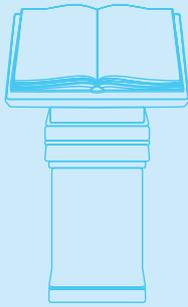# In the Search for Peace in Myanmar: Investigating Top-Level and Ground-Level Perspectives

August 2019

Framing the Constitution-Making Process for Peace-Building in Myanmar: The Perspectives of Ethnic Armed Organizations and Civil Society

Hnin Aye Hlaing and La Gyi Zau Lawn
Edited by Radka Antalíková, PhD

The Deadlocking Factors in Myanmar's Peace Process

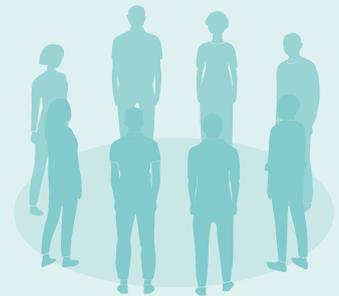Gum San Awng, Mi Aye Khine, and Nyan Tun Aung
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Htoo Htet Naing and Kyaw Zin Lin
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Public Trust in the Myanmar Police Force: Exploring the Influencing Factors

Thura Aung and Win Win May
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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

PLRI
Peace Leadership & Research Institute

In the Search for Peace in Myanmar: Investigating Top-Level and Ground-Level Perspectives

August 2019

Contents

List of Abbreviations

ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army	**MPF**	Myanmar Police Force
CSO	civil society organization	**NCA**	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
EAO	ethnic armed organization	**NLD**	National League for Democracy
EPP	ethnic political party	**NRC**	National Registration Card
FGD	focus group discussion	**UEHRD**	Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development
JMC	Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee		
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization	**UPC**	Union Peace Conference
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party		
KNU	Karen National Union		

Foreword

Before talking about the Peace Leadership and Research Institute (PLRI) and the work of our graduates in this publication, I should perhaps start with the development of an idea. The beginning of an idea is always by thinking, and a fine idea, in fact, is a formulated piece of thinking. We know that serious thinking has its own order and structure. It involves both answering questions and questioning answers. Moreover, serious thinking requires an open and orderly mind. It is precisely this process of thinking – about the peace process in Myanmar – that led us at Thabyay Education Foundation to initiate a small research institute that would train young leaders in the country to think and write about critical issues that the country is facing. The goal is not only to introduce the new generation of peacemakers in Myanmar to the critical thinking process, but also to encourage them to approach the myriad of problems we are facing from multiple perspectives and make evidence-based arguments in their presentation on a topic of their choice.

Altogether twenty-one fellows completed the program in the academic year 2018-2019. They were required to conduct research on relevant topics in collaboration with one another. Through the research that they conducted, we encouraged them to question the status quo and come up with new ideas and new ways of thinking about peace. Above all, we encouraged them to dare to dream about a new Myanmar! This publication is a result of this process, presenting selected reports of our graduates' research projects that we believe to be the most applicable to the country's peace process as well as the most rigorously executed.

While the PLRI offers only a year-long program, the relationships that have been built among the fellows, we hope, will be sustained long beyond the duration of the fellowship. As the fellows came from different backgrounds, different geographic regions, they will go back and serve or work with different organizations. It is even possible that they will one day sit in the same room – where peace negotiations take place – and yet on different sides of the table. Regardless, we hope that they will let reason prevail in their search for peace and allow critical discourse and reasonability guide them in their endeavor for justice for the people of Myanmar.

Saw Myo Min Thu
Co-founder of PLRI

It is with great pleasure that we congratulate the Peace Leadership and Research Institute (PRLI) on the completion of this publication. The research papers written by the young research fellows from the first batch of the Institute are a significant, innovative and Myanmar-owned contribution to achieving peace in this country.

The FES is dedicated to promoting future leaders and researchers of Myanmar. As a political foundation engaged in supporting peace all around the world we firmly believe that the pathway towards resolution of conflicts leads through education and empowerment.

