# WE WANT GENUINE PEACE

*Voices of communities from Myanmar's ceasefire areas 2015*

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| AA | Arakan Army |
| BGF | Border Guard Force |
| CPB | Communist Party of Burma |
| DKBA | Democratic Karen Benevolent Army |
| HRP/MRP | Hongsawatoi Restoration Party/Mon Restoration Party |
| IDPs | Internally displaced persons |
| KIO | Kachin Independence Organisation |
| KIA | Kachin Independence Army |
| KNU | Karen National Union |
| KNPP | Karenni National Progressive Party |
| KNPLF | Karenni 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 | Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement |
| NCCT | Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team |
| NMSP | New Mon State Party |
| NGOs | Non-government organisations |
| NSAG | Non-State Armed Groups |
| 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

*Everyone wants peace.*
   *Civil wars and fighting are not good for anyone.*

*Using weapons is not a solution to political problems.*

- Middle-aged male from Kachin State

Since 2011, the Myanmar Government has embarked on a peace process that seeks to put an end to one of the world's longest and most protracted civil wars. The complexity of the more than six-decades of conflict is rooted mainly in the multiplicity of actors involved; the Myanmar conflict involves fighting between the Myanmar Government's armed forces, domestically known as the Tatmadaw, and over fifteen active non-state armed groups (NSAGs), fighting in different locations all over the country. Forming the bedrock of the peace process are the bilateral agreements signed between the Myanmar government and fifteen NSAGs (see Annex 1).

The peace process has to address several long-standing issues. Apart from institutionalising deep-seated resentments and mistrust, various counter-insurgency strategies employed in the different ethnic states that aimed at cutting off communication and trade between the NSAGs and civilian communities have effectively stunted economic and social development in most ethnic states. This has left behind a legacy of severe poverty and lack of communication and transportation infrastructure that remains a pressing problem today.

In the midst of all these challenges are the communities living in the areas of the frontlines of battles. These populations are amongst the most affected by the ongoing conflict; they are also the first to feel and notice the effects of the various bilateral ceasefire agreements at the local level.

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) recognises the importance of accessing the voices of these communities to learn about how they have been affected, not only by the ongoing conflict but also by the ongoing peace process. Listening to the diverse voices of these communities and considering their experiences in the Myanmar peace process is crucial to finding solutions to address the long-standing problems that are at the heart of the violent conflicts. These voices also provide feedback to the negotiating parties on the positive and negative effects that the ongoing peace process is having on communities.

Inclusivity and wide ownership are often hailed as the hallmarks of a robust and sustainable peace process. These are built by including communities, the people who will be directly affected by decisions made in the peace process, in the process. But because the Myanmar peace process is largely a top-level process that concentrates on dialogue between the Myanmar Government, Tatmadaw and NSAG leadership, communities are usually left with little opportunity to engage with the process. Despite the direct impact the ongoing peace negotiations will have on their lives, communities often remain voiceless and invisible at the negotiating table.

CPCS chose to conduct conversations with community members from six different locations across Myanmar. These locations were chosen primarily because of the existing ceasefire agreements with the main NSAGs operating in these areas, as well as the presence of local partner organisations. Using *Listening Methodology* to gather data, CPCS aims to produce a publication that can inform decision makers in the Myanmar peace process of the changing situation, needs and challenges for communities in states across Myanmar. In creating this feedback mechanism, CPCS hopes to build inclusive engagement of all actors in the peace process and ensure local ownership and public support that is essential to sustainable and long-lasting peace.

**Structure of the publication**

This publication is divided into nine chapters. **Chapter 1** contains the introduction as well as the summary of all findings, both the main findings across all the states and the main findings from each state. This chapter also contains CPCS recommendations to key stakeholders based on an analysis of the findings. **Chapter 2** explains what listening methodology is and how it was used to obtain the results. **Chapter 3** covers the evolution of *listening methodology* as it has been applied by CPCS in peace research, and **Chapters 4 to 9** contain more in-depth discussions of the main themes in each of the six areas covered by the research. Lastly, the **Annex** contains various tables, including the overall main themes, the uncategorized main themes from each state and a summary of the answers to guide questions in each state.

**Source:** United Nations[1]

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[1] http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/myanmar.pdf

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Between November 2014 and March 2015, 772 conversations were carried out with 1,072 people living in six states which have ceasefires: Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Northern Shan, Southern Shan, and Mon. Using *Listening Methodology*, people familiar with local contexts, cultures, and who spoke the same language (called *listeners*) were asked to travel to hard-to-reach communities to converse with a cross-section of residents. These conversations focused on community opinions about their direct experiences of living in conflict situations, their needs, challenges, as well as hopes for the future, all within the framework of the Myanmar peace process.

## MAIN THEMES ACROSS ALL STATES

The following themes focus on how communities have been affected by conflict in the ethnic states, community perspectives and experiences relating to the peace process, as well as the current challenges they face and their hopes for the future.

## 1. On the peace process

### *Real and sustainable peace*

*I don't want a fragile peace. I just want to have peace in our country… People should not be the victim of the fighting anymore.*

> - Middle aged Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Northern Shan State

*If war breaks out in this region again, children's education and regional development will be affected. In the future, we don't want any communal or ethnic conflict. We want equal relationships and mutual respect for each other.*

> - A middle-aged man from Kachin State

Communities in all the selected areas frequently mentioned how their lives were greatly affected by violent conflict. One of the commonly mentioned effects was how violent conflict limited their freedom of movement, which in turn negatively affected their livelihood opportunities. Communities also recounted negative experiences resulting from the presence of soldiers from the Tatmadaw or different NSAGs.

Unsurprisingly, the desire for peace was one of the most prevalent themes that came across from different communities. In speaking about peace, most community members mentioned strong desires for "true", "real", "lasting", or "sustainable" peace. Many community members explained their own experiences of peace were limited to short periods of cessation of hostilities, when past ceasefire agreements were implemented that then broke down. Communities were explicit in saying that the type of peace they desire goes beyond sustained cessation of hostilities to include basic freedoms, such as to live dignified lives with family members and work freely without fear of violence or future violent conflict. Most community members also expressed the hope that peace would bring higher standards of living through improvements in social service delivery, economic development, and better income generation opportunities.

### Cautious optimism

*Looking at the timeline, the rule of the current government and the previous military government is quite different. Freedom of expression has changed, apparently. There also is a little more transparency.*

- Ta'ang farmer from Northern Shan State

*In my opinion, security is one of the obvious changes over the course of the ceasefire*

- A Karenni Catholic religious leader from Kayah State

*The peace process has been good. Before the ceasefire agreement, whenever we went to another village, the military always checked us during the journey because they worried about spies...These days it's very easy to travel from one place to another.*

- An elderly Karen farmer in Kayin State

*Now it is a little freer to trade because transportation has become better. Our living standard is becoming better. We can study at school now. Health services are becoming better with more doctors and medicine. We can now participate in social development and our economy is improving.*

- A mature Buddhist Karen woman in Kayin State

Communities consistently mentioned several positive changes that they have experienced since the ceasefire agreements were signed under President Thein

Sein. The greatest positive changes were improved human security as a direct result of the cessation of hostilities, less militarisation of communities, and the ability to travel more freely in different parts of the country. Communities also cited improvements in social service delivery, such as easier access to education and health care services, as well as better communication and transportation infrastructure. Keeping in mind that these improvements occurred in the period following the signing of different ceasefire agreements, most communities recognised that these positive developments were connected to the ongoing peace process.

*Things became a little more peaceful in Myanmar since they began the peace process, but there is no real peace because they are still fighting in some places.*

- A Buddhist monk in Mon State

*It can't be assumed that there is peace just because there is a ceasefire and no battle. It will be peaceful only when the government and all the ethnic groups protect the general public together, I think.*

- Conversation between three Ta'ang people in Northern Shan State

However, these same communities recalled their experiences with past ceasefire breakdowns. This has made them cautious about the peace process. Several communities recognised the peace process is still in its early stages and a lot more needs to be done by the negotiating parties for full trust to emerge. Anxiety over the possibility of ceasefires breaking down was particularly noticeable among communities in Kachin and Northern Shan State, where there have been recent instances of fighting between the Tatmadaw and NSAGs. Several community members in other states also cited the ongoing fighting in these states as reasons for them to be wary about the sustainability of the peace process. Despite this, most communities remained hopeful that the peace process would continue and bring about more positive changes in their daily lives.

### Desire for sincere engagement from parties

*The main thing I want to say is that lasting peace requires the government and armed groups to work together and implement the peace process in practice. If they can do so, people will trust both of them.*

- A middle-aged Karenni farmer from Kayah State

*To create peace, the first thing is to give first priority to the public needs. Promises have to be kept. Soldiers have to protect people's lives. Soldiers serving at the front must obey the orders from above. Officials do not know what the soldiers at the front are doing to the public so they deny that they harm the public.*

<div align="right">- Middle-aged man in government service from Kachin State</div>

*…peace is not dependent upon armed groups alone. Peace has to be viewed from the side of the public. What the public needs has to be considered.*

<div align="right">- Mature male Burmese merchant from Northern Shan State</div>

Another prevalent theme that emerged is the communities' expressed desire for negotiating parties from both the Myanmar Government and the NSAGs to sincerely engage in the peace process. According to communities, this means that the negotiating parties need to look past their own interests and consider the needs of communities living in Myanmar. Similarly, a clear desire was expressed to have the negotiating parties learn about how violent conflict negatively impacts the daily lives of communities so that these concerns can be included and addressed in the peace process. This would contribute towards building trust among the negotiating parties and help overcome the legacy of past ceasefire breakdowns. It would also ensure that top-level decisions made at the negotiating table actually benefited communities on the frontlines of the conflicts.

## 2. Hopes for the peace process

### Information and understanding

*To implement the peace process, both government and NSAGs must come to communities and seek advice and agreement from them. In particular, the leaders and responsible individuals from government and armed groups will have to educate communities about peace.*

<div align="right">- A farmer in Kayah State</div>

*Our villagers don't know what the NSAG leaders have agreed to in the peace process. We can only know the agreement they have if they come and explain it to us. Village communities don't know or understand anything and have no idea or opinion to share about the peace process.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged farmer in Kayah State</div>

Communities expressed a strong desire to have more information about the peace process. Participants understood the peace process to be vaguely about the cessation of hostilities and talks taking place between the Myanmar Government and the various NSAGs. Their lack of information about the peace process was often linked to expressions of feeling geographically isolated from the rest of the country. They asked for those involved in the peace process to improve information channels so that people living in the most remote villages can understand what the peace process was about. They also want to keep abreast of the latest developments and any implications such developments may have on their lives.

### Participation and consultation

*We wish the voice of the people to be included in discussions in Hluttaw. We wish the public, the people of Myanmar, to have political knowledge and to be able to have freedom of expression according to the law. We wish for a fair democracy.*

- A middle-aged man from Kachin State

*Peace will come truly if they solve the community's problems and conflicts as justly as they can after listening to the public, and not by ignoring them. Public participation is really necessary. Public cooperation is very much needed.*

- Young Pa'o female from Southern Shan State

From Kachin State to Mon State, participants expressed their desire to be included in the peace process. They talked about wanting to support and contribute to the peace process as active citizens. However, communities felt that their lack of information and understanding about the peace process prevented them from getting more involved. Giving communities more information and increasing their understanding would be the first step towards greater public engagement in the peace process.

### Better social services

*The education sector is the main thing to be considered in the peace process. We need enough school buildings, furniture, and purified water for education.*

- A middle-aged female Karenni teacher in Kayah State

*The biggest challenge in our country is our poor education system. Teachers do not have enough skills and the exercises in school are not appropriate in all areas. Our children don't learn critical thinking at school. Our children also don't understand all the lessons in the books and they simply memorise by heart. We are worried that this has limited our children and our society. Our future depends on our children.*

- A male Buddhist Mon shopkeeper in Kayin State

*In the future, I want a clinic and doctor in my community.*

- A middle-aged Mon rubber maker in Mon State

Communities across the six areas recognised the improvements they experienced in terms of access to social services and infrastructure. Participants cited the construction of education and health care facilities, improvements in the quality of teachers and health care workers, as well as better communication and road infrastructure, all of which helped to enhance their daily lives. However, communities were quick to point out that more social development efforts were needed. Participants identified improving the quality and access to education to be the primary concern, given that having educated youth was seen as the key to a better future for the country. Improvements in transportation infrastructure, specifically roads linking remote communities to the state capitals, and health care were also identified as crucial developments. Several communities across the different states also called for better access to electricity and clean water.

## 3. Challenges

### Crippling economic hardship

*Talking of peace, when we think of people struggling for their livelihoods, we see there is no peace yet.*

- A young female Pa'O farmer from Southern Shan State

*In the peace process, we want them to discuss poverty reduction, rural development, power reduction, tax reduction, and corruption eradication in the meetings.*

- A middle-aged Ta'ang male village elder from Northern Shan State

*The economic situation is so bad now. We are having difficulties to even have enough food to survive.*

<div align="right">- A young Mon female teacher in Mon State</div>

*There is no justice in tax collection.*

<div align="right">- A young female farmer in Kayah State</div>

The strongest challenge to emerge from all areas covered was the economic hardship that communities experience. This is caused by multiple factors, of which the most commonly mentioned was the low prices for crops that farmers produce, coupled with inflation and the high prices of basic commodities. Participants also cited the lack of good employment opportunities, particularly for young people. Economic hardship was aggravated by the ad hoc "taxation systems" imposed on communities, such as "travel tax" collected by soldiers at checkpoints or house-to-house tax collections. To survive, several participants mentioned having to leave their communities to find work outside the country. This brings about another set of problems, such as falling prey to human trafficking or having to work under unsafe or abusive conditions.

### Drug production, trade and addiction

*Opium is the main destroyer. I want poppy destroying camps to be built before all the youth are spoiled. The police do not come to the village to seize the poppy dealers. So, the dealers are very free.*

<div align="right">- A middle aged Ta'ang female farmer from Northern Shan State</div>

*Youth become slaves to drugs.*

<div align="right">- A university educated young Karenni man in Kayah State</div>

Communities recognised the dilemma that they faced when it came to the issue of drug production. On the one hand, many farmers have to resort to planting opium to make enough money to support their families. On the other hand, the easy availability of illegal drugs was causing widespread societal problems. Communities felt drug addiction was disempowering the youth and destroying their future. Drugs were also causing people to behave immorally or commit crimes. Several participants therefore identified a need for drug eradication programmes that provided alternative livelihood opportunities for farmers who currently relied on drug production for their incomes.

Communities in all states noted an increase in the availability of drugs, which has led to a rise in drug use and drug addiction, particularly among the youth. Participants believed this to be an unexpected result of improvements due to the bilateral ceasefire agreements. As the security situation and transportation infrastructure improve, together with a decrease in check points, more people are able to travel to other places and illegal drugs are more easily transported from one area to another.

Communities most affected by drug addiction, such as Kachin, Northern Shan State and Southern Shan State, actually considered drug eradication to be an important component of the peace process. Some participants interpreted the government's inaction in addressing drug issues as a means of disempowering ethnic youth. Others claimed that different individuals from the Tatmadaw, the government, the police force, and the NSAGs were profiting from the drug trade. Communities therefore expressed a desire for the government and the different NSAGs to coordinate and cooperate in implementing successful drug eradication strategies.

### Discrimination

*If all are not equal it means discrimination exists. If there is discrimination, how can peace be built?*

- Male resident of Southern Shan State

*In the future, I want my community to be united.*

- A Burmese farmer in Mon State

Communities also recognised discrimination to be an ongoing problem. In terms of the government, which most ethnic minority participants equated with the majority Bamar ethnic group, several participants cited the uneven levels of social development or access to social services as evidence of ethnic group discrimination. Several participants also used the phrase "*one kyat for Bamar, one kyat for _____,*"[2] to emphasise the right of ethnic minority states to a fair share of the national budget.

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[2] This is a variation of a statement attributed to General Aung San that promises fiscal equality in terms of national budget allotments between the Bamar-majority areas and the ethnic states. Participants who quoted this statement would insert their ethnic group in the blank space.

Closely related to this issue is the call for a truly representative government in the form of federalism and greater state autonomy. Other participants also highlighted the desire for ethnic states to receive benefits from resource extraction projects in their areas, as well as to have some measure of control over these projects.

Ethnic discrimination was not attributed solely to the Myanmar Government/Bamar ethnic group. Several participants also spoke of feeling disconnected from other ethnic groups, with some citing previous experiences of discrimination and fighting between different ethnicities within the state. A few participants also mentioned discrimination being present even among different sub-groups of the same ethnic group. Religion-based discrimination was also cited as an issue of growing concern.

Another strong sub-theme was the issue of gender-based discrimination, specifically discrimination against women. Several participants spoke of wanting more livelihood and higher education opportunities for girls and women. They also wanted more opportunities for women to participate in political discussions, as well as in community engagement in the peace process.

### Land confiscation and land registration issues

*Currently the area is seemingly peaceful but the land issue is very much against peace and burning in the hearts of people.*
>                                                       - Middle-aged male Pa'o farmer from Southern Shan State

*During the peace process, there are new roads built. Ta-ang farmers' tea leaf farms are destroyed to build new roads but we do not get anything as compensation.*
>                                                            - Female tea leaf farmer from Northern Shan State

Another theme that emerged quite strongly as a current challenge was the issue of land confiscation. This was linked to the issue of the new land registration laws,[3] which several participants said they did not have sufficient knowledge of or understanding. This made many participants anxious, particularly given the rise in reported land confiscation cases. These usually occurred in the context of infrastructure projects (for road widening) or large-scale development projects (mining, resource extraction, tourist or economic zone developments, etc.).

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3 The Myanmar Government passed two significant land registration laws in 2011 and 2012.

## MAIN THEMES IN EACH STATE

The following section provides summaries of the key findings from each state. A more detailed discussion on the main themes from each state can be found in later chapters.

## KACHIN STATE

### *Limited tangible effects of peace process*

Participants in Kachin overwhelmingly spoke about how strongly their daily lives were shaped by living on the frontlines, in close vicinity to both Tatmadaw and Kachin armed group soldiers. People spoke most, not about their fear of being caught in the crossfire of firefights, but rather about how the presence of soldiers restricted their ability to travel to other areas. Such restrictions were seen as severely limiting the livelihood opportunities of people in villages. This was also strongly linked to feelings of geographic isolation that most communities mentioned, and their expressed desire to have better transportation infrastructure, which was seen as a practical solution to the lack of employment opportunities in most villages. Concern over geographic isolation was more pressing in Kachin State when compared to findings from other areas in Myanmar.

The pervasive effects of conflict on daily lives could explain why there emerged a strong sense of weariness with the fighting and a resounding expression of support for peace. Indeed, communities explicitly connected peace with development, with participants explaining that they wanted to see the fighting stop so that development could begin.

Generally, communities in Kachin State reported limited tangible benefits from the current peace process. The majority of communities cited the continued military presence and outbreaks of conflict in the region as major obstacles to peace, constituting threats to personal safety and security. Furthermore, while communities acknowledged recent political developments, overwhelmingly they reported limited improvement in their standard of living. As a result, many community members expressed concern that ceasefire agreements and current negotiations had not yet achieved real peace.

The desire of communities to be heard in the peace process and to be politically represented was much stronger in Kachin State than in the other states. This indicates that communities feel ready to engage, but are not being heard and do not have any channels for representation.

## *Self-administration and natural resource development*

Participants from Kachin said they wanted self-administration in Kachin State, which they believed was the key to development. Significantly, several participants admitted that they did not fully understand what "self-administration" meant. When it came to large-scale development projects based on natural resource extraction projects, most communities expressed apprehension, if not downright hostility. These feelings were based on previous experiences or observations that these projects often resulted in land -grabbing or restrictions of access to community resources, such as forests or rivers.

Caution should be applied to the oversimplified understanding that peace (understood in the narrow sense as the cessation of fighting) will automatically lead to self-administration, which in turn will automatically result in development. It is therefore critical for communities in Kachin State to gain a clearer understanding of concepts like the peace process, self-administration, and federalism. This would not only provide an avenue for communities to become more engaged with the peace process, but could also temper unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved immediately after the fighting has stopped. This would be helpful in managing disillusionment relating to the peace process in Kachin State.

## *Internally displaced people*

An unexpected insight that emerged from Kachin State was the negative perception that some communities had of internally displaced people (IDPs) who were usually the recipients of aid. Communities often said they were facing hardships similar to people living in IDP camps but they did not have access to any support when the conflict started. This led some to speak of the perceived advantage IDPs had over them, namely their access to food aid. A handful of participants even went so far as to suggest that some IDPs were taking advantage of non-government organisations (NGOs), becoming lazy and losing any motivation to work since they were being "spoon-fed" with aid. This theme must be placed within the context of underdevelopment in Kachin State,

as well as the lack of stable livelihood opportunities. It is crucial to address this misconception and manage the growing resentment as this has the potential to escalate, particularly if it collides with the unrealistic expectations communities have about how much their quality of life will improve immediately after the fighting ends.

## NORTHERN SHAN STATE

### *Limited tangible effects of peace process*

Similar to Kachin State, significantly less tangible improvements were observed from the peace process in Northern Shan State. Communities continue to live with fear due to intimidation from soldiers living near their areas, and feel restrictions on travel. The threatening presence of soldiers or landmines in their areas interfered with the ability of people to make a living – cutting off communities from their farms, preventing them from traveling to find work, or inhibiting trade by making the roads unsafe or impassable. Economic hardship was thus seen as the most obvious effect of the ongoing conflict, and several participants said that they could not think of their future or make any plans because they are preoccupied with the basic issue of survival. Cessation of hostilities is therefore seen as the essential first step to being able to improve their living conditions and provide access to better livelihood opportunities.

Some positive impacts of the peace process were observed in the form of better relations between Tatmadaw soldiers and communities, including a decrease in instances of soldiers stealing food and livestock, and examples of soldiers making formal requests from village heads for food, as well as offering to pay for the food they consumed. Communities also mentioned the presence of government officials providing community members with identification cards for the first time. These changes are most likely being implemented due to formalised policy changes by the Myanmar Government or Tatmadaw.

### *Inter-ethnic discrimination*

Shan State is the most ethnically diverse region in Myanmar. Historic manipulation of these divisions through policies of *Burmanisation*[4] and *Shanisation*[5], coupled

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[4] Burmanisation refers to the policy of the previous military governments of promoting Burman culture, language, and historical perspectives, leading to the marginalisation of the cultures, religions, and languages of the other ethnic groups.
[5] Shanisation refers to the deliberate effort to homogenise the cultural orientation of the various Shan subgroups.

with the multiple NSAGs formed along ethnic lines in the northern part of the state, have exacerbated ethnic divisions. According to the predominantly Ta'ang participants, their relatively peaceful co-existence with other "non-Burman" ethnic groups in their area was disturbed as a result of the forced recruitment by Shan, Kachin and Wa NSAGs. Participants felt that other ethnic groups in the area looked down upon their ethnic group. Several participants spoke of a sense of shame they felt in the past when admitting that they are Ta'ang. Most therefore viewed the formation of the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) in 1992 as a positive step needed to stop the "bullying" from other NSAGs and the Tatmadaw through extortion of money or "taxation" and forced recruitment. Themes relating to the need for greater unity to deal with inter-ethnic discrimination, and the recognition by communities of a need for unity between the different ethnic groups in Northern Shan, are particularly important given these divisions.

### Drug problem

Most participants who mentioned the drug problem also spoke about the strong connection between the presence of drugs and war - "*as long as there are drugs, peace will never be achieved*." Addressing the drug problem was thus seen as an essential component of the peace process, and most participants put the onus on the government to come up with programmes that sufficiently address the problem.

Most participants therefore expressed strong support for the TNLA's consistent anti-drug campaigns. Several participants repeatedly expressed satisfaction with TNLA activities that focused on destroying poppy fields, arresting drug dealers, and forcing drug-addicted people into rehabilitation. Other participants spoke of TNLA activities that bordered on vigilantism – first giving warnings to known drug dealers to cease all drug trading activities before killing them if they chose to ignore such warnings. The communities' main criticism of the TNLA drug eradication policy is that they should provide alternative crops when they burn poppy fields.

### Complex conflict dynamics

The presence of opium drug production and trade, unregulated resource extraction, government and military corruption, geographic isolation from the rest of the country due to limited road infrastructure and an easily accessible

and porous border with China have played into the conflict dynamics in the region, further complicating the situation. Communities explained that there were local armed militias organised to protect opium farms and ensure that production continues. Community members were unsure as to whom these local militias were aligned with, whether the different NSAGs, or the Tatmadaw.

### Effect of conflict on youth

Communities repeatedly discussed how young people have experienced the most dramatic negative effects of the conflict: not having access to education, becoming addicted to drugs, being recruited into the armed groups, or having to leave their villages and move to other countries to provide income for their families. This exodus of young people from Northern Shan State is viewed by most of the communities as a threat to the future of the Ta'ang ethnic group.

## SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

During the training workshop with *listeners* from Southern Shan State, an interpretation error occurred. The term "peace process", referring to the formal peace process occurring between the Myanmar Government and the country's different NSAGs, was translated to the term "peace", referring to personal understandings of what peace means to individuals. As a result, *listeners* focused less on the Myanmar peace process in the conversations they had with community members from Southern Shan State. Some *listeners* explained that several community members did not want to talk about peace or the peace process as they believed these discussions to be political in nature and were reluctant to talk about politics publicly.

### Peace as socioeconomic development in ethnic states

The strongest theme was how hard life is for the participants, not only because of the ongoing conflict but also because of underdevelopment in their communities. Most communities relied on farming for their source of livelihood and, generally, low crop prices resulted in insufficient incomes to meet their most basic needs. A lack of access to basic social services adds to their hardship. Unsurprisingly, when asked about what they wanted for their future, participants focused mostly on having sustainable livelihoods

and meeting the basic needs of their families. In the concise words of one participant, "*our future is foggy; we cannot even think about it because we are too busy surviving*."

For most communities, peace is tied to the socioeconomic development and availability of secure livelihoods of their region. From the enumerated needs, participants emphasised the need to improve the education system. They asked for more schools to be built so that each village would have access to a school, more teachers, and better quality education. Many participants saw education as the solution to a number of the country's problems – the key to providing youth with better opportunities for improving their lives, to combating bigotry and prejudice, and to provide a stronger foundation for peace. Because so many young people still do not have proper access to quality education in their communities, several communities expressed concern about the future of their children. In general, most of the participants who mentioned education agreed that it was necessary for their children to have better lives than their parents.

Participants want to feel connected with their government by seeing evidence that the government is actually concerned about the needs of people living in the ethnic states and are taking steps to improve their living situation. To demonstrate its commitment to the people, communities suggested that the government interact and collaborate with them more, particularly in terms of consulting with them while formulating policies or making decisions.

### Consultation as empowerment

Significantly, communities reflected that the act of having *listeners* ask them about their opinions of the peace process and local community problems was empowering. Several participants expressed satisfaction when they were approached by *listeners* and asked to have conversations. A number of participants said this was the first time they had ever been asked to share their opinions and views, and this made them feel important.

### Frustration over large-scale development projects

Community feelings of disempowerment and disconnectedness became more apparent when discussing large-scale development projects being undertaken in Southern Shan State. Two areas stand out in terms of strong feelings of resentment and frustration from communities: the Baw Sai area and Inle

regions. This is likely due to the fact that there are several mining projects in the Baw Sai area, while in Inle there is a large hotel zone being developed to promote tourism.

In conversations relating to these projects, communities unanimously expressed resentment and frustration at not having been consulted before official authorisation was given to proceed. While local authorities frame large-scale projects in their areas as the means for socioeconomic development, communities counter that the responsibility for ensuring development lies with the government and not with foreign companies. Community frustration has further intensified as residents continue to bear the brunt of the negative effects of these large-scale projects. These effects ranged from incidents of land-grabbing and displacement, to environmental degradation and exposure to health risks. Several participants from these areas equated the lack of peace with the continued operation of these projects.

### Growing xenophobia linked to large-scale development projects

These negative experiences provide a background for understanding the rise in xenophobic expressions among communities directed at Chinese companies and the Chinese workers they bring with them. Apart from causing an increase in land-grabbing and environmental destruction, residents also view Chinese companies with suspicion because of the widespread belief that these companies obtained permits to operate in their areas by bribing government officials. Residents also feel aggrieved because the jobs created by these large-scale projects usually go to Chinese workers who are brought into the area by the companies.

Communities also feel threatened by Chinese workers living in their areas who are believed to be bribing parents to marry women from Shan State. Participants interpret marriage between local women and Chinese workers as changing the ethnicity of these women. The growing discontent with Chinese workers expressed in these communities needs to be carefully monitored as it could become a conflict trigger for future violence.

**KAYAH STATE**

*Cautious optimism*

Participants' expression of their great desire for peace was partly founded on a sincere recognition of the improvements that communities are experiencing since the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Myanmar Government signed a ceasefire agreement in 2012. The ability to move more freely and feel safer in a less militarised environment emerged as key positive changes that people in Kayah highly value and appreciate. The breakdown of ceasefire agreements in the mid 1990s just three months after their signing has, however, made communities in Kayah relatively cautious in their outlook towards peace. Kayah State residents also critically ask for a "true" and "lasting" peace that translates agreements and words into actions. Communities express a cautious optimism towards the peace process, which puts more realistic boundaries around their hopes, but does not change their strong desire for peace in the state.

*Desire for socio-economic development*

Several conversations focused on the economic and social development needs of Kayah State. Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of agriculture as issues directly related to farming were often at the root of ongoing problems for residents. Taxation, land issues, drug production, agricultural capacity and environmental concerns were important challenges for communities who rely on farming for their livelihoods. Communities were also sensitive to market forces that affected their ability to sustain their livelihoods.

Communities also recognised how the lack of access to electricity and water greatly burden their daily lives and leave them disadvantaged compared to their urban counterparts. They called on the government to improve healthcare and education.

These were key issues that communities needed to have addressed at various levels. The emphasis on these issues indicates relative benefits gained over time from the peace process: as fighting is reduced and people gain a sense of security, their primary concerns may have shifted to more state development and better access to basic services. Understanding these issues as part of a true and lasting peace for Kayah residents requires a nuanced approach

that can only be achieved by engaging communities and including them in discussions.

### *Information about the peace process*

Communities repeatedly mentioned their lack of knowledge of the peace process. Although people were generally aware of the peace process, they were not aware of the latest developments. The *listeners* themselves recognised this lack of awareness on the part of the participants as they reflected upon the challenges they encountered while engaging participants in conversations.

### *Participation in the peace process*

People in Kayah State overwhelmingly want to be involved in the peace process; they just do not know how this can be achieved. Communities strongly conveyed the message that they need both government and NSAG authorities involved in the peace process to share their knowledge and insights with them. They called on experts, civil society, government, and NSAGs to provide information about the peace process, reflecting their desire to hear issues from various perspectives. They also wanted to be involved in the peace process, and asked that the relevant authorities engage them and listen to their opinions and experiences. They recognise that their voices and participation are not only beneficial, but also vital to successfully reach sustainable peace. This strong desire to become more informed and engage further in the peace process provides a window of opportunity and a strong incentive for ceasefire actors to shift their attention towards communities in Kayah State.

## KAYIN STATE

### *Positive views on the peace process*

Communities across Kayin State generally felt strongly connected to the peace process. This was not surprising considering most Kayin residents have been living with the effects of violent conflict their entire lives. Many participants said that they did not know much about peace, which can be attributed to the fact that peace is an abstract concept for those that have never experienced it.

Overall, Kayin State is the strongest example of communities experiencing positive impacts from the peace process. Most community members generally

felt safer now than before, a change that they attributed to less fighting in or near their villages. Communities could also travel more freely without having to go through multiple checkpoints. There was also an apparent reduction in the number of soldiers in their communities and this made residents feel more secure on a day-to-day basis.

A better security situation, coupled with improved infrastructure and basic social services, has helped communities appreciate the peace process. As participants associate these changes with the peace process, this has contributed to the largely positive outlook they have of the peace process and fostered a strong desire to see it take place more quickly and successfully. Nevertheless, their longstanding history of conflict explains the skepticism that accompanies their hope.

