

# Monastic schools in Myanmar

## a baseline assessment

### Myanmar Education Consortium

The Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) was established in 2012 and is funded through the Australian and UK Governments. It has the overall goal of increasing the number and proportion of children in Myanmar accessing and completing quality basic education. In particular, MEC aims to increase the quality of and access to complementary (non-government) education including early childhood, primary and non-formal education programs.

### Burnet Institute Myanmar & Monastic Education Development Group

BIMM has partnered with the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) - the national level coordinating and decision-making body for the monastic education sector - to build the capacity of the monastic school system to provide quality education and school facilities, including water, sanitation and hygiene. The monastic school system in Myanmar operates over 1,700 schools catering for around 300,000 children. This baseline study aimed to assess the current situation in monastic schools and to identify key areas of need to inform project development. The study is the broadest assessment of monastic schools to date and helps to build a national picture of monastic education in Myanmar. The study was designed to collect high quality and relevant data, consistent (where possible) with standardised international indicators.

### Baseline study objectives

Specific objectives of the baseline study are to assess and describe:

1. Administration practices within monastic schools
2. Teaching and learning practices, including profiling of teaching staff
3. School environments and facilities, in particular, water, sanitation and hygiene characteristics
4. Student health and hygiene practices, and hygiene education
5. Level of involvement of parents and communities in the schools.

### Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was used, employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including observation checklists, self-administered questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Eight states and regions were included to ensure feasibility, whilst maintaining representativeness of various geographic areas. A ten per cent random sample of monastic schools was selected from all registered monastic schools in the included eight states/regions. A total of 127 monastic schools were included for quantitative data collection, and qualitative data collection was carried out in approximately one third of schools (n=41) in order to reach saturation.

Table 1. Sampling frame for monastic schools in eight states and divisions

| State/Region | Registered schools | Target sample | Inflated 10% (non-response) | Inflated 25% (substitutions) |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Yangon       | 182                | 18            | 20                          | 27                           |
| Mandalay     | 343                | 34            | 38                          | 51                           |
| Bago         | 121                | 12            | 13                          | 18                           |
| Sagaing      | 212                | 21            | 24                          | 31                           |
| Chin         | 19                 | 2             | 2                           | 3                            |
| Shan         | 62                 | 6             | 7                           | 9                            |
| Ayarwaddy    | 159                | 16            | 18                          | 24                           |
| Tanintharyi  | 48                 | 5             | 5                           | 7                            |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>1146</b>        | <b>114</b>    | <b>127</b>                  | <b>170</b>                   |

Data collection was carried out from July – October 2013 by five teams of four data collectors.

### Main findings

Schools varied greatly in terms of size, infrastructure, management practices, and available resources. There was less variation in teaching and learning practices, and teacher profiles, and some variation in student health and hygiene practices. Schools had been operating for between two and 51 years, with a median of 14 years.

### School profiles

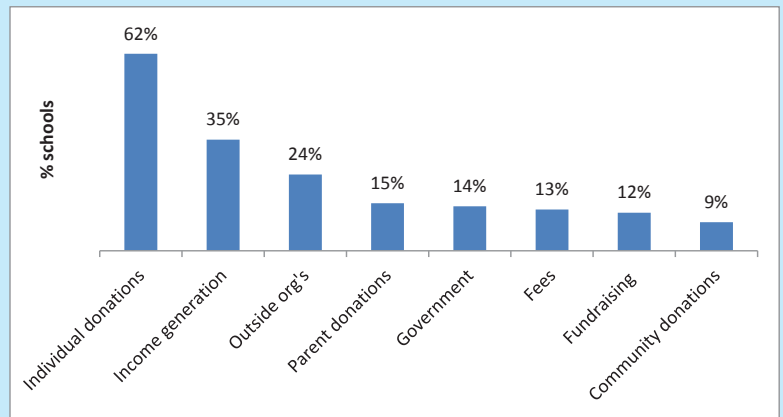
- 54% of schools were primary level, 37% post primary (up to grade nine) and 9% were high schools (up to year 11). The sample included day schools (54%), boarding schools (10%) and both (36%)
- The median number of students was 152 with a range of 10 to 2946
- The median student to teacher ratio was 1:25
- The main ethnicity of students in 81% of schools was Bamar, and Paou and/or Palaung in 19% monastery schools
- Five year survival rates are low - median 54%
- Gross retention rates from the beginning of the school term to the beginning of the following year were 98%.

