue to demand that their voices be heard by those in the government and by their representatives at peace talks. Communities want to be consulted on matters pertaining to the state and country. They want decisions made to be reflective of their best interests, and want laws to be just, fair, and in the service of the people. A recurring demand is for their leaders to prioritize the needs of the community over the needs of a few who hold power.

The people of Kayah State expect the government to foster a better relationship with them to counter the overall sense of disconnect between the people and the government. They ask government officials to visit their townships and villages and converse with them. According to communities, peace will only be achieved when their voices are heard and they have a say in government policies and regulations.

The peace process must represent the people and prioritise the people. It must ensure that we have equal rights. But we need to change the laws to have genuine peace. Laws are not drafted based on the needs of people. People are the key.

- A conversation between three men and one woman in Loikaw Township

Better education and health care services

We want genuine and sustainable peace. We want development in economy, health, and education sector.

- A conversation with four Kayaw men and two women from Demoso Township

Communities are unanimous in expressing their desire to see critical improvements in the education system. They want to see more institutions of higher-level education such as high schools, colleges, and universities in the

state, and have qualified teachers staff all the schools. They voice concerns over the quality of instruction at schools and note that students usually need to enrol in extra classes after school (tutorial or tuition) to supplement their education. But, this is expensive and leaves students with little time for other activities. These conditions could explain the high dropout rate among young people. This leaves most participants apprehensive, as they think about the future of the younger generation if they do not have proper education. One of the most often articulated concerns is that if young people cannot find good jobs because they are uneducated, they may lean towards committing crimes. Therefore, they expect the government to lower the cost of education to encourage young people to finish their schooling and have opportunities to break the cycle of poverty.

Communities also share their view that they are being discriminated against as they notice better education systems in other parts of the country. Some say this is a class issue as the affluent are able to obtain a better education unlike the poorer residents. Participants also note that women in Kayah are less educated than the men. This creates an unfair situation for the women, whose potential to contribute to community development remain untapped.

Additionally, communities voice the need for improvements in health care systems, especially the availability of facilities that care for the elderly. They also want to see better waste management systems.

More employment and livelihood opportunities

Due to the lack of job opportunity and paying taxes to armed groups, the local people face hardship.

- A conversation between six Kayah men and one woman from Bawlakhe Township

According to communities, the low employment rates and lack of job opportunities affect everyone in the state. Communities fear for the future of the youth - because of limited employment opportunities, most young adults are unemployed, even those with a high school diploma. This raises concerns that young people, because they do not have opportunities for economic advancement, might start using illegal drugs or choose to get involved in the drug trade to make ends meet.

Many participants who rely on poppy cultivation for their livelihoods share that they would gladly stop growing opium poppies if the government could help them transition by providing substitute crops for them to grow. They explain that the reason they started growing opium poppies is because they could not earn enough when they grew cash crops. While the prices of their produce were too low, the prices of the basic necessities they needed to buy for their families were too high. Some participants explain that people who have monopoly of goods on the market are able to charge high prices because local authorities do not stop them. They thus recognise the importance of having the government regulate market prices to make sure that goods and produce are sold at equitable prices.

Some participants say they want to be alleviated from poverty and believe the government can help them by developing the economy and providing more job opportunities. Another suggestion they came up with is for the central government to reduce its military spending and use these funds for socio-economic development projects. They expect the government to invest in education and agricultural sectors, as well as help people set up small businesses so that residents have ways to earn a living. Finally, there are calls from the community to the government to prioritize providing development jobs to the local population in Kayah State rather than bringing in labour from Yangon or other states.

Chapter 9

KAYIN STATE

*We need to stay closer and stronger with each other,
just like a clove of the garlic, to develop our future.*

- Male Karen village leader from Kyain Seikgyi Township



Kayin State, or Karen State, is located in the southern part of Myanmar. It covers 11,731 square miles, including the mountainous Dawna range and the southern end of the Karen hills in the northwest. It borders Mae Hong Son, Tak, and Kanchanaburi provinces of Thailand in the east, Mon State and Bago division in the west and south, and Mandalay division, Shan State and Kayah State in the north.



Source: Myanmar Information ManagementUnit[1]

Kayin State is made up of 4 districts (Hpa-An, Myawaddy, Hpapun and Kawkareik), seven townships and 4,092 villages.[2] The capital is Hpa-an. Kayin State is a multicultural and multilingual state, home of the Karen, Pa'O, Mon, and Bamar ethnicities. Kayin State is home to 1,574,079 adults.[3] While residents are predominantly Buddhist, the minority Christian population has greatly influenced events in Karen history. A small percentage of residents are Muslims and animists.[4] About 20% of the households living in Kayin State are female-headed. [5]

The Karen ethnic group is one of the largest ethnic minority groups in Myanmar and accounts for 7% of the country's total population. "Karen" is used in a broad sense to refer to people who speak *Karanic language*. The English name 'Karen' derives from Kayin in Burmese and Kareang in Mon.[6] The final British conquest of Burma in 1886 dramatically changed the social order and cosmological basis of the old royal order, which had been practiced for hundreds of thousand years. [7]

Since the 19th century, Kayin State has been home to a strong Karen nationalist movement. In 1881, the Karen National Association (KNA) formed to unite Karen sub-groups and foster a strong pan-Karen identity. This in turn promoted ideas of self-determination and independence among the Karen people. [8]

The Karen supported British troops during World War II, with the understanding that they would be allowed to create a sovereign state for Karen people. After the war and as Burma was preparing for independence, the Karen National Union (KNU) formed in 1947 to advocate the creation of a separate state called Kawthoolei that included the present Kayin State, Toungoo, Tenasserim, Insein, and Hanthawaddy districts. [9]

After independence, the KNU sought to reach a political agreement with the Bamar-majority central government that would grant the Karen greater autonomy, but to no avail. The attacks by Bamar-majority auxiliary forces against Karen villages and the removal of ethnic Karen General Smith Dun as the Commander in Chief of the Tatmadaw in 1948 led to the KNU and its military wing, the Karen National Defence Organization (later known as Karen National Liberation Army, KNLA), going underground in January 1949. [10]

In the next few years, the KNU operated a *de facto* government while the KNLA established seven main brigades in Thaton, Toungoo, Kyaukkyi, Tavoy/Dawei,

Papun, Three Pagoda Pass, and Hpa-an. The KNU established administrative authority over these areas, setting up health care and education departments. Continuous fighting between the KNU and the Tatmadaw over the next 60 years resulted in the loss of KNU-held territories as the group was pushed back to the Thai-Myanmar border. [11]

Through the years, the KNU experienced several splits within its ranks. In 1994, when Buddhist Karen soldiers felt frustrated and marginalized by the KNU leadership, they formed the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA, later renamed the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army). Immediately after the formation of the DKBA, it signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar military government. Most DKBA brigades transformed into Border Guard Forces (BGF) and put under the Tatmadaw's operational control. Notably, there have been sporadic clashes between the Tatmadaw and DKBA brigades that disagreed with the decision to become BGF. [12] This ultimately led to the formation of the DKBA splinter group Klo Htoo Baw (also referred to as DKBA Brigade 5) in 2010, which refused to transform into a BGF and realigned with the KNU. In the following months of 2010, hundreds of ex-DKBA personnel defected to the KNU over similar frustration and resentment at the transformation into BGF units. [13]

The next split within the KNU occurred in 1997, with the formation of the Karen Peace Force (KPF). The KPF also signed a ceasefire agreement with the ruling military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Government.¹ The KPF subsequently transformed into a BGF force under direct Tatmadaw control in 2010. Lastly, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council broke off from the KNU in 2007 and signed a ceasefire agreement with the government. [14]

As the Thein Sein government initiated a peace process in 2011, it signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the KNU in January 2012.