### *Desire less militarisation*

Kayin State participants often perceived soldiers from both the Tatmadaw and the NSAGs as having disrupted their lives and communities. Compared to other states, where communities have often shown strong support for one group or the other, communities in Kayin State generally saw soldiers, regardless of affinity, as being responsible for their hardships. Conversations about these negative experiences underscored the sense of weariness that communities had with the conflict. These discussions also acknowledged that the lack of trust and sincerity amongst actors is an issue that all negotiating groups need to work on for a successful peace process.

### *NGO effects on conflict dynamics*

The Karen people have a long history with humanitarian assistance and international NGOs. IDPs living inside Kayin State and refugees living in border communities in Thailand have been more visible than in others parts of the country, resulting in an increasing number of NGOs working in the area. The exposure and experiences that Karen people have with these NGOs have inevitably shaped how they view NGOs, not only in terms of the contributions these organisations make to the communities by providing assistance, but also the unintended negative effects their projects can have. There were certainly participants that saw NGOs as an important player in supporting the state at this stage of its development.

Although many community members mentioned the contribution of NGOs in their areas in terms of development and social services, there were also frequent mentions of problems arising as a result of NGO service delivery. Some saw NGO assistance as unwittingly creating a gap in communities between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. This was seen to be generating community-level divisions. Some participants also noticed that local residents were becoming more dependent on NGOs for their basic needs, and expressed concern that these changing attitudes and behaviours would negatively affect communities. Others worried that NGO funds were fueling corruption and were not really reaching the communities they were intended for.

The community perspective in Kayin demonstrates how humanitarian NGO presence can negatively affect communities and create tensions between different community members. The opinions expressed regarding NGOs and the effects that humanitarian assistance has on conflict dynamics are a stark reminder of the relevance of employing 'do no harm'[6] approaches in the project planning and implementation of humanitarian and development work when it affects the lives of people in conflict.

## MON STATE

### *Trust in New Mon State Party*

Similar to other ethnic states, communities in Mon State expressed strong resentment towards the Tatmadaw and skepticism regarding the sustainability of the peace process. Participants also displayed much stronger support, primarily from Mon ethnic communities, for the New Mon State Party (NMSP). Many community members saw the NMSP as their representative and a legitimate security force. For example, community members frequently expressed a desire for the NMSP to address drug use and sales in government-controlled areas. Mon communities, in general, held a high level of trust and support for the NMSP.

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[6] Do no harm: How aid can support peace – or war, is a publication written by Mary Anderson that encourages a practical approach for aid agency staff to take in consideration the unintended effects humanitarian assistance can have when provided in conflict situations.

### Understanding official state borders

Although conversations for this state-by-state research were structured around official state borders, the findings from Mon State demonstrate an alternative community understanding of official boundaries. Ethnic Mon *listeners* saw themselves from Mon State, but ethnic Karen *listeners* geographically based in Mon State believed that their communities were actually located inside Kayin State. This understanding was mirrored in opinions from community members, *i.e.*, while living within the official state borders for Mon State, participants living in Karen villages believed they were located inside Kayin State. This is a highly significant consideration for future discussion on federalism and decentralised governance based on the official state boundaries, particularly in terms of representation of minority ethnic groups in states.

### Importance of language and culture

Language and cultural considerations were particularly important for Mon ethnic communities and were reflected in many of the main highlighted themes. This was observed even during the initial listening training for this publication, as Mon groups preferred to communicate and work in Mon language rather than Burmese, even in the presence of Karen *listeners*. Some *listeners* felt uncomfortable to speak in Burmese and reverted to Mon. Despite a recognised decline in the use of Mon language and the growing number of monolingual Burmese speakers amongst Mon ethnics, in many Mon communities, the Mon language is still the primary language spoken. Mon communities echoed this in conversations and demonstrated a desire to increase Mon language in education, government, and public services throughout Mon State. Ethnic Mon groups also saw issues of culture and recognition as crucial to their future. Having a Mon National Day and government representation at all levels was also important to ethnic Mon communities.

### Community development and economic concerns

Communities in Mon State tended to look beyond conflict and frontline fighting and talked more about issues of development, infrastructure, jobs, the economy, and public services. There was a heavy focus on future needs and ways to overcome challenges. *Listeners* shared that in communities where there was no fighting or conflict, many participants felt that the peace process had little relevance to their lives. People in the age range of 30-50 years old

were often more concerned about jobs and the economy, particularly with regard to the rubber industry.

Young people often expressed little interest in the peace process and were more concerned about social movements focused on education. At the time these conversations were being conducted, several protests led by the Mon State Student Union were taking place across the state to demand student rights and recognition of ethnic language instruction under the National Education Law. For many participants, these were the current issues of tension and conflict that took precedence over the national peace process dialogue.

Even though communities in Mon State have a range of concerns beyond the peace process, they see their inclusion in the process as an important part of state unity. People across the state called for more community participation in the peace process, but also highlighted the need to address broader issues that affect their everyday lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the suggestions made by communities, as well as the observations made by the *listeners*, CPCS has come up with the following recommendations for the Myanmar Government, the Tatmadaw and non-state armed group leadership, and international organisations and non-government organisations working inside Myanmar.

### *For the Myanmar Government*

- The government needs to take steps to gain the trust of the people after almost six decades of conflict. One of the key ways of doing this is to show its sincerity towards the peace process by continuing to engage in dialogue with the NSAGs.

- The government must work with the Tatmadaw to respect not only the National Ceasefire Agreement but also the other bilateral ceasefire agreements signed with NSAGs between 2011-2012.

- It is critical for the government to formulate and effectively implement strategies that explain what the peace process is, and its current progress, to communities. This will help dispel misinformation and manage unrealistic expectations at the community level about what can be achieved immediately after the fighting has stopped. Expanding communication with communities will also open avenues for engaging with the peace process.

- The government can work towards obtaining the trust of communities by leading a comprehensive poverty alleviation strategy in which employment and livelihood opportunities for the general population are prioritised. This should include:
  - plans to increase investment in improving agricultural productivity in rural areas, thereby promoting better livelihood opportunities while at the same time addressing food security concerns; and
  - increasing investment in local industries (processing of food, timber, agricultural products, jewellery-making ventures, etc.) that promote production of higher value goods from raw materials, which would create livelihood opportunities, as well as prevent the exportation of raw materials at low prices to other countries.

- The government should make every effort to increase national investment in all states and regions to improve social service delivery. The priority should be remote areas that have the weakest social delivery systems, with a particular focus on widening and strengthening education and health care provision and improving the quality of services.

- The government should improve communication and transportation infrastructure, which would decrease feelings of isolation in rural areas. Improving the coverage and quality of roads and bridges, as well as providing better coverage of mobile phone systems, would improve the daily lives of people.

- There is a great need for the government to expand and improve community access to stable electricity and water supplies.

- The government should work to establish a good-governance approach to natural resource development to ensure that communities benefit from resource development that occurs within their state. This would include institutionalising community consultations and obtaining permission from communities prior to approving projects.

- The government should establish protocols relating to resource development projects that ensure communities have access to information regarding legal channels for addressing grievances.

- The government should promote information-sharing initiatives on land registration processes, and legal remedies should be established that provide appropriate compensation to people whose land has been confiscated.

- The government should work to provide methods of redress for those who experience racial, gender and religious discrimination. Government policies should demonstrate low tolerance for hate speech of any kind. The government should also disseminate information to communities regarding legal protection from discrimination.

- The government must recognize the extent of the damage inflicted by drug trafficking and drug use within communities, and embrace strategies that implement sustainable agricultural alternatives for drug producers and rehabilitation for drug users.

- There is a need for the government to implement law enforcement reforms to ensure that drug cases are handled properly. This could help to curb the activities of local vigilante groups that formed to address the drug problem.

- Youth development is a central concern for communities and should be prioritised by government efforts to stimulate national, and state, economies through investment in industry and education.

### *For the Tatmadaw and Non-State Armed Group leadership*

- The Tatmadaw and NSAG leadership need to continue efforts to build trust between their groups. Proving their commitment to the peace process requires sincerity and respect for the various ceasefire agreements signed between the government and different NSAGs between 2011-2012.

- Leadership of all parties should decrease militarisation of communities by reducing the presence of soldiers near or in villages around the country. This would help to reduce tensions between the civilian population and the Tatmadaw and NSAGs.

- To further improve relations with the civilian population, both the Tatmadaw and NSAG leadership should produce clear policies on the rules of engagement for NSAGs/Tatmadaw soldiers when dealing with civilians. These policies should be founded on respecting the human rights of communities.

- Improving communication between the Tatmadaw/NSAG leadership and soldiers stationed near or around communities would help to ensure that agreements reached at the peace process negotiating table can be translated into concrete improvements in relations with civilian populations.

- The Tatmadaw/NSAG leadership should improve relations with civilian populations by putting in place local community communication and consultation structures that provide opportunities for productive social interaction and engagement with soldiers.

- The Tatmadaw/NSAG leadership should work to eliminate or, at the very least, reduce the ad hoc taxation systems imposed on local communities.

- The Tatmadaw/NSAG leadership should cease all instances of forced labour or recruitment in communities as it diminishes trust and increases animosity between the Tatmadaw/NSAG and communities.

### *For international organisations and non-government organisations working inside Myanmar*

- IOs/NGOs need to continue working strategically with the government on key issues such as improving social service delivery, anti-discrimination and hate speech initiatives, and poverty alleviation initiatives.

- IOs/NGOs should continue promoting sustainable and continuous dialogue between signatories and non-signatories to the ceasefire agreement to continue the peace process.

- IOs/NGOs working within Myanmar need to cooperate, collaborate, and share information with each other to promote understanding of each other's activities and minimise isolation.

- IOs/NGOs should assist the government in clarifying abstract concepts related to the peace process, such as democracy, federalism and state autonomy by utilising their extensive networks in the different states and divisions throughout the country. This could help the government's efforts to dispel misinformation and manage unrealistic expectations about the peace process.

- IOs/NGOs should consider conducting a context/conflict analysis prior to implementing projects in communities to avoid aggravating any existing tensions in the area. This requires proper consultations with local residents to learn about their needs and take these into consideration in programme planning. Local consultations should also provide IOs/NGOs the opportunity to clarify the objectives of projects being implemented in the communities.

- IOs/NGOs are advised to apply the established 'Do No Harm' principles in planning and implementing any kind of project in communities.

- IOs/NGOs should continue to support inter-religious dialogue and engagement between people on religious issues.

# CHAPTER 2:  METHODOLOGY

*CPCS recognises Listening Methodology as an appropriate approach to elevate community perceptions of the Myanmar peace process.*

*Listening Methodology* is a qualitative, subject-oriented research approach used to analyse the direct experiences of individuals. *Listening* research involves an inductive, comprehensive and systematic exploration of the ideas and insights of people living in and affected by a particular situation. It is used to identify key themes, trends, and common issues from a wide range of people, creating an opportunity to elevate voices that are less often heard and facilitating a channel to share opinions on a particular situation or plan for the future.

CDA-Collaborative Learning Development created this methodology to listen to communities receiving humanitarian aid. CDA's aim is to share experiences and feedback from communities and to "gather evidence on the cumulative effects of aid efforts and ideas on how to make international aid more effective".[7]

CPCS has been using *listening* methodology since 2009 in various locations across Asia to access less-heard voices in situations of violent conflict, post-conflict, and peace processes. The methodology creates a collective voice by identifying main themes from the non-prescriptive conversations conducted with people with diverse viewpoints. By presenting these voices in publications, CPCS endeavours to support peace processes by contributing to policy discussions to promote inclusivity and representation in decision-making processes. CPCS has also discovered that the process of *listening* creates transformational dialogue spaces by giving groups or actors in a conflict setting opportunities to interact with other groups, allowing them to widen their understanding of each other, transform relationships, and support the possibility for collaboration. In this way, CPCS has used *Listening Methodology* as a conflict transformation tool.

One challenge of gathering information in a conflict setting is people's reluctance to share information. The use of conversations in *Listening Methodology* aims to overcome this challenge by creating a more relaxed environment where conversations can flow organically. This is crucial when working in conflict contexts, as participants who are engaged in more formal interview-based research have a tendency to censor their views. The process also protects the anonymity of participants without compromising the integrity of the data by avoiding attributing statements directly to individuals. Instead, age, ethnicity, profession, town of residence, and other more general characteristics are used to describe participants.

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[7] CDA, CDA's Listening Program, (2014), available at http://www.cdacollaborative.org/programs/listening-program/

## Using Listening Methodology to monitor community opinions about the peace process

In 2013, CPCS began to use *Listening Methodology* to support the Myanmar peace process. *Listeners* travelled to different parts of the country to have conversations with non-ranked or lower-ranking soldiers from six non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the Tatmadaw[8] to hear their opinions, challenges, and desires for the future. CPCS compiled these conversations into two publications to share them with a wider audience so they could be considered in the top-level negotiation process. In early 2014, another *listening* exercise was undertaken with a cross-section of community members living in Kayin (Karen) State to understand their opinions, experiences and desires for the future.[9] *Listening Methodology* has also been used to elevate the voices of communities from six locations in Myanmar that experienced communal violence to share their first-hand perspectives about the violence that occurred. This project identified a strong alternative narrative that communal violence was not motivated by inter-religious animosity originating from within communities.[10]

Recognising the need to elevate and monitor community perceptions and experiences of the Myanmar peace process, CPCS identified *Listening Methodology* as an appropriate and effective approach. By accessing a cross-section demographic of community members living in states across Myanmar, themes detailing the most prevalent opinions, concerns and desires for the future of these populations are collected and distilled in a publication. By conducting a similar *listening* exercise every twelve months, these opinions can be monitored and compared for changes and consistency over time.

## Listening Methodology process

CPCS initially sought to conduct *listening* conversations in all ethnic states where various forms of peace agreements were being implemented (bilateral agreements, memoranda of understanding or ceasefire agreements). However, only six areas were covered in the first year of implementation, namely: Kayin

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[8] These publications are available at: http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Tatmadaw-layout-30.6.15.pdf, and http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Listening-to-voices_Myanmar_Foot-Soldiers-Speak.pdf
[9] Publication available at: http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Listening_to_communities_Karen_Kayin_State_Myanmar_ENG.pdf
[10] Publication available at: http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/This-is-Not-Who-We-Are-8.9.15.pdf

(Karen) State, Kayah State, Mon State, Kachin State, Northern Shan State and Southern Shan State. The decision to limit the scope to these areas was guided by time and funding considerations, as well as the availability of local partner organisations.

The implementation of *Listening Methodology* requires the support of individuals who form *listening* teams. With the help of local partners, individuals from target areas who are familiar with local contexts and had the ability to conduct conversations in the local language were invited to be *listeners*. CPCS connected with *listeners* by conducting a series of training workshops in state capitals to equip them with the necessary skills to carry out conversations with community members. These workshops focused on sharing the methodology, with exercises to orient participants in *listening* and bias-mitigation techniques.

*Listeners* formed teams of two or three and travelled to various villages and townships in their respective states immediately following the training workshop. They were asked to speak with a cross-section of people living in these areas, who were recognised as relevant participants because they directly experience the effects of the peace process. *Listeners* were given and asked to memorise a set of topic areas and guide questions to ensure consistency across conversations. They were instructed to try to cover all topic areas during these conversations, but were advised to be flexible and allow participants to discuss topics of their choosing. Conversations were conducted in the language that participants felt most comfortable speaking. *Listeners* were told not to take the guide questions with them or take notes during conversations. The topic areas, as well as the sample guide questions, are listed below:

**Table 1.  List of Guide Questions**

| NO. | Guide Questions | Key Words |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | Opinion, peace process |
| 2 | What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | Topics, peace negotiations |
| 3. | For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | Peace process, issues of importance |
| 4. | What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | Challenges, peace process |
| 5. | What would help to overcome these challenges/concerns? | Assistance, challenges, peace process |
| 6. | What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | Outcomes, peace process |
| 7. | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | Changes, peace process |
| 8. | Now, what is a challenge/concern for you? | Current challenges, personal |
| 9. | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | Future wants, community/personal |
| 10. | What would help you achieve that? | Needs, future |
| 11. | What role could you have/how could you help achieve that? | Your role in the future |
| 12. | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | Challenges, future |
| 13. | What would help you overcome these challenges? | Assistance, challenges |

Four tools were used to record data from the conversations: **notebooks**, **logbooks**, **quote banks** and, where possible, a **photo diary**. The details of each conversation were recorded in a notebook immediately after every conversation. Each listener recorded a separate notebook, using his or her memory to identify the main themes and topics discussed.

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

When *listeners* heard a phrase they felt captured the essence of a main point, they added it to a quote bank immediately after the conversations to capture quotations from participants that could be used as direct voices in the publication. A photo diary was also used for *listeners* to capture images from the locations of the conversations. Photos were meant to provide visual examples of the topics discussed in the conversations, such as road conditions or housing infrastructure.

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

All materials used to record data (notebooks, logbooks and quotes) were translated from their original language to English for further analysis. To ensure that key themes, common issues and differences were accurately identified, CPCS went over the translated notebooks and logbooks and coded them into categories that were then compared to the main themes that *listeners* identified in the workshops. The analysis found in this publication is based on the material written up from both stages. Quotations and detailed insights of participants were taken from the translated notebooks, logbooks, and quote banks to serve as direct and illustrative voices of community members.

*Scope and limitations of monitoring community opinions*

Between November 2014 and March 2015, 772 conversations were carried out with 1,072 people.[11] This exceeded the target number of 728 participants. This target number was calculated proportionally based on the size of each state population, using Kayah State (with a population of 300,000) as a baseline (80 participants). The baseline figure was determined by taking into consideration the capacity of the research team as well as time constraints. Target numbers in each state, as well as the actual number of participants the *listeners* were able to converse with, are summarised in the table below:

**Table 2. Locations covered and Number of Participants**

| State/Area | Target Number | Actual number |
|---|---|---|
| Kachin | 128 | 277 |
| Kayah | 80 | 106 |
| Kayin (Karen) | 120 | 129 |
| Southern Shan State | 136 | 210 |
| Northern Shan State | 128 | 220 |
| Mon State | 136 | 130 |
| **Total** | **728** | **1,072** |

The aim was to access participants who represent the diverse ethnic, gender, age, profession, and religious affiliations in each state. In some cases, *listening teams* were not able to access a representative sample of some demographic groups. These inconsistencies are mentioned in the demographics section of each of the state chapters.

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[11] The discrepancy between the number of conversations and individuals can be explained by the fact that conversations often happened with more than one person.

The following tables summarise the gender, ethnicity and age range of the 1,072 participants:

**Table 3. Gender of participants**

| Gender | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 578 | 53% |
| Female | 472 | 44% |
| Unspecified | 22 | 2% |
| Total | 1,072 | 99% |

**Table 4. Ethnicity of participants**

| Ethnic group | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Kachin | 258 | 24% |
| Palaung/Ta'ang | 195 | 18% |
| Karen | 135 | 12.6% |
| Mon | 104 | 9.7% |
| Kayah | 103 | 9.6% |
| Danu | 54 | 5% |
| Pa'O | 50 | 5% |
| Shan (including Shan-Bamar) | 45 | 4% |
| Bamar | 35 | 3% |
| Intha | 32 | 3% |
| Taung Yoe | 32 | 3% |
| Unspecified | 9 | 0.8% |
| Others (including Hindu and Muslim) | 9 | 0.8% |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mixed | 5 | 0.5% |
| Lisu | 4 | 0.4% |
| Chinese | 1 | 0.1% |
| Wa | 1 | 0.1% |
| **Total** | **1,072** | **99.6%** |

**Table 5. Age range of participants**

| Age Range | Number of Participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 20 years and below | 31 | 3% |
| 21-30 | 206 | 19% |
| 31-40 | 289 | 27% |
| 41-50 | 214 | 20% |
| 51-60 | 138 | 13% |
| Over 60 | 67 | 6% |
| Unspecified | 127 | 12% |
| **Total** | **1,072** | **100%** |

CPCS facilitators sought to address the issue of bias by conducting exercises during training workshops that taught *listeners* about self-awareness, perceptions and selection of participants. Facilitators also identified bias in the primary data during the processing workshops by having in-depth discussions with *listeners* about the main themes and being aware of, or detecting, incongruent or inconsistent findings. After the processing workshops, facilitators also went through a guided reflection on the research process to identify *listener* bias, which they then noted during internal analysis and report writing.

Memory is an important component of *Listening Methodology* because it is assumed that *listeners* will most easily remember recurring themes from their conversations. The daily debriefing sessions that *listening teams* held in the course of their work were designed to reinforce their memories. To preserve as much detailed information as possible, CPCS conducted processing workshops immediately after *listeners* had finished data collection. During the processing workshops, *listeners* were asked to put away their notes and rely on their memories to identify the main themes that regularly emerged throughout the process. Giving *listeners* the space to compare and contrast their findings during the processing workshops also helps to stimulate their recollection of the main themes from their conversations.

### *Strengthening methodological design*

One limitation was identified in the course of using *Listening Methodology*. Since *listening* does not use random sampling, empirical reliability had to be strengthened to ensure that a cross-section demographic of people living in the state participated in the monitoring exercise. Another issue that had to be addressed is how to ensure consistency of this cross-section demographic every year.

Two measures were devised to address these limitations. Firstly, CPCS held consultations with local partners and *listeners* to understand their perceptions of the diverse range of people living in each state and to access a cross-section demographic of community members in *listening* conversations. These consultations were necessary as there is no available census data on demographics of people living in each state/division in Myanmar.

The second measure was to develop a semi-structured questionnaire that would supplement the *listening* results. The expectation was that the more direct nature of the semi-structured questionnaire would show correlation or disparities in relation to the *listening* results. It could also strengthen the empirical elements of the results by providing quantifiable data.

One limitation of the questionnaires was that the process was restricted to community members living in urban centres or the state capitals. Because this was the first time that most participants were conducting interviews with community members, CPCS facilitation staff were required to conduct daily debriefing sessions with the researchers. These debriefing sessions allowed

CPCS staff to check recording techniques and provide support for any problems or challenges the researchers encountered. Researchers were also reluctant to be seen conducting formalised research in non-urban areas as they felt that community members and local authorities would not be supportive of the process. For these reasons, all questionnaires were conducted in urban centres or state capitals.

The ability to control a more representative sample of demographics strengthened the representation of community voices in state capitals and major regional cities in the geographic scope of this monitoring exercise. However, the limitations of a questionnaire approach made *Listening Methodology* more favourable for the purposes of monitoring community opinions of the peace process. The questionnaire produced more quantifiable results and stronger numerical evidence, but did not produce the breadth and depth of responses when compared to the less prescriptive *listening* approach. Given that the questionnaire did not sufficiently reinforce or complement the *listening* approach, a decision was made not to use it during the next round of monitoring.

# CHAPTER 3:
# LISTENING AS A TRANSFORMATIVE TOOL

*The very act of asking communities about
their opinions, experiences and ideas
had the effect of empowering them.*

From its origins as a CDA methodology used to explore issues of aid effectiveness, CPCS has modified *Listening Methodology* to become an effective tool in peace research, particularly for better understanding conflict situations. In its various incarnations at CPCS, *Listening Methodology* has been used to produce publications presenting the perceptions of ethnic voices, as well as members of civil society working inside Myanmar, prior to the widespread democratisation efforts when these voices went largely unheard. More recently, CPCS has applied the methodology to hold conversations with community members living in Kayin State about their opinions, experiences and perceptions of the ongoing peace process; with communities that experienced communal violence; and with foot soldiers from the Tatmadaw and different NSAGs. These publications are all available on the CPCS website.[12]

Throughout its evolution, the essence of *Listening Methodology* has remained the same – to capture and elevate the voices of community members that often go unheard or are ignored. This approach has a unique advantage over other research methodologies in reaching remote areas and environments where political sensitivities or challenges to self-expression may exist. *Listening Methodology* focuses on capturing people's perceptions and understanding based on their direct experiences, rather than aiming for factual accuracy. It recognises that community members are key informants who directly experience the situations that CPCS wants to understand. CPCS intentionally chooses to speak with communities living in these environments because of the understanding that although they have a great stake in the policy discussions being held at the national level, their perceptions, opinions, and experiences are too often excluded or remain inaccessible.

A key element in the effectiveness of the methodology is the use of open-ended conversations between *listeners* and community members. Having *listeners* engage in open-ended conversations provides communities with the space to express what they want, allowing the most important issues to emerge organically. Trust and comfort between the *listeners* and participants is also essential in order to obtain access to the genuine opinions of communities. *Listening Methodology* is able to facilitate this by relying on *listeners* who can use the local language and are familiar with cultural nuances. That *listeners* also interact with community members in familiar settings also helps to alleviate any tension or suspicion that generally arises when talking to strangers.

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[12] See: www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/publications

By allowing the conversation to reveal, without direction, the opinions and perspectives of community members, *listeners* are able to later reflect and record the themes that they heard the most. Processing workshops are conducted to collect, collate, reflect and explore these themes across communities, allowing for cross-examination and comparison from different areas. CPCS then acts as a medium for elevating these community voices via our publications. The objective is to use these publications to contribute to policy discussions by providing feedback on already implemented policies, or giving input for ongoing conversations regarding designing effective policies.

These strengths make *Listening Methodology* ideal for monitoring community perceptions and opinions of the peace process in ceasefire states across Myanmar. By presenting the unheard voices of communities directly affected by violent conflict in a manner that promotes a more holistic understanding of their current situations, CPCS aims to raise awareness about the urgent need for strategic advocacy and inform policy discussions about the peace process. In this way, CPCS hopes to contribute to fostering inclusivity and representation in the peace process.

### *Semi-structured questionnaire*

The use of a semi-structured questionnaire as a side activity was part of an ongoing effort to further develop the methodology for monitoring. CPCS sought to quantitatively strengthen the results of the methodology's outputs with results from an interview-type inquiry using a questionnaire containing both open-ended and closed questions.

The questionnaire process proved to be a labour intensive activity that provided clear answers to questions that many stakeholders would like to understand more clearly. The small-scale questionnaire-based interviews were carried out immediately after the *Listening Methodology* activities were done, and within the same state. Since the process had to be closely monitored by CPCS staff, the interviews were done in the vicinity of the state capitals. The results therefore had a strong urban focus.

Although the questionnaires supported the findings from the *Listening Methodology* approach, the answers failed to capture the richness of the data that came out of the *listening* conversations. What was apparent was that quantitative analysis provided readily packaged data with less space to explore

the emerging themes that the *listening* approach was able to highlight and emphasise. In comparison with the *listening* conversations, the structured nature of the questionnaire limited the qualitative depth of the research while strengthening only its narrow quantitative aspect.

Despite the inclusion of a concluding question in the questionnaire that gave space to participants to share additional thoughts or opinions regarding the peace process, the structured approach in obtaining information from participants most likely limited the participants' candour, and very little information was added apart from the issues mentioned in the questionnaire.

From this experience and the results obtained, CPCS has decided that the semi-structured questionnaire would no longer be included in subsequent rounds of the project in order to focus on the conservations that form the basis of the qualitative research output.

### *Methodological challenges*

Due to the nature of *listening*, particularly in conflict sensitive environments where the process is led by community members in areas they are comfortable enough to work in, accurate demographic representation is a challenge. Nevertheless, the strength of *listening* is its ability to collect a snapshot of collective perceptions from a cross-section of a population sample rather than achieving demographical accuracy. In Northern Shan State, for example, although we were unable to reach demographical representation of all the ethnic groups present in that state, we were able to capture the less-heard voices of the Ta'ang ethnic group. In other states, Bamar representatives could not be included because a number of *listeners* were not Bamar and, thus, felt uncomfortable engaging people from outside their own ethnic groups. At times, *listeners* could be persuaded to focus more on specific demographics so as to widen the scope of the study. Other times, this proved to be too challenging.

Another challenge is the use of multiple languages and the need to use translators, which can lead to misunderstandings during the research process. In one state, the term "peace process" was mistranslated during the training workshop. This left the *listeners* thinking that they should have conversations about personal understandings of "peace", rather than asking about the effects

of the ceasefire agreements or the ongoing peace process. *Listeners* then came back with narratives detailing participants' perceptions of peace and their personal desires to feel at peace. To address this issue, trainings now include an additional session that specifically talks about the Myanmar peace process. Prior to training workshops, CPCS staff also work closely with translators and brief them about common peace process terminology.

Given the number of translations *listening* results have to go through – from the initial Burmese to English translation of results, and then the subsequent translation of CPCS publications from English to Burmese for distribution to local partners - there is the potential for mistranslation of direct quotations and misunderstanding of the words of participants. We are aware of this concern and recognise that accuracy of language will be a continuing challenge, particularly considering the aim is to contribute to the ongoing dialogue inside Myanmar by elevating less heard or unheard community voices.

One last challenge encountered in *Listening Methodology* relates to how the research presents itself – whether as qualitative or quantitative in nature. Throughout its evolution, CPCS has found that the qualitative aspect of *listening* must remain central to the process and analysis of the research. Although quantitative research, such as the interview questionnaire trial during this round of monitoring, helped to highlight and strengthen one specific and narrow aspect of perspectives regarding the peace process, it lacked the depth of the qualitative conversations that had already been conducted. Therefore, the question of how to maintain the consistency, efficacy, and impact of the qualitative dimension of *Listening Methodology* will remain a key challenge in future projects.

### *Listening as a transformational dialogue space in conflict settings*

The evolution of *Listening Methodology* in CPCS projects pertains not only to its function as a research methodology.  CPCS has increasingly found that the methodology itself acts as a tool for conflict transformation work. Conversations become an instrument of empowerment by amplifying unheard voices, capturing perspectives that are often ignored, and impacting processes, both consciously and unconsciously, that affect a wide variety of stakeholders. By giving people the opportunity and the space to engage in dialogues with others, three levels of transformational dialogue space emerge.

On the first level, *listeners* and participants engage in conversations that ultimately inform all other aspects of the monitoring project. In some cases, *listeners* connect with their own community members and facilitate individual or group dialogues that result in unique benefits at the grassroots level. Many participants expressed overall positive feelings at being able to share their opinions on aspects of the peace process or about the situation in their communities. The very act of asking communities about their opinions, their experiences, and their ideas about how to improve their current situation had the effect of empowering them. It made communities aware that their voices are important and that there are others who recognise the value of their opinions and experiences. It also gave them the space to reflect on their understanding of the conflict situation.

In both the *listening* activity and the interviews, participants overwhelmingly supported the idea of a monitoring mechanism and approved the sharing of their voices. Surprisingly, some participants stated a willingness to have their names mentioned in the publication, reflecting a strong desire to express opinions and contribute to the future of their country and the peace process.

On a secondary level, *listeners* themselves were affected by conversations they had. Many returned to the processing workshop genuinely surprised by what they heard and learned from participants. In some cases, having to speak with people from different ethnic groups, age groups or gender exposed them to new ideas and helped dispel prejudices. These interactions contributed to furthering dialogue and understanding on both sides.

Dialogue between *listeners* also showed transformation opportunities as they shared their stories and experiences from the field. This was particularly evident when different ethnic groups were present. In one state, *listeners* from two different ethnic groups initially expressed hesitation about working together. But after these groups returned from the field and realised the similarities in their experiences, there was a considerable shift in the way they viewed each other. This allowed the different groups to become much closer.

The third level of dialogue, which is expected to take place as this consolidated collection of voices is shared more widely, happens at the negotiation table amongst high-level actors in the peace process. The voices of communities are essential components of any dialogue relating to the peace process. Such a

level of dialogue is part of an overall conflict transformation approach that aims to build inclusivity into the peace process.

### *The future of monitoring ceasefire states in Myanmar*

The first year of monitoring ceasefire areas in Myanmar using *Listening Methodology* has provided many lessons in the form of ongoing challenges to improve future output.  Primarily, there is the challenge of timeliness – of producing a snapshot analysis so that results remain relevant to the ongoing policy discussions and help inform the peace process. To meet this challenge, adjustments will be made to the methodology to enable results to be released more promptly without compromising reliability and accuracy. *Listening* processes, tools and analysis will likely be adapted to contribute to a more timely production of results.