The authors of this collection of papers, a group of young pioneers, have dedicated their time and have taken steps to highlight issues that are prevalent and are pressing matters in current day Myanmar's political landscape. They have done their very best to provide a general overview on the current situation on the ground and the possible remedies that should be taken under consideration from the various stakeholders and the general reader.

In a country like Myanmar, where research and statistics skillsets are limited, the PLRI programme provides a genuinely unique platform for young researchers to hone their skills and gather experience in academic writing..

The future is bright for these young researchers as they endeavor to bring about change in their respective communities or in the careers paths. We wish them success for their next steps as researchers, think tankers, civil society activists, government employees and local community leaders

Kaung Myat Soe
FES Myanmar
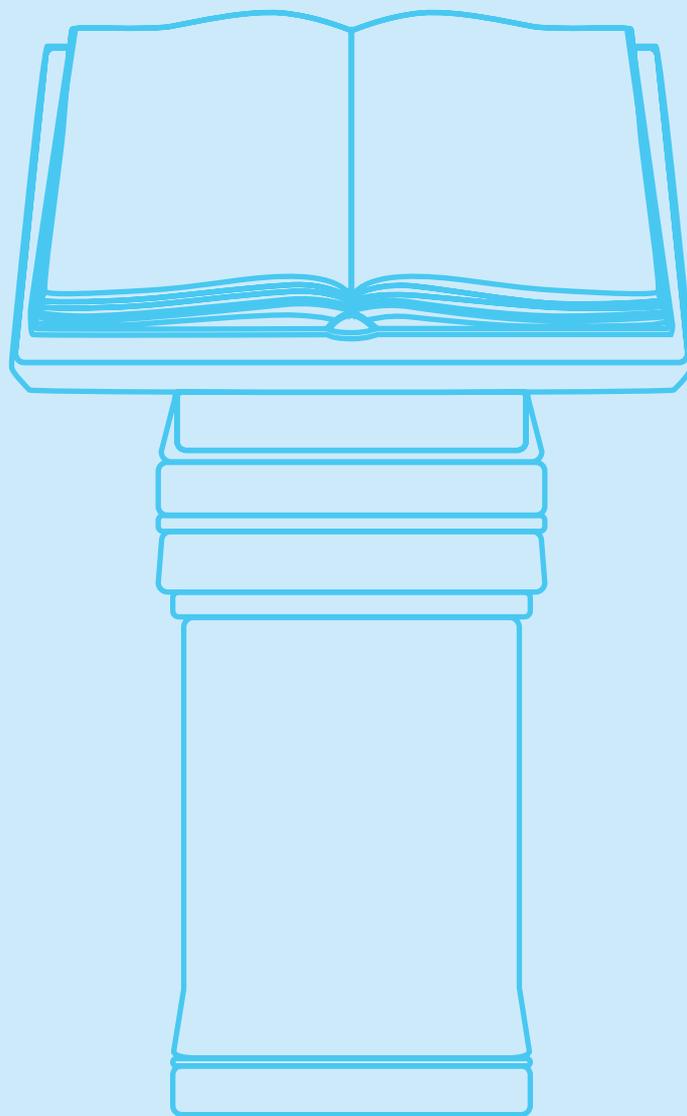Programme Manager for Peace and Security

Acknowledgement

PART I

PERSPECTIVES OF TOP-LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS OF MYANMAR'S PEACE PROCESS

Framing the Constitution-Making Process for Peace-Building in Myanmar: The Perspectives of Ethnic Armed Organizations and Civil Society