Kayin State has rich soil suitable for growing rice (paddy), ground nut, sesame, durian, tobacco, betel nut, sugarcane, rubber, and raising livestock. More than six decades of conflict has undermined economic development and communities are heavily scarred by the consequences, including forced displacement, pillaged food stores, injury from violence and forced labour.

¹ In 1997, the SLORC was abolished and reformed as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which became the new official name of the military regime in Myanmar.

Decades of the Tatmadaw's counter-insurgency operations, including General Ne Win's four-cuts policy,² have left about 17% of the population in Kayin State living under the poverty line. [15]

While the ethnic armed groups, such as the KNU and the DKBA, have endeavoured to deliver basic social services within the areas under their control, the division of state administration between the central government and the ethnic armed groups has further complicated the situation.[16] Clashes between the different Karen ethnic armed groups, primarily the KNU and the DKBA, have also contributed to divisions between Karen people within the state.

The violent conflict has also caused large-scale displacement within the state. There are 89,150 internally displaced people within Kayin, while approximately 80,000 Karen live in refugee camps in Thailand as of October 2015.[17] People living in these camps generally rely on non-government organisations and international humanitarian organisations to provide food aid and basic social services.

The ceasefire agreement signed in 2012 between the government and the KNU has brought about a measure of stability within the state, allowing for more economic development opportunities. However, communities remain wary of the negative impacts of large-scale projects. Alongside opportunity, there has been an increase in reported incidents of land grabbing and displacement due to dam or mining projects within the state, as well as the environmental degradation that these projects cause. [18]

In October 2015, the KNU was the largest ethnic armed group to sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the central government. As the group continues to participate in the national political dialogue process, fighting broke out in Hlaingbwe Township in August 2016 between the BGF and DKBA splinter groups, which forced residents to once again flee from violence.

² General Ne Win initiated "four cuts Policy" in order to eliminate ethnic armed groups. Four cut means cutting food supplies, intelligence, and recruits-or heads.

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KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Between July and August 2016, six listening teams travelled to nearly thirty villages in four townships, namely Kyain Seikgyi, Hpa-an, Hlaingbwe, and Thandaunggyi. These listeners engaged 200 participants in 61 conversations.

The listening teams spoke with 120 (60%) males and 80 (40%) females. 46% of participants are married, 18.5% are single, while 35.5% did not state their marital status.

Table 44. Gender of participants

Gender	Number of participants	Percentage
Male	120	60%
Female	80	40%
Total	200	100%

A vast majority (98%) of participants belong to the Karen ethnic group. The rest identify as Mon, Shan or Bamar.

Table 45. Ethnicity of participants

Ethnicity	Number of participants	Percentage
Karen	188	94%
Mon	4	2%
Shan	4	2%
Bamar	2	1%
Others	1	1%
Total	200	100%

The majority of the participants are Buddhist (54%). The remaining participants are Christian (16.5%) and animists (1.5%). 28% of the participants did not state their religion.

Table 46. Religion of participants		
Religion	Number of participants	Percentage
Buddhist	108	54%
Christian	33	16.5%
Animists	3	1.5%
Not available	56	28%
Total	200	100%

Participants came from a wide range of ages, from 18 to 70 years old. The majority of participants are between the ages of 41-50 (18.5%), 31-40 (13.5%), and 51-60 (10.5%). 44% of participants did not provide information about their age. The details of the age ranges are found in the table below.

Table 47. Age Range of participants		
Age Range	Number of participants	Percentage
18-20	2	1%
21-30	7	3.5%
31-40	27	13.5%
41-50	37	18.5%
51-60	21	10.5%
61-70	18	9%
71-80	0	0%
Not Available	88	44%
Total	200	100%

The majority of participants are farmers (54.5%). Other participants work as government administrators, small business owners, shopkeepers, or NGO workers. The details are found in the table below.

Table 48. Livelihood of participants		
Livelihood	Number of Participants	Percentage
Farmers	109	54.5%
Government/ local administrators	23	11.5%
Labourers	7	3.5%
Health care workers	4	2%
Shop keepers	3	1.5%
Business owners	2	1%
Students	3	1.5%
Religious workers	2	1%
NGOs/ social workers	5	2.5%
Unemployed	23	11.5%
Teachers	7	3.5%
Not available	12	6%
Total	200	100%

MAIN THEMES

1. On The Peace Process

In wartime, we did not have good food to eat, we ate our meals in a rush. Once we hear the gunshots, we have to run without cleaning our hands. We have had enough. We need peace.

- A middle-age Karen woman from Kyain Seikgyi Township

Want a sustainable peace process

Because of the peace process, people can live with the peace. Now we have job opportunities and better living standards.

- A young male Mon farmer from Hlaingbwe Township

In most conversations, participants express their strong desire to have a genuine, mutually accepted, and sustainable peace process. Since the central government signed the bilateral ceasefire agreement with the KNU, communities say they have seen a stop to the fighting and some positive changes. They are grateful for the ongoing peace process but recognise that there is still a long way to go.

Likely, due to their history of longstanding conflict, most communities understand peace to be the cessation of hostilities – to have no fighting, to no longer hear gunshots, or fear bombs. They recognise the importance of peace so they can go about their daily tasks - collect wood, feed their children, drink clean water, sleep without fear, and send their children to school.

If the peace process is done successfully, we all hope to see social and religious developments, and improvements in education, health, and transportation.

- A middle-age Karen woman in Hlaingbwe Township

In most of the conversations, communities say that war will not bring peace to their state. They prefer that conflict parties use peace negotiations to settle their differences. They express strong hope that the peace process will not break down, for fear of the resurgence of violent conflict and its consequences on their livelihood.

Positive developments since the start of the peace process

The ceasefire delivered us developments, electricity, purified water, and transportation. I hope to have more development in the future.