As CPCS takes monitoring of ceasefire states into a second year, there is recognition of the need to be flexible to changing contexts and conditions. While CPCS intends to cover the same areas covered during the first round of monitoring, there is room to expand the study to include other states as they become more accessible. Conversely, circumstances may arise that affect our ability to access areas previously covered. A second round should not only produce state-to-state snapshot analysis but also begin a new set of data that can serve as the basis for comparison over time that reflects the changing context and conditions of peace in Myanmar.

Likewise, as the political context in Myanmar shifts in the wake of the 2015 election, *listening* will take on greater importance in monitoring and recording any changes or remaining challenges faced by unheard communities. Such depth of analysis will be important in helping preserve the good political will generated by the election, and ensure feedback can be heard from communities that continue to experience change.

While discussing how *Listening* Methodology works, it is necessary to acknowledge the community members that were willing participants in this project. By reflecting and describing their life experiences, they provide us with valuable insights into the complexities of Myanmar. *Listeners* serve not only as data collectors but also provide the first layer of analysis. It is through interactions between CPCS and the *listeners* that we are able to construct knowledge together that can contribute to ongoing dialogue.

It is our hope that this publication, and future publications in this series, will be considered a resource by policy makers, negotiators involved in the peace process, practitioners, and others working within Myanmar, and used to inform the policy formulation process, with the intention of improving the lives of those communities that selflessly contributed to the making of this publication.

# CHAPTER 4: KACHIN STATE

*We are happy with any government that
rules the nation with justice and fairness.*

Kachin State lies in the northernmost area of Myanmar, sharing a border with India on the west, and China on the north and east. Within Myanmar, it shares a border with Sagaing Division and Northern Shan State.



*Source:* Myanmar Information Management Unit[13]

[13] http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/State_Map_District_Kachin_MIMU764v02_17Jun2015_A4.pdf

According to the 2014 nationwide census, Kachin State has a population of 1,689,441, although people living in areas controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) did not participate in the census.[14] The majority of people in Kachin State are from the Kachin,[15] Bamar, and Shan ethnic groups.

Kachin State has four administrative districts: Myitkyina, Bhamo, Mohnyin, and Putao, divided into 18 townships. Different areas of Kachin State fall under the administrative control of either the government or the KIO.

The roots of conflict in Kachin State can be traced to disagreement between Kachin leaders and the Myanmar Government over territorial control and preservation of ethnic identity in 1947. Kachin leaders felt the government had failed to respect the Panglong Agreement brokered by General Aung San in 1947. The agreement between Aung San, as the representative of the Burmese Government, and Shan, Kachin and Chin representatives served as the basis of the formation of the Union of Burma. The agreement guaranteed full autonomy in the internal administration of the Frontier Areas, as well as entitling them to an equal share in the country's wealth if they recognised that their areas are part of the Union of Burma.

The Kachin are predominantly Christian, and the government's decision to recognise Buddhism as the state religion in 1961, under the government's wider Burmanisation policy throughout the country,[16] further heightened their feelings of marginalisation. The KIO, a political organisation with the declared objective of protecting the rights of the Kachin, and its armed wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), were formed that same year.

The KIA has become one of the largest and most well-organised ethnic armed groups in the country. The KIO reports to have 10,000 troops as well as 10,000 reservists. They control portions of Kachin and northern Shan States, with the KIO operating like a state within the state in these areas. In the territories under its exclusive control, the KIO has created its own ministries that provide social services to the residents, such as law enforcement, a fire brigade, education system and health system.

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[14] See: http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/census-rebel-controlled-parts-kachin-state.html
[15] The term "Kachin" refers to diverse subgroups inhabiting Kachin State and neighbouring areas of Myanmar, China and India. The majority of the Kachin are known as the Jingphaw. Other Kachin groups are the Rawang, Lisu, Lashi, Maru and Azi.
[16] Burmanisation refers to the policy of the previous military governments of promoting Burman culture, language, and historical perspectives, leading to the marginalisation of the cultures, religions, and languages of the other ethnic groups.

Kachin State has an abundance of natural resources – timber, gold, rare earth metals, and jade. The armed conflict, combined with a lack of governance in the conflict areas, has enabled massive exploitation of these resources. The KIO has been able to generate large revenues from the extraction and sale of natural resources (see next page).

On the 24 February 1994, the KIO signed a ceasefire with the government. Hoping that they could come to a political agreement with the government on a suitable federal set-up, the KIO participated in the National Convention process for the drafting the new constitution. However, KIO proposals were largely ignored in the drafting of the 2008 Constitution. This, as well as the government's push for the KIA to become border guard units under Tatmadaw control,[17] and the refusal of the Union Electoral Commission to allow the main Kachin political parties and independent candidates to run in the 2010 elections, are believed to have been the main factors that led to the breakdown of the ceasefire.

In 2011, three months after a new government assumed power, fighting between Tatmadaw forces and the KIA broke out once more. There were several unsuccessful attempts to re-open ceasefire negotiations, but fighting continued throughout 2012-2013, with Tatmadaw carrying out air strikes in Kachin State.[18]

In May 2013, the KIO reached an agreement with the government that called for a cessation of hostilities, but was not denominated a ceasefire agreement.[19] Clashes between government forces and the KIA continue to occur, and the KIA/KIO are among the major NSAGs that decided not to sign the National Ceasefire Agreement in October 2015, although they are still in peace negotiations with the government.

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[17] In 2009, the government exerted pressure on ceasefire groups, including the KIA, to join the Border Guard Forces (BGF) under control of the national army, the Tatmadaw. This was seen by the KIA as a scheme to force them to demobilise by being absorbed into the Tatmadaw without any corresponding commitment from the government to negotiate their political demands.
[18] Between December 2012 and January 2013, several shells from Tatmadaw artillery fire attacks landed across the Chinese border. Subsequently, high-level Chinese officials met with President Thein Sein to discuss border stability and convince the Myanmar Government to end hostilities. The Chinese delegation also exerted efforts to convince the KIO leadership to end the fighting and return to the negotiating table. Both sides returned to the negotiating table in February 2013.
[19] The seven points covered in this new agreement are as follows: (1) Agreement to hold political dialogue; (2) Undertake efforts to achieve de-escalation and cessation of hostilities; (3) Establish joint monitoring committees; (4) Undertake relief, rehabilitation and resettlement efforts for internally displaced people in consultation with each other; (5) Engage in dialogue regarding repositioning of troops; (6) Establish a Myitkyina-based KIO technical team to undertake necessary measures for more effective peace discussions; and (7) Invite observers to attend future meetings.

Residents of Kachin State have been living with the effects of violent conflict for almost six decades. During the 1994-2011 ceasefire period, several large-scale economic projects in Kachin State in the form of resource extraction were established, *i.e.*, jade and gold mining and logging. The government allowed the KIO leadership to continue with their resource extraction trade, but those who benefited the most from the industry were non-Kachin, *i.e.*, Chinese businessmen or large private Myanmar businesses. Illegal extraction and smuggling of natural resources also remained rampant due to the lack of clear extraction and trade regulations.

Among the more controversial government-led development projects in Kachin State is the Myitsone dam project, based on a 2005 agreement between the previous military government and the state-owned China Power Investment company. Construction in Kachin began in 2007, but widespread opposition from Kachin residents to the project resulted in its suspension in September 2011. Kachin residents now fear that construction may continue after the 2015 general elections.

Overall, the Kachin population received none of the benefits from the natural resource trade, but had to deal with the negative impacts of the resulting environmental degradation. This has caused several problems for the largely agricultural local economy, and most of the residents suffer from chronic economic problems and underdevelopment. Incidents of land confiscation and forced relocation have also meant many people have migrated to mining camps to earn a living. Social problems, such as alcoholism and drug addiction, are among the many issues that currently beset Kachin society.

## KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Seven listening teams held 142 conversations with 277 participants in Kachin State. These conversations took place in various locations, including in the townships of Chipwi, Pang War, Mohnyin, Hopin, Puta-O, Bhamo, Myitkyina, Sumprabum, and Tanai.

A little over half (50.5%) of the participants were female, 47% were male, and 2.5% were unspecified. A vast majority (87%) of the participants were married, with only 7% single. The remaining 6% did not provide any information on their marital status.

Most participants were Kachin (92%), with the remaining divided between the Bamar, Kayah, Shan, and Chinese ethnicities. These details are found in the table and illustrated in the chart below.

**Table 6. Kachin State Demographics: Ethnicity**

| Ethnicity | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Bamar | 11 | 4% |
| Chinese | 1 | 0.3% |
| Kachin (Law Waw, Lisu, Lhovo, Lawan, Lachid, Maru) | 255 | 92% |
| Shan (including Shan-Bamar) | 5 | 2% |
| Kayah | 2 | 0.7% |
| Unspecified | 3 | 1% |
| **Total** | **277** | **100%** |

Most of the participants were between the age ranges of 31-40 (78 or 28%), 41-50 (67 or 24%), and 20-30 (38 or 14%). The remaining participants were within the age ranges of 51-60 (33 or 12%), over 60 years old (11 or 4%), and below 20 years old (4 or 1%). 46 (17%) of participants did not provide any information about their age.

Most of the participants (96%) identified as Christians, while a very small percentage (3%) said they are Buddhist. The remaining 1% did not state their religion.

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

**Table 7. Kachin State Demographics: Livelihoods**

| Livelihood | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Drug elimination worker | 1 | 0.4% |
| Health worker | 1 | 0.4% |
| Transport | 3 | 1% |
| Local government worker | 8 | 3% |
| Labourer | 8 | 3% |
| Student | 9 | 3% |
| Teacher | 9 | 3% |
| Dependant/housewife | 16 | 6% |
| Small business | 18 | 6.5% |
| Religious worker | 20 | 7.2% |
| Unspecified | 67 | 24.2% |
| Farmer | 117 | 42.2% |
| **Total** | **277** | **100%** |

**MAIN THEMES**

## 1. On the peace process

*Using weapons is not a solution to political problems.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged male from Kyarapadi</div>

### *Strong desire for peace and security*

The most prevalent theme in all conversations was the strong desire for peace and security. All participants talked about how conflict affected their daily lives and most participants expressed weariness with the armed conflict. Several highlighted a feeling of hope that the peace negotiations would result in a peace agreement that would stop the fighting. People could then go on to concentrate on building a better future for themselves – internally displaced persons (IDPs) could move back to their homes, children could go back to school, families could be reunited, and communities could look for secure livelihoods.

Many participants stressed, however, that they wanted 'genuine' or 'real' peace and not a temporary peace. A common observation among the participants was that they did not really know what peace was because they had never experienced it before.

### *Community desire for information about the peace process*

While participants wanted peace and wanted to contribute to the peace process, most communities did not have enough information about it. Participants stressed that communities in Kachin State, because of the lack of transportation and communication infrastructure, are relatively isolated from the rest of the country, making accurate information hard to come by. They recognised that greater awareness and knowledge about the peace process was essential to increase community engagement in the process.

The desire for more information about the peace process is closely related to the desire of communities to have a voice and to have their concerns included in the peace process negotiations. Several participants expressed the need for trainings and workshops to build local knowledge and understanding so that communities could be more aware of the political developments in the

country. A number of participants also said they wanted access to information so that they could have greater participation in governance and decision-making processes.

### The need to reduce military presence in or near villages

The desire for peace and security was closely related to concerns about the presence of Tatmadaw troops in or near communities. Communities felt insecure because soldiers are not held accountable for abusive actions. Women felt particularly vulnerable in areas where soldiers were around, and some participants spoke of physical threats to their safety, and general mistreatment, including fears of being forced to be a porter, or having children recruited as child soldiers.

*The military troops must be stationed far away from the village so that the villages will have peace.*

*- A young male church worker from Hka-garan*

Communities expressed concern about being caught in the crossfire whenever there were clashes between the Tatmadaw soldiers and NSAGs. A few participants spoke about Tatmadaw soldiers threatening to take retaliatory measures against the village in response to KIA attacks. Most security concerns relating to military presence near communities referred to soldiers from the Tatmadaw, but some participants also mentioned being afraid of soldiers from the KIA.

### Conflict limits freedom of movement, making livelihood opportunities more difficult to access

Communities spoke about the additional challenges that military presence in villages posed, by restricting freedom of movement and preventing access to livelihood opportunities. Community members faced significant challenges securing livelihoods as frequent movement of troops and outbreaks of fighting impacted their ability to farm and access surrounding lands freely and safely.

*Local people would like to move freely.*

*- A middle-aged man from Chipwi*

Travel restrictions were linked to poverty in participants' communities. Communities also related how regulations imposed at local Tatmadaw checkpoints, meant to ensure that community members were not supplying Kachin armed groups, restricted the number of goods individuals could transport through the area and placed limitations on trade opportunities. Some participants noted that Kachin youth were particularly at risk of being interrogated at checkpoints because they were suspected of being associated with the KIO. These obstacles also made it difficult for community members to travel to other areas for work. A substantial number of participants equated peace with the ability to travel freely and safely to other parts of the state to find jobs, cultivate their farms, or go to the forests to find food.

*Because of the conflict, we cannot go anywhere. Youths and adults without work lack focus and take drugs. Formerly, they focused on their work and did not get destroyed by drugs. Now they become addicted to drugs. I think this is one of the consequences of war.*

- A young female from Chipwi

Landmines presented another significant obstacle to traveling safely and freely, and accessing livelihood opportunities. Community members felt landmines restricted their ability to perform daily work tasks such as farming or accessing food from the forest.

### Decisions at the top-level peace negotiations do not affect communities

Participants emphasised that the peace process has not yet brought real peace, as decisions made in top-level peace negotiations rarely translate to any positive changes in the communities. Though communities had heard about negotiations and dialogue taking place between government officials and NSAG leadership, they noted that fighting still occurred near local villages. Participants explained that these continued outbreaks in armed conflict undermined ceasefire agreements, heightened mistrust between the groups, and increased uncertainty over the potential of the current negotiations to deliver real peace. This led a few participants to voice doubts about the sincerity of the negotiating parties or the likelihood of achieving real peace.

*Even though we have a building for a nursery, we can't open it now, as bombs and shells drop in the school compound; volunteer teachers are afraid. So this year we can't open the nursery.*

- A middle-aged female farmer from Lung Sha Yang

In the context of these discussions, participants mentioned their dissatisfaction with the current government. While communities admitted to seeing some changes in the government such as the change from a military to a civilian government, they felt that, more importantly, the mindsets and policies of key leaders remained the same. Some further noted that the civilian government was composed of ex-Tatmadaw officers.

Participants were concerned about the likelihood of current leaders being able to secure peace for the people. Some community members suggested bringing in a third party to support political decision-making, ensure fair and just governance in Myanmar, or provide peace process support in terms of mediating between the conflict parties. Others voiced a need for stronger linkages between government decisions and local implementation, citing instances when government representatives did not seem to know what the Tatmadaw troops were doing at the village level.

A notable point raised by communities was their observation of a split between the government and the military, specifically the power struggle that they noticed between the government and the Tatmadaw leadership. They believed that this split was a factor in causing delays in the peace process.

## 2. Hopes for the peace process

### *Communities noted a lack of representation and public participation in the peace process*

*Although the government is making changes, nothing will be changed without public involvement.*

<div align="right">- Group discussion with two men and one woman from Kyarapadi</div>

Community leaders who had some knowledge about the peace process expressed the need for wider community participation. They felt that the government and NSAG leadership did not represent and advocate for community needs in peace negotiations.

Other community members said they felt disconnected from the negotiations because only top-level government representatives and armed group leadership were participating in the process. To achieve peace, communities

explained, government and NSAG leaders needed to listen to the voices from communities, and work together with communities in Kachin State.

*We wish the voice of the people to be included in discussions in Hluttaw. We want the public, the people of Myanmar, to have political knowledge and to be able to have freedom of expression according to the law. We wish for a fair democracy.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged man from Chipwi</div>

Providing opportunities for the public to engage and participate in the peace process was seen as a way for the government to rebuild the community's trust in the process. Some community members also expressed the belief that if they were included in the peace process, they could bring issues of justice and equity into the discussions.

Other participants believed public consultations and having the government consider the needs of the general public were necessary to have a democracy. Community members wanted the chance to participate in governance by having the opportunity to honestly express their opinions and concerns to the government. If the country practiced true democracy, participants explained, peace would follow.

### Communities desire a more democratic governance system

Communities associated peace with democracy and expressed a strong desire for 'true democracy'. Participants equated 'true democracy' with the presence of rule of law, fair and just governance, and having equal rights and opportunities for all. A number of participants mentioned observing a high level of corruption in government and highlighted the need for transparency in government projects.

*The general public do not like any armed organisations. We want a true democracy.*

<div align="right">- A young male hillside farmer from Hka-garan</div>

### *Government and NSAGs need to prioritise public needs*

Another strong theme that emerged from the conversations was the need for both the government and the NSAGs to go beyond their own interests and put more emphasis on compromise. For communities, having key actors pursue their own interests presented a significant obstacle to peace and constituted a major factor in causing ceasefire agreement violations and outbreaks of fighting. When either or both sides broke their promises, it increased the level of mistrust between the parties. Communities felt that an important next step was for both sides to reduce the tensions between themselves and start building trust. They advised a reduction of ego and pride from both government and NSAG leadership, and recognised that both sides needed to overcome the bitter experiences of the past.

Communities further observed the need for both the government and the NSAG leadership to be committed to change, to equally want peace, and to show more flexibility during negotiations. Both the government and the NSAGs need to want to find political solutions at the negotiating table rather than through fighting, which causes loss of life and other resources on both sides.

*To create peace, the first thing is to give first priority to the public needs. Promises are to be kept. Soldiers are to protect people's lives. Soldiers serving at the front must obey the orders from above. Officials do not know what the soldiers at the front are doing to the public so they deny that they harm the public.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged man in government service from Bhamo</div>

### *Communities desire self-administration*

For participants, a true democracy also entailed a federal union with self-administration for each state. The Panglong Agreement of 1947 was repeatedly mentioned as providing a sufficient framework for self-administration and a federal system. This, most participants felt, would provide the Kachin people with equal rights and opportunities and address the historical grievances rooted in past government oppression.

Another concept raised was decentralisation, and the hope that the government would grant the people of Kachin State a measure of control over their territory. This includes control over the use of natural resources found in their state,

as well as a sufficient share of the profits earned from its extraction. Many participants believed that self-administration in the ethnic states would pave the way for state development.

*We wish the government to understand, feel and have empathy for the hardship of the people and rule us equally.*

<div align="right">- A young married man from Chipwi</div>

### Communities desire equal ethnic and religious rights

Participants also reported experiencing religious and ethnic discrimination in their communities. Notably, communities spoke not only of discrimination between ethnic groups but also within them.[20] Participants were particularly concerned about instances of religious discrimination, while some related instances of gender and social class discrimination. They cited incidents when people from particular ethnic or religious groups were not allowed to apply for government job appointments, or encountered problems obtaining government permits for land ownership. Some participants spoke of perceived preferential treatment accorded to members of a particular ethnic group. Another source of grievance for communities was that government schools did not include education about Kachin language or culture.

*We are happy with any government that rules the nation with justice and fairness.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged female teacher from Shadau</div>

Most communities stressed the need for the government to provide equal opportunities and recognise equal ethnic and religious rights to achieve peace. Participants further expressed the need to find ways to reduce the instances of ethnic or religious discrimination. For their part, communities mentioned their desire for all ethnic groups, and intra-ethnic groups, to be united and learn to work together. This, communities believed, was also an important factor in achieving peace.

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[20] The Kachin ethnic group is composed of several ethnic subgroups, such as the Jinghpaw, Lachik, Lhao Vo, Lisu, Rawang, and Zaiwa.

### Communities desire greater development

*If war breaks out in this region again, children's education and regional development will be affected. In the future, we don't want any communal or ethnic conflict. We want equal relationships and mutual respect for each other.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged man from Chipwi</div>

Another prevalent theme that emerged was participants' hope for more development in their areas once the fighting stops. Given their geographic isolation from the rest of the country, participants specifically voiced a need for better transportation infrastructure like roads and bridges. Communities equated better transportation infrastructure with being able to gain access to livelihood opportunities in the form of jobs or trade with other areas.

*If we have peace, public transportation will be better, economic and health sectors will be developed.*

<div align="right">- A married man from Chipwi</div>

Participants also spoke of the need for the government to address poverty and underdevelopment in the state. Communities mentioned problems with food security, particularly when bad weather conditions ruined harvests, and some participants had to rely on non-government organisations (NGOs) to meet their basic food needs. They also spoke about the high cost of food and other staple items caused by the difficulty of transporting food due to poor infrastructure and insecurity because of conflict.

Community members explained that there have been some improvements to education in their areas since the beginning of the peace process, particularly the availability of free primary education in some villages. However, this was still not available in all villages and participants highlighted the need for more teachers to work in the village schools. Communities also have difficulty accessing clean water and electricity, and there is a need for better health services because medical care is expensive and difficult for most people to access due to limited transportation options.

*Poverty reduction actions are being done by the government but the number of poor people is increasing as the political situation is not good.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged male from Kyarapadi</div>

Some community members said there was a need to provide employment opportunities for Kachin youth, such as by building factories in the state. Others expressed a desire for the government to help them by providing cash grants or loans that would allow them to rebuild their homes or start small businesses. A few participants believed there was a link between the higher crime rate and the lack of development, linking instances of theft with the difficulty community members faced meeting their basic needs. Most participants were in agreement that they wanted better standards of living and hoped that these concerns could be addressed when they had peace.

## 3. Challenges

### *Communities are concerned about drug production, use and trade*

Participants said they have witnessed an increase in drug production, use and trade over the past few years. Some participants believed that Kachin youth are susceptible to drugs because they cannot find jobs in their villages, leaving them idle for long periods of time. Communities expressed a deep concern about the government's lack of response in drug prevention or eradication efforts in communities. Other participants worried about the destructive effects of drugs on community members.

*Some people in the village grow poppies for business. Making a living here is very difficult at present because the Drug Elimination Team came and destroyed our poppy plantation.*

- An older male from Tanai

Communities supported the efforts of local authorities to destroy poppy plantation farms but observed the need to have crop substitution schemes for families that have relied on poppy sales for their livelihoods. Participants expressed concern about corrupt practices of local authorities that were linked to the drug trade. They also observed that as drug use became more prevalent, the more the rate of crime and corruption increased.

### Communities want to receive benefits from natural resource development and are concerned about land-grabbing

Participants voiced concerns over local resource exploitation, stressing that communities rarely benefit from natural resource development. Communities reported limited opportunities to exercise control over, or manage natural resources.

*Sometimes even peace seems like it might not be desirable because, as soon as a peace agreement is signed, many private companies will come to take resources. Even now, private companies buy many acres of land in this region and we local people are restricted from going anywhere, even to collect vegetables, bamboo and firewood for our daily food and general use. There are many signboards that say, "Don't enter, don't intrude, don't come in."*

- A middle-aged male farmer from Puta-O

Some participants felt the conflict in Kachin State was motivated by control of natural resources. Other participants were worried that a peace agreement would lead to private companies arriving in the state to buy up land and drive communities out. Communities emphasised this as a growing concern, given the increasing encroachment of big business and incidents of land-grabbing in Kachin State. They also spoke about how these developments have a negative effect on their livelihoods, blocking access to forests or rivers.

*There should be a system to grant ownership for houses, farms, and lands.*

- A middle-aged male from Kyarapadi

Concern about land-grabbing incidents was closely related to the observation by some participants that communities lacked knowledge about the land registration system that would allow them to obtain legal recognition of ownership over their land.

### Communities and IDPs have similar hardships

Community members explained that their daily hardships were similar to those of IDPs living in camps in Kachin State. According to them, conflict significantly affects the lives of all community members, especially when frontlines are in or near their villages. Participants who did not live in IDP camps felt that more

assistance should be given to communities who could not undertake livelihood activities.

*We don't need to run away because we don't hear gunshots in this area. However, we also endure hardship. Our crops can fail due to pests and if harvested, we have no market or no place to sell our products. The prices for our farm products are too low and imported goods are too expensive. For example, in the lower part of Myanmar, a pack of salt costs 50 Kyat only, however here the price is up to 500 Kyat.*

- A middle-aged male farmer from Putao

# CHAPTER 5: NORTHERN SHAN STATE

*I don't want a fragile peace. I just want to have peace in our country… People should not be the victim of the fighting anymore.*

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



**Source:** Myanmar Information Management Unit[21]

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# Shan State

Shan State has the distinction of being the largest of Myanmar's states. It is divided into three administrative sections: Northern Shan State, Southern Shan State and Eastern Shan State. Shan State is comprised of eleven official districts: Taunggyi, Loilem, Lyaukme, Muse, Laukkaing, Kunlong, Lashio, Keng Tung, Mong Hsat, Mong Hpayak and Tachileik.

It contains 55 townships and includes five self-administered areas: the Wa self-administered division, the Kokang self-administered zone, the Palaung self-administered zone, the Danu self-administered zone, and the Pa-o self-administered zone.

The 2014 census puts the population of Shan State at 5,824,432 people, representing 11.3% of the country's total population.[22] Shan State contains the greatest ethnic diversity in Myanmar. It is a largely rural region, with three densely populated cities – Lashio (Northern Shan State), Kengtung (Eastern Shan State), and Taunggyi (Southern Shan State). It has two main bodies of water - the Salween River, which flows through the entire state, and Inle Lake, the second-largest lake in the country.

It contains vast reserves of timber, coal, and precious stones and is rich in natural resources such as gold, silver, lead, zinc and copper. The state economy relies heavily on natural resource extraction, with various groups reportedly profiting from the sale of these resources. Despite these rich resources, decades of violent conflict have limited the livelihoods and living conditions of residents whose main economic activities are mining, forestry and agriculture. The Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment of 2009-10, based on the surveys conducted by the Myanmar Government, shows that Shan State has the fourth-highest poverty incidence in the country with 33% of residents living below the poverty line.[23]

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[22] The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Shan State,
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B067GBtstE5TZFV0U2ZvR3p0bk0/view
[23] Myanmar Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar (2009-2010), Poverty Profile,
http://www.mm.undp.org/content/dam/myanmar/docs/FA1MMRPovertyProfile_Eng.pdf

## Northern Shan State

Northern Shan State's population is approximately 1.82 million.[24] The most prevalent ethnic groups in the region are the Shan, Palaung (Ta'ang), Kachin, Lisu, Kokang, and the Maingtha people.

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

Subsequently, Shan State became the backdrop of domestic rebellions with the formation of various NSAGs such as the Communist Party of Burma and the Shan State Army. Among the more established NSAGs that presently reside in Northern Shan State are the United Wa State Army (UWSA), considered the largest and best equipped ethnic army in Myanmar; the Shan State Army - North (SSA-N), the armed wing of the Shan State Progress Party fighting for greater autonomy within Shan State; the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the armed group formerly allied with the Communist Party of Burma and claiming to fight for the rights of the ethnic Kokang; and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), claiming to fight for the rights of the ethnic Ta'ang/Palaung.[25]

Since the 1960s, the Tatmadaw had been engaged in suppressing these armed insurgencies in Shan State, until ceasefire agreements were concluded with several armed groups between the late 1980s to the 1990s. These ceasefires brought relative stability and calm to the region, but fighting broke out between the Tatmadaw and the MNDAA in Northern Shan State in August 2009. In 2011, renewed fighting between the Tatmadaw and SSA-N also broke out and more recently there have been clashes in TNLA and MNDAA areas.

At present, the government has agreed in principle to a cessation of hostilities with the United Wa State Army and the SSA-N. The TNLA and the MNDAA do not have standing ceasefire agreements with the government, and fighting between the Tatmadaw and these NSAGs continues.

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[24] http://themimu.info/states_regions/shan
[25] UNDP Myanmar, *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Shan*, 2015.

On 15 October 2015, eight NSAGs signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the government. Notably, the KIO, the SSA-N and the UWSP/UWSA have abstained from signing the agreement so far, although the bilateral ceasefires between the government and these ethnic armed groups still stand. Despite this, the Tatmadaw continues to engage in military offensives against some of these groups in Northern Shan State.

The longstanding violent conflict in Northern Shan State has led to severe governance problems, with most of the population living in poverty and lacking access to basic social services. Most families make a living by selling the crops they harvest from small farms. The low prices of rice, tea leaves, and other cash crops, as well as the various "taxes" villagers have to pay to the different sets of combatants in their areas, have made opium farming a lucrative alternative. This has fueled drug production and trade in the area, providing an important contribution to the state's beleaguered economy. However, this has resulted in drug addiction becoming a serious concern across the state.[26] The drug trade in the area has also seen the formation of private militias used to protect poppy plantations, adding to the complex configuration of armed groups operating in the state.

In recent years, Shan State has been the site of several large-scale foreign projects, including the Salween River dam and the Shwe gas and oil pipeline. In the wake of these projects, however, has been an increase in the reported number of land confiscations that coincide with increasing Tatmadaw presence. Several communities have complained that land evictions and project construction occur without providing locals with prior warning or any information about the impacts of the projects. Many are now fearful of the harmful effects these projects will have on the environment, which could severely affect their health and livelihoods.

## KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Six listening teams held 128 conversations with 220 participants. These conversations took place across Northern Shan State, including in the townships and villages of Nam Tu, Haik Taung, Ho Nar, Hsar Lu, Hue Khin, Kyaukme, Lone Kham, Kutkai, Lone Kham, Mai Sat, Mai Lone, Maingo, Man Aung, Man Lwe Htet, Manlone, Namt Katt, Namt Taung, Taung Kyaw Htet, and Nay Wun Ni.

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[26] UNDP Myanmar, *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Shan*, 2015.

More than half (55%) of the participants were male, 41% were female, and 4% were unspecified. Most of the participants (79%) were married, with only 10% single, while the remaining 11% did not specify their marital status.

Most of the participants (88.5%) were from the Ta'ang/Palaung ethnic group. The remaining participants identified themselves as Shan, Lisu, Bamar, Kachin, Lahu, and Gorakha. More details can be found in the table below. The listeners who conducted conversations were all from the Ta'ang/Palaung ethnic group, which accounts for the disproportionate number of Ta'ang/Palaung community members among participants.

**Table 8. Northern Shan State Demographics: Ethnicity**

| Ethnicity | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Palaung/Ta'ang | 195 | 88.5% |
| Shan | 7 | 3% |
| Lisu | 4 | 2% |
| Bamar | 5 | 2.2% |
| Kachin | 3 | 1.4% |
| Other | 3 | 1.4% |
| Unspecified | 3 | 1.4% |
| **Total** | **220** | **100%** |

Most of the participants were between the ages of 31-40 (38%), 41-50 (21.5%), and 21-30 (19%). The remaining participants were within the ages of 51-60 (9.1%), or over 60 (4.1%). Only 1% of the participants were 20 or below, while 7.3% did not provide any information about their age.

Most of the participants (95%) identified as Buddhists, while a very small percentage (2%) identified as Christians. The other participants were Hindu and Muslim (0.5% each), while the remaining 2% did not state their religion.

The majority of the participants relied on farming for their livelihoods. Listeners also had conversations with teachers, government workers, waged workers and small business owners. The breakdown of the participants based on their livelihoods is illustrated in the table below.

**Table 9. Northern Shan State Demographics: Livelihoods**

| Livelihood | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Government worker/civil servant | 4 | 2% |
| Farmer (corn, tea) | 158 | 72% |
| Teacher | 10 | 4.5% |
| Dependent | 2 | 1% |
| Waged workers | 2 | 1% |
| Monk | 1 | 0.5% |
| Small business owner | 9 | 4% |
| Political party member | 6 | 3% |
| Other (village elder, communications) | 3 | 1% |
| Unspecified | 25 | 11% |
| **Total** | **220** | **100%** |

**MAIN THEMES**

## 1. On the peace process

*We want to know what peace is. We want to feel it.*

- Young female Ta'ang tea leaf farmer from Huu Khin

### Strong desire for real peace

The most prevalent theme expressed across communities was the desire for real and sustainable peace. Communities wanted fighting between the NSAGs and the Tatmadaw to stop. Renewed violence has increased their desire to have peace in the region. Some participants said they had heard about the talks between the government and the TNLA and they hoped these talks would result in a ceasefire. Other participants voiced a desire to see an end to all armed groups.