Hnin Aye Hlaing and La Gyi Zau Lawn
Edited by Radka Antalíková, PhD

Abstract

Myanmar has been affected by long-lasting armed conflict. Along with Myanmar's complex history, the lack of a constitution guaranteeing political demands to diverse political entities is one of the main barriers to obtaining peace in the country. Consequently, constitution-making is essential for the peace process in Myanmar. Therefore, the aim of the present research was to examine how constitution-making can be applied as a conflict resolution tool in Myanmar's peace process. Qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with four experts, three stakeholders from ethnic armed organizations, and one member of a regional parliament of the current civilian government. The study found that constitution-making is a crucial tool for mitigating the conflicts in the country. This research suggests that approaches to constitution-making need to be changed in order to achieve sustainable peace in Myanmar. Based on the findings of this research, there are two significant barriers to the peace-building process: 1) lack of political settlement through a peace agreement and 2) constitutional issues. Therefore, the research recommends parties to engage in peace negotiation to meet political settlement in the form of a peace agreement. The constitution-making process could then be initiated based on such an agreement, and potentially result in a new constitution guaranteeing genuine federalism. This study contributes to our understanding of stakeholders' views on constitutional issues, which need to be resolved when building peace, especially in a conflicted country.

Acknowledgement

Introduction

The constitution is the foundational feature of a nation recognized as supreme law. A constitution sets out the fundamental framework for the legal, political, and social system of a country. As a legal instrument, the constitution itself lays out the functioning system of the state's power, provides for the rule of law, and limits power. By expressing shared values, identity, and aspirations of the people, constitutions are also formed to reflect and shape the society (Bulmer, 2017). Finally, constitutions are political instruments, which manage the separation of powers among governance institutions and produce mechanisms through which public policy has to be adopted (Hedling, 2017). Above all, constitutions are vitally important for nation-building, promoting common identity through the inclusiveness and involvement of all layers of diverse societies in the constitution-making process (Fleiner, 2002).

Furthermore, in many states, constitutions have been established not only to build and regulate the form of a government and its relations with its citizens, but also to provide them with crisis management tools. In fact, the traditional constitution-making process is still widely perceived as an essential element of governance after conflict, formulating settlement structures that aim to obtain balance and stability in the long term (Hart, 2001). Specifically, power sharing needs to be seriously considered as a factor in the constitution-making process, as it is the only way in which interests and demands of diverse groups in deeply divided societies can be accommodated (Lijphart, 2004). Since constitution-making is a process that provides the framework for the distribution and limitation of power, it is the context in which political elites from different divisions should proceed with negotiations regarding the claiming, holding, and sharing of power. Ideally, a constitution should then be a mechanism through which future conflict can be handled peacefully without turning back to violence.

At the same time, building peace only through the cessation of conflict is unlikely to be successful without transformation of the political environment. Negative peace can be achieved through ceasefire agreements that only focus on ending violent conflict, but are not intended to build all-inclusive and sustainable peace; that is, to provide political and governance transition and a proper power sharing among diverse groups within a nation. Therefore, the design of a constitution and the constitution-making process can play an important role in conflict resolution by regulating and providing all these requirements that are needed for positive peace. Then, the model of constitution and constitution-making processes can be applied as an essential tool in transitional post-conflict periods (Samuels, 2006). At this point, the higher the involvement of the parties that experienced the conflict, the more sustainable the constitutional outcome will be. Therefore, with respect to strong public participation, the voices of marginalized people must be included in the power sharing process (Hart, 2001).

In Myanmar, one of the reasons why domestic armed conflicts still continue to happen is the lack of political settlement between conflicting parties. To solve such a problem, it is necessary to take into consideration the constitution crisis in parallel with the negotiation of peace agreements. In fact, the 2008 Constitution has been by some described as one of the main obstacles in the country's current peace process (e.g. Karen Information Center News, 2019). According to Hartery (2019), the reservation of 25% of parliamentary seats for the Tatmadaw as provided for in Articles 74, 141, and 161 is the most challenging factor. Furthermore, due to the Tatmadaw having authority over the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Border Guard Force, and holding majority in the National Defense and Security Council, it can be argued that this constitution had been "monopolized" by the Tatmadaw. Considering the above issues, it is undeniable that the role of the constitution is a crucial tool for mitigating conflicts in the current peace process.