- A middle-age Karen male from Kyain Seikgyi Township

Communities are experiencing positive changes that come with the peace process. As shared by participants, in the past, they lived with fear and had low expectations of their future because they were in the midst of violent conflict. After the ceasefire agreement was signed, people had greater freedom of movement and could travel safely to other areas. This allowed communities to access their farmlands or the forests, where they collect firewood, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and other supplies.

The peace process also generated a number of infrastructure projects like more roads, electrical and telecommunication facilities. Communities also express satisfaction with the corresponding effects these developments have had on their livelihood. These developments have made food, petrol (which was restricted during times of conflict), and other necessary items more accessible and affordable. They value these new developments and the relative stability the peace process has brought to their state.

We worry about future conflict. Soldiers are not around but they might come back in the future.

- Young male farmer from Hlaingbwe Township

Desire for genuine and comprehensive ceasefire agreement

There are some worries in our community because not all armed groups have signed the ceasefire agreement. People worry about not getting real peace.

- A Bamar middle-age male farmer from Kyain Seikgyi Township

While the peace process has brought positive changes, communities recognise that there are still many challenges to overcome. They express the belief that without a comprehensive ceasefire agreement among all armed groups, the ceasefire they have will remain fragile.

Communities also voice concern about the stability of the peace process while there are sporadic clashes in Kayin between the Tatmadaw, the KNU, and splinter groups of the KNU. Some villagers share that the KNU continues to recruit from their areas, or collect taxes from the people. Other participants say they still see Tatmadaw soldiers passing through their villages with firearms. The presence of armed soldiers makes them fearful. They want all armed groups to respect the ceasefire and the peace process.

Now it is quite peaceful but we cannot trust soldiers yet. People want peace but it must be a genuine one.

- A middle-age Bamar male farmer Thandaunggyi Township

Unreasonable informal taxation system

The tax system has plenty of issues. There is no transparency.

- A young male shopkeeper from Myawaddy Township

Communities are not happy with the prevailing system of informal tax collection. The taxes imposed by the armed groups and the Tatmadaw only worsen their livelihood difficulties as they pay a large portion of what they earn.

They strongly believe that the tax they currently pay is unfair. Their main concern is that there is no transparency in the tax system and they doubt the honesty of tax collectors. They also note that they have to pay different amounts of tax at different times, and to different groups. They thus ask authorities to address these concerns

Communities want access to lands

Now we do not have many lands as before to get our food because soldiers occupied our lands. We cannot go to our lands.

- A middle-aged farmer from Hlaingbwe Township

According to the communities, they have lost access or use of large tracts of land. Some land they lost when the KNU and the Tatmadaw started occupying hunting grounds and farming lands in different parts of Kayin. Other agricultural lands, while not occupied by armed groups or the Tatmadaw, have become inaccessible because of the presence of landmines.

Losing access to these communal lands add to the challenges of communities in different ways. The most obvious is the negative impact on daily incomes where communities lose agricultural land and can no longer harvest cash crops for trade. Communities also lose sources of traditional herbs, food, and supplies like bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and firewood. Communities hope that as the violent conflict is being resolved, they can get their lands back, free of land mines.

Transparent peace process

Communities would like to have more information about the ongoing peace process. They want the actions of the negotiating parties to be transparent. They believe that this will help to dispel negative rumours that are circulating in the community. Keeping communities informed can also foster more confidence in the peace process.

Proper implementation of ceasefire agreement

It is important to follow the ceasefire agreement signed by the government and the ethnic groups, and to respect the agreement from seniors to bottom-level soldier and [to] respect each other on both sides.

- A middle-aged village head from Thandaunggyi Township

Communities need a ceasefire that is largely and generally accepted by all of the parties. They note that while there is a nationwide ceasefire agreement between the central government, the Tatmadaw, and the KNU, some villagers continue to be harassed by Tatmadaw and ethnic armed group soldiers. Some participants mention reports of community members experiencing inhumane treatment such as torture. They ask the decision makers to ensure that the provisions of the ceasefire agreement are implemented at all levels, even in the remote villages and communities.

Soldiers came and asked so many things. If we could not give them the answer they expect, they hit us.

- A young male farmer from Kyain Seikgyi Township

2. Challenges

Drug abuse and drugs trade

The biggest challenge for us is the drug issue. It has affected all age groups - adults, youth, and children.

- A Karen male teacher from Hpa-an Township

The communities identify the increase in illegal drug use as the biggest challenge in Kayin. They observe that various types of illegal drugs are easily available and accessible in their villages. In addition to health issues, illegal drugs create social issues such as destroying the family unit, increasing domestic violence, increased dropout rates at schools, and increasing unemployment rates in communities. Communities also note the frequent occurrence of drug-related crimes.

Some participants share that they have witnessed violent actions by soldiers under the influence of drugs. There have been reports of these soldiers stealing chickens, pigs, assaulting villagers, and abusing children. The actions of these soldiers, community members believe, can impair the peace process. Communities thus strongly believe that illegal drug eradication programs need to be introduced as a part of the peace process.

Lack of livelihood opportunities

In the future, we want to see our village developed with a full supply of electricity and clean water, access to education for children, and a better standard of living for people. To have that hope, we need the peace process to continue.

- A young male farmer from Hlaingbwe Township

Communities share their daily challenges and struggles to fulfil their basic needs. They say that they do not have enough employment opportunities in their villages. For many of them, nothing has changed with regard to the unemployment situation that affects their daily life.

Farmers also have trouble selling their produce and earning enough to support their families. Some participants mention encountering problems accessing their farms because of the presence of landmines.

Communities therefore express hope that decision-makers involved in the peace process can address these livelihood concerns. They envision a successful peace process to result in more job opportunities and financial security for communities.

Continuing presence of armed groups

Many groups come and say ‘we are a genuine armed group’ and ask for money. We don’t know what to do...we pay so much money.

- Group of middle-aged Karen and Mon men from Myawaddy Township

Communities voice concern over the presence of many different armed groups near their homes and villages, as well as throughout their state. They continue to fear the threat of violence that surrounds these armed men, which explains why they constantly comply with whatever demands they make. They are also anxious that the presence of these groups can negatively affect the peace process, as they may cause fighting to restart.

Specific challenges for women

During war times, our families had to eat unhealthy foods. We were so hungry.... But, we didn’t have a choice.

- Middle-aged women from Hlaingbwe Township

Communities, particularly female participants, explain that women are traditionally responsible for collecting firewood, mushrooms, and bamboo shoots. During times of conflict, this task was life threatening as soldiers from either side positioned in these areas posed a security threat. At present, while the ceasefire agreement has resulted in greater stability in Kayin, women who collect crops, vegetables, and firewood are still at risk because of the landmines around bush lands.

We want Myanmar to be a developed country that grants full access to education and protects women’s right.

- A young female schoolteacher from Hpa-an Township

Concerns over unlawful commerce and effects

While the peace process is ongoing, some businessmen are taking advantage of the situation. People worry that these men are taking advantage of the peace process.