*The peacebuilding process will still take time even after national reconciliation. With the awareness that civil wars have been going on for a long time, we know our country will be affected and our people will have to suffer. We would like to make a request to implement peace as soon as possible.*

- Male Ta'ang village elder from Zay-tan ward

For most communities, peace meant a cessation of hostilities. Peace was seen as the first step for communities to concentrate on livelihood concerns rather than survival, and to have more employment opportunities. Communities recognised that as long as the fighting continued, they would continue to face hardships accessing their basic needs, such as food and income for themselves and their families. Peace was seen as an essential component to development.

*As for me, I don't want a fragile peace. I just want to have peace in our country... People should not be the victims of the fighting anymore.*

- A middle-aged Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Taung Kyaw Htet

### Communities feel the impact of past and present fighting

Communities across Northern Shan State described living in fear and anxiety because of previous experiences of being caught in the crossfire of the fighting. Many participants recognised that the armed conflict caused losses and damage to lives and property. Other participants noted that communities living in remote rural areas experience the greatest negative impacts of fighting. One participant summed up the effects of the armed conflict on his village as only resulting in "lost lives from our own kind," concluding, "war is the root of all evil."

*I feel sad. The sounds of the guns do not stop.*
                                    - A middle aged Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Taung Kyaw Htet

Several communities recounted the most recent rounds of fighting the region experienced in 2015. They talked about the experiences of their communities being subjected to heavy shelling and airplane attacks by Tatmadaw troops. Some participants observed that stronger artillery and weapons were used this time, noting that they had not been subjected to air raids in the past. The attacks resulted in mass evacuations from the area, with villages having to resettle in camps for IDPs, and caused civilian deaths and loss of farm animals.

*Soldiers from all groups should not be fighting near villages or towns. We have seen that the bullets and bombshells they fired hit civilians and caused death or injury. They also hit the cows, buffalos, horses or pigs. The war destroys civilians. There is no compensation for death or injury. There is no person to complain to. When the fighting goes on, villagers dare not live in the villages anymore. They flee to China and work like slaves. Then, most of them become addicted to opium. The young and the old use drugs, yaba, a type of methamphetamine. These are part of the results of war.*
                                    - A middle aged Shan-Chinese female from Maingo Township

### Travel restrictions continue to affect communities

The presence of Tatmadaw or NSAG soldiers near communities, as well as the danger of land mines in the area, also meant that people cannot travel freely to their farms in the hills or visit other villages. Restricted movement interfered with the ability of communities to make a living, adding to their economic hardship.

*Why is my son who joined the military service in "Wa" not allowed to come back? Does the civil war not stop till now?*

*- Mature Ta'ang male, tea leaf farmer, Mai Sat*

### Communities are greatly affected by continued military presence

Communities, particularly those living in areas close to the recent outbreak of fighting, said the latest round of fighting resulted in an increase in the presence of soldiers in some communities, causing fear among residents. Communities were concerned about forced recruitment by Tatmadaw, KIA, SSA-N and TNLA soldiers. Communities were also concerned about expectations for each family to send young men to fight for either the Tatmadaw or a NSAG, and about being forced by the Tatmadaw to porter in areas with landmines.

Other participants expressed fear of the Tatmadaw and NSAGs who subjected villagers suspected of being members of armed groups to questioning and intimidation. Communities who lived near the areas where the fighting occurred recounted experiencing Tatmadaw soldiers inspect their mobile phones for suspicious messages. Some participants observed armed groups increasing collections in "tributes" or fees, as well as recruitment drives in villages. Other participants were concerned that the Tatmadaw would confiscate their land. These fears have caused community members to view visitors to the villages with suspicion.

*If we have peace, there will be no tribute and no armed men and our villages will be able to save their money. Children will die when they are involved in the war. I pray to gain peace quickly.*

*- A middle-aged Ta'ang male casual worker from Kyaukme Township*

### Better soldier-civilian relations

While communities continued to experience negative impacts of having soldiers near their villages, some communities acknowledged improvements in their living conditions since 2011, when ceasefire agreements were signed and the peace process negotiations began across the country. Communities remembered previous negative encounters with Tatmadaw soldiers who threatened and harassed them. In more recent times, some communities spoke of improved Tatmadaw-civilian relations, with soldiers acting less harshly

towards them and no longer stealing their property. There was also a decrease in instances of forced labor and violent treatment from both the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups, which significantly improved the living situation of communities. Some participants recounted witnessing the Tatmadaw now making requests to the village head when they need to take supplies from the communities, and receiving compensation for supplies taken.

### *More openness to speak freely, infrastructure and service access*

Several participants also mentioned infrastructure improvements in their communities since 2011 – the presence of more teachers in village schools, the construction of health clinics, and having improved access to electricity and water. Other community members said they were able to travel more freely, and to exercise some of their political rights more freely. Some participants noted that they had more freedom to talk about politics, to speak about the government, and to hold gatherings in public that were political in nature, such as screenings of political documentaries. This was noted as a significant improvement and has encouraged the public to be more open about the country's political situation. Other participants noted government offices offering some services for the first time, such as offering identification cards. Participants also noticed more transparency and less corruption in dealing with government offices (i.e. encounters with traffic police).

*Looking at the timeline, the rule of the current government and the previous military government is quite different. Freedom of expression has changed apparently. There also is a little more transparency.*

<div align="right">- A Ta'ang farmer from Muse</div>

## 2. Hopes for the peace process

*In the peace process, we want them to discuss drug eradication and access to equal rights. We will be able to live in peace mentally and physically at present as well as in the future when there is no war but everlasting peace. … Through the peace process, we hope a lot of issues will be solved, such as demining, resettlement of the IDPs, drug eradication, and unemployment.*

<div align="right">- Young Lisu male from Nay Wun Ni</div>

### *Communities desire more information about the peace process*

Several participants expressed a desire to know more about the peace process, but noted that they did not know where to get proper information. Some expressed a willingness to get involved in the peace process or to provide support, but felt they did not have enough information to do so. Others explained that struggling to make a living meant they did not have enough time to learn about the peace process. For the most part, communities knew that the TNLA had engaged in talks with the government, but did not know the result of these talks or how these talks would affect their lives.

*I don't know much about peace. The peace that I know is that everyone wants to live peacefully. Every conflict causes loss of lives and damage to properties. No one wants such impacts. If the government acted justly, it is not necessary to have war with the ethnic people.*

*- A young Ta'ang male farmer from Muse*

### *Communities want the peace process to meet the needs of communities*

*It doesn't matter which group rules the country as long as the government serves the people…*

*- Male Ta'ang village elder from Zay-tan ward*

Several participants mentioned the need for public support for the peace process to be successful. To obtain public support, communities expressed a desire to be included in the peace process. Communities wanted their voices heard, to have the government recognise and acknowledge the difficulties they have had to live with in the midst of the ongoing conflict. Several participants wanted the public to be given the opportunity to engage with political leaders and for these leaders to understand and prioritise community problems. For these participants, real peace meant not just the cessation of hostilities, but also being able to meet the needs of communities.

*…Peace is not dependent upon armed groups alone. Peace has to be viewed from the side of the public. What the public needs has to be considered.*

*- A mature male Burmese merchant from Kyaukme*

Some participants expressed their mistrust in the peace process, noting that previous peace negotiations produced no viable solutions. According to several

participants, only the ethnic armed group leadership benefited from the previous 2005 ceasefire. Skepticism about the peace process also stemmed from the most recent outbreaks of fighting between the government and the ethnic armed groups, with communities noting the discrepancy between negotiations or agreements that occur at the top level and the actual realities at the community level, where the fighting still occurs.

*Peace is not about war only. … If there is peace, the government, as the powerful group, can't look down, neglect or ignore the powerless people.*

- A young male Ta'ang farmer from Mai Lone Township

### Communities want sincere engagement from the government to achieve lasting peace

*Peace dialogues are being held. It is not easy to achieve. Discussion and fighting are alternately happening. How can trust be built?*

- A young Ta'ang male farmer from Muse

Communities generally believed that the government has the authority and the responsibility to resolve the conflict. While the majority of the participants recognised that building trust among the negotiating parties was essential to the peace process, most participants believed the burden of proving sincerity to the process fell on the government. Several participants cited the breakdown of previous ceasefire attempts, as well as the more recent instances of Tatmadaw attacks on recognised strongholds of ethnic armed groups. Participants also recalled previous pledges, such as the promise to improve connecting roads, which the government failed to keep. These were cited as evidence that the government did not want real peace.

*It can't be assumed that there is peace just because there is a ceasefire and no battle. It will be peaceful only when the government and all the ethnic groups protect the general public together, I think.*

- Conversation between two Ta'ang men and a Ta'ang woman, Nam Kham

Despite these expressions of doubt, most communities continued to be hopeful, and provided concrete suggestions on how to move the peace process forward. To regain lost trust, communities said that the government needed to take responsibility for its actions and show accountability to the people by keeping its promises to the region.

Negotiating parties from the government and the ethnic armed groups also need to have a sincere desire to find a solution and a willingness to negotiate. To come up with viable solutions that would improve the lives of community members, representatives of the communities have to be included during the discussions and negotiations.

Some participants observed the need for better linkages between the government, the general public and different civil society organisations/NGOs to garner support for the peace process, make it as participatory as possible, and to build public ownership over the resulting agreement. Communities also mentioned the need for the government to strengthen the rule of law in the country by ensuring that laws applied to everyone.

### *Unity among all ethnic groups would help the peace process to progress*

Another common theme that emerged from the conversations was the need for unity among the different ethnic groups in Shan State to move forward with the peace process. For some participants, this referred to having the different ethnic armed groups work together and negotiate collectively with the government, which they believed would give ethnic armed groups a stronger bargaining position. Several community members recognised that one of the difficulties in the peace process is the creation of a Union army, which would need to be composed of members of different ethnic armed groups. This is based on their belief that the Tatmadaw does not accept soldiers from other ethnic groups.

For other participants, the need for unity referred to the need to improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious relationships within Northern Shan State. Communities felt the presence of diverse ethnic and religious groups in Shan State could be a possible source of future conflict. Reflecting on the communal violence that occurred in Muse and Lashio, a strong feeling emerged that communities want to live harmoniously with other members of their communities and did not want to see religious violence in their areas. Notably, several participants acknowledged that communities had the power to prevent communal violence from occurring by holding discussions amongst themselves about respect and consideration of others.

### Need to decrease militarisation of communities

Communities also expressed a strong desire to have fewer soldiers stationed near their villages. Most participants generally mentioned Tatmadaw soldiers, although some participants also mentioned negative experiences with Shan and Ta'ang soldiers. These included being subjected to forced labor and recruitment.

*In the reconciliation process, we would like to request that the number of government soldiers in our region be reduced by half, and the launching of arbitrary attacks is stopped.*

- A young Ta'ang male from Minggalar

### Communities desire equal ethnic rights

Another strong theme was the desire for minority ethnic people to have the same rights granted not only to the majority Bamar people but also to the Shan people – "one kyat for Shan, one kyat for Ta'ang." Many Ta'ang communities mentioned feeling discriminated against and mistreated by the other ethnic groups in the area. For instance, some participants shared their experiences of being harshly treated by Shan soldiers who passed through Ta'ang communities. This is closely related to the positive view that most Ta'ang participants had of the TNLA, whom the majority consider as their protectors from oppression and discrimination by other ethnic groups in the area.

Equal ethnic rights were seen as a necessary component of peace. Some participants said that they do not care which ethnic group rules the country as long as they have a government that serves all people and does not discriminate based on ethnic affiliation. Several participants felt that education, socioeconomic development, and healthcare for minority ethnic groups in particular needed to be provided by the government.

For most participants, these rights included the right to teach in their mother tongue, and the right of ethnic (rural) areas to have the same level of development as urban areas. A number of participants believed equal rights could be granted if ethnic areas were allowed self-administration under a federal form of government. For these participants, the current strong, centralised government prevented them from having ownership over their future. The solution to this problem, according to communities, would be for

ethnic states to be accorded the right of self-administration, which would allow ethnic groups to have some control over their future.

### Communities desire benefits from resources in their areas

The desire for self-administration was often linked to being granted a measure of control over the natural resources found in their areas, which would also allow ethnic minority groups to share in the profits derived from these resources. Specifically, communities wanted the right to participate in the decision-making process when it came to large-scale development projects in their areas, such as the oil pipeline crossing through Northern Shan State or the construction of hydropower dams.

Several participants brought up the negative effects these projects had on communities that had not even been consulted by the government. Some communities were concerned about Chinese companies buying land titles for large-scale extraction and development projects on land owned by community members who were unable to afford the costs required to acquire formal land titles. A few participants also spoke of tea leaf farms being confiscated without proper compensation by the government to build infrastructure for large-scale projects in the area, e.g., to build new roads to hydropower dams.

*We must be able to create our own destiny. We must be able to do our own business. We want to own the natural resources coming from our region. However, illegal businesses should be punished in accordance with the law.*

- Young Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Hue Sat

### Hope that achieving peace will lead to development

*In the peace process, we want them to discuss poverty reduction, rural development, power reduction, tax reduction, and corruption eradication in the meetings.*

- A middle-aged Ta'ang male village elder from Man Lone

Another common theme that cuts across all conversations was a lack of basic social services and infrastructure in villages. Communities spoke of the weak educational system, with several saying that they did not have schools or teachers in their villages. Children had to travel long distances to go to schools

in other villages. Because of on-going conflict, most parents chose not to send their children to school for fear that they might be caught in the crossfire.

*People believe that they will be happy if there is peace in Ta'ang areas. The country, town and villages will develop and we will be able to access education and health care, our economy will be better, and we will practice our religion freely. We can live peacefully without any worries if the country is peaceful. We want to see our region developed comprehensively and peacefully. Since the peace process started, the towns have been developed but we in the villages are not very satisfied.*

- Young Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Taung Kyaw

Communities also spoke of not having access to health care services, since most villages had no clinics. Several participants recounted stories of people needing emergency services who died while traveling to hospitals in other areas. Where there was access to the basic services, these were generally provided by NGOs.

*If a peace dialogue is to be held, it should emphasise only on human rights by putting all -isms – racism and religious – aside so that they can overcome the challenges of peace. Since Myanmar is multi-ethnic, ethnic racism conflicts are more common.*

- Adult Burmese male from Kyaukme

Other difficulties that communities experienced included lack of passable roads and bridges, problems with transportation, and not having sufficient access to clean water, electricity or telecommunications. Some participants complained of the seeming inequality of their situation, knowing that electricity is being produced in ethnic areas but sold to China, and then resold to communities at a much higher price.

*Everyone is praying for peace so that young people can have access to high-quality education, job opportunities, and we can have electricity, water and well-developed transportation in our region.*

- A middle aged Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Namt San Mann Lwe

Communities expressed a very strong desire for the government to address these issues once the fighting stopped. Communities talked of their hope to see development, in the form of school, clinics, roads and bridges, water

tanks, telecommunication infrastructure and the like, in their villages. Most communities strongly believed that the education of young people was a particularly important factor to ensure development. Several communities also spoke of the effect the ongoing violent conflict had on inhibiting trade and business. These communities were optimistic that improved livelihood opportunities would come once the fighting stops and people could travel more freely to other areas. Some participants also mentioned the need for the government to embark on poverty alleviation projects once the fighting stops.

## 3. Challenges

### Drug production, sale and use is a significant social concern

*Some don't want peace. If there is peace, poppy can't be grown anymore. This situation is being taken advantage of. I don't want war anymore. I'm sad both for the fall of Ta'ang soldiers and for the loss of government soldiers in the fighting. But when we hear that the Ta'ang soldiers are destroying poppy, we are happy.*
   - Conversation with seven Ta'ang men and women, farmer/charcoal producers, Muse

The most frequently mentioned challenge was the prevalence of drugs in Northern Shan State. Communities repeatedly spoke of the dangers that drug production, sale and use posed to them. Most communities viewed addressing the drug problem as a necessary component to the success of the peace process. According to several participants, "there can be no peace if there are drugs in the community".

*Opium is the main destructor. I want poppy destroying camps to be built before all the youth are spoilt. The police do not come to village to seize the poppy-dealers. So, the dealers are very free.*
                                                    - A middle aged Ta'ang female farmer, Muse

The presence of drugs in the community is viewed as one of the main causes for social disintegration. In addition to concerns over youth addiction to drugs, the presence of drugs has also led several families to send their children to China to prevent them from using drugs. Drug addiction is believed to be one cause of criminality and domestic violence in communities.

Several participants saw the drug trade in Northern Shan State as an indicator of corruption in the local government and law enforcement offices. Several communities explained that because local government authorities were unable or unwilling to address this problem, communities had begun organising committees to forcefully commit drug users into local rehabilitation programs and arrest drug dealers in their areas. When these drug dealers were brought to the police, however, those who could pay "fines" were usually released.

*TNLA is fighting against drug abuse in Ta'ang areas these days. We are really happy about that. As there are many people using drugs, we cannot get a good price for selling tea leaves. Ta'ang people are not modernised because we are spoiled by drugs. We are very happy that the TNLA has come. The number of people using drugs is decreasing and they are getting arrested.*

- Ta'ang male tea leaf farmer from Namt San Mann Lwe Htet

Communities also spoke of being caught in the middle of fighting between armed groups trying to destroy poppy plantations and the militias guarding them. Most communities therefore looked favorably on the TNLA for its strict anti-drugs policy. A common perception of the TNLA is that it is sufficiently addressing the drug problem by destroying the poppy fields and "arresting" drug dealers in the community. Several participants also spoke of the TNLA providing a drug rehabilitation programme, but since this requires the payment of a fee, not all families could afford to include their addicted children.

### Ongoing economic hardship

*During wars, it's difficult to make a living.*

- A middle-aged male Ta'ang village elder from Man Lone

Another predominant theme that came up in almost all conversations was the general economic hardship that communities experienced. This was strongly linked to the ongoing conflict, which was seen as the cause of the lack of employment or livelihood opportunities. The presence of groups of armed men (whether Tatmadaw or ethnic armed group soldiers) and land mines close to the communities served to restrict access to hillside farms, preventing families from planting or harvesting crops.

*When we go to our farm, we have to run back home if we meet government troops or armed groups because we are afraid of them. Although they don't*

*do anything, we don't feel secure. Sometimes we are questioned on the way. Even when we are just questioned, we are scared. Since both TNLA and government troops come and go in the village, we are afraid about any accidental confrontations. We dare not go to work either. We even dare not stay at home… It is not easy to work.*

- A middle-aged Ta'ang male farmer from Namtu

Even when communities could access their farms, the low prices of tea leaves and other local crops meant that most families' incomes were not sufficient to meet their needs. Having to provide financial support to armed groups only added to the economic hardship experienced by communities. Some communities talked about being subjected to tribute collections from as many as three different armed groups.

*I started this store long ago. Sometimes we can sell a lot - enough for food. We have to rely on this store… Burmese soldiers, Shan soldiers, and now Ta'ang soldiers have appeared. Fighting is very frequent around the town. Now we dare not open the store at night. Government senior officials should visit the village and the remote areas in person to see how poor the villages are and how much fear there is among the villagers. No jobs. Low incomes even if there is a job. Things are expensive. Some have to go to China and some have to go to mines. Eventually, they become drug users.*

- A middle-aged Shan-Chinese female store owner from Maingo

This has caused some families to move from the villages to the towns and cities. Having worked most of their lives on tea leaf farms, several participants spoke of not being able to find jobs when they moved to the cities or towns because they lacked skills or knowledge that would make them desirable employees. Other communities spoke of being unable to travel to other areas to look for work, or not being able to find work in other areas. Several participants spoke of family members having to work in mines or go abroad to China to earn a living. These participants looked to the government to come up with poverty alleviation programmes to help people find employment opportunities.

*The town is more peaceful than the village but employment is difficult. We have to rent because we don't have a house. We have been in the tea business since we were young. So, we can't do any other job when we reach the town. We just have to wait for peace so that we can go back to the village quickly.*

- A middle aged Ta'ang male casual worker from Kyaukme Township

### Communities are losing their young people

*I don't want to keep children and youth in this village because I am afraid that they will become drug-users. Since they are not educated, they have to go to China to work there.*

*- A conversation with a middle-aged married Ta'ang couple from Muse*

Communities from all over Northern Shan State also shared their concern over the effects of the ongoing conflict on the youth. In several communities, listeners noticed a visible absence of young people. According to participants, most families were sending their children abroad because they fear they will be conscripted or forced to act as porters for the Tatmadaw, or recruited into armed groups. Young people are also more commonly suspected of being members of armed groups, subjected to questioning by the Tatmadaw, and face greater risk of being harassed by soldiers.

The presence of drugs in communities is another reason why families choose to send younger members abroad. Still another common reason for the youth to leave and go abroad is to find work and earn money for their families. But the desire of young people to find work opportunities abroad has also made them more vulnerable to human trafficking or abusive labor conditions. Some participants also expressed their concern over young people working abroad who acquire bad habits, change their behaviour, and lose touch with their own culture or religious beliefs.

*Boys and girls of 15 or 16 years dare not live in the village because armed groups are doing recruitment. If we can't give a person, they ask (20,000 to 200,000)[27] kyat per person. So only children and old ladies are present in the village. The soldiers do not trust some youth, thinking them to be rebels. Sometimes, if they don't like the answers of their questions, they beat the youth up. Sometimes, they ask for money.*

*- Mature Ta'ang female tea leaf farmer from Maingo*

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[27] In the notebook, this was written as "twenty hundred thousand kyat," which may have been a translation error.

# CHAPTER 6: SOUTHERN SHAN STATE

*Talking of peace, when we think of people struggling for their livelihoods, we see there is no peace yet.*

Southern Shan State shares an international border with Thailand. It is surrounded by Northern Shan State, Eastern Shan State, Kayah State, Kayin State, Mandalay Division, and Naypyidaw Union territory, and is divided into three main districts: Loilen, Langkho, and Taunggyi, where the state capital, Taunggyi, is found. Two self-administered zones, Danu and Pa'O, are also located within Southern Shan State.



***Source:*** Myanmar Information Management Unit[28]

[28] http://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/State_Map_District_Shan-South_MIMU764v02_17Jun2015_A4.pdf

There are approximately 2.4 million people living in Southern Shan State.[29] The most prevalent ethnic groups in this area are the Shan, Pa'O, Danu, Intha, Taungyoe, Bamar, Kachin and Karen.[30] People of Chinese and Indian ethnicity also reside in Southern Shan State.

Communities in Southern Shan State have experienced violent conflict for over six decades. During World War II, Japanese forces occupied the region. After the defeat of the Japanese, Shan State found itself affected by the domestic affairs of China. Having suffered heavy losses in the Chinese civil war,[31] groups of armed Kuomintang members entered Eastern Shan State in the early 1950s. Burmese troops were brought in to combat the presence of Kuomintang forces and Shan State became heavily militarised from the mid 1950s and throughout the 1960s.

The experiences of the civilian population during this time of increased violent conflict greatly influenced various Shan nationalist groups throughout the state who, at a meeting in 1957, advocated for secession from the Union of Myanmar.[32] The Shan rebellion subsequently broke out in 1959, with the Shan nationalist movement seeking to build a united, independent and democratic state.[33] Several Shan ethnic armed groups then formed to pursue this cause.

In 1964, the Shan State Army (SSA) was formed through the merging of the Shan State Independence Army, the Shan National United Front and the Kokang Revolutionary Force,[34] and became the most influential NSAG in Southern Shan State. Another major NSAG in Southern Shan State, seeking to fight for the rights of the Pa'O, was the Pa'O National Liberation Organisation (PNLO), established in 1968. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) also had a significant presence in Shan State during this period, and from the 1970s-1980s engaged in hostilities with the Tatmadaw. The demise of the CPB in 1989, which was a strong ally and provided the SSA with supplies and ammunition, was considered to be a significant factor in the SSA's decision to enter into a ceasefire with the Myanmar Government. Several SSA soldiers subsequently

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[29] *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census Shan State,*
https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B067GBtstE5TZFV0U2ZvR3p0bk0/view
[30] UNDP Myanmar, *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Shan*, 2015.
[31] From the late 1920s, the nationalist Kuomintang forces loyal to the government led by Chiang Kai-Shek fought against the Communist Party of China in a civil war that affected the whole country. During World War II, these forces stopped fighting to repel the Japanese Army. The civil war resumed in 1946, after hostilities with Japan ended.
[32] In keeping with the 1947 Constitution of the Union of Burma, which recognised the right of Shan State to secede from the Union 10 years after the Constitution comes into operation.
[33] Bertil Lintner, 1999, B*urma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai.
[34] Bertil Lintner, 1999, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai.

joined the Mong Tai Army (MTA), another well-organised armed group in Southern Shan State.[35]

Soon after, the Tatmadaw concentrated its forces on the MTA. When the MTA surrendered to the Tatmadaw in 1995, factions within the MTA who disagreed with the surrender formed the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S). In 1999, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) was formed to act as the political wing of the SSA-S.[36]

From 1996 to 1998, clashes between the Tatmadaw and the SSA-S intensified and resulted in the mass displacement of approximately 300,000 civilians in Southern Shan State.[37] The SSA-S and the Myanmar Government signed a ceasefire agreement in 2011, however renewed clashes took place in 2014. Most recently, the RCSS were among the ethnic armed groups that signed the 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA).

The Salween River runs through Shan State and is the longest free-flowing river in mainland Southeast Asia. Inle Lake, the country's second-largest lake, is located in Shan State and creates fertile soil for agriculture. Since the signing of the bilateral ceasefire agreements between the RCSS and the Myanmar Government in 2011, these areas in Southern Shan State have become more accessible and the government has agreed to several large-scale development projects in the form of mines, hydropower dams and a special economic zone in the area. Several foreign companies maintain a presence in Shan State working on these development projects.

At present, the large-scale hydropower dam projects on the Salween River and the mining projects are among the top concerns of Southern Shan State residents. Several villages have already reported being evicted from their land with the resulting unemployment and displacement serving to increase their hardship.[38] Other villages have complained about the environmental impact of these projects, specifically the pollution of land, water sources and the corresponding effects these have had on the health of residents.

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[35] United Nations Multilingual Terminology Database, http://unterm.un.org/dgaacs/unterm.nsf/8fa942046ff7601c8525 6983007ca4d8/a1326ac3689cbbf6852575c40063cb4b?OpenDocument
[36] Gary Risser, Oum Kher, and Sein Htun (2003), Running the Gauntlet: The Impact of Internal Displacement in Southern Shan State, Chulalongkorn University, http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/Gauntlet-ocr.pdf
[37] Gary Risser, Oum Kher, and Sein Htun (2003), Running the Gauntlet: The Impact of Internal Displacement in Southern Shan State, Chulalongkorn University, http://www.ibiblio.org/obl/docs3/Gauntlet-ocr.pdf
[38] http://www.dvb.no/news/depression-plagues-dam-displaced-locals/57934

## KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Five listening teams held 163 conversations with 210 participants. These conversations took place all over Southern Shan State, including in the townships and villages of Pekon, Hopong, Baw Sai, Hsihseng, Taunggyi, Pindaya, Moebye, Nyaungshwe, and the Inle region.

During the training workshop with *listeners* from Southern Shan State, an interpretation error occurred. The term "peace process", referring to the formal peace process occurring in Myanmar between the government and the country's different NSAGs, was translated to the term "peace", referring to personal understandings of what peace means to individuals. As a result, *listeners* focused less on the Myanmar peace process in the conversations they had with community members from Southern Shan State.

More than half (57%) of the participants were male, while 43% were female. Most participants (40.5%) were married, 34.3% were single, and 25.5% did not specify their marital status.

The largest ethnic group among the participants was the Danu (26%), followed by the Pa'O (17.1%). The Inn Tha, Kayah, and Taung Yoe each comprised 15.2% of the participants, while Shan made up 8%. Details can be found in the table below.

**Table 10. Southern Shan State Demographics: Ethnicity**

| Ethnicity | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Pa'O-Shan | 2 | 1% |
| Bamar | 5 | 2.3% |
| Shan | 17 | 8% |
| Inn Tha | 32 | 15.2% |
| Kayah (Kayan) | 32 | 15.2% |
| Taung Yoe | 32 | 15.2% |
| Pa'O | 36 | 17.1% |
| Danu | 54 | 26% |
| **Total** | **210** | **100%** |

Most participants were between the ages of 21-30 (25%), 31-40 (19.5%), and 41-50 (14%). The remaining participants were within the ages of 51-60 (9.5%), above 60 (4%), or 20 or below (4%). The remaining 24% did not provide any information about their age.

A majority of participants were farmers. Listeners also talked to government employees, NGO employees, teachers, students, professionals, monks, day labourers, and small business owners. The breakdown of the participants based on their livelihoods can be seen in the table in the table below.

**Table 11. Southern Shan State Demographics: Livelihoods**

| Livelihood | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Government worker/civil servant | 2 | 1% |
| Employee (NGO staff, phone communication) | 2 | 1% |
| Monk | 2 | 1% |
| Professionals (lawyer, accountant, broker) | 3 | 1% |
| Teacher | 4 | 2% |
| Student | 4 | 2% |
| Trader/small business owner/shop seller, boarding house owner | 6 | 3% |
| Unspecified | 11 | 5% |
| Laborer (tractor driver, mechanic, casual worker) | 15 | 7% |
| Farmer/animal husbandry | 161 | 77% |
| **Total** | **210** | **100%** |

**MAIN THEMES**

## 1. On the peace process

*It is said that we have peace but it is just an absence of war. There is no village or regional development. Peace is not absolute yet.*

<div align="right">- Adult Pa'O female farmer from Hopong</div>

### *Conflict has greatly affected the lives of people*

Ongoing conflict has shaped the lives of communities. Several participants recounted past experiences of their villages being caught in fighting between the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups in the area, leading to the death or injury of civilians. This affected the mobility of community members, who could not leave their villages for fear of being killed or injured should fighting erupt outside the villages. Others talked about the danger that landmines in the area posed to community members when travelling to their farmlands.

Participants also talked about the psychological affects of living near violent conflict. Communities suffered trauma and several people mentioned feeling anxiety and fear whenever they heard gunfire. Several communities noted that fighting had stopped in their areas in recent times, yet they continued to feel fear and anxiety.

*In the past, there were many armed groups and many wars were fought. We had to worry for our life all the time. On the one hand, we had to worry about food, shelter, and we could not work well. We also had to worry about the wars so we did not have time to study. As a result, we are not literate. We have to work very hard although wars have ended. We are very tired because we have to educate our children so they won't be illiterate like us.*

<div align="right">- Adult female Pa'O farmer from Hopong</div>

In the past, the presence of soldiers, particularly from the Tatmadaw, near villages restricted women from travelling freely due to security concerns. Communities also had concerns about forced recruitment of community members to the Tatmadaw. Although the frequency of forced recruitment has reduced, community members feel nervous anytime they see anyone unfamiliar coming to their village.

### Communities experience economic hardship

*Talking of peace, when we think of people struggling for their livelihood, we see there is no peace yet.*

- Adult female Pa'O farmer from Hopong

One of the strongest themes from all conversations was economic hardship. While the ongoing conflict was certainly a large factor, most communities stressed other factors that contributed to their economic hardship. Communities noted that even when the fighting had stopped and they no longer had to worry about being caught in the crossfire they continued to worry on a daily basis about accessing food. Participants referred to low crop prices and the lack of employment opportunities as the two most significant challenges. Several participants expressed hope that the government would implement poverty reduction initiatives to help their communities.

### Communities desire peace and security

Community members expressed a desire for an end to fighting and to be able to concentrate more on securing livelihoods for their families. They felt a ceasefire between the Tatmadaw and the NSAGs would be necessary for them to achieve this.

While a number of participants said that fighting had stopped in their areas, there were some communities that continued to live in fear because of the presence of soldiers from ethnic armed groups in the hills nearby. The presence of soldiers contributed to a feeling of insecurity around the villages. Some communities said that fighting continued to occur in the hills and they could still hear gunfire.

### Communities have noticed less fighting, more freedom of movement and expression

Several communities said that they noticed positive changes since the peace process began. Participants said they felt safer now that there was less threat of violent conflict in their areas - people in the villages were no longer anxious that they would be forced to porter for the Tatmadaw or that they would get killed or injured by the fighting. This had a corresponding effect on the daily lives of communities – participants said they were able to travel more freely and that trade was improving slightly as a result.

