

**WE WANT OUR COMMUNITIES BACK,
NO MORE FIGHTING AND VIOLENCE**

**Voices of Communities from Myanmar's
Ceasefire Areas from 2017 - 2018**



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement.....	3
List of Tables.....	6
Abbreviations and Acronyms	8
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	 11
RECURRING MAIN THEMES IN ALL AREAS: 2018 RESULTS	15
Reoccurring Themes Based on Gender Across all States.....	22
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS - MAIN THEMES OVER FOUR YEARS (2015-2018)...	25
 CHAPTER 2: MAIN FINDINGS IN EACH AREA	 33
KACHIN STATE	33
OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS	34
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES	36
HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS	39
Similarities from 2016 until 2018	42
Differences from 2016 until 2018.....	44
KAREN STATE.....	46
OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS	47
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES	48
HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS.....	50
Similarities from 2016 until 2018	51
Differences from 2016 until 2018.....	52
KAYAH STATE	54
OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS	55
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES	56
HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS.....	60
Similarities from 2016 until 2018	60
Differences from 2016 until 2018.....	63
MON STATE	64
OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS	65
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES	66
HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS	68
Similarities from 2016 until 2018	70
Differences from 2016 until 2018.....	71

NORTHERN SHAN STATE	73
OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS	74
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES	77
HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS	81
Similarities from 2016 until 2018	82
Differences from 2016 until 2018	84
SOUTHERN SHAN STATE	87
OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS	88
CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES	89
HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS	94
Similarities from 2016 until 2018	95
Differences from 2016 until 2018	97
CHAPTER 3: Recommendations.....	99
To the Myanmar Government.....	100
To the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups.....	103
To civil society actors (national civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations, and international non-governmental organisations)	104
CHAPTER 4: Listening Methodology.....	105
Challenges and Limitations	119
APPENDICES.....	122
Demographics from Kachin State	122
Demographics from Karen State	125
Demographics from Kayah State.....	128
Demographics from Mon State	131
Demographics from Northern Shan State.....	134
Demographics from Southern Shan State	137

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Ceasefire Groups	12
Table 2. Most Heard Themes Based on Gender – Men.....	22
Table 3. Most Heard Themes Based on Gender – Women	23
Table 4. Total Number of Conversations and Participants	25
Table 5. List of Partner Organisations	108
Table 6. Gender of Listeners	109
Table 7. Guide Questions	110
Table 8. Total Conversations and Participants Over Three Years	113
Table 9. Locations Covered and Number of Participants	114
Table 10. Gender of Participants	115
Table 11. Ethnicity of Participants	115
Table 12. Age Range of Participants	116
Table 13. Educational Background of Participants	116
Table 14. Livelihood of Participants	117
Table 15. Religion of Participants	118
Table 16. Kachin State Demographics: Age	122
Table 17. Kachin State Demographics: Gender	122
Table 18. Kachin State Demographics: Education	122
Table 19. Kachin State Demographics: Ethnicity.....	123
Table 20. Kachin State Demographics: Occupation	123
Table 21. Kachin State Demographics: Marital Status.....	123
Table 22. Kachin State Demographics: Religion	124
Table 23. Karen State Demographics: Age	125
Table 24. Karen State Demographics: Gender.....	125
Table 25. Karen State Demographics: Education.....	125
Table 26. Karen State Demographics: Ethnicity	126
Table 27. Karen State Demographics: Occupation.....	126
Table 28. Karen State Demographics: Marital Status.....	127
Table 29. Karen State Demographics: Religion	127

Table 30. Kayah State Demographics: Age	128
Table 31. Kayah State Demographics: Gender	128
Table 32. Kayah State Demographics: Education.....	128
Table 33. Kayah State Demographics: Ethnicity	129
Table 34. Kayah State Demographics: Occupation.....	129
Table 35. Kayah State Demographics: Marital Status	130
Table 36. Kayah State Demographics: Religion.....	130
Table 37. Mon State Demographics: Age	131
Table 38. Mon State Demographics: Gender	131
Table 39. Mon State Demographics: Ethnicity	131
Table 40. Mon State Demographics: Education	132
Table 41. Mon State Demographics: Occupation	132
Table 42. Mon State Demographics: Marital Status.....	133
Table 43. Mon State Demographics: Religion	133
Table 44. N. Shan State Demographics: Age	134
Table 45. N. Shan State Demographics: Gender.....	134
Table 46. N. Shan State Demographics: Education	134
Table 47. N. Shan State Demographics: Ethnicity	135
Table 48. N. Shan State Demographics: Occupation.....	135
Table 49. N. Shan State Demographics: Marital Status	135
Table 50. N. Shan State Demographics: Religion	136
Table 51. S. Shan State Demographics: Age	137
Table 52. S. Shan State Demographics: Gender	137
Table 53. S. Shan State Demographics: Education	137
Table 54. S. Shan State Demographics: Ethnicity	138
Table 55. S. Shan State Demographics: Occupation	138
Table 56. S. Shan State Demographics: Marital Status.....	139
Table 57. S. Shan State Demographics: Religion	139

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AA	Arakan Army
BGF	Border Guard Force
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
EAG	Ethnic Armed Group
MRP	Hongsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP)/Mon Restoration Party
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KNU	Karen National Union
KNPP	Karen National Progressive Party
KNPLF	Karen Nationalities 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 Peoples Front
MTA	Mong Tai Army
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCA	National Ceasefire Agreement
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NMSP	New Mon State Party
NGOs	Non-government organisations

PNLO	Pa'O National Liberation Organisation
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
SSA-N	Shan State Army - North
SSA	Shan State Army
SSA-S	Shan State Army- South
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UWSA	United Wa State Army

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



For over six decades Myanmar has endured violent conflict between the central government armed forces, called the Tatmadaw, and numerous ethnic armed groups. The complexity of the conflict lies in the multitude of actors involved and armed clashes that take place across the country, which have taken the lives of many and diminished the potential of the country. The peace process that was initiated in 2011 by the government is formed on bilateral ceasefire agreements signed between the government and Ethnic Armed Groups.

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	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	Yes
9. Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council	Kayin	7 February 2012	Yes

10. Karenni National Progressive Part (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 Area	5 August 2013	Yes
15. Kachin Independence organisation (KIO)	Kachin/ Northern Shan	30 May 2012	No
16. Lahu Democratic Union (LDU)		No Agreement	Yes
17. Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)	Northern Shan	No Agreement	No
18. Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA, 'Kokang Group')	Northern Shan	No Agreement	No
19. Arakan Army (AA)	Rakhine	No Agreement	No

The bilateral ceasefire agreements served as a foundation for the central government, 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 addresses longstanding issues that affect all communities. The forging of the ceasefire agreement in 2015 was seen as a first step in a long process that needs to address decades of resentment, marginalisation, and mistrust from the different ethnic groups across the country. Various counter-insurgency tactics employed in different ethnic states that aimed at cutting off communication and trade between the EAG and civilian communities

have stunted economic and social development in most ethnic states. This has left a legacy of severe poverty and lack of communication and transportation infrastructure that remains a problem today.

As the country prepares for the third session of nationwide peace talks, the peace process is at a precarious juncture, with armed clashes continuing in Kachin state between the Tatmadaw and the KIA, and fighting in Northern Shan state between the Tatmadaw and the RCSS and TNLA. Not only have these clashes been putting the lives of communities at risk and created large numbers of IDPs in the country, but they have also undermined national trust in the sustainability of the peace process.

Other challenges to the peace process are issues of inclusivity and representation at peace dialogues. However, more recently the signing of two ethnic armed groups to the cease-fire agreement, the NMSP and LDU, bring the total signatories to ten, marking a more positive step. Besides this, the dialogues have also been criticized for not including participation from civil society groups and women. Since the Myanmar peace process has largely been a top-level process that concentrates on dialogue between the Myanmar government, Tatmadaw, and EAG leadership, communities often remain voiceless and invisible at the negotiating table.

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) recognises the importance of involving 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 conflict, they have valuable insights to share about the grievances that drive conflict. Listening to how the bilateral ceasefire agreements are being implemented in their areas also serves as a significant source of feedback on the positive and negative effects of the ongoing peace process 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.

From May to September 2017, 485 conversations were conducted with 1537 community members living in the six ceasefire states of: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Northern Shan, Southern Shan, Kayah, and Mon state. Using the listening methodology, trained researchers known as listeners who are familiar with the context, culture and geography travelled to various townships across the country and had conversations with a cross-section of the states' demographics. These conversations were focused on community opinions regarding their direct experiences living through conflict and as their country progresses through a peace process. The topics covered their daily challenges, their thoughts on the peace process and their hopes for the future.

RECURRING MAIN THEMES IN ALL AREAS: 2018 RESULTS

The following themes are a collection of the most often recurring opinions, challenges, and aspirations that communities in the ceasefire states of Myanmar described for the year 2018. These themes will be categorized into thoughts on the peace process, challenges, and hopes for the future.

1. On the peace process

Communities fear that conflict will resume

In all selected areas, communities repeatedly brought up their fears for the resumption of conflict and the delicacy of the current peace process. Although most areas where listeners visited and held conversations were not in the midst of armed conflict, some areas had ongoing fights. This affected the perception of most people spoken to, as many members of the community remarked that peace could only be achieved when there is a genuine desire for change. But with the ongoing fighting in parts of the country, this reflects the lack of commitment to the peace process on the part of all conflict actors. This has placed people in a state of insecurity. Community members repeatedly expressed their fears that fighting in other parts of the country would gradually move into more stable parts of the country.

In addition to this, communities have discussed the genuine power of the current government, and remarked that it was the military that was still in

control. Due to this and the past actions of the military government, civilians still harbor lingering fears of the past abuse they endured, such as portering and torture, despite the national ceasefire agreement and peace process in motion. Moreover, there were talks on how natural resources play a part in the stability of the ceasefire, determining that grabs for the country's resources and the multitude of armed actors create a highly volatile situation.

Inclusivity

Communities mentioned the importance of their voice and the inclusion of all conflicting parties to the success of the peace process. Throughout conversations, people spoke of the lack of community representation in the peace talks in the form of what they need and want for their society. There is a strong desire for the government and armed groups to dialogue with communities and consult them on what is needed for the benefit of their respective states. There is a general sense amongst most people interviewed that the government and the armed groups do not represent the voice of the people, and that the peace talks are disingenuous, self-serving, and only pander to the international community. A key point raised was the divisive law that makes it unlawful to be associated with an illegal organization. This law, community members feel, is used unjustly and in a discriminatory manner to exclude them from political aspirations. They believe that, in order for there to be genuine inclusivity, this law needs to be reexamined.

Finally, there are calls from communities that the government include all armed groups into the NCA. The unequal inclusion of armed groups into the NCA creates tensions among the armed groups. With the backdrop of peace talks in motion, communities feel that the situation is fragile, and a more inclusive NCA could strengthen the peace process.

Genuine sustainable peace

An overarching theme throughout conversations that took place this year regarding the peace process is the need for sustainable peace. Communities have spoken about their desire for their voices to be included in peace talks and that this is the key to sustainable peace. Moreover, a sustainable peace process, they imagine, is one that is transparent and that will lead to federalism.

In terms of transparency, communities remarked on the behavior of some armed groups during and after peace talks with the government, since they do not provide the people with summaries on what was discussed during these conversations. In regards to the role federalism plays in sustaining peace, there is a belief among communities that a move to federalism would create unity at a national level and a more sustainable peace for the country.

2. Challenges

Communities still suffer from the lack of basic social services

Communities across all states visited for this year's round of listening have spoken about the need for further development of social services such as medical facilities and schools. Communities urgently need the government to prioritise the development of these services. The issue with some schools, especially in rural areas, is the limited teaching staff. This is due to the lower salary they receive working in more remote areas. Communities mentioned that some teachers would bribe their way to more desirable areas to work. Communities also mentioned the lack of commitment that teachers present, stating that some teachers will take leave for long periods of time, in some cases up to six months. In addition to this, teachers are not properly trained. The state of school facilities has also been described as poor; schools are constructed with materials such as bamboo and lack teaching materials. Further, there is the two-stream education system that has proven to show favoritism. The first category of student is the full-time student, and the other is the long-distance learner, Communities explained that the full-time student receives more priority when applying for jobs. Members of the community ask why have this unfair system? In conversations, a 'brain drain' was a worry for people. Due to the conflict and lack of opportunities, there is a sense that educated individuals are slowly leaving for better opportunities, taking with them their capacity to help better their communities.

Throughout the majority of conversations, a re-emerging theme was the lack of medical facilities and trained staff. Communities have made continual calls for the improvement of hospitals. These hospitals lack capable staff and equipment for medical procedures. Currently, most villages have basic clinics that can provide only basic procedures, and over-the-counter medication,

such as painkillers. What makes matters worse are the conditions of roads, which lead to hospitals, most of which are either poorly made or non-existent. In some instances, the conflict has caused suspicion within the community and amongst armed group members. These groups target some doctors and nurses, claiming they are spies or working for the enemy, forcing these trained medical staff to leave townships and villages.

Drugs abuse and proliferation

Drug abuse and proliferation has been a continual challenge for all communities across all states. The drugs issue is a multilayered problem that consists of three categories: its production and trade, its consumption, and the factors that push people to fall into either of the previous categories, and the consequences on communities. To begin, communities have expressed that people rely on growing and producing drugs such as heroin and methamphetamines known locally as ‘Ya Ba’ as a source of stable income. Due to the poor economy and lack of job opportunities, people in some townships resort to the drugs trade to earn a living. Some armed groups who have a vested interest in the maintenance of this industry support these farmers and manufacturers. This contrasts with other groups that have stricter policies towards drugs, and is a cause for conflict and tension within communities.

Throughout the years, communities have expressed that the ceasefire has contributed to the ease of drugs flowing throughout the country. The ease with which people can access drugs and the normalcy of its consumption and trade in the current culture is challenging for people within Myanmar. The greatest victims are the youth and young adults and this has put a significant strain on the family unit, as noted by communities. According to people interviewed, if there were better job opportunities, more efforts made in raising awareness and stricter rule of law, this issue would be solved.

High unemployment and a weak economy

Another prevalent theme is the lack of job opportunities that communities are currently facing. Most people rely on agricultural work, which includes tea farming and paddy farming. The conflict has made this work challenging; sporadic fighting limits farmers from harvesting crops. The use of landmines

has made transporting goods as well as commuting to fields dangerous. The multiple, informal, taxing at checkpoints also puts a strain on businesses causing the price of goods to increase. People have to rely on illegal foresting to make charcoal as a source of income, which yields low financial returns. To make matters worse, there were remarks on the high cost of living in relation to income and in some cases the earning capacity of an entire family could not cover living expenses. Communities argue that taxes are too high, and although they notice some development projects in their townships, these projects outsource jobs and do not utilize local labour. This perspective is echoed through numerous townships that participated in listening.

There is a growing sense of disappointment with the current government over the state of the economy and the less-than-satisfactory livelihood opportunities. Communities feel that the education system doesn't produce qualified individuals for the skills needed for jobs that are available on the market. Moreover, communities spoke of the link between low employment and drug abuse. The youth are particularly vulnerable to this and communities request that the government provide vocational training for them.

Communities' concern for the environment

A steadily growing theme that emerged from this year's round of listening is communities' concern for the environment and the negative effects companies extracting natural resources contributes to the issue. There are reports of prosperity and development since the arrival of these companies, but the methods they employ to extract resources are highly dangerous and irresponsible. In some communities where mining is the main industry, some companies have used explosives on caves, subsequently blasting debris and rocks on to nearby homes, pagodas, and places of work. Together with irresponsible handling of waste products from manufacturing, which has polluted fresh water streams, communities demand that the government place stricter regulating policies on companies.

Equally important is the concern for the rise of illegal logging taking place across various communities. There are reports that illegal logging companies have begun chopping down trees and damaging farming land, thus affecting the livelihood of people in the area. Communities suspect that the timber

is sold on the black market to countries across the borders. Communities request that the government consider these issues; although they acknowledge the positive results of development, there needs to be more monitoring and regulations for these companies.

3. Hopes and aspirations for the future

Communities' hope for development in their townships and villages

An enduring hope of the communities that took part in the listening project for this year was the need for infrastructure and social services development. The state of roads in the areas covered is poor; mud-carved paths with only some areas having cement roads. Communities spoke of how this affects them in two ways, the first, by affecting their livelihood opportunities. Commuting to work is challenging and this stunts the livelihood opportunities for those who depend on trade, as the poor road conditions limit their business potential. To add, the situation of the roads affects how children to go to school, making it significantly more challenging, especially during the rainy season when traversing between townships and places of work and school is even more risky.

In conversations, communities spoke of their wish for improved medical facilities, telecommunication, and schools. The medical facilities still need improvement in terms of staff, buildings, and services provided. Similarly, communities hope that the government will be able to advance the state of the telecommunication systems, as a number of people spoke of this issue and the challenge it poses on work, business, and other daily activities. In addition to this, communities wish for their education system to be improved and for school facilities to be upgraded, such as having properly trained teaching staff. Communities hope that the government will provide teachers who can speak in the local dialect, as the language barrier is a challenge that children are facing in the areas where the listening project was implemented.