Methodology

This research used qualitative methodology; specifically, in-depth interviews with key participants were chosen. The interview questions were developed based on previous literature and the researchers' interests in constitution-making and the current Myanmar peace process. The interview questions were open-ended and not completely identical across all participants, because their background as well as their perceptions were different. First, the questions were formulated in English and then translated into Burmese. Before the actual data collection, the researchers conducted a pilot study with Saw Myo Min Thu, who was Executive Director of Thabyay Education Foundation at that time, in order to ensure the method and questions were appropriate.

In this study, purposive expert and stakeholder sampling methods were used. Since the research question related to very current issues, experts and stakeholders of the peace process, constitution, and laws were the most relevant people to provide insights to answer the research question. A total of eight high-level people from ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), civil society, and the current government were interviewed. The interviewees were:

- General Sumlut Gun Maw, Vice-Chairman of the Kachin Independence Council, Kachin Independence Organization (KIO; non-signatory);
- Khu Oo Reh, Vice-Chairman of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP; non-signatory);
- Padoh Kwe Htoo Win, Vice-Chairman of Karen National Union (KNU; signatory);
- Dr. Khin Zaw Win, human rights defender;
- Sai Wansai, Shan political activist and commentator;
- Naw May Oo, Policy Advisor, Salween Institute for Public Policy;
- Gum Ja Naw, constitutional expert from Kachin State; and,
- U Kyaw Min San, National League for Democracy (NLD) Member of Bago Region Parliament.

Once all the data had been collected, the interviews were transcribed. Then, all the transcriptions were printed and coded by hand and the most important codes were organized into categories and themes. When it comes to ethical considerations, the participants of this research were experts and high-level members of EAOs, so building trust was a priority for their security. It was also important to promise confidential storing of the collected data. Finally, the researchers confirmed with the participants that they were happy to have their names mentioned in the published report.

Findings and Discussion

Participants' Views on the 2008 Constitution

Most of the interviewed EAOs, whether signatory or non-signatory to the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), are against the 2008 Constitution and have never accepted it. This is not only because of its contents but also because of the nature of the drafting process, which was not all-inclusive. Even though some representatives from EAOs participated in the drafting process, they had no real influence and viewed their involvement as tokenistic. General Sumlut Gun Maw explained:

> "When we attended [the National Assembly], the principles had been already released. They [the Tatmadaw] formed the National Assembly in the 1990s. As we just started to attend in 2003, 2004, it was the time for discussion in detail about those basic principles. But, we submitted [a request] to the Assembly to re-discuss those basic principles, because we [EAOs] did not attend the prior stages of the Assembly. However, these discussions did not make it into the final decisions".

Moreover, according to Padoh Saw Kwe Htoo Win from the KNU, although the 2008 Constitution has some features of democratic norms and principles, there is nothing to guarantee the ethnic rights that EAOs have been demanding. General Sumlut Gun Maw also said that "the 2008 Constitution does not have the important basic content which ought to be inserted. For instance, the principles of federal democracy, human rights norms, and the values of the 1947 Panglong Agreement have not been included". U Kyaw Min San, NLD Member of Bago Region Parliament, maintained that "our constitution is quasi-federal and quasi-democratic, so if we amend the constitution with more relevant factors, I think that can make the ethnics satisfied". However, expert Gun Ja Naw claimed that the 2008 Constitution is neither federal nor quasi-federal, stating that it "solely supports the role of the Tatmadaw".

All-inclusive participation in the process of constitution-making is essential, since the shared identity and the common values must be preserved through the provisions of the constitution, as it is social document. Yet, because the 2008 Constitution does not represent the political will

of EAOs and safeguards the role of the Tatmadaw, they do not accept it. Moreover, the present findings show that the 2008 Constitution lacks ethnic rights based on the principles of federal democracy and the 1947 Panglong Agreement. In order for the constitution to be a political document for all the different ethnic political entities, it must include the demands of the EAOs.