- A Karen male village head from Hlaingbwe Township

Communities are also very concerned about the large businesses operating in their towns and village that they suspect to be operating illegally. These include logging and mining companies, as well as those involved in drug production and transport.

Communities suspect that these businesses contribute to the corrupt practices in their areas. They also voice concerns that these business owners may want the cycle of conflict to endure so they can continue to operate under unregulated conditions and without government scrutiny. Related to businesses conducting resource extraction activities such as logging and mining, communities also raise concerns about the environmental destruction and the negative impacts on their health.

3. Hopes for the future

Greater opportunity to present community needs in peace process

If we have a chance to participate in the peace talks, we will talk about the words that they use. For example “withholding the war (yat-sae)” is not a strong word and we want to change into “stop the war (ah-pyit-ah-khat-yat)”.

- A male government employee from Hpa-an Township

Communities express enthusiasm at the idea of supporting to the peace process. They recognise the importance of contributing to the process and they want to do so. They want decision-makers of the peace process to listen to them and address their needs at the policy level. They note, however, that the political dialogues lack mechanisms to give them a chance to share their perspectives, views, and experiences, or voice their concerns.

More health care facilities and quality services

Communities also voice concerns about the lack of sufficient health care facilities in Kayin State. In particular, communities express their frustration at having to travel long distances to get to clinics or health centres located in other villages. Even when there are clinics in some villages, there are few skilled health care workers or medicines available. They observe that a lot of health care workers are not willing to come to Kayin State because of security concerns. Communities explain that if there is a successful peace process, health care workers will not be afraid to come to Kayin State. Access to quality health care is thus a continuing challenge for them.

More infrastructure developments

Our community needs development in all different sectors such as transportation, education, and health care. We need a library and a good school.

-A young Karen man from Hpa-an Township

Communities also want to see more infrastructure projects to improve travel conditions. They explain that in the rainy season, travel is particularly restricted as roads become muddy and transportation options are limited. Participants share that they are often stuck in their village for several days due to damaged roads. Not only does this negatively impact trade and livelihood opportunities, it also endangers the health of the community, because some villagers need to travel to find clean water across hilly and muddy roads.

Communities also explain that while some villages have improved access to electricity as a result of the peace process, other communities are still not connected to the grid and thus do not have access to electricity. As the peace process progresses, they express the hope of seeing an increase in high quality roads and electricity infrastructure, developments that will greatly improve their quality of life.

Better education facilities and services

High quality education and education infrastructure also remain a challenge for communities in Kayin State. Villagers explain that there is a shortage of skilled education workers in school because of the conflict. They also associate

the shortage of teachers to drug issues. Given the insecure situation in some areas due to increasing crime rates associated with drug use in communities, some teachers are not willing to be assigned to these areas.

But communities recognise the importance of high quality education for their children. They know that a good education will help their children to find good jobs and secure better futures. They thus express hope that a successful peace process will result in the construction of more schools, as well as the presence of properly trained teachers.

Religious and ethnic unity

If I have a chance, to participate in the peace talks, I will talk about the importance of unity among all ethnic people. I will ask them to stay together like cloves of garlic, bonding closely and supporting each other.

- A middle-age male farmer from Hlaingbwe Township

Communities recognise the importance of unity and cooperation between different ethnic and religious groups in their state. They observe that people continue to feel divided based on their ethnic or religious groups and know that unity is necessary to achieve true and genuine peace. They hope that the peace process can address this issue and find ways to encourage inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony among all groups.

Fair and equal application of laws

We cannot talk much with government officials. They treat us differently because they know we are Karen.

- A Young Karen farmer from Hpa-an Township

Communities also share the perception that government officials discriminate against them because of their ethnicity. Some participants share that they feel government officials rule against them when it comes to land disputes because of their ethnic or religious backgrounds. They express a strong desire to see rule of law, and have laws and regulations that apply equally, regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation.

Chapter 10

MON STATE

*If it is just our village that is peaceful, that cannot be called peace.
When the whole country is peaceful, then we can say
we have peace.*

- Mon woman from Chaungzon



Mon state lies in southeast Myanmar. It shares a border with Bago division to the north, Tanintharyi division to the south and Kayin state to the east. Mon state also shares a short border with Thailand to its east and is flanked by the Andaman Sea on its west.



Source: The Myanmar Information Unit [1]

The total population of Mon state is 2,054,393, with 987,392 (48.06%) males and 1,067,001 (51.94%) females.[2] The majority of the population belongs to the Mon ethnic group although Mon state is also home for Bamar, Karen and Pa'O ethnic groups. [3]

Mon State has two administrative districts: Mawlamyine and Thaton. There are ten townships made up of over a thousand villages and two islands within the state. The state has different areas controlled by the central government, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and some smaller areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU), the ethnic armed group primarily located in neighbouring Kayin State. [4]

The Mon people have a long history, having been recognised as one of the oldest civilisations in South East Asia. However, the use of the Mon language has been in decline among the younger generations. Across Mon State, in the space created by the ceasefire, the NMSP administered an education system that built on Mon literacy and cultural education programs provided by monasteries since the 1950s and 1960s. In the past, these schools were tolerated but not subsidised by the national government to provide schooling in the Mon language. At present, the central government allows the Mon language to be taught in some government schools. [5]

Following the second Anglo-Burmese war, the British colonized the entire Mon territory of lower Burma in 1824. In the anti-colonial struggle, Mon people and some Mon organizations joined with the Bamar nationalist leaders. After independence, President U Nu rejected the Mon ethnic-identity demands presented by the Mon leaders and organizations such as such as Romania Mon Association, United Mon Association, and Mon Freedom League. This resulted in the transformation of the Mon ethnic struggle to an armed conflict for separatism and self-determination for the Mon homeland, covering the whole of lower Burma. [6][7]

The Mon People's Front (MPF) took the lead in the armed struggle until it reached an agreement with the U Nu government to take part as a political party under the democratic system in July 1958. When General Ne Win took over in 1962, the Mon armed resistance movement continued with the formation of the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and its armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), established in 1971. [8]

In 1982, NMSP became a member of the National Democratic Front (NDF), an umbrella organization for all non-Bamar ethnic nationalities resisting the Rangoon central government for self-determination. As the Tatmadaw increased its numbers in Mon State throughout the 1990s, clashes broke out between the government and the NMSP, as well as with the Karen National Union (KNU) in some parts of the state. This resulted, during the 1990s, in over 10,000 Mon State residents having to take refuge in camps across the border in Thailand. [9]