Communities aspire to unity amongst all ethnic groups of Myanmar

Calls for ethnic harmony and unity are a strong hope for communities in Myanmar. The sustainability of the peace process, some people believe, depends

on the relationships between ethnic groups. Moreover, communities believe that, if this peace process is to be successful, there ought to be collaboration and unity between the armed groups and military. The conflict, which has plagued Myanmar for decades, has eroded relationships between the various ethnic groups of the country. There are rising tensions and distrust between people of different races, as expressed by those interviewed. Communities wish that they could return to how things were before, that is, the state of ethnic harmony in the past was strong and unified. There is a powerful desire for bridging the gaps between the various ethnic groups and lessening the discrimination that afflicts the people of the country.

Communities hope for access to land

A number of community members that were interviewed spoke of one day having access to land for farming, foraging, and reaping the benefits of the natural resources in their areas. At the moment, in some places, there are disputes over land ownership and this issue extends to those that have been displaced by conflict. Community members have identified those involved in this issue who they feel have taken advantage of the situation and have acted unjustly. These groups are the government, development companies, and armed groups.

During conversations, people acknowledged that the government has made efforts in compensating them for the loss of land during conflict and also from acquisition by development companies. However, they say the compensation is not equivalent to what was taken, and in some cases people were not compensated at all. One of the obstacles that they face is the complicated system of claiming land. Some people who go through this process do not have the legal knowledge nor the money to pay for legal assistance to claim their land lawfully. Moreover, some companies purchase land titles and deeds without the knowledge of community members, causing some people to be displaced. Armed groups who occupy land that communities live on and prohibit them from utilizing land or forest for resources and food exacerbate this issue. Communities hope that, as the peace process moves forward, they may be able to reclaim land lost and gain some compensation for the grief this matter has caused.

REOCCURRING THEMES BASED ON GENDER ACROSS ALL STATES

The introduction of a gender component to this year's rounds of listening is a new addition to this research project. The rationale behind this is the belief that conflict affects men and women differently and that both genders would face their own different set of challenges and aspirations. It was this concept that with this year's research, these differences could be captured and analysed. During training workshops, the research team introduced this new component to the listeners and instructed them to take note of the differences between what men and women were saying. The research tools were modified to incorporate a section dedicated to this new component. The tables below summarize the main opinions from both men and women.

Table 2. Most Heard Themes Based on Gender – Men

Peace Process	Challenges	Aspirations
There is a strong desire for good leadership to combat corruption and strengthen government institutions for a prosperous and developed nation.	Men acknowledge that the behavior of the youth has changed; they are not interested to work and less interested in socializing. Theft and robbery have increased in recent years. There is suspicion that this is a soft strategy by government to destroy people.	Desire for a developed nation
Since the signing of the NCA men are not forced to join an armed group as much as before. They feel freer.	There are concerns over business monopolies, which are believed to be controlled by government officials or military.	Better infrastructure and safety when traveling across the country.

Due to the unstable political situation, men expressed that villagers are the victims. There is too much fighting between armed groups and Tatmadaw and ceasefire agreements must be honored.	Health – there needs to be more hospitals and easily accessible. More medicine and capable staff.	
They want unity amongst all ethnicities. There is a strong desire for federalism and shared autonomy.	Desire for more employment opportunities and a better economy.	
In politics they say the political parties and armed groups and mechanism of the government structures are not transparent.	Improved schools that are closer to their areas and more vocational training for the youth.	

Table 3. Most Heard Themes Based on Gender – Women

Peace Process	Challenges	Aspirations
There is a strong belief that people are happier with the current government compared to the previous government.	The drugs issue has raised crime rates and family problems. There are more cases of domestic violence due to drugs. Traveling is dangerous due to mugging and abductions. Women do not feel safe.	Women want equal rights to men. During the civil war, women had the opportunity to be village chief and manage villages and townships. Since the start of the peace process they are not given those roles.
During the campaign, NLD promised many things, but nothing has changed and now they have nothing to eat	Women said there needs to be stronger rule of law and implementation to control the drug issues they face.	They want more female representation in parliament so that they may promote the voice of women.

Women are not interested in peace process	They desire improved education opportunities for their children. Schools that are easy to access, close to their areas, and that teach children critical thinking. They spoke of the need for more vocational training for the youth.	
When it comes to the peace process women feel that those in the cities know more and have a stronger say than women who reside in the countryside.	Women are struggling everyday just to survive in the midst of conflict. Many live with the fear of being a casualty of the war.	
Women talk about fear of conflict restarting.	Armed groups of soldiers abuse women and intimidate them. In one case, an armed group member shot a pregnant woman by accident when intoxicated. Women speak of the need for accountability and security.	
	Women feel discriminated in the work place. They speak of lower incomes relative to their male counter parts.	
	The conflict has forced children to stay in monasteries, separating families.	

	There is too much racial discrimination in their society	
	Domestic violence occurs due to economic crisis and low income. Many women have to go abroad for work.	

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS - MAIN THEMES OVER FOUR YEARS (2015 - 2018)

The project to listen to communities across six different states in Myanmar about their perspectives, experiences, and opinions of the peace process has elevated thousands of voices over four years. In each community, and in each state, the issues faced by community members emerge from the lived reality of conflict and how it affects them. However, over the four years that the project took place, a number of themes remained constant. Although circumstances do change, these themes help to define the national context of the peace process in Myanmar, as well as community perspectives of how the peace process affects them.

**Table 4. Total Number of Conversations and Participants
2015 – 2018**

Year	Community Members	Conversations
2015	1072	772
2016	1663	459
2017/2018	1537	485

These following themes were first identified in 2016, and were based on the findings from 2015 and 2016. At the end of the research period, these themes have again been used to compare what has and has not changed in the peace

process, and what communities are sharing in conversations with listeners. There are nine themes in total that capture what is heard in each State. They are:

- 1) Engagement and Inclusion in the Political Process**
- 2) Sustainability and Progress of the Peace Process**
- 3) Ethnic Discrimination**
- 4) Drug Issues**
- 5) Land Rights**
- 6) Livelihood Opportunities**
- 7) Infrastructure Development**
- 8) Environmental Concerns**

These themes help us to focus on the needs and aspirations of communities affected by conflict. Although there are a number of parts to the peace process, the inclusion of issues and knowledge from communities continues to be a missing link, and focusing on these themes will help to ensure a long-lasting, sustainable, and genuine engagement with the peace process in Myanmar.

1) Engagement and Inclusion in the Political Process

In 2015, Myanmar had their first freely held democratic elections, and the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a resounding victory against the military backed USDP. There was a sense of optimism in 2016 that the turning of the political tide would bring about positive change for the people of Myanmar. However, in communities there continues to be a sense of being excluded and left out of the political process.

In 2017 and 2018, communities continue to express their desire to be included and better represented in the political process. In some states, community members believe that their voices are not being heard, and that representatives are not consulting with communities. However, there remains a sense that the renewed political process is the way forward, and that the development and implementation of a federal system of government is the best way to reconcile the many different aspects, opinions, perspectives, and interests across Myanmar.

2) Sustainability and Progress of the Peace Process

A consistent theme throughout the listening project is the sustainability and the progress of the peace process over the three years. Community members note that there are significant changes and milestones, such as the Union Peace Conferences and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. However, people are aware of the changing influence of ethnic armed organisations. As the government and ethnic armed organisations continue to negotiate peace, communities continue to worry how successes in the peace process are translated into positive developments for the country.

The desired outcome of the peace process is for a genuine and sustainable peace in Myanmar. In order to achieve this, communities want to be included in the peace process to a greater extent by having their voices heard during peace negotiations. Communities hope for greater transparency from all parties to negotiations.

Communities also want peace talks to occur in an environment that does not have violent armed conflict. In many parts of Myanmar, although the peace process is active, there is still ongoing fighting between the armed conflict actors, and communities struggle to understand how there can be a peace process and armed violent conflict at the same time.

Similarly, the consequences of armed violent conflict still exist in and around many communities, even if there is no active conflict in their area. The concerns of IDPs, the insecurity caused by landmines, the constant threat of renewed conflict, and the threatening presence of armed conflict actors near to villages, all contribute to a peace process that proves unsustainable for communities if these concerns and fears are not addressed.

3) Ethnic Discrimination

Community members describe different examples of discrimination in their areas, and these examples remain a constant theme throughout the listening project. Discrimination is felt at road checkpoints, where community members have their identity documentation checked, and where they are fearful of laws that mean they can be arrested for association with illegal

organisations. Community members believe these laws are used to reinforce ethnic stereotypes and are a constant source of concern for citizens as they move around their communities.

In some schools, students struggle where they are unable to learn in their ethnic languages. In terms of business opportunities, some community members felt that they are discriminated based on their ethnicity and, in some areas, community members could see that there are limited job opportunities for local workers with preference given, instead, to workers from elsewhere.

However, community members believe that unity among ethnicities would mean a strong and peaceful Myanmar. In different states, ethnic division is heightened due to conflict dynamics, and community members identify these tensions as causing further conflict. Community members explain that maintaining inter-community relationships or, as some community members put it, bringing relationships between the different ethnicities back to how they were in the past, would help to reduce tensions.

4) Drug Issues

Drugs and drug-related social issues remain a prevalent theme in conversations with community members, although the experiences related to drugs varied across the six states included in the project. These issues include corruption that facilitates drug smuggling; drug traffickers taking advantage of ongoing conflict to increase smuggling; youth turning to drugs and the drug trade to support their livelihood; and a rising crime rate caused by drug-affected individuals.

Rather than a blanket approach to drug issues, communities want consistent and appropriate approaches in order to help communities better face up to the challenges posed by drug use and abuse. Some community members suggest that the government work with grassroots-led initiatives to help engage those involved in the drug trade and bring them back into the community. Others, who are farmers, suggest that there be more livelihood support so that they had more options to cultivating drug crops in order to provide for their families.

Most important, communities want less corruption and more transparency by those involved in conflict and the peace process, so that a consistent approach to drugs could be maintained in their communities.

5) Land Rights

For communities, land rights cover everything from existing ownership of land, to access to custodial and traditional land, to the consequences of renewed conflict leading to displacement. However, there is a consistent theme that communities face challenges from armed conflict actors, government, and private companies all occupying or buying land that they currently or traditionally use, and that more has to be done to help build capacity for communities to educate themselves about how to respond to these challenges.

Those interviewed expressed their desire for a land rights management system that fairly recognises the different ways in which land has been owned or used in different parts of Myanmar. Communities require education in order to understand how land is registered and owned, and communities require support and advice to ensure they are included in land registration processes. But there must also be recognition that, after such a long period of conflict in some parts of the state, displaced people do return to land that is now occupied by someone else, and that there is little recourse to help these displaced people in these circumstances.

As for large development companies purchasing land for projects, communities require fair inclusion in the planning process and compensation in the development process if their land is required. It is apparent that, over the years of the project, communities have become more aware of land ownership issues. However, it is equally apparent that communities have not been able yet to address these issues.

6) Livelihood opportunities

The pressures created by conflict on communities have been immense over the last three years. Community members explain in numerous conversations that they are concerned at the lack of improvement in their livelihood

opportunities, even as small victories such as the NLD election and the peace process continue. The real concerns for community center on what opportunities exist for improving their community.

The focus, in a number of conversations, is on what people can utilise to develop and grow their communities. Community members explain that conflict is not good for business, as it pushes trade away from their areas, and conflict limits their ability to grow their own produce. In other cases, internal displacement means that community members did not have access to the sources of livelihood that they rely upon and they are, instead, forced into new pockets of society where something as simple as a space at a local market is not available. Education, one way that is seen to lift the standard of livelihood, is difficult and expensive for some.

7) Infrastructure Development

One theme around improvement is in the area of infrastructure development. Community members believe that enhanced and increased access to services had benefitted them, but more is needed.

Although the needs of people vary from state to state, there are common requests. Firstly, there are requests for new and better-kept health and education facilities, along with an increase in staff for those facilities to provide said services. Communication infrastructure has improved in some areas, but for some communities there is not consistent access to electricity. In some areas, roads had improved but are not being maintained, and in other areas there still are no paved or sealed roads.

Communities are realistic that the only way infrastructure would be developed is if there is an end to violent conflict in Myanmar, as they point out that development is less likely during conflict because of security implications. In Karen State, for example, where the KNU had signed the NCA, there is more discussion about improving development, whereas in areas where there is ongoing conflict and no ceasefire, communities had different issues and priorities.

8) Informal Taxation

The concerns and issues regarding informal taxation remain unchanged for the three years that the listening took place, and they remain an ongoing challenge for communities. Mostly, these taxes are paid in order to move through checkpoints or because armed conflict actors are in the vicinity of the village. But in other cases the taxation is livestock such as cattle and pigs, and some people are sometimes expected to porter for armed conflict actors. Specific experiences varied from area to area, but all of these were perceived as examples of informal taxation.

The multiple instances of informal taxes, such as when different armed conflict actors move through villages, impact the livelihood of people in those areas and, in areas where the armed actors remain and are seen as a strong presence, community members wanted more transparency about what they were paying for.

The experience of informal taxation is a pressing issue affecting and impacting communities across Myanmar. However, there is reluctance to bring the issue in the peace process because, whether intentionally or otherwise, armed conflict actors were seen to benefit from this aspect of the conflict.

9) Environmental concerns

Environmental concerns are more apparent in 2017 and 2018, and built on the concerns that were expressed in **in** previous years. In particular, communities are concerned about the lasting impact of development projects that are near or around their villages, and how these projects affect the livelihood of people.

In different communities, projects had been implemented without oversight or with little regulation, and the effects of the projects had already negatively affected the environment and sources of livelihood, such as water sources or land access. Communities are increasingly adamant that they be included in the planning and implementation of development projects so that the effects of the projects are better monitored and those affected could be compensated for any negative impact.

But, most of all, communities wanted development to be sustainable and beneficial for the environment, so that there would be an environment left to hand to their children. Without sustainable interventions, the negative impact on the environment could be seen and felt by people in the area.

CHAPTER 2

MAIN FINDINGS IN EACH AREA

KACHIN STATE

“For change, you must begin with the little things.”

- A religious leader in Pu Tao Township



OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Communities desire self-determination and the right to natural resources.

“Infrastructure especially electricity is very important for the development of the area.”

- A religious leader in Pu Tao Township

Throughout the communities that took part in listening interviews in Kachin State, community members express their desire for more self-determination for Kachin State by the Kachin people. They believe that Kachin communities did not have influence and control over the affairs of their State. They say that the increased presence of armed soldiers; investment and control of mining operations by non-Kachin; and development projects such as the Myitsone Dam, remain a source of worry. Despite efforts from some members of state, parliament, and congress who have supported communities, some people that were spoken to feel alienated from political leaders and representatives who, in some areas, did not or had not visited to consult with communities.

Communities desire a true and sustainable peace but are concerned that peace dialogues are not effective because of ongoing-armed conflict and inter-communal tensions.

“We want to practice federalism.”

- A former village administrator in Myitkyina Township

The focus of many conversations is not just achieving peace, but also achieving a genuine, or true, peace. Community members reflect on the ongoing conflict in some parts of Kachin State as a sign that there is no true or genuine peace, even if the conflict is not directly affecting their community. Some people point out that there are ongoing peace talks, such as the Union Peace Conference, and yet there is still ongoing violent conflict. Therefore, there could not be genuine peace. In other conversations, especially in IDP camps, there is no peace so long as there is violent conflict, and without additional security guarantees, many community members express their reluctance to

go back to their homes for fear that they would be displaced again. In 2018, communities spoke of the rise in armed confrontation and the rise of IDPs, which has created more challenges for communities in the area. Despite the efforts of political parties and civil service organisations rescuing people from conflict zones there is still a need for more support.

Community members want to better understand the justice system and the peace process, and increase their awareness of how the peace process affects them.

“We want a peace agreement that gives us genuine and sustainable peace.”

- An IDP in Myitkyina Township

“Although there is no direct violence, there is still a need for genuine peace.”

- A farmer in Pu Tao Township

Across communities where conversations took place, a desire for greater understanding about the peace process and how the justice system works is evident. In particular, communities are concerned about corruption and discrimination within the justice system, and how that affects their lives. Listeners who spoke with groups of women in some parts of Kachin State heard that these women felt they could not talk about the peace process because they felt they did not know anything about the peace process, and that the men would be better able to talk about politics. In another area, a community member believed women were unable to reflect on their role in the peace process because they did not know about the peace process.

Community members recognize the 2008 constitution as a barrier to the peace process, and express their desire that it be amended.

“The 2008 constitution should be amended or changed at the consent of the people.”

- A religious leader in Phakant Township

In some conversations, the 2008 constitution was seen as a barrier to the peace process. In one conversation, the constitution is referred to as a structural

limitation to progress in the peace process because it blocks any efforts to approach genuine and sustainable peace. However, not all conversations are as detailed when referring to the constitution. In some areas, community members simply stated the constitution had to change without clarifying why, whereas some other community members more specifically understood and explained why and how the constitution had to be amended in order to promote genuine peace

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES

Communities want the government to effectively address drug issues, and believe that the government should cooperate with civilians in order to prevent drug problems.

“Before, they used the opium poppy, but now they use chemical pills because it is very cheap and available.”

- A shop-owner in Pu Tao Township

Despite the efforts by the government, church organisations, and Patjasan¹, drug issues are a widespread concern from all areas visited. However, how drug issues affect communities was different in different parts of Kachin State. In some communities, drug issues are about how drugs affect family members or friends, causing pressure on families already struggling with livelihood challenges. In other areas, community members are concerned about the connection between drug issues and conflict, suggesting that conflict actors benefit from drug smuggling or trafficking during conflict. Drugs are also a source of fear in communities, especially because of the association with crime and the negative impacts on those within the community, especially those who are stuck in unemployment. Communities suggest that the government should put more effort on working with grassroots-led initiatives that seek to address drug issues so that they could be effective at rehabilitating drug users and enforcing anti-drug laws.

¹ Patjasan is an anti-drug organisation founded in 2014 in Kachin State, Myanmar. They have an estimated membership of 100,000 people.

Community members who are displaced want to return to their homes safely, as well as safely farm and forage in their lands and forests.

“If we have to return there must be a guarantee of security in our communities.”

- An IDP in Myitkyina Township

Community members who are displaced, or know those who are displaced, are concerned that it is not safe to return to their homes, or to forage for food. In particular, concerns about landmines are a recurring theme in many communities that had been displaced because of armed conflict, or are close to active armed conflict areas. Community members are concerned about the uncertainty caused by where landmines had been laid and the impact these landmines would have on the safety and security of people. They stress the need for de-mining operations to begin as soon as possible to help with the transition back into communities, as well as to ensure that people could safely forage and farm for food, and travel within and around their local area.

Community members feel their freedom of movement is restricted by the presence of military camps, landmines, and checkpoints around their communities, and are afraid to go near land for farming or food that is currently occupied by the military.

“Every citizen should enjoy the freedom of movement, settlement, and business in the whole country.”

- A group of IDP's in Phakant Township

“We need mine clearance. There are signs - “Caution - Mines. If you want to go there you will die... We have no responsibility for your death.”

- A farmer in Mohnyin Township

Although community members are concerned that their freedom of movement is limited because of the presence of armed conflict actors around their villages, they also explain that there are other limitations to their ability to freely move in and around their communities. In particular, some community members

feel they are targeted because of their Kachin ethnicity at checkpoints, and are continually under suspicion of being members of ethnic armed groups, even if the groups are not in their area. In some cases, checkpoints are a barrier to passing through an area, whether by holding up travellers to be questioned or by having to pay tolls to use roads. These fears and limitations mean community members are unlikely to access land for livelihood purposes if it is near military camps, and they would reconsider travel if checkpoints made the journey difficult. In other conversations, IDP's also focus on a fear of insecurity as the main reason they would not want to return to their homes, having been displaced too many times because of conflict.

Communities remain worried about forced recruitment although it has decreased in some areas.

"We see a lot of peace talks and peace meetings but we do not see any improvement."

- A farmer in Myitkyina Township

"It is not safe to live in the IDP camps. At anytime we can be arrested (for associating with an illegal organization.)"

- An IDP in Mohnyin Township

Communities face challenges from two aspects of armed conflict that are out of their hands: forced recruitment and the threat of arrest under suspicion of being connected to illegal organisations. Community members note that forced recruitment has lessened more recently, but that it is still ongoing, and that recruits that had been taken from villages were unlikely to return, even to finish their education. On the other hand, people are arrested under suspicion of being connected to illegal organisations. The stress, both mentally and physically, from these conflict dynamics are an added burden to already vulnerable communities.

There are worries that educated people are leaving communities.

Although most communities are concerned that there are not enough education opportunities for children and youth, some community members in the more remote parts of Kachin State are particularly concerned that educated people

are leaving their communities for more opportunities in cities elsewhere within the state and Myanmar, and had little reason to return to build and improve their areas. These people are concerned about the sustainability of their communities into the future if it is not possible to retain educated youth in their area. Communities request more trained teachers and improved quality of education in their areas.

Community members feel neglected by the government and their representatives.

Although not widespread, there is a theme present in some conversations that community members felt alienated by the government and government system based on their ethnicity. This included a feeling of exclusion from elected posts, as well as government jobs, which are seen to favour particular ethnicities or sub-ethnicities, leading to intercommunal tensions. Community members are concerned that institutional discrimination and the lack of opportunity would continue to be a structural barrier to genuine peace in their communities. Another concern expressed by community members is that elected representatives rarely, if ever, visit communities and, as a result, community members felt they were not being heard or represented.

HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Communities hope for greater enforcement of law, security, and trust.

The security of communities is an important theme in many conversations, and the focus is on how communities can feel secure and law enforcement can be effective, especially with regards to drug issues. In particular, people expect fair and just enforcement of laws in order to reduce crime in their areas, but want authorities to consult and work with them in order to build trust. In particular, people want authorities to work with community-led initiatives to address crime. Communities referred specifically to ongoing efforts of the Patjasan, one such community-led initiative to prevent drug problems, and how the initiative could be more effective if they worked with authorities. In order to reduce crime, those spoken to want the government to consult them

on how and when to provide security, which will build trust between them and authorities.

Communities desire more development of better quality infrastructure and social services.

“After the conflict, we hope for increased development such as bridges and roads.”

- A vendor in Mohnyin Township

Communities explain that the government had improved some infrastructure in their area in recent years. However, there is still a need for ongoing improvement of infrastructure to keep up with needs and demands. In one area, communities explain that power is inconsistently supplied to communities, and the only time it ran efficiently and at all hours is when a VIP was in town. Another example is the improvement of infrastructure not only within towns but also between towns, especially transportation, to ease transportation costs between population centers. And across all communities, more schools, medical infrastructure, and consistent telecommunication infrastructure are desired.

Communities want an increase in education opportunities, and an end to discrimination against IDP students and teachers in education.

“We need quality education for our children, as well as economic opportunities and better healthcare.”

- A former village administrator in Myitkyina Township

Community members focus on improving education opportunities for children. In many communities, there is a desire specifically for the creation of new schools at different education levels and the employment of more teachers by the government. In some areas, this had already taken place. However, in one community, there are promises to supply wages to teachers, but the community has had to pay teachers to teach their children themselves. Community members also discuss discrimination in schools against IDP

students and teachers. In some cases, students are excluded from participating in schools, or teachers are treated unfairly because they are IDPs.

Communities require more business opportunities, such as access to markets and livelihood opportunities, in order to increase their income.

A common theme heard by listeners is about business opportunities for communities, as well as livelihood opportunities to increase their income. Community members explain that, in most cases, they are not concerned with the status of the peace process or their business opportunities, because they are too focused meeting day-to-day needs. Communities want help to increase their earning potential through the building of infrastructure that would better connect communities and ease livelihood challenges, such as helping all community members to access and sell goods more easily in the market.

Communities desire unity among ethnic groups like there was in the past.

Another theme, although not widespread, is the unity between the many ethnicities of Kachin State, as well as with the Kachin and the rest of the ethnic groups in Myanmar. In particular, there are concerns that inter-ethnic tensions would renew violence in communities that are already under pressure from violent conflict in Kachin State. Community members remark that it was not always like this, and that communities could and should come together to face their common challenges.

Communities want to protect free access to land for livelihood, and want a fair compensation for land-grabbing

Communities that had been displaced because of conflict or development are adamant that they should be fairly compensated for the lack of access to lands that they traditionally had used as a source of livelihood. They explain that this is caused by armed groups and development companies. Although a system for distributing compensation is in place, sometimes the distribution of compensation is challenged by corruption or unfair administrative practices.

“We want our customary land to be returned to the owners. If the land is occupied, we should be compensated fairly.”

- A farmer in Waingmaw Township

In particular, some communities are concerned over land ownership and land rights when many community members did not have deeds or titles to the land, instead relying on customary ownership laws to govern the sale and ownership of land. Companies sometimes purchase titles and deeds without communities being aware they even existed. Other community members are also worried that land would not be available for them if they returned to their communities, explaining that their villages and lands had since been occupied and cultivated by armed conflict actors in their absence.

Similarities from 2016 until 2018

There are a number of themes that emerged in 2017 and 2018 that are similar to what communities were discussing in Kachin state in 2016. These themes can be categorized into four main points: peace process, infrastructure, livelihood and land access, and equality.

Communities are still facing ongoing conflict, which has created a growing number of IDPs in the state. With the backdrop of peace talks juxtaposed to ongoing clashes, some people believe that there is no attempt towards genuine peace and this has made their daily lives challenging. Similarly, freedom of movement has been restricted due to these fights, and communities are still living in a militarized environment, which constitutes checkpoints, land mines in fields, military barracks of armed groups and military in their areas. Furthermore, there are calls for the 2008 constitution to be amended, as people spoken to have mentioned that it is a barrier to peace. Particularly, the law that prohibits working with an illegal organisation, which is used to arrest people arbitrarily.

A similar theme that was discussed since 2016 until now is the need for transparency in the peace process, but in particular this year, transparency in the judicial system. People spoke of how they are unaware of the progress of peace talks but also the content of these dialogues is not shared with them by

organisations that claim to be representing them. Likewise, the judicial system has been described as unjust, discriminatory, and corrupt. Communities desire transparency, inclusion and a fair judicial system. Finally, communities spoke of their desire for sustainable and genuine peace. They stressed the phrase genuine peace because, from their perspective, conflict actors speak about wanting peace but their actions are contrary to this. The results of this are evident in all aspects of their lives, such as the ongoing conflict that has created IDPs and other challenges.

Another similarity is the calls for improved infrastructure and social services. Roads are not constructed in most areas and the roads that do exist need to be maintained and improved. Most areas that were visited for this listening project did have roads but people living in other areas visited rely on dirt tracks as roads, which become treacherous during the rainy season. Traveling to hospitals during emergencies becomes especially difficult due to the poor road conditions. Communities at the moment still do not have proper medical facilities and rely on clinics, which only provide basic medication and simple operations. Furthermore, schools in the areas were described by community members as basic and need improvement. What is more, communities still lack consistent electricity, which has affected their businesses by making it difficult to produce goods, which limits their income.

The issue of land access and livelihood opportunities was reiterated.. Both topics, as explained by community members, affect one another. Communities still have limited access to land that is used for foraging and cultivating crops. Although being compensated, some people who are affected feel that it is insufficient. In addition, for development and other projects the government easily confiscates land; community members are unable to reclaim the land because they don't have titles and deeds, as it is their customary land and they have lived there for generations.

Communities so far still desire equality and unity between all ethnic groups. Community members wish for all ethnic groups to be unified and for the discrimination to stop. Some people spoken to wish for their country to return to harmony and unity.

One of the more prominent similarities between this year's findings and the previous is the focus on forced recruitment, which still occurs in some areas. This may be attributed to the clashes that took place throughout the year, as a number of people spoke of how their relatives or members of their communities have been forced to join the armed groups. Often times never returning back to their villages, these individuals are at risk of being killed in battle or forced into hard labor. However, in 2018 forced recruitment has decreased. Furthermore, the recent clashes have raised the level of suspicion, and arbitrary arrests have increased, IDPs are also prone to arrests with authorities coming into camps and arresting them. Communities note that this is due to authorities assuming people are connected to illegal organisations, and this has left them feeling hopeless.

Differences from 2016 until 2018

Another issue that differs in conversations is the fear of losing skilled people. The lack of opportunities, community members note, is the cause of this. They spoke of these educated and talented individuals migrating to other cities or abroad, taking with them their expertise and the ability to better their communities.

What links and enforces these two concerns together is the third theme that emerged this year, which is the situation of the rule of law and security. With the growing drugs issue, some people spoken to believe that cooperation between Patjasan and the authorities could prove to be effective in eradicating this problem.

Other differences from 2018 and the previous years include the development of special economic zones between China and Myanmar situated in Kachin state. These economic zones have been a source of conflict between landowners such as farmers and Chinese companies that are developing the land. Those spoken to wish to be compensated fairly. Moreover, community members that were interviewed spoke of the rise in banana plantations, which they say has confiscated and destroyed land. IDPs are particularly vulnerable to this, as they have been displaced from their lands due to conflict. Some of those spoken to identified that Chinese companies, operating under Burmese names, are the ones building plantations. Community members explain that

thousands of acres of land including pasture land, forest reserves, and ‘vacant’ and virgin land have been taken over, despite efforts by some armed groups to stop this. People remark that the conflict has weakened their rights, and displaced people may not be able to get their land back.

Recent developments include the building of roads that link to China and India via Kachin state and the abolishing of road tax and toll fares. Communities see this as a positive development.

KAREN STATE

“Federalism is not the separation; it’s about living together with the respect.”

– Middle aged male farmer from Hpa-an Township.



OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Communities are concerned that armed conflict will resume, despite the peace process.

“They talk about peace. But do we have peace? We can’t understand what is happening with the top leaders. I’m sure they will shoot us again.”

- A farmer from Kyahin Seikgyi Township

In conversations, community members believe that conflict would start again because they are suspicious that the military has maintained influence and control over the government. Participants reflect that it is the military in the past that had caused pain and suffering to communities, who had lost farms and homes, and as such community members are still recovering. Although there is the current peace process, and the resulting NCA, communities still did not trust the peace process, and point out that there is still ongoing fighting between armed conflict actors in the state. For community members, there could not be peace if there is still fighting.

Communities are aware about the Panglong conferences in the last year, and that the government and the ethnic armed organisations had attended, and some had signed the NCA. However, community members complain that there is very limited information that has come to the ground level from the top. Community members expect the reflection of their voices in the peace process. Hence, they believe that if there is no consultation with them regarding the ongoing peace process, there is a tendency to resume armed conflict.

Communities need a peace process that leads to sustainable peace.

Community members want a peace process that leads to sustainable peace. Communities came to this conclusion after expressing their dissatisfaction with the way the government has handled the peace process, believing that their community opinions, perspectives, and experiences have not fully been reflected at a national level. According to community members, they believe

that the military has controlled the implementation of the peace process in a way that holds back ethnic communities. In one way, communities believe that a move to federalism would create the necessary unity at a national level, and self-determination at a state level, which would ensure stability in communities as well as consultation with community members.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES

Communities want a society that is free from drug-related social issues.

During conversations, concerns emerged over the prevalence of drugs, with community members pointing out that drugs are easily available in their towns and villages. Those spoken to are concerned that they cannot speak up against the drug issue. Community members suspect that there is a link between law enforcement authorities and the drug trade. In particular, people remarked that after the ceasefire agreement had been signed, they noticed the drug trade and drug abuse only increased.

“Drugs are easy to find, they are everywhere. Many young people are addicted to “Yaba.”

- A farmer in Kyahin Seikgyi Township

A greater fear expressed by participants that took part in listening, is that drugs are waylaying youth, and due to addiction they are losing direction and purpose in their lives. As other livelihood pressures affect youth, such as lack of education opportunities or employment prospects, communities notice youth turning to drugs as a way to make money and to escape reality. In one example, communities spoke about how some young people wanted to be schoolteachers but found out they do not have the required qualifications to teach, and the opportunities to become qualified were difficult. As a result, communities explain that there is social instability because of the increasing prevalence of drugs.

Communities are concerned about informal taxation and forced-conscription by the armed persons in the frontline.

“No rule of law. We have to pay taxes to armed groups.”

- A farmer from Seikgyi Township

For many communities, ongoing informal taxation is a burden on an already struggling population. Community members explain that multiple instances of informal taxation must be paid to different authorities in their townships. In one example, it was different militias and armed groups that would come through their towns and collect informal taxes. In other cases, these groups would instead take payment in the form of food or animals, such as chickens or pigs.

Another challenge faced by some is recruitment programs conducted by armed groups. In one case, those interviewed explain that their village is expected to provide men for armed groups when required, which takes away family members who might otherwise be working in the community. If the village cannot provide men, they are required to pay a fine.

Communities are worried about how new development projects will affect their environment.

“Government and companies don’t want to listen to us. No matter what we do.”

- A Businessman from Hpa-an Township

Communities are concerned that new development projects initiated by large companies are destroying the environment around their villages. In one example, a new project began close to a village that is located near a limestone cave. The government gave permission to a mining company to mine limestone in the cave. However, the company had to use explosives to extract the resource; in the resulting explosion, debris from the blast damaged homes and pagodas in the village. Despite protesting to the authorities to put a halt to the mining, there was no response. As a consequence, there is ongoing noise pollution, and water pollution from the limestone factory has been released in the river without purification.

Community members are concerned that these types of developments, with little oversight and regulation, are destroying the environment they rely on for livelihood.

HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Communities hope for the increased development of education and public service infrastructure in their community.

In conversations, community members explain that they feel they are challenged by the lack of electricity in their villages. They only have access to basic healthcare facilities, and quality education opportunities are difficult to come by. Communities believe that improving social service infrastructure would help improve their livelihood.

“In most Karen villages there are not enough schools, and not enough qualified teachers. We feel neglected.”

- A Peace Leader from Myawaddy Township.

Another improvement that communities want is access to consistent electricity supply. Community members believe that consistent electricity would allow them to develop local businesses. Even though some communities have had access to solar power, it is not always reliable and some business machinery will not operate on solar power alone. If communities had better developed electricity infrastructure, they could improve opportunities for new income and business.

Communities believe that teachers who can teach in ethnic languages would improve the quality of education in schools. In most cases, the quality of education is low because of language barriers in the schools. For example, teachers in some areas were non-Karen-speaking teachers who had to teach Karen-speaking students in Burmese. Therefore, miscommunication between teachers and students is unavoidable.

Similarities from 2016 until 2018

The situation of social services and infrastructure in Karen state has remained deficient since the previous year. The medical facilities are still basic and lacking in trained doctors and nurses. Similarly, in previous years these issues were lacking and exacerbated by conflict, causing healthcare providers to avoid some areas in Karen state. To add, the standard of education has also remained inadequate. Besides the lack of trained teaching staff, what sets this apart from last year is that communities spoke of the need to have teachers who speak in the Karen language. Some community members explained that lessons are taught in Burmese and most students do not understand and because of this there is miscommunication. This language barrier is one of the causes of the low quality of education children are receiving, remarked those who took part in this year's listening.

Access to stable electricity is another issue that has carried on from the previous year. People spoken to expressed that the lack of consistent electricity has limited their business opportunities. For example, in manufacturing products, some community members explained that they are unable to produce goods due to the shortage of electricity and this greatly affects their livelihood potential. In the previous year, this again was an issue, with some members of the community having access to electricity whilst a majority do not.

Due to the ongoing clashes within the state, the notion of a sustainable peace is again at the forefront of peoples' desires. The influence of the military on the civilian government is still suspect, and this raises fears within some people due to past trauma inflicted upon them by the military. In the previous year, the need for sustainable peace was spoken about with hope, but currently community members speak about the lack of trust they have in peace being sustained. This is attributed to the ongoing conflict while peace talks are being held. What sets this year's theme on sustainable peace apart from the previous years is the change in how they see peace being sustained. In the previous year communities were hopeful and spoke of the cessation of conflict. However, this year the change is now a desire for a more transparent peace process and community consultation. Communities spoke about how armed groups and the military do not share developments with them about peace talks and what

is being discussed. This is in tandem with their desire to be consulted, as they see themselves as a part of the peace process.

The issue of drug abuse and proliferation is a reoccurring theme in Karen state. However, during this year's round of listening, this issue has taken on a more nuanced understanding. Individuals that took part in the conversation spoke about their belief that the authorities are complicit in the manufacturing and distribution of drugs. Communities mentioned how they therefore fear speaking up on this issue. This resonates and adds to last year's issue on how soldiers would harass and abuse communities when intoxicated. Moreover, they spoke about how the peace process has brought with it the increase of drugs and the rise of drug abuse by the youth.

Finally, the informal taxation system is again an issue that remains unchanged. In 2016 there were discussions on how the military and armed groups tax communities at checkpoints and as they pass through their areas. They take a large portion of the income from people living in those areas and this negatively affects their earnings. Moreover, there is no transparency within this system, and communities are unaware of what happens to the money. This year is no different, except now communities remarked that there are more forced conscriptions and confiscation of animals and food as payment if they cannot pay the tax.

Differences from 2016 until 2018

One of the chief differences is a greater concern for the environment and the negative impacts of development. This issue was not raised in 2016 as there was more concern over the peace process, a sustainable ceasefire, law and order, and economic development.

The mining of limestone in Karen state for cement has been described by community members as destructive to the environment and lacking their consent. The methods companies use to extract resources are dangerous; in some cases, explosives have been used, damaging nearby houses and pagodas from residues of the blasts. The destruction extends to polluting rivers and polluting the air. People demand that the government place stricter implementation of regulations on these companies. This new development

may be attributed to listeners traveling to different areas this year such as Khonkhan, where there are currently limestone mountains being excavated by permission of the armed groups in the area.

Other changes this year include improvements in infrastructure, such as the construction of concrete roads. Community members say that the road has improved their lives; however, others say it has made the situation with respect to armed groups worse as it allows easier access for the military through the area. Communities believe that this does not help the peace process and may make things more difficult. Moreover, communities have noticed improvements in mechanisms that allow for them to file complaints, such as the joint monitoring committee's complaint mechanism. In some conversations, people mentioned how they are now able to file complaints against armed soldiers who tax them informally; this is a major positive change, as before, this mechanism was not available.

KAYAH STATE

'Cows that do not stay as a herd become victims of tiger. (A Burmese proverb: "United we stand, divided we fall")'

- Farmer, 73 years old, Khe Ma Phyu 1 village



OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Communities are concerned about the resumption of armed conflict.

'The key thing is that we, the people, do not want ceasefire. We just want permanent peace. Ceasefire means they can start shooting their guns again if they don't want that ceasefire anymore. In the end, the communities will suffer.'

- A 44-year-old farmer from Chi Kwe village, Bawlake Township

In conversations, listeners heard that communities are concerned about the stability of the current bilateral ceasefire, and have noticed little change in attitudes and behaviours between armed conflict actors on the ground since implementation. Community members explain that they are aware that communication between the top-level actors, those at the peace talks, and the soldiers on the ground do not reflect what is actually happening at the peace talks. In particular, communities voiced concerns over the soldiers in their villages expressing their preparation for conflict if the opposition were to break the ceasefire. Statements such as this create tension and anxiety at the township and village level that conflict might begin again.

In response, communities ask for clear communication lines between all the government departments and armed groups. Community members wish for the armed conflict actors to follow the agreements and for the aggressive speech of the soldiers in their areas to tone down, as it exacerbates tension. In particular, the spirit of the ceasefire agreement needs to be reflected at the grassroots level.

Inclusive participation of communities will create a successful peace process.

'Communities need to participate in the peace process. They should participate in it. But we are afraid of Section 17/1 (Association with unlawful organization).'

- A 45-year-old, paddy farmer from Shadaw

There is a strong desire from communities to take part in the peace process and to voice their opinions and challenges for the government and armed groups to consider during peace talks. Communities are concerned about one law in particular: unlawful association with an illegal organization. Community members believe this law is used unfairly to persecute and discriminate against members of the community. The communities want this law amended, as they believe only through working with all people affected by conflict can peace be achieved.

A successful peace process will lead to increased development.

'Now the ethnic armed organization and the government side only talks about peace. They have forgotten the interest of the communities.'

- A 32-year-old pastor from Kaya Pai village, Bawleke Township

In some communities, there is a widespread belief that no infrastructure development projects, such as roads, will be begin or be completed until peace negotiations are successful. Communities explain that armed conflict affects the beginning and conclusion of development in their state. Community members call for all armed conflict actors to prioritise the development of the nation over their own interests.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES

Communities are still under the authority of armed conflict actors.

'In the current context, there are more and more groups that are using peace as a means to an end for their financial gains. People have to ask them for permission even for household use (of natural resources). These so-called peace-builders are exploiting (the natural resources) commercially. If they continue like that, there won't be peace. What they gained will not be peace.'

- A 39 -year-old farmer from Sa Le Lon Su See village, Bawleke Township.

Armed conflict actors have set up bases around villages and townships, placing communities in a situation where there is tension and insecurity due to the presence of soldiers. In particular, community members in some areas explain that some armed group camps have captured the main sources of fresh water and use it for water-intensive farming. Before the camps and plantations, the water source initially supported numerous villages, but now its being diverted has caused water shortages in communities. Moreover, the soldiers hunt the local wildlife with no restraint and have chopped down scores of trees, which is a great environmental concern to communities.

To add to this situation, communities experience regular, informal taxation by armed conflict actors. Community members complain that there are no records of where the money from taxation goes and how the money is used. Communities believe that, if the armed conflict actors continue affecting the economy through checkpoint taxation, the price of their goods would eventually be greatly affected, as the informal taxation strains the delicate livelihood balance.

Communities are challenged by ownership of customary lands.

‘After the enactment of 2012 Farmland Law, land issues worsened horribly. That Farmland Law was enacted only for cronies. It is against the customary practices. It is necessary to redraft the Farmland Law of 2012 based on local context and revitalize the customary law.’

- A 31-year-old Farmer, Demoso Township

Community members explain that, in many cases, they are subjected to land confiscation by the government due to laws that imply the government owns sections of land, regardless of who occupies it. In cases where community members have lost land, they received no compensation. However, community members explain that they had noticed that land is readily available to companies for development projects should a request be made to the government. These disputes and displacement over land ownership extend to ancestral and customary land, where communities have experience of the government prohibiting them from using jungle for agricultural or foraging purposes, even if it is vacant. Communities express their desire for free access to their

ancestral land, clear demarcation of land ownership, and for the cessation of land-grabbing.

Communities struggle with low employment rates, a lack of market places to sell their local products, and they demand equal access to natural resources.

A challenge faced by communities is the lack of employment opportunities. Among community members, there is a general sense of disappointment with the current government for not doing more to provide better job opportunities. In particular, there is resentment towards development companies that come from outside Kayah State and do not hire local people. Instead, the companies would bring their own labourers. In conversations, community members demand better opportunities to increase their livelihood.

Most community members rely on farming and agriculture for their livelihood and so rely heavily on the trading of their produce. Communities speak out about the lack of market places to sell their produce, and a lack of customers to buy their goods. The conflict in Northern Shan State has made the economic situation more difficult, as this limits business opportunities. Since 2015, communities have noticed a steady decline in business opportunities within Kayah State, and this has caused a significant loss to people's income.

What is more, there is still a culture of cronyism thriving in development projects and business. Armed conflict actors in many areas control access to natural resources, and community members believe these groups only grant access to these resources, such as development projects, to those who are closest to them.

Communities face inadequate education infrastructure, and existing schools are understaffed.

Communities explain that schools are understaffed, and they are concerned about the commitment of teachers to remaining in their villages. The teachers that are employed at the schools in listening areas do not have enough training

and, in some cases, community members explain that some teachers will take leave for half the year, leaving the students without ongoing or continuing education. Community members explain that they need the government to increase support and investment in improving education infrastructure in order to provide more education opportunities. Communities demand that the government prioritise these issues.

Communities want the government to seriously address drug issues.

Communities need the distribution and consumption of drugs to stop. They believe it is the government's responsibility to play an active role in controlling this problem through awareness training and clamping down on those who are involved in the drugs trade. Communities are aware that there are armed conflict groups that are involved in this issue and there are calls for them to stop the selling and production of drugs.

Communities note that demands for improved health care facilities and more trained medical staff have not yet been addressed.

In conversations, participants explain the challenges faced by lack of access to adequate healthcare facilities. Communities demand improved hospitals that provide efficient services with an increase in qualified medical staff. The current situation faced by some in Kayah State is that they have access to small clinics that are understaffed and, sometimes, do not have a doctor or nurse. Moreover, these clinics do not carry a full stock of medicines, sometimes carrying only basic painkillers, and so people are forced to travel elsewhere for basic medicines.

As a consequence, communities have difficulty treating serious, yet manageable issues, such as malaria. Community members express their hope that improvement to healthcare and medical infrastructure would be a focal point for development in their communities.

HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Communities hope for a peaceful future through collaboration, harmony and equality.

In order to ensure a peaceful future, communities focus on the need for successful collaboration between the government and ethnic armed organisations, ensuring inclusivity and sustainability for any peaceful future.

A strong theme with community members is the desire for equality amongst all ethnic groups in Myanmar, and for a future free from discrimination based on ethnicity. In particular, when discussing the future, community members talk about hopes for achieving lasting peace throughout Myanmar, as well as development and prosperity.

Communities want increased local and state governance.

Specifically, communities focus on the desire for the central government to share more power with state and local governments in order to allow ethnic communities access to their customary lands, and to practice their customary laws. In particular, communities believed that the 2008 constitution is a barrier to states increasing their opportunity to govern because the 2008 constitution guarantees military representation. Community members suggest that the constitution be amended in order ensure unimpeded representation of all communities, in order to address the perception by communities that the central government maintains an unfair and unjust system of governance that perpetuates an imbalance of power away from communities.

Similarities from 2016 until 2018

The similarities of themes between the years begin with issues pertaining to the peace process. Communities this year spoke about the fear they have over the renewal of conflict as the bilateral ceasefire is in effect. They spoke of the heightened tensions in their areas and note the lack of communication between those in peace talks and soldiers in their townships as armed clashes ensue, stating that soldiers behave aggressively and make comments about

fighting one another. This concern has morphed from the previous year in which people spoken to were afraid that not all armed groups had signed a ceasefire agreement.

Another similarity is the desire for inclusion in the peace process. People spoken to remark that a successful peace process needs to include the voices, opinions, and challenges of the communities. This is comparable to what was expressed last year when those interviewed said that inclusivity was key to a successful peace process, but the stress last year was on inclusion of all ethnic armed groups. The change could be due to the members of the non-signatory bloc, the united nationalities federal council, of which the KNPP is a member, not signing a ceasefire at that time. Moreover, communities this year spoke on the importance of inclusion of their voices in the peace talks, and highlighted their desire for the amendment of the unlawful association act section 17/1, which is used to intimidate and arrest political activists but also ethnic minorities in general.

Turning to another similarity, communities spoke of their grievances with the militarisation of their areas. In the previous year, the residents of the areas that listening covered explained how they endured informal taxation that included tolls, accessing resources such as timber, and forced occupancy of armed group members in their homes. In addition, these soldiers from both military and armed groups were accused of abusing people in the towns and villages they were stationed in. Likewise, this year communities are repeating the same issues: bases are built around their townships, making residents tense and anxious that conflict will erupt. Again, these soldiers are capturing necessary resources such as fresh water and hunting wildlife. To conclude, communities are still living a militarised life and request that the presence of armed actors reduce in their areas.

The issue regarding land rights has evolved since 2016. During that time, communities were concerned with unclear demarcation of privately owned land and land open to the public. Further, the encroachment of armed groups and military onto communal land was also a concern. In the same way, communities are facing these challenges again with the addition of land confiscation by the government under the guise of laws which state that land belongs to government unless documents prove otherwise. Communities are

relocated and provided no compensation in some cases. Additionally, these lands are easily given to development companies for projects and the public are prohibited from using ancestral or customary land for agriculture or foraging. The people request that land- grabbing, clear demarcation of land, and access to ancestral land be answered.

Social services such as education and healthcare have again been carried forward from the previous year. As in 2016, communities still lack proper medical facilities and schools. Villages and townships visited do not have properly trained doctors and nurses, especially medicines, as most areas have clinics and are not stocked with proper medication. Infections such as malaria are prevalent and easily treatable, but due to poor medical services this has become difficult to manage. Likewise, the state of schools is poor. In 2016 community members explained that there were no universities in their areas and that the youth received only a basic education. This issue has remained the same in 2018.

The poor economy and limited job prospects coupled with the peace process making travel easier has led a number of people from communities to believe that these are the factors to why drug abuse has remained a challenge throughout the years. People spoken to have requested that the government take this issue seriously and investigate those in positions of authority who might be complicit in the manufacturing and distribution of drugs. A major concern of those interviewed is that the youth will fall prey to drug addiction. The sentiment towards this issue has remained the same from 2016 to 2018, with little changing about the solution to this problem.

Finally, the theme of ethnic harmony and unity is again mentioned this year. Participants to listening spoke of the need for peace through ethnic harmony and highlight the point that a successful peace process would result from cooperation between the government and all ethnic armed groups. Moreover, they remarked on the need for equality and no more discrimination based on ethnicity, whether that is based on government policies or the daily lives of people. What differs from previous years in regards to equality is that, last year, communities focused more on a unification of all armed groups and military because of the multiple policies and taxes inflicted on them by the various groups. Further, they spoke of the need for the country to have a

unified armed and country for the greater security of the nation. The change has shifted from communities worrying about security to the peace process, possibly indicating a safer environment.

Differences from 2016 until 2018

This year's round of listening shows that communities have started to voice desires for the central government to share power with the local government of Kayah state. This desire is due to people wanting access to customary lands and to practice their customary laws. What separates this issue more is that communities are now expressing the need for change in the 2008 constitution that vests a significant amount of power in the military, which people have described as limiting states' ability to govern themselves.

Another differing theme is the belief that a successful peace process will bring development. Those interviewed expressed that they believe that conflict has stunted any development in their area and that the conflict has only been perpetuated because it enriches a few.

MON STATE

“We want community to work together to eradicate drugs, armed conflict, and achieve peace”

- A farmer from Kyeikmayaw Township



OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Communities are dissatisfied with the progress of the peace process.

“No fighting, but it will start sooner or later.”

- A farmer from Ye Township

In conversations with community members, there is a lack of satisfaction with the status of the NCA, and a belief that the peace process is only for top-level leaders, not for communities at the ground level. In particular, communities do not feel as though they have been consulted during the peace process. However, more concerning for them is the perception that conflict might start again. According to the listeners, communities are concerned that the peace process has slowed, and that issues, such as corruption and the drug trade, are developing whilst the NCA is in progress.

One suggestion from communities to increase trust in the peace process is the inclusion of grass roots-level opinions, perspectives, and experiences in the political process, rather than just the concerns and understanding of top-level political leaders. In order to increase this inclusion, community members request more clarity and knowledge about the peace process so that they can recognize and empower their own representation in it.

Communities still feel insecure despite no fighting.

“We need peace, not only for the top level but also for the village level”.

- A farmer from Bilin Township

Community members from some areas in Mon State share in conversations that, although they no longer have armed conflict in or around their communities, they cannot help but feel that it might begin at any moment. As a result, there is an instability in their lives that has affected their economic and social livelihood, as opportunities are dismissed based on worries or concerns about

possible armed conflict. Community members believe that stability can only come from a trustworthy and genuine peace process that will enhance the development of their communities.

Community members believe that federalism and unity among ethnic groups is necessary to support the peace process.

There is an idea that federalism can bring sustainable peace to Myanmar, and that what communities require is a solid peace process and national ceasefire. As a political solution, federalism is the most common topic discussed in conversations.

The other aspect of sustainable peace and security for all communities that is discussed by community members is the belief in unity among ethnic groups. According to community members, it is important for ethnic groups to remain united in order to reinforce the peace process.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES

Communities want a society free from drug abuse and drug-related issues.

“Majority of youth are addicted to drugs, no jobs, no good income, no education but full of drugs in our community”

- A community member from Chaungzon Township

Community members are concerned about safety and security because of drug-related crime. Communities feel there is a direct connection between the level of security, and drug usage and drug-dealing. Other community members, in some areas, feel they cannot move safely within or between their communities because of crime. Community members are also concerned that drug issues mostly affect youth, and that youth are vulnerable to drugs because of unemployment or lack of education opportunities.

Community members believe that the way to address drug issues that affect them is through law enforcement, to work with existing programmes that focus on good education and the eradication of poverty, and eradicating drug-related crimes and social issues from their areas. Additionally, those spoken to remark on how armed groups in their areas work with the police but that some members of the police work with the drug dealers. People wish for genuine collaboration and effective measures to control the drugs issue.

Communities need more job-oriented education or vocational training in the community.

“We need more job opportunities for our youth. If not, they will be a target of drug trade.”

- A farmer from Thaton Township

According to community members, there is a large number of unemployed youth. People request that they receive vocational training in order to alleviate and address unskilled youth drifting into unemployment. In particular, community members believe that the education system is not set up to feed the demand for professional skills that already exist. Hence, there is a large number of youth that have missed an opportunity to develop professional skills.

“We need good jobs. Rubber cannot guarantee a good income”

- A community member from Bilin Township

A major concern for community members is the perceived connection between unemployed youth and drug-related social issues, and there are worries that, without addressing both issues at the same time, they will only both get worse. Therefore, community members demand the government assist in creating suitable job opportunities and professional skill development for youth as a pathway to address youth unemployment, in conjunction with programmes that address drug issues.

Communities are concerned about the effects of large development projects on the environment.

“We need development but we need our environment and nature to be protected.”

- A University student from Ye Township

Community members are concerned that large development projects have destroyed the environment, affecting opportunities for livelihood by polluting land used for agriculture. The largest concern, according to communities, is that large companies do not listen to residents when they try and raise their concerns, and also the government does not consider local communities when deciding to back development projects.

As a result, there are many development projects that have been, or are being, implemented by companies without community consultation or notice. In particular, communities refer to the ongoing situation with a coal power plant project that has been situated in Mon State. Local communities have complained that the coal power plant will cause massive environmental destruction, but neither the government nor the company has taken their concerns into account. Communities demand more consultation and inclusion in the planning and implementation of development projects to ensure that the outcome is not detrimental to the community.

HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Communities hope for free access to forest products.

“Our community should work together to achieve peace.”

- A farmer from Ye Township

Community members express their concerns that large companies have restricted access to lands that have been traditionally used by villages as a source of livelihood. As a result, the day-to-day income has been steadily dropping, as limitations on what can be foraged or grown have been restricted. For example, communities used to collect forest products from the customary land such as

wood, bamboo shoots, and bush meat. These resources have been harvested by villages and serve as a source of livelihood for them. Communities are hopeful that free and fair access to forest products can be restored so that people can maintain their way of life and ensure a stable income for families.

Communities want improvements to infrastructure, especially road networks to remote areas.

“No good roads to go to school or good roads to go to the city”

- A community member from Kyaikto Township

Community members refer to the lack of access and availability of hospitals and schools for many villages, especially hospitals and schools that are located far away and connected by poor roads. Further investment and development of social services and infrastructure would help these communities.

Communities draw a connection between the quality of transportation infrastructure and the quality of social service provision. In some areas, roads in their villages are very narrow and muddy, and in the rainy season transportation is dangerous. As a result of these poor road conditions, the livelihood opportunities of residents are limited, as they cannot use transportation to sell their produce or trade. Other examples include that, in the rainy season, children cannot go to schools and laborers cannot go to work because roads are ruined.

Community members hope for more job opportunities, especially economic development for the youth.

The topic of youth unemployment is an ongoing area of concern for people, and young community members point out that there is a lack of good job opportunities and reliable ways to earn an income. For example, many available jobs are labor-intensive, unsecured, and for low wages. Therefore, there are concerns that youth are vulnerable to the drug trade. However, communities are hopeful that out of these challenges would emerge solutions.

In one example, community members stress the importance of getting fair prices for their local products, such as rubber and wood, in order to support their livelihoods. And communities are hopeful that there would be reliable and sustainable alternative livelihood methods in their areas that would create local jobs. However, people need government support, and they need to be consulted and included to ensure the issues that they face are addressed.

Similarities from 2016 until 2018

Similar to the previous years, people from various areas in Mon state mentioned the need for improved roads, electricity, and telecommunication networks. Though there has been some progress with developing these necessities, still a number of people request that the government work harder in building the infrastructure in their areas. They explain that the poor road conditions make it difficult to travel to work, schools, or hospitals. Moreover, the dirt roads that connect towns, villages and workplaces are dangerous, especially during the rainy season. Secondly, social services such as schools and hospitals are also in demand. During conversations, community members spoke of how there were no schools or hospitals near their areas and that they had to travel far and usually by unpaved mud roads to get to city centres.

As in 2016, the opportunities for employment and economic development are still issues that have carried on to the present. There is a lack of job opportunities and the wages from jobs that are available are very low, which motivates people to move to neighboring Thailand for better opportunities. Similar to the previous year, communities spoke of the rising cost of living and the reduced value of the price of rubber. Mon state suffers greatly from relying heavily on rubber as a source of income, and people request that the government regulate prices so that they may earn a living. What sets this year's theme apart from last year is the focus now on the youth. People who were interviewed explained that the youth are not engaged in work and are more likely to fall into drug addiction and drug-dealing due to the ease of availability of drugs such as methamphetamines. They attribute this worry to the lack of job opportunities and education; they ask the government to provide vocational training, better opportunities for work and improved schools for the youth.

This leads to the issue of drug addiction and distribution as another theme that has carried forward to 2018. With the rise in drug abuse and proliferation in Mon state, people interviewed shared their fear over the safety and security of their towns. Besides this, they mentioned that their freedom of movement is limited due to the rise of crime, and traveling from town to town has become dangerous. Community members feel that the youth are at most risk due to the limited job opportunities and access to good education. What sets this apart from the previous year is that people spoke more on how the government could handle this situation through awareness programmes that target the youth, clamping down on drug traffickers and trying to mitigate poverty.

The desire for federalism and unity is a theme that has reemerged this year. Those interviewed mentioned the need for Mon state to have some level of control over the direction of governance, emphasizing that federalism is key to the peace process. Moreover, they spoke of the need for unity among all the ethnic groups and to no longer be divided so that the peace process may be fruitful.

Finally, a concern over large development projects damaging the environment is another key issue that was brought up during conversations. The problem lies in the inadequate consultation with communities in the areas where development occurs, as those spoken to want to be included in the decision making process and want their state to benefit from the resources. Moreover, these development projects damage the environment and pollute land for farming. There is a shift in focus from the Salween dam to the rise in coal power plants in Mon state this year. Community members have described the consequences of the coal extraction as massive environmental destruction, and request that the government curb potential damages.

Differences from 2016 until 2018

The main difference between findings in 2016 to 2017/18 is the growing disappointment with the peace process. In 2016, communities were more positive acknowledging improvements since the peace process was implemented. There were more themes regarding ways the government could improve its actions for a successful peace process, indicating a hope in the process. However, this year there is a shift in tone, with community members

losing faith in the peace process, describing it as exclusive and only for the country's elites. To add, they spoke of how corruption and the drugs trade has grown since the national ceasefire agreement and communities have lost hope in the genuine interest of both parties to the conflict to live in peace. In order to fix this issue, people interviewed recommend that the government seek the opinions, thoughts, and voices of those at the grassroots level and consider them before entering peace talks. To add, this year communities comment on the signing of the NCA by the NMSP, which was followed by two consultations and ethnic dialogues. This, as seen by community members, is a positive step.

The second differing issue is the change in communities' feelings of security, despite no armed clashes conflict in their areas. Past experiences of sudden eruptions of clashes and the fragility of the peace process worry them. They believe that this fear limits their actions in business and livelihood opportunities, as they base decisions on whether conflict will restart. Communities believe that stability will result from a trustworthy and genuine peace process that will enhance the development of their nation.

The third and final difference is the growing concern over access to forests for produce and foraging, which has been restricted by development companies through the support of the government. Land that has been traditionally used by villages as a source of livelihood has been given to companies and this has negative effects on the daily income of communities that relied on them. Communities hope that the government may look into this issue so that they may once again use the land for food and livelihood.

NORTHERN SHAN STATE

“Peace will only be achieved by participating in the peace process.”

- A farmer in Muse Township.



OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Communities want peaceful negotiations among all the armed groups, they believe that peace can be achieved through negotiation and understanding.

“There is no genuine peace. One side is about peace and the other is about war.”

- A Community member in Hsipaw Township

Community members strongly believe that only through negotiations can peace be achieved between armed conflict actors. However, in conversations with community members, listeners heard that there is a lack of trust in the peace process that is attributed to a lack of trust in the government. Moreover, community members demand a transparent and accountable peace process, but due to past experiences with ceasefires, they are concerned whether actions would match words.

“They need to focus on action more than their words. Around the table they talk about peace and negotiation but there is killing happening on the ground.”

- A teacher in Nam Sam Township

Community members wish for a more inclusive Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

“We should build peace together with all of the communities.”

- A community member in Lashio Township

In conversations, community members explain that the lack of inclusivity in the NCA creates tension between armed groups. Communities note that, since implementation, the NCA has excluded some armed groups, which has led to tension in Northern Shan State between those who are, and who are not, signatories to the NCA.

Community members explain that they now live in a situation where multiple armed actors are operating against one another within the framework of the peace process, creating an insecure environment. Community members strongly believe that the NCA can be strengthened through an inclusive approach.

“It is very sad that still we cannot achieve peace in our communities.”

- A community member in Nam Sam Township

Communities want a fair system of government in their area that leads to a federal system.

Community members regard a federal system of government as a possible way out of the cycle of informal taxation enforced by so many different armed conflict actors in their area. Communities explain that the armed conflict actors demand community support, affecting their income and livestock. For example, community members face informal taxation or ‘protection fees’ by different armed conflict actors depending on the area and, sometimes, groups enter villages demanding money and threatening to harm villagers who refuse. In other cases, the armed conflict actors take whatever they need, such as rice, chickens, or vegetables.

Community members also explain that, in some cases, if they could not give any support, they would be made to act as porters. Depending on the community, some explain that the support to particular armed conflict actors is legitimate, although other community members did not regard the informal taxation as legitimate or fair.

Community members hope that the next election will be conducted openly and freely, without any interruption by armed conflict.

Communities are not satisfied with the current government.

Communities initially supported and voted for the new government. However, since it acceded to power, communities note slow development in their state’s education and socioeconomic status. In some cases, listeners

heard that community members are unable to move freely, that there is no safety and security, and that the situation is degenerating. Community members describe their hope in the peace process as dwindling and worry about the future.

Community members compare the previous government with its successor and conclude that, since the start of its new government, armed conflict has continued and in some instances increased. This trend has lowered the confidence the people have in their capabilities and thus the peace process. Repeatedly, communities said that they are not satisfied, especially as there was much hope and many expectations placed upon the current government after the election.

Communities believe armed groups and those participating in armed conflict need to be prepared for a successful peace process.

“Without concern for our life, the commanders are giving orders to fight.”

- A farmer in Kyaukme Township

In conversations, community members are clear that they believe armed conflict actors need to be prepared for peace. Communities believe that there are those who are involved in conflict that wish for its continuation as it benefits them economically. These parties, community members say, are not ready for genuine peace and development.

Communities also explain that they notice the unfairness in peace negotiations between larger and smaller armed groups, believing the larger groups are in a stronger position to negotiate. In order to address this, community members suggest a more transparent and accountable peace process that would establish more trust in the government, the armed groups, and all those involved in peace negotiations.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES

Communities face restrictions to their freedom of movement because of challenges and difficulties posed by landmines, checkpoints, informal taxation, and armed conflict.

Communities explain that they have made repeated calls for better transportation infrastructure and the ability to move safely around their villages. In some cases, during checkpoints community members are subjected to invasive searches. Communities add that during these searches, their phones are inspected for photographs that could be used to demonstrate that individuals are associating with illegal organisations.

Community members also explain that there is a lack of cement roads and this makes traveling difficult. Roads are basic, either mud or covered in stones, which become dangerous to traverse during heavy rainstorms. Communities desire that peace bring with it improved conditions for developing infrastructure.

Communities want a drug-free society, and are concerned about rising social problems as a result of drug issues.

“The drug problem will never end. We are frustrated.”

- A community member from Namkham Township.

Community members focus on drugs and drug-related issues throughout the areas where conversations took place. The drugs trade and abuse has seeped into every aspect of their lives and holds a tight grip on the economy and society. In some areas, communities are so dependent on trading drugs they have no other options to earn a living. The conflict has made drugs easily accessible and communities are concerned that the situation has damaged the future of the youth.

“Drugs are killing our young people. We want NGOs, CSOs, and also government to come and support us to resolve the drug issue.”

- A community member in Lashio Township

Communities notice that, although the number of drug crop plantations has decreased, the overall number of users has slowly but steadily increased. Community members believe that armed conflict has caused more tension in their communities because some armed actors are believed to be involved in the drug trade, while other armed actors are actively opposed to it.

Community members feel that the 2008 constitution is a barrier to building sustainable peace.

In particular, community members refer to the guaranteed 25% occupation of the parliament by members of the military, as the aspect of the constitution that has made genuine political progress difficult. Communities believe that the 25% guarantee reduces and limits civilian representation in the government, and this reduces and limits opportunities for community members to voice their concerns, especially regarding the status of the peace process.

Communities are afraid that building gas pipelines in Northern Shan State will have negative consequences.

Community members explain that the construction of gas pipelines in their area does not benefit their communities. In some cases, community members had lost their land due to construction of the pipeline and did not receive what they believe was fair compensation. Communities are also concerned that they are not consulted before the beginning of development, leaving communities feeling excluded and a lesser priority. In particular, communities are concerned that there is a lack of regulations that determine the safe distance of construction from homes near the pipeline, and a lack of safety measures in the case that a pipeline fails and breaks. Communities are also worried about the long-term environmental impact should the gas pipeline leak.

Communities want to increase their knowledge of human rights in order to take action.

“We need trainings and education.”

- A farmer in Hsipaw Township

There are concerns among community members, especially in remote areas, that they do not have enough understanding about human rights, and that the justice system is corrupt. Even though they see injustice, they are not confident enough, or knowledgeable enough, to take action. Community members explain that there had been cases of abuses during armed conflict, but that they were unsure how to navigate the justice system to see that laws were enforced, and those responsible brought to justice.

Communities express that women, children, elderly people, and IDPs are the most vulnerable groups, and want them protected.

Community members explain in conversations that it is mostly women, children, and elders who are in IDP camps, and that they are vulnerable as a result. Communities remark that, although the government supports IDPs in some areas by giving them money, it does not reach the IDPs because of corruption and a lack of transparency in the welfare process. Community members feel that their experience during conflict is that the weakest suffer the most and the strongest people are in charge at their expense. Community members expect protection and safety for those most vulnerable in their communities.

Communities believe that armed conflict has worsened education opportunities.

“We don’t have anything, but we at least need a good school for our kids.”

- Middle-aged female from Namkham Township

As armed conflict between the multitudes of actors continues, communities recognize the correlation between war and the neglect of social services delivery such as education. For example, the closure of schools is commonplace

during conflict, and qualified teachers are sometimes not available to work in these conflict areas. If they do work in the villages and townships they are usually overworked due to the lack of staff. Children from the community are unable to go to school during armed clashes and are likely to become internally displaced, seeking refuge in neighboring townships, causing delays in their education. Teachers themselves also face discrimination based on their ethnicity due to suspicion of collaborating with illegal organisations.

Communities struggle with limited job prospects and limited economy.

“We need a good price for our tea.”

- A farmer in Lashio Township

Communities request that they be given employment opportunities and a stable economy in order to improve their livelihood. Those interviewed spoke about the difficulties they faced trying to earn a living. Traditionally farming tea, the conflict has made it difficult for farmers to harvest on time. Roads are riddled with landmines, making it dangerous to commute to their plantations. Tea merchants and traders who do manage to harvest their crop and are able to transport their goods are subjected to multiple levels of informal taxation, thus lowering the value of their goods by the time they can sell it. Previously, communities relied on paddy farming, which requires a slash and burn cultivating technique that has been banned by the government as a cause of deforestation.

For some, the only alternative for a sustainable income is to make charcoal by illegally chopping down trees and burning them. Again, those that are able to manufacture charcoal are subjected to informal taxes and in some cases have to travel across the border to neighboring states.

Violent armed conflict perpetuates ethnic hatred and division.

The conflict in the region has heightened tensions between ethnic groups in Northern Shan, such as the Ta’ang and Shan. Communities mention that, if a person were to refer to themselves as Ta’ang, they would be immediately

associated as being a member of an armed group and be treated with suspicion and hatred. This generalising has extended to the point that ethnic Ta'ang have to refer to themselves as Palaung so that they can be free of association. This division is noticeable in the marketplace, as each ethnic group will not serve or do business with the other. Communities recognize this is unsustainable and want unity.

Communities do not have sufficient health care services.

Throughout conversations there are calls for the government to focus on developing medical facilities. Currently, there are few hospitals and they are understaffed. In some areas, communities only have access to clinics that are open twice a week and are only able to do simple procedures. Villages that are further away from townships have a harder time accessing these clinics due to poor road conditions and landmines. Moreover, doctors and nurses are accused of working for illegal organisations and many flee from townships to avoid trouble.

HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Communities want safe and secure society free from the threats of armed conflict.

“We want to speak up for our children but we know that no one will listen to us.”

- A community member in Muse Township

Community members aspire to a society that is free from armed, violent conflict. Communities are concerned about their safety and security because of abductions from their homes and villages by armed conflict actors for forced labor and portering. Similarly, there is forceful recruitment into armed groups in villages. Community members also explain that casualties caused by landmines near or around their villages cause insecurity. Overall, community members feel these threats from armed conflict add a burden to their lives, and hope for a safe and secure society in the future.

Community members want ethnic harmony.

In conversations, community members are concerned about tensions between different ethnicities. In particular, community members explain that they do not believe there is trust between these groups and that this lack of trust leads to ethnic tension and discrimination. Community members want to increase opportunities to bridge these gaps between different ethnicities, and they believe that increased knowledge and access to information through education would help.

Communities want to be able to fairly access natural resources.

In many conversations, community members complain that they are not able to benefit from the natural resources that surround their communities. Due to the conflict, the cost of living is high and armed conflict makes it difficult for communities to earn a living. Communities believe that armed actors are limiting their access to natural resources and, in some cases, taking advantage of those natural resources for income, preventing communities from utilizing those natural resources to improve their living conditions.

Similarities from 2016 until 2018

Communities in Northern Shan state are still suffering from poor social services such as healthcare and education. According to the majority of conversations, people still do not have access to proper hospitals that are well equipped with medicines and skilled staff. As in the previous year, areas visited have basic clinics that do not have the proper facilities to conduct operations and more complex procedures. Moreover, people spoken to remark that the conflict is the cause for the lack of trained medical staff, as the instability and presence of armed groups drives doctors to leave townships and villages. Similarly, schools face the same situation and have been a continual issue since 2016. Communities spoke of the need for more schools in their townships and villages, with trained teaching staff and adequate facilities. But what distinguishes the community perspectives of education in Northern Shan state from other areas of the country is that people have said that the conflict has stopped children from going to school. As sporadic armed clashes

erupt, schools are closed down, some students become internally displaced and relocated to other areas. These communities regard this as hindering their education.

Another theme from the previous year is employment opportunities and the economy. Participants to this year's listening spoke of the difficulty in acquiring jobs due to the conflict, and how it has made the economy unstable. People in Northern Shan rely on tea as a source of income and, due to the fighting, harvesting the cash crop has become a challenge throughout the years. Furthermore, the logistics of transporting crops from farm to market is affected by the lack of freedom of movement and the multitude of checkpoints by armed groups and the military. Roads riddled with mines make traveling dangerous and the taxing from armed groups lowers the value of income community members can make from selling crops.

This leads to another reoccurring theme, that communities suffer from a limited freedom of movement due to conflict. This matter has multiple issues that restrict movement of people in Northern Shan, such as landmines, which have been placed along mud track roads and littered in jungles where some people forage for food or for other resources such as timber. In addition, there are various checkpoints set up by armed groups and the military, which impose informal taxation on people. Besides this, invasive searches are prone to happen and some people spoken to explained that they are accused of supporting armed groups due to their ethnicity. As in 2016, communities request that this issue be looked into by the government and discussed in peace talks.

Drug abuse and proliferation had been a regular feature in the 2016 round of listening. This issue has remained in 2017 and throughout the years as the drug epidemic has tightened its grip on society and the economy. Communities believe that the violence and weak institutions are to blame for the rise in drugs; some people mentioned that armed group members and the military are involved in the production and / or selling of drugs, particularly methamphetamines or opium. The youth, communities explain, are the greatest victims as they note a rising number of teenagers acquiring drug habits and forgoing school or a career.

Finally, communities again have repeated calls for a more inclusive ceasefire agreement. People spoken to remark that the NCA is not genuine as the TNLA is not a signatory to the agreement. Moreover, the lack of inclusivity has created tensions between armed groups that have signed and those who have not. These tensions reverberate throughout communities in Northern Shan state, fashioning an insecure environment for civilians.

Differences from 2016 until 2018

What sets this round of listening apart from the previous year can be broadly categorized into: desires for peace talks, governance, the environment and resources, safety and human rights. To begin, participants to listening spoke about the need for a fair system of governance that will eventually lead to federalism. This opinion was sparked due to the informal taxing system that occurs in their areas. People interviewed believe that, if federalism was granted they would not have to pay taxes to armed groups and the military. Furthermore, communities who took part in listening this year have voiced their dissatisfaction with the current government, stating that, with the new administration, they have seen little socioeconomic development in their areas and in some cases an increase in conflict. It is for this reason that communities have lost confidence in the capacity of the current government.

Another theme which did not emerge in the previous year is the need for armed groups to be prepared for negotiations. Interviewees spoke of the internal divisions within armed groups and the military respectively, whereby some individuals benefit economically from a prolonged conflict and others want conflict to stop. Communities believe that these two opposing desires need to be reconciled in order for the peace process to move forward. Finally, there is an overall feeling of disappointment with the new government and the expectations they placed in their abilities, as communities have witnessed little change.

In discussing change, communities brought up the need to amend the 2008 constitution, as they believe that it is a barrier to sustainable peace, specifically, the guarantee of 25% representation of the military in parliament. This, communities believe, limits the civilian representation in the government and

thus restricts their voices and concerns being raised on policy issues and peace talks.

One major difference from previous years is the growing concern over the Sino-Myanmar gas pipeline that cuts through Northern Shan state. The first concern is in regards to the benefit that communities will receive from this pipeline. People spoken to regard the pipeline as a development that does not bring any economic advantage to their towns or villages. Further, there is the resentment over loss of land due to the pipeline being built and housing being relocated; in some cases people were not compensated. An equal concern is the desire for consultation before development projects are initiated. The exclusion of their opinion on decisions such as this has left most in communities feeling unimportant and of a lesser priority. Moreover, some of those spoken to believe that the pipeline and Chinese investment influences conflict in their areas. This is because they believe that Chinese companies pay the military to protect their investments. Finally, interviewees expressed their concern over the safety of the pipeline, which has been constructed at a close distance from homes and other areas that are densely populated. There are worries that, if any malfunction were to occur, it would have a grave impact on the surrounding area. The desire for free and fair access to natural resources was raised this year, as many people spoken to wish to gain some benefit from the natural resources in their state. Those spoken to mention that armed group members prohibit them from accessing natural resources, instead using it for personal gain rather than development.

Another difference this year is the desire for learning about human rights and the protection of women, children and internally displaced people. The desire to learn more about human rights is spurred by the injustice that community members are experiencing on a regular basis, especially the justice system. The abuse they experience, which is inflicted upon them by armed groups and the military, is a source of grievance. Moreover, the majority of people spoken to comment on the situation that women, children and IDPs face in camps, noting that they do not receive enough aid and support from the government.

The recent clashes between the northern alliance and militia groups has also been mentioned this year, which it had not been in the previous years.

Communities note that the fighting between armed groups has caused a rise in IDPs and increased troop movements in the north. What is more, communities spoke of the clashes between armed groups and the military also taking place, and with the bomb blast that took place earlier in the year, those spoken to feel that the situation in their areas has become complicated and dangerous. They hope that the fighting will stop.

Finally, there has been much discussion on how the conflict has divided the various communities in the state. This especially holds true for the Ta'ang and Shan, with the former being discriminated against and accused of working with armed groups. This has gone to the extent whereby people of the Ta'ang ethnic group must refer to themselves as Palaung in order to evade suspicion.

SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

'If we want peace we need agreements on how to manage our natural resources.'

- A community member from Kalaw Township



OPINIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON THE PEACE PROCESS

Communities want all those involved in the peace talks to be sincere in their desire for peace, and for those that represent communities to promote the voice of the people.

“Before going to the conference or meeting, the representative or the persons need to know what is really happen to the ground level people and hear the voice what they want to say. They should promote their voice to the upper level.”

- A community member from Kalaw Township

There is a strong belief in communities that the government, ethnic armed organisations, and other actors in the peace talks should represent the people and their needs better. In conversations, community members demand that representatives in the peace talks be genuine in their efforts for peace and not participate only to satisfy the international community. For those attending the peace talks, community members want them to start communicating with communities to bring their voices and opinions to the negotiating table. One issue from conversations that needs to be heard is over the rights of children to education and for freedom from forced labour.

Community members also focus on the need for both sides during peace talks to come to a compromise. Communities want from those attending the peace talks to look for common ground and to respect the diverse needs and desires of all people within Myanmar.

Communities want to be informed of the intentions of ethnic armed organisations in the peace process.

“The armed groups do not work and represent for the people but for their own benefit”.

- A farmer from Phekon Township

Communities observe that there are numerous ethnic armed organisations that claim to fight for the people when they are perceived to be only serving and enriching themselves. Community members add that, after these ethnic armed organisations attend peace conferences, they do not share information

from the peace talks with people at the grassroots level. The communities in Southern Shan state demand a more transparent peace process and genuine representation during peace negotiations.

The peace process is delicate and communities are concerned that armed conflict will resume.

“We worry that war will take place again. War is never good for us. If war, we have to porter for the soldier, carry their ammunition and their ration”.

- A farmer from Phekon Township

Communities acknowledge the significance of the role that natural resources play in fuelling violent conflict between armed conflict actors. Community members believe that these resources are for the country and not for any one group or individual. Communities share their fears that violent conflict would resume over natural resources, affecting their way of life. In particular, community members are fearful of the resumption of torture, forced portering, and internal displacement as a consequence of resumed violent conflict.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY COMMUNITIES

Communities are plagued by a poor and unstable economy.

“It is like lottery to work at agriculture fields. No stable price, expensive fertilizer and (low) wages”.

- A farmer from Kalaw Township

Community members explain that, similar to previous years, communities are facing challenges to earning a living. In many communities, the cost of living is more than the earning capacity of entire families. In particular, communities believe that the government is struggling to stabilize the economy, causing pressure on livelihoods. Community members also express their feeling that taxes are too high. In many communities, although there are construction and development projects taking place in their townships, the unemployment

rate remains high and it is difficult to find employment. Some community members believe that these projects outsourced jobs. In one example, a participant spoke of the rising price of petrol, noting that, before, a full tank of petrol for a car would last a week but now it will last just two days. This has affected taxi fares and has made traveling much more challenging for people.

Communities have poor road and electricity infrastructure in rural areas.

“Village is not systematically structured; road is so narrow we are not able to set up the electricity line. That is why we did not access to electricity till now”.

- A highland farmer, Mong Nai Township

At the time of conversations, community members explained that they have poor road infrastructure that makes traveling for work or accessing medical facilities challenging. Community members see a link between the low quality roads and their struggling economy, and they believe that new and improved roads will allow them access to other areas of the state where they can find more work or opportunities for commerce.

In addition to these challenges, the narrow roads in villages make it difficult for electricity lines to be set up and, as a result, communities suffer from regular power shortages and rely on generators that are expensive.

Communities have limited access to healthcare facilities and doctors.

Communities discuss the need for better health services. Those who live outside the city do not have enough medical facilities and the situation is made more challenging due to the lack of roads. Communities only have access to clinics that are only able to treat minor cases. Community members explain that there is a lack of doctors available to treat medical cases, and many medical facilities are understaffed.

Opium farming and drug abuse is becoming deeply ingrained in communities that took part in listening.

“We have been worried so much about drugs in our quarter. In our quarter, there are so many drug dealers and users, where they can buy easily with cheap price. The authorities do not take serious action on that, so we cannot live free from that circle”.

- A day worker from Taunggyi, Township

The issue of drugs and drug abuse is a continual challenge that communities have been facing. Some community members do not have opportunities for a stable income and so resort to growing poppy plants, and the issue of drug abuse is further compounded by weak law enforcement. Those spoken to note that there has been some positive change to the situation, stating that the government has crackdown on drug producers. However, there is a movement that wants to protect their livelihood. Communities believe that the government should provide alternative crops for those who rely on growing poppy plants.

In conversations with communities, they identified the youth that live in cities and farmers of middle age as the most vulnerable groups to drug use and abuse. For community members, the most disturbing aspect of the issue is the normalcy and cultural acceptance of drug abuse and proliferation. Communities call for the government to address these issues and provide alternative livelihood opportunities for those who are involved in the farming and production of drugs.

Communities urgently need improved school facilities and are dissatisfied with the current education system.

“There are not enough teachers at our village. Our kids cannot answer whatever we ask them when they come back home from school because there are no lessons that they learned at school. We parents are also not educated so we cannot teach and guide our kids for education”.

- A community member from Mong Nai, Township

Communities identify four major issues that are negatively affecting the education system in their state. The first is that there are not enough teachers in their areas to work at the schools, especially in the rural or remote areas, because some teachers bribe township officers to be relocated to a more favorable location. They do this because the situation in the villages is not good, as there are no proper roads and no stable electricity. This leads to the second issue that communities recognize is a problem: corruption within the education system.

The third issue that community members' express is the state of the school infrastructure in their villages. Most of the schools are made of bamboo and lack the facilities necessary to provide a child an education. The final issue regarding education is the system that is in place that allows for two types of schooling: long-distance learning and full-time students. When applying for work after graduation, students that are under the full-time students category are given priority for work, whereas the long-distance learners are given less priority. Community members are left to question 'Why have these two systems but give no work to the distance learners?' and hope that there could be change.

That being said, there are some voices that express the positive changes they have seen in the education system. Teachers are trained in better teaching methods such as taking a more child-centred approach, which focuses more on class participation. However, communities note that this is a gradual process and explain that it has only been implemented in G 2 and only in urban areas. They hope that this approach to education will extend to the rural areas.

Communities want their ethnic identity retained in education.

Communities from different ethnic backgrounds notice that their ethnic literature is slowly disappearing as more Burmese literature is used in schools. They worry that they will lose their identity if this continues, and they wish to maintain their language so that future generations may continue to maintain their ethnic identity.

Communities are concerned about land ownership.

“There will be land registration process soon. Now they are starting for land demarcation; when we got land registration land price will be higher. Villagers knew that and they are competing in land ownership. No one wants to lose their property. Argument, fighting, and disagreement are everywhere”.

- A community member from Mong Nai, Township

Communities are troubled by disputes over land ownership, as the demarcation lines for property are unclear. Moreover, many community members do not have documents that show rights to land. To exacerbate the situation, community members explain that sometimes companies have taken land from community members and used it to grow fruits and vegetables, forcing community members to work for these companies as laborers on their own land because they have no alternatives. Communities recognize that this occurrence is due to the land law acts that the government implemented in 2012, which state that those who have no deeds to the land have no title to it, and so the land is viewed as vacant.

Communities experience the negative effects of natural resource extraction in their villages and townships.

In conversations, some community members worry about land-grabbing and illegal logging, and some people believe that there is corruption that is allowing illegal loggers and other companies to access natural resources for their own interests.

The other land issues communities are concerned about are related to the effects of natural resource extraction. Lead and other precious metals are plentiful in Shan State. Communities have experienced some positive advancement that has come from foreign companies extracting these resources, such as a steady income. However, communities voice concerns over the damage this has caused to the environment, in particular the lead mining that causes streams to become polluted. Some companies have also taken part in illegal logging that supplies the international market and damages the local farming land, making it difficult to cultivate food crops. Communities demand that the authorities

place stricter implementation on regulating these extractive companies and an end to illegal logging.

Community member's want the enforcement of law and worry about corruption.

Communities demand that all conflict actors obey the law, whether they are government officers or armed groups. Community members emphasize armed groups, as there are still cases of arbitrary torture and beatings that affect citizens. Moreover, people are still subjected to taxes that include livestock and food by multiple authorities, including drug smugglers.

Communities spoke about the amount of corruption that exists in the government, and the officials and administrators that represent them in their state. Community members believe that this level of corruption extends to armed organisations and the military, as well. Communities had experienced government officials taking part in a form of informal taxation that is facilitated by the village head that collects 'supporter fees'. Communities acknowledge that the government system in their experience is corrupt and are frustrated that they must bribe in order to move anything in the administrative or judicial systems.

HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Communities hope to raise awareness of their rights, from human rights to rights as citizens.

"Awareness trainings are to be conducted in the community such as human rights, child rights, land law, and constitution. So that they will know how to ask for what they want and their rights".

- A merchant from Taunggyi, Township

Throughout conversations, community members reiterate the need for training workshops to increase their awareness and knowledge of the political and peace processes, despite efforts made by some NGOs to train people on these matters. In particular, communities express their desire for training that

increases their knowledge about human rights, child rights, women's rights, and the rights of a citizen. Moreover, communities hope that the government can be more transparent with information regarding the progress of the country in terms of the peace process and other important national issues. Communities feel that, through knowledge and education, they can protect themselves better and, in turn, their country.

Communities want their voices to be included in the peace process.

In conversations with communities, there are demands made by some community members that those involved in peace talks consult with communities on the points of agreements and on matters that might affect their lives. Community members feel they are excluded or left out from the peace negotiation process, and feel they are not included through consultation. Communities are hopeful that there would be more open and clear communication channels between the government and the ethnic armed organizations during the peace talks, and with the communities at the local level, in order to create greater inclusivity and ownership within the peace process.

Similarities from 2016 until 2018

From 2016 until 2018 the challenges that communities encounter have remained the same. As in the previous years, communities in Southern Shan state are still facing dire economic conditions as people are struggling to earn a decent wage to support their families as the cost of living rises. A large number of people rely on farming to earn a living. However, due to old agricultural techniques, communities are unable to produce more crops. The unstable economy and unfair market prices for their goods exacerbate this challenge, as their earning capacity is stunted. What makes their economic challenges different from the previous year is that, in 2018, communities are acknowledging that there are construction and development projects happening in their areas, but that the jobs for these projects are outsourced. What they desire is for more economic and employment opportunities.

Communities repeat their appeal to the government to improve social services such as schools and hospitals. In the previous year, there were calls

for more clinics in towns and villages within the state, currently the desire for medical facilities has evolved from clinics to having proper, well-equipped hospitals with trained staff. Those spoken to mentioned that areas outside of the city centre do not have access to medical care and rely on clinics, which only provide basic services. Besides this, there are requests for better school facilities; currently there are reports of school buildings being made of poor quality material, and not enough books. What exacerbates this situation is the lack of trained teachers; most teachers decide to not work in rural areas due to conflict or lower standard of life. Likewise, there are suspicions that the education system is corrupt as teachers can bribe their way out of teaching in certain areas. A number of individuals interviewed regard the poor education system as one of the factors that lead the youth to drug abuse. Community members believe that, if these children are given an education, then they can break the cycle of addiction.

Another continuing theme from last year is the concern over natural resources and the environment. Though the concern is the same, the perspective has changed over time. In 2016, people were concerned with the amount of deforestation, burning trees for charcoal, and effects that logging has on agricultural land. This year, the shift in focus is more on development companies and extracting resources, particularly, lead mining, which has become more prevalent in Southern Shan state. Community members acknowledge that there have been positive developments since the implementation of these projects such as more jobs, however, there are worries over its impact on the environment. There are reports that waste products from the manufacturing and extraction of lead is released into streams and rivers polluting the water. Communities request that the government place stricter implementation of regulations on companies so that they are more responsible.

Participants to this year's round of listening are still challenged by the issues of land grabbing and land rights. A majority of people spoken to reveal that they do not have documents supporting the land they live on, but have resided there for many generations. They report a continual rise of land-grabbing done by development companies, who then force the previous occupants to work as laborers on their own land. In some cases, residents are relocated and not fairly compensated.

The last similarity in themes between 2016 until 2018 is the desire for retaining their ethnic identity, especially in schools. Communities notice less and less ethnic literature taught in schools, as the majority ethnic group's literature gradually takes its place. Communities wish to maintain their identity, through local literature for the younger generation.

Differences from 2016 until 2018

The differences in opinions from 2016 to 2018 have manifested in various ways. One sharp contrast between the findings from previous years is the shift in communities wanting to have a successful peace process to having their voices in the dialogue. There is a strong belief that there is not a significant representation of those from the grassroots level. A common remark is the need for the rights of all children to be afforded an education and forced labor to come to an end. Issues such as these, people feel, should be included in peace talks. Communities feel that armed groups and the government do not represent the needs of the people during peace talks. Some members of the community observed that the results from discussions between armed groups and the government are not made transparent and shared with the community. This has led a number of people to lose trust in the process and believe that those involved in peace talks are only serving and enriching themselves.

The delicate nature of peace in Myanmar is a constant fear that members of communities across southern Shan state feel. This issue was not brought up in the previous year; however, in 2017 there is a fear that the rush for control of natural resources fuels tensions between armed groups and the military. Communities fear that conflict will erupt over this, and with conflict the resumption of torture, forced labor, and internal displacement.

The desire for awareness on human rights is another divergence from previous years. Communities know that, if they knew their rights, the justice system, and the political system, they would be better able to protect themselves from abuse and violence inflicted upon them. This is in tandem with another theme, that of the need for the enforcement of law and cracking down on corruption. Those spoken to identified some government officers and armed group members as human rights abusers.

The last variance with the previous years is the state of infrastructure. Community members have noticed an improvement since 2016. In the previous iterations of listening, people spoken to remarked that they do not have proper streets and relied on dirt roads or muddy tracks. Furthermore, they explained that the poor state of their infrastructure had negative effects on their economic opportunities, as it made it challenging to commute to work or transport goods to sell in markets. Moreover, the insufficient electricity grids and utility poles for stable electricity made it challenging to manufacture goods and limited their income. However, now they notice slight improvements in infrastructure such as roads and electricity.

CHAPTER 3

RECOMMENDATIONS



After analyzing the perspectives and opinions of communities with our partner organisation, CPCS has come up with the following recommendations for the Myanmar government, the Tatmadaw, EAG, civil society organisations non-governmental organisations, and international non-governmental organisations. A number of these recommendations are similar to those in other previous ceasefire-monitoring publications.

To the Myanmar Government

- The government and the Tatmadaw could strive to find a shared vision of nation- wide peace. One of the ways of doing this is to ensure that the provisions of the ceasefire agreement and the bilateral ceasefire agreements are adhered to and respected.
- The government needs to practice understanding, and appreciate the value of ethnic diversity and harmony for the success of the peace process.
- The government should consider amending the law of association with illegal organisation.
- The government and armed groups need to ensure that information is shared with CSOs and communities. This includes an explanation of the peace process and progress of peace talks. Through this, a sense of local ownership and inclusivity in the peace process could be achieved. Equally important, this could mitigate unrealistic expectations and clarify misinformation.
- The government needs to find ways to include the voices, opinions and perspectives of communities in the peace process. The government needs to initiate consultations with CSOs and communities on issues relating to the peace process, socioeconomic development, and good governance. This will ensure trust is built and genuine representation of the community established.
- The government needs to increase national investment in improving the quality and accessibility of social services across all states, with priority given to more remote areas. Moreover, it needs to ensure training for teachers speaking local languages to teach in their ethnic language.

- The government needs to develop a comprehensive poverty-alleviation strategy in which employment and livelihood opportunities for the general public are prioritised. This includes plans to increase investment in improving agricultural productivity in rural areas, and increased investment in local industries that promote higher-value goods from raw materials. Build more markets to increase trading opportunities and regulate prices of basic goods to mitigate overcharging or undercharging. And ensure that living costs and basic income are balanced so that people can afford food and housing.
- The government needs to improve road infrastructure by constructing quality roads and bridges, and improving roads that have already been built. The government should prioritise building roads to more rural areas to connect to city centres, hospitals, and schools.
- The government needs to improve access to stable electricity and safe drinking water for communities.
- The government needs to ensure comprehensive implementation of law when regulating the resource extraction industry. This should include:
 - To make certain the environment is protected and communities are not in danger from harmful effects of these projects.
 - Transparency and accountability need to be established in business and investment processes and practices.
 - Fair and adequate compensation for any loss communities may incur from development projects
 - Development projects should benefit the local people through job opportunities, and income.
 - Potential impacts on the environment should be considered. This can be done through studies, research and community consultation.
- The government needs to formulate an effective strategy to address the widespread drugs issue and rehabilitate drug users in a safe manner. The government should look into sustainable agricultural alternatives for farmers who rely on poppy production for their livelihood. To add, the government needs to ensure the stricter implementation of law and to ensure that this issue is included in peace talks. The government should work closely with communities, authorities, and armed groups to address the issue.

- The government needs to provide information-sharing initiatives on land registration. This is to ensure that legally owned land is not taken illegally, and to help communities' transition from traditional land ownership practices to national land registration process. This should include:
 - Protecting land that is owned by IDPs and making land acquisition by development companies fair.
 - The government should consider using one universal policy for land that covers ownership and use.
 - The government should employ a systematic land survey, land registration, and should avoid land concessions that have existing communities living on the land.
 - The government should recognize customary practices of land ownership and law and also take into consideration the variety of practices across all states of the country.
- The government needs to find ways to return and resettle IDPs in a safe and dignified manner. This should include:
 - Provisions of alternative livelihood that will eventually lead IDPs to be independent.
 - The government should consider IDP security through demining land they lived on to ensure safe housing and farming.
 - The government should support reintegration and access to public services
 - The government should consider religious rights, cultural practices and religious buildings of IDPs.

To the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups

- It is important that all armed actors to the conflict try to uphold the ceasefire agreements and continue to build trust between their groups and communities. Armed persons could reduce their presence in villages as this would ease tensions between civilian populations and armed people.
- Armed persons need to show a commitment to the peace process by reducing troop mobilisation in the northern states of Myanmar.
- To further improve relationships with civilian populations, both the Tatmadaw and armed groups should have clear policies on rules of engagement when dealing with civilians. These policies should respect the inherent human rights of the civilian population.
- Tatmadaw needs to clarify its role in government and the peace process to clear up any misunderstandings with communities.
- The Tatmadaw and armed groups need to work on eliminating or reducing the informal taxation imposed on local communities by armed persons.
- There need to be more liaison offices opened throughout the country. These offices would improve relations between the community and soldiers, through consultation and other productive social interactions.
- The Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups need to reduce or eliminate all instances of forced labor, portering, or forced recruitment. They should stop all abusive behavior towards communities.
- The leadership of the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups could develop strategies to strengthen their internal communication channels, so that actions of soldiers at the community level reflect agreements made during peace talks. This would help reduce tensions in villages and townships as well as improve relations with civilian population.

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

- Civil society actors are encouraged to assist communities in awareness training campaigns to raise their knowledge on land registration process. They may also help by providing legal assistance for communities facing land disputes or land confiscation.
- Civil society organisations and international non-governmental organisations need to work strategically with the central government on improving social services, education, and poverty alleviation.
- All civil society organisations should collaborate, cooperate, and share information on their programme activities in order to minimize isolation and duplication of efforts for maximum effectiveness in their work.
- International non-governmental organisations should consider conducting a conflict / context analysis prior to implementing projects in communities to avoid aggravating existing tensions. This would involve community consultations, providing the opportunity to clarify objectives of projects being implemented.
- International non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations should assist the government in clarifying concepts such as democracy, federalism, and state autonomy by utilising their extensive networks in different states. This could help dispel misinformation and manage expectations.

CHAPTER 4

LISTENING METHODOLOGY



The centre for peace and conflict studies (CPCS) has been using the listening methodology to monitor community opinions of the ceasefire and peace process of Myanmar since its initiation in 2015. The rationale that drives this project is that an inclusive peace process that takes into account all voices of society will make it legitimate, locally-owned and sustainable. In order to achieve this goal CPCS has sought multiple ways to support peace processes and methods to capture less-heard voices so that they may participate in the ongoing national discussion.

One process is the listening methodology (*listening*), which is a qualitative research approach that seeks to elevate community opinions, thoughts, and voices in conflict-afflicted communities across Asia. Listening allows for the observation of various perspectives and insights as well as the examination of ideas. Informal discussions and open-ended conversations facilitated by participants who speak the local language and come from the same context are the guiding principles of these talks. This creates a safe space where community members may discuss issues that affect their lives. The listening methodology compiles the issues raised from these open-ended conversations, taken from a cross section of the countries demographics, into a singular unified voice and presents it to those in positions of power. By compiling these voices into a publication, CPCS aims to advocate for policy change and provide wider representation in governance and decision-making processes.

The listening methodology was adapted from Collaborative Learning's (CDA) *listening programme*, which sought to listen to communities that were receiving aid in order to understand how to measure its utility. The reasoning was that those who were receiving aid would best be able to explain its effectiveness and assess the impact of the aid they were receiving. Similarly, CPCS uses the listening methodology with the belief that communities that are directly experiencing conflict would best be able to judge the situation more accurately, rather than excluding their insights as to root causes of violence, what perpetuates it, and lasting solutions.

Monitoring community opinions using the listening methodology

In 2013, CPCS began to use the Listening Methodology to support Myanmar's peace process. Listeners traveled to various parts of the country and conducted conversations with non-ranked or lower-ranking soldiers from six Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) and the Tatmadaw. This was done to hear their opinions, challenges and desires for the future. These conversations were documented and collated into two publications, and distributed amongst a larger audience so that they could be considered in the top-level negotiating process. The outcomes from this project were two-fold: for the soldiers of the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, there was a transformation in how they viewed each other, bringing to light a shared common humanity and similarities in their aspirations and challenges. In addition to this, the perspectives that listeners had of the military were transformed, humanizing the soldiers who were once viewed as the enemy.

In 2014, CPCS employed the listening methodology on a cross section of the demographics within Karen state to gather their opinions, challenges, and aspirations during the bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the military. It was from this listening exercise that the ceasefire monitoring began, identifying the need to monitor community voices against the backdrop of peace talks between the government and various armed groups. The chief objective of which being: the collection of first hand experiences, alternative narratives, and the effects of the ceasefire on communities. CPCS intended to monitor community opinions annually over a period of ten years in order to track trends, changes and other indicators 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 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 experienced the effects of the Myanmar peace process.

In this third year of the ceasefire monitoring, CPCS collaborated with six civil society organisations that provided on the ground logistical support, planning support for trainings, expertise on their context, and worked in their on-going advisory capacity in their respective states to determine the areas covered by the listeners. However, this year their role evolved further, which included: facilitating training and processing workshops, and having a greater role in the analysis of the data. This was part of CPCS' long-term plan of gradually building the capacity of our partners so that eventually they would be conducting listening projects in their states while CPCS would shift to an advisory and technical assistance role. Additionally, 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:

Table 5. List of Partner Organisations

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

For the listening conducted in 2017, CPCS recruited 62 listeners, 27 male and 35 female, from a diverse range of ethnic groups. The listeners were chosen for their familiarity with the local context and their ability to conduct conversations in the local language.

Table 6. Gender of Listeners

State	Female	Male
Kachin	5	5
Northern Shan	8	3
Southern Shan	4	6
Kayah	4	6
Kayin	6	6
Mon	8	1
Total	35	27

The Listening Methodology Process

The listening methodology begins with the training workshops held in state capitals in collaboration with partner organisations. The training workshop is a two-and-a-half day process in which listeners learn the conceptual basis of the listening methodology, active listening, communication skills, and bias mitigation techniques. These skills are then strengthened through practical exercises so that listeners are better able to facilitate conversations with community members.

During the training workshop listeners were equipped with guide questions that covered various topics that encompassed the peace process and community opinions. This was to ensure consistency across conversations. Although the guide questions were comprehensive, listeners were encouraged to create their own questions based off the guide questions, and by no means to follow them strictly; this was so that discussions could flow naturally. During this round of listening, listeners were encouraged to focus more on remembering key words of guide questions so that they could paraphrase and create their own questions. The listeners were instructed not to have the guide questions out in front of participants while having conversations, and to allow participants the space to speak about issues or concerns that were most pressing to them while still in the framework of this research. Listeners held conversations in the local language and were trained not to take down any notes during discussions. The

topic areas and sample guide questions used during conversations are listed below:

Table 7. Guide Questions

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

Listeners formed teams of two to three members and travelled to various townships and villages in their respective states immediately following the training workshop. Research areas were decided by our partner organisations and listeners were designated to as many locations as possible that were also different from previous years. The safety and security of the listeners was essential and listeners were not placed in any locations that may have posed

any risk. They were asked to hold three conversations a day with a maximum of five participants in one conversation for ease of facilitation, and spent a total of two weeks doing field research. Listeners were encouraged to speak to a cross-section of the demographics that were recognised as being relevant due to their direct experience of the bilateral ceasefire agreement.

Four tools were used to record data from conversations: notebooks, logbooks, quote banks, and wherever possible, a photo diary. The key technique of the listening methodology is its reliance on memory. The rationale that guides this is that the most important issues that emerge from a conversation would be easily remembered as they would be discussed the most. Listeners were taught to record what they heard in their notebooks immediately after the conversation, while it was still fresh in their memories. Both listeners in the team facilitated conversations, and each listener would record what they heard into their own notebooks, thereby increasing the chances of capturing everything heard. This provided an additional use in that it allowed CPCS the opportunity to validate data and guard against bias by going through 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 the logbook to record what they heard most from all conversations for that day. The logbook served as a daily debriefing and processing exercise that acted as a preliminary stage of analysis for listeners to identify trends or patterns from conversations.

When listeners heard a phrase, statement, or in some cases a proverb that they think best captured the essence of a main point, they would record it in the quote bank immediately after conversations were completed. These quotations from participants are used to cite their direct voices in the publication. In order to protect the identity of participants, quotes were not attributed to anyone, but were signified with indicators of where the conversation took place or other descriptive indicators such as: age, job, and gender. The photo diary was also used by listeners to capture images of the locations where they held conversations and visually illustrate the situation that communities were experiencing.

After conducting two weeks of field research the listening teams reconvened for a two-day processing workshop facilitated by CPCS. Through synthesizing and analytical exercises, the listeners identified the main overall themes for each topic area, guide questions, and what men and women expressed separately. Additionally, the processing workshop explored what listeners heard that was unexpected and the differences and observations heard from conversations, to provide a snapshot of listener analysis of results in each state.

After the processing workshop, all recording tools (notebooks, logbooks, and photo diaries) were collected and translated from their original language to English. The research and analysis team carefully went through each document and triangulated the findings from the notebook and logbooks by coding the findings from the translated documents based on the main themes and categories that the listeners identified during the processing workshop.

The outcome from CPCS' internal analysis: the preliminary analysis was then shared with our partners in a consultation workshop. The consultation workshop included the heads of the organisations that we partner with in Myanmar, as well as the listening project coordinators from each organisation. The workshop was held over three days and it provided a space for our partner organisations to present updates on events in each area during and after the time the research occurred. This helped contextualise the main themes that communities discussed in conversations. Another objective was to validate the findings with our partner organisations and integrate their analysis and recommendations for a more nuanced understanding of the communities and situation. Moreover, advocacy strategies were discussed that would be the most effective and the format in which to present the findings in order to capture our intended audience.

What distinguishes this year's round of listening from the previous years was the creation of the listener coordinator role, which was a part of CPCS' long term strategy of building capacity of our local partners in Myanmar, with the intention of CPCS taking a technical advisory role while our partners operated the listening project. This strategy had two main outcomes: building the facilitation capacity of our partners for listening training workshops and strengthening the relationships between the various partner organisations

across all states. This was achieved by having each partner provide one member from their organisation to facilitate workshops with the research team in another partner organisation's state. Moreover, CPCS with the help of its partner organisations worked together in analyzing the data during a three-day workshop to further strengthen their skills in analysis and provide a more robust ceasefire monitoring report.

Scope and limitations of study

This study took place over the period of 2017 – 2018, with a second workshop being held in May 2018 to update the information in this publication. From May to September 2017 a, 485 conversations were conducted with 1537 community members. This exceeded the target number of 728 participants. This target number of participants for listening conversations in each location was calculated proportionately based on the size of each state population, using Kayah state with a population of less than 300,000 as a baseline of 80 participants. The baseline was determined by the following factors:

- (a) Size of population;
- (b) Estimated number of conversations that listeners could hold on a daily basis, taking into consideration the time to travel to various locations;
- (c) Time constraints

The number of participants throughout the course of the listening project increased since its first iteration in 2015, with it dropping slightly this year. Conversely, the total number of conversations has declined significantly, indicating that listeners may have been facilitating conversations with larger groups of people. The table below illustrates this.

Table 8. Total Conversations and Participants Over Three Years

Period	Conversations	Participants
November 2014 – March 2015	772	1072
March 2016 – August 2016	459	1663
May 2017 – September 2017	485	1537

The target numbers in each state are summarized in the table below, as well as the actual number of participants with whom the listeners spoke, including the number of conversations. In order to reach these numbers while still managing the conversation, listeners were asked to facilitate 10 – 15 conversations with at least 3 people for the total two week period of research.

Table 9. Locations Covered and Number of Participants

State	Population	Target number of participants	Actual number of participants	Number of conversations
Kachin	1.68 million	128	224	65
Kayah	286,627	128	270	78
Karen	1.57 million	120	302	110
Mon	2 million	136	270	90
Northern Shan	1.8 million	128	240	80
Southern Shan	2.4 million	136	231	62
Total	9.7 million	728	1537	485

Listeners were requested to speak to a cross-section of individuals living in each state, with the objective of capturing voices of participants that represent the diversity in ethnicity, gender, age, profession, and religious affiliation. However, in some cases listeners were not able to gather data of some of the demographic groups. Demographic data pertaining to gender, age range, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and occupation are summarized in the demographics section of each state chapter.

The following is the summary of the gender, age range, ethnicity, religion, educational background, and occupation of the 1537 participants.

Table 10. Gender of Participants

Gender	No. Participants	Percentage
Male	805	52.37%
Female	732	47.62%
Unspecified	N/A	N/A
Total	1537	99.9%

Table 11. Ethnicity of Participants

Ethnic Group	No. Participants	Percentage
Karen/Kayin	326	21.21%
Kayah	256	16.65%
Kachin	212	13.79%
Ta'ang/Palaung	207	13.46%
Mon	174	11.32%
Bamar	76	4.90%
Shan	66	4.29%
Kayan	34	2.21%
Pa'o	33	2.14%
Danu	20	1.30%
Taung Yoe	11	0.71%
Yin Ta Le	10	0.65%
Manaw	4	0.26%
Chinese	4	0.26%
Chin	3	0.2%
Inn Thar	3	0.2%
Indian	3	0.2%
Lahu	2	0.2%
Lisu	1	0.06%
Unknown	92	6%
Total	1537	100%

Table 12. Age Range of Participants

Age Range	No. Participants	Percentage
18 – 30	422	27.45%
31 – 40	439	28.56%
41 – 50	351	22.83%
51 – 60	202	13.14%
61 and above	66	4.3%
Unavailable	57	3.7%
Total	1537	99.9%

Table 13. Educational Background of Participants

Educational background	No. Of participants	Percentage
None	135	8.8%
Primary	349	22.7%
Middle school	397	25.8%
Secondary	265	17.24%
University	63	4.1%
Other/Monastic	249	16.2%
Not Available	79	5.1%
Total	1537	99.94%

Table 14. Livelihood of Participants

Livelihood	No. Participants	Percentage
Farmer	857	55.8%
Shopkeeper/Merchant	43	2.8%
Religious Leader	29	1.9%
Laborer/seasonal worker/ daily worker	157	10.2%
Village administrator	23	1.5%
Student	19	1.23%
Internally Displaced Person	12	0.8%
Political party member	9	0.6%
Musician	1	0.07%
Construction Worker	53	3.45%
Carpenters	14	0.9%
Driver	10	0.7%
Civil Servant/ Military/ government officer	51	3.3%
Nurse/Midwife/Medical Doctor	9	0.6%
Teacher	23	1.5%
Tailor	2	0.13%
NGO worker/Social Worker	14	1%
Youth Leader	2	0.13%
Dependent	10	0.7%
Retired	6	0.4%
Unemployed	131	8.5%
Not available	62	4%
Total	1537	100%

Table 15. Religion of Participants

Religion	No. Participants	Percentage
Buddhist	636	54.3%
Christian	519	35%
Hindu	10	0.7%
Muslim	5	0.3%
Animist/traditional	61	4%
Other	66	6.1%
Total	1537	100%

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS



The listening methodology prides itself on its ability to access less-heard voices and including them into political discourses. There are times when meeting this objective proves challenging. The difficulty lies in several factors: the inclusion of voices from all levels of society that represent a broad spectrum of ethnic groups, gender, religion, and age ranges has at times been difficult to include. Moreover, obstacles such as time constraints and logistical challenges played a part in limiting areas covered in this year's round of listening. The time of year that the project was implemented was affected, pushing it further into the year during the rainy season. This is a difficult period to travel in Myanmar, poor road conditions and weather, and made accessing some areas unfeasible.

Local partners and listeners had the freedom to choose which areas were safe to cover for the scope of this project. Fortunately, during the period this round of listening was implemented, there was no ongoing fighting that impeded the process with the exception of heightened tensions between armed groups in Northern Shan state, which limited the movements of listeners in that area. Listeners were encouraged to speak to a broad spectrum of people but to use their judgment to decide whom to speak to. In some cases, listeners could not go to certain communities where they had no contacts, which would explain the modest representation of Muslims and Hindus, which however, has increased since previous years.

Mitigating bias has always been a challenge. This methodology places trust on the listeners to avoid biases. This is done through exercises conducted during the training workshop that focus on self-awareness, perceptions, and selection of participants. After the processing workshop, the research team reads through the notebooks and logbooks to detect any biases and inconsistencies during the internal analysis period.

The assurance of reliability of the results has also been a point of contention, since memory plays a crucial part in the capturing of data. The listeners had daily debriefing tools, such as the notebooks and logbooks, which were designed to reinforce what they heard during conversations. Common practice during the processing workshops over the years has been to ask listeners to put away their notebooks and logbooks and to rely on memory to identify main themes. The theory is that recurring themes in conversations would be most easily remembered. However, in this year's round of listening, the research team

decided to allow the listeners to use their notebooks and logbooks during the processing workshop. The motivation behind this decision was to produce a stronger preliminary analysis from the processing workshop that could overstep the internal analysis stage of the listening project and immediately be used for advocacy. Unfortunately, this adjustment to the methodology proved to be overly ambitious. The issue lay in controlling the level of output per processing workshop, as in some workshops data was easy to elicit and detailed, while in others meager and superficial. This was in part due to poor facilitation and the level of commitment of some listeners.

Another continuous challenge was translations in training and processing workshops as well as the analysis component, which required translating notebooks and logbooks. It is difficult to capture the exact meaning of words across various languages as at times listeners had conversations in the local dialect which would then be translated to Burmese then to English putting it through multiple filters. This may have caused loss in the essence or power of what was being said. Additionally, the research team faced challenges with interpreters who were unfamiliar with peace building lexicon and at times made errors with instructions for listeners. Again, the change in methodology necessitated a quick translation of notebooks and logbooks to reinforce the data from the preliminary analysis; this was combined with the analysis workshop done with the partners and listeners.

APPENDICES

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM KACHIN STATE

Townships: Myitkyina, Waingmaw, Putao, Lung Sha Yang, Hpakant, Mohnyin

Total Conversations: 65

Total Participants: 224

Languages used: Kachin, Burmese, Lisu

Table 16. Kachin State Demographics: Age

20-30	24
30-40	53
40-50	54
50-60	55
60-Above	22
Not Available	16

Table 17. Kachin State Demographics: Gender

Male	89
Female	135
Total	224

Table 18. Kachin State Demographics: Education

No Schooling	29
Primary School	79
Middle School	58
High School	25
University	3
Not Available	30
Total	224

Table 19. Kachin State Demographics: Ethnicity

Kachin	190
Shan	17
Bamar	6
Chin	1
Not Available	10
Total	224

Table 20. Kachin State Demographics: Occupation

Farmer	157
Shopkeeper/Store Owner	9
Musician	1
Religious Leader	10
Day Worker	5
Current or Former Village Administrator	3
Political Party Member	9
Students	4
IDP	12
Not Available	14
Total	224

Table 21. Kachin State Demographics: Marital Status

Single	31
Married	168
Other	3
Not Available	22
Total	224

Table 22. Kachin State Demographics: Religion

Buddhist	23
Christian	201
Total	224

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM KAREN STATE

Townships: Hlaigbwe, Myawaddy, Hpa-an, Seikgyi

Total Conversations: 110

Total Participants: 302

Languages used: Karen, Mon, Burmese

Table 23. Karen State Demographics: Age

18-20	60
21-30	20
31-40	105
41-50	57
51-60	40
61-70	8
Other	12
Total	302

Table 24. Karen State Demographics: Gender

Male	136
Female	166
Total	302

Table 25. Karen State Demographics: Education

None	20
Primary	13
Middle (6-8)	70
Secondary (9-12)	60
University	07
Other	132
Total	302

Table 26. Karen State Demographics: Ethnicity

Karen	297
Mon	3
Shan	1
Bamar	0
Others	1
Total	302

Table 27. Karen State Demographics: Occupation

Farmers	137
Construction workers	36
Carpenters	9
Drivers	8
Government officers	13
Nurses	1
Laborers	70
Teachers	1
University Students	3
Tailors	0
Midwife	0
Unemployed	24
Total	302

Table 28: Karen State Demographics: Marital Status

Married	160
Unmarried	79
Other	63
Total	302

Table 29. Karen State Demographics: Religion

Buddhist	190
Christian	67
Hindu	4
Other	41
Total	302

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM KAYAH STATE

Townships: Shadaw, Loikaw, Baw La Khe, Hpasang, Hpruso, Demoso

Total Conversations: 78

Total Participants: 270

Languages used: Kayah, Shan, Bamar, Yine Ta Le

Table 30. Kayah State Demographics: Age

18-30	61
31-40	76
41-50	78
51-60	42
60-Above	13
N/A	0
Total	270

Table 31. Kayah State Demographics: Gender

Male	182
Female	88
Total	270

Table 32. Kayah State Demographics: Education

No Schooling	34
Primary School	79
Middle School	59
High School	40
University	9
N/A	49
Total	270

Table 33. Kayah State Demographics: Ethnicity

Kayah	159
Shan	19
Karen	17
Pa'o	13
Yin Ta Le	10
Bamar	8
Manaw	4
Chin	2
Kayan	34
N/A	4
Total	270

Table 34. Kayah State Demographics: Occupation

NGO/development work	5
Youth leaders	2
Teacher	8
Shopkeeper/Merchant	9
Religious Leader	8
Farmer	196
Civil Servant/ Military/Government Staff	5
Students	1
Village administrators	20
Retired	6
Unemployed	2
N/A	8
Total	270

Table 35. Kayah State Demographics: Marital Status

Single	68
Married	202
Other	0
Total	270

Table 36. Kayah State Demographics: Religion

Buddhist	77
Christian	130
Muslim	3
Traditional/other	15
Animist	45
Total	270

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM MON STATE

Townships: Bilin, Kyaikmaraw, Ye, Thaton, Kyaikto

Total Conversations: 90

Total Participants: 270

Languages used: Mon, Burmese

Table 37. Mon State Demographics: Age

18-20	30
21-30	107
31-40	45
41-50	33
51-60	27
61-70	18
Other	10
Total	270

Table 38. Mon State Demographics: Gender

Male	150
Female	120
Total	270

Table 39. Mon State Demographics: Ethnicity

Mon	171
Bamar	27
Karen	3
Pa'O	9
Others	61
Total	270

Table 40. Mon State Demographics: Education

None	10
Primary	80
Middle (6-8)	70
Secondary (9-12)	12
University	05
Other	93
Total	270

Table 41. Mon State Demographics: Occupation

Farmers	160
Construction workers	1
Carpenters	0
Drivers	0
Government officers	14
Nurses	1
Religious Leaders	4
Labourers	36
Teachers	0
University Students	4
Tailors	0
Midwife	0
Unemployed	50
Total	270

Table 42. Mon State Demographics: Marital Status

Married	170
Unmarried	40
Other	60
Total	270

Table 43. Mon State Demographics: Religion

Buddhist	215
Christian	30
Other	25
Total	270

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM NORTHERN SHAN STATE

Townships: Lashio, Nam San, Muse, Nam Ton, Hsipaw, Kyaukme, Namkham

Namh San, Man Ton, Kyautme

Total Conversations: 80

Total Participants: 240

Languages used: Ta'ang, Burmese

Table 44. N. Shan State Demographics: Age

18-20	13
21-30	34
31-40	105
41-50	70
51-60	10
61-70	3
Other	5
Total	240

Table 45. N. Shan State Demographics: Gender

Men	123
Women	117
Total	240

Table 46. N. Shan State Demographics: Education

None	20
Primary	31
Middle (6-8)	93
Secondary (9-12)	70
University	2
Other	24
Total	240

Table 47. N. Shan State Demographics: Ethnicity

Shan	13
Ta'ang	195
Karen	3
Kachin	12
Others	17
Total	240

Table 48. N. Shan State Demographics: Occupation

Farmers	115
Construction workers	16
Carpenters	5
Drivers	2
Government officers	10
Nurses	3
Religious Leaders	2
Laborers	20
Teachers	6
University Students	2
Tailors	2
Midwife	1
Unemployed	56
Total	240

Table 49. N. Shan State Demographics: Marital Status

Married	80
Unmarried	40
Other	120
Total	240

Table 50. N. Shan State Demographics: Religion

Buddhist	198
Christian	15
Other	27
Total	240

DEMOGRAPHICS FROM SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

Townships: Taunggyi, Shwe Nyaung, Yawksaw, Ywar Ngan, KaLaw, Mong Nai, Mawmai, Phe Khon

Total Conversations: 62

Total Participants: 231

Languages used: Kayah, Kayan, Shan, Palaung, Burmese, Danu, Taung Yoe, Pao

Table 51. S. Shan State Demographics: Age

19-30	73
31-40	55
41-50	59
51-60	28
61-Above	2
N/A	3
Total	220

Table 52. S. Shan State Demographics: Gender

Male	125
Female	106
Total	231

Table 53. S. Shan State Demographics: Education

None	22
Primary	67
Middle (6-8)	47
Secondary (9-12)	58
University	37
Other	0
Total	231

Table 54. S. Shan State Demographics: Ethnicity

Kaya	97
Inn Thar	3
Shan	16
Burmese	35
Pao	11
Kayin	6
Palaung	12
Danu	20
Chinese	4
Kachin	10
Indian	3
Taung Yoe	11
Lahu	2
Lisu	1
Total	231

Table 55. S. Shan State Demographics: Occupation

Laborer/General worker/seasonal worker	22
Medical field/Nurse/Doctor	3
Social worker	9
Teacher	8
Shopkeeper/merchant	25
Religious leader	2
Farmer	92
Civil servant/Military/Government staff	8
Student	4
Dependent	10
Bricklayer	4
Police	1
Catechist	3
N/A	40
Total	231

Table 56. S. Shan State Demographics: Marital Status

Single	75
Married	155
Other	1
Total	231

Table 57. S. Shan State Demographics: Religion

Buddhist	131
Christian	91
Muslim	2
Hindu	6
Animist	1
Total	231



Karuna Mission Social Services (KMSS) – Since 2002 Karuna Mission 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 dignity of life of the poor and the needy.



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.



Ta'ang Student and Youth Union – TSYU is a non profit organization providing support to 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 organization 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.



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