

Analysis of Education Services in Contested Regions of Myanmar

Final Report

July 2015



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Myanmar Education Consortium



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Acknowledgements

Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) works with partners to improve education for marginalised children in Myanmar – those not fully served by the government system – whether due to access, language, poverty or exclusion, for instance due to disability. MEC supports complementary basic education services – community-based, faith-based and ethnic education systems – through funding to partners to deliver services and organisational support to build effective organisations. The programme promotes inclusive, evidence-based policy dialogue through networking and knowledge sharing. MEC is managed by Save the Children and supported by the governments of Australia, UK and Denmark with a programme budget of AUD29m for 2013-2016.

MEC is developing a revised strategy for the period to the end of 2018. This study was commissioned to provide an evidence base and recommendations on potential strategic programming priorities to MEC. The research was done in June and July 2015 and therefore the report is out of date in some respects. The views presented in this report are those of the consultants and do not necessarily represent those of the MEC.

The consultants extend their warm thanks to the many individuals and organisations who gave up their time to meet with us and to provide us with an insight into the education situation in ethnic nationality areas.

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Executive summary

This report was commissioned by MEC to provide the background analysis for the development of MEC's strategy and specifically to provide a situational analysis on basic education in contested areas, including barriers for children in achieving a quality education; an analysis of existing systems and organisations providing education services, the support they receive and areas where systems could be strengthened; as well as to identify opportunities for MEC to provide support and provide recommendations for MEC programme design.

Children in rural ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar face specific challenges in accessing quality basic education, related to language, teacher deployment, and curriculum. These challenges are not adequately addressed – and in many cases are exacerbated, albeit unintentionally – by government service provision and government policies. This contributes to the perception on the part of many ethnic groups that the state is intentionally 'Burmanising' Myanmar's ethnic minorities, and this perception fuels distrust of the central government, and contributes to ethnic grievances. Education – and the right to an education that celebrates and supports ethnic identity – is a driver of conflict in Myanmar and one of the priority points for discussion in the political dialogue that is expected to take place as part of the peace process.

Ethnic education providers, including the education departments of armed groups and affiliated NGOs, fill many of the gaps left by the government basic education system in ethnic nationality areas, as well as providing basic education services in areas under their direct control. The services they provide sometimes –

but not always – complement and occasionally overlap with government education services, but are often much more accessible to children from ethnic minority backgrounds. For example, they provide teaching at primary level in mother tongue, which is internationally recognised to be the most effective method of ensuring that children establish concrete foundations for learning. However, ethnic education providers face challenges in delivering these services related to government (and international donor) lack of recognition of the legitimacy of these services, as well as challenges in delivering these services in complex, conflict-affected and under-resourced contexts.

The report argues that support to ethnic education providers is essential for ensuring that children in many ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar have access to education. Ethnic education providers should be supported because they have greater legitimacy and coverage than the government in many ethnic nationality areas, and thus funding to government is neither effective nor appropriate. While in some cases supporting ethnic education providers may amount to continuation of existing parallel (and complementary) systems, this is necessary in the short to medium term given the context, and particularly the fragility of the peace process.

Support to ethnic education providers should cover three interlinked areas:

1. Core service delivery, namely support to the core costs of service provision to ensure that children can access education
2. Systems and capacity development, to improve the quality of education that is provided

3. Policy engagement, to enable ethnic education providers to engage in policy dialogue processes in order to identify and agree options for future decentralised governance systems, and to ensure that children in these systems have the best possible opportunities for education and beyond.

We suggest that MEC develops three kinds of programmes under these areas:

1. Single source procurement for a restricted number of the bigger ethnic education providers
2. A flexible fund mechanism for quality improvement, systems development and policy engagement
3. Direct implementation of a small number of policy engagement activities. The report concludes with recommendations for how MEC can develop and implement such programmes, and a discussion of the risks involved in working in this area.



Children in refugee camp. Credit: Save the Children Thailand

Children in rural ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar face specific challenges in accessing quality basic education, related to language, teacher deployment, and curriculum.

Definitions/Nomenclature

Complementary system	A system of education provision that fills gaps in the coverage and quality of the government education system.
Convergence	Bringing together parallel/complementary systems. In Myanmar this term is sometimes used to mean merging ethnic education systems under the government system and is therefore viewed with a certain degree of caution. We use the definition proposed by some ethnic education providers: ‘Convergence is a process of dialogue, collaboration and agreement within and across borders to ensure all people have equal access to relevant and quality education and training that is valued and recognised ¹ .’
Ethnic	Relating to a population subgroup with a common national or cultural tradition. In Myanmar, ‘ethnic’ (တိုင်းရင်းသား) in Burmese) is generally used to refer to groups with a common national or cultural tradition that is different from that of the majority Bamar population. See footnote (2) for caveats.
EAG-EDs	Ethnic armed group education departments.
Ethnic nationality areas	Myanmar’s ethnic groups live predominantly in the hilly border areas that ring the central plains. The most politically acceptable term in Burmese for these areas is ‘ethnic nationality areas’ (တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးဒေသ).
Decentralisation	The transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organisations ² .
EEOs	Ethnic education organisations (EEOs) or ethnic education providers comprise the EAG-EDs as well as CSOs and CBOs originating from the ethnic areas who provide education services in these areas.
Federalism	There are multiple competing definitions of this term in Myanmar. We do not have our own definition: it is for the political dialogue discussions that take place as part of the peace process to define this.

1. ‘Defining and Planning for Education Convergence’, powerpoint presentation, March 2015.

2. Hamish Nixon et al., State and Region Governments in Myanmar, MDRI/CESD and The Asia Foundation, 2013.



Girl from Karen Thai-based refugee camp. Credit: Save the Children Thailand

MTB-MLE

Mother-Tongue Based Multi-Lingual Education is the internationally recommended approach to delivering education in multi-lingual states and areas with large ethnic minority populations

National

We use “national” in two senses: 1) as a name for activities at the Union State level, and 2) as a name for activities at ethnic state level.

Parallel systems

Refers to the existence of one or more systems of organised provision of education within a larger (national) framework. It is often considered wasteful because of duplication and diversification of resources. It is often considered negatively because it implies duplication of services and diversification of resources. In Myanmar, we argue, it is a necessity to ensure the continuation of basic educational services within ethnic areas in a situation where the government neither has the commitment nor the capacity to ensure this provision.

Acronyms

ACS	Adventist Community Services	KnED	Karenni Education Department
ADRA	Adventist Development in Rural Area	KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
AG	Armed Group	KPC	Karen Peace Council (KNLAPC-Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council)
CB	Capacity Building	KNU	Karen National Union
CBO	Community Based Organisation	KNGY	Karenni New Generation Youth
CD	Curriculum Development	KnLCC	Karenni Language and Cultural Committee
CNF	Chin National Front	KNPP	Karenni National People's Party
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	KRCEE	Karen Refugee Camps Education Entity
DEO	District Education Officer	KSEAG	Karen State Education Assistance Group
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army	KTWG	Karen Teachers' Working Group
EAGs	Ethnic Armed Groups	KWO	Karen Women Organisation
EEOs	Ethnic Education Organisations	KWO	Kachin Women Organisation
EMIS	Education Management Information System	MBC	Myanmar Baptist Convention
EO	Education Officer	MCC	Myanmar Christian Churches Council
EPRP	Ethnic Peace Resources Project	MEC	Myanmar Education Consortium
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio	MNEC	Mon National Education Committee
HE	Higher Education	MNED	Mon National Education Department
HS	High School	MoE	Ministry of Education
ILO	International Labour Organisation	MORA	Ministry of Religious Affairs
IHLCS	Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey	NMSP	New Mon State Party
INSET	In-Service Teacher Training	MINE	Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education
IRC	International Rescue Committee	EBCS	Eastern Burma Community Schools
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention	MORA	Ministry of Religious Affairs
KED	Karen Education Department	MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue based Multi
KIA	Kachin Independence Army		
KIO CC	Kachin Independence Council		
KIO Ed	Kachin Independence Organisation Education Department (KIO-ED)		
KMSS	Karuna Myanmar Social Services		

	Lingual Education
MTT	Mobile Teacher Trainer
Natala	Ministry of Border Affairs
NER	NET Enrolment Ratio
NNER	National Network for Education Reform
NPA	Norwegian People’s Aid
PLE	Project for Local Empowerment
PNLA	Pa ‘Oh Liberation Army
PNO	Pa ‘Oh National Organisation
PRESET	Pre-Service Teacher Training
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTR	“Pupil Teacher Ratio” (read: Student-Teacher Ratio)
RPF	Rahmonya Peace Foundation
RDSS	Rural Development For Shan State
RDFSS	Rural Development Foundation For Shan State
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SMC	School Management Committee
SSA-N	Shan State Army (North)
SSA-S	Shan State Army (South)
TEO	Township Education Officer
TLM	Teaching Learning Materials
TMD	Tatmadaw (Army)
TT	Teacher Training
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UWSA	United Wa Solidarity Army
WB	World Bank
WE	World Education
ZOA	‘Zuid Oost Azië’
3MDG	3 Millennium Development Goals



Children at Mai Maw Middle School, Wa State
Credit: Myanmar Education Consortium



Mai Maw Township, Wa State
Credit: Myanmar Education Consortium

I. Introduction

Myanmar's people comprise a majority Bamar ethnic population (approximately 60%³) and a variety of smaller groups of diverse cultures and identities, commonly referred to in Myanmar as ethnic nationality groups⁴. The Bamar population lives mostly in the central plains of the country (corresponding in the constitution to seven 'regions'), as well as in the larger towns of the hilly areas that ring the country, which are divided up into seven 'states', designated on the basis of the majority ethnic population in those areas, but populated by a diverse range of ethnic groups. These seven states are the 'contested areas' to which this consultancy refers⁵.

For much of Myanmar's independence (and during earlier periods as well), relations between the majority Bamar population and groups with different languages and cultures has been characterised by tension and outbreaks of conflict, over claims to ethnic rights and identity, self-governance and control over natural resources. These conflicts have resulted in large-scale migration from many of Myanmar's designated states, causing tens of thousands to become displaced or to flee across the border into Thailand, and destroying the economic and development foundations of communities⁶. In areas where

3. Actual percentage not known and controversial; 2014 census data on ethnicity has not yet been released due to the possibility this could trigger conflict between different groups.

4. A classification of these groups was undertaken in the 1980s, which divided up Myanmar's population into 135 official 'national races'; however the categorisations are widely contested. For a useful explanation of the futility – and the risks – of defining fixed ethno-linguistic categories, see Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 1991.

5. The terms of reference for the consultancy called for 'an overview of the context in the designated states in Myanmar, excluding Rakhine'.

6. For useful summaries see Tom Kramer, *Developing Disparity: Regional Investment in Burma's Borderlands*, TNI, 2013;

control is contested by armed groups and the government, education and health services have been sparse or non-existent. Nonetheless, many communities and the education departments of some ethnic armed groups have been able to establish comprehensive education systems and reasonably well functioning community schools.

Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) is a coalition of three INGOs, Save the Children, World Vision and Burnet Institute. MEC works with partners to improve education for marginalised children in Myanmar, who are not fully served by the government system. MEC supports complementary basic education services through funding to partners to deliver services and organisational support to build effective organisations. MEC is currently developing a revised strategy and as part of this they want to consider how MEC could provide support to education in ethnic areas. This consultancy report was commissioned to provide an evidence base and strategic advice to this process.

The purpose of the consultancy is:

1. To provide a situational analysis on basic education in contested areas including barriers for children in achieving a quality education
2. To provide an analysis of existing systems and organisations providing education services, the support they receive and areas where systems could be strengthened
3. To identify opportunities for MEC to provide support
4. To provide recommendations for MEC programme design.

International Crisis Group, Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative, 30 November 2011.

2. Background

In November 2010, following the roadmap set out in the 2008 constitution, Myanmar held parliamentary elections. These elections marked a transition from military rule to quasi-democratic rule, as indicated by the fact that the many candidates for election who came from the ruling military had to step down from the military in order to run. In March 2011, in his inaugural speech, President Thein Sein set out his plan for the country's development and democratic transition under his presidential term, with specific commitments for politics, peace, the economy and social sectors including education⁷. This speech was followed by the initiation of multiple parallel reform processes. These processes include reform of the country's political order through the implementation and review of the 2008 constitution, the negotiation of ceasefire agreements and the launching of a peace process to end the country's long-running civil conflicts, and the reform of the education sector. Since late 2012 education reform has been mainly through the donor-supported and Ministry of Education-run Comprehensive Education Sector Review, as well as a parliamentary law development process (since late 2013). While the processes are interlinked, they have often seemed to run in parallel to each other with very little opportunities to ensure coordination or coherence.