*It is more peaceful, better, compared to the previous time. We have more freedom of movement. In comparison to the past, the present is relatively ok. Before we could not trade as we wished. Now, we can travel as we want.*

- A middle-aged person from Kan Daw

In terms of freedoms, communities also said they had more right to express their opinions on what was going on in the country. Previously, anyone talking about political issues would get arrested. Some participants said this relative freedom has allowed civil society organisations to come to their communities to conduct trainings and capacity-building workshops on human rights, the peace process, and other political issues.

### Improved access to basic social services

Communities spoke of improvements in access to better education opportunities for their children as well as basic health care services. There has also been an improvement in communication facilities with the availability of affordable SIM cards for mobile phones in rural communities, although several participants complained about the weak signal and poor connection. Some main roads have been fixed and transportation services are getting better in certain areas.

### Less fighting means opportunities for land confiscations

A negative consequence of the improved security situation noted by some participants was an increase in reported instances of land confiscations. Participants associated these land confiscations with the large-scale development projects currently being implemented in the safer areas of the state.

*The way they talk about peace is just in words and not in practice. In reality, the peace is in the hands of the owners of big business who are in high positions and high-ranking officers in the military.*

- A middle-aged Burmese male from Hopong

### Communities desire real peace, not only a ceasefire

A very strong theme that emerged was that peace is not just about a ceasefire between the Tatmadaw and the NSAGs, but also about people being able to

live dignified lives. Most communities believed that although they had seen a decrease in fighting between the different armed groups in their area they still had no peace because the conditions for real peace are missing. In some communities, participants said that the fighting continued in the hillside, and the number of clashes between the Tatmadaw and the ethnic armed groups seemed to be increasing.

*Even if the village is peaceful, I don't feel peace in my heart. Since there is no reasonable price for our farm products, we lose much of our effort. Sometimes when we send our farm products to the city market, we have to pay so much money to carry our load on the bus. There is no direct transportation from our village to the city… The communities still have a livelihood problem.*

- Middle-aged female Pa'O farmer from Hopong

Several participants believed that real peace requires communities to be able to meet their basic needs by having stable livelihoods and good economic conditions. Good economic conditions, as defined by the participants, means farmers receive reasonable prices for their crops and earn enough to pay for the family's necessary expenses. It also requires being able to provide children with access to quality education.

To attain real peace, some participants articulated the government's responsibility to provide communities with sufficient livelihood support, improve basic social services and transportation infrastructure, and to address the region's widespread poverty. For many, peace is linked to social development that can be seen at all levels, not just in the state capitals and cities but also in smaller, rural villages.

### Communities experience ethnic and gender-based discrimination and desire equality

Most communities viewed discrimination as an important issue that needed to be addressed to build a strong foundation for peace. Participants spoke of discrimination and the injustice they felt from the government. Communities believed the government continues to prioritise some ethnic groups above others. They cited the unequal access to basic social services and uneven development as a strong indication of bias against their ethnic group. This is best exemplified by the level of development seen in the capital, Naypyidaw, which they perceived to be a Bamar city, as compared to the underdevelopment

of the rural areas in the ethnic states. This inequality was identified as the main cause of conflict in Shan State.

*If all are not equal it means discrimination exists. If there is discrimination, how can peace be built?*

<div align="right">- Male from Sagar, Inle region</div>

Communities highlighted discrimination that girls and women experienced based on gender norms and expectations as another challenge. Several female participants recounted that as young girls, they were expected to do all the housework but had limited opportunities to find work outside of the home. When they did find work, they were paid lower wages even though they were doing the same job as male workers. Moreover, girls had no opportunities to study outside of Shan State.

Several female participants noted that men were always given priority to be chosen as village authorities and to participate politically. These participants expressed frustration at being excluded from community meetings and not being allowed to participate in local decision-making processes. They felt that girls and women were not expected to know about national issues and were instead expected to focus on family and village life. According to the participants, this was most strongly felt when single young women wanted to join community discussions.

*If the government had to assign local government authorities, they prioritise the men. Unknowingly, this becomes the practice of the community. I want equality of gender not only in my country but also in the whole world.*

<div align="right">- Middle-aged female Pa'O farmer from Hopong</div>

Communities felt that discrimination and prejudice had no place in a peaceful society. Several participants felt that the best way to address discrimination and prejudice is to have rule of law – to have good laws in place that protected the rights of community members and applied to all, regardless of gender, ethnic group/race, religion, or social class. Other participants felt that providing everyone with quality education would help to address bigotry and bias, and lessen discrimination in society.

***Communities feel disconnected from other ethnic groups in their area and desire unity***

Communities identified unity among the different ethnic and religious groups in Shan State as an important factor in attaining peace. They recognised that violent conflicts between different ethnic groups came about because some groups oppressed others. Some participants mentioned the fighting between the Shan and Pa'o ethnic armed groups as an issue of particular concern in Southern Shan State.

*The main cause of conflict is discrimination. To eliminate discrimination, law is required. There must be law – good and just law is the best.*

- Male from Inle region

Participants spoke of the need for different groups to come together and learn to settle their differences through negotiations and discussions to avoid violent conflict. They also recognised the need for members of different groups to become more familiar with, and learn about, each other through regular social contact. Some participants highlighted the importance of education in encouraging unity among different groups by helping people to become less biased. Others said ethnic groups needed to become united so they could become actively involved in the peace process.

## 2. Hopes for the peace process

*In our village, we don't have sufficient drinking water. We don't have 24-hour access to electricity. There are not enough jobs for all who want to work. Even when we work together, the wages of men and women are different – men earn more. If there is a criminal case, it is difficult to access legal protection. Unlawful investigations and arrests still happen. Since the villagers do not know, they are oppressed more. When we travel in good faith within our own country, we have to face bans, barriers and restrictions. Our southern Inn people are lower than those in the northern Inn in terms of living standard because of remoteness from town. Although we have heard that everyone can access free education, the system to get children to school is still weak. Everyone does not have full security. The government departments are staying away as if these areas were not their concern at all. Peace is still far from us.*

- Female from Inn Phyar, Inle region

*Communities desire basic social services*

In almost all conversations, communities spoke of the hardships they experienced because they did not have 24-hour access to electricity or clean water. Because villages lacked education facilities, their children had to travel long distances to go to school in other villages. Health care facilities were also severely lacking in most villages.

Travel is challenging because of bad roads. Communities expressed a strong desire to see improvements in transportation infrastructure, particularly the narrow roads from villages to the state capital, Taunggyi.

*Since basic needs remain unfulfilled, how can there be peace?*

- Male from Sagar, Inle region

Most communities believed that the government is responsible for providing basic social services. Some communities, however, associated humanitarian assistance and basic services with NGOs, and said they hoped NGOs could provide more services for them.

*Communities desire government assistance to improve livelihoods*

Another strong theme was the community expectation that the government address their livelihood concerns. Communities talked about the need for high-ranking government officials to know how people in the ethnic states live, so that they can best address the needs of the people. Several participants brought up the need for the government to regulate crop prices to make sure that farmers get a fair price. Some of the participants who rely on farming for their livelihoods explained that the current market rate fails to take into consideration the production and transportation costs that farmers have to absorb to bring their crops to the market.

*Communities expect the government to respect the rights of ethnic minorities*

*As for me, social justice is most important in the peace process.*

- Young adult female Pa'o from Taunggyi

Other participants wanted the government to respect the dignity of all people and guarantee the human rights of all people living in Myanmar, including people living in ethnic states. The root cause of the ongoing conflict, according to several participants, is discrimination and injustice. Therefore, the government needs to ensure social justice and demonstrate sincerity in the peace process. Communities also mentioned the need for the government to hold sincere discussions with the ethnic armed groups, emphasising the need for continuous dialogue among all the conflicting parties to build trust.

### Communities desire good governance and rule of law

Communities desire a good governance approach from the government, explaining that good governance meant addressing problems related to corruption in government transactions as well as nepotism that participants observed in hiring practices. Transparency in government actions was also identified as an important component of good governance. Communities believed that if the government could demonstrate good governance by being transparent about its transactions, and holding government officials accountable for their transgressions, people could start believing in the sincerity of their government.

*One challenge is the issue of rule of law. It is necessary to proceed with democracy. The presence of freedom is like opening the passage for justice. Since my society is weak in development, I want to say that poverty should be reduced in the future.*

- Mature male lawyer from Nyaung Shwe

Several participants also mentioned the need for the government to improve the rule of law in the country so that laws applied to everyone, including government officials. An example often cited in relation to rule of law was the difficulty that participants encountered when trying to access the legal system. A few participants mentioned finding it difficult to deal with local law enforcement officials who conduct unlawful investigations or arrests without due process.

### Communities desire information about the peace process

Several participants said that they lack understanding about the political changes that are happening in the country because they do not have enough information about what the parties in the peace negotiations are doing. In particular, communities had insufficient information about the peace process and expressed a desire to have government officials share information with them about the peace process, i.e., what is the peace process; at what stage of the peace process are they in; what are the implications of the peace process on their lives. Several participants expressed a desire to support and contribute to the peace process as active citizens, but felt that their lack of information prevented them from engaging.

*The success of peace depends on the whole public/communities of the country.*
- Adult Danu male from Baw Sai

### Communities desire participation in the peace process

Communities also expressed a desire to be consulted before decisions are made related to the peace process. As one participant explained, the peace process should not just be about the needs of the government and the ethnic armed groups, but should also include the needs of communities. Communities want to be given a chance to articulate their needs to the government and ethnic armed group representatives that negotiate peace agreements, and to have these needs addressed in the peace process.

*Peace will truly come if they solve the community's problems and conflicts as justly as they can after listening to the public, and not by ignoring them. Public participation is really necessary. Public cooperation is very much needed.*
- Young Pa'o female from Kyauktalonegyi township

### Communities want government to consult with them

Participants expressed a desire to communicate with their government officials in the form of regularly scheduled community meetings and consultations so that they can voice their needs and opinions, as well as their experiences and hardships. Communities further expressed expectations of having government officials devise policies and make decisions that are responsive to these needs. One participant explained that they wanted a "*community-centered approach to governance.*"

## 3. Challenges

Communities are greatly concerned about the negative effects of large-scale development projects in their area

*The private rich men built hotels and do their business. They grabbed our land and built hotels. It is peaceful and tranquil for them but it is not for us. Again, at present, government department officials have set and divided plots of lands in our village for their own use by using legal means. Law is on their side. There is no legal protection for us, the grassroots people. If the situation keeps going on like this, peace will be far away from us. It is necessary to be humanitarian and humane so that the world can be peaceful.*

- Male from Inle region

Communities are most concerned about large-scale development projects in parts of Southern Shan State. These include natural resource extraction projects, such as mining, and the construction of hydropower dams or hotel zones.

Negative sentiments about these large-scale development projects were most strongly expressed by participants who live in the Inle region, where a hotel zone is being constructed, and in Baw Sai, the site of several mining projects. Communities recounted how these projects interfered with their livelihood. In the most severe cases, participants said they lost their land. Other participants said the projects are damaging their fields, polluting the soil, or destroying their crops. While some community members were given compensation, they said the amount received was not sufficient to cover the actual cost of the damage. Participants also spoke of how the presence of projects in their region resulted in a reduction of electricity they could use.

*Due to the hydropower project in Mai Lone village, Nyaung Shwe, our land was taken. We don't have any more land for business. Living in Nauk Woe is also a problem. We rely on the upper Baloo Chaung. The charcoal project in Ti Gyit up Baloo Chaung disposes their waste into the stream, meaning we have to use unclean water. Villagers got sick and went to hospital, we know that their illness is because of drinking unclean water. We are worried about the consequences we may have to suffer in the future regarding these projects. We farmers don't have peace concerning these issues.*

- Male from Inle region

Communities in Baw Sai were particularly concerned about the noxious gases and waste they were being exposed to as a result of mining projects near their villages. Waste emitted by these project sites also polluted water sources. Some participants talked about their neighbours who had gotten sick from drinking polluted water and expressed ongoing concern for their health and the health of their families.

Communities also complained about these projects destroying reserved forestland. While the projects created jobs for some residents, participants noted that the work were low-paying and temporary. The general consensus among these communities was that they preferred not to have these development projects in their areas.

*People from companies arrived in our villages for mining. The villagers, in unity, protested this plan saying that if the companies do mining here, it will damage our livelihoods. Then the township administrator came to us and said that the villagers should not protest against the companies if they want development. But I think we can solve the need for health, education and social issues if we are successful with our farming. I don't want the companies to initiate their projects. It is better to live alone in peace.*

*- Male farmer from Baw Sai region*

### Communities are concerned about corrupt practices connected to development projects

Communities from the Inle and Baw Sai areas also expressed concern that Chinese companies were obtaining government approval for their projects through bribery and corrupt practices. Most residents spoke of local village heads, township administrators, and local religious leaders voicing their support for large-scale projects after receiving gifts from Chinese companies. Other participants complained about the lack of transparency, with government officials not providing sufficient information or consulting communities about the projects. Some participants saw foreign companies as being responsible for disrupting social cohesion and causing disunity between the local government officials and the residents.

*Our village environment became polluted, our paddy lands are damaged and roads are damaged because the Chinese companies arrived in our region. A Chinese company came and established project sites near our village. The*

*village administrators allowed it because the company said that they will provide electricity and will establish a religious hall for the monastery. But they have not done anything.*

*- Male from Baw Sai region*

Some community members explained that foreign companies obtained permits from local authorities with an agreement that they would implement development in the region, but communities had not seen these development projects implemented. These participants felt the government should be responsible for rural development, not large companies.

### *Communities experience land-grabbing*

*There are many lands that have been confiscated by the Government Army in the southern part of the village. Now the Pa'O elders (authorised persons) are trying to negotiate between the government and the community to get the land back. It has been two years already and there is no proper answer yet. The government doesn't care about that issue. I feel so sad that the government is ignoring the facts and feelings of the people. The village people only say yes to whatever authorities say. Currently, the area is seemingly peaceful but the land issue is very against peace and burning in the hearts of people.*

*- A middle-aged Pa'O male farmer from Hopong*

Several participants also shared how they lost their land to the Tatmadaw, or the government, and subsequently learned that their land had been turned over to companies for their projects. This has meant displacement, loss of livelihoods, and an uncertain future for several participants.

While most of these community members were trying to regain these lands or obtain fair compensation for their land through local government authorities (village leaders or township administrators), several expressed disillusionment with the legal process.

### *Drug-use and production is a significant concern for communities*

Community members were very concerned about the presence of drugs in their communities. A few participants talked about the presence of opium plantations in the hills and how the ready availability of drugs tempted young people living in the area, who choose to do drugs rather than go to school. They

also described how drugs negatively affected families, causing an increase in domestic violence and fighting between family members.

Because some farmers depend on opium as their only source of income, participants recognised the need to provide substitute crops for these farmers. They also suggested addressing the drug problem by providing support for drug prevention, drug awareness, and drug rehabilitation programmes for residents.

Other participants raised drug use as a particularly potent problem that young people are facing, with one describing drugs as "*poisoning the future*" of their community.

### Communities worry about effects of mass migration

Participants were concerned about the number of people who were leaving to work in other countries. Farming was a difficult way to provide for the needs of families, and several community members were moving to other countries to look for work. Several participants expressed concern about these people, recognising that their low levels of education and inexperience made them vulnerable to human traffickers. Some participants mentioned others who they believed were victimised by human traffickers since they never returned to their villages or contacted their families again. Several participants suggested setting up programmes to raise awareness among communities.

*People are not educated. Brokers (agents) are recruiting. Some people disappear without getting a contract. Awareness-raising about human trafficking is crucial.*

- Adult Pa'O female farmer from Kyauktalonegyi township

Other participants shared their experiences while working in other countries, explaining that their status as illegal migrant workers allowed employers to take advantage of them. They often earned lower wages while working under unsafe working conditions. Even after working abroad for several years, they said, they had still not saved enough money to live comfortably.

**Additional themes**

***Communities express growing antagonism towards Chinese companies/ workers***

*We don't want these Chinese people in our region because of their cheating. The presence of these Chinese people is not only a problem for men but can also be a disadvantage for women in the future. Our Danu people are not as united like before because of these Chinese people. The village leaders have one idea, the village youth have another different view, while even the village monk has another idea. So the village's unity has been broken. This is because of the Chinese companies. The company has also had impacts on the health, education, social relations, economy and religious life of the village.*

<div align="right">- Danu resident from Baw Sai region</div>

While the theme of anti-Chinese sentiment appeared in most areas of Southern Shan State, it emerged most strongly from Hopong and Baw Sai. This can be explained by the presence of Chinese companies operating in these areas and the growing perception among communities that these companies are getting official permits from government officials (including local village heads and religious leaders) through corrupt practices and bribery. Chinese people are perceived to be "*coming and going in our village as they want*" with local government officials believed to be "*on their side*" because they had been paid "*sufficient fees*". Chinese projects are also considered the reason for the land confiscations in the region, with several participants blaming them for the loss of livelihoods and generally making their lives harder.

On a more personal level, communities from Hopong and Baw Sai expressed mistrust in the Chinese workers residing near their communities. This arose from their belief that Chinese workers are using money to persuade local women to marry them, making these women lose their ethnicity and "become Chinese". Several participants described Chinese men as "seizing" local women and, once married, violating their rights. Chinese workers are also believed to be causing disunity among families – with some parents forcing their daughters to marry Chinese workers for money. Several participants consider this problem to be so severe that they are asking the government to provide effective protection from Chinese workers.

# CHAPTER 7: KAYAH STATE

*If we gain peace, development is next.*

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



**Source:** The Myanmar Information Management Unit[39]

Kayah State is the smallest state in Myanmar, both in terms of geographic size and population. The 2014 Myanmar Census documents the population of Kayah State at 286,627. The large majority of the Kayah State population belongs to the Karenni ethnic group, which also consists of smaller sub-groups. In addition, there are sizable populations of Bamar, Shan, Karen, Pa'O, Intha, mixed races, and other groups throughout the state.

The state is composed of two main districts, Loikaw and Bawlakhe, made up of seven townships: Bawlakhe, Demoso, Hpasawng, Hpruso, Mese, Shadaw, and Loikaw, where the state capital, Loikaw, is located.

Kayah State is a very mountainous state, rich in natural resources such as timber, minerals and hydropower. Much of the population depends on farming for their daily earning and livelihoods. Major crops include rice, corn, sesame, garlic, and vegetables. Unstable market prices, poor agricultural productivity due to flooding and drought, and lack of any technical support have meant many residents struggle to meet their subsistence needs.[40]

Other residents are also involved in small-scale mining and logging activities, which have caused deforestation, pollution and environmental degradation in parts of the state. There have also been reported incidents of land-grabbing in connection with some of the major mining concessions.[41]

The state's main ethnic armed group is the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and its armed wing is known as the Karenni Army. Pro-independence groups formed the KNPP in 1957, seeking to protect the rights of the Karenni people and fight for state autonomy. Other NSAGs that operated in the state are: the Kayan National Guard (KNG), the Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (both NSAGs transformed into a Border Guard Force under the control of the Tatmadaw), and the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP).[42] Between 1957 and 2013, the Tatmadaw has been engaged in a mostly low-intensity armed conflict in Kayah State against these different NSAGs.

Six decades of violent conflict between the KNPP, the various other ethnic armed groups in Kayah State, and the Tatmadaw have forcefully displaced thousands of people, many of whom sought refuge in camps on the Thai side of the border.

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[40] UNHCR, 2014: *Kayah State Profile*; updated June 2014.http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=224
[41] UNDP, 2014, *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Kayah*, http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDP_MM_LG_Mapping_Kayah_web.pdf
[42] UNHCR, 2014: *Kayah State Profile*; updated June 2014.http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=224

The longstanding violent conflict has uprooted approximately 10-15% of the population of the state, with 34,600 people internally displaced in Kayah State, while 16,074 refugees are living in camps in Thailand.[43] Those who remained living in Kayah State while the conflict was ongoing were subjected to "tax" and forced labour by the different armed groups operating in their areas.

The enduring conflict has also caused uneven economic development and access to social services within the state. This disparity in living conditions is particularly stark between the capital, Loikaw, which has generally been under the control of the Myanmar Government, and the remote villages, especially those under the control of the NSAGs.[44]

Different NSAGs in Kayah State agreed to a ceasefire with the Myanmar Government in 1994 and 1995 but the agreements fell through when fighting resumed later in the year. The KNPP continued to engage in armed conflict throughout the 1990s until the 2012 round of peace talks. An initial state-level ceasefire agreement was signed between the Myanmar Government and the KNPP in March 2012.

The KNPP is one of the seventeen founding members of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT). Meetings between the parties as part of the ongoing peace process have seen discussions progress towards agreement on important issues in the state. A suitable deal on the management and profit-sharing of the state's natural resources continues to pose a challenge in negotiations between the government, ethnic armed groups and local communities. The withdrawal of government forces is another problematic issue.

In 2015, despite being one of the NCCT Senior Delegation negotiating bloc members, and agreeing in principle to the contents of the agreement, the KNPP did not join other NSAGs in signing the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). The KNPP leadership has cited ongoing military combat operations against some NSAGs, as well as the exclusion of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the Arakan Army (AA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), as reasons for not signing the NCA.[45] Nevertheless, the KNPP has maintained its desire and intent to sign the agreement and end fighting in Kayah State.

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[43] *Kayah State Profile* – SK – UNHCR. The IDP figure is taken from The Border Consortium data while the refugee figure comes from UNHCR registration and estimation numbers. data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=224
[44] UNHCR, 2014: *Kayah State Profile*; updated June 2014.  http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=224
[45] *Myanmar Times*, October 2015, 'We want a real peace, not a fake one,' http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/17122-we-want-a-real-peace-not-a-fake-one.html

**KEY DEMOGRAPHICS**

In November 2014, listening teams conducted 86 conversations with 106 community members across Kayah State in Loikaw, Bawlakhe, Demoso, Hpasawng, and Hpruso townships.

A total of 64% (68) participants were male while 36% (38) were female. A majority 73% of the participants were married, 24% were single, while 3% did not specify their marital status.

The majority of participants self-identified as being from the Karenni ethnic group. Listeners also had conversations with Shan, Karen, Pa'O, Bamar and some mixed ethnic participants, as indicated in the following ethnicity information table.

**Table 12. Kayah State Demographics: Ethnicity**

| Ethnicity | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Karenni | 69 | 65% |
| Shan | 16 | 15% |
| Karen | 9 | 8.5% |
| Pa'O | 9 | 8.5% |
| Mixed | 2 | 2% |
| Bamar | 1 | 1% |
| Total | 106 | 100% |

Most participants were between the ages of 51-60 (25.47%), 41-50 (22.64%), and 31-40 (21.69%). The remaining participants were within the ages of 21-30 (17%), above 60 (7.54%), or 20 or below (5.66%).

Most of the participants worked in farming. A number were unemployed while others made a living working in the community. The table below demonstrates the range of work of the participants.

**Table 13. Kayah State Demographics: Livelihoods**

| Livelihood | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Farmers | 74 | 69.81% |
| Community leaders/local administration | 4 | 3.77% |
| Community development/health | 3 | 2.83% |
| Religious leaders | 3 | 2.83% |
| Teachers | 3 | 2.83% |
| Commerce | 2 | 1.89% |
| Unemployed | 15 | 14.15% |
| Unrecorded | 2 | 1.89% |
| **Total** | **106** | **100%** |

**MAIN THEMES**

## 1. On the peace process

*Everyone wants peace. Civil wars and fighting are not good for anyone.*

<div style="text-align: right">

- A group of three Karen participants from Hpasawng

</div>

### Communities desire "true" and "lasting" peace

Communities unanimously expressed a desire for peace. They talked about praying and hoping for peace, and for a successful peace process between the government and the KNPP, as well as with other NSAGs. Many people explained that everyone wants peace and that peace was the primary need in Kayah State.

*Everyone wants true peace. If there is peace, our economy, society, education and health will be better off. We haven't had such an opportunity in Kayah State until now.*

<div style="text-align: right">

- Young adult Pa'O male in Loikaw

</div>

Many participants spoke about wanting "true" and "lasting" peace. They often coupled peace with development, viewing their desire for peace as a means to improve their lives. For many community members, true peace was connected to the ability to carry out activities to earn a living. This meant the right to earn a living freely, to have freedom of movement in livelihood activities or commerce, and to live in an environment with jobs and opportunities. Other community members linked the idea of peace to increased development and public services for the community. This included improved education, health, agriculture, and general economic conditions that would contribute to better living standards and holistic development.

### Communities have positive feelings towards the peace process

Overall, communities felt relatively positive and somewhat optimistic about the peace process in Kayah State. Although they spoke about hardships in the past, such as forced migration, tension with soldiers, and extreme poverty, they saw the general situation as having substantially improved. Communities talked about significant changes over time contributing to their positive perceptions of the peace process.

***Communities experience greater freedom of movement***

*As the peace process is implemented, we can move freely now.*

- A group of four Shan female farmers in Hpasawng

Communities spoke about experiencing an increased freedom of movement. Many attributed this directly to the peace process or the ceasefire agreement. They discussed how more freedom of movement also contributed to decreased levels of worry and stress as they felt they were more able to travel peacefully in their areas. In the past, some community members had experienced difficulties travelling from their homes to their farms to hunt and had feared being taken as a porter and sent to transport goods for soldiers. Communities now saw a decreasing number of checkpoints and ID checks, which contributed to their ability to move freely around their areas and within the state.

***Communities feel safer due to less fighting***

*In my opinion, security is one of the obvious changes over the course of the ceasefire*

- Karenni Catholic religious leader in Hpruso

Participants mostly felt that fighting had significantly decreased in Kayah State, and shared a general sense of feeling safer. Many referenced no longer hearing gunshots or the ability to sleep more soundly at night as positive signs of the current security situation. Most participants embraced the general feeling of being safer, seeing it as a significant improvement in their daily lives.

***Communities experience reduced militarisation and improved relations with soldiers***

*Whenever we saw the soldiers, we were afraid of them. Now we see them like ordinary people and have no more fear.*

- A middle-aged Karreni farmer in Bawlakhe

Many people spoke in detail about tense relationships with the military and NSAG soldiers prior to the peace process. They recalled having to give up their food or shelter for visiting soldiers without getting any compensation. Numerous community members referred to their fears of barking dogs as signs of soldiers coming into the village.

*We can sleep soundly now. We do not need to be afraid of dogs barking anymore.*

<div align="right">- A Karenni farmer in Demoso</div>

Community perceptions of soldiers have significantly changed since the peace process began. Participants noted less military presence and shared more positive views of soldiers. Some saw improved relations between soldiers, with a few communities saying that they interacted more like family members now.

### Communities are concerned about previous ceasefire breakdowns

*We feel so worried that the peace process will be broken again.*

<div align="right">- Three Karenni farmers in Demoso</div>

In spite of a strong desire for peace, many community members worried about the possibility of a breakdown in the current peace process. Several people conveyed a lack of trust in the process that accompanied their hope for peace. They said they were happy to have a peace process but they were not able to fully trust it. They thought that the possibility of disagreement between the government and NSAGs could disrupt the process. Some expressed a concern that the KNPP and the government may change their minds about participating in the peace process.

*I just want to say that the peace process can only break down because of government and armed group disagreement, never because of the people.*

<div align="right">- A middle-aged Karenni farmer in Hpruso</div>

Some participants identified disagreements between the Tatmadaw and NSAGs on the implementation of the agreement as a specific challenge to the peace process that could lead to more fighting. Other community members recognised that the distrust that exists between the different negotiating parties, including between ceasefire groups, means that no guarantee could be passed down to communities regarding the success of the peace process.

*If there is no negotiation in the peace process, people will become the grass between two buffaloes.*

<div align="right">- A group of Karen village elders in Hpasawng</div>

In some instances, participants' fear of a breakdown in the ceasefire stemmed from past experiences and disappointments, when they lived through violations of previous peace agreements. These participants said they hoped that a breakdown would not occur again, but many expressed an inability to believe that peace could be true or lasting. Such conversations often led to more skeptical views of the overall peace process.

*In my opinion, in regards to peace or to the ceasefire agreement, I can't believe anyone yet. Leaders from both sides seek benefits for themselves.*

- Adult Karenni farmer in Hpruso

Some community members expressed their lack of trust in the government and, to a lesser extent, the NSAGs. The majority of people who expressed this opinion based it on previous experiences relating to the implementation by negotiating actors of previous peace agreements. Some felt that disunity amongst NSAGs, which they believed was caused by the government, was impeding the process.

## 2. Hopes for the peace process

### Ceasefire actors need to build trust and understanding

*The main thing I want to say is that lasting peace requires the government and armed groups to work together and implement the peace process in practice. If they can do so, people will trust both of them.*

- A middle-aged Karenni farmer in Hpruso

Communities called for negotiating actors to strive towards mutual trust, respect and understanding. Many community members across Kayah State saw building trust between the government and NSAGs as particularly important to a successful outcome. They recommended that these groups work together in the course of the peace process, noting that lack of trust and selfishness would impair the peace process.

Several participants also mentioned the importance of forgiveness and fairness in reducing tensions in the negotiations, which required a spirit of collaboration. Most people equated their hope for improved relations between negotiating actors with their overall hope for peace in the future.

***Communities need more information about the peace process***

*Our villagers don't know what NSAG leaders have agreed to in the peace process. We can only know the agreement they have made in the peace process if they come and explain to us. Village communities don't know or understand anything and have no idea or opinion to share about the peace process.*

- A middle-aged Karenni farmer in Hpruso

Many participants spoke about their own, and their communities', lack of understanding about the peace process. These community members admitted they did not really understand what discussions on the peace process were about, and shared the general community's confusion regarding laws connected to the peace process. These same participants recognised their need to not only understand the peace process, but also to participate in it. They often conveyed, however, that they did not know how to achieve this.

***Communities desire participation and engagement in the peace process***

*We need to participate in the peace process in order to have peace – but we still don't know how yet.*

- A middle-aged Karenni village leader in Bawlakhe

In spite of often not knowing how, most community members conveyed the fundamental importance of community participation in the peace process. They recognised the need for the people's voices to be considered in the negotiations, and having public support for the process to achieve sustainable peace. Communities highlighted the need to include voices from a diverse range of ages, genders, and ethnicities for community representation.

Some community members offered more concrete ways to increase participation in the peace process. These participants often cited education or awareness-raising activities as instrumental to increasing public participation. They looked to outside experts and civil society organisations to come to their villages and teach or update them about politics and the peace process. Such opinions showed the importance of involving multiple actors to help inform communities about the peace process and its ongoing developments.

*In order to implement the peace process, both government and NSAGs must come to communities and seek advice and agreement from them. In particular,*

*the leaders and responsible individuals from government and armed groups will have to educate communities about peace.*

<div align="right">- A Karenni farmer in Hpruso</div>

Other community members felt that the government or NSAGs needed to be more proactive and engage communities more. They saw it as a responsibility of those participating in high-level negotiations to engage with them in dialogue.

### Communities desire unity among the different groups in the country

For some participants, this meant unity between the government and NSAGs in the peace process. Others spoke of their hope that the present government would be able to overcome past misunderstandings and challenges to build peace together with the KNPP. They believe that if the government and NSAGs could come to an understanding, there could be peace in the future. Some community members shared their fear that if fighting broke out, it would be the people who would suffer the most.

Other participants wanted to see unity between and among the different community members and different ethnic groups. Some people expressed concern that conflicts between the KNPP and other ceasefire NSAGs could break out at anytime, and hoped the government and other NSAGs would continue to participate in the peace process.

## 3. Challenges

### Communities expressed dissatisfaction with taxation

*There is no justice in tax collection.*

<div align="right">- Adult female farmer in Hpruso</div>

As explained by communities, tax collection refers to the act of collecting money or goods by the authorities, whether from the government, the Tatmadaw or NSAGs, through house-to-house collections, checkpoint tolls where fees are collected on goods passing through, or other forms of money collection.