Participants' Views on the Current Peace Process and the Role of the 2008 Constitution

According to the present findings, both the signatories and non-signatories to the NCA agree that a nationwide ceasefire agreement should be implemented prior to entering an all-inclusive peace agreement. Moreover, the EAOs interviewed for this study expressed a need for a common political vision (i.e. to form federalism) in order to effectively take part in the peace negotiation process. Khu Oo Reh from the KNPP clarified, "We need a common political goal and perception among the EAOs while we are entering the frame of political dialogues to achieve reliable political settlement through peace agreements". Indeed, EAOs view the lack of political settlement as the main cause of the conflict, and the hard pressure from the Tatmadaw and concerns about the formation of a single army as the most considerable barriers. Furthermore, the commitment to follow the agreed terms of past and present agreements is seen as crucial for trust-building, which is in turn crucial for the peace process. General Sumlut Gun Maw from the KIO said, "We should not only talk about trust-building. We need practical action for building trust. The commitment to follow the promised agreement is very essential. Without this kind of commitment, the 'trust-building' will be easily broken".

Two of the interviewed EAO participants strongly believe that the peace process is related with the constitutional matters, as the current 2008 Constitution does not fully provide for the rights of ethnics and democratic norms. Therefore, constitutional matters must be resolved in order to obtain peace. Khu Oo Reh from KNPP argued that "the 2008 Constitution must be amended, since it lacks strong provisions about self-determination rights and ethnic equality." When it comes to the KIO's decision not to sign the NCA, according to General Sumlut Gun

Maw, the 2008 Constitution is not the main influencing factor; the KIO believes that the issue of the constitution should be discussed separately. However, contrary to the KIO, the reason why the KNPP has decided not to sign the NCA is related to the 2008 Constitution. At the same time, both the KIO and the KNPP representatives said that there had been no specific discussion about the constitution with the Tatmadaw or the government. According to Sai Wansai, the EAOs' decisions to sign or not to sign the NCA are not influenced by the 2008 Constitution, since they do not accept it in the first place as it cannot cover their political aspirations and objectives.

Myanmar is very diverse country, so it is very important to recognize and respect diversity through democratic federal principles. Most of the armed groups are formed based on ethnicity, demanding political rights that can be described as minority rights and self-determination. Therefore, some of the EAOs strongly believe that the peace process is related to constitutional matters as the current 2008 Constitution does not fully provide ethnic rights or a fully democratic system. Reducing violent conflict might be the first step of the peace process; yet, peace cannot be obtained by a ceasefire agreement only. Since the main cause of the conflict is the lack of political settlement, it is essential to implement an effective political dialogue in the peace process.

Participants' Views on the Current Constitutional Amendment Process

According to the peace process road map of the NLD, the 2008 Constitution will be amended in accordance with the Union Peace Accord from the Union Peace Conference (UPC) also known as the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference. The NCA signatory EAOs generally agree with this amending process. Padoh Kwe Htoo Win from the KNU stated,

"Some countries adopt the constitution based on the result of a political agreement. Therefore, with regard to the constitution amendment, it is required firstly to obtain a political agreement through a political dialogue. For our country, the Union Peace Accord from the UPC is the political agreement, so it is superior to the constitution from a political

point of view, as constitution-making is interrelated with politics and the peace process. Moreover, the representatives of the Hluttaw, the Tatmadaw, and the government also have been deeply involved in the UPC. Therefore, the Hluttaw cannot deny or abolish the proposals that came from the Union Peace Accord to amend the constitution".

The current way the NLD is approaching the constitutional amendment is clearly laid out in written form; however, in reality, there are many serious challenges to this process. For instance, while EAOs and civil society organizations submitted proposals to the UPC with the hope of building a framework for a new constitution, the Tatmadaw, some political parties, and the Hluttaw approved the amending process mainly based on the frame of the current constitution. Moreover, the conferences did not allow for effective discussions related with constitutional issues. