



# Building Relationships Across Divides

Peace and Conflict Analysis  
of Kachin State

2016



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## **List of Acronyms**

BGF	Border Guard Force
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CPCS	Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
EAG	Ethnic Armed Group
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KNU	Karen National Union
KSDP	Kachin State Democracy Party
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NDA-K	New Democracy Army - Kachin
NDF	National Defense Force
NLD	National League for Democracy
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
TAT	Technical Advisory Team
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Council
UPC	Union Peace Conference
UWSA	United Wa State Army

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## Overview

Kachin State is Myanmar's northernmost and second largest state after Shan State, and it is the only state to share a border with both India and China. Given the size and strategic importance of Kachin State, renewed and ongoing conflict represents the risks and consequences of violent conflict elsewhere in Myanmar.

In 2016, fighting between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), and Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces, is ongoing though sporadic, and almost 100,000 people remain in limbo within IDP camps across the state. At the same time, the Central Government continues to push for the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) and a political dialogue with Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) to resolve ethnic concerns.

Fighting had resumed in 2011, despite a ceasefire that had been signed between the KIO and Central Government in 1994, after the KIO refused to agree to transition the KIA into a Border Guard Force (BGF) under the command of the Tatmadaw as part of the renewed peace process. Unlike previous confrontations, the conflict quickly escalated as the Tatmadaw used aircraft and heavy artillery to launch offensives against KIA positions.

The purpose of this conflict analysis is emphasise the relationships between different dynamics of the Kachin State conflict, and to encourage intervention that is meaningful, sustainable, amplifies factors for peace, and renews relationships and trust between those involved and affected by conflict in Kachin State.

This analysis applies systems thinking to the conflict and is, importantly, based on and informed by a series of recent conversations with community leaders as representatives of communities who suffer the most from the effects of violent conflict, and have the most to gain from a successful peace process. The community leaders represent religious, civil society and political organisations in Kachin State and the conversations took place in

Myitkyina, the state capital, in February 2016. In each conversation, the community leaders were asked to share their thoughts and experiences regarding the conflict, what they believe to be the greatest threat to the peace process, and what the future is for Kachin State. As a result, this analysis is a reflection of community perspectives of the conflict in Kachin State.

From these conversations, nine key driving factors of the conflict have been identified: (1) *Militarisation of Communities*; (2) *Prevalence of Drugs*; (3) *Self-Perception of Kachin Identity*; (4) *Changing National Governance*; (5) *Legitimacy of the NCA*; (6) *Unity of Ethnic Armed Groups*; (7) *Unequal Access and Rights to Natural Resources*; (8) *Displacement of People*; (9) *Mobilising Ethnic Politics*.

In addressing and reflecting on these key driving factors, several leverage points to help transform the conflict away from violence emerged. Each leverage point helps to inform programming in relation to the Kachin Conflict, and should be guided by three principles:

1. *To build trust and relationships between and within ethnic groups at every level*
2. *To engage the community and build political capacity*
3. *To sustain meaningful outcomes from structural changes*

These leverage points are as follows:

1. **Engage in building political capacity in Kachin State**
2. **Recognise the political capacity of the KIO**
3. **Support community-led initiatives away from violent outcomes**
4. **Promote dialogue, whether at a community, state, or a national level, as a sign of progress**
5. **Encourage immediate resolution of the IDP situation**
6. **Identify opportunities for trust and relationship building between community, state, and national actors in the Kachin State conflict**
7. **Encourage more equitable and more inclusive investment and trade in natural resources in Kachin State.**

## Conflict Dynamics

The relationship between the KIO and the Central Government, both politically and militarily, as well as the different self-perceptions of Kachin identity throughout Kachin communities are key to understanding the current state of the conflict.

The dynamics of the renewed conflict in Kachin State are influenced by the experience of preceding generations of Kachin leaders, especially those who were engaged in negotiating and securing the 1994 ceasefire agreement. However, another reason why the KIO is reluctant to negotiate a ceasefire with the Central Government is the KIO's experience with the Panglong Agreement in 1947 and in particular, its promise of "full autonomy in internal administration" for certain ethnic states in the Myanmar Union, as well as a united Burma. The agreement was brokered by General Aung San, then Deputy Chairman of the Executive Council or 5th Premier of British-Burma Crown Colony, and signed between the Central Government and representatives of the Kachin, Shan and Chin peoples, with observers from Karen State. Although the agreement demonstrated the spirit of unifying Myanmar, it also marks the earliest broken promise between the Central Government and Kachin State. Prime Minister U Nu (in office 1960-1962) began to challenge ethnic state identity by establishing Buddhism as the national religion, contrasting especially with the predominantly Christian identity of some ethnic states, and, after a military coup by General Ne Win in 1962, the agreement was largely discarded after the Central Government added "burmanisation" as a central policy for building national unity. These policies of "burmanisation" are what led to the creation of the KIO in 1961.

Nevertheless, Panglong has been held out by the recently elected civilian Central Government as the exemplary agreement for governing relations between the Central Government and EAGs. At the first Union Peace Conference in January 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) which had just won a majority of seats in the national assembly, said renewed talks with EAGs would be held "in the

spirit of a 21<sup>st</sup> century Panglong.”<sup>1</sup> EAGs, including the KIO, have welcomed subsequent government efforts at organising a political dialogue under the banner of a new “Panglong agreement.”<sup>2</sup>

Renewed fighting, despite the 1994 ceasefire agreement, has had a negative impact on the relationship and trust between Kachin State and the Central Government. In 1994, the KIO was the first of the major EAGs to sign a ceasefire agreement with the Tatmadaw. This was because of major political changes, such as the collapse of Communist Party of Burma which had been opposed by the National Defence Force (NDF) of which the KIO was a member,<sup>3</sup> and the KIO wanting to retain influence in the face of the defection of members to the New Democratic Army – Kachin (NDA-K), formed in 1989 as a faction of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), and the breakaway of the entire fourth brigade in Northern Shan State.

At the time, the KIO was openly advocating for a negotiated ceasefire among all of the EAGs and stating that it was necessary to bring stability to Myanmar. The KIO reasoned that “the only answers to Burma’s deep-rooted ethnic and political problems will come through negotiation...the first priority, therefore, is a nationwide ceasefire which will bring peace to all areas of the country and all ethnic groups.”<sup>4</sup> The KIO’s efforts to broker a nationwide ceasefire agreement in the early 1990s were met with opposition from other NDF members and, in 1994, the KIO went ahead alone and signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the government. As a result, the KIO was forced out of the NDF; and no nationwide ceasefire agreement materialised.

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<sup>1</sup> While campaigning in 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi also promised a “second Panglong” agreement with ethnic groups. See: Transnational Institute, The 2015 General Election in Myanmar: What now for Ethnic Politics, 2015; Eleven Myanmar, “Ethnic minorities’ dream of peace will be reached through negotiation: Suu Kyi”, January 2016, <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/ethnic-minorities%E2%80%99-dream-peace-will-be-reached-through-negotiation-suu-kyi>

<sup>2</sup> The United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), a coalition of EAGs that campaigns for ethnic rights, has indicated willingness to discuss with the newly-created National Reconciliation and Peace Centre and Aung San Suu Kyi, how it might be involved in the upcoming Union Peace Conferences. See: Saw Yan Naing, “Ethnic Armed Groups to Meet Suu Kyi”, The Irrawaddy, 1 July 2016, See: <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/ethnic-armed-groups-meet-suu-kyi.html>

<sup>3</sup> The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) was an old standing political force in Myanmar that was seen to be under the influence of China. By the 1980s, several EAGs, including the KIO, had formed the NDF to oppose the CPB. By late 1980s, the CPB had splintered and lost its political relevance and influence.