*My fellow villagers cannot do any business. They just go to their farmlands and do farming activities, sometimes with machines. Whenever the government and armed groups collect tax, they collect the same amount on machines, cars and so on, even though rural villagers don't have the same level of business or profit as town and city dwellers. KNPP and others also collect too much tax on business, motorcycles and cars. But no one dares to say anything to them. I think that if they keep doing that, it will continue to be an obstacle for the peace process.*

- A middle-aged Karenni female school teacher in Hpruso

Participants mainly complained about checkpoint taxation that they faced along roads during travel. Many narrated how this practice, which they all encountered during their travels, contributed to the significant hardships of the villagers.

*We want to ask KNPP not to collect tax from the households.*

- A middle-aged Shan business owner

*The government should reduce tax.*

- Two Karenni farmers from Demoso

Communities also mentioned household tax, the rate of which was often computed based on their dwellings. Several people noted that this was commonly collected by NSAGs.

Although a few noted that tax collection had decreased during the ceasefire period, the majority strongly voiced their opposition to current levels of taxation, which they believed to be too high and inequitable.

*The people want to know where and what the collected tax from checkpoints goes towards and desire transparency in tax collection.*

- Adult Karenni farmer in Demoso

Several participants felt the taxation system lacked transparency and questioned the fairness of the system within the larger context of overall justice. They wanted to know how tax collection systems worked and understand how funds were channeled and spent. Some communities listed tax collection issues and transparency as one of the important issues that needed to be addressed in peace negotiations.

***Negative effects of resource extraction are a serious concern for communities***

*We want communities to have access to our own resources. We don't want any organisation or company to extract our resources simply by implementing road construction for show. After extracting resources, companies just leave all the waste, causing communities and animals to suffer from many kinds of diseases. We have to think carefully whether constructing roads is truly for the benefit of the communities, or just a way to take the natural resources away from us. Companies have been taking advantage of communities for some time now. They do business for their own sake, without discussing anything with us. The beautiful word of "peace" is being abused by the government, companies, and armed groups. They should consider the benefits for local communities.*

- A group of three male and female village elders and farmers in Hpasawng

Community members overwhelmingly spoke out against the extraction of the state's natural resources by different actors. Most mentioned logging as a primary concern whilst some also made references to lead mining and fishing. Communities felt that the government, NSAGs and private companies were taking advantage of them by profiting greatly from these extraction activities without sharing the profits with communities. Participants believed that communities should benefit from the natural resources in their state. They also associated resource extraction activities with land-grabbing incidents, and expressed fear that if more extraction projects are implemented, more land will be taken from residents.

Communities highlighted restrictions which barred them from using these resources, noting the hypocrisy of having groups prohibit community use of resources while at the same time benefiting from extraction activities. Participants spoke of not being allowed to cut trees for wood to use domestically, and then being forced to buy wood at a higher cost from actors exploiting their forests.

Other participants noted the negative effects these extraction projects have had on communities. They linked deforestation with changing weather patterns, and believed it contributed to climate change. Community members expressed a desire to preserve the forests. Some also mentioned the harmful health effects that waste from these extraction activities had on community members.

***Communities are concerned about land-grabbing and land ownership laws***

*We don't need to have this land law because we have already been practicing our customary law for land use which works better for us. Because of these laws imposed upon us, there is a lot of land-grabbing in the village communities, especially by the military soldiers who come and take our land. We haven't experienced this before and we can't understand it. Our people want to earn our living on our own farmland freely.*

- A middle-aged Karenni farmer in Hpruso

Communities frequently brought up the issue of land-grabbing in conversations, particularly in rural village areas. This was seen as an issue of primary concern in the region. Several participants indicated their belief that government officials (including local authorities), military soldiers and ceasefire groups are involved in the land-grabbing incidents. People also noted the connections between land-grabbing incidents and the resources found in those areas.

A story in Hpasawng surfaced in conversations about the local government registering land ownership in 2008 based on century-old recognition of households in the village. As the community grew, the 2008 registration was never revised and, eventually, the township administrator was able to take possession of pieces of land already covered by the registration without properly compensating the community members.

Communities also spoke with concern about their lack of understanding of land ownership laws. Some participants blamed the government, noting that it failed to provide any form of awareness-raising activities that would help villagers understand the recently legislated land laws. Others complained about the lack of compensation or the inadequacy of the compensation they received for the land taken. Communities questioned the fairness of high pricing in towns and noted the lack of any set market value for land in rural areas. To illustrate, some communities in Hpasawng brought up instances of land-grabbing by Tatmadaw soldiers where, although they were given compensation, the amount received was significantly lower than the market value.

***Drug issues are a significant burden for communities***

*It is important to resolve the drug issue within the peace process because of the corruption and the lack of genuine efforts to fight the problem. The government should conduct a drug education programme, provide a drug combating system, and supply crops to substitute drug production.*

- A middle-aged Karenni farmer in Demoso

Issues of both drug use and production were often raised amongst participants as a major concern. Some saw drug addiction as one of the most pressing challenges for the future.

*Youth become slaves to drugs.*

- A university educated young adult Karenni male in Demoso

Several people made references to the risk that drugs pose, particularly for youth in their communities. Participants discussed the effects of drugs and the way they were ruining young people's lives. They saw drugs contributing to the lack of morals and poor behaviour amongst students and young people. Some noted the rampant increase in drug use and discussed how this was causing families to break apart and elevating crime levels in the community.

*We feel so happy to be able to take action against the drug users and traders. I want this to be drug-free country.*

- A group of four Karenni male farmers in Demoso

Communities suggested ways to address the drug problem in Kayah State. They recommended having the government and NSAGs take a unified approach to the problem. Others saw education as the key, proposing that the government run a drug education programme or parents take more responsibility for their children.

Communities, recognising the reliance of some farmers on drug production for their livelihoods, suggested crop substitution schemes to allow farmers to transition to vegetable farming. There were also calls for stronger rule of law against drug dealers that would punish them and make them think twice before getting involved in the drug industry.

### Communities desire democracy and fair elections

*There are two opposing groups competing with each other: one is the U Thein Sein Government and the other one is the Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD. If they would join hands instead of competing with each other, the country will surely develop.*

- Adult Pa'O male in Loikaw

The 2015 election was an important topic for many participants. Most people stressed the need to have a transparent and fair election that would allow communities to vote for whichever party they wished. In some conversations, participants said they simply wanted to have the chance to vote. Some emphasised the importance of having a neutral election commission staffed by volunteer community members without any lucrative gain provided by the government. Others recognised the important role that political parties had in the peace process as decision-makers for the country.

### Communities desire holistic development

*If we gain peace, development is next.*

- A group of three Karenni male and female famers in Demoso

In general, participants were happy to see development projects and initiatives in their communities, with some saying that development is an important step towards attaining peace. Participants said they saw improvements in their communities since the peace process began, which they acknowledged were made possible through the efforts of the government, NSAGs and NGOs.

Nevertheless, people in communities also expressed frustration with some of these development projects. Many mentioned that communities were frequently not consulted before development projects were undertaken in their areas. This was compounded by the inability of the government and NGOs to come to a consensus when making decisions about development projects. Consequently, host communities were not genuinely represented during the planning stages of these projects, leaving specific local needs unmet.

Some participants also noted that in spite of promises to begin certain development projects, they were still awaiting implementation. Some projects had begun, but were stopped midway and not completed. Others felt that there

was simply not enough activity happening in their areas. Several participants expressed anxiety over the issue of land-grabbing, which was sometimes linked to development projects and the lack of protection for residents.

### Farmers need support to improve agricultural output

*For generations, villagers mainly grow corn and sesame to earn their livelihoods in this community. As villagers practice shifting cultivation systems of farming, the forest is being depleted and the climate is changing for the worse.*

- A young Shan male farmer in Hpasawng

Farmers in Kayah State voiced their concern over the lack of development in the agricultural sector, emphasising their need for sustainable livelihoods from farming. Many participants noted a lack of technical capacity to improve farming techniques, and called on the government or other actors to provide training in farming techniques to help them improve their knowledge. They also complained about a lack of farming infrastructure, such as access to tractors, machinery and other equipment to productively tend to their crops.

Some farmers highlighted the declining quality of seeds they received as well as their lack of access to water, which both contributed to lower productivity of farmers in the state. There were several references to changing climate conditions that were directly affecting the ability of farmers to grow crops. Participants often mentioned the rapid deforestation and the widespread use of chemical fertilisers as key contributors to environmental degradation, which in turn led to low agricultural production.

### Communities in rural areas still live without electricity

*The government talked about providing electricity for the whole of Kayah State. Although there are electricity power plants throughout the state, many villages still do not have electricity.*

- A group of three Karen participants in Hpasawng

Communities were dissatisfied with their access to electricity in the rural areas outside of the state capital, Loikaw. Some participants noted that Loikaw is commonly called the "city of electricity" and most of the rest of the state is still lit by candlelight. Many participants spoke of previous promises of energy production and access to electricity in their areas that remained unfulfilled.

Some communities talked about the commencement of electrification projects in their villages that they had to pay for themselves. When villagers could no longer afford to pay the costs, progress on these projects halted.

Participants flagged the electricity issue as a possible source of disagreement that might hinder the peace process, explaining how some NSAGs saw the potential damage that energy production projects such as hydropower dams might have for communities and farmlands.

### The state of the economy and lack of jobs are of major concern to residents

*The government also needs to create job opportunities for communities.*
- A middle-aged Karenni farmer in Demoso

General economic development, particularly a lack of jobs, was of major concern for communities across Kayah State. Several participants mentioned the high prices for food and commodities as a common cause of apprehension, especially for farmers who earn little profit from selling their produce. Several farmers also mentioned how their own livelihoods and overall economic growth in the country were directly connected to the deteriorating environmental conditions as a result of the state's natural resource extraction projects, and the effects these were having on weather conditions.

Many participants advocated for more jobs and noted that many job postings in the community were not open for locals. Youth were especially vocal in their criticism over the current lack of jobs. They called on the government and the private sector to address this issue as the country further develops.

### Access to water is still a challenge for communities across the state

*The water issue is the main problem in the village. If the need for water is fulfilled, the rest will be fine.*
- A group of three male and female Karenni farmers in Demoso

Communities throughout the state saw access to clean water as a significant development challenge. The scarcity of water was particularly challenging, especially during summer months. In one community, participants complained that elephants had begun drinking from the main water source, leaving the community with dirty water. In another area, villagers discussed damage to

their main source of water after a pipe was broken from bridge construction activities. As they now had to get water directly from the river, they lamented the loss of the pipe and the dangers using river water posed to their health.

## Healthcare has improved but there is still a lot to be done

*As the hospital is far away and the cost of medical treatment and medicine is high, the villagers still have no peace within their minds and hearts yet.*

- A group of three Karenni female farmers in Demoso

Many people in Kayah State saw improvements to overall health conditions within their communities. Some participants noticed the construction of new health clinics nearby. They also mentioned the relative affordability of medicine and treatment costs compared to the past.

Nevertheless, several participants mentioned inadequate health services, particularly in more remote villages. Community members complained that they had no clinics in their communities, meaning they have to travel far to receive any medical treatment. Others criticised the lack of nursing staff or the capacity of present staff to treat patients. Unsatisfied residents called on government and non-governmental groups to provide better health services.

## Communities see high quality and inexpensive education as vital

*The education sector is the main thing to be considered in the peace process. We need enough school buildings, furniture, and purified water for education.*

- A middle-aged female Karenni teacher in Demoso

Most participants highlighted the importance of improving the quality of education, noting how low education levels were linked to poor critical thinking capacity or an inability to understand complicated issues, such as politics, peace and development. Although some people saw improvements in the educational services provided in the state, many lamented the general population's low education levels. Some conversations touched on the lack of local schools and the difficulties children encountered in commuting to other villages to access education. Others brought up a lack of teachers, or the cultural and linguistic differences that Burmese teachers encountered when teaching children from different ethnic communities. The language barrier was specifically mentioned as a factor that hindered children from performing well in school.

Many participants expressed the desire of families to send their children to school. However, high costs associated with having to pay teachers' salaries or costs related to travel often prevented the poorer families from doing so. In this regard, many participants highlighted the need for government support, not only to improve the quality of education, but also to help make education more accessible for their children.

# CHAPTER 8: KAYIN STATE

*In the future, I want to see more knowledgeable people in healthcare and see my community develop. We need help and support from government and NGOs. I can contribute to healthcare too.*

Kayin State, previously known as Karen State,[46] is located in the southeast of Myanmar and borders Mon State and the Bago Region to the west, Kayah State to the northeast, and Shan State and Mandalay Division to the north. It shares a long, porous border with Thailand in the east.



***Source:*** Myanmar Information Management Unit [47]

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[46] In 1989, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) military government changed the official name of the state from Karen to Kayin. It is still widely referred to as Karen State.
[47] http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/State_Map_District_Kayin_MIMU764v02_17Jun2015_A4.pdf

The 2014 Myanmar census showed a total population of 1,574,079 people living in Kayin State. A majority of the residents come from the Karen ethnic group, which encompasses the following subgroups: Sgaw, Pwo, Bwe, and Paku. Approximately 70-80% of Karen are Buddhist, although the Christian minority, at 15-30%, has greatly influenced events within Karen history and the formation of Karen identity.[48] Other ethnic groups residing in Kayin State are the Shan, Pa'O, Bamar and Mon.

Kayin State is divided into four districts: Myawaddy, Hpapun, Kawkareik, and Hpa-An, which is also where the state capital, Hpa-An, is located. These districts are made up of seven townships that encompass approximately 4,000 villages.[49]

Since the late 19th century, Kayin State has been home to a strong nationalist movement. The Karen National Association, formed in 1881 to unite the different Karen sub-groups, helped to shape and promote a strong pan-Karen identity consolidating ideas of self-determination and independence among the Karen people. Notably, the Karen supported British troops during World War II on the understanding that they would be allowed to create a sovereign state for Karen people.

Shortly after the end of World War II, the Karen National Union (KNU) was formed in 1947 to advocate the creation of an independent Karen State. The KNU sought to reach a political agreement with the newly independent Burmese-majority government that would grant the Karen greater autonomy. However, the removal of Chief of Staff General Smith Dun, a Karen, as head of the military, reports of abuse committed by predominantly Burmese militias against Karen communities, and, most importantly, the failure of the KNU to reach any form of political agreement with the new government, prompted the KNU to go underground as an ethnic non-state armed group.

In the following years the KNU operated as a *de facto* government in Kayin State, with its military wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) establishing seven main brigades and controlling large tracts of territory across the state and surrounding areas to.[50] The KNU also established administrative authority within the state, setting up departments for health and education.[51]

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[48] UNHCR, *Kayin State Profile*, Updated June 2014, http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=223.
[49] UNDP, 2014, *The State of Local Governance Trends in Kayin*, http://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/library/poverty/TheStateofLocalGovernanceChin/the-state-of-local-governance--trends-in-kayin.html
[50] The seven KNU Brigades are: Thaton (1), Taungu (2), KyaukKyi (3) Tavoy/Dawei (4), Papun (5), Three Pagoda Pass/Payathonsu (6) and Hpa'an (7).
[51] Ashley South, *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict* (Amsterdam, Burma Center Netherlands, 2011).

Over the next 60 years, the KNU were unable to maintain control of the area initially established in the 1950s, and the organisation was slowly pushed back to the Thai-Myanmar border. The KNU also experienced several splits within its ranks. The first split occurred in 1994 when Buddhist Karen soldiers, feeling frustrated and marginalized by the KNU leadership, formed the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA, later renamed the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army). Immediately after the formation of the DKBA, it signed a ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar military government and was put under the Tatmadaw's operational control. Most DKBA brigades were transformed into Border Guard Forces (BGF) although there have been reports of sporadic clashes between the Tatmadaw and certain DKBA brigades that disagreed with the decision to become a BGF.[52] This ultimately led to the formation of the DKBA splinter group Klo Htoo Baw in 2010 (also referred to as DKBA Brigade 5), which refused to transform into a BGF and realigned with the KNU. In the following months, hundreds of ex-DKBA personnel also defected to the KNU over similar frustration and resentment at the transformation into BGF units.

The second split from the KNU occurred in 1997, with the formation of the Karen Peace Force (KPF). The KPF also signed a ceasefire agreement with the ruling military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) Government.[53] The KPF was subsequently transformed into a BGF force under direct Tatmadaw control in 2010.[54] Lastly, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council broke off from the KNU in 2007 and signed a ceasefire with the government.

In January 2012, the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement with the government. Although there have been sporadic clashes between KNU and Tatmadaw troops since then, the KNU, as well as the DKBA, were among the eight ethnic armed groups that signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in October 2015.

More than six decades of conflict has resulted in an array of socioeconomic challenges for Kayin State. The state's economy relies mainly on agriculture and animal husbandry, and the violent conflict has undermined economic development. While the ethnic armed groups, such as the KNU and the DKBA,

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[52] Ashley South, *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict* (Amsterdam, Burma Center Netherlands, 2011).
[53] In 1997, the SLORC was abolished and reformed as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which became the new official name of the military regime in Myanmar.
[54] Ashley South, *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict* (Amsterdam, Burma Center Netherlands, 2011).

have endeavoured to deliver basic social services within the areas under their control, the division of state administration between the Myanmar Government and the NSAGs has further complicated the situation. Clashes between the different Karen NSAGs, primarily KNU and the DKBA, have also contributed to a division between Karen people within the state.

Recognising this issue, the KNU Central Committee established the first Karen National Unity Seminar in January 1999. The seminar brings together Karen from all of the different existing organisations including armed groups, civil societies and, most recently, political parties, to discuss ways of strengthening unity among Karen people. Regardless of political developments, the Karen Nation Unity Seminars have continued to take place over the years and remain an important unity-building vehicle between different Karen communities.

The violent conflict has also caused large-scale displacement within the state. As of 2012, the Border Consortium estimates that there are 89,000 IDPs,[55] with approximately 80,000 Karen refugees living in camps in Thailand as of October 2015.[56] People living in these camps generally rely on NGOs and international humanitarian organisations to provide food aid and basic social services.

The ceasefire agreements signed since 2012 between the government and the NSAGs have brought about a measure of stability within the state, allowing for more economic development opportunities. However, these development projects have produced another set of negative impacts for communities living within Kayin State. Alongside opportunity there has been an increase in reported incidents of land-grabbing and displacement due to dam or mining projects within the state, as well as the environmental degradation that these projects cause.

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[55] UNHCR, *Kayin State Profile Updated June 2014*, http://data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=223.
[56] The Thai Border Consortium, *Refugee and IDP Camp Populations: October 2015*, http://www.theborderconsortium.org/media/64561/2015-10-oct-map-tbc-unhcr.pdf

## KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Five listening teams travelled across Kayin State in January 2015 and engaged in conversations with 129 community members in the townships of Kyainseikgyi, Hpa-An, Hlaingbwe, and Thandaung. One team of ethnic Mon *listeners* focused specifically on Mon communities in Kyainseikgyi, where people from Karen and Mon ethnicity live together.

Gender was relatively balanced, with a little over half (52%) of the participants being male, while 48% were female. In total, 74% were married while 25% were single. Only one participant did not identify her marital status.

A vast majority of the participants (78%) identified as ethnic Karen, with the remainder divided between Mon (15.5%), other ethnic groups[57] (4.5%), Bamar (1%), and mixed-ethnicity (1%).

### Table 14. Kayin State Demographics: Ethnicity

| Ethnicity | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Karen | 101 | 78% |
| Mon | 20 | 15.5% |
| Others | 6 | 4.5% |
| Bamar | 1 | 1% |
| Mixed ethnicity (Mon-Bamar) | 1 | 1% |
| **Total** | **129** | **100%** |

Most of the participants were between the ages of 31-40 (26%), 21-30 (22%), 51-60 (19%), and 41-50 (17%). The remaining participants were above the age of 61 (12%), or between 19-20 (4%).

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[57] Listeners recorded "Muslim" and "Hindu" under both ethnic and religious categories.

In terms of religion, 61% of the participants were Buddhist, 33% were Christian, with the remainder being Muslim (3%) and Hindu (1%), while 2% did not identify their religion.

Occupations and professions ranged widely amongst the 129 participants. The majority of participants were farmers or undertook agricultural work, whereas others earned their livelihoods as teachers, plantation workers, or had their own small businesses. The table below lists the participants based on their livelihood.

**Table 15. Kayin State Demographics: Livelihoods**

| Livelihood | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Farmers/agricultural workers | 39 | 30% |
| Teachers | 15 | 12% |
| Plantation workers | 14 | 11% |
| Shopkeepers/vendors | 14 | 11% |
| Dependents/housewives | 12 | 9% |
| Health workers | 8 | 6% |
| Students | 8 | 6% |
| Religious workers | 4 | 3% |
| Laborers/carpenters | 3 | 2% |
| Drivers/mechanics | 3 | 2% |
| Interior designers | 2 | 2% |
| NGO staff | 2 | 2% |
| Government | 1 | 1% |
| Unemployed/retired | 3 | 2% |
| Unreported | 1 | 1% |
| **Total** | **129** | **100%** |

**MAIN THEMES**

## 1. On the peace process

***Communities desire true and lasting peace that can be achieved soon***

*Local ethnic people really want peace. We really hate the war.*
<div align="right">- Adult Christian Karen woman in Kyainseikgyi</div>

All communities across Kayin State are hoping for peace. When talking about peace, community members commonly meant an end to fighting. Participants recounted the hardships they experienced as a result of the violent conflict in their areas, such as leaving their villages to flee from the violence and having to live in other places. Several participants also talked about their experiences of being forced to act as porters for either the Tatmadaw or NSAGs. They recounted fear and anxiety that they would be hurt or killed because of violence occurring close to their villages.

*I just wish the peace process could finish successfully as soon as possible. If they can do it quickly, it will also help stabilise the political situation.*
<div align="right">- A young Buddhist Mon interior designer in Kyainseikgyi</div>

Many community members saw the peace process, or more specifically the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the armed groups and the government, as an important part of attaining peace. Several participants also saw the peace process as being necessary for development, noting that the country could not progress until a peace agreement is concluded. Some associated peace with the election, seeing transparency and fairness during the election process as concrete indicators that there is peace.

Participants who saw the peace process and a ceasefire as signs of peace stressed the importance of the negotiating parties reaching an agreement as soon as possible. However, several participants cautioned against rushing the process, recognising the importance of being patient in the formation of a strong and viable agreement. According to participants, the agreement also needs to genuinely address grievances in order to be sustainable.

***Communities recognise security improvements because of the peace process***

Even though several participants said that they did not have a clear understanding of the peace process, many expressed their appreciation and support for it. Participants recognised significant security improvements in their communities and connected them to the ongoing peace process.

*The peace process has been good. Before the ceasefire agreement, whenever we went to another village, the military always checked us during the journey because they worried about spies. These days it's very easy to travel from one place to another.*

- An elderly Karen farmer in Kyainseikgyi

Most community members noted a recent decrease in fighting. One of the most significant effects of this was improvements in the communities' sense of security, knowing that they no longer need to flee to the forests or other places as they did in the past when fighting broke out.

*We often needed to hide and run away from areas where there was fighting. I feel like there is more peace in my village because I don't hear the fighting anymore.*

- Young adult Karen male teacher in Hlaingbwe

People in many parts of the state also noted a general reduction of military and armed group presence inside their communities, with soldiers from the Tatmadaw, KNU, BGF, and DKBA no longer visiting or camping inside their villages. In some villages, community members said they still saw soldiers but they were now camped outside the village and encroached less on communities. This has improved the feeling of personal security among residents as they no longer fear forced recruitment as a porter for either side. Communities no longer have to give their livestock to travelling soldiers, and felt more secure that their villages would not be burnt down as they had in the past.

*Before we were so afraid when the military and KNU came to our village. Our life was full of worry. When the military arrived, they called us to work as porters and took our food. When the KNU came, they interrogated us about why we were working with the military. There is no more of this now. We are becoming freer.*

- A middle-aged Christian Karen man in Thandaung

### Communities recognise more freedom of movement

*Now it is a little freer to trade because transportation has become better. Our living standard is becoming better. We can study at school now. Health services are becoming better with more doctors and medicine. We can now participate in social development and our economy is improving.*

- Mature Buddhist Karen woman in Hlaingbwe

Community members frequently mentioned recent improvements in their ability to travel more freely. General improvements to the state of transportation infrastructure were frequently mentioned in conversations. They also attributed this to less fighting near their areas, fewer checkpoints on the roads, and significantly improved transportation because of the construction of roads. There was also mention of the lifting of curfews that had restricted some communities from travelling after 4pm. People saw this as a direct result of the peace process and commented on how it helped them to have more confidence to work and earn a living as they could move freely from one place to another. Most participants noted improved transportation in their areas allowed for an increase in travel, improving communication between villages. These improvements also positively affected regional business and trade, and made it easier for participants to access food. As these improvements occurred after the start of the peace process, several participants credited these changes to the peace process.

*It is easier to trade from one place to another because the roads have improved.*

- Young adult Buddhist Karen male university student in Hlaingbwe

### Communities express anxiety about the sustainability of the peace process

*Even though they have been negotiating for peace for such a long time, the truth is getting less and less clear between one group and another and between one person and the next.*

- A Buddhist Mon rubber plantation worker in Kyainseikgyi

Although communities overwhelmingly expressed desire for peace and acknowledged positive changes as a result of the peace process, skepticism about the sustainability of the process continued. Some participants expressed concern that some negotiating parties were not sincere in their engagement. These participants cited the postponements and delays in negotiation meetings or the finalising of signed agreements as proof of a lack of sincerity on the part

of negotiating parties. Others felt that overall the changes brought about by the peace process were too small and not reaching communities directly.

*The challenge for the peace process is selfishness among the negotiating parties, and the legacy of the dictatorship. In order to overcome this, parties need to understand each other.*

- Middle aged Karen Christian leader in Thandaung

Other community members said their distrust came from the misallocation of funds meant for peace initiatives but used for other purposes. Closely related to this was the perception that both the government and the NSAGs were profiting from the extraction of natural resources. A few participants also associated continued "taxation" collected by NSAGs at checkpoints with the peace process, and noted that this was adding to the difficulties community members faced in everyday life.

### Continued fighting and military presence, previous ceasefire breakdowns make communities wary

*I feel impatient about the peace process negotiations and how the two sides are approaching it. Even though they are saying we should have peace in our country, they are still fighting each other in so many places. I think they're not working hard enough!*

- Adult Mon Buddhist male shopkeeper in Kyainseikgyi

Some communities said the peace process was taking too long and focused more on talking without resulting in real action. Participants brought up the continued fighting in some parts of Kayin State and expressed concern about the possibility of ceasefires breaking down. Fighting in other areas outside the state, such as the ongoing conflict between the Tatmadaw and the NSAGs in Kachin State, also worried people in Kayin State and contributed to their lack of trust. These incidents made some people very apprehensive about the potential for fighting to resume. A few participants mentioned the KNU's withdrawal from the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) as a source of concern.

Some participants questioned the progress of the peace process given that they still observed the presence of the Tatmadaw in their communities. There was also worry about the upcoming elections and the possibility of political instability. Some people associated transparent and fair elections with peace

in the country and also expressed concern for the potential of a return to a dictatorship. These uncertainties were factors that affected community members' ability to fully trust the peace process.

A few participants mentioned their previous experiences with ceasefire agreements, recounting how the Tatmadaw had in the past intruded on ethnic-controlled areas and initiated conflict with NSAGs while these agreements were in place. This contributed to their distrust in the peace process.

## 2. Hopes for the peace process

### Communities desire more information about the peace process

*I really don't understand the peace process but I do want to see our community have stability.*

<div align="right">- Young adult Buddhist Bamar housewife in Hpa-An</div>

*I've heard lots about peace but I don't really understand anything about the peace process.*

<div align="right">- Middle-aged Buddhist Karen female shopkeeper in a Hpa-An village</div>

Communities felt they did not know a lot about the peace process or the progress being made in negotiations. In some villages, people said they had never heard about the peace process. Some participants who had heard about it did not feel confident enough to share their opinions or perspectives on it. Others felt it was not their business or it did not concern them in their daily lives. Several community members felt the lack of transparency about the peace process was undermining it since only limited information relating to it was reaching the communities, creating suspicion around the negotiations. Because of the lack of understanding about the peace process, some participants went so far as to say that they viewed the process as producing a non-binding or illegal agreement that had no real legitimacy.

Although some participants expressed disinterest in the peace process, most said they wanted to know more. Some participants were critical about the lack of information being disseminated about the peace process. They suggested using television shows as a medium to spread awareness, perhaps using talk shows to discuss what is going on with the peace process and informing people of the progress being made by leaders at the top level.

***Communities want their voices to be heard and considered in the peace process***

*I think if they can change the constitution, the public would be happy. To get peace and freedom of expression for ethnics, they need to amend the 2008 Constitution.*

- A middle-aged Muslim man in Kyainseikgyi

Communities recognised the importance of their participation in the peace process in order for them to directly benefit from it. Communities wanted a chance to communicate their needs and wanted their leaders to listen to them to find new solutions to problems, allowing community-based organisations to get more involved in problem solving. While acknowledging that their lack of knowledge about the peace process serves as a barrier to this participation, they emphasised that those at the negotiating table had to listen to voices from the community and they needed to take action to build trust with communities. Farmers in particular voiced the importance of their inclusion. Some participants also felt that the 2008 Constitution needed to change to focus more on giving ethnic minorities more rights and benefits.

***Government and NSAGs need to act with sincerity and cooperate with each other***

*The government, ethnic armed groups, and the public have to cooperate and understand each other.*

- A middle-aged female Karen Christian church secretary in Kyainseikgyi

Communities across Kayin State called on peace process actors, such as NSAG leaders, the government and the military, to act with sincerity and mutual understanding towards each other in order to build the trust required for negotiations to be successful. Communities also cited the need for agreements to be signed honestly, with negotiating parties keeping the promises they made to each other.

Some community members felt the negotiating parties need to take a new approach based on increased understanding and collaboration. They also mentioned the need for negotiating parties to remain committed, act with empathy towards each other to avoid misunderstandings, and move forward. They also advised negotiating parties to be more open-minded and be willing to compromise to prevent either side from giving up.

*Peace process negotiations should have a reliable neutral mediator with clear understanding. We think that some powerful people control the peace process from behind the scenes, making it hard for decisions to be made. Such a mediator needs to understand dynamics on both sides.*

> - A young Mon Buddhist female university educated shopkeeper in Kyainseikgyi

Participants themselves came up with suggestions on how to build trust between the negotiating parties. Some mentioned using independent mediators in the negotiating process to provide unbiased facilitation, particularly for issues where parties find it difficult to compromise or agree. If necessary, a voting or consensus system could be developed to overcome stalemate situations and allow negotiations to continue. Community members also suggested using more technical experts in the dialogues to help ethnic groups work better together and facilitate working with top-level leaders.

### Communities desire more direct benefits from the peace process

*If I had a chance to participate in the peace process, I wouldn't just talk about what the top-level actors are doing amongst themselves, but also the work that needs to get done for local people to benefit.*

> - A middle-aged Karen Christian female NGO worker

Another strong theme was the communities' desire for those living in rural villages to see more benefits from the peace process. Several participants shared their perception of how it seemed like the top-level actors (government officials and NSAG leadership), as well as business elites, were the only ones benefitting and profiting from the peace process. To illustrate, participants frequently mentioned how these top-level actors, business elites and foreign companies were able to engage in extraction activities as a result of the peace process. These actors were then able to obtain profit from these activities, while the local people continued to suffer from economic hardship and a lack of livelihood opportunities.

### Communities desire better access to quality education

Several communities associated peace not just with increased opportunity to see the end of suffering from violent conflict but also with social development through better infrastructure and public services. Several participants mentioned that their communities had seen improvements in access to

schools. Some community members attributed this change to more freedom of movement. Others noted that the quality of education had improved because of infrastructure improvements, such as wooden school buildings being replaced with concrete structures, increases in teachers' salaries, increases in the number of government teachers for villages, as well as educational support from the NGO sector. These changes meant more children are able to attend school and increased the number of graduates in communities.