The NMSP began ceasefire negotiations with the government in 1993 and eventually signed a ceasefire agreement in June 1995. In the wake of signing the ceasefire agreement, a number of splinter groups emerged from the NMSP, mostly in the Ye township and Northern Tanintharyi region. The Mon Army Mergui District (MAMD) was the first group to form immediately following the ceasefire agreement and, after a number of clashes with the Tatmadaw, proceeded to sign their own ceasefire agreement with the government in 1997. As of 2007, the group was still active and based south of the Maw Dawng Pass in Tenasserim Division. Another small splinter group emerged in 1997 as the Mon Peace Group (MPG), clashing with the Tatmadaw sporadically throughout the 2000s. Their current status is unknown. [10]

However, it was the formation of the Hongsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP), otherwise known as the Mon Restoration Party (MRP), led by former NMSP Central Committee Member, Colonel Nai Pan Nyunt, in 2001 that posed the greatest threat to the 1995 ceasefire agreement. In late 2001, Nai Pan Nyunt negotiated with another anti-ceasefire group, the Mon National Democratic Army (later, Mon Democratic Warrior Army), to form the HRP, collecting taxes and laying landmines near the Three Pagoda Pass. By early 2002, there were reports of fighting between the MNLA-HRP and Tatmadaw-HRP, which continued until late 2003, when HRP forces were expelled from NMSP territory. In 2007, Nai Pan Nyunt reformed as the MRP and began again to collect taxes in Ye township. However, the MRP failed to gain the same support as they did in 2003 and remained a marginalised group. As of 2014, there were no reports of these splinter groups holding territory or participating in any conflict in Mon State. [11]

As well as these splinter groups, the KNU and their own splinter group, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), have at times been militarily involved in Mon State. The KNU's map of Kayin territory overlaps with parts

of the official boundaries of Mon State, and the KNU have been active in Northeast Mon state. The forced repatriation of Mon refugees from Thailand into Mon State in 1996 added further strain to the post-ceasefire situation in Mon state, when 10,000 refugees were moved to three areas in the NMSP-controlled territory for temporary settlement. As of 2014, those settlements still hosted several thousand individuals. [12]

Even though there was some stability following the ceasefire agreement, there were still a number of violations of the agreement. In 2005, it was reported that various human rights abuses had occurred within ceasefire and non-ceasefire zones, in addition to the confiscation of land and property from Mon farmers between 1998 and 2002. [13]

Politically, the NMSP was active at the National Convention in 2004, where the NMSP, alongside the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), led a group of representatives from thirteen ceasefire groups in support of a federal union in Myanmar. Although the National Convention acknowledged the group's demands, they were not included in the draft constitution released in 2008. This disagreement eventually led to the breakdown of communication between the NMSP and the government in 2010, after the MNLA refused government demands to become a Border Guard Force (BGF). As a result, the 1995 ceasefire agreement was discarded. Despite the increased tension, and reneging on the ceasefire agreement, the NMSP and government remained in peace negotiations through 2011 and 2012, ensuring that there was no renewed conflict.[14] Today, the NMSP reportedly has over 800 troops, with another 2,000 reserves controlling areas along the eastern hills of Mon State and portions of the Thaninthaya Division. [15]

Mon State has remained relatively stable since the NMSP and the government signed the 1995 ceasefire agreement.[16] The NMSP has also shown to be responsive to internal reform and democratic practices. It has responded to pressure from ethnic communities and constituencies by including public participation on matters such as military engagement with the government. As a result, since 2005, the NMSP has remained the most outspoken critic of the National Convention, while at the same time ensuring its criticism never transformed into outright conflict. [17]

The NMSP signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar government in February 2012 at both the state and union level. The NMSP's vice chairman,

Nai Hon Sar, was the leader of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) that negotiated the text for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Notably, while the NMSP agreed with the finalised text of the NCA, it chose not to sign the agreement. [18]

At present, there continue to be minor clashes between the Tatmadaw and soldiers from the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, a splinter group from the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army. Tensions remain between the KNU and the NMSP due to the lack of a mutually agreed upon border between Kayin and Mon states, despite the existence of a central government defined border. Thus there exist Karen villages inside Mon state, and Mon villages inside Kayin state, with communities feeling confused over which of the different governing authorities they should recognise.

Within Mon state, tensions also exist between the state government and the NMSP over NMSP activities that are perceived to be intruding into governance functions. For instance, the Mon state government has recently admonished the NMSP for their law enforcement activities relating to illegal drug eradication efforts.

The general stability due to the signing of the 1995 ceasefire has meant that Mon State has seen marginally more development than Kayin or Kayah. However, recent large scale development projects made possible by the relative stability has meant that Mon residents also face environmental issues related to resource extraction businesses in their areas such as quarrying and mining. They are also seeing a rise in the emergence of land ownership and possession issues. [19]

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KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Between July and August 2016, six listening teams travelled throughout Mon State and engaged in 88 conversations with 324 community members. They visited communities in the townships of Thanbyuzayat, Southern Ye, Thaton, Bilin, Kyaikhto, and Chaungzon. One team focused on reaching Mon communities in Kawkareik in Kayin State, while another team focused on Kayin and Pa'O communities residing within Mon State.

58% of the participants are male whilst 40% are female. 2.2% of participants did not specify their gender.

Table 49. Gender of participants

Gender	Number of Participants	Percentage
Male	188	58%
Female	129	40%
Not available	7	2.2%
Total	324	100%

Most participants are Mon (36%) and Karen (29%). Others are Pa'O (20.4%), Bamar (11.4%) and Hindu/Indian (0.3%). The details are found in the table below.

Table 50. Ethnicity of participants

Ethnicity	Number of Participants	Percentage
Mon	117	36%
Bamar	37	11.4%
Karen	93	29%
Pa'O	66	20.4%
Hindu/Indian	1	0.3%
Not available	10	3%
Total	324	100%

Participants came from a wide range of ages in Mon State from 18-80 years old. Most participants are between the ages of 31-40 (23%), 21-30 (22%), 41-50 (20.4%) or 51-60 (20.1%). The rest are between 18-21 (6.5%), 61-70 (5.2%), or 71-80 (0.3%). The details of the age ranges are found in the table below.

Table 51. Age range of participants		
Age Range	Number of Participants	Percentage
18 – 21	21	6.5%
21 – 30	71	22%
31 – 40	74	23%
41 – 50	66	20.4%
51 – 60	65	20.1%
61 – 70	17	5.2%
71 – 80	1	0.3%
Not Available	19	3%
Total	324	100%

Most of the participants had some level of education at the primary (34.3%), middle school (23%) or high school (54%) levels. The remainder attended university (19%) or had no formal education (5.5%). 0.9% did not provide any information about their education.

Table 52. Education background of participants		
Education	Number of Participants	Percentage
None	18	5.5%
Primary	111	34.3%
Middle School	74	23%
High School	54	18.4%
University	60	19%
Not available	3	0.9%
Total	324	100%

98% of the participants are Buddhist, 1.5% are Catholic, while there is one Hindu and one Takhonai participant.

The participants hold a wide variety of jobs. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the participants based on their livelihood.

Table 53. Livelihood of participants		
Livelihood	Number of participants	Percentage
Farmers/Gardener	128	40%
Fishermen	4	1.2%
Community leaders/youth leaders	6	1.9%
Teachers and educators	30	9.3%
Government officers	1	0.3%
Priests and religious leaders	1	0.3%
Drivers/labourers/seamstress	36	11%
Domestic helpers	19	5.9%
Health care	5	1.5%
Childcare/dependents	14	4.3%
Students	10	3.1%
Lawyer	1	0.3%
Secretary	6	1.9%
Photographer	1	0.3%
Village Administrators	6	1.9%
Retired	2	0.6%
Merchant/Independent	40	12.3%
Not Available	14	3%
Total	324	98.3%

MAIN THEMES

1. On the Peace Process

Acknowledgment of positive changes

Since 2010 to 2016, villages are becoming more peaceful and there are no more forced portering (that we had before). Roads are getting better, village is nicer, we are getting government electricity and we have a school.

- Conversation between four Mon women from Kawkareik Township, Kayin

The strongest theme to emerge is that communities acknowledge they have experienced some positive changes since the peace process began. Most report that they no longer hear gunshots and that there are less instances of violence occurring near communities. They also notice a significant decrease in community members being made to do forced labour or to act as porters. Some community members relate feeling relieved after their areas were removed from the list of “black areas”¹ as this meant they could travel more freely to other villages and they experience less questioning from Tatmadaw soldiers. More generally, communities spoke of experiencing greater measures of freedom of movement because of the fewer checkpoints in their area.

More rights and freedoms

There was no peace in this village and the situation was unstable. Our village was known as a black area because there were many armed groups in this area. However, it is changing now that we are under a democratic system. We used to be harassed and forced to porter. We had to pay taxation. But now, it has become better after 2010.

- Conversation between three male Pa’o farmers and wage workers
from Thaton Township

Communities note other positive changes relating to the more permissive atmosphere. They mention that they have greater freedom of expression now. They can gather and express their opinions about the government, the peace process, and current events in public spaces without being penalised. They

¹ These are areas considered under the administrative control of ethnic armed groups.

also note that different non-government organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) are now allowed to operate openly throughout the state. Consequently, various organisations are now coming to communities and conducting awareness campaigns, trainings, and other activities. Participants also observe that media (newspapers, radio) is able to report more freely on current events and they cite this as a positive change.

Some communities disclose they have better working relationships with local government officials, who appear to be more responsive to their needs. To illustrate, several participants cite finally getting their national identity cards. Other community members report how the government has, in the last few years, become more transparent with the public about its actions.

Inclusivity of peace process

Peace means being able to relate to everybody, with no discrimination against people and ethnic groups and to have the mindset of equality. We want all ethnic groups to sign the NCA.

- Male Mon youth leader from Southern Ye Township

Communities recognise that the peace process needs to be more inclusive. Most participants cite the importance of having all ethnic armed groups participate in the peace talks and sign the NCA. According to communities, there cannot be genuine peace unless the fighting stops in all the states. Genuine peace also requires peace between the different ethnic groups.

Desire equal rights for all ethnic groups

To encourage the participation of all ethnic armed groups in the peace process, communities believe that the central government needs to ensure that all ethnic groups have equal rights. As one participant summarised, *“to have peace, equal rights are necessary. Without equality, living together peacefully cannot happen. We also need our right to self-determination respected.”*

Most consider it the responsibility of the central government to ensure equal treatment by coming up with laws and policies that protect the rights of ethnic and religious minorities. Some also cite the need to provide equal opportunities for ethnic minorities in terms of livelihood and socio-economic development.

They add that ethnic minorities should have equal opportunities to take up positions in the central government.

Unity among different ethnic groups

We cannot be selfish and just think of the interest of our own ethnicity, like Pa'O for Pa'O or Karen for Karen. We need to be in this together, in unity.

- Conversation between three Pa'O men and women from Thaton Township

Closely related to this theme is the need to develop greater unity and solidarity among the different ethnic groups. Several communities say they no longer wanted to be divided based on ethnic, religious, or political affiliation. They believe that if they remain divided, this makes it easier for others ("outsiders") to take advantage of them. Most equate genuine peace with different ethnic and religious groups collaborating and working together in solidarity for the country's development.

In our village, we have not seen separation of people based on their religions. In our village, we have Hindu and Buddhism. In the future, I want to be able to preserve this.

- Young Mon woman from Chaungzon Township

Interestingly, several community members also say that genuine peace requires people to go beyond thinking about the needs of their particular ethnic group, political party, or religious group. Instead, people have to start thinking about the needs of all people in Myanmar. Some participants also raise concerns about religious tensions and express the hope that communities remain united despite different affiliations.

Civilian and democratic government

To better represent all ethnic groups, instead of the Union of Myanmar, I think we need to change to the Federal Union of Myanmar.

- Young Pa'O woman from Thaton Township

Community members also relate their strong desire for decision makers to ensure non-discrimination and equal rights for all ethnic groups throughout the country. Closely related to this is the hope they expressed of having a

truly democratic and civilian government. For the government to be truly democratic, they want fair laws that apply to all. They also want a government that acts with transparency and accountability to the people.

A common concern among Mon communities is the perception that they are constantly under the authority of Bamar government officials. They want to have representatives of ethnic minorities elected to the highest positions of government. Specifically, they want to see Mon officials become part of the central government to better represent the needs and interests of Mon people.

Genuine federal union with a union army

Community members further spoke of having a genuine federal union of Myanmar, with Mon leaders having a measure of control over the direction of governance in Mon State. They expressed concern that if the peace process does not continue, the country will not become a true federal union.

Tatmadaw soldiers come from the people and should listen to the voice of the civilians. Civilians did not have any power and we want our voice to be heard so that we will get genuine peace.

- Conversation between five Karen men and women living in Thaton Township

They also require the Tatmadaw to act as a trustworthy national army that protects the security of civilians. Several observe that the Tatmadaw would best serve the people by concentrating on providing external defense for the country and not as an army that fights against Myanmar citizens.

Strong desire for genuine and sustainable peace

I do not want war at all because whenever the war fighting happens, the local people suffer and have to flee and become IDPs and their lives become worse. Therefore I do not want a civil war at all.

- Middle aged Pa'O man from Thaton Township

Communities want the peace process to be successful so that they can have genuine and sustainable peace. They are afraid that if the peace process is not successful, fighting between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups will break out again, and communities will once again bear the brunt of the

violent conflict. Several participants said they want their children to have a better future. Genuine and sustainable peace is key so people can concentrate on working to improve the lives of their families. These are all necessary steps to ensure the country's holistic development.

Some communities share that they continue to feel anxious when they see soldiers passing through their villages because they still face harassment or the threat of forced labour, portering, or violence. As fighting between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups continue in other states, participants express hopes that these parties could show their sincerity in wanting peace by agreeing to stop and talk about their differences at the negotiating table.

Trust building efforts necessary on all sides

We are willing to help if there is something we can do to help. Only through collaboration can we overcome our challenges. ... We need to build trust between different groups and try to understand each other.

- Four female Pa'O students from Thaton Township

Communities note that for the negotiating parties to agree to sign the NCA, they all needed to believe in the process. Trust between the ethnic armed groups, the Tatmadaw and the government is therefore integral to a sustainable peace process. But the ongoing fighting has made several participants express mistrust towards the peace process.

We do not want to build peace with guns or arms. We want to discuss in political dialogue and solve problems.

- Young Karen woman from Thaton Township

To build trust between the negotiating groups, they recommend the implementation of an inclusive ceasefire with all armed groups that should last throughout the period of the talks. They also advise the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed group leadership to ensure discipline among their troops and to guarantee that everyone respects the terms of the ceasefire agreement. They further suggest giving space for all ethnic armed groups, not just the signatories to the NCA, to participate in the peace talks and voice their concerns and grievances. They believe that this can be the starting point for different parties to better understand each other and build trust among themselves.

2. Challenges

Increasing drug use and drug addiction

For our community to develop, the young generation needs to be educated. We have to work together to get rid of gambling, drug addiction and alcoholism in our community.

- Conversation between three Karen men and two Karen women from
Thaton Township

The communities view the increasing number of illegal drug users as the most serious challenge in their villages. Various illegal drugs such as methamphetamine pills, heroin and alcohol are now easily available in villages. Several participants note that improvements in road infrastructure have made it easier for drug traffickers to spread their product throughout the state.

Drug use among the youth is of particular concern as drug users drop out of school, engage in violent behaviour, or remain unemployed as a result of their drug addiction. Many communities also believe drug addiction is the reason for the increasing incidents of domestic violence. Communities are worried that the spreading drug addiction is destroying the future of the Mon people.

In our country, why is it that the more development we have, the more we see illegal drugs are spreading? Why do we see that only the drug users and (small) drug sellers are getting arrested, but not the (bigger) drug producers?

- Mon woman from Chaungzon Township

Some communities see the drug issue not only as social and economic issues but also a political one. Several villagers cite the drug elimination programs and rehabilitation centres set up by the NMSP as effective measures to address the drug issue. They share the expectation that the central government could work together with the NMSP to eradicate the drug problem in their areas. They also notice that arrests made in connection with illegal drugs are small-time drug dealers or drug users, and believe that law enforcement authorities need to concentrate on arresting the more significant drug producers. A few participants believe that illegal drug use and drug addiction is widespread enough to be considered a threat to sustainable peace in the state.

“Taxation” by authorities

In Thaton, some soldiers are still collecting money from the villagers and there is no rule of law.

- An adult Pa’O man from Thaton Township

Another big challenge for communities in some parts of Mon State is what they call “taxation”, or the practice of soldiers from the Tatmadaw or the ethnic armed groups of collecting money for various activities. This includes paying taxes for doing business, tax as contribution for road construction, and the like. The taxing authority depends on where the villages are located. In some areas, this can mean villages have multiple taxing authorities because of the unclear territorial boundaries between the government, the KNU, and the NMSP.

One specific tax that they described was a payment made for each member of the family. They also spoke of having to pay a large amount of money in lieu of sending a male member of the family to join an armed group. A few villagers share that they are afraid of not paying because they might be physically harmed.

Land confiscation

The previous government sold the land used by the people and the forest of the community.

- Conversation between two Mon women from Thanbyuzayat Township

Issues related to land ownership and possession remain a persistent problem. Villagers share their experiences of losing farmland or residential land to government officials, or soldiers from the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, without proper compensation. Some observe that their lands continued to be occupied by military camps despite the ceasefire. They express the hope that once there is peace, the military troops can leave and they can reclaim their land.

Some participants associate incidents of land confiscation with corrupt village administrators, who sell village land without obtaining consent from the villagers. Some also mention new zoning regulations that reclassify agricultural land used and occupied by communities as forestland. With this move, villages find they are prevented from using land they used to occupy or farm.

They thus ask government land authorities to clarify land boundary systems. They also ask for government assistance to learn land laws and understand how they apply so they can register ownership over their lands. For those whose lands had already been taken, they ask for assistance from the central government, the state government or CSOs so that they can reclaim their lands. Lastly, for those community members who do not own land, they request the government to provide plots of land so that they can have a source of livelihoods.

Multiple governing authorities

Communities also spoke of the challenges brought about by being subject to two governing administrations, one under the state government and the other under the NMSP. This has left communities confused over which laws or regulations apply. One common example relates to the training and recognition of health workers. As several community members explain, difficulties arose when government hospitals or health care centres refuse to recognise and hire NMSP-trained health workers despite their sufficient training and experience in NMSP-run clinics, and the limited number of health care workers available. Communities hope the NMSP and the state government can come to an agreement as to a qualification system that would increase the number of health workers available to provide health services to the villages.

Negative effects of large projects

Big businessmen are digging for natural resources in our area and destroying the environment. We do not have enough drinking water.

- Young Mon man from Kyaikto Township

Another issue of considerable concern is the presence of big companies engaged in natural resource extraction activities (mining, quarrying and logging) that are causing environmental destruction. Some of the problems identified as a result of these activities are: the reduction of agricultural land and decreasing rice production, rapid deforestation, and the destruction or levelling of mountains and hills. Communities add that while their environment is being destroyed, their state government is not receiving any part of the profits from these activities.

Due to dams being built on the Thanlwin (Salween) river, we who are living downstream are affected by soil erosion. Salty water is also getting into our water supply. In the summer, we have a shortage of fresh water.

- Young male Bamar-Mon from Chaungzon Township

Dam construction on the Salween river is likewise mentioned as causing significant problems to communities living around the river. Several communities notice the regular occurrence of major flooding, which destroys crops on farmlands around the river. Participants mention as well the salty water mixing with their fresh water sources, which they attribute to the fact that the dam has obstructed the flow of water. This has meant a shortage of water supply for many, particularly during the summer months.

3. Hopes and aspirations

Strong desire for leaders to prioritise challenges of people

Without knowing the difficulties of the civilians, there can be no genuine peace.

- Conversation between three Pa'O men from Thaton Township

Most participants want the government and the armed groups to learn about their daily hardships and address them in the peace process. Several mention wanting to feel connected to representatives from the government, Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups. They hope that decision makers can visit their villages to consult with them about their needs so that they can discover how their lives have been affected by conflict. Participants also propose the participation of civil society organisations in the peace process to act as their representatives and suggest viable solutions to their concerns and challenges.

In the peace process talks, it is not enough that only the government and the ethnic armed groups participate. Civilians should also be invited to participate in the negotiation process.

- Conversation between three Karen men and two Karen women from
Bilin Township

Desire better social services

We have a primary school in our village but for middle school, children have to go to another village and this is difficult in the rainy season. Therefore, we want a middle school in our village.

- Mon village headman from Kyawkareik Township in Kayin

Another common theme participants bring up in almost all conversations is their desire for the central government to improve the effectiveness of delivery and quality of social services. These services most often refer to education and health care, although some also mention wanting the government to provide electricity in villages, as well as build telecommunications infrastructure that will improve communication facilities.

For most communities, education is the key to ensuring a better future for their youth. To improve educational services, communities say they want schools to be built and better-trained teachers to teach at the village schools. Some participants request to have teachers who specialise in teaching the Burmese language as they are worried that their children's lack of Burmese language skills could affect access to higher education. Some parents also want to include English classes as they believe this will make their children more employable.

Communities also mentioned wanting to see improvements in health care services. Many villages lack clinics, while those who have clinics lack adequate health care workers or medicines. Several believe this is the reason diseases spread so quickly in their villages. The lack of adequately trained health care workers (see also *Multiple governing authorities*) during emergencies also means sick people die from treatable ailments.

Desire better infrastructure – roads, electricity, communication

We do not hear gunshots like before. Now we are able to travel from one village to another but the road is not so good. There is also difficulty with electricity in the village. If the road can be repair with concrete, it will be better.

- Conversation between three Mon women from Kawkareik
Township in Kayin

Communities acknowledge some improvements in the form of slightly improved road infrastructure. Some participants cite having access to electricity, or to telecommunications services. Other improvements include the construction of clinics, school buildings, roads and bridges. A few participants note that while there have been physical infrastructure changes, some of the roads and buildings built are not sturdy and need to be repaired often.

While plenty of roads have been built, communities want more roads and bridges to be built. They describe the taxing road conditions, which become worse during rainy season and hampers their ability to travel. Some roads were destroyed because of the floods. For some remote villages, the impassable road conditions make communities feel isolated from other parts of the state. These communities worry about emergency situations, as when they need to travel to access immediate health care but find that they cannot.

Communities also mention their strong yearning for villages to be connected to the national grid so they can have regular access to electricity. This, they believe, would greatly improve their quality of life.

Desire better employment and livelihood opportunities

There is a big challenge with the imbalance between our income and daily expenses. We also do not have job opportunities. I really want to see the community at peace with a lot of job opportunities.

- Conversation between two young Bamar men and three young Bamar women
from Bilin Township

Communities also cite the lack of job opportunities as a challenge that they wanted assistance from the central government. When they did have jobs, the wages they receive are insufficient for them to meet the daily expenses of their families. Given that one of the main products produced in Mon State is rubber, communities repeatedly spoke of the negative effects of the low price of rubber. They therefore ask the central government to intervene to regulate rubber prices and ensure that they are getting a fair price for their goods.

Apart from low wages or insufficient profits, several participants further observe the rising cost of living. This is forcing many Mon residents to leave the country and migrate to Thailand for work. Many community members express the expectation that if the central government could provide better

employment opportunities and work conditions in the country, migrant workers can return and contribute to the country's development.

More information about peace process and governance

There is little awareness or discussion about politics and women do not have many opportunities to participate in politics.

- Conversation between two Mon women from Thanbyuzayat Township

Communities do not understand much about the peace process and want to learn more about it. They welcome opportunities to have government representatives or civil society actors such as CBOs and CSOs come to their villages to explain about the peace process or give them updates.

Several participants also want young people to know about the peace process and the political situation in the country so that they can be involved. They believe that being politically aware will help them guard against government corruption or abuses.

Amendment of 2008 constitution

I worry that the peace process will be affected because of the 2008 constitution. In the future, I want to have democracy and the federal union system. But I think the 2008 constitution will prevent peace. We want all ethnic groups to sign the ceasefire agreement. And we want the 2008 constitution to be amended.

- Mon Youth leader from Southern Ye Township

Most participants believe amendment of the 2008 constitution is necessary for a successful peace process. They want these amendments to guarantee the civilian and democratic character of the government and lay solid foundations for a genuine federal union system. They also mention the need for the constitution to guarantee equal rights for all, particularly for ethnic minority groups.

Mon language recognition

I want Mon literature to be taught as Mon subject in school full time.

- Conversation between three Mon women living in Kayin State

A strong theme that emerged from Mon communities is the desire for the central government to officially recognise Mon language as one of the languages of instruction. They express the hope to be able to teach Mon literature in government schools. Closely related to this is the pride that Mon communities express about their cultural heritage and their strong desire to preserve and protect it.

Less military spending, increase in social services budget

Lastly, some participants share the observation that the national budget is not equally distributed to the different states. They hope that once there is peace and the Tatmadaw is no longer fighting against ethnic armed groups, the government can decrease the percentage of the national budget invested in the military. The central government could then invest this money in social services and development, particularly of the remote underdeveloped ethnic areas.



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Karuna Myanmar Social Services – Since 2002 Karuna Myanmar Social Services, guided by the Social Teaching of the Church and mandated by CBCM, undertakes social development activities in 16 Dioceses. Karuna Myanmar has been putting every effort to maximize the quality and the dignity of life of the poor and the needy.



Ta'ang Student and Youth Union – TSYU is a non profit organisation providing support to the Ta'ang people. It seeks to empower Ta'ang youth by providing education opportunities and financially assisting displaced and impoverished Ta'ang villagers. It also advocates for the Ta'ang people, and publishes reports on human rights abuses in Shan state.



Pyi Nyein Thu Kha – PNTK is a non-profit and non-political organisation founded in February 2015 and based in Taunggyi, Southern Shan State. It is committed to helping people through the work for peace and development initiatives in Myanmar.



Karen Development Network – Established in 2004, KDN focuses on networking and training at the leadership and community levels. It aims to develop greater capacity in the education and communication sectors. It also works to coordinate efforts at documenting and analyzing the vulnerabilities and needs of displaced Karen communities.



Kayah State Peace Monitoring Network – In July 2012, 12 local civil society organisations founded the KSPMN to support public consultations and monitor the ceasefire agreement in Kayah. They provide information and report incidents of ceasefire violations, as well as spread awareness in different villages throughout the state about the ceasefire agreement.

Mon Women Network – The Mon Women Network was formally formed in 2011 to represent all Mon women through events and activities that promote their equality and increase their participation in community-level and political decision-making. Through discussions, community projects, collaborations with civil society groups and political organizations, and advocacy activities, MWN hopes to identify solutions to the problems facing many contemporary Mon women and to nurture leadership roles for all Mon women.

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PEACE IS LIVING WITH DIGNITY

Voices of Communities from Myanmar's ceasefire areas in 2016