<sup>4</sup> Transnational Institute, Neither War Nor Peace: The Future of the Ceasefire Agreements in Burma, 2009, p 10.

Despite the government's initial promise of further political dialogue after the ceasefire, the objective of the agreement itself was first and foremost a military truce. The agreement's focus was on the number of deployed troops, who controlled territory, and the operation of checkpoints within the state. However, the KIO interpreted the agreement to mean the Central Government recognised the autonomy of Kachin State, and the KIO used the ceasefire as an opportunity to focus on its development activities within the state. One result of the ceasefire was the creation of enterprises that were run by the KIO, such as the BUGA Company, which had interests in jade mining and logging.<sup>5</sup> The KIO also established formal administration of territory it occupied, including the creation and operation of its own healthcare and education systems. But the unique feature of the agreement was that it was set out in a document, unlike later bilateral ceasefires of other armed groups that were reached through only verbal agreement.<sup>6</sup>

Just as the Kachin State ceasefire was brought about amidst major political change, the ceasefire was also broken amidst major political change. In 2010, the Central Government transitioned from a strict military junta when Thein Sein headed the newly implemented quasi-civilian government after a boycotted election. The new government also held out the prospect of a nationwide ceasefire agreement. Under the terms of the proposed agreement, however, EAGs were to become BGFs under the command of the Tatmadaw. The KIO opposed the proposal even as members of the KIA broke away and signed up to become members of the BGFs. In 2011, amidst opposition to the government's plans for BGFs, the gradual encirclement of KIO-held territory by BGFs, and the increasing tension between KIA and Tatmadaw, not to mention the eroded relationship between the KIO and the Central Government, the ceasefire was broken after one side fired upon the other. Unlike in previous skirmishes, the Tatmadaw quickly escalated their offensives with the use of aircraft and heavy artillery, causing the KIO to reinforce its positions. This escalation has contributed to the cyclic nature

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<sup>5</sup> Transnational Institute, *Neither War Nor Peace: The Future of the Ceasefire Agreements in Burma*, 2009, p 14. The BUGA company is also responsible for a hydropower station in Waingmaw Township.

<sup>6</sup> A good account of the renewal and de-escalation of conflict in Kachin State can be found here: International Crisis Group, "A Tentative Peace in Myanmar's Kachin Conflict", Asia Briefing No. 140, 12 June 2013.

of the conflict as neither army retreats from its secured territories, both sides dispute who was responsible for breaking the ceasefire, and each army remains on high alert.<sup>7</sup>

An additional layer to the conflict in Kachin State derives from the self-perception of Kachin identity. Although not violent, the tension around what constitutes Kachin identity does cause confrontation within communities because of its political and social implications, affecting the dynamics of the conflict.

The population of ethnic Kachin is in majority Christian, living alongside Buddhists, Animists, and Muslims. However, within the majority Christian group is a majority of Baptists, followed by a minority of Catholics and other Christian denominations. Because of their majority, the Baptists are most prominent within Kachin society, and the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) is the strongest religious institution in the state because of its large congregation which includes many members of the KIO. Across these religious denominations is a cross-section of different ethnicities, and Kachin State is also a melting pot of languages and dialects, with Jinghpaw the most commonly spoken language.<sup>8</sup>

Where there is confrontation over Kachin identity, the disagreement is tied to perspectives of Kachin history and religion. Because the KBC is seen through its large congregation to represent the ethnic and religious majority in Kachin State, it is often perceived, both self-perceived and by third parties, to represent Kachin identity, which is at odds with those who are not Baptists, or even Christians, and yet are Kachin. This dilemma of who represents Kachin identity, and what Kachin identity means, is most evident between the Baptists and Catholics, especially with regards to the

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<sup>7</sup> In Kachin State, community leaders see the Tatmadaw as having more influence than the central government in matters of national policy, and especially policy in Kachin State. Through programmes such as the BGF scheme, the Tatmadaw also has extensive control over territory in Kachin State. Therefore, the KIO, which retains the most influence as the strongest Kachin EAG and still has control of limited territory in Kachin State, considers the Tatmadaw as its most obvious opponent, and faces against this opponent with the KIA. In conversations about the central government, the Tatmadaw and central government are used interchangeably to refer to national governance and national policies.

<sup>8</sup> Carine Jaquet provides a good introduction to the demography of Kachin State and how that applies to the context of the Kachin Conflict. See Carine Jaquet, *The Kachin Conflict: Testing the Limits of the Political Transition in Myanmar*, 2015, pp 17 – 18.

peace process and the policies of the KIO. Kachin society is described in some of the conversations as a series of ‘clusters’ around religion. Baptists are most likely to associate with other Baptists and to align their views according to their priests, just as the Catholics would associate with other Catholics under the guidance of their own priests. According to community leaders, religious clustering causes fractures within Kachin communities. On the other hand, these fractures are points for relationship and trust building initiatives that can strengthen Kachin communities.

In order to contextualise the recent escalation in violence in Kachin State, it is necessary to understand that the conflict consists of the militarised experiences of Kachin society, ever since the creation of the KIO in 1961, and the modern relationship with the Central Government and Tatmadaw, as well as the added complexity of the layered makeup of Kachin identity. These experiences and layers are important aspects of the present context that help to make sense of some, if not all, of the dynamics found within the conflict in Kachin State.





## Key Driving Factors

By mapping the Kachin Conflict through the use of systems thinking, it is possible to identify the dimensions of the conflict, alongside the root causes and relationships. The following map illustrates how the key driving factors of the present conflict in Kachin State are interconnected. Most important, the interconnections are dynamic and will change depending on how the driving factors interact, what new driving factors emerge, and how current, and future, factors are affected by interventions. Interventions in relation to one factor can affect other, seemingly unrelated factors through the interconnection of factors in a system of conflict.

It is important to note that these driving factors are considered in this analysis to have equal force in relation to one another. Although, at certain points in the conflict, one driving factor might be more prominent than another, each driving factor is relative to the other due to their shared relationship and interconnections. Therefore, by intervening in any of these driving factors, it is possible to effect change in other driving factors, if not immediately then through committed and continuing intervention.

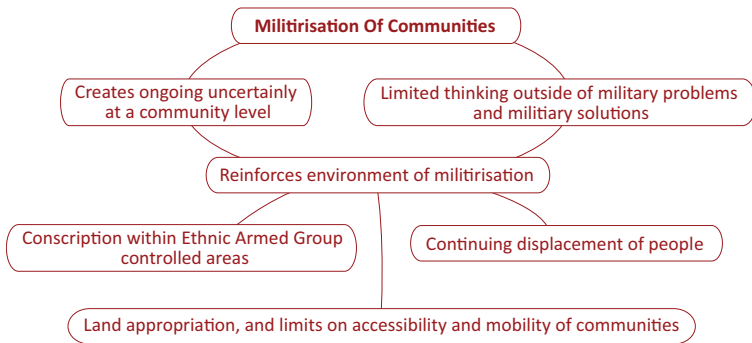
During the conversations with community leaders, there were also a number of perspectives and opinions expressed in relation to the key driving factors of the conflict. These specific perspectives and opinions are not driving factors but further contextualise concerns for the future of Kachin State.

# System Map of Key Driving Factors in Kachin Conflict, 2016



In the overall map of the Kachin Conflict, it is possible to see the interconnections and relationships of nine key driving factors that help shape the dimensions of the conflict. Each key driving factor will be discussed, beginning with the militarisation of communities that is identified by community leaders as the greatest challenge to peace in Kachin State, and will include a sub-system map that positions additional factors and outcomes that demonstrate the reinforcing effects existing within the key driving factor, as well as linkages to other key driving factors. The nine key driving factors also form the basis for discussing leverage points later in this analysis.

## Factor 1: Militarisation of Communities



The military, mostly with reference to the Tatmadaw but also including the KIA, is seen by community leaders as the greatest challenge to peace in Kachin State. It is the presence of the military throughout the state that poses a number of challenges to any transformation away from conflict. In particular, the extensive presence of the Tatmadaw is taken as a sign that the Central Government does not take the peace process seriously. This is then perceived as a lack of trust between the Central Government and the KIO. However, there are appeals from community leaders that *if only* the military were to withdraw from parts of the state, then there could be progress towards peace.

In this regard, the KIA is also acknowledged as a source of destabilisation in some areas of Kachin State and that it would have to mirror any withdrawal of the Tatmadaw from occupied territory in order to maintain the integrity of the peace process, and show genuine commitment to a move away from conflict. This solution, stressed throughout the conversations with the community leaders, could only take place *after* the Tatmadaw had shown, with actions, that it took seriously the necessity for reducing the number of deployed soldiers. The refusal of either military to be the first to take action towards peace reflects the ongoing militarisation of Kachin communities and the challenges of thinking outside of military problems and military solutions.

As a result, communities remain displaced because militaries are positioned in or near their villages, which also limits access to traditional village land and inhibits movement around villages. As a consequence, a 'stalemate' is reinforced. But most significant, the uncertainty creates a lack of confidence within communities that meaningful and sustainable change can occur.

### *Perspective: Narrative of 'stalemate' reinforces status quo*

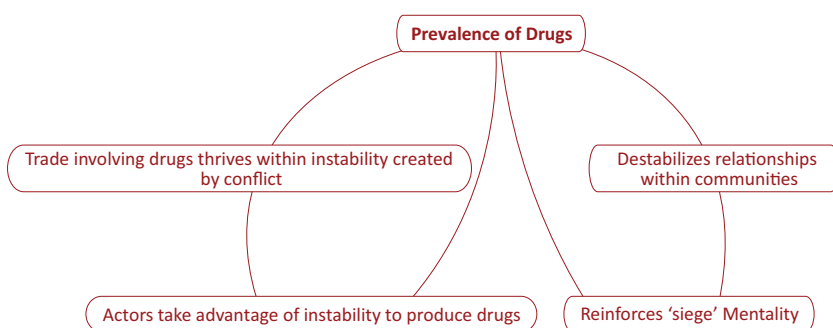
One perspective that encompassed many of the opinions expressed by community leaders during the conversations is the importance of narrative, and how narrative can reinforce the conditions under which communities find themselves. In the case of Kachin, the talk of "stalemate" and "wait and see" reinforced the status quo, which is perpetual conflict without end. This status quo reduced the potential for leaders and communities to see beyond the conflict, towards the future, and limited the opportunity for community members to access ways and means to influence the dynamics of the conflict. In addition, reinforcing the status quo as a result of narratives of conflict means that solutions to community problems are often expressed in military terms, rather than political or development terms, limiting the opportunity to address the causes of conflict or to identify areas where progress has been made.

In one conversation, it was suggested that a "new discourse" for peace needed to emerge from the conflict, as the previous discourse had been subsumed into the conditions of conflict. Another community leader suggested that the KIO has been caught in their own propaganda, reinforcing their (perceived or real) actions and circumstances, and limiting their political options to de-escalate and negotiate the end of the conflict. And, of course, negotiations surrounding the NCA had provided a platform and an objective to demonstrate that a 'stalemate' is very real and affects the Kachin Conflict. But underlying this narrative is the positive development that negotiations are still ongoing. That, despite not signing the NCA, the KIO is still talking to the government. That, despite a lack of representation in national politics, local political parties were working hard to build their capacity to represent Kachin communities. These developments, although

incremental rather than monumental, indicate that Kachin State is moving forward, albeit slowly, and is not caught in a stalemate.

The nature of narrating the status quo is that it reinforces the status quo, and in the Kachin Conflict this means that not only do parties to the conflict remain on a war-footing, but communities remain displaced, access to their homes and villages remains limited, divisions between ethnic and religious groups remain intact, and relationships remain strained.

## Factor 2: Prevalence of Drugs



The prevalence of drugs in Kachin communities is a direct consequence of the ongoing conflict in Kachin State, as producers and smugglers take advantage of the instability across the state. The indirect effect is that the increased prevalence of drugs in communities has a negative impact on relationships within communities.

Although there is consensus between the Central Government, religious leaders, and KIO that drug cultivation, trafficking, and use, must be stopped, there is little movement at a political level to specifically address the problem of drug crops growing in areas of Kachin State. According to the community leaders, destruction of the crops is a government issue that is not being addressed because of the conflict. Therefore, the government

must intervene and be seen to intervene. In the absence of government intervention, it has been religious institutions that have provided the logistical support to community groups fighting drugs.

A special challenge to Kachin State lies in the escalation of community campaigns against drug crops and the confrontational, sometimes violent, manner of the campaigns. As the community groups grow bolder, and opposition hardens to their actions, the conflict risks escalating into further violence that is exacerbated by the lack of coordination from the Central Government or Tatmadaw, who label the community groups “illegal” and deny them the resources and capacity of the government.

On the other hand, the mobilisation of broad sections of Kachin community towards anti-drug efforts is a new dimension to the conflict. Although there were efforts in the past to police drug cultivation and trafficking, they were controlled by the KIO. In this case, however, the involvement of religious leaders, as well as the targeting of drug crops in BGF areas that are technically under the control of the Tatmadaw but are, in reality, the sole province of a BGF, show an extensive community dimension to the drug problem in Kachin State.

### ***Perspective: The trafficking, production, and use of drugs in Kachin State***

Opium is used in traditional cultural practices in some parts of Kachin State. However, ongoing conflict, especially in border areas or remote and difficult to access areas of the state, led to the widespread cultivation of opium for international drug trafficking, facilitated by local militias that are cultivating opium as a cash crop. The easy availability of drugs made its way into Kachin communities and there was a significant push back by the KIO and religious leaders against opium cultivation and drug use.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> KIO opposition to poppy growing was as early as 1991, when the KIO banned poppy growing in some areas. The Central Government has also made efforts to eradicate poppy fields over the ceasefire period. Despite similar aims, cooperation is minimal and there exists grey areas in Kachin State where poppy growing continues under the provisional control of militia groups. For details regarding previous drug eradication programs before the breaking of the ceasefire, see: Mizzima, “KIO arrests nearly 1,000 people in anti-drug campaign”, 21 February 2011, <http://archive-2.mizzima.com/news/inside-burma/4908-kio-arrests-nearly-1000-people-in-anti-drug-campaign-.html>

Today, there is a community level movement against the use of drugs that are seen to be destroying families and community life. Although the issue of drugs in Kachin State is intricately linked to the cycles of conflict, it has its own dynamics outside the conflict itself. The latest dynamic is the emergence of the *Pat Jasan*, an organised community group consisting of an estimated 1300 civilians and endorsed across the political and religious spectrum in Kachin State. As a result, they have received widespread media attention after destroying opium crops that are cultivated in the border areas of Kachin State, and conducting community level interventions in relation to drug users.

The *Pat Jasan* form the heart of the anti-drug initiatives that are promoted by religious and community leaders, and target drug crops in areas controlled in varying degrees by Tatmadaw and other militia groups. However, it is the farmers, some victims of circumstance or ignorance, who bear the brunt of the *Pat Jasan*. Many of these farmers are cultivating opium crops for their livelihoods in areas where little other agriculture can be undertaken. Other farmers, however, are parts of larger drug production syndicates.

But to characterise the *Pat Jasan* as just a vigilante group does not adequately describe the group's purpose. Community leaders explain that the *Pat Jasan* is the outcome of a three-year initiative that began by informing opium farmers of the impact of what they were doing to promote awareness against drug cultivation. They then proceeded to warn farmers that continued cultivation of drug crops would not be tolerated. And, more recently, the *Pat Jasan* began slashing crops with the use of bamboo canes and machetes. Community leaders added that there are efforts by religious institutions to promote support for farmers who rely on the crops for livelihood by providing substitute crops as alternative sources of income.

In response, some farmers and cultivators have begun to oppose opium crop destruction in order to save their source of livelihood or protect crops. Although the first few *Pat Jasan* missions were successful in destroying crops, recent trips to the border areas have been forced back by organised and armed opposition. As recently as February 2016, government authorities had blocked the *Pat Jasan* from accessing the farming areas. Only a week

later, members of a militia attacked a *Pat Jasan* march with explosives and guns, causing multiple casualties.<sup>10</sup> The escalation into violence is mirrored by the increasingly militarised organising of the *Pat Jasan*. When missions are discussed, *Pat Jasan* movements are described by military terms, and members of the group are often seen dressed in uniforms.

Despite the violence, there has been an absence of official response to the *Pat Jasan*, although they have been labelled vigilantes throughout much of the national media. However, after the Tatamadaw moved to reinforce positions in Northern Shan State near the border with Kachin State in response to the escalation of conflict near the Kachin border, the *Pat Jasan* has ceased any marches. This shows the multiple facets of sensitivity around drugs in Kachin State - first, that drugs are a national problem and efforts at eradicating them in border areas are tolerated, in some instances; and, second, that efforts at unilaterally eradicating drug crops by ethnic groups in conflict areas can and does escalate hostilities. Given that the drug issue in Kachin State continues to gain national coverage and attention, even at a union parliamentary level,<sup>11</sup> at least part of the *Pat Jasan* mission has already been achieved. In the absence of marches, *Pat Jasan* have turned their efforts toward policing drug use in their communities, but the efficacy of their efforts remain inconsistent given the mixture of ethnicities in Kachin society. For instance, the overwhelming Christian/Kachin identity of the *Pat Jasan* mean that the *Pat Jasan* cannot access some parts of their communities, such as communities who are Shan or Bamar, because of a lack of shared community identity or dialogue.<sup>12</sup>

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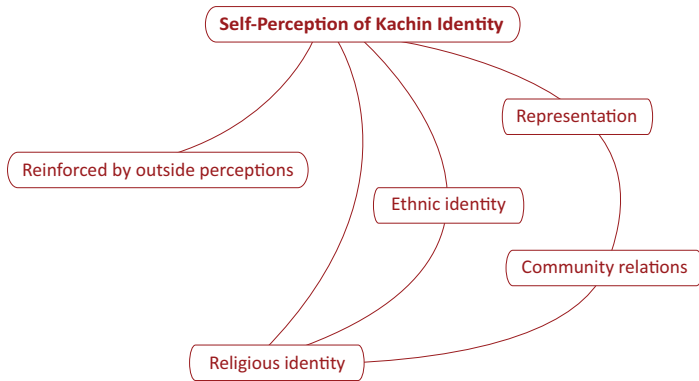
<sup>10</sup> On their last march, militants attacked the Patjasan despite a police presence, leading to a number of casualties. See: <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/several-anti-poppy-activists-injured-in-attack-in-waingmaw-township.html>

<sup>11</sup> Proposals were lodged at Union level to discuss *Pat Jasan* activities, but were ultimately ignored. See: Tin Htet Paing, The Irrawaddy, “Parliament Awaits Government Support on Urgent Proposals”, 1 March, 2016, <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/parliament-awaits-government-support-on-urgent-proposals.html>; and <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/govt-officials-fail-to-front-parliament-to-discuss-urgent-proposals.html>.

<sup>12</sup> For a good overview of the current situation in Kachin State regarding drugs, see: Transnational Institute, “People’s War on Drugs in Kachin State: Indication of Failed Policies”, 21 March, 2016, <https://www.tni.org/en/article/peoples-war-on-drugs-in-kachin-state-indication-of-failed-policies>



### Factor 3: Self-Perception of Kachin Identity



There is a self-perception of powerlessness within communities of Kachin State, who feel threatened by external interests and powers, whether from inside or outside Myanmar, and believe they lack the capacity to push back. This powerlessness, as explained by community leaders, can be seen in the perception that ‘outside’ people were over - populating Kachin State, or that ‘outside’ developers and business people were advantaged over Kachin developers and business people. Therefore, communities turn to actors who can best represent their concerns, such as the KIO, to act on their behalf.

Community leaders explained that their efforts have been focused on empowering individuals in communities so that they can develop a positive self-perception. This has been achieved through encouraging and establishing alternative methods of raising capital for farmers, for example, or developing leadership skills among leaders in communities so that their community can begin organising their own businesses and practices. However, there is a larger role of the self-perception of Kachin identity as revealed through conversations with people in Kachin communities. In previous Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) listening projects in Kachin State, Kachin communities freely shared their opinion, experiences, and perspectives, but they routinely expressed a lack of representatives

to advocate on their behalf.<sup>13</sup> In this gap between representatives and advocates, and communities, self-perception becomes challenged and influenced by the conflict as communities experience ongoing political and physical marginalisation. Therefore, as the self-perception of Kachin identity undergoes a period of self-reflection and reinforcement, there are also political efforts at representing and empowering Kachin identity nationally, such as through the Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP).

### *Perspective: The importance of religious identity*

Religious identity is a defining aspect of Kachin State, and it expresses itself throughout the Kachin Conflict. One such example is religious identity and the KIO. So overwhelming is the nature of KBC influence in KIO affairs that non-Baptists view the *political* makeup of the KIO with scepticism. Although there is obvious support for the KIO, regardless of religion, there are still questions regarding who is represented by the KIO. Catholics, for example, could not see their own religious leaders among those in positions of power and responsibility within the KIO, just as the KIO in turn could not see its own representatives at a national level.

But much of the tension in Kachin politics that came from *religion* was down to matters of process rather than substance. For example, the Catholic Church supported signing the NCA, and the KBC did not. This disagreement did not discount Catholic support for the KIO, but instead prompted a search for other ways to continue the peace process and representation of Catholic views, which was achieved through Catholic representation at KIO central committee meetings. Likewise, the KBC is viewed as holding strongly nationalist views about an independent Kachin State that are not

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<sup>13</sup> Two CPCS publications have helped elevate voices and perceptions in Kachin communities. In “Listening to Voices from Inside: Ethnic people speak”, published in 2010, Kachin NGO workers detailed the faith communities had in the KIO/KIA and the opposition to the Tatmadaw, as well as the perceived challenges to land rights and Kachin identity. In 2015, when CPCS began monitoring six ceasefire states in “We Want Genuine Peace: Voices of Communities from Myanmar’s Ceasefire Areas 2015”, the main opinions heard in Kachin State were around the limited tangible benefits from the peace process, the desire for self-administration, and increasing fatigue towards the situation of IDP communities. The shift in perception as conflict resumed demonstrates the effects of the renewed conflict on communities, especially towards their confidence in the peace process as it drags on.

shared wholly throughout Kachin State, although demands for autonomy or self-determination are supported. In response, the KSDP, in particular, has been involved in conferences to draft a federal system for Myanmar that helps to capture these perspectives, without causing further conflict. From conversations with community leaders, the discussion is now around the differences and possibilities of ethnic or geographical federal states to help support demands for autonomy or self-determination.<sup>14</sup>

Fundamentally, these religious differences are grounded in the distinctive religious makeup of Kachin State in comparison to the rest of Myanmar. Although Kachin are majority Christian, they are a national minority in the majority Buddhist nation of Myanmar, which means that any federal system must make space for a national identity that allows the practice of different religions. During listening projects conducted by CPCS in Kachin State, religious autonomy has been an important issue for communities, with some participants referring to their religious rights being relegated to “worship rights”.<sup>15</sup> As questions over religious rights have been a previous source of conflict, and with other voices in Myanmar arguing for Buddhist nationalism, religious practice continues to be a source of friction and Kachin State is not immune to the increase of religious discrimination nationally, especially towards Muslims. In July, a Mosque was torched near Hpakant, not long after another Mosque had been torched in the central Bago region.<sup>16</sup> Although rare, the attacks stress the importance of interfaith dialogues within Kachin communities.

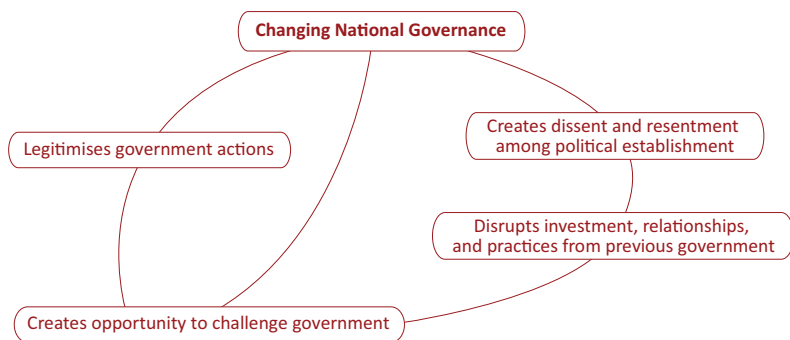
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<sup>14</sup> In July, 2016, Dr. Manam Tu Ja, leader of the KSDP, was shown attending a workshop in Yangon, titled “Drafting Key Principles and Characteristics for a Federal Union of Burma.” This came at the same time the KSDP were organising for the multiple Kachin ethnic political parties to come together under a coordination group. For more on the coordination group, see: Eleven Myanmar, “Kachin parties form coordination group”, 26 June, 2016, <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/5256>

<sup>15</sup> Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, “Listening to Voices from Inside: Ethnic people speak”, 2010, p 233.

<sup>16</sup> For reports of the Mosque destruction, see: Frontier Myanmar, “Five arrested over Hpakant mosque burning”, 5 July, 2016, <http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/news/five-arrested-hpakant-mosque-burning>

## Factor 4: Changing National Governance



The political environment created by the 2015 elections, which brought the NLD to power, can act as both a factor for and against peace; first, in that in the environment of changing national governance there are opportunities for ethnic voices to be heard, and, second, for governing structures to shift to encompass those voices. However, this changing political environment also disrupts investments and relationships made by the previous government which, in turn, creates dissent and resentment in different parts of the political structure. Nevertheless, this factor drives the desire for genuine representation of Kachin perspectives at a national level so that change can occur in Kachin State, and it is intimately related to mobilising ethnic politics and the self-perception of Kachin identity.<sup>17</sup>

As a consequence of changing national governance, the new NLD-led Central Government is increasingly embraced internationally, which results in added legitimacy for policies and actions. Numerous foreign governments have already begun reinforcing this legitimacy by visiting and meeting with NLD leaders, along with government ministers making

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<sup>17</sup> Although the NLD representatives were elected in Kachin State in 2015, community leaders did not regard their success as an opportunity to represent Kachin identity in national politics. In one conversation, the election was described as a “referendum” that discarded the military-backed government. It was explained that the real opportunity for representation and changing national governance, however, would come in 2020, when ethnic political parties were better prepared and organised for campaigning in the national election.

appearances abroad. This legitimacy strengthens the authority of the Central Government without necessarily moderating its behaviour, as is the case in Kachin State with the actions of the Tatmadaw, and with the Chinese government shifting to focus on the Central Government at the expense of EAGs.

This factor significantly reframes the relationship between EAGs and the Central Government as changes to perceived government legitimacy affect the stances of actors who had previously fought for greater ethnic rights and autonomy. There is a possibility that as this factor evolves it will be those EAGs that are resisting change that will be seen to be agents against change, and the government will be seen as an agent for change, regardless of actual policy positions. Without being politically involved, EAGs are threatened to be left behind.

The additional element of this factor is the advantages of conferred legitimacy to the Tatmadaw, who are modernising their armed forces. As the government is viewed internationally as legitimate, and sanctions are slowly loosened, the Tatmadaw can begin building relationships with armed forces around the world, especially the USA. Already, Kachin State has experienced the advances in warfare conducted by the Tatmadaw with their aircraft and heavy artillery. But, on the ground, advancements in communication and logistical support already threaten to overrun the EAGs.<sup>18</sup>

### *Perspective: Sustainability of ageing leadership*

Community leaders expressed their concerns about how prepared and engaged the next generation will be when it comes time to take over positions of responsibility and authority, regardless of the institution or organisation.

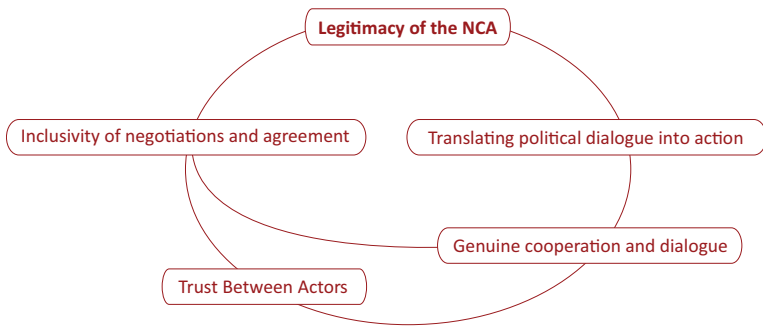
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<sup>18</sup> The Tatmadaw has been undergoing steady amounts of modernisation since 2011, and is unlikely to see that trend reversed as they retain veto power within parliament under the current constitution. See Lowy Institute for a time line of recent Tatmadaw military advancements: <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/10/22/Burmas-Tatmadaw-A-force-to-be-reckoned-with.aspx>

There were two dimensions to this perspective that caused it to emerge as a point of concern. The first is about youth development and education, and the second is about the effects of the renewed conflict and the ensuing military narratives. Interruptions due to conflict meant that it is difficult to administer education programmes in conflict areas in Kachin State, leading to increased drop out rates and inconsistent education. The lack or poor quality of education infrastructure and resources means that students have to travel long distances, if they are able to travel at all, for further education. In KIO-controlled areas, the EAG provides education facilities and programmes, but the programmes are not recognised by the Central Government, further limiting higher education opportunities. There are also concerns that the national education programmes do not teach Kachin languages, such as Jinghpaw, and culture. This mixture of poor infrastructure, conflict instability, obstacles to further education, and incomplete education programmes means that the youth are susceptible to disengagement, leading to drug use and labour abuse, and limiting their options aside from joining a military.

This feeds into the second concern over military narratives and how they influence the youth. In the absence of sustained and engaged education opportunities, and in the constant instability of conflict, Kachin youth see the KIO fighting for their rights. As the KIA is fighting with the Tatmadaw, and the KIO is opposed to Central Government policy towards Kachin State, the KIO response reinforces military conflict as a suitable step forward. The most recent experience of broken ceasefire and difficult NCA negotiations further reinforces the collective militarisation of Kachin society. The concern, as expressed by community leaders, is how these narratives of war and the mixture of disenfranchised and disillusioned youth will affect the peace process in years to come. There is optimism that engaging with the youth now will help to curb the cycle of violent conflict, but there remains the perspective that the youth are being left behind.

## Factor 5: Legitimacy of the NCA

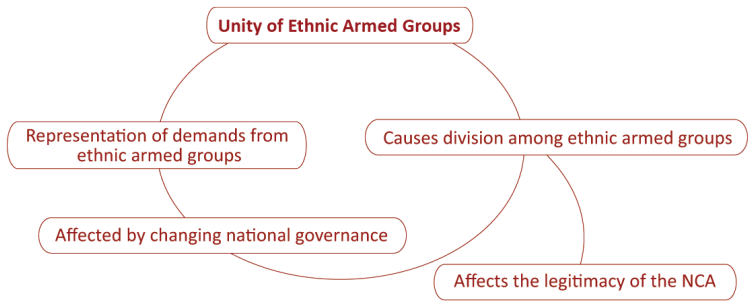


Conversations with community leaders demonstrated significant disillusionment in Kachin State with the negotiations of the NCA at the end of 2015. Much of this disillusionment draws from the broken ceasefire in 2011, and the lack of belief that the government is sincere in its efforts to take forward the peace process. The renewal of conflict in Northern Shan State at the border with Kachin State between the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), a signatory to the NCA and with the assistance of the Tatmadaw, and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), a non-signatory to the NCA that is not recognised by the Central Government, has further diminished what little faith there already is in the NCA negotiations. Community leaders agreed in principle that a ceasefire agreement is necessary for Kachin State, but they argued that because of the militarisation of Kachin State and the ongoing displacement of communities, there has been little opportunity for genuine negotiation towards a ceasefire agreement.

A main point of contention is the inclusivity of the agreement and negotiations. The KIO has opposed signing the NCA on the grounds that it excludes EAGs and is, therefore, not a comprehensive agreement. The KIO has insisted that it would only sign the NCA after inclusive political dialogue, a promise that was made during negotiations of the bilateral ceasefire agreement in 1994. KIO opposition to signing the NCA has resulted in strained trust between the KIO and other EAGs and, during negotiations with the Central Government, there was a schism in the

United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC)<sup>19</sup> between the Karen National Union (KNU), another strong EAG from Karen State, and the KIO. The result was the signing of the NCA by only some of the EAGs, led by the KNU. The 2nd Union Peace Conference (UPC), also referred to as the ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Panglong conference’, is an opportunity for EAGs to confront these disagreements, and to reinforce the legitimacy of the NCA by demonstrating genuine commitment to the peace process.

**Factor 6: Unity of Ethnic Armed Groups**



The KIO was at the forefront of efforts to lead EAGs towards a nationwide ceasefire agreement throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, since 2011, the KIO has slowly been left behind on issues of ceasefire and political dialogue as it carries on confronting Tatmadaw offensives through the KIA. Continued violent conflict through sporadic skirmishes has only emboldened the KIO against settling with the Central Government unless all Kachin ethnic demands are fulfilled, a proposition that has prolonged conflict and reduced opportunities for interventions. This has also affected the unity of EAGs, one such example is the split in the UNFC with the KNU signing the NCA, and the increasing presence of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), another powerful and influential EAG, in negotiations with the Central Government after years of absence. The result of these differences, and the schism at this level of unifying EAGs, is that the combined weight of ethnic viewpoints is divided and in competition with one another.

<sup>19</sup>The UNFC was formed in 2011, as a representative coalition of armed groups in negotiations with the central government. There are presently 11 members, only six of which have signed the NCA.



Community leaders expressed their exasperation that infighting among EAGs stalled progress towards peace in the Kachin State.

Another outcome is that the KIO, for one of the few times in its history, finds itself lagging behind on efforts at securing a nationwide ceasefire agreement. Community leaders in Kachin State expressed their disappointment that the KIO is no longer seen as a leader on ceasefire issues, and outside observers of conflict in Kachin State express their concerns that if the KIO does not come back into a unified fold with other EAGs and resume a leading position it risks being isolated in any political resolution and prolonging the conflict in Kachin State. The KIO is able to reinforce the legitimacy of any political dialogue with the government because of its strength which would work towards addressing the conflict in Kachin State. But this requires unity and cooperation with other EAGs.<sup>20</sup>

## Factor 7: Unequal Access and Rights to Natural Resources



Kachin State contains rich sources of natural resources that have attracted domestic and foreign investors, particularly in jade mining, logging, gold mining, and hydropower projects. However, the unstable conflict situation in Kachin State has meant investors in some industries, such as jade mining,

<sup>20</sup> For commentary on the developing relationships between the EAGs and the peace process, see: Saw Yan Naing, Kyaw Kha, "A fragmented ethnic bloc impedes Suu Kyi's 'Panglong' Vision", The Irrawaddy, 20 May 2016, <http://www.irrawaddy.com/commentary/a-fragmented-ethnic-bloc-impedes-suu-kyis-panglong-vision.html>.

have been able to exploit these natural resources with few, if any, official limitations or regulations. Community leaders can see the wealth in resources that are extracted from Kachin State, and hope to see that wealth reinvested in developing Kachin State.

The condition and operation of jade mines, in particular, is a source of ongoing instability. In the central mining town of Hpakant in late May, 2016, mining company machinery was torched by unidentified assailants. Since the attack, the Tatmadaw has arrested and interrogated suspects who are accused of being KIA operatives and carrying out the attack. In another case, a landslide killed a number of itinerant miners who were picking through slag piles in the mines in the hope of finding remnant gems. And, in an effort to regulate jade mining, the Central Government has passed legislation limiting mining licenses, just as a large shipment of explosives arrived at Hpakant, a signal that mining companies, despite the worsening weather conditions, continued to mine for jade.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of hydropower projects, there is a different dynamic that illustrates the influence of, and opposition to, foreign investors. Construction of the Myitsone dam, just outside of Myitkyina, has been stalled since 2011 after the Central Government halted the Chinese-funded project after protests against the displacement of communities because of the dam construction. Since then, the Chinese government still lobbies to see the project fulfilled and the company responsible for its construction has been known to use aid and supplies as a tool to help convince communities not to protest against the dam's completion.

Despite this, in Kachin State, community leaders refuse to allow the dam to be completed, while insisting they welcome outside investment so long as it benefits Kachin State, too. As one conversation went, "Just because we oppose Chinese development does not mean we oppose the Chinese."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See: Chan May Htwe, "Jade miners still at work in Hpakant despite landslide risk", Myanmar Times, 26 May 2016, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20506-jade-miners-still-at-work-in-hpakant-despite-landslide-risk.html>; and DVB, "Burma Army accuses KIA 'operatives' of Hpakant bombings", 25 May 2016, <http://www.dvb.no/news/burma-army-kia-operatives-hpakant-bombings/66365>

<sup>22</sup> For the most recent calls to resume the project by the Chinese government, see: <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/20671-chinese-ambassador-pushes-for-myitsone-dam-restart.html>

More equitable access to natural resources, and their economic benefits, can contribute to peace in Kachin State, and greater equity can be achieved through consulting with communities and developing infrastructure that aims to build Kachin State, rather than only extract from Kachin State.

*Perspective: Foreign interests in natural resources and business*

As much as a factor for peace as a driver for conflict are the rich natural re-sources that are found throughout Kachin State. This irony is described in one way by a community leader as “we are in a boat surrounded by water and yet we are thirsty.” However, what increases the importance of these natural resources are the foreign and domestic attention that they attract and the coinciding business interests that seek to establish themselves in Kachin State.

This outside intervention is characterised in two ways in conversations with community leaders - both separate from Kachin communities - as Chinese and “Burmese” (those from outside Kachin State) driven investments. The important common factor is that Kachin interests are not considered, or are actively ignored, when it comes to project approval. This exacerbates the perception that Kachin are treated as second-class citizens, and perpetuates the dynamic of insufficient infrastructure investment that benefits communities, and not just extractive industries. There is resentment against these external interests in Kachin natural resources, and this can reinforce perceptions that communities are unable to access the economic market or compete on a level economic field. It also fuels an “us” versus “them” sense of disenfranchisement when it comes to investment opportunities and access to the local economy.

A case in point is the ongoing dispute regarding the Myitsone Dam project. Because it is a Chinese development company that initiated the project, and the Central Government approved the project without consultation with Kachin communities, there is anger that Kachin State is left out of the planning process. This was compounded by the terms of the project - although the dam is in Kachin State, and displaces Kachin communities, only 10% of electricity generated would go to Myanmar, with an option to purchase 20%

more, and the remaining electricity would be consumed by China.<sup>23</sup> This perceived imbalance in investment in Kachin State is similar throughout the extractive industries. Jade mining is conducted predominantly by external corporations, and even workers are sometimes from outside Kachin State. Preliminary results from listeners involved in the 2016 phase of the CPCS listening project monitoring community opinions and perspectives on the Myanmar peace process indicate concerns that these companies are also destroying the environment, blocking communities from agricultural land, and are negatively affecting local economies by limiting job opportunities and influencing import and export costs of produce and products.<sup>24</sup>

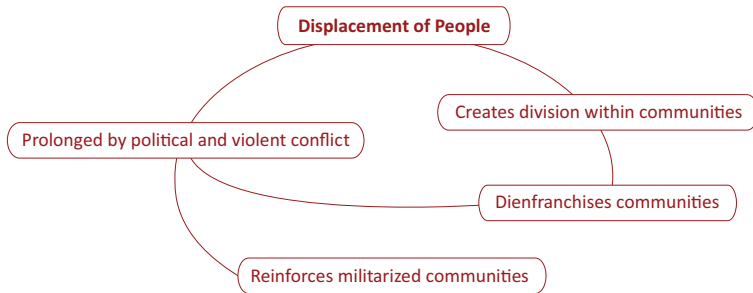
Nevertheless, there is a wealth of potential in Kachin natural resources that does not benefit Kachin communities directly, and in some cases this wealth is seen as the cause for ongoing conditions for conflict, rather than as a symptom. Should the profit from these natural resources be more equitably distributed into developing Kachin State, and access and rights to these natural resources more equitably allocated, conflict can be positively directed away from violent outcomes.

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<sup>23</sup> For a recent analysis of the Myitsone project and China's options, see: <http://frontiermyanmar.net/en/the-myitsone-dam-chinas-three-options>

<sup>24</sup> The latest phase of the CPCS listening project is a continuation of monitoring opinions and perspectives in six ceasefire states across Myanmar. Findings in the first phase of this project were published in 2016, as "We Want Genuine Peace." Analysis from the most recent rounds of listening will be ready in late 2016.

## Factor 8: Displacement of People



The resumption and escalation of conflict in Kachin State in 2011 has disproportionately affected civilians, and this is reflected by the present IDP situation, where almost 100,000 people, entire communities, have left their villages and cannot return, requiring an enormous humanitarian aid response in Kachin State.<sup>25</sup>

The responsibility of administering IDP camps after 2011 fell to the religious institutions in Kachin State, who were the only organisations that had the capacity to provide immediate aid to displaced communities. The situation was compounded when government forces restricted access to KIO areas and blocked the delivery of humanitarian aid to IDP camps outside of government areas. The KBC and Catholic Church are responsible for most camps and distribute aid and assistance, either for healthcare or education, and maintain camp infrastructure.

In 2011, religious institutions assumed they could handle these responsibilities because they believed that the conflict would be short-lived and IDP communities would relocate only temporarily. However, with the continuing militarisation of Kachin State and the presence of military forces near, or in, villages, IDP communities have been forced to remain in camps

<sup>25</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates more than 100,000 IDPs in government and KIO controlled areas in Kachin and Northern Shan States as a result of renewed conflict, and they also note that they have limited access to camps because of government restrictions on access to areas. See: [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MMR\\_humanitarian\\_overview\\_23aug2016\\_ou.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MMR_humanitarian_overview_23aug2016_ou.pdf)

for years longer than anticipated, even as newly displaced people continue to arrive. Community leaders note that as resources available for IDP camps are becoming scarce, the religious institutions are feeling the pressure. As a result, there is tension between camp administrating groups, within camp communities, and between the KIO and Central Government.

The return of IDP communities to their homes and villages is considered the foremost priority of community leaders. According to one camp observer, those who were in the camps predominantly wanted to return to their homes, with very few wishing to relocate elsewhere and even fewer expressing a desire to remain in the camps. But the overwhelming barrier to returning to their villages was the presence of military, either of the government or an EAG, exacerbating the fear that conflict might erupt at any time. Because the militaries are reluctant to withdraw without having first addressed their political demands, and the political wings of all sides are reluctant to move forward because of a lack of trust, IDP communities are undiminished.

In response to this situation, some camp administrators have focused on building capacity within camp communities to help with the relocation process, implementing community development programs aimed at empowering cooperatives of skilled individuals to support communities when they returned to their villages. Other camps, however, are opposed to returning to villages until all Kachin demands have been met at a political level. This divergence in the administration of the IDP camps reinforces division within communities.

## Factor 9: Mobilising Ethnic Politics



The long-term outlook for Kachin State is largely expressed as positive by community leaders. The 2015 national elections, although unsuccessful for Kachin ethnic political parties, have encouraged local political leaders to look towards the next round of elections in 2020. At the KSDP, political planning for lobbying the government regarding models of federalism and consolidating a party platform for 2020 are obvious and open, and throughout conversations with community leaders a picture of a forward planning KIO is just as evident. The outlook and planning pointed towards a stronger ethnic representation for Kachin State at the 2020 elections, which demonstrated mobilising ethnic politics within the state. However, this would depend on the relationship between the KIO and the Central Government, something that is viewed with cautious optimism as the NLD government consolidate power.

Although the current discourse surrounding Kachin State suggests to ‘wait and see’ what will happen next, there is confidence from community leaders that the peace process will be ongoing, even without the KIO signing the NCA, and that the KIO is not outside of the peace process, just lagging behind. This hints at the need for reframing the discourse around peace in Kachin State to better capture mobilising ethnic politics and, more important, to reinforce that the KIO is willing to talk with the government and has not withdrawn from all dialogue. Nevertheless, the community

leaders wanted the KIO to take a lead on the peace process like in the past, and that now was the best opportunity for peace.

However, in order for mobilising ethnic politics to be sustainable and to make meaningful change in Kachin State, there needs to be informed engagement and political capacity building within communities. In this way, ethnic political parties can be informed of their constituents opinions, and constituents are able to explain their perspectives. And, through capacity building, the next generation can be empowered to continue with political efforts at better representing the ethnic and religious makeup of Kachin identity.



## Leverage Points

From the key driving factors that were identified from conversations with community leaders, and by taking into account key perspectives, several leverage points have been identified for possible interventions. These leverage points provide a focal point for efforts to transform the conflict away from violent dynamics or outcomes, towards sustainable factors for peace. Like driving factors, these leverage points are dynamic because the system is dynamic; therefore they are not absolute solutions but, instead, guideposts for interventions.

The first leverage point is to **engage in building political capacity in Kachin State**. This is in response to *changing national governance* in the wake of the 2015 elections, and *mobilising ethnic politics* that show a pronounced desire for external assistance to enable community consultation and outreach. This includes efforts to empower youth and communities so that they can be represented in political processes.

Also, there is a necessity to **recognise the political capacity of the KIO**, instead of its military capacity alone. It is apparent that the KIO has a political plan and a vision that look toward the future of Kachin State, and it is important for the sake of *unity among ethnic armed groups* and *self-perception of Kachin identity*. Similarly, the *legitimacy of the NCA* depends on the inclusion and engagement of the KIO, not as a hostile actor, but as a political actor.

There is a need to **support community-led initiatives away from violent outcomes** as a way to encourage a positive, empowered *self-perception of Kachin identity* and minimise violent effects on communities. An example of a community-led initiative is the *Pat Jasan* response to the *prevalence of drugs*, especially in communities. However, without additional support *Pat Jasan* activities can affect the *displacement of people* if initiatives cause division and exclusion within communities. Therefore, support can lead to engagement and help to divert initiatives away from violent outcomes.

Efforts must **encourage the immediate resolution of the IDP situation** as this exacerbates almost every community level factor of the conflict, prolonging the *displacement of people*, reinforcing the *militarisation of communities*, and influencing the *self-perception of Kachin identity*. At its core, however, the severity of the IDP situation means that the sustainability of any intervention for ending the conflict cannot be guaranteed without also addressing this factor as a key driver of the conflict.

Interventions must also **promote dialogue, at both a community and a political level, as a sign of progress**. This means recognising that dialogue between the government and the KIO, or between community members, is a sign of progress. This can influence *mobilising ethnic politics* and *self-perception of Kachin identity*, as well as address the *militarisation of communities* by demonstrating that not all aspects of the conflict are military.

An important principle that should underpin any intervention in Kachin State is to **identify opportunities for trust and relationship building between actors in the Kachin Conflict**. This applies not only between the Central Government and the KIO, but also within Kachin communities between different denominations of the same religion and between different ethnic groups. Fundamentally, trust and relationship building would positively influence *unity among ethnic armed groups*, as much as they would ease *displacement of people* by encouraging a positive *self-perception of Kachin identity*. They would also help to facilitate *mobilising ethnic politics* as parties seek to represent community perspectives and views.

One other way to address the conflict in Kachin is to **encourage more equitable and more inclusive investment and trade in natural resources in Kachin State**. As *mobilising ethnic politics* and *changing national governance* increases, there is an opportunity to revisit how investment into Kachin State affects Kachin communities, especially regarding natural resources. In order to address the *unequal access and rights to natural resources*, Kachin communities require the capacity to represent their demands and, through improving the *self-perception of Kachin identity*, to see themselves as capable of engaging in an economic process from which they have long believed themselves to be excluded.

## Looking Forward

Despite the ongoing conflict there are existing interventions that can be advocated and strengthened in order to affect the Kachin Conflict towards peace. These interventions exist at the level of *community development* and *local politics*, and they engage with Kachin politicians and religious leaders.

At a *community level*, there are existing programmes in IDP camps that facilitate interfaith dialogue between religious leaders, lessening tensions and divisions that are exacerbated by the displacement of communities. Some of these programmes have extended into engaging community members and preparing them for their eventual transition back to their communities through skills training. Similarly, cooperative programmes have helped to empower Kachin farmers so that they can have more control over their agricultural trade.

At a *local political level*, Kachin political parties have been forming strong foundations in local Kachin community and are preparing for contesting at the next national elections. The KSDP, in particular, have been active in consultations and planning for a Federal Union of Myanmar, and they have been working towards unifying the various Kachin political parties in order to present a united ethnic political front. The KIO, on the other hand, through Technical Advisory Teams (TATs) throughout the state, have been building their framework for community consultation and representation at the KIO central committee. Each team consists of 15 members, five of whom are KIO members and the remaining members from the community. Already there has been success in consulting with communities and drafting KIO positions on land appropriations, with the position of the KIO reflecting community feedback and being presented at a national level through political dialogue between the KIO and Central Government.

These developments demonstrate that the Kachin Conflict is not static, and the term ‘stalemate’ that is often used to characterise the conflict is not preventing efforts at transforming the conflict. However, in order to

build upon the foundations of existing developments in Kachin State and establish sustainable frame-work for the future, interventions must focus on three principles:

- 1. To build trust and relationships between and within ethnic groups at every level*
- 2. To engage the community and build political capacity*
- 3. To sustain meaningful outcomes from structural changes*

These three principles will guide future interventions to ensure effective, and transformational, change in the dynamics of the conflict in Kachin State.

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