### School administration and management

- Principals (monks) are primarily responsible for administration and management, sometimes supported by school committees
- 49% of schools had a staff member trained in school administration
- Schools appear to be reliant on donations - fees are charged in 17% of schools. Income generation activities are conducted in 30% of schools and fundraising in 13% (Figure 1)



**Figure 1.** Funding sources for monastic schools



- Record keeping practices varied significantly, and there are no agreed minimum standards
- Staff meetings were held in 74% schools, were usually infrequent, and teacher participation is only encouraged in 46% of schools

### Teaching staff and teaching and learning practices

- 14% of teachers in monastic schools were voluntary and not paid a salary - 28% of these were monks, 44% women, 28% male
- 82% of teachers were female; monks were teachers in 4% of schools. Teachers had a median of four years teaching experience
- Monastic schools cannot match the salaries offered in government schools and many principals acknowledged retention of teachers as a significant issue - *“When there is a vacancy in the government schools, teachers move to government schools”*
- Median monthly income for teachers ranged from 33 300 Kyats to 40 000 Kyats (34 USD – 40 USD)
- Staff recruitment processes vary. Although the minimum level of qualifications for teachers appears to be low, over half of teachers (60%) are have various graduate degrees
- There is some government involvement or collaboration in 50% of monastic schools, mainly in the form of training offered, stationary and textbook provision or occasional technical support.
- Only a small proportion of classes observed (16%) demonstrated a high number of features of child-centred approaches (CCA) to teaching and learning

“A child centred approach is the very good method if we can use it effectively, compared with the current method. By using teaching aids, this technique makes the children learn easily without learning by heart.”

– School teacher

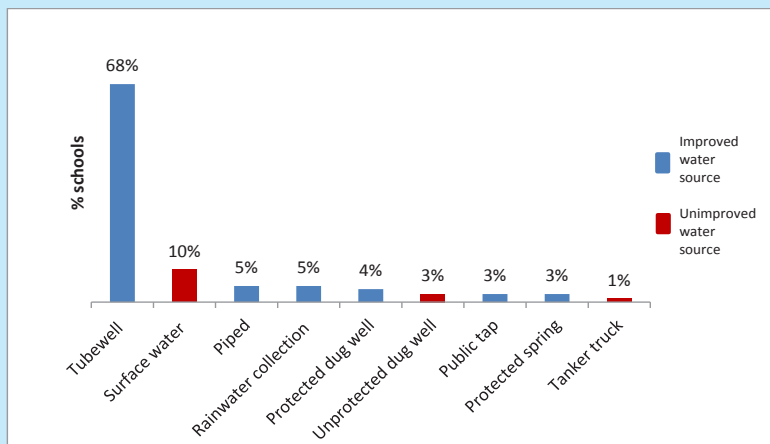
- Almost all teachers have heard of CCA, and 43% have attended some form of CCA training in the past
- Most teachers and principals identified several barriers to implementing CCA, including: insufficient class time, materials and teaching aides, and classroom space
- Misconceptions of CCA and a lack of understanding of how to implement CCA was common
- 33% of teachers nominated CCA as a topic they would like to receive future training in
- Physical punishment of students for misbehavior was reported by most schools and observed in 7% of classes

### School environment and facilities

- The level of infrastructure and facilities varied considerably: 60% classrooms had desks and chairs, while 6% of schools had neither chairs nor desks
- 29% of schools had a library. In schools without libraries, 60% had books available for students

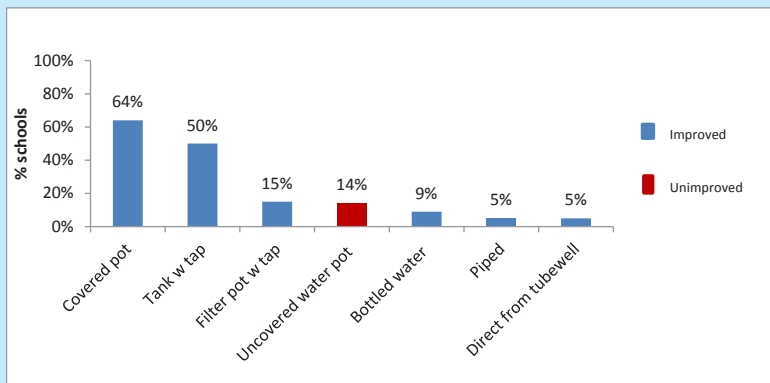
- Most schools (83%) had adequate play space for students
- The majority of schools (75%) conducted multiple classes in one room. For some schools, up to nine classes per room were taught
- Only 37% of schools practiced good waste disposal (collection, burying, used as fertilizer).
- Most monastery schools (81%) rely on an 'improved' water source – usually tube wells (58% of schools) (Figure 2)

**Figure 2.** Main water source for schools



- Drinking water is stored unsafely in uncovered water pots in 13% of schools (Figure 3)

**Figure 3.** Drinking water storage



- The majority of schools (59%) had poor water drainage systems
- A small proportion of schools (6%) did not have any toilets for students
- The most common types of toilets were: fly proof toilets, pour flush, or septic tank systems.
- Function, accessibility and cleanliness of toilets varied considerably: 42% were 'clean', and no toilets were wheelchair accessible
- The median student to toilet ratio was 53:1. Seven schools had a student to toilet ratio of greater than 294:1. (UNICEF/WHO recommend 25 girls per toilet compartment and 50 boys per toilet when a urinal is available)
- Hand washing facilities were available in only 67% of schools
- Only 22% of those schools with hand washing facilities had sufficient soap or ash

### School health, hygiene practices and hygiene education

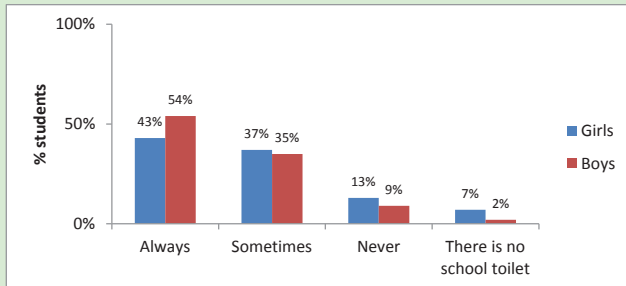
- Government health checks for students were conducted in 78% of monastery schools last year (only in 44% of schools in Ayeyarwaddy)
- There is limited capacity for schools to address illness in students, e.g. only 16% of schools had a clinic or health workers available, only 51% had first aid kits and 30% had someone trained in first aid
- 83% of students reported remembering some lessons about hygiene or cleanliness, however the quality, amount and effectiveness of hygiene education in monastery schools is questionable
- 61% of students reported 'always' washing hands before meals, and 61% 'always' washing after toileting. However, observations and anecdotal reports suggest significant reporting bias
- Reported hand washing behavior was not related to availability of hand



wash facilities, remembering hygiene lessons, location of hand wash facilities, or availability of soap or water

- 49% of students reported 'always' using the school toilet, 39% 'sometimes', 8% 'never', and 3% said 'there was no school toilet'. Boys were more likely to always use the toilet, and girls more likely to never use the school toilet ( $p=0.02$ ) (Figure 4). Common reasons for not using the toilets were that they were too dirty, too dark or busy

**Figure 4.** Reported use of school toilets by students



- Toilets were clean in less than half of schools (43%)
- Reported toilet use was not related to cleanliness or availability (student:toilet ratio)
- 23% of students (median age 10 years) reported experiencing diarrhoea on one day or more in the week prior to the survey, and half of these students also had vomiting on one or more days in the past week
- Shan state and Tanintharyi had the highest weekly rates of diarrhea at 39% and 32% respectively. Chin, Yangon and Bago had the lowest at 7%, 12% and 12% respectively
- Diarrhoeal rates did not vary significantly between boys and girls, or between grades
- About half (59%) of students reported taking oral rehydration salts the last time they had diarrhea. Grade five students were more likely to report ORS use than grade four ( $p=0.03$ ).
- Reported poor hand washing before eating and after toileting was associated with an increased prevalence of diarrhoea ( $p=0.04$ )
- A functional water source (on 5-7 days per week) was associated with reduced prevalence of diarrhea ( $p<0.05$ )

## Involvement of parents and communities in monastic schools

- Parental involvement in schools and student learning is minimal - "Here parents are quite poor and they are busy with their daily chores. They do not have much concern about the children's education."
- School committees or parent teacher associations (PTA) were present at 67% of monastic schools
- The school committees/PTA were usually made up of the principal, teachers, monks, parents, and other community members
- Female members were only present in 49% of school committees/PTA
- Groups did not meet very often – only 21% met weekly or monthly
- Primary functions of the school committees/PTA included: fundraising (61%), school maintenance (60%), coordinating parental involvement in the schools (46%), support for building new infrastructure (42%), encouraging out of school children to go to school (44%), and hiring new teachers (13%).

## Gender differences in monastic schools:

- The median girl-boy ratio at monastic schools is relatively even at 0.96, ie. for every 100 boys attending monastic schools, there are 96 girls. Chin state has the highest girl-boy ratio at 1.31, and Tanintharyi the lowest at 0.79

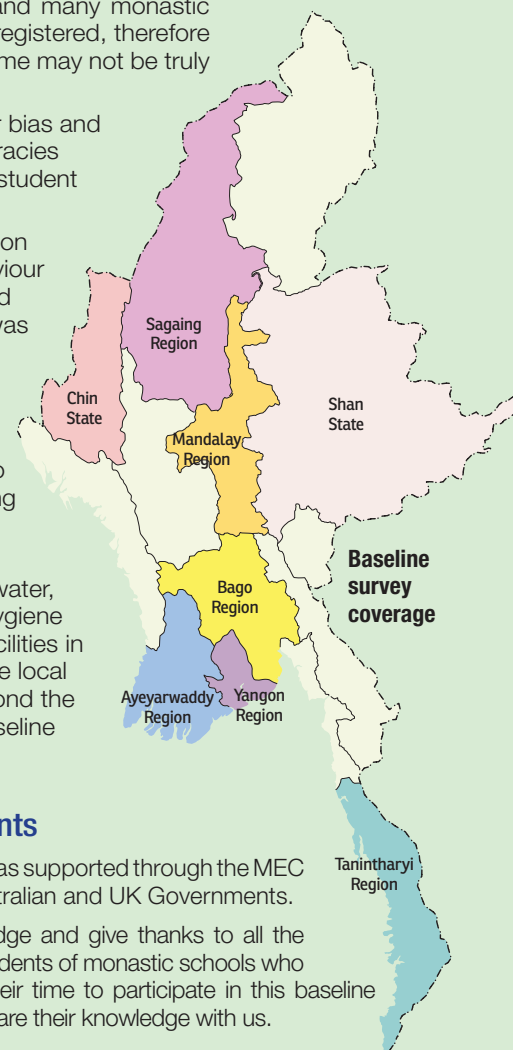
- Survival rates were equal, however the upper range for girls was greater suggesting a relative increase in girls enrolments over the last five years
- Girls had separate toilets in only 47% of schools
- In schools that had separate girls' toilets, a significantly greater proportion of girls reported 'always' using the school toilets ( $p<0.01$ )
- Girls tended to be less likely to 'always' use the school toilets ( $p=0.08$ )
- Females are less involved in formal school committees or parent teacher associations
- Women make up 62% of all voluntary teachers (not including monks)

## Disability in monastic schools:

- Data on disability is not routinely collected and. Only 2% of schools collect information on disability at enrolment
- Students with disabilities were reported in 40% of schools
- Some teachers were aware of strategies for including students with disabilities in class
- Schools did not tend to have accessible facilities (classrooms, toilets, drinking water, hand wash stations etc.)

## Limitations

- Sampling for this baseline study was based on a list of registered monastic schools. However, this list was from two years ago and many monastic schools are not registered, therefore this sampling frame may not be truly representative
- Some responder bias and reporting inaccuracies are likely for the student questionnaire
- Formal observation of hygiene behaviour (use of toilets and hand washing) was not conducted
- Students were not included in qualitative data collection (due to difficulties passing this by ethics committees)
- Investigation of water, sanitation and hygiene practices and facilities in homes and at the local village were beyond the scope of this baseline assessment.



## Acknowledgements

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