Arguably the driving motivation for these reforms (aside from the military's commitment to seeing out the roadmap it set for itself when it took power in the 1990s) has been the prospect of increased investment – both economic investment and development aid – for Myanmar's chronic state of under-development, and in light of the country's

7. President Thein Sein's inaugural speech to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, 30 March 2011, republished in English in *The New Light of Myanmar*, 31 March 2011.

increasing financial and economic dependence on China⁸. OECD governments, which had massively restricted their development budgets in Myanmar as part of a programme of economic sanctions and isolation of the military regime⁹, started to rapidly re-engage with Myanmar from ca. 2012 onwards¹⁰, with corresponding aid commitments.

An election is scheduled for later this year (November 2015), on which numerous expectations regarding the democratic transition are pinned, but which itself carries multiple risks in relation to conflict within the country as well as for existing education (and other development) plans.

Education background

Decades of underinvestment in, and mismanagement of, Myanmar's education system on the part of successive military and quasi-military governments have resulted in chronic inequalities in access to education across the country, and chronically poor quality education provision¹¹. The military government, which ruled from 1990 to 2010, strictly limited international involvement in and support

8. International Crisis Group, *Myanmar's Military: Back to the Barracks?* 22 April 2014.

9. Between 1990 and 2007 Myanmar had the lowest rates of overseas aid of all 50 countries with least developed country (LDC) status. Soubhik Ronnie Saha, *Working Through Ambiguity: International NGOs in Myanmar*, The Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organisations, Harvard University, 2011. ODA per capita had fallen back to \$5.6 in 2010, in line with the 1990-2007 levels of less than \$5 annually. Ibid and *Myanmar: ODA shrinks post-Nargis*, *Irin News*, 24 January 2011.

10. Although there had been some prior engagement, largely forgotten now. See Lex Rieffel, *The Economy of Burma/ Myanmar on the Eve of the 2010 Elections*, United States Institute of Peace, 2010.

11. See e.g. Hayden M and Martin R (2013), 'Recovery of the Education System in Myanmar', *Journal of International and Comparative Education*, 2013, Volume 2, Issue 2.

for the education sector, as did the Burmese Socialist Progress Party (BSPP) regime before it (1962-1988).

Most international support for education during this period was directed towards the multiplicity of non-state actors working to fill the gaps in the government's education provision, through monastic and other faith-based schools, civil society initiatives and the education programmes of non-state armed groups¹². This resulted in the provision of donor support to a number of parallel education systems that were set up in non-government controlled areas and in the refugee camps on the Thai side of the border. A substantial amount of that aid was delivered cross-border from Thailand¹³. It was in this pre-transition context that MEC was first developed.

The transition period has seen a massive shift in terms of the way that international support to education is delivered in Myanmar. The international community in Yangon (the former capital) and Naypyidaw (the capital) has agreed to commit substantial amounts of funding towards government education programmes¹⁴, and has supported a government-led education reform process, the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), which is intended to culminate this year (2015) in the finalisation of a costed National Education Sector Plan (NESP).

12. Jasmin Lorch, *Myanmar's Civil Society – a Patch for the National Education System? The Emergence of Civil Society in Areas of State Weakness*, *Südöstasian Aktuell*, 2007/3.

13. Figures for the amount of cross-border aid are not known.

14. See particularly Australia (Steve Tickner, *Australia Pledges 80 million for Burmese Education, 11 June 2012, The Irrawaddy*, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/australia-pledges-80m-for-burmese-education.html>); EU [EU Relations with Myanmar/ Burma, http://eeas.europa.eu/myanmar/index_en.htm]; *Record of Discussion on the Project for Curriculum Reform at Primary Level of Basic Education in Myanmar in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar*, Agreed Upon between the Ministry of Education and Japan International Cooperation Agency, 31 January 2014.

However, the education reform process itself has been highly politicised¹⁵, with many groups feeling excluded from, or questioning the genuineness of, the reform. Popular discontent culminated in the countrywide student protest movement, which started in early 2014 and was largely directed against the new Education Law (passed 30 September 2014¹⁶). This movement grew to the extent that in March 2015, the government agreed to amend the law, but the revisions made in parliament seem to have resulted in very few – if any – substantive changes to the 2014 Law. Ethnic groups are one of the many groups that have felt excluded from the process and are concerned about the unrepresentative nature of the law and of the CESR/NESP.

During this time the government has also increased funding to education significantly (from a very low base) and introduced a number of programmes designed to demonstrate its commitment to reform in the education sector. These programmes include mass recruitment and deployment of teachers, making primary education 'free and compulsory'¹⁷, construction of classrooms, and introduction of a schools grants and stipends programme, now supported by Australia and the World Bank.

Conflict background

In August 2011, the government invited ethnic armed groups for peace talks¹⁸, and since

15. See Pyoe Pin, *The Political Economy of Basic Education in Myanmar*, March 2014. This dynamic is common across many aspects of the reform.

16. National Network for Education Reform (NNER), *Request to Government, Hluttaw and Educational organisations concern about the student's demonstration on National Education Law*, 27 January 2015.

17. Myanmar, National Education Law (2014, Parliamentary Law No. 41), 1376, New Moon of Thadingyut 7th day, September 30, 2014.

18. The process is set out in Richard Horsey, *Prospects for the Myanmar Peace Process*, CPPF Research Paper, January 2015 and

October 2013, the present government and 16 armed groups¹⁹ have been working towards the signing of a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA). The expectation on the part of both the government and the armed groups is that after the NCA has been signed, the peace process will continue in the form of a political dialogue between a wider group of actors²⁰. The majority of the armed actors involved in the process claim to represent an ethnic minority population, and some of these groups have been in conflict with the government for over 60 years²¹.

Conflict broke out across Burma (as it was then called) almost as soon as the country gained independence from Britain in 1948. While one of the main post-independence uprisings was communist, the politics of ethnic identity have played a defining role in the conflicts that have ebbed and flowed since that time, and almost all of the armed groups have claimed to represent a particular ethnic minority population²². The dynamics of conflict had been set long before and crystallised during the colonial period²³ and their complexity resists summarisation. However, it is important to

Min Zaw Oo, *Understanding Myanmar's Peace Process: Ceasefire Agreements*, Catalyzing Reflection Series, swisspeace, 2014.

19. The number of armed groups who will be allowed to sign the NCA is the major remaining point of contention between the government and the armed groups. Nyein Nyein and Neng Seng Nom, "All-inclusive pact proves elusive as latest peace talks close", 7 August 2015, *The Irrawaddy*. See also Richard Horsey, *Myanmar: What Next for the Peace Process?*, CPPF Briefing Paper, 10 June 2015. Throughout the years of conflict, many ethnic states have become host to numerous militias – both government and non-government affiliated – as well as the armed groups recognised as part of the peace process. This further complicates the situation on the ground.

20. See Euro-Burma Office briefing papers e.g. *DEED of COMMITMENT For Peace and Reconciliation*, February 2015; presentation of Hannes Siebert and colleagues to International Peace Support Group (IPSG), Yangon, 13 May 2015.

21. Ashley South, *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict*, TNI, 2011.

22. Martin Smith 1991; Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State-Building in Burma*, 2005; Bertil Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, 2000.

23. Callahan 2005; Smith 1991.

understand the underlying causes and drivers of ethnic-central government conflicts, as these greatly influence and affect the debate about education in ethnic nationality areas. In brief, these might be described as:

- The desire on the part of the ethnic groups for a level of self-governance (differs between each group how much and what this would look like), and a fundamental difference of opinion as to what a 'federal' state would look like and the risk (as seen by the government) it might pose to central unity²⁴
- The desire for recognition of ethnic rights, culture and identity in the face of perceived (and possibly actual) strategies on the part of the central Tatmadaw/government to impose a unifying and homogenising vision of the Myanmar state. Education is a key part of this, and is one of the priority agenda points for the political dialogue that it is hoped will take place as part of the peace process
- Grievances as a result of war crimes and human rights violations on both sides, but particularly the harsh military policies of the Tatmadaw (the Myanmar armed forces)²⁵
- Control over taxation and extraction of natural resources²⁶
- Questions concerning the legitimacy of the state in providing services – including education services – in these areas, and the underdevelopment of ethnic areas despite the abundance of natural resources in many (though not all) of these areas.

While some conflicts have lasted more than

24. Arguably the main reason for the 1962 coup, as U Nu appeared to be willing to discuss options for federalism, and the Shan states were developing their own constitution. See Martin Smith 1991.

25. See Martin Smith 1991 and Bertil Lintner 2000 as well as reports of human rights watchdogs. For a recent example, see ALTSEAN Burma, *Ethnic Areas Update: Burma Heads Towards Civil War*, 2011.

26. Myanmar Peace Monitor, *Economics of Peace and Conflict*, Burma News International, September 2013

60 years, there have been multiple attempts to forge peace, or at least to broker ceasefires, some of these more legitimate than others. The history of prior attempts at peacemaking has also influenced the current situation, in the following ways:

- Lack of trust as to the genuine intention of the government and the Tatmadaw in suing for peace, particularly given continued fighting in Northern Shan and Kachin²⁷
- Continued reluctance by the Tatmadaw to genuinely consider possible options for a certain amount of self-rule/governance in ethnic areas (commonly referred to as federalism). The ceasefires brokered in the 1990s are instructional in this respect: fighting ceased, but political settlements were never agreed with most groups²⁸
- The need of Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) to maintain their own administrative structures and service provision, including for health and education, in the absence of a genuine political settlement. This is particularly significant given that if EAGs relinquish administrative power to the government, and then fighting begins again (as in Kachin after a ceasefire from 1994-2011), non-government administrative structures will have to be rebuilt from scratch. At the same time, ceasefires have enabled some groups to develop relatively stable systems, and to reach a set of pragmatic compromises with the government regarding recognition of these administrative systems²⁹. These will be discussed further below.

27. Precedents set, in the eyes of the armed groups, by the BSPP government's 1963 peace talks *inter alia* – see Martin Smith for a summary of the differing views as to the motivations for these talks.

28. The Wa is an exception. See Tom Kramer, *Neither War nor Peace: The Future of the Cease-Fire Agreements in Burma*, TNI, 2009.

29. See Marie Lall and Ashley South, *Education, Conflict and Identity: Non-state ethnic education regimes in Burma/Myanmar*, March 2012.

Certainly, communities in many of the areas that we visited are sceptical about the likelihood that the current peace process will result in genuine peace³⁰. One official from an education department described this particularly well:

“It’s like burning wood. At the start of the peace process we had a very strong flame. Now, after three to four years, we are at embers and ash.”

30. A small number of ‘listening projects’ have started to develop a much richer picture of communities’ perceptions of the current peace process than we were able to glean. See CPCS Listening Projects series, available at <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org>, and MPSI, *Lessons Learned from MPSI’s work supporting the peace process in Myanmar: March 2012 to March 2014*, 2014.



Pupils from Yay Phyu Village School, Seiseng Township, Shan State

3. Methodology

The analytical framework for the consultancy consisted of four pillars:

1. An identification of basic education problems in ethnic nationality areas³¹ of Myanmar
2. A mapping of actors/providers of education in these areas
3. An analysis of issues and problems facing these providers, and
4. An identification of potential intervention options.

The approach included the following activities:

- Literature review (see annex for references)
- Interviews with over 40 education stakeholders in Thailand (Mae Sot, Mae

Hong Son, Mae Sariang, Chiang Mai), Mon state (Mawlamyine and La Maing), Karen state (Hpa’an), Kayah state (Loikaw and Demowso), Shan state (Taunggyi, Hopon, Lashio, Hispaw), and Kachin state (Myitkyina)

- School visits in Yangon region and Kayin, Mon and Kayah states
- Key informant interviews in Yangon with 11 conflict and education experts.

The eastern corridor of Myanmar – Mon, Karen, Kayah, Shan and Kachin states – as well as bordering parts of Thailand were chosen as the focus for research, largely on the basis that this would allow us to meet with the largest number of non-government actors involved in providing education in ethnic nationality areas. (Rakhine was explicitly excluded in the TOR.)

We relied extensively on existing networks

31. တိုင်းရင်းသားလူမျိုးဒေသ – we thought this was the most appropriate/accepted terminology.

of the consultants and (to a lesser extent) MEC in order to identify interviewees, rather than going to a particular area and starting to map the actors in each area in order to ensure comprehensive coverage of that area³². Reasons for choosing geographical range over in-depth assessments of any particular area or group are described in the section on limitations. To help with focus, we chose not to look at service provision in the health sector, even though the health sector faces some similar issues and despite the fact that lessons can potentially be learnt from experiences in the health sector.

The team was highly aware of the need for conflict sensitivity in its approach to this consultancy.

We decided to privilege the suggestion of one of the donors that the consultancy produce a 'practical, possible introduction to working in ethnic education in an incremental way'. We took this to mean that the focus be not so much on providing an 'off the shelf' menu of options for working with a generic set of ethnic education actors, but rather – especially in light of the sensitivity and complexity of this area – setting out the steps of the process that MEC would need to take in order to be able to develop and design effective and conflict-sensitive programmes.



Mother Tongue Based School run by EED. Credit: Liza May Thet Thet Oo

32. This resulted in a necessary selection bias: our assumption was that this would ensure that we met with the more prominent and more established groups in any area. We also inferred (based on discussions with the MEC director) that MEC would have a preference for working with larger and more established actors and therefore that it was more important to meet with them than to meet with – and perhaps raise the hopes of – smaller groups with whom MEC was less likely to work.

4. Limitations

The scope of a consultancy to analyse education in contested ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar is necessarily vast – it applies to large swathes of the country (seven ethnic states, of which only Rakhine state was excepted in the terms of reference) and to a wide variety of types of service providers and contexts. There is also relatively little prior reliable research and data on this fascinating and important area for Myanmar’s development, with a few notable exceptions.

We faced the following limitations in undertaking the consultancy:

- In light of the **short timeframe** for the consultancy, the decision to cover as much ground as possible, and the need to prioritise meeting with ethnic education actors who were the main focus of the study, we were unable to:
 - 1. Meet with government**– MOE, MPC – to get their perspective on the issues covered in this report³³. A mapping of government perceptions would be hugely beneficial to developing work to support ethnic education.
 - 2. Meet with UNICEF in Yangon** (although we did meet with field staff)
 - 3. Comprehensively map education service coverage in any single area.**We also couldn’t meet with all actors in any one area – e.g. in Karen state we didn’t meet with DBKA, in Southern Shan we didn’t meet with the PNO-ED. We spent a very short amount of time with most stakeholders and in most areas – maximum 48 hours in most locations. The requirement to submit a TA so far in

33. We reported to DSW officials in the field as part of fulfilling the obligations of the TA, but we did not interview them for the consultancy; most pointed out to us that basic education does not fall under their remit.

advance also affected our ability to plan for school visits and travel outside of towns.

4. Cover every state. We didn’t travel to Chin (although we did speak with one Chin education actor) and our travel in Shan was limited to the western stretch of the state, therefore leaving out potentially key education departments of armed groups, such as the education department of the United Wa State Army. We also could not cover the situation for ethnic children in Myanmar’s states

The MEC director and MEC team provided significant support for logistics of travel planning, for which we are very grateful. In addition, the MEC director was also involved at the start of the consultancy with the consultancy design, and two MEC staff members accompanied us on our travel in Myanmar (for which additional logistical support we are also very grateful).

There is a paucity of quality research and robust data on the issues covered in this report and on ethnic areas in general. This has made it difficult for us to confidently assess the scale of needs, and also means there is a lot of groundwork to cover in introducing and mapping the issues. The need for additional research in this area is huge. Some areas that fell completely outside of our remit and which would merit further research include:

- How are education services provided in ‘grey’ or ‘brown’ areas, i.e. contested areas where there is no clear single authority (government or non-government)?
- What are the perceptions of government regarding ethnic education needs?
- How are education services provided in self-administered zones and what are the



Government school in Ethnic Area. Credit: : Liza May Thet Thet Oo

needs in these zones and opportunities to support the education departments in these areas?³⁴

- What do communities value in terms of education? We heard many times that the education that was on offer was not relevant for livelihoods available to communities, nor likely to provide other career opportunities, on the basis of which parents often decided it wasn't worth sending their children to school. Anthropological research on what communities value as education and is useful could inform future local curricula/ accreditation frameworks³⁵.

34 See e.g. Sandar Lwin, *Autonomy and the development gap*, *Myanmar Times*, Monday, 03 June 2013 and Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar*, The Asia Foundation, 2015.

35. Research related to this question is reportedly being undertaken by Greg Cathcart, commissioned by Ethnic Peace Resources Project (EPRP) .

5. Key findings and analysis

5.1 Situation analysis

The basic education situation for children in ethnic nationality areas is the focus of this report. However, in our interviews many people described both problems that affect children in all rural areas – and problems that are specific to children from ethnic nationality areas/backgrounds. We therefore start with the problems that face all children in rural areas – which may affect children in ethnic nationality areas more severely – before moving on to what is unique about the problems facing children from ethnic nationality areas. These problems combined, build a compelling case for focusing MEC support on ethnic nationality areas/backgrounds.

A lack of robust data makes it difficult to set out the situation authoritatively – not to mention to design and implement programmes to address these problems³⁶. However, analysis undertaken as part of the CESR shows that children living in rural areas across Myanmar are much less likely than urban children to be able to complete primary school and progress onwards through the full 11 years of basic education, with poor girls at a particular disadvantage (see table

below)³⁷. 88% of primary school-aged children (5-9 years) were enrolled in school in academic year 2009/2010³⁸, and 83% of children who enrol complete primary school³⁹. Less than half of that 83% complete middle school (see table opposite).

As well as being inequitable in terms of urban/rural and girls/boys, the education system is inequitable in terms of the coverage it provides to children with disabilities⁴⁰.

The picture is less clear regarding children from ethnic nationality backgrounds (see the table in the annexes, which disaggregates by region. This depicts a very different picture to the picture we were told in interviews⁴¹). The absence of data that affects Myanmar development is particularly lacking in ethnic nationality areas. This may be due to a combination of challenges for government staff in reaching ‘hard to reach’, conflict-affected areas, a preference for/tendency towards

36. Government data is unreliable – tending to represent a more positive picture of the situation than exists – and is of poor quality. Reliable data on rural and especially some ethnic nationality areas is particularly lacking. For example, as Chris Spohr notes, ‘IHLCs survey teams were unable to reach at least a small number of highly remote and conflict-affected areas, where we expect that education access may be more problematic.’ ADB, MOE and Australia (2014), *CESR Supplementary Annex: Updated Analysis of Education Access, Retention, and Attainment in Myanmar, with a Focus on Post-Primary Education*. On the unreliability of education data and the lack of planning see Muta, Hiromitsu (2015). *Regional Disparity of Educational Conditions in Townships*; World Bank (2014). *Public Expenditure Review, Myanmar*; the sub-sector reports of the Ministry of Education’s *National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016-2021*.

37. MOE (2014) *CESR Phase 2: In-Depth Analysis, SECONDARY EDUCATION SUBSECTOR, BE Sub-component 3: Secondary Education Subsector Access, Quality, and Management*.

38. ADB, MOE and Australia (2014). Cited in MOE (2015), *Access, Quality and Inclusion, Sub-sector Report No. 3, National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2015-19, Comprehensive Education Sector Review Phase 3*. This report notes that it is not clear – and nor does the CESR/ADB/Australia analysis specify – whether this figure includes data from monastic schools or other types of non-government schools. There is no integrated database to take into account data from non-government schools.

39. MOE (2014c), *Comprehensive Education Sector Review, Phase 2 Report: Primary Education Report*; ADB, MOE and Australia (2014). *CESR Supplementary Annex*.

40. MOE (2015), *Access, Quality and Inclusion; Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) 2013*, *Disability Inclusion Guidelines*; ECDC and VSO (2015). *A Space to Learn for All Children? Inclusive Education and Children with Disabilities in Yangon, Myanmar*.

41. Taken directly from ADB, MOE and Australia (2014). *CESR Supplementary Annex*.

depicting the situation in as positive a light as possible on the part of previous governments, and the poor quality of the data that is collected⁴². In addition, while non-government actors gather data that could help to fill in some of the blanks, this data itself suffers from quality issues and more importantly is often felt to be sensitive, which means that groups are uncomfortable sharing it widely.

It was very difficult in many of our interviews to get a sense of the scale of the problem. For example, we think there are fewer schools in ethnic nationality areas, that the transport infrastructure is worse, and that children are more likely to be displaced or schools to be closed or damaged by conflict. We think there are also overall fewer middle and high schools – although it is hard to know whether there are fewer schools per student, given that population levels are lower in most ethnic states. We also think that education may be even more under-resourced in ethnic nationality areas than in central Bamar, but it is very hard to establish whether this is the case, particularly due to the lack of financial data and in light of government policies such as ‘hardship posting’ stipends for civil servants, and the fact that education provision in areas with difficult terrain will carry additional costs related to transport and accessibility.

Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (IHLCS) data on transition from primary (PS) to middle (MS) and middle to high school (HS)					
	Urban boys	Urban girls	Poor boys	Poor girls	Rural
PS-MS transition	92.7%	93.9%	69.2%	63.6%	70.7%
MS-HS transition	92.7%	96.5%	74.9%	86.4%	81.9%

42. There is actually no authoritative research to explain the data challenges in Myanmar; such a piece of research is sorely needed.

5.1.2 Major educational problems in (rural) Myanmar

Children in rural areas of Myanmar face a number of interrelated challenges in relation to accessing basic education. These include lack of infrastructure and teachers, cost and lack of government resourcing, quality, and governance. Many of these problems are also found in urban areas – but to a lesser extent and with less of a negative impact, except in poor peri-urban areas.

Infrastructure

Villages in remote, rural areas are unlikely to have schools⁴³. JICA’s analysis of 2009/2010 IHLCS survey data found that while more than 90% of primary school students live within an hour’s walk of school, 76% of secondary school students who live in rural areas have to walk more than one hour to reach their nearest secondary school (or post-primary Grade 6 upwards)⁴⁴. Transport infrastructure/ road quality in rural areas is particularly poor and terrain can be very challenging especially in hilly areas, making commutes difficult (for both students and teachers), especially during the monsoon season. Schools, particularly in rural areas, often lack basic furniture, teaching and learning materials and other supplies, and are poorly maintained⁴⁵. Schools in rural areas are also unlikely to have government-provided teachers, contributing to the picture of a general pattern of government neglect of education needs in rural areas. In addition, often schools only provide teaching for a handful of the total grades that constitute the

43. MOE (2015), *Access, Quality and Inclusion*. The lack of data makes it very difficult to authoritatively establish the scope of this problem – hence one of the first activities scheduled under the basic education component of the NESF is a school access mapping exercise.

44. JICA, *Basic Education Assessment for the CESR Phase 1*, 2013.

45. *CESR Primary Education and Secondary Education Phase II* reports.

full complement of basic education⁴⁶.

The lack of government education provision is in part made up for by a patchwork of different types of non-government education services⁴⁷, some of which are discussed further below – but there is no data on the extent to which these services provide overlapping coverage or which areas are completely uncovered⁴⁸.

Cost and lack of government resourcing

Parents bear the highest burden of costs for education in Myanmar. Even though the government has committed to make primary education free, parents still have to pay for repairs to school buildings, textbooks and other materials needed for school attendance, support to teachers, tuition (particularly in urban areas), cost of travel and other costs⁴⁹. Urban households spend 5.8% of their income on education, versus 4.0% in rural households⁵⁰. In addition, many poor families have to factor in the cost of children attending school and therefore not earning any money, rather than contributing to the family's income (the opportunity cost of education). Unsurprisingly, the high cost of education for families is a major factor contributing to children not attending school at all and to school dropout⁵¹. Teachers'

low salaries also mean that they have developed a number of coping strategies for their livelihoods including living off communities, charging for tuition (particularly in urban areas) and developing their own businesses (to the extent of teaching only part-time).

Quality

When parents and students consider the costs of education vs. the benefit, a great many of them are likely to decide that the current education on offer is not worth the cost. This is often interpreted in Myanmar as parents failing to see the 'value' of education, or 'lack of interest' in education⁵². However, it is likely that a rational assessment of the quality of education on offer, rather than 'lack of interest', is what influences many decisions to drop out of school, or not to enrol in the first place⁵³.

While again there is very little data, recent early grade reading assessments conducted in parts of Myanmar suggest that education indeed has very little value in terms of contributing to children's ability to read⁵⁴. Surveys of teaching methods in Myanmar also point to poor quality teaching and poor quality classrooms across Myanmar and particularly in rural areas⁵⁵.

Governance

46. The CESR found that 'there are many types of school specification in the basic education sector with too many post-primary school types' (MOE (2013), *Comprehensive Education Sector Review, Phase 1 Rapid Assessment Report*, MOE (2014) *CESR Phase 2: In-Depth Analysis, SECONDARY EDUCATION SUBSECTOR*). While most affiliated schools have now been upgraded to branch schools, the status of some schools remains unresolved. The recent upgrading policy has itself been controversial in many ethnic nationality areas, where government has been perceived to 'claim' schools to which it has contributed and continues to contribute very little, by upgrading them. Described in further detail below. See also Muta (2015) *Regional Disparity of Educational Conditions*.

47. Jasmin Lorch, *Myanmar's Civil Society*, 2007.

48. This challenge also referenced in Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services*, 2014.

49. World Bank (2014). *Public Expenditure Review*.

50. ADB, MOE and Australia (2014). *CESR Supplementary Annex*.

51. Ibid.

52. See MNEPD, UNDP, UNOPS and Idea International (2010), *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar: Quantitative Survey Technical Report*; MEC and World Vision (2014). *Report on Reasons for Out of School Children in Select Communities in Myanmar*.

53. There is no research on this in Myanmar, but Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo make a convincing case for the argument that in other developing countries, poor families (and teachers) are likely to 'pick winners' – i.e. the child most likely to do well – from within the family in whom to invest rather than sending all of their children to school. Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics*, 2012.

54. World Bank and Ministry of Education (2015), *Myanmar Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) for the Yangon Region (DBE 3), 2014 Results Report, April 2015*; Dantdalun, *Myanmar Education Consortium: Baseline Study Report*, December 2014.

55. Hardman, Frank et al. (2012). *Baseline Study: Child-Centred Approaches to Teaching and Learning Practices in Selected Primary Schools in Child-Friendly School Focused Townships in Myanmar*. UNICEF and the University of York.

The Myanmar government education system is a top-down, highly centralised system in which there are few opportunities for decentralised decision-making at the school, village tract, township, district or state/region level⁵⁶. The top-down nature of planning, focused on inputs and outputs rather than outcomes, results in gross inefficiencies and inequalities⁵⁷, for example in the roll-out of the recent daily wage teacher programme⁵⁸. This results in a system that is blind to local needs, and where experienced teachers are most likely to be found in urban, wealthy areas and least likely to teach in schools in poor rural areas⁵⁹.

5.1.3 Major educational problems in (rural) ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar

This section focuses on major education problems related to government basic education provision in ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar. It suggests that in some areas there are other providers who may have a more legitimate claim to serve these areas⁶⁰. We describe problems related to non-government provision of education in a following section.

Children in ethnic nationality areas face additional challenges in accessing education compared to their peers in central Myanmar – and this is particularly the case for children in rural areas. These are specifically related to language, identity, and the history of conflict. Since the Burmese Socialist Progress Party (BSPP) era or possibly even earlier, the Myanmar

government has introduced a range of policies and programmes that have proven highly destructive for education in ethnic nationality areas⁶¹. While many of the negative impacts may have been unintentional, these policies directly negatively affect the quality and the accessibility of education provision in these areas, and raise the question of whether the government is the most appropriate provider in some areas. These policies are related to language, teacher deployment and curriculum.

Language

The teaching of ethnic languages in schools was never explicitly banned, but under the BSPP government and subsequently, its practice decreased, through a combination of benign and intentional neglect. This led to a situation in which ethnic groups were not able to use their mother tongues inside – and in some cases outside of school – from that period onwards⁶². This policy has been mediated since 2008 by the introduction of a clause in the constitution that affords citizens the right to ‘develop their language, literature, culture’ (Chapter 8, Article 354d)⁶³. The 2014 National Education Law (passed 30 September 2014) expanded upon this by allowing for use of ethnic languages as a classroom language alongside Myanmar and creating opportunities for teaching of ethnic languages within schools and universities; the basic education law draft (July 2015) contains similar provisions.

56. UNESCO (2014), Working Paper on Education. Decentralisation, Myanmar Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), Phase 2: In-Depth Analysis Policy, Legislation, Management & Finance (PLMF).

57. World Bank (2014). Public Expenditure Review, Myanmar.

58. What actually falls within the official 2014-15 Quick Wins programme is not clear – here we describe MOE activities that seem to have been perceived by MOE as quick wins.

59. Muta (2015). Regional Disparity.

60. We focus on the areas we visited – Kayin, Mon, Shan, Kachin, Kayah states. Chin and Rakhine are not included.

61. The mass literacy programmes that started in the 1950s were also perceived to be destructive to local languages and culture.

62. ‘After the 1962 military coup, the use of ethnic minority languages in the education system and for publication of newspapers and books was banned. Ethnic minority communities saw this as a deliberate policy by the central government to Burmanise them.’ ICG, Myanmar Backgrounder: Ethnic Minority Politics, May 2003.

63. However, this clause affords citizens these rights with the potentially far-reaching caveat that they be realised only ‘if not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquility or public order and morality’. Interview, civil society representative from an organisation supporting the peace process, Yangon.



MEC and Wa Youth Center Life Empowerment Organisation visit the middle school in Mai Maw Middle School, Wa State
Credit: Myanmar Education Consortium

The 2014 National Education Law contained the provisions to support the development of teaching in ethnic languages, stated that classes ‘to develop the ethnic groups’ literature, language, culture, arts and traditions’ be provided and subjects/majors in ethnic groups’ culture, literature, and history be started in universities. While it continued to mandate that language of instruction remain Myanmar and/or English, it also allowed that ‘If there is a need, an ethnic language can be used alongside Myanmar as a language of instruction at the basic education level’, and that region and state governments could teach ethnic languages starting at the primary level and gradually expanding (to higher grades.) (Chapter 7, articles 42-44).

The 2014 law was passed in the face of considerable opposition on the part of civil society and student activists; one of the points of opposition was the demand that ‘the language of instruction for ethnic groups should be in mother tongue’ and that a system of mother-tongue-based multi-lingual education be implemented, with each school having

the ability to decide in which language they taught. The current *Basic Education Law* draft (July 2015) states that ‘As Myanmar language being the official language, relevant indigenous languages shall be used as classroom language together with Myanmar language in teaching-learning of basic education as necessary’ (Chapter 3, Article 4(f)).

In practice, according to our interviewees, Burmese continues to be the main language of instruction in government schools – and Burmese and English are still the main languages of examination.

In some states, the state government now allows⁶⁴ local languages to be taught outside of school hours⁶⁵. However, there is a lack of resources for teacher salaries, teacher training, and development of appropriate curricula for language teaching. The requirement that

64. Not clear whether this is via a directive, a law, etc.

65. We heard that from 2015-16, some states now allow mother tongue to be taught in school time if the schools apply for teaching mother tongue and ‘if it is necessary’. We were not able to find an official document stating this policy within the consultancy time period.

language be taught outside school hours means that children and teachers are tired. And for many languages (although not all – Shan and Mon being exceptions⁶⁶) the government/MOE has only allowed the Burmese G1-3 language textbooks to be directly translated page by page into the local language. This direct translation renders the textbooks meaningless, as these languages are quite different in their structure to Burmese and therefore cannot be taught as if they were Burmese in structure.

It is not known how many children in Myanmar do not speak Burmese at all, and how many speak Burmese only as a second language⁶⁷. This presents a major challenge to understanding the extent to which this is a problem across the country. However, MEC's own baseline found that 'children who speak the same language at home as in school have better comprehension levels'⁶⁸, echoing the findings of an earlier Shalom study⁶⁹ and we were told anecdotally by the majority of our 40+ interviewees that children who do not speak Burmese in the home unsurprisingly struggled to relate to Burmese textbooks or Burmese teachers – and that this had far-reaching consequences for their education. Children who do not speak Burmese or who speak Burmese only as a second language are more likely to drop out, and less likely to leave

66. Mon is currently preparing Mon language textbooks for Kindergarten to Grade 6 with support from the MoE.

67. There is also an interrelated problem of not speaking the majority language of the area e.g. Rawang children in Kachin state who do not speak Jinghpaw. Even less is known about this issue though it is often raised by critics of MTB MLE as a reason why privileging a majority ethnic language (other than Burmese) as the main language of instruction would itself bring challenges. It was also raised in our interviews with MTB MLE advocates in Kayah and Kachin.

68. Dantdalun, Myanmar Education Consortium: Baseline Study Report, December 2014.

69. Shalom (2014), *Language-Related Problems Encountered by the Primary Level Ethnic Students in Myanmar*. See also Women and Child Rights Project (WCRP) and Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM), *Inaccessible and Under-Resourced: Concerns over Education in Rural Mon Communities*, 2015.

school with basic literacy and numeracy. This is particularly the case for rural areas, where children are unlikely to have exposure to Burmese.

One civil society leader in Kayah interviewed for this consultancy had conducted research (400 interviews in 3 townships) on the impact of not speaking Burmese in 2008. The main findings from this research were:

- If you don't speak Burmese or English, it's harder to get work
- If you don't speak Burmese it's a threat to your life and human rights – you can get killed by the Tatmadaw or put in prison because you cannot explain yourself
- Myanmar is taking over/Burmanisation
- People don't value their own language any more because they can't use it the same way as English or Myanmar – but languages have their own unique flavours which need to be celebrated and valued
- There are people who are stuck in the middle, speaking neither language well
- If children have foundation in mother tongue they are more able to learn other languages.

Some of our interviewees remarked upon a noticeable difference between children who had spent a few years in 'boarders' (boarding houses) in towns versus the children who had just come to the boarders, even when the latter were ostensibly in a higher grade⁷⁰.

The language debate is not yet very advanced in Myanmar, perhaps because it has only been possible to have this debate openly since the start of the political transition. It is very common to hear people dismiss this problem because it is 'too difficult' and there are too many languages⁷¹. Differences within ethnic

70. Civil society youth leader, Lashio; church-based education leader, Myitkyina.

71. For example, this was a common response during the first NNER conference on mother tongue in February 2014; also personal experience of some of the consultants in discussing

groups have contributed to this perception⁷². Overall, the level of quality policy dialogue to explore different options is low, although UNICEF has been supporting some workshops on language and social cohesion.

Teacher deployment

The Union Government has initiated a number of teacher training and deployment programmes to address chronic shortages in rural areas. One of our interviewees dated the start of these programmes to 1962⁷³. These have predominantly involved training teacher trainees from Bamar areas of Myanmar, who have subsequently been posted to remote ethnic nationality villages, where they can face huge assimilation and acceptance problems. The current 'daily wage teacher' training programme (2012-present) involves training 60,000 teachers, some with four-month courses at education colleges (for degree holders) and others with one month of training, or no training at all⁷⁴.

The deployment of predominantly Bamar teachers to ethnic nationality areas – either as part of mass daily wage teacher programmes or general deployment – has many negative consequences. It represents a burden on the community both financially – as communities must often provide housing and supplementary income – and in terms of education quality.

this topic with various MOE officials and politicians.

72. For example, for a description of the difficulties within Kayah state, see: Tadayuki Kubo, Karenni and Kayah: The Nature of Burma's Ethnic Problem over Two Names and the Path to Resolution, 5 February 2014, <http://peacebuilding.asia/burmas-ethnic-problem-over-two-names-and-the-path-to-resolution/> [accessed 9 August 2015].

73. This interviewee, in Kachin state, claimed that prior to 1962, the central government had largely left ethnic nationality groups to run their own schools. It would be interesting to find out how many mass teacher training programmes to send predominantly Bamar teachers to rural areas there have been, and the history of these sorts of programmes.

74. MOE (2015), *Teacher Education and Management, Sub-sector Report No. 5, National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21*, Comprehensive Education Sector Review Phase 3.

Teachers often do not speak the same language as the parents or the children, and often are unmotivated and keen to return to their home areas, which results in long periods of teacher absenteeism⁷⁵. Absenteeism is made worse by the fact that teachers in particularly remote areas have to travel long distances to the township education office on a monthly basis to collect their salary. This can result in them being away from the school for up to 10 days at a time – each month⁷⁶. We heard of multiple instances where teachers worked on a rotating shift, with one teacher teaching all grades for a month while the other teachers were away⁷⁷. In many cases deployment of Bamar government teachers has had the consequence of displacing the volunteer local teacher, thereby eroding the quality and sustainability of the school.

The government daily wage teacher training programmes have also attracted the teachers of some ethnic education systems, contributing to a loss of teachers in those systems⁷⁸. (These problems are discussed further below.) In addition, many of the teacher training periods are short-term and when teachers have gained teaching experience through working in ethnic rural schools they redeploy to places that are closer to urban areas or to their native area⁷⁹. More than one of our interviewees pointed out that this contributes to the perception amongst many communities that the government does

75. Interviews with education providers in Kachin, Shan and Kayah states and in Thailand. See also Andrea Costa and Tim Murray, *Supporting refugee and community teachers along the Thailand – Myanmar border and striving for their recognition to support ongoing peace building efforts*, paper for UNESCO Bangkok workshop, 2014.

76. Interviews with education providers in Kachin, Shan and Kayah states and in Thailand.

77. Interviews with education providers in Kachin, Shan and Kayah states.

78. Interviews; WCRP and HURFOM, *Inaccessible and Under-Resourced*, 2015; Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services*, 2014.

79. Muta (2015). *Regional Disparity of Educational Conditions in Townships*.

not consider their areas worthy of quality teachers and that they are being used ‘for training purposes only’⁸⁰.

The Ministry of Border Affairs-sponsored University for the Development of National Races has a teacher training programme exclusively for students from ethnic nationality backgrounds, which could in theory be an effective way of addressing the problem of non-local teachers. These trainees, once trained are now deployed to Nataka schools in border areas. However, these schools and programmes are viewed with great distrust by many ethnic nationality population, perhaps in part because of the very Bamar-centric curriculum and in part because of their affiliation with the Nataka which is a Tatmadaw-run ministry⁸¹.

Curriculum

Many of our interviewees described how irrelevant parts of the curriculum were for schoolchildren in ethnic nationality areas. Relevance per se is not necessarily the problem; it is irrelevance combined with complexity which means that the curriculum does not provide learner appropriate knowledge and strategies for learning. Two examples prove this point:

1. Complex Buddhist concepts and Pali terminology are included in G3 textbooks as part of a description of the Shwedagon pagoda, when children are still learning to read. These words derive from Pali language and have complicated spelling, including using stacked consonants and Pali letters which are part of the Myanmar alphabet but rarely used other than to express complex Buddhist concepts. These would

80. Civil society youth leader, Lashio

81. See for example Chin Human Rights Organisation (CHRO), which argues that: “the Na Ta La schools arguably function as a cornerstone of the unwritten policy of forced assimilation.” CHRO, “Threats to Our Existence”: Persecution of Ethnic Chin Christians in Burma, September 2012.

be particularly difficult for non-Buddhist children (e.g. Christians, Muslims or animists in Kayin, Kachin, Kayah, Chin) to memorise.

2. Use of central Bamar geography and flora and fauna in the standard rhyme for memorisation of alphabet, which would be completely alien to children living in the hills of Shan, Kayah, Kachin, Chin state. For example, the Burmese letter ‘ဝ’ is memorised by reciting the rhyme ‘ဝ ဓနိတန်း ပင်လယ်ကမ်း’, which means ‘long nipa (dhani) palm on the banks of the ocean’.

In addition, the history curriculum provides a Bamar-centric, homogenising narrative of the nation with very little recognition of the histories and alternative perspectives of ethnic nationality groups. The curriculum has become increasingly Bamar-centric since Myanmar’s independence, and particularly so since the rule of State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in the 1990s⁸².

Lack of recognition of non-government systems

This will be explored in further detail in the following section. However, it is relevant here to note because the MOE’s lack of recognition of non-government systems means that children educated in these systems are often not able to transition to the government system to continue their education – or if they are, it is contingent upon local agreements and understandings which can be broken if the local official is moved to a different post, or the conflict/political context shifts⁸³.

82. Nicolas Salem-Gervais and Rosalie Metro, “A Textbook Case of Nation Building: The Evolution of History Curricula in Myanmar”, *The Journal of Burma Studies* Vol. 16 No. 1 (2012), pp. 27–78.

83. Interviews. See also Aoife Dare, *Beyond Access: Refugee Students’ Experiences of Myanmar State Education, Save the Children Thailand* January 2015; VSO, *Reintegration of migrant children into schools in Myanmar: current policies, practice and opportunities/risks. Assessment report*, May 2014 (unpublished).

Burmanisation?

At best, the programmes and policies described above suggest a lack of understanding of the context in ethnic nationality areas, which many who have worked with and within the MOE suggest is an unfortunate characteristic of the ministry⁸⁴. At worst, they suggest intentional efforts to undermine quality education provision in ethnic nationality areas and promote a strategy of ‘Burmanisation’. Regardless of the true intent, they are perceived by many actors in ethnic nationality areas as the latter, and this contributes to the many grievances held by many ethnic groups in relation to the Union government. They may also contribute to parents’ negative assessment of the value of basic education. It also suggests the current redundancy of the government education system in some areas and why other providers who are working to address these issues might have a more legitimate claim as education providers in these areas.

5.2 Analysis of ethnic education systems and organisations

As the problems vary, so do the types of organisations and initiatives that seek to address these problems and provide alternatives or supplements to the state education system. It was not possible for us to do a comprehensive, state-by-state mapping of education services in ethnic nationality areas. We also struggled to work out how to describe a) characteristics of systems and b) types of services. The complexity of the picture and the multiplicity of different shapes and sizes of actors – from education systems to community and monastic schools that do not sit within a larger system – makes this difficult.

84. Interviews with four education experts who are former MOE employees, Yangon; professional experiences of two members of the consultancy team who have worked for many years in the Myanmar education sector.

We provide an overview in general terms of the types of providers, followed by the types of basic education they provide, and what related work they do, followed by unique characteristics of schools/systems/providers in relation to government relations, language and curriculum, and finally the issues they face.

5.2.1 Who is working to address these problems?

In non-government controlled areas and contested areas, there are three main types of ethnic education providers that directly deliver or provide support to basic education:

- **Ethnic armed group education departments (EAG-EDs).** A number of ethnic armed groups have their own education departments. These education departments range vastly in size and function. Some of these provide support to and oversight of entire systems of education (from G1 to higher education) within the areas under their control, and others offer a more nominal level of education services. Some – but by no means all – have benefited from relatively secure bases in Thailand from which to design and develop strong systems, or from periods of long and relatively stable ceasefire. Each EAG-ED’s level of coordination and engagement with the government differs. We have attempted to profile these organisations
- **Civil society organisations/NGOs.** National civil society organisations and NGOs provide a variety of support to education services in ethnic nationality areas, from teacher training and material support to managing schools. Some of these organisations have church or ethnic affiliation, for example Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS)⁸⁵, which falls under the Catholic church, and Kachin and Karen

85. KMSS has now established an Education Commission to focus on basic education. Interview with KMSS, Myitkyina.

Baptist Convention, under the Myanmar Baptist Convention. A number of them work in partnership with EAG-EDs, or work separately but in close coordination with them, while others attempt to work at a degree of separation and neutrality, and avoid affiliation with EAGs. We also include the Literature and Culture Committees of different ethnic groups under this category; these organisations are involved in teacher training and language and history curricula development.

- **Community-based organisations.** Community self help organisations are common in rural areas of Myanmar. They may be organised around faith (e.g. monastic schools), or around village governance and administration. There are also many individual (setana, parahitta) initiatives for education which fall under this category.

Many of these service providers are in turn supported by INGOs, which channel funding for a number of these groups, and provide technical and capacity building support.

Finally, a number of networks exist that bring together local and national initiatives in order to share resources and knowledge, and for purposes of advocacy and coordination. These include the NNER and Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education (MINE) and Eastern Burma Community Schools (EBCS) at the national level, and a few state level education networks such as Chin Education Network, Kachin State Education Network, and a nascent Shan State Education Network.

NB: This list is not exhaustive and it may not be 100% accurate; we apologise for any omissions or errors.

ETHNIC ARMED GROUP EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS (EAG-EDS)

ARMED GROUP	DEP'T	CURRENT SIZE AND ADMIN STRUCTURE	SERVICES / CHARACTERISTICS	GEOGRAPHIC AREA
Kachin Independence Army	Kachin Independence Organisation Education Department (KIO-ED)	50 staff KIOCC ▶ Kachin Independence Council ▶ KIO-ED (50 staff) ▶ Division ▶ District ▶ Township Direct administration of schools is done by school management committee who are supported by KIO-ED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GI-university • Institute of Education for teacher training • High Schools in Mai Ja Yang and Laiza • 162 primary and middle schools • 1,200 teachers • separate IDP schools up to G10. • use govt curriculum plus Kachin literature/language textbooks up to G8 	Areas under KIA control. 5 divisions across Kachin state – Northern, Western, Eastern and Southern (currently merged), Central
New Mon State Party	Mon National Education Department	Mon National Education Committee HQ ▶ District ▶ Township	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 104 primary schools • 12 middle schools • 3 middle/high schools • 23 post primary schools • 800 teachers • 13,000 students • use mix of government and Mon curriculum • Mon language teaching • Teacher training 	Mon state: Areas under NMSP control Areas under government control (mixed schools)

Karen National Union	Karen Education Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 17 staff at central level Majority of schools are community-managed with loose administrative oversight from KED Works in coordination with (see acronyms): KKTWG, KSEAG, KRCEE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GI-university 1,294 schools 7,911 teachers 153,428 students 122 student teachers KED curriculum Karen language Teacher training centre (managed by KTWG) 	Wider Karen state including parts of Mon and Bago Areas under KED control Areas under government control (mixed schools)
Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	Karenni National Education Department	Education Department directly implement in refugee camps and support two schools in Kayah state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inside Kayah State: 1 middle school and 1 high school. 75 students New curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 6 	Predominantly in camps in Thailand, as well as Kayah state
Restoration Council of Shan State/ Shan State Army South (RCSS)	Shan State Development Foundation (SSDF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SSDF coordinating body of three committees: Education, Health and Relief Plan to open office in Taunggyi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 schools across the border in Thailand 200 schools in Shan State Only primary curriculum, secondary being developed 	Shan State – areas under RCSS control
United Wa State Army (UWSA)	Wa Education Department	Wa Self-Administered Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 300 primary school 1 middle school 1 high school Accepts 70 government (MOE/Natala) teachers annually Curriculum/ language reportedly Chinese 	Wa Self-Administered areas
Pa 'O National Organisation (PNO)	Pa 'O National Education Department	Education department sits under PNO Social Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides complementary services to government system e.g. community teachers salary Ca. 78 schools in PNO areas recently became government-affiliated schools 	Pa 'O Self-Administered Areas
Pa 'O National Liberation Organisation (PNO)	Pa 'O National Liberation Organisation Education Department	Two staff within education department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No schools Developed curriculum in 2006 	Maingbain Township, Southern Shan

5.2.2. How do they work?

Types of schools

It is not always easy to differentiate between the types of basic education schools that these actors support. In ethnic nationality areas (including government-controlled, non-government controlled areas and contested areas), there are four main types of schools:

- EAG-ED schools
- Community self-help schools (လူထုအခြေပြုကျောင်း)
- Faith-based schools, particularly monastic schools in Buddhist areas e.g. parts of Shan⁸⁶
- National schools, e.g. the Shan National School in Kutkai
- Mixed schools (government plus a combination of the above)
- Government schools.

In reality there is a lot of overlap between these different types of schools. For example, a government school can have a volunteer teacher supported by the community (a community self-help teacher); a Mon school can be a monastic school; more than 75% of the schools that the KED supports are government or mixed⁸⁷. This is discussed further below. The MINE project areas map (opposite) demonstrates the extent of overlap and complementary support provided by ethnic education organisations: the highlighted areas extend far beyond areas under the direct control of EAGs.

In addition, some schools provide alternative education for children who have failed the G10 matriculation exam. This could arguably be construed as vocational or non-formal education

86. Many ethnic areas have monastic schools, some of which operate entirely independently, and others of which are affiliated to either the government (either MORA or MOE) or to armed groups (e.g. RCSS in Shan). In predominantly Christian areas they are generally perceived as part of a strategy for Burmanisation, although in these areas they may also be accepted as legitimate schools for children from Buddhist backgrounds to attend.

87. Interview, KED officials.

rather than basic education – but it seems like a very important area given that on average only 37% of students pass the matriculation exam every year (many of those are repeaters)⁸⁸ and children from rural areas are more likely to fail.

Types of support

Ethnic education organisations provide the following kinds of support to these schools:

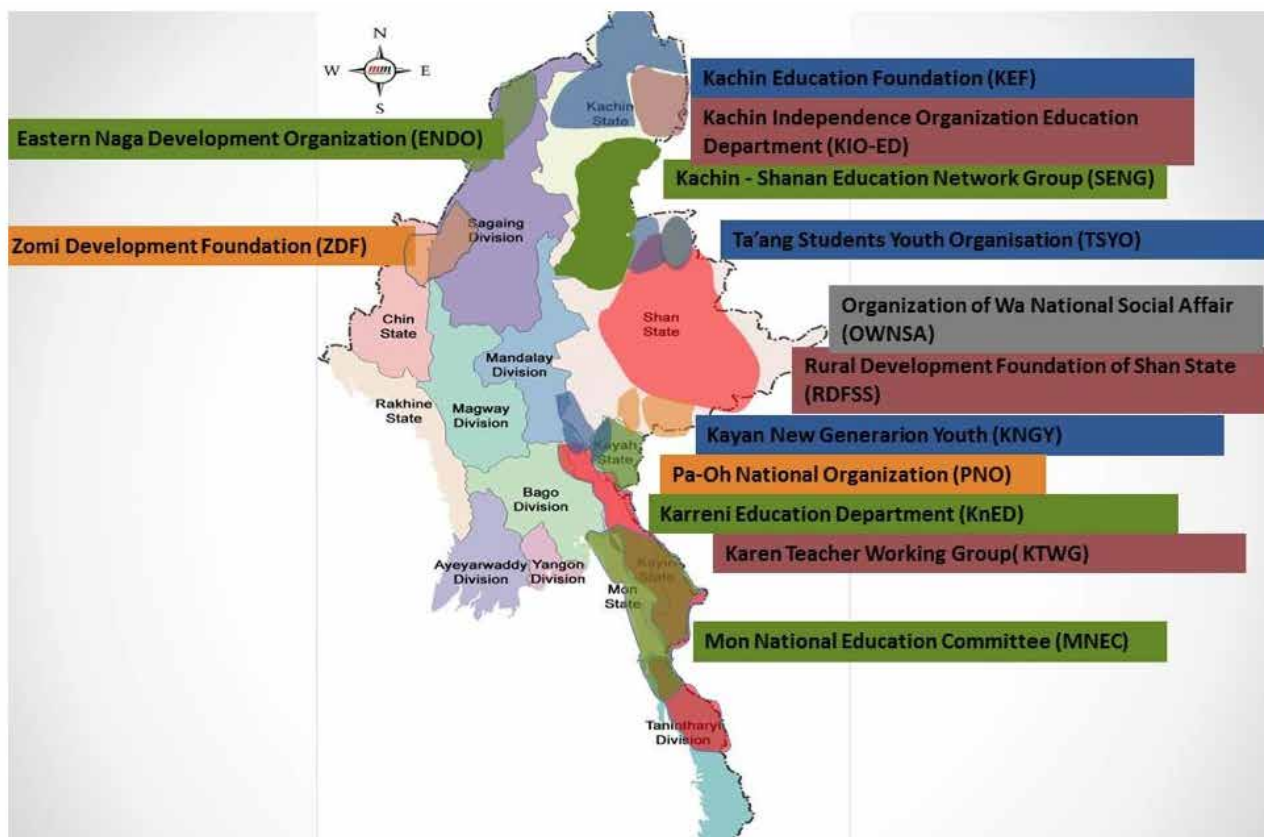
Infrastructure. Support to infrastructure typically comprises the construction and furnishing of school buildings, toilets and water supply, teachers' houses, and boarding houses. This is often community-funded and driven, although not exclusively – many NGOs/CSOs and EAG-EDs work hard to generate a patchwork of funds for this and sometimes provide other support as well. For example, in EAG-controlled areas EDs can often negotiate with their own forestry departments to provide some basic materials for school construction.

Social inputs serve to address the particular problems of vulnerability and poverty of school age children in the ethnic areas. They comprise the provision of school health services, uniforms, stipends, school meals⁸⁹, scholarships, and the establishment and operation of boarding houses ('boarders') so that students can attend middle and high schools in larger villages and towns. These are common inputs for many different types of organisations: for example many individual and community self-help organisations, CBOs and NGOs run boarding houses.

Quality inputs are directed at ensuring that education of a minimum standard can occur. They include the recruitment and training of

88. MoE (2014), *CESR Phase 2: In-Depth Analysis, SECONDARY EDUCATION SUBSECTOR*.

89. We are actually not sure how common is the provision of health services, uniforms, stipends, school meals by ethnic education providers; boarders are very common. Many ethnic armed groups provide health services too.



Map of EBCS project implementation areas

volunteer teachers (pre-service and in-service), provision of teacher salaries and subsidies to teachers, head teacher training, the provision of teaching-learning materials (TLM), and the provision of libraries. A number of international and national NGOs work with local CSOs and community-based organisations to support teacher training. Some of the ethnic education departments have their own teacher training institutions (KIO-ED, KED/KTWG, KNED, MNEC) and many send volunteer teachers to the Teacher Preparation Centre in Mae Sot, while MEC currently funds a project with advocacy network MINE and implementation network EBCS to provide teacher training and support to volunteer teachers in schools across a range of ethnic minority areas. As part of this project, 'backpack teacher trainers' travel to remote schools to provide training and mentoring to teachers in those schools. In addition,

where possible the larger ethnic education systems undertake specific quality assurance measures, for example Education Management Information System (EMIS), school monitoring and inspection.

Other important elements of ethnic education systems are developing local ownership as well as community engagement and resilience through awareness raising campaigns and support for the establishment of PTAs/School management committees (SMCs).

5.2.3 How do ethnic education providers relate to central government and government education systems?

Recognition by the government

The union government does not officially recognise the education services provided

by ethnic armed groups and supported and complemented by NGOs. This lack of official recognition from the government side is perhaps understandable, given that these groups are listed as illegal organisations of the type proscribed by Article 19 of the constitution⁹⁰. Recognition of these groups is one of the clauses of the as-yet unsigned NCA⁹¹.

This provides huge technical and bureaucratic challenges to service delivery and – most importantly – to children who learn through these education systems receiving a full basic education. For example, it means that organisations or individuals that work with these groups are doing so illegally⁹². In addition, this has significantly affected the groups' ability to negotiate at a policy level and engage with the education reform process, leading to huge gaps in the NESP – and contributing to the risk that government programmes will 'encroach' or be perceived to encroach on areas that are covered by the EAG-EDs and other actors⁹³.

Despite lack of recognition at union level, the situation at the sub-national level is different and varies. A number of groups have reached unofficial – and thus precarious –

90. Why they were not taken off the list as a part of their signing of bilateral state or union-level ceasefires that preceded the negotiation of the NCA is not clear.

91. Richard Horsey, Myanmar: *What Next for the Peace Process?*, CPPF Briefing Paper, 10 June 2015.

92. This has affected different groups' levels of engagement with their own literature and culture committees (LCCs) differently. Many of the LCCs have the potential to provide technical support to the development of language and history curricula (see below), but the LCCs have also struggled with their status. The Mon LCC is well advanced in government and MNEC relations. The Karen LCC received no support/engagement from KED until 2013, and still is not recognised by government.

93. For example, one of the first activities planned under the basic education component of the NESP is a mapping of school coverage. But, as the NESP notes, this is a complex political issue and mapping 'will need to be negotiated at the region/ state or township level with ethnic education providers based on the recognition that it might not be appropriate for them to share this information.' MOE (2015), *Access, Quality and Inclusion*.

understandings at the local level. For example, MNEC has come far in establishing a practical working arrangement with government involving (occasionally) common teacher training, the provision of textbooks, as well as reciprocal acceptance of ethnic and government teachers operating in mixed schools, etc. In the case of the Pa 'O Self-Administered Region, this meant that ca. 70 monastic/community schools have slowly been upgraded to 'affiliated' or 'branch' government schools and been provided with additional support as a result, which has generally been well accepted⁹⁴.

In other contexts it has resulted in the following issues:

- **Claiming.** As noted above, there is a lot of overlap between the different types of schools in ethnic areas. The government's propensity for 'claiming' schools as part of an official school upgrading programme⁹⁵ makes this especially likely⁹⁶. We heard many stories of community self-help schools where the government had put up a signboard and provided some minimal support, e.g. a teacher or a small grant. However, this did not necessarily mean that the community viewed the school as a government school, even though it might mean that their own teacher had been displaced from their position by the government teacher. In some cases this

94. Supported by the EU-funded Metta project, Responsive Education Partnerships (REP) Project.

95. A recommendation of the *CESR Phase 1* was upgrading schools from branch and affiliated status; this has happened (and potentially involved 'claiming' of community schools). See the NESP Sub-sector Report on *Access, Quality and Management*. From our interviews it seems that during the same time period more community schools have taken on branch and affiliated status, but this could just reflect confusion on the part of communities and EEOs and TEOs about unclear government policy (which is highly possible since government policies are rarely written down, see World Bank [2014]. *Public Expenditure Review, Myanmar*).

96. There could also be situations in which EAGs claim community schools – we did not find out much about this.

has caused considerable conflict, and not just about which authority has the right to 'claim' the school. We heard of an example where an armed group was trying to close some schools in an area under its control, in order to produce a larger student population at the school they did not close, which would enable this school to upgrade to a middle school⁹⁷.

- **Challenges in accreditation and transition.**

As noted above, children have difficulty transitioning from non-government to government schools, and having their prior learning and qualifications recognised. Until the outbreak of conflict in 2011, students from KIO-ED schools were able to sit the matriculation exam, and some groups are still working with state level government to find ways to enable students to continue their schooling and sit the exam. Some students from migrant and refugee camp education have been able to return to government schools, and to sit the matriculation exam⁹⁸. But anecdotal reports suggest that many other children face exclusion from the government system because they studied in non-government schools. (This is linked to curriculum, below.) The same problem is not noted in reverse.

- **Sensitivity regarding data.** Little is known/understood about the real situation on the ground in the ethnic areas in Myanmar by the government or by the international community. This ignorance leads to all sorts of misunderstandings, hostility and ill designed responses to the situational needs. But ongoing conflict and insecurity as well as legal status means that some ethnic education providers/groups are rightly reluctant to share data.

97. Incidents described in Kim Jolliffe (2014) and also told to us by representatives of EAG-EDs.

98. *Dare, Beyond Access 2015; VSO, Reintegration of migrant children, 2014.*

Why is this question of recognition/engagement so important?

Children should be able to gain recognised education and qualifications along a learning pathway, yet the current government policy of non-recognition makes this very difficult. It's not as simple as 'parallel systems'. In some circumstances ethnic education providers are essentially subsidising government education through their support in the form of language teachers, curricula and other inputs. Ethnic education providers offer good complementary education – but the government doesn't take advantage of and support what already exists, instead it seems to be undermining it (albeit unintentionally).

Language

As noted above, language policy is hugely contentious in Myanmar and the restrictions on providing mother-tongue based education at primary level (and beyond) have negative impacts for children from ethnic nationality areas. At the same time, children who do not speak Burmese face many challenges in relation to their ability to progress through the education system, as well as their future livelihoods. Different ethnic education providers address this challenge in different ways. Some education providers provide primary education in mother-tongue, while gradually introducing Burmese and switching to Burmese language curriculum in middle schools (e.g. MNEC). Others provide Burmese language as a subject only.

Many EAG-EDs and other EEOs recruit and train volunteer language teachers to teach in government schools (as referenced above). For example, the Mon national education system trains, pays and provides curriculum for 800 teachers who teach Mon literacy and history to around 29,000 students in 142 mixed schools⁹⁹.

99. Interviews, MNEC. This is an increase from the amount Kim Jolliffe cites in his earlier report, Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and*

Many Literature and Culture Associations are involved in this kind of activity, or have plans to start working in this area¹⁰⁰. Youth groups and other CSOs are also involved in this kind of activity. For example, KNGY has recruited and trained 125 teachers who are now teaching Karenni language in 105 schools in Kayah state.

Curriculum

The majority of schools supported by ethnic education providers teach the government curriculum and use the Burmese language textbooks to do so, with additional language and history classes provided by EAG-EDs or LCCs. The MNEC has worked with the government to develop a Mon language version of the government curriculum up to middle school, and the KNED has similar plans. There are some notable exceptions to this: KED schools teach their own separate curriculum, and a network of community schools in Kachin and Northern Shan has also developed and teaches its own separate curriculum. The benefit of teaching the government curriculum is that in some circumstances, this means that children are allowed to transfer to government schools and/or to take the matriculation exam, which is the only way to gain recognised education qualifications and to progress to higher education within Myanmar.

Community perspectives

We were not able to assess the extent to which communities support the ethnic education services they receive, or the extent to which they prefer them over and above government services, although we imagine that it differs greatly according to the context. However, as South and Lall note: 'Although their legitimacy should not be taken for granted, for many ethnic nationality communities

Social Services, 2014.

100. Shan LCC in Taunggyi and Hsipaw, Pa 'O LCC in Hopon, Karenni LCC in Kayah all plan to or are already providing this kind of support.



MTB-MLE curriculum development workshop facilitated by SIL in November 2015. Credit: Myanmar Education Consortium

EAGs enjoy greater legitimacy than the state and its agencies. Furthermore, in the field of education, EAG and other non-state (e.g. civil society) actors often provide the only accessible education services (especially in languages).¹⁰¹

101. Ashley South and Marie Lall, Myanmar: *Developing a Framework for WBG Engagements in Conflict-Affected Areas. EDUCATION Analysis*, November 2014 (draft).

While many ethnic education providers work hard at community engagement (including through their support for parent and teachers association and school management communities), the level of genuine participation and the extent to which policy decisions taken at a central level reflect community voices is probably inconsistent¹⁰². In addition, we assume that communities in some – although far from all – ethnic nationality areas find themselves in a dilemma in relation to education: whether to provide an education that meets the identity and language needs of their children, or one that prepares them to earn a living in Myanmar through providing them with a basic level of Burmese, and recognition of their educational qualifications. Some communities have chosen to opt out of this dilemma altogether: the community school network in Kachin and Northern Shan was started by communities on the basis that the mainstream government education system was destructive to their children because it teaches unquestioning obedience to authority, uses violence, and emphasises rote learning¹⁰³.

Networks and policy engagement

The various ethnic education providers are at very different stages of developing internally coherent systems as well as articulating them vis-à-vis the government system. However, groups and their representative networks are engaging together and/or thinking through issues related to recognition of their systems including specifically around the following issues:

- Decentralisation
- Language
- Curriculum
- Transition and recognised student qualifications.

In some cases they have been supported

102. See Lall and South, *Education, Conflict and Identity*, 2012.

103. Interview, adviser to an organisation that supports the network, Yangon.

in this by different international and local organisations.

A key factor in the development of ethnic policy has been horizontal learning facilitated by interagency EO networking. The widespread application of the KTWG model in six areas using the Mobile teacher trainer (MTT) for teacher training, community awareness promotion, data collection and EMIS development as well as advocacy is an example of this. The Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education is another, as are the involvement of various state-level networks and EEOs within the NNER.

5.2.4 What other issues do they face in providing services?

Non-state education providers in ethnic areas face considerable challenges in delivering the services described above. With the caveat that the variation in the situation across different parts of Myanmar makes it difficult to generalise, we summarise the challenges below:

Conflict and insecurity

Ongoing conflict and insecurity affects many ethnic nationality areas across Myanmar. Much of this is low-level insecurity caused by the proliferation of armed groups and competition between them for resources and taxation privileges, rather than the active conflict that is currently going on between the KIO and the Tatmadaw. Nonetheless, schools are burnt down in attacks, or villages displaced by conflict, or teachers (and students) conscripted¹⁰⁴. In many settings, e.g. in parts of Shan State, CBOs/NGOs that support education in non-government areas have to negotiate with a range of different armed actors to

104. See inter alia Karen human rights group reports (<http://karenhumanrightsgroup.org>); Chin human rights group reports (<http://www.chro.ca>).

travel, and to pass between areas controlled by different groups.

The constant insecurity and the instability of the current peace process also means that groups are keen to protect their systems because if they allow the government in to provide services, and then the peace process breaks down and there is a return to conflict, then they will have to rebuild their systems from scratch. The example of Kachin – where fighting is ongoing – was provided as justification for this line of thinking by a number of organisations that we spoke to. The peace process has brought its own challenges in terms of perceived government ‘encroachment’ and inappropriate aid and development¹⁰⁵.

Human and financial resources

Many organisations face challenges in mobilising sufficient financial and human resources to support their operations. The main financial burden for organisations – which if it is not met, shifts downwards onto communities – is funding for teacher salaries. Some organisations are attempting to address this by developing income generation programmes (e.g. Pyoe Pin with MNEC). School construction is also a financial burden, although in EAG-controlled areas EDs can often negotiate with their own forestry departments to provide some basic materials for school construction. Textbooks and learning materials carry additional costs. While the government now provides free primary school textbooks to all children attending government schools, it only does so for textbooks in Burmese language. If these textbooks are to be printed in Shan, Mon or another ethnic language, the cost must be borne by ethnic education providers or by communities. This adds up. For example, we were told that the Shan language textbooks cost MMK 1,000 (roughly USD 0.80)

105. Tom Kramer, *Developing Disparity*, 2013

per book. For most families in rural ethnic areas this would represent a significant amount of expenditure: recent qualitative surveys estimate daily wages for male and female agricultural workers in Shan at between 2,000-5,000 MMK (non-peak season) to 6,000 MMK (peak season)¹⁰⁶.

We were not able to ascertain whether there has indeed been a drop in funding to ethnic education providers since the start of the transition in 2011, as donors have increased their development budgets in Myanmar. It is clear that these organisations receive less funding than they need to effectively run core services and pay teacher salaries – and that they receive much less than the support provided to the government for service provision in adjoining areas. Some groups told us that it has been more difficult to fundraise since the transition, as donors have increased their development budgets in Myanmar and decreased their cross-border humanitarian support.

We were also told about donor requirements becoming more stringent: for example requirements that groups purchase more materials in Myanmar, even if the quality is poorer and it is more expensive to transport from Yangon to areas bordering Thailand¹⁰⁷. The problem is as much one of perception as it is one of lack of resources: the ethnic education groups perceive that they are no longer being supported because donors have bought into the government’s version of the situation on the ground – and this risks fuelling conflict. This issue is discussed further below.

Lack of financial resources is one of the main factors that contribute to the human resource

106. LIFT, World Bank Group and EMR, *Qualitative Social and Economic Monitoring (QSEM): Round Four Report, December 2014*.

107. Interview with EAG-ED.

challenges faced by education providers. If they cannot pay their teachers a living wage, they are more likely to lose them, whether to economic migration (particularly common near the Thai and China borders), or to more lucrative jobs in government schools. As a consequence, teacher attrition rates are high, with one group estimating them to be as much as 37% per year¹⁰⁸. To further compound this problem, in recent years the government's daily wage teacher recruitment programme, which offers a higher salary, has attracted trained teachers away from a number of different EAG-EDs¹⁰⁹.

Transport and challenging terrain

This situation is compounded by steep costs for transport in areas that are still affected by conflict such as Kachin and parts of Karen State. One EAG-ED representative described to us not having enough money to pay for the costs of fuel for their Township Education Officer (TEO) to visit some of the schools under his remit, a particularly hilly area. The lack of transport infrastructure and the rugged nature of the terrain also adds to costs and travel time.

Quality

All of the above issues affect ethnic education providers' ability to develop quality education services. Many of the groups we met with spoke about the challenges they face in relation to quality, particularly related to retaining and supporting quality teachers. While some ethnic education providers have been able to establish fairly comprehensive and sophisticated systems, they still struggle with limited technical capacity and most educational provision in ethnic nationality areas is inadequate, incomprehensive, and of variable quality¹¹⁰. Data is gathered but not

108. Interview with ethnic education provider.

109. WCRP and HURFOM, *Inaccessible and Under-Resourced*, 2015; Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services*, 2014

110. Interviews with education providers in Kachin, Shan



Children learning in the Thai-based refugee camp schools
Credit: Save the Children Thailand

always analysed; many groups are keen to do this better.

Time and scope limitations mean that we were not able to comprehensively assess the quality of any of the education services provided by ethnic actors. Anecdotal evidence, as well as the MEC own baseline, could be interpreted

and Kayah states and in Thailand. See also Costa and Murray, *Supporting refugee and community teachers*.



Opening of new primary school, Ox Soi village, Mot Nu Township, Mai Maw District, Wa State
Credit: Myanmar Education Consortium

to suggest that quality of non-government provided education is lower than that provided by government – for example, in a visit to one area we saw a well funded and well staffed government school and a less well staffed and well funded EAG-ED school, and the children in the government school seemed to have a better command of Burmese, English and their mother tongue. But we were not able to establish the factors that may have contributed to this, for example whether the government school was selective in its choice of children, or whether it was unusually well-funded and well-staffed. It certainly would not be possible to draw generalised conclusions on the basis of this.

Conflict sensitivity of international organisations

Ethnic education providers receive a range of support from international organisations and there are some very positive long-term

relationships between some INGOs and ethnic education providers, particularly for technical support and policy engagement. The USAID-supported Project for Local Empowerment (PLE) programme managed by IRC (with World Education as the main education partner) is a good example of this, as is the Save the Children Thailand project that works with some of the ethnic education groups on convergence. In addition, the Swiss supported a project in which the Chin National Front (CNF) worked with the government to provide computers for schools and training in Chin state, which has reportedly been successful in building confidence between the CNF and the government¹¹¹.

However, in general perceptions of international organisations¹¹² are rather

111. Interview, civil society actor supporting the peace process, Yangon.

112. Most people that we spoke to make little distinction

negative. International actors are perceived by ethnic groups to be pushing the government 'peace' agenda by supporting or enabling government projects and services in contested areas. This has had specific negative effects for ethnic education providers and communities. For example, we were told that 'NGOs will come to our village with the local authorities and introduce themselves to the village tract chief. The NGO says we are independent and interested in better education. They offer school construction, promising that ownership will remain a community school, and the community agrees. Then, in the middle of construction, legal ownership papers are produced, claiming the school for the government. Two schools have been torched, and a third was threatened as a result of this.'¹¹³

We also heard examples of INGOs getting permission from the government to provide education support in a particular township, but the government approving support only for government controlled areas, not for non-government controlled areas of the same township. Some international organisations have also attempted unsuccessfully to create opportunities for dialogue, but done so with a lack of political sensitivity. This has the unfortunate effect of reinforcing ethnic education organisations' concerns that these international organisations have the government's ear, but are not using it to challenge them regarding the real situation on the ground – and are in fact legitimating a flawed situation due to their own lack of understanding¹¹⁴.



MTB-MLE ECCD workshop organized by MEC
Credit: Myanmar Education Consortium

between UN, donor agencies, multilateral organisations and international NGOs – they are all referred to as 'INGOs'.

113. Interview, EAG-ED official. Examples are also given in Jolliffe K, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services*, 2014.

114. For example the UNHCR-convened South-East Consultations, Meeting on 'convergence', 19 June 2014, Yangon.

6 Options for external support

6.1 Who to support and why?

The analysis of the current context, above, leads us to conclude that support to ethnic education providers is essential for ensuring that children in many ethnic nationality areas of Myanmar have access to education.

The main reasons why ethnic education providers should be supported are that they have greater legitimacy and coverage than the government in many ethnic nationality areas, and thus funding to government is neither effective nor appropriate. While in some cases supporting ethnic education providers may amount to continuation of existing parallel (and complementary) systems, this is necessary in the short to medium term given the context, and particularly the fragility of the peace process. These reasons are explained further below.

1. EAG-EDs, affiliated organisations and other non-state ethnic education providers have the legitimacy and the coverage to meet immediate needs

Ethnic education providers provide education support to many thousands of children. Indeed, '[Ethnic armed organisation]-linked providers remain the only entities able to provide critical services to hundreds of thousands of conflict-affected civilians'¹¹⁵. These providers fill many of the gaps in government coverage, in many cases also complement government coverage, and provide education against considerable odds, in conflict settings. Without these providers children in many of these areas would receive little, if any, education. It is difficult to get a sense of scale, or to compare this against government coverage, but the five biggest EAG-EDs alone reach approximately

200,000 children within Myanmar – and this is before the coverage of smaller and complementary organisations is included¹¹⁶.

Education provider	Number of students
KED and affiliates	141,632
MNEC	29,000
KIO-ED	23,000
KNED	4,000
RCSS/SSDF	1,200

2. Funding to the government for education is not effective or appropriate in these circumstances

The Myanmar government has shown only minimal willingness to assume responsibility for quality educational service provision to ethnic nationality areas, let alone accommodate some of the major interests and concerns of ethnic groups regarding mother tongue learning, ethnic national curriculum and decentralisation. Indeed, some of its policies and programmes seem highly destructive to education in ethnic nationality areas, even if that is not their intended purpose. As such, providing funding to the MOE for education service provision in ethnic nationality areas is unlikely to be effective, and seems inefficient given that there are already effective and legitimate non-state service providers (the ethnic education organisations)

116. Jolliffe provides the following comparisons: 1) in Kayah state the KNED provides education to 50,351 students and the MOE provides education for 55,606 students; 2) KED/ KSEAG provide support to 141,623 students of which 123,212 students in Kayin and Mon states compared to the MOE's 317,280 students in the same area; 3) KIO-ED over 23,000 students compared to the government's 13,811 students; 4) MNEC 17,000 students to the government's 340,000 students. However, it is likely that these figures overlap and – from the government's side at least – they are unreliable.

115. Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services*, 2014

working to meet populations' needs.

Donors might feel this to be an unusual state of affairs, given the aspirations set out in the Naypyidaw Accord¹¹⁷ and the fact that the Paris Principles and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States encourage on-budget funding to states for service provision, with the assumption that this is necessary in order to strengthen fragile states¹¹⁸. However, this fails to take into account the possibility, in the context of Myanmar's peace process, that support to government for contested areas may further conflict¹¹⁹.

3. Parallel systems are necessary given the fragility of the peace process

Support to ethnic education providers currently means support to parallel – if in many cases also complementary – systems. The long-term sustainability of these systems is not guaranteed. There are currently no arrangements for decentralised resource sharing and administration which would allow these systems to receive a share of government budget, even if decentralisation of education management is a stated intent of the government¹²⁰. In addition, the unique and important characteristics of these parallel systems – e.g. their approach to mother tongue

learning and their community engagement – are not recognised¹²¹.

The peace process offers the opportunity for genuine discussion and development of a decentralised federal system of the sort that would enable local language and curriculum needs to be met, and possible integration or bridging between different education systems¹²². But these discussions are not yet guaranteed as part of the peace process, not least because they are promised as part of a political dialogue which is on hold until a nationwide ceasefire agreement can be signed, the likelihood of which diminishes (at least in the short-term) as the elections approach.

Until there are sufficient guarantees and a roadmap for implementation of a decentralised system that meets ethnic education needs, these parallel/complementary systems need to be supported. This is both so that children can attend school, and also so that trust can continue to be built within the peace process. If this support is shifted to the government, the implications for the peace process could be grave¹²³.

6.2 How to support them?

Below we have outlined the three main types of support that we understand ethnic education providers (both EAG-EDs and NGOs/CBOs) to need, as part of a complete package

117. Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2013), *Naypyitaw Accord for Effective Development Cooperation*

118. <http://www.g7plus.org/new-deal-document>

119. MPSI convened a workshop with Eric Sollheim on this issue in January 2015 (MPSI, Meeting Note: Round table discussion with OECD/DAC Chair on Busan Agreement, Aid and the Peace Process in Myanmar, 30 January 2015); see also accompanying discussion paper (Stefan Bächtold, Briefing Note: MPSI Discussion, swisspeace, January 2015). Jolliffe (2014) also explains this well. The unintended impacts of a number of donor projects in some ethnic rural areas illustrate exactly this point.

120. Plans for decentralisation, including in the education sector, are described in *Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2012), Framework for Economic and Social Reforms: Policy Priorities for 2012-15 towards the Long-Term Goals of the National Comprehensive Development Plan* (draft).

121. This is despite the fact that, as we have shown, some systems are genuinely complementary and/or have the potential to be.

122. The education sector reform process has not yet tackled questions relating to what decentralisation of education management might look like in Myanmar, despite some initial CESR reports on this topic sponsored by UNESCO.

123. Jolliffe puts this well: 'if support to the state comes at the expense of support to EAO-linked service providers, it risks strengthening fears that the peace process serves primarily to make the government stronger, while generally weakening EAO- and non-Burma societal structures'.

of interventions. We follow this with further description of what each component entails,

the justification for this component and the principles for the approach.

MAIN TYPES OF SUPPORT FOR ETHNIC EDUCATION PROVIDERS
<p>COMPONENT 1: SERVICE DELIVERY</p> <p>Focus: Access Rationale: Without this, ethnic education providers cannot continue to respond to the fundamental and urgent education needs of children in ethnic nationality areas Remark: Core function of systems is an absolute priority</p>
<p>COMPONENT 2: SYSTEMS AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Focus: Quality Rationale: There is a recognised need for improving the quality of ethnic education providers' existing service provision and systems strengthening Remark: This requires relevant technical expertise and nuanced and critical understanding of 'capacity development'</p>
<p>COMPONENT 3: POLICY ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>Focus: Strategy Rationale: Need for recognition of ethnic education diverse systems and, ultimately, dialogue about how these systems can co-exist or integrate within a federal Myanmar Remark: This requires acceptance of the diversity of different groups and the fact that it may not be possible to work towards concrete and universally agreed outcomes</p>

Service delivery

What it constitutes:

- Core support for service delivery could include, but is not limited to:
- Teachers' subsidies and remuneration
- Teacher training
- Training and learning materials
- Infrastructure
- Social instruments like stipends/ scholarships and conditional cash transfers (CCT).

Justification

The armed groups with which many ethnic education departments are associated, while they provide some financial support, are not in a position to cover the full cost of education

service delivery¹²⁴. They face funding shortfalls in covering teacher salaries and other core costs of their systems¹²⁵. Supporting ethnic education will enable them to better provide quality education services to communities on the ground.

The three arguments provided above for

124. If education systems are to be sustainable, they require the support of an authority (normally a state) with the capacity to generate fiscal revenue for the financing of social expenditures such as education. Yet full government expenditure on education is rare in developing countries, which tend to rely on donor on-budget support. Myanmar is no exception. We were not in a position to explore expenditure or income generation capacity on either side (government or ethnic education providers) in any detail.

125. Many of our interviewees suggested that the flow of international aid coming in to the ethnic education providers have been gradually diminishing over the last three to four years, and core support has been particularly affected. The team has not been able to verify this assumption.

supporting ethnic education providers are all part of the justification for providing core support for service delivery: i.e. these providers have legitimacy and coverage; funding to government is neither effective nor appropriate; parallel systems are necessary in the short to medium term given the fragility of the peace process. However, there is another reason for providing core support. Sustaining systems that provide the greatest coverage will give these providers the breathing space afforded by a basic level of core support. This in turn will enable them to improve their quality and their ability to engage in policy dialogue about long-term questions related to coexistence, integration and sustainability (options 2 and 3). Ensuring the core function of systems is an absolute priority both in terms of education provision, but also in terms of ensuring that education departments of armed groups are able to continue to function during the long drawn out peace process – and are given the time to plan for eventual integration or recognition of their systems.

Principles of approach

The most fundamental principle of this approach is taking time to build relationships and understand the context. It is also essential to recognise that these are complex conflict contexts and instant and easily measurable education outcomes cannot be expected. The 3MDG Fund has worked to establish realistic indicators for health in some of the same conflict-affected areas and these could be drawn upon and adapted for education.

Developing programmes to support core service delivery requires using a partner-specific approach, and working with the partner (the ethnic education provider) to map and understand the local context, including what other actors (complementary and non-complementary) are working in the same area, the specific risks and the specific needs.

Systems and Capacity Development

What it constitutes

Support for systems and capacity development could include, but is not limited to:

- Technical educational inputs and support, e.g. teacher training, curriculum development/revision, MTB-MLE.
- Organisational development and system strengthening, in e.g. project planning, communication, M&E, EMIS¹²⁶, financial and progress reporting
- Pilot projects, coupled with rigorous evaluation, to test different approaches to improving quality.

Justification

As described above, ethnic education providers face challenges in delivering quality services. Many express a need and willingness to improve the quality of the services they provide, as well as to strengthen their own systems and organisations¹²⁷. Processes aimed at strengthening systems and organisations may have the added benefit of supporting appropriate management of donor funds.

Strengthening systems and improving quality will also help ethnic education actors to make a stronger representation of the work that they do in their policy engagement efforts (option 3).

Principles of approach

Being able to identify needed technical inputs

126. Establishing and developing a reliable, comprehensive and inter-relational data set of educational data (an EMIS), would not only assist in planning and management, but could also offer a powerful way of substantiating the claims of the NSAs about the effectiveness and reach of their education services. Needless to say that utmost care has to be paid to protecting such information from being misused. One solution could be only to publish aggregate data sets.

127. NB: we did not – nor would it have been appropriate for us to within the context of this consultancy – undertake organisational capacity assessments or assess the quality of the education systems. This can only be done as part of a genuine partnership process.

requires relevant technical expertise on the part of the supporting organisation. In addition, it requires the supporting organisation to have the capacity and the skill to work through a genuine partnership process to identify and support systems and capacity development needs. This must be done in a practical and incremental way, and with a realistic assessment of the level of change that can be expected.

Policy Engagement

What it constitutes

Support for policy engagement could include, but is not limited to, facilitating and funding:

- Technical discussions, including identification of lessons learnt
- Research to create the evidence base for policy and advocacy
- Study exchanges
- Dialogue discussions
- Supporting networks and platforms for engagement and dialogue
- Advocacy events and other communications activities
- Documenting best practice so it can be scaled up and support quality improvements in other areas
- Identifying models and practical examples of what has worked elsewhere
- Supporting horizontal learning.

Justification

Ethnic education organisations need support to engage in policy dialogue processes – including those related to the peace process, and the education reform process – in order to identify and agree options for future decentralised governance systems, and to ensure that children in these system have the best possible opportunities for education and beyond. To do this, they need to think through what their negotiating positions are, what their arguments are, and what they are willing to compromise and concede on, as well as their red lines.

In addition, more reliable information is needed on the education situation in ethnic areas, both information about the problems identified earlier in this report, but perhaps more importantly, about the indigenous solutions that have been developed and about the systems that exist – and the benefits and successes of the current models. Also, identifying state of the art international references, models and practical examples of what has worked elsewhere could help to facilitate dialogue, encourage imagination and defuse fear and uncertainty.

Principles of approach

This is a facilitative approach that requires playing a catalytic role and assisting groups in what they want to do, without trying to force the agenda or direct the discussion. This could include supporting networks if they emerge (or where they already exist), but should not include actively forming networks for the reason that this reduces the likelihood that they are genuinely locally owned.

This approach requires accepting the diversity of different groups and the possibility that they will disagree and/or not wish to work as a cohesive whole. As a result it may be more appropriate to find different ways to support different groups' engagement with the process. It also requires being modest in the level of ambition (therefore not setting targets related to specific policy-level outcomes but rather focusing on the quality of the process) and accepting that any change in this process is incremental and may include negative as well as positive changes¹²⁸.

128. Kim Jolliffe's paper also sets out very useful guidelines in relation to supporting organisations in policy and advocacy. Jolliffe K, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services*, 2014.

7. Annexes

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Table: Primary-Middle and Middle-High School Transition Rates by State and Region

Table 5. Estimated Primary-Middle School and Middle-High School Transition Rates using EMIS and IHLCS

	PANEL A: Primary-Middle School Transition Rates			PANEL B: Middle-High School Transition Rates		
	EMIS (2011-12)	IHLCS 2009/10 (age 16-20 respondents)	IHLCS obs. (age 16-20)	EMIS (2011-12)	IHLCS 2009/10 (age 18-22 respondents)	IHLCS obs. (age 18-22)
UNION	79.34%	80.2%	10,064	83.54%	84.6%	9,440
Rural	69.03%	75.3%	7,485	61.27%	80.1%	6,972
Urban	113.32%	95.0%	2,579	108.50%	92.5%	2,468
By Region/State						
Kachin	93.64%	93%	390	80.56%	84%	378
Kayah	91.19%	98%	80	77.37%	89%	74
Kayin	79.05%	83%	416	69.49%	81%	364
Chin	89.56%	89%	228	76.54%	84%	203
Sagaing	87.47%	77%	1,220	79.91%	82%	1,178
Taninthayi	83.11%	89%	478	77.77%	74%	446
Bago (East)	82.53%	84%	513	77.43%	82%	506
Bago (West)	78.02%	63%	318	85.24%	80%	296
Magwe	83.70%	70%	874	83.99%	80%	834
Mandalay	86.68%	80%	1,390	87.12%	85%	1,294
Mon	82.82%	90%	435	78.73%	81%	411
Rakhine	53.83%	76%	900	92.33%	85%	847
Yangon	93.52%	95%	529	94.37%	93%	478
Shan (South)	79.12%	84%	365	75.72%	85%	345
Shan (North)	77.97%	73%	542	76.31%	87%	501
Shan (East)	80.65%	83%	293	78.75%	84%	259
Ayeyarwady	58.95%	74%	1,093	80.03%	85%	1,026

Notes: (1) The IHLCS is not intended to be representative at a state/region level, and estimates are subject to greater statistical imprecision due to small sub-sample size. Number of IHLCS observations shown in the right (grey) column of each panel.

(2) EMIS estimates are based on school (not household) locations, hence rural/urban transition rates are subject to errors.

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