*My village is becoming peaceful now and villagers can study at school. Their knowledge is improving because of this opportunity for education.*

- Mature Buddhist Karen housewife in Hlaingbwe

While recognising these improvements, many community members identified the many challenges that remained for local schools. Participants mentioned overcrowding and a lack of physical space for students to study as major challenges, as well as deficiencies in educational facilities for primary and secondary schools. Communities also talked about lack of administration staff, such as headmasters and teachers. Some listeners observed during their visits to communities that the teachers were generally not qualified or motivated to teach.

*The biggest challenge in our country is our poor education system. Teachers do not have enough skills and the exercises in school are not appropriate in all areas. Our children don't learn critical thinking at school. Our children also don't understand all the lessons in the books and they simply memorise materials by heart. We are worried that this has limited our children and our society. Our future depends on our children.*

- A Buddhist Mon male shopkeeper in Kyainseikgyi

Those advocating better education facilities and better quality schools saw educated children as the key to a better future, as they will be the future leaders. If the youth were better educated, they will be more aware of issues such as the peace process and better prepared for the future.

### Communities desire better access to quality health services

*We gain knowledge from international organisations, especially about children's healthcare and family planning.*

- Adult Buddhist Karen female nurse in Hpa-An

*In the future, I want to see more knowledgeable people in healthcare and see my community develop. We need help and support from government and NGOs. I can contribute to healthcare too.*

> \- Middle-aged Karen Christian female midwife in Thandaung

A significant number of community members also cited modest improvements in healthcare services. Prior to the ceasefire, many people suffered and often died because of insufficient medicine in hospitals and clinics. Participants claimed patients now have better access to medicine and treatment because it is easier to reach hospitals and the cost of healthcare is more affordable. Some also talked about improved community awareness of diseases and other health issues that affect villages.

*It's so difficult to travel in the rainy season.  The children can't even get to school in the rain.*

> \- Middle-aged Muslim female shopkeeper in Hpa-An

Some participants expressed hope that the peace process would result in achieving better standards and more development in the health sector. In some areas, community members complained that there was still a lack of medicine in hospitals. In other areas, particularly in Hpa-An villages, residents spoke out about having no clinics in their communities. There was strong consensus overall that healthcare needed to be included in the peace talks.

### Communities desire improvements in transportation, electricity, communication infrastructures

Communities frequently expressed their desire to see better roads in villages and overall improved transportation options. They felt that poor transportation was affecting their everyday lives and making it difficult for them to prosper in their livelihoods. They also noted that poor road conditions, particularly during the rainy season, prevented children from going to school at certain times of the year. Security checks along the way were also mentioned as a challenge to moving freely in some areas.

*Our community's current challenge is getting electricity. If we don't have electricity, our students can't even prepare for their exams because they can't read their books.*

> \- A middle-aged Christian Karen male gardener in Thandaung

Some villagers focused on the lack of adequate electricity and communication, and talked about how this affected their lives. Communities mentioned the absence of telephone lines and electricity in their villages and said this amounted to 'being blind' as residents had no way to access information and had limited information about what was happening outside their village. A number of participants identified regular access to electricity as one of the most pressing issues for the future. Those living in areas that had some access to electricity wanted access to increase. During times of blackouts, their children could not read books or study.

While there appeared general agreement among communities that infrastructure and public services had improved in Kayin State, many said that these improvements were not enough. A few community members equated social development with equity and social justice, and called on the government to abide by the saying, "*One kyat for Burman, one kyat for Karen*", to ensure that efforts were exerted to raise the standard of living in Kayin State.

## 3. Challenges

### Communities desire better livelihood opportunities

Communities regularly brought up the economic hardship that they faced and the need for better livelihood opportunities. They identified the lack of job opportunities, insufficient livelihoods, and the corresponding economic worries as among the biggest challenges they faced. Farmers in particular talked about the problems they encountered in earning a profit because of flooding. They expressed their desire to have the peace process address the needs of local people, which at the very minimum required having enough food to eat. Some participants expressed a hope that the government could help them with these challenges by providing job opportunities, investment for businesses, and addressing the challenge of the low prices for the agricultural products provided by the farmers.

### Drug issues are an increasing social concern

*We see the drug problem is getting worse during the peace process. We never heard anything about drugs when there was conflict. Drugs make us feel uncomfortable.*

<div align="right">- Adult Christian Karen female teacher in Kyainseikgyi</div>

Communities are very concerned about the rise in both drug use and drug sales in Kayin State. Many see it as an issue that has become worse since the beginning of the peace process. Drug transportation has become easier as the number of checkpoints decreased and drug dealers are able to more easily reach communities to sell amphetamines ("yaba"). Participants believed that some soldiers from both the Tatmadaw and the NSAGs were involved in the drug trade and this made it harder for residents to take action against them. Communities also identified the perceived cooperation between drug dealers and some members of the police as among the reasons why it was difficult for communities to eradicate the drug trade from their areas.

Community members were particularly concerned about drug use among the youth. They lamented the use of drugs in schools, noting that children as young as middle school students were using drugs. They saw the negative effects of drug use on the youth and feared the overall societal impact, as addicted young people no longer had any interest in their education. They also connected drug use with a lack of morals and the rise in crime in their communities. Older residents also expressed concern that the younger generation would no longer work or care about their families if they used drugs.

### *Communities are concerned that ceasefires open up areas to land confiscation and natural resource extraction*

Several community members, particularly those from Hlaingbwe Township, voiced concerns that the stability brought about by the peace process had enabled companies to enter their areas to extract gypsum to make concrete. Other participants also mentioned their concern about incidents of land confiscation, particularly since most local residents had no legal remedies available to stop this from occurring or to obtain compensation. These issues were often characterised as related to or enabled by the peace process.

## Additional themes

### *Communities express wariness over the role of NGOs in community development*

*Some NGOs and community based organisations come to our village and provide awareness trainings about livelihoods. They also lend money without interest and sometimes give money directly to poor people. But some people who don't get any support at all are beginning to have misunderstandings with those that do get money. And then some businessmen take advantage of the peace process and take over free land, where they cut down the trees and sell it only for their benefit.*

*- A middle-aged Christian Karen female farmer in Kyainseikgyi*

Several community members recognised the valuable contribution that NGOs made in helping community development or providing humanitarian aid. There was criticism, however, of the effects some NGOs had in some areas, particularly regarding how these organisations were contributing to unequal development. A few participants noted how NGOs supported only specific people or groups and this led to tensions within communities between those who benefited from the NGO support and those who did not. Such disparities caused division among some communities. Other participants said that NGO support also had the negative effect of making people dependent on aid. A few participants added that they observed corrupt practices in the use of NGO funds, with benefits reaching only a select few and not the entire community.

# CHAPTER 9: MON STATE

*The peace process needs to take into consideration the voice of the people, which means those involved must listen to civilians.*

Mon State is located in the southwest of Myanmar on the Andaman Sea. It borders the Bago Region to the north and the Tanintharyi Region to the south, with a small border running along Thailand's Kanchanaburi Province.



*Source:* The Myanmar Information Unit[58]

[58] http://www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/State_Map_District_Mon_MIMU764v02_17Jun2015_A4.pdf

According to the 2014 nationwide census, Mon State has a population of 2,050,282. The majority of the population is comprised of the Mon ethnic group, but there are also large populations of people from the Bamar, Kayin and Pa'O ethnicities amongst other smaller groups throughout the state.

Mon State has two administrative districts: Mawlamyine and Thaton. There are ten townships made up of over 1,000 villages and two islands within the state. The state has different areas controlled by the Myanmar Government, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and some smaller areas controlled by the Karen National Union (KNU), the NSAG primarily located in neighbouring Kayin State.

The Mon people have a long history and are recognised as one of the oldest civilisations in Southeast Asia. This is a point that is emphasised by contemporary Mon nationalists. However, the use of the Mon language has been in decline amongst younger generations.[59] Across Mon State, in the space created by the ceasefire, the NMSP administered an education system that built on Mon literacy and cultural education programmes delivered in monasteries since the 1950s and 1960s. The schools are tolerated but not subsidised by the government and provide schooling in Mon language in an attempt to help preserve the Mon language and culture throughout the state.[60]

The most influential NSAG in Mon State is the NMSP, which came into existence immediately after the capitulation of the Mon Peoples Front (MPF) in 1958, when MPF leaders accepted a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw. Nai Shwe Kyin (aka Nai Ba Lwin), with a small group of followers, established the NMSP in order to continue the struggle for an independent Mon State and self-determination.[61] The NMSP formed its armed wing, the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA), in 1971. Today it has over 800 troops, with another 2,000 reserves, controlling areas along the eastern hills of Mon State and portions of the Thaninthaya Division.[62] As the Tatmadaw increased its numbers in Mon State throughout the 1990s, clashes broke out between the government and the NMSP, as well as with the KNU in some parts of the state. During the 1990s, this resulted in over 10,000 Mon State residents having to take refuge in camps across the border in Thailand.

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[59] UNHCR, *Mon State Profile*, available at: data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222
[60] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf
[61] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf
[62] http://mmpeacemonitor.org/component/content/article/57-stakeholders/164-nmsp
[63] Ashley South, *Mon Nationalism and Civil War in Burma: The Golden Sheldrake*, page 248

The NMSP began ceasefire negotiations with the government in 1993 and eventually signed a ceasefire agreement in June 1995. In the wake of signing the ceasefire agreement, a number of splinter groups emerged from the NMSP, mostly in Ye Township and northern Tanintharyi Region. The Mon Army Mergui District (MAMD) was the first group to form immediately following the ceasefire agreement. MAMD leaders opposed plans to hand over land to the Tatmadaw and promised to reunite with the NMSP only if the ceasefire was abandoned. After a number of clashes with the Tatmadaw, the MAMD proceeded to sign their own ceasefire agreement with the government in 1997. As of 2007, the group was still active and based south of the Maw Dawng Pass in Tenasserim Division.[64]

Another small splinter group emerged in 1997 on the southern Tenasserim Coast as the Mon Peace Group (MPG), partaking in clashes sporadically throughout the 2000s, sometimes in affiliation with the Tatmadaw. Their current status is unknown,[65] although they sent one delegate to the National Convention.

It was the formation of the Hongsawatoi Restoration Party (HRP), or the Mon Restoration Party (MRP), led by former NMSP Central Committee Member Colonel Nai Pan Nyunt in 2001 that posed the greatest threat to the 1995 ceasefire agreement. Colonel Nai Pan Nyunt claimed that the NMSP was unable to prevent the confiscation of Mon lands, prompting his defection and the creation of the HRP.[66] In late 2001, Nai Pan Nyunt negotiated with another anti-ceasefire group, the Mon National Democratic Army (later, Mon Democratic Warrior Army), to form the HRP, collecting taxes and laying landmines near the Three Pagoda Pass. By early 2002, there were reports of fighting between the MNLA-HRP and Tatmadaw-HRP, which continued until late 2003 when HRP forces were expelled from NMSP territory. In 2007, Nai Pan Nyunt reformed as the MRP and again began to collect taxes in Ye Township. However, the MRP failed to gain the same support as they did in 2003 and remained a marginalised group.[67] As of 2014, there were no reports of these splinter groups holding territory or participating in any conflict in Mon State.[68]

In addition to these splinter groups, the KNU and their own splinter group, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), have at times been militarily involved in Mon State. The KNU's map of Kayin territory overlaps some official

[64] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf
[65] UNHCR, *Mon State Profile*, available at: data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222
[66] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf
[67] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf
[68] UNHCR, *Mon State Profile*, available at: data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222

boundaries of Mon State, and the KNU have been active in north-eastern Mon State.[69] The forced repatriation of Mon refugees from Thailand into Mon State in 1996 added further strain to the post-ceasefire situation, when 10,000 refugees were moved to three areas in NMSP-controlled territory for temporary settlement. As of 2014, those settlements still hosted several thousand individuals.[70]

Even though there was some stability following the ceasefire, there were still a number of reported violations of the agreement. In 2005, it was reported that various human rights abuses had occurred within ceasefire and non-ceasefire zones, in addition to the confiscation of land and property from Mon farmers between 1998 and 2002.[71]

Politically, the NMSP was also active at the National Convention in 2004, where the NMSP, alongside the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), led a group of representatives from thirteen ceasefire groups in support of a federal union in Myanmar. Although the National Convention acknowledged the group's demands, they were not included in the draft constitution released in 2008. This disagreement eventually led to the breakdown of communication between the NMSP and the government in 2010, after the MNLA refused government demands to become a Border Guard Force (BGF). As a result, the 1995 ceasefire agreement was broken. Despite the increased tension, and despite reneging on the ceasefire agreement, the NMSP and government remained in peace negotiations throughout 2011 and 2012, ensuring that there was no renewed conflict.[72]

Mon State has remained relatively stable since the signing of the 1995 ceasefire agreement between the NMSP and the government, and the NMSP has also shown itself to be responsive to internal reform and democratic practices. The NMSP has reacted to pressure from ethnic communities and constituencies, and has included public participation on matters such as military engagement with the government. As a result, since 2005, the NMSP has remained the most outspoken critic of the National Convention, while always making sure that its criticism never spilled over into outright conflict.[73]

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[69] According to the UNHCR, the KNU's map of a Karen free state (known locally as Kawthoolei) overlaps with the official boundaries of Mon State, data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222
[70] UNHCR, *Mon State Profile*, available at: data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222
[71] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf
[72] UNHCR, *Mon State Profile*, available at: data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222
[73] http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Chulalongkorn_University_Mon_Seminar_October_2007.pdf

The NMSP signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement with the Myanmar Government in February 2012 at both the state and union level. The NMSP's vice chairman, Nai Hon Sar, was the leader of the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) that negotiated the text for the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). While the NMSP agreed with the finalised text of the NCA, it chose not to sign the agreement.

Because of the general stability in the wake of the 1995 ceasefire, Mon State has seen marginally more development than Kayin or Kayah State, and that has meant service provision, from education to infrastructure, has been at least consistent. However, recent developments, such as a natural gas pipeline in the Tenasserim Region, have drawn criticism from local villages, which have seen their lands confiscated or made unusable due to construction works.[74] In another case, in May 2015, around 5,000 people from the Ye Township area protested against the construction of a coal power plant, citing concerns ranging from a lack of transparency throughout the planning process to the destruction of local livelihoods.[75]

As of 2014, concerns still remained for 4,000 Mon refugees living in camps in Thailand, and for the population in the areas surrounding Ye Township, where there was considerable numbers of armed groups fighting throughout the 2000s, subjecting the local population to forced labour, arbitrary taxation and land confiscation. Because this area is unsuitable for agriculture, and lacks access during rainy season, these underlying issues can be exacerbated and lead to instability.[76] Drug use is also another concern in Mon State, with efforts undertaken by the NMSP to rehabilitate users and combat the selling and use of drugs in the state.[77]

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[74] The Mon Forum, http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs14/MF2013-01-op.pdf
[75] http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/mass-protest-held-against-mon-state-coal-plant-proposal.html
[76] UNHCR, *Mon State Profile*, available at: data.unhcr.org/thailand/download.php?id=222
[77] http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/drug-culture-thrives-in-mon-state.html

## KEY DEMOGRAPHICS

In late January 2015, eight *listening teams* travelled throughout Mon State and engaged in conversations with community members. They visited communities in the townships of Mudon, Paung, Ye, Thanbyuzayat, Bilin, Kyaikto, Mawlamyine, Chaungzon and Kyaikmaraw. One team focused on reaching Kayin and Pa'O communities residing within the state.[79]

In total, 124 conversations took place with a total of 130 participants; 55% (72) of the participants were male, 40% (52) were female and 5% did not specify their gender. A total of 30% (39) of the participants were single, 57% (74) were married and 13% (17) did not indicate their marital status.

In terms of religion, 95% (123) of the participants were Buddhist, 4.5% (6) were Christian and one participant was Muslim.

Most participants were Mon (64.6%), followed by Kayin (19.2%), with the remaining divided between Bamar (9.2%), Pa'O (3.8%) and Wa (0.76%), while three did not specify their ethnicity. The details are found in the table below.

**Table 16. Mon State Demographics: Ethnicity**

| Ethnicity | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Mon | 84 | 64.6% |
| Kayin | 25 | 19.2% |
| Bamar | 12 | 9.2% |
| Pa'O | 5 | 3.8% |
| Wa | 1 | 0.76% |
| Unreported | 3 | 2.3% |
| **Total** | **130** | **99.86%** |

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[79] Rounding means this figure does not add to 100%.

Participants came from a wide range of ages. Youth was well represented with six (5%) participants under 20 years old and 27 (21%) between the ages of 21-30. Middle-aged participants included 29 (22%) in the category of 31-40 years old, 24 (18%) between 41-50, and 13 (10%) in the age range of 51-60. Eleven participants (8%) were aged between 61-70 and five (4%) were over 71. Fifteen (11%) did not provide any information about their ages.

Participants held a wide variety of jobs. The chart below illustrates the breakdown of the participants based on their livelihood.

**Table 17. Mon State Demographics: Livelihoods**

| Livelihood | Number of participants | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Farmers/gardeners | 34 | 26% |
| Teachers | 19 | 15% |
| Small business/vendors | 15 | 12% |
| Dependents/housewives | 11 | 8% |
| Politicians, civil servants, community leaders | 6 | 5% |
| Labourers/carpenters | 6 | 5% |
| Health workers | 6 | 5% |
| Rubber plantation workers | 4 | 3% |
| Textile workers | 3 | 2% |
| Religious workers | 3 | 2% |
| Transportation/drivers | 3 | 2% |
| Students | 3 | 2% |
| NGO staff | 2 | 1.5% |
| Other | 2 | 1.5% |
| Unreported | 13 | 10% |
| **Total** | **130** | **100%** |

**MAIN THEMES**

## 1. On the peace process

### *Communities desire real, sustainable peace*

*I hope the peace process can create a lifelong peace. I do believe this can come true.*

*- A young housewife in Chaungzon*

The most prevalent theme across all conversations was the desire for peace. Communities want to see long-term sustainable peace and view peace as the most important issue in the country. Participants expressed their desire for the end of fighting between the government and NSAGs. Continued fighting was seen as a barrier to the peace process and communities hoped for an end to all violence in the country so that people could live happy and healthy lives.

### *There are improvements, but "real peace" has not been achieved*

*Things became a little more peaceful in Myanmar since they began the peace process, but there is no real peace because they are still fighting in some places.*

*- A Buddhist monk in Chaungzon*

Communities recognised positive improvements in their lives since the beginning of the peace process. They felt it was more peaceful in their areas, yet many people continued to feel that "real" peace had yet to be achieved. When discussing positive improvements, many participants also highlighted the continuing challenges that they faced.

*There is no real peace in our view even though every person wants it. I'm not saying that there aren't signs of peace. When most people talk about peace, they are simplistic and measure it as whether there is fighting happening at that given moment.*

*- A female shopkeeper in Kyaikmaraw*

Many community members noted less gunfire in their areas, but continued to feel afraid of the potential for fighting to break out in the future. Others said that it is better than before, but they still hear gunshots in other villages. Some communities questioned whether they had peace in their villages due to the presence of armed groups in their areas.

Many community members felt that the peace process had not achieved peace for minority ethnic groups or local communities. Some Kare communities in Mon State expressed that clashes between the government and KNU soldiers had subsided since the signing of a peace agreement and fighting had stopped, but they still lived in a "yellow" stage of peace rather than "white".

### Communities experience greater freedom of movement

*Since 2011, there is change in our community, like being able to travel more easily.*

<div align="right">- A Karen farmer in Kyaikmaraw</div>

In general, communities across the state feel that they now have more freedom to travel. In the past, community members faced challenges and feared travelling because they encountered NSAG and Tatmadaw soldiers. Now, participants said they can even travel at night, something which had previously been restricted. Freedom of movement has meant more opportunities to communicate with other villages, as well as increased opportunities for foreigners to do business in the state.

*We say it's safe to travel now, but I still hear about many robbers on motorbikes.*

<div align="right">- An adult Mon housewife in Paung</div>

Although most participants conveyed an overall increase in the freedom of movement, some did mention continuing restrictions in accessing certain places such as crop fields, farms and plantations. These participants noted other barriers such as increased instances of robbery and a weakening economy that caused restrictions on travel.

### Communities want negotiating parties to prove their sincerity in the peace process

Many participants highlighted the need for the government and Tatmadaw to be sincere in their engagement in the peace process. Some community members thought conflict between ethnic groups was initiated by government involvement or provocations to divide them on issues. Several community members expressed distrust for the Tatmadaw because of the previous violations of ceasefire agreement. A few participants also mentioned the

fighting happening in Kachin State as a reason for their mistrust. Several community members felt that, although people say democracy has come, these are just the words of individuals rather than representing true action or change. Participants explained that the current government remained heavily influenced by the military. People shared frustration that the president did not have control over the Tatmadaw. Some emphasised the importance for the military, in particular, to adhere to stipulations committed to in the agreements.

### Communities desire unity among all ethnic groups

*In the future, I want my community to be united.*

*- A Burmese farmer in Chaungzon*

Many community members saw unity as an integral element to long-term peace. Participants mentioned the need for building unity not just between government and ethnic groups, but also within ethnic groups. According to participants, unity-building requires government and armed groups to be transparent with communities about their activities and transactions. Some participants also expressed their desire to see solidarity within their communities.

*I want the government and ethnic political parties to be united. Stop fighting each other and be fair.*

*- An elderly Mon farmer in Thanbyuzayat*

### Communities desire more information about the peace process

*As we are ordinary people, we can't understand everything in the peace process.*

*- A female shop owner in Ye*

For many communities across Mon State, lack of understanding or information about the peace process is hindering their participation. Community members said they had limited information about the peace process, with most stating that they got their information only from the radio or television. Participants wanted NSAG leaders and the government to provide more updates to the general public on developments that would raise awareness and understanding. This was integral to getting community support for the peace process.

***Communities believe they can contribute to the peace process***

*The peace process needs to take into consideration the voice of the people, which means those involved must listen to civilians.*

<div align="right">- A Karen gardener in Thaton</div>

Many explained the need to increase civilian participation in the peace process to make the process more inclusive. They felt that stronger community engagement and involvement would lead to more unity amongst state residents. Some said that educators and community leaders had a fundamental role to play in informing the general population of peace process developments. Others also saw the role of communities in helping to solve problems by contributing grounded solutions to ongoing challenges.

*I want youth to participate more and I want older people to listen to their voices.*

<div align="right">- An adult Mon male in rubber manufacturing</div>

Many spoke about the difficulty of incorporating the perspectives of young people into the peace process or into peace activities even though they had a lot to contribute. Some lamented that even after attempts to empower young people to become leaders, they were not given leadership opportunities. Other younger participants expressed more optimism and recognised that they had more opportunities to contribute to the process, noting the changing mindset of the younger generation.

## 2. Hopes for the future

***Language is a critical issue for communities in Mon State***

*It would be easier to negotiate with ethnic people if first they allowed the right to teach their ethnic literature in state schools.*

<div align="right">- An older Pa'O man in Thaton</div>

Communities desired official recognition of ethnic languages and to have the opportunity to learn, teach and speak their ethnic language. For Mon ethnic residents, the Mon language is of vital importance in cultural preservation and identity. In Karen communities, some participants positively noted that education and the ability to teach in the Karen language had improved over

time. Pa'O communities also felt that being able to teach ethnic literature in schools was a key issue for them and other ethnic groups in the peace process.

*They say we have the right to teach our mother language, but it's not the reality. I am worried our language will disappear if we cannot learn it over the long term.*

<div align="right">- A Ye resident</div>

Communities that did not have Mon language as a subject taught at school or access to Mon education stressed the need for it. These communities wanted Mon language to be used in state schools or to have Mon-administered schools for Mon people. Some participants expressed their desire to be Mon language teachers at schools. In some communities, the Mon language was already being taught in schools, which was appreciated as a significant change. However, even in those schools where some Mon language was taught, participants wanted it to go further than teaching the basics. Some suggested that Mon should be the official language in schools throughout the state.

*As we are Mon ethnics, we would prefer to use Mon language in government offices throughout Mon State.*

<div align="right">- A Mon participant from Ye</div>

Mon speakers also saw the importance of accessing services in the Mon language. Some participants mentioned their preference to be able to use the language in government offices in Mon State, as well as the need for it to be an official state language, both spoken and written.

*Nowadays, children of every ethnicity have to learn in the Burmese language so they just read to memorise by heart and therefore can't understand the meaning of everything. This leaves our ethnic children behind Bamar children.*

<div align="right">- A university-educated Mon woman</div>

Although the importance of Mon language was a strong theme emerging from conversations in Mon ethnic communities, community members also acknowledged the importance of Burmese language at a national and practical level. Some Mon people expressed their desire to be able to learn how to speak Burmese fluently so they could communicate better with others and succeed in a multilingual society.

### Communities desire a more representative government

*We want self-government for our own state because we don't want others who know nothing about us making decisions for us.*

*- A young Mon female teacher in Ye*

Community members discussed their hopes to have a more representative governance system by having more Mon ethnic politicians. Many people desired a federal system promoting equal ethnic rights and the ability for ethnic groups to govern their own communities. Some community members suggested decentralisation at the state level to allow government to work more closely with the people it represents. A few community members said that being under the control of a Burmese government was not appropriate and that Mon people should have the authority to administer their own state. While many participants spoke strongly of the desire for federalism and decentralisation, some lacked understanding of the practical implications and how this governance system would work.

*Karen groups want self-administration and request this right.*

*- An older Karen male gardener*

Although it was mainly participants from Mon ethnic communities who spoke about the need for self-government, Karen people in Mon State also discussed governance issues. Some suggested that a proportional representation system was needed to ensure more equal rights in administration and government.

Many community members found it difficult to understand that Mon communities within Kayin State were not part of Mon State, or that Karen communities in Mon State were not part of Kayin State. Overall, the groups identified with the state correlating to their ethnic/linguistic group.

### Communities want Mon National Day recognised as a holiday

*We are requesting to have an official day off in celebration of Mon National Day but they don't allow us to. Other ethnic groups have official days off for their special celebrations, but not the Mon people.*

*- A middle-aged female farmer in Paung*

For many Mon ethnic communities, official recognition of Mon National Day to celebrate the first Mon kingdom is of crucial symbolic importance. Although celebrations on this day are more tolerated now compared to before 2011, some participants expressed a desire to have a legally recognised Mon National Day.[80] Some community members believed that Mon National Day should have the same official status as Christmas, Chinese New Year and Karen New Year, and wanted to see schools closed in recognition of the celebration. Demonstrating the importance of this holiday, participants in one community spoke of a conflict between Mon groups that initiated two different ceremonies for Mon National Day. Some in the community asked for a mediator from outside to help bring the two groups together, since the celebration of this important event was very significant in building unity and peace throughout Mon State.

### Communities want women empowerment

*The challenge in the peace process is the discrimination of women and the hindrance of their rights. Women need to be empowered to become leaders of our country.*

- A young female teacher in Chaungzon

The need for women's representation and lack of leadership opportunities were also common issues raised in conversations. Some community members said that women's rights needed to be included in the peace process, and that female representation and participation in general state politics was vital to the process.

## 3. Challenges

### Economic hardship is a widespread concern

*The economic situation is so bad now. We are having difficulties to even have enough food to survive.*

- A young Mon female teacher in Paung

Economic and livelihood challenges were heard from participants all over Mon State. Many felt directly affected by the economic situation that made their daily lives more difficult.

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[80] Mon National Day is celebrated one day after the full moon day of the lunar month of Thabodwe.

*Farmers are suffering because of the global economic downturn.*

- A Bamar farmer in Chaungzon

Some participants felt the global economic situation was directly impacting Mon State. They expressed a desire to develop similar to foreign countries, but felt the international economic situation was causing stagnation and negatively affecting local livelihood activities. Some participants felt that export of raw goods to foreign countries was increasing domestic prices, making products unaffordable for the general population. For some, increasing international activities by foreign companies in Mon State had meant their land was being sold off, leaving them with nothing to sustain their livelihoods.

*The price of goods is going up and the price for rubber and rice is going down. We can't make any money in this situation.*

- A young adult farmer in Paung

Both inflation and price fluctuation of raw goods and food were common concerns discussed in conversations. In particular, farmers explained that increased prices for general goods meant they could no longer afford to buy them. At the same time, they shared their worries about the decreasing prices of their crops, particularly for rubber and rice. Farmers mentioned the need for support from government, NGOs, and Mon leaders in dealing with the shocks of price fluctuations.

*I don't know anything about the peace process because everyone in this village, including me, is struggling to earn their livelihoods. The lack of job opportunities makes it very hard to survive and many people are migrating to Bangkok.*

- A Pa'O trader in Thaton

### Unemployment is a serious concern

The lack of jobs was a major concern across the state. Listening teams noticed that people between 30-50 years old were primarily concerned with the economy and job security. One of the causes of job insecurity was the falling price of rubber, which had become too low to provide an adequate salary for farmers.

Some participants connected difficulties finding employment to education, noting that those without work could not send their children to school. Recent

graduates also spoke about their growing frustration at not being able to find work. Community members without education felt that the increasingly educated population was creating more competition for limited livelihood opportunities.

Migration was seen as a problem, especially for the youth, who commonly left Mon State to find employment in Thailand or other places. Communities felt that employment opportunities should be available in Mon State so young people did not have to move away.

### Increasing drug use and production is challenging communities

*The biggest challenge is the drug issue.*

- A young Mon female teacher in Thanbyuzayat

Drug use and production is a considerable concern in Mon State and some participants felt drugs posed the biggest challenge for their future. Communities noticed an increase in the number of drug users, particularly amongst the youth. They connected this increase to the improved security situation, which allowed for greater freedom of movement and more access to trade. The increased use of drugs caused community members to lose trust in the peace process because they suspected the government of directing the sale of drugs to ethnic youths. This, they believed, disempowered minority ethnic groups by taking away their decision-making and leadership ability.

*There are many drug users in Mon State. There are more in rural areas than urban. Why doesn't the government help to solve the drug issue? The government should help.*

- A Mon doctor in Paung

Some communities wanted village leaders and law enforcement to address drug use and production in Mon State, while others felt drug eradication was the responsibility of the government or NSAGs, such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP). Many Mon communities were particularly supportive of the NMSP and saw it as a legitimate actor addressing the drug issue. Communities wanted the NMSP to help deal with drug use and sales in government-controlled areas as they thought the government was involved in the drug trade and not working to reduce drug use effectively. They also called for help from village leaders and local authorities responsible for the arrest of drug dealers and users.

***Road development and access to electricity have improved, but communities desire more improvements***

*Transportation and electricity have improved a little compared to before.*

- A middle-aged female grocer in Kyaikmaraw

Communities spoke about increasing development in areas throughout Mon State. Most participants spoke about improvements to roads and access to electricity as significant changes they have seen over time with the most positive effects on their lives.

Other communities felt these improvements fell short of their expectations or did not do enough to satisfy their needs. Some participants felt these improvements were superficial with little real value. Community members also expressed concerns about the money allocated for development projects in their areas. They felt that there was a lack of transparency in the use of funds, as they could see grants being allocated but did not see local authorities spending all of the money on the proposed projects.

*I want them to repair the road and build a bridge in Ba Loo Jon village.*

- A Mon carpenter

Several communities expressed the need for bridges to be built to improve their ability to connect with other areas. For example, in Chaungzon, people in the Belu Kyun Township felt that a bridge would help solve their difficult situation due to poor road conditions. In Chaungzon, people also expressed their desire to see a bridge built to Mawlamyine, hoping to get support from Mon representatives.

*I'm actually happy the roads are being repaired, but due to road repairs and extensions, my home garden was destroyed and I lost my property. I felt so sad that no compensation was offered by the company. Roads have been privatised and contracted out to many different companies that repair and build them at a low standard, allowing them to erode quickly. I don't want to see any more road extensions that force our homes and land to be confiscated and make authorities collect money from us villagers.*

- An adult Karen machinist

One community in Kyaik Hto noted the improvement of roads in their township, but the road construction often led to the destruction of their homes without compensation. They weighed the pros and the cons of road expansion, as widened roads led to more houses being lost. At the same time they realised that the low quality of the construction left them with roads that needed to be repaired in a short period of time.

*We want to get electricity in our village because now we have computers in our school run by a generator… Peace for me as a civilian means having public access to electricity in my village.*

- A transport driver in Thaton

Some people saw improvements in access to electricity, depending on where they were in Mon State. For example, residents in Ye and Thanbyuzayat townships often commented quite positively about the increased access to electricity. However, many in Chaungzon, Kyaikmaraw, Paung and Thaton complained that electricity was still a problem, either in terms of access or because of the unaffordable price. Many saw electricity as an important aspect of a peaceful country or as a sign of better conditions for residents, and advocated for improvements in access. *Listening teams* noted a significant disparity in the availability of electricity and road infrastructure across the state.

### Poor education and healthcare are still barriers to quality of life

*If education and healthcare are developed, there will be nothing to worry about and we can hope for peace.*

- An adult Mon man in Ye

The lack of quality education and healthcare was a common theme discussed in conversations throughout Mon state. Although many people saw some positive changes in education and health services, for others, much more was needed to reach an acceptable level.

*In our village, we don't have enough teachers and only a very small school building for over 260 students. We have five teachers and one school helper so our children's education is greatly lacking. If there is any authority or organisations that can help us, we ask them to increase the number of teachers in our village.*

- A Pa'O trader in Aung Sai village

Many community members noted that government schools had improved and that they had seen changes over time. Participants discussed the need to create a modern educational system as part of the overall improvement of the state and country. They hoped to see a future generation of educated leaders.

*I am really worried because I want my children to be educated, but I do not have money to afford their education.*

<div align="right">- A Burmese taxi driver in Chaungzon.</div>

Some participants spoke of the challenge of affording education for their children. Although free education was available in their communities, the reality was that the loss of income from sending their children to school instead of having them work, or other fees and costs that were required to send their children to school, posed economic difficulties for families.

*There are many corrupt people. If we want to be a teacher, we need to pay bribes of between 1,000,000 to 1,500,000 Kyat. This is not a symbol for our country. Nothing is changing. The most important thing is education. Children should be supported to become educated.*

<div align="right">- An adult  Mon doctor in Paung</div>

Some participants said they were expected to pay teachers directly and were not able to afford these high payments. They quoted different rates in different areas. Several people complained that if they could not afford the fee, their child could not attend school.

*The challenge is that children do not want to attend school because they do not want to learn in the Burmese language. To overcome this challenge, the government should allow the teaching of our mother tongue at school.*

<div align="right">- A young Mon female teacher</div>

Many participants felt inequality was inherent in the education system and disadvantaged Mon ethnic children because of the use of a Burmese-based curriculum. Some community members suggested establishing Mon schools and teaching Mon-focused education as a solution to this problem. Participants felt that if their children had to attend a government school, the state government should also allow them to study Mon language as a regular subject.

Young people were often less aware or concerned about the peace process, but worried more about demonstrations and uprisings that threatened school closures. Recent protests led by the Mon State Student Union called for student rights and for the recognition of ethnic language instruction under Myanmar's National Education Law.

*The government said they would provide free medical check-ups and medicine, but only for a short time. The reason they provided medicine is because of a rabies outbreak amongst dogs. There was only access to rabies vaccinations for one month. Nothing else is changing in our hospitals.*

- An adult Mon doctor in Paung

Some participants did note general improvements to overall healthcare in the state. However, many shared their concerns about major gaps in accessing services. Rural residents lamented not having clinics or having to face poor road conditions that were dangerous to travel on in emergency situations. Several participants spoke about rabies vaccination programmes that were short-lived and insufficient to meet the more general health needs of the population.

*In the future, I want a clinic and doctor in my community.*

- An adult Mon rubber maker in Thanbyuzayat

# ANNEXES

## Table 18. Ceasefire agreements with NSAGs

| Non-state armed groups | State | Date of ceasefire agreement |
|---|---|---|
| United Wa State Party (UWSP) | Wa State (Northern Shan State) | 6 September 2011 |
| National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) | Eastern Shan State | 7 September 2011 |
| Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA) | Kayin | 3 November 2011 |
| Restoration Council of Shan State / Shan State Army-South (RCSS/SSA-S) | Southern Shan State | 2 December 2011 |
| Chin National Front (CNF) | Chin | 6 January 2012 |
| Karen National Union (KNU) | Kayin | 12 January 2012 |
| Shan State Progress Party/Shan State Army North (SSPP/SSA-North) | Northern Shan State | 28 January 2012 |
| New Mon Stat Party (NMSP) | Mon | 1 February 2012 |
| Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council | Kayin | 7 February 2012 |
| Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) | Kayah | 7 March 2012 |
| Arakan Liberation Party (ALP) | Rakhine | 5 April 2012 |
| National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang | Sagaing Division | 9 April 2012 |
| Pa'O National Liberation Organisation | Shan | 25 August 2012 |
| All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) | Border areas (Myanmar-India, Myanmar-Thailand, Myanmar-China) | 5 August 2013 |

| Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) | Kachin | *An agreement was signed on 30 May 2012 with the commitment to "efforts to achieve de-escalation and cessation of hostilities". |
| --- | --- | --- |

**Table 19.  Most Commonly Heard Themes Across all States: Uncategorised**

| ALL STATES - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
| --- |
| 1. Communities are greatly affected by violent conflict (limited freedom of movement, livelihood opportunities, militarization) and expressed great desire for real and sustainable peace. |
| 2. Communities feel cautious optimism towards the ongoing peace process because, while they have seen some improvements (greater freedom of movement, improved social services delivery, less fighting in some areas), they recall previous ceasefire breakdowns, with some citing ongoing fighting in some states between Tatmadaw and NSAGs. |
| 3. Communities desire more information about the peace process. |
| 4. Communities want their leaders (from both the government and the NSAGs) to engage sincerely in the peace process, work on trust-building, and to consider the needs of communities during the peace process. |
| 5. Communities experience crippling economic hardship. |
| 6. Drug production and drug use is a significant concern for communities, particularly the effects of drug addiction on the youth. |
| 7. Different forms of discrimination (ethnicity, religion, gender) remains a source of considerable concern for communities. |
| 8. Communities recognise improvements in transportation and communication infrastructure, as well as in social services delivery, but desire more social development. |

**STATE TABLES**

**Table 20. Kachin State Most Commonly Heard Themes: Uncategorised**

| KACHIN STATE - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
|---|
| 1. Communities want to live in peace and with security. |
| 2. Violent conflict has limited the freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities of communities. |
| 3. Communities want transportation infrastructure to be built/rebuilt. |
| 4. Communities want more social development in their area. |
| 5. Communities want to have more information on the peace process and governance issues, and want their views to be heard. |
| 6. Communities desire self-administration in a democratic governance system that allows public participation. |
| 7. Real peace has not been achieved yet. While decisions about ceasefire negotiations are being made at the top level, communities still witness fighting at the village level. |
| 8. In order to achieve peace, both sides (the government and NSAGs) need to look past their own interests and work together with all groups, including communities. |
| 9. Military presence in or near villages remains a serious concern. |
| 10. Communities want equal ethnic rights, and ethnic and religious discrimination remains a significant concern |
| 11. Communities feel they do not benefit from natural resources in Kachin State. Land-grabbing for large-scale projects is a serious concern. |
| 12. Communities are concerned about drug production, use and trade. |

**Table 21. Kachin State Most Commonly Heard Themes Under Each Guide Question**

| KACHIN STATE - Most commonly heard themes under each guide question | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Guide Questions** | **Response** |
| 1 | What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | • Communities desire peace and support, as well as effective discussion and dialogue between the conflict parties in the peace process. |
| 2 | What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | • Communities desire an opportunity to be heard, or at least included in the peace process. |
| 3 | For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | • There needs to be more mutual understanding, respect, and flexibility among the parties to the negotiation processes. |
| 4 | What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | Distrust and tension between the government and the NSAGs are considered the biggest challenges to the peace process. Communities are also greatly concerned about the exploitation of natural resources in their area. |
| 5 | What would help to overcome these challenges/ concerns? | • There needs to be mutual trust and forgiveness between groups.<br>• There needs to be a trusted third party to mediate between the conflict parties.<br>• There needs to be unity between all groups in the country, and there must be measures to address and prevent all kinds of discrimination. |
| 6 | What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | • Communities hope that the peace process will result in fair and just governance, freedom of movement, self-administration in the ethnic states, and a higher standard of living, particularly in the rural areas. |

| 7 | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | • Most participants say the situation is the same in their areas, with continued fighting.<br>• A few recognise improvements in transportation infrastructure and educational access. |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | Now, what is a challenge/concern for you? | • The greatest challenges faced relate to earning a livelihood, mostly in relation to generating adequate income to support their families.<br>• Another big challenge is connected to mobility concerns caused by deficient transportation infrastructure (impassable roads) as well as freedom of movement concerns (because of checkpoints). Communities believe that better transportation would result in development.<br>• The need for wider access to quality education is another challenge. |
| 9 | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | • Communities desire peace and socioeconomic development in the future. |
| 10 | What would help you achieve that? | • Participants asked for micro-financing opportunities and loans that would allow them to have their own small businesses.<br>• They also want to have more knowledge about the peace process so they could understand what is going on and contribute to the process.<br>• Better transportation was identified as integral to community development.<br>• Communities also believed a fair and just government, and stronger rule of law are key to a better future for all. |
| 11 | What role could you have/how could you assist to achieve that? | • Communities are unsure how to help but they are willing to contribute in any way they can. |

| 12 | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | • The attainment of state self-administration was identified as the biggest challenge for the state's future. <br> • Another big challenge was freedom of movement and travel limitations. <br> • Participants also believed the disunity between the different ethnic groups in the state would prove to be a challenge. <br> • The lack of job opportunities for residents and the dismal socioeconomic development were also perceived to be problematic. <br> • Drug issues facing the residents were also identified as a challenge that needs to be addressed. |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | What would help you overcome these challenges? | • Communities believed the movements of Tatmadaw troops should be limited within communities or villages, and soldiers should be stationed in a camp. <br> • Communities also said that both the government and the ethnic armed groups needed to have an equal commitment to achieving peace. <br> • Communities identified the need for a truly civilian government to help address the country's challenges. |

**Table 22. Northern Shan State Most Commonly Heard Themes: Uncategorised**

| NORTHERN SHAN STATE - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
| --- |
| 1. Drug production, sale and use are a significant social concern and communities want a more effective drug reduction response. |
| 2. Communities experience negative impacts from recent fighting: injuries/casualties, economic hardship, fear of recruitment, less freedom. |
| 3. Communities have insufficient services (education, healthcare) and infrastructure (roads, telecommunication, electricity) and want the government to address these shortcomings. |
| 4. Communities experience economic hardship due to lack of economic opportunities, restricted access to their farms, and low sale price of tea leaves and other crops. |
| 5. Communities feel fear as a result of past and present fighting in their areas, feel mistrust towards the peace process, and desire sincere engagement by involved actors to achieve peace. |
| 6. Communities lack awareness of the peace process and find it difficult to talk about what they want from it in the future. |
| 7. Communities desire equal rights, equal economic benefits and increased services and infrastructure for their communities. |
| 8. Communities believe that achieving "real peace" would lead to development. |
| 9. Communities want a decrease in Tatmadaw military presence in their area to address the problems linked to militarisation, such as taking of community property without compensation, forced recruitment, and being subjected to illegal taxation. |
| 10. Communities have mixed feelings about the peace process: some saw progress, while others felt only leaders benefited from the previous ceasefire and communities did not see any benefits. |
| 11. Communities suggest that unity among all ethnic groups would support the peace process. |

**Table 23. Northern Shan State Most Commonly Heard Themes Under Each Guide Question**

| NORTHERN SHAN STATE - Most commonly heard themes under each guide question | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Guide Questions** | | **Response** |
| 1 | What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | • Communities have limited information about the peace process, with some people saying the extent of their knowledge was that they heard the TNLA met with the government for talks.<br>• Some communities are mistrustful of the peace process – while the government says peace, communities continue to see fighting in their areas. The government's actions and words are not the same and communities still suffer from the ongoing fighting.<br>• Some communities recognise there have been positive changes since the start of the peace process, with some noticeable developments like the building of new schools in their communities. |
| 2 | What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | • Several participants brought up the need to have equal rights for all ethnic groups, as embodied in the saying, "One Kyat for Shan, one Kyat for Ta'ang".<br>• Some noted that although there are two recognised Ta'ang self-administered townships, they think that there are fifteen more that should be recognised.<br>• Communities also mentioned the importance of including the needs of communities in the peace negotiations: the need for basic social services, such as providing better access to the health care system, electricity and improving the roads; the need to improve the quality of education and make it inclusive by including Ta'ang language in the formal education system; the need to provide better economic opportunities for residents. |

| 3 | For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | • There needs to be transparency in the way government officials exercise their powers.<br>• There needs to be a way to include the people in the peace process.<br>• There needs to be recognition of equal ethnic rights.<br>• The words and actions of the government must align, as previous experience shows that the government often breaks its promises. |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | • One of the biggest challenges identified by participants was how the TNLA would be incorporated into the Myanmar army. Participants emphasised the need for negotiation first before this would be possible.<br>• Another big challenge is the attainment of self-administration for ethnic minority groups within the ethnic states.<br>• Communities also saw building trust between the government and the ethnic armed groups as a big challenge because of how the government broke its promises in the past.<br>• Several participants also pointed out how the peace talks failed to translate to a cessation of hostilities - *'We hear about discussions at the negotiating table, but the government and the ethnic armed groups are still fighting in the field'.*<br>• Participants identified Burmese favouritism as another barrier to the peace process, noting that all high positions in government have always been reserved for Burmese people. |
| 5 | What would help to overcome these challenges/concerns? | • Communities asked for education opportunities for their residents.<br>• Communities also saw the need to reduce military presence in the villages, as well as the need for effective and continued negotiations between the ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw. *"At the moment it's just words, but both sides are not keeping their promises."*<br>• Communities also highlighted the need for the government/Tatmadaw to stop the instances of land-grabbing. |

| 6 | What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | • Communities hoped that the continuing peace process would mean more freedom for them: freedom of movement, as well as better human security and the freedom to conduct business.<br>• Communities also hoped for equal ethnic rights, equal economic opportunities, and the right of self-administration.<br>• Communities also hoped the peace process would lead to socioeconomic development, primarily by providing communities with education, healthcare, transportation and better communication infrastructure. |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | • Several participants noticed that society had become a lot more open, meaning people can talk more openly about different topics and can read all kinds of materials. They also noticed that they can also meet freely with others now, even to talk about politics.<br>• Several participants also noticed that there has been an improvement in government services in providing ID cards.<br>• There have also been improvements in educational services, with several participants saying free education is now available in their villages.<br>• Some participants said that the Tatmadaw has stopped forcibly recruiting porters. Soldiers now make requests to the village head when they want to take something from the community.<br>• Communities have also noticed that some aid programmes, like the World Food Programme and malaria prevention programmes, have reached their villages. |

| 8 | Now, what is a challenge/ concern for you? | • Some communities are greatly affected by the continued fighting. People living in villages close to the fighting cannot work in their own farms due to unofficial military curfews and because it would be unsafe for them to travel in areas where there are many soldiers.<br>• Communities also spoke of the lack of job opportunities in their areas. As a result, many young people have to go to China to find work and avoid forced recruitment by ethnic armed groups. When these young people go to China, they also have to worry about the possibility of being victims of human trafficking.<br>• Communities are also greatly concerned about drug production, sale and use, and want these activities to stop.<br>• Land-grabbing is frequent. Communities believe the government takes their land and then issues land titles to Chinese companies.<br>• Some communities continue to be afraid of forced recruitment into ethnic armed groups or being forced to porter for the Tatmadaw.<br>• Communities are experiencing great economic hardship, with low incomes, but high living expenses.<br>• Communities are also greatly concerned about the low price of their tea leaves. |
| 9 | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | • Communities want to see peace and no more fighting. They want to be able to send their children to school and not worry for their children's safety. They want security: to be able to move freely and not worry about being attacked by Tatmadaw soldiers.<br>• They want effective rule of law.<br>• They want to eradicate drug use from their area.<br>• They want to have schools and teachers, healthcare centres and doctors and nurses for their communities. They also want better roads, and improved access to clean water and electricity.<br>• They want forced recruitment by non-Ta'ang ethnic armed groups in Ta'ang areas to stop. |

| 10 | What would help you achieve that? | • More education services would improve their future. Knowledge and information-sharing for communities would also help them to know what is going on.<br>• Communities want proper implementation of anti-drug laws as well as effective law enforcement. They also want to play a role in drug eradication, since they usually know who are involved in the drug trade in their villages. |
|---|---|---|
| 11 | What role could you have/how could you assist to achieve that? | • Some participants said they could join trainings, organise young people, and are even willing to contribute some money even if they do not have much.<br>• Several participants showed a willingness to help in any way they can but struggled to suggest solutions. |
| 12 | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | • Communities have also noticed that some aid programmes, like the World Food Programme and malaria prevention programmes, have reached their villages.There are many different ethnic groups and religions in the state. These groups must all unite to avoid conflict caused by the government's perceived divide and rule strategies.<br>• Communities have also noticed that some aid programmes, like the World Food Programme and malaria prevention programmes, have reached their villages.Communities see the religious violence that occurred in Lashio and Muse as a tactic used by the government to divide communities. According to them, communities used to live together with many different religions in harmony. After the violence, communication between these different religious groups has become more difficult. As one participant said, *"We have to think very hard about what we are going to say before we talk to them so that we don't offend them"*. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Drug use, trade and availability are also some of the biggest challenges of the state.<br>• The current fighting is also a big challenge for those living near the frontlines.<br>• Several participants said there is one particular concern in some families arising from situations where a female family member marries a Chinese man and then is forced to move/stay in China. |
| 13 | What would help you overcome these challenges? | • Communities have also noticed that some aid programmes, like the World Food Programme and malaria prevention programmes, have reached their villages.Several participants believed that knowledge-sharing about politics, economics and other topics would help people to tackle these problems.<br>• Communities have also noticed that some aid programmes, like the World Food Programme and malaria prevention programmes, have reached their villages.<br>• They also identified the need for all people to be united, regardless of ethnicity and religion.<br>• Participants also talked about the government, ethnic armed groups and communities needing to work together to overcome opium/drug problems. Communities can help because they usually know who is involved, but the police needs to cooperate by arresting drug producers/traders.<br>• Communities also believed there needed to be a stronger agreement between the ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw.<br>• Communities also needed to get a higher market price for their tea leaves so they could have a sufficient income from farming. |

**Table 24. Southern Shan State Most Commonly Heard Themes: Uncategorised**

| SOUTHERN SHAN STATE - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
|---|
| 1. Communities desire basic services. Basic services pertain to better/more regular access to electricity, improvements in transportation infrastructure, and improved access to healthcare, education, communication and clean water. |
| 2. Communities desire good governance, meaning more transparency and less corruption and nepotism in government. |
| 3. Communities desire more employment and economic opportunities. |
| 4. Drug-use and production is a significant concern for communities. The youth are particularly vulnerable to drug use and require preventative assistance. |
| 5. Communities desire information and want more awareness-raising opportunities about the peace process, politics, government processes, and rule of law. |
| 6. Communities experience difficulties with their livelihood. |
| 7. Communities experience land-grabbing by companies and government, want proper compensation for their lost land, and fair land registration processes. |
| 8. Communities define peace as a level of development when the government can provide for the basic needs of residents, respect their human rights, and ensure justice. |
| 9. Communities want companies engaged in resource extraction to apply sustainable environmental practices and stop environmentally destructive practices. |
| 10. Communities recognise various forms of discrimination and ask that measures be taken to address the need for equity in society. |
| 11. Communities feel disconnected from other ethnic groups in their area and desire unity. |
| 12. Communities want the government to be more transparent and accountable regarding transactions with companies engaged in resource extraction. They also want to receive a fair share of the profits earned from the projects in their areas. |
| 13. Communities desire community-level representation. |

**Table 25. Southern Shan State Most Commonly Heard Themes Under Each Guide Question**

| SOUTHERN SHAN STATE - Most commonly heard themes under each guide question | |
|---|---|
| **Guide Questions** | **Response** |
| 1 What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | • There is a lack of understanding about the meaning of the peace process.<br>• Communities emphasised how conflict has negatively impacted their lives in the past. |
| 2 What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | • Communities recognised the need to strengthen justice and development.<br>• There needs to be unity between government and the citizens, as well as rule of law.<br>• Government and NSAGs need to address issues of religious and ethnic discrimination.<br>• More opportunities are needed for community participation: the peace process should address the needs of communities.<br>• Continued injustice will hinder the achievement of peace. |
| 3 For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | • Communities desire peace and security.<br>• Holistic development for urban and rural areas, including education and health services, environmental preservation.<br>• Equal treatment of all ethnic groups will help to achieve peace. |
| 4 What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | • Corruption<br>• Disunity among the different communities.<br>• Drug production, sale and use, particularly for youth. |
| 5 What would help to overcome these challenges/ concerns? | • Good governance, justice and transparency.<br>• Collaboration and consultation between the government, ethnic armed groups, NGOs and CSOs, and communities. |

| 6 | What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | • Communities hoped to be able to live in peace, meaning they would no longer have to worry about violent conflict in their areas.<br>• Communities want to be able to meet their basic needs through development and democratic governance. |
|---|---|---|
| 7 | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | • Transportation infrastructure.<br>• Some areas have electricity.<br>• Decrease in fighting between the Tatmadaw and the NSAGs.<br>• Improved access to social services (education and communication, and transportation).<br>• More freedom to travel and speak about politics. |
| 8 | Now, what is a challenge/concern for you? | • Continued economic hardship (limited job and income generation opportunities).<br>• Communities want a government that represents their interests. |
| 9 | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | • Several communities said they wanted to see the government respect equal rights for all by providing equal basic services to all, whether they live in cities or in villages.<br>• Leaders to have community-centred approaches, particularly in development and extraction activities. |
| 10 | What would help you achieve that? | • Government officials need to work together with communities to achieve sustainable development.<br>• Communities desire opportunities to learn more about law, regulations and human rights. |
| 11 | What role could you have/how could you assist to achieve that? | • If community and government can work together, there will be unity and peace. |
| 12 | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | • Communities could not answer this question. |
| 13 | What would help you overcome these challenges? | • Everyone in the country should abide by the rule of law.<br>• If communities do not know what the law is, there will be no peace.<br>• Government, peace organisations and communities should work hand-in-hand to attain peace. |

**Table 26. Kayah State Most Commonly Heard Themes: Uncategorised**

| KAYAH STATE - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
|---|
| 1. Communities have experienced positive changes since the ceasefire. Communities are less militarised and have less restrictions compared to before the ceasefire. |
| 2. Communities have experienced an increase in freedom of movement. |
| 3. Communities perceive they are safer and have more freedom now. |
| 4. Communities find checkpoint taxation economically challenging and desire transparency in the system. |
| 5. Communities want transparent, equitable, inclusive and consultative approaches to resource extraction, and want to receive benefits from resource extraction projects in their areas. |
| 6. Communities are concerned about the ceasefire breaking down and want lasting peace. |
| 7. Communities want more community engagement in the peace process, including women's participation. |
| 8. Communities desire holistic development (electricity, economic growth, water, healthcare and education). |
| 9. Land-grabbing and land registration are concerns for communities. |
| 10. There is a need for trust-building between the Myanmar Government and the NSAGs. |
| 11. Drug issues are a significant social burden for communities. |
| 12. Communities desire equity in government service provision. |
| 13. Communities desire sincere engagement in peace process by government and armed groups. |
| 14. Communities desire more information about the peace process. |

**Table 27. Kayah State Most Commonly Heard Themes Under Each Guide Question**

| KAYAH STATE - Most commonly heard themes under each guide question | |
| --- | --- |
| **Guide Questions** | **Response** |
| 1 What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | • Communities expressed positive feelings about the peace process because they noticed more freedom and development.<br>• Communities are concerned about the ceasefire breaking down and lack of trust among the people. |
| 2 What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | • Sustainable peace process.<br>• Community engagement and inclusion of community needs in discussions (including civil society organisations).<br>• Need continued negotiations and trust-building between NSAG and government. |
| 3 For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | • Trust-building between the government and NSAGs to foster agreement.<br>• Include rights for communities. |
| 4 What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | • Communities still feel they have restrictions on business and security.<br>• There is a lack of trust and mutual understanding between NSAGs and government.<br>• Lack of community awareness of the peace process.<br>Continued military presence. |
| 5 What would help to overcome these challenges/concerns? | • Communities need to be involved in the peace process, equal rights and more freedom.<br>• Need for more frequent dialogue between government and NSAGs.<br>• Possible mediation support for dialogue. |
| 6 What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | • Lasting peace, basic human rights and freedom. |

| 7 | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | • Development improvements (transportation, healthcare, education).<br>• Basic rights and freedoms have improved.<br>• More access to information and an increase in basic political understanding.<br>• Recognition of ethnic languages in formal education system. |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | Now, what is a challenge/ concern for you? | • Lack of awareness about the peace process.<br>• Lack of job and economic opportunities.<br>• Natural resources extraction (environmental impact and lack of community benefit).<br>• Land-grabbing<br>• Concern about presence of armed soldiers in communities.<br>• Stagnation of the peace process |
| 9 | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | • Sustainable peace and holistic development.<br>• A community-centred approach to governance. |
| 10 | What would help you achieve that? | • Community participation and rights in the peace process.<br>• Development support.<br>• Government support, accountability and collaboration with communities (ceasefire, development, resource extraction). |
| 11 | What role could you have/how could you assist to achieve that? | Participate/volunteer in community mobilisation.<br>Do not know how to participate. It is the role of the leader to participate in the peace process (communities want to know how to participate). |
| 12 | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | • Perceived tensions and concerns about breakdowns in the ceasefire.<br>• Concern about impact of the election on the peace process.<br>• Land scarcity.<br>• Underdevelopment. |
| 13 | What would help you overcome these challenges? | • Unity between government and NSAGs.<br>• Community inclusion in the peace process.<br>• Transparent governance (including fair electoral process).<br>• Sincere approaches to the peace process by government and armed groups.<br>• Community-centred development projects (implemented by Government and NSAGs). |

**Table 28. Kayin State Most Commonly Heard Themes: Uncategorised**

| KAYIN STATE - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
|---|
| 1. Communities desire development in their areas (roads, electricity, education and healthcare). |
| 2. Communities desire lasting peace and hope that it is achieved soon. |
| 3. Communities have seen material improvements to roads, electrical infrastructure and education. |
| 4. Communities perceive the peace process to be in its early stages and do not fully trust the process. |
| 5. Communities feel positive about the peace process due to increased freedom of movement, decreased fighting, and less militarisation of communities. |
| 6. Drug use, particularly among the youth, and drug distribution is an increasing social concern. |
| 7. Communities have a limited awareness of the peace process. |
| 8. Peace (and the peace process) should benefit communities rather than only the government and NSAGs. |
| 9. The government and NSAGs should show sincerity and build trust and mutual understanding in the peace process. |

**Table 29. Kayin State Most Commonly Heard Themes Under Each Guide Question**

| KAYIN STATE - Most commonly heard themes relating to guide question | |
|---|---|
| **Guide Questions** | **Response** |
| 1 What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | • Scepticism about the peace process.<br>• Positive feelings due to improvements in development, less fighting, and more freedom of movement.<br>• Overall positivity about the peace process.<br>• Lack of awareness about the peace process. |
| 2 What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | • Negotiating parties need mutual understanding, trust, and to keep their promises.<br>• Code of conduct for both sides.<br>• Ceasefire agreements should benefit communities. |
| 3 For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | • Improvements in community development.<br>• More stakeholder engagement (e.g. communities, religious leaders, third parties). |
| 4 What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | • Insincere engagement by the government, NSAGs, national army and companies.<br>• Corruption<br>• Lack of trust between the government and NSAGs.<br>• Land-grabbing<br>• Ethnic discrimination. |
| 5 What would help to overcome these challenges/ concerns? | • Educational and organisational support to enable community participation.<br>• Community engagement in the peace process.<br>• Collaboration with the public. |
| 6 What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | • Peace and development. |

| 7 | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | • More freedom of movement.<br>• Better transportation by road.<br>• Less fear and fighting.<br>• Improvements to education and healthcare. |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | Now, what is a challenge/concern for you? | • Economic and livelihood challenges.<br>• Potential for a breakdown in the peace process.<br>• Corruption and high taxation rate. |
| 9 | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | • Development and peace.<br>• Youth education and leadership opportunities. |
| 10 | What would help you achieve that? | • People working together; unity. |
| 11 | What role could you have/how could you assist to achieve that? | • Public involvement through dialogue, consultation and community mobilisation. |
| 12 | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | • Drug use.<br>• Environmental concerns.<br>• Corruption |
| 13 | What would help you overcome these challenges? | • Everyone should abide by the law.<br>• The peace process should be achieved faster. |

**Table 30.  Mon State Most Commonly Heard Themes:** Uncategorised

| MON STATE - Most commonly heard themes: Uncategorised |
|---|
| 1.  Communities want real/sustainable peace (equal rights and living standards, freedom, no fighting). |
| 2.  People want official recognition of their ethnic language (the ability to learn, speak and teach their language). |
| 3.  People desire decentralised and representative governance and the right to govern their own state. |
| 4.  Community participation in the peace process is required and people want their voices to be heard. |
| 5.  Communities want Mon National Day recognised as a national holiday. |
| 6.  Freedom of movement has increased. |
| 7.  Communities are experiencing improvements but real peace has not been achieved yet. |
| 8.  Economic hardship exists due to inflation, a decrease in commodity prices (such as rubber and rice) and lack of economic opportunities. |
| 9.  Communities are uncertain whether the government's approach to the peace process is sincere. |
| 10. Drug use and production is a significant social concern. |
| 11. Road and electricity infrastructure (provided by the private and public sectors) has improved but requires further improvements. |

**Table 31. Mon State Most Commonly Heard Themes Under Each Guide Question**

| MON STATE - Most commonly heard themes under each guide question | |
|---|---|
| **Guide Questions** | **Response** |
| 1 What are your opinions and feelings about the peace process? | Communities want peace but real/sustainable peace hasn't been achieved yet. |
| 2 What would you talk about if you were at the peace negotiations? | • Equal rights.<br>• Unity, meaning all groups working together for peace.<br>• Decentralisation of governance. |
| 3 For you, what are the most important things that need to be included in the peace process? | • Fulfillment of promises.<br>• Community development.<br>• Representative state government. |
| 4 What are the biggest challenges in the peace process? | • Exploitation of the community due to a lack of education.<br>• Drug use.<br>• Current fighting.<br>• Transparency, financial accountability for development spending and sharing information on peace process and politics. |
| 5 What would help to overcome these challenges/ concerns? | • Transparency financial accountability for development spending and sharing information on peace process and politics.<br>• Understanding and cooperation between government and non-state armed groups with communities. |
| 6 What do you hope the peace process will achieve? | Sustainable peace; however, uncertainty exists about achievability. |

| 7 | What things have changed since the beginning of the peace process? | • Increased inflation and living costs.<br>• Improved transportation and road infrastructure.<br>• Improved provision of electricity, although it still needs improvement.<br>• Freedom of speech.<br>• Better healthcare. |
|---|---|---|
| 8 | Now, what is a challenge/concern for you? | • Low price of rubber (for farmers who are selling).<br>• Lack of education.<br>• Security.<br>• Rule of law. |
| 9 | What do you want to see in the future in your community? | • Equal rights.<br>• Development.<br>• Peace and security.<br>• Unity. |
| 10 | What would help you achieve that? | • Job opportunities.<br>• Educational opportunities.<br>• Controlled inflation.<br>• Religious freedom. |
| 11 | What role could you have/how could you assist to achieve that? | • Volunteer.<br>• Work together.<br>• Share information. |
| 12 | What is the biggest challenge for the future in your state? | • Lack of job opportunities.<br>• Need for development.<br>• Corruption.<br>• Increased drug use.<br>• Military presence and potential fighting.<br>• Religious conflict. |
| 13 | What would help you overcome these challenges? | • Mutual respect, unity and trust between the government, non-state armed groups and communities.<br>• People in powerful positions should abide by promises. |

The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies is home to a range of interconnected programmes that promote the advancement of peace processes, research and learning. It creates opportunities for practitioners, students, academics and analysts to access information and resources that are contextually grounded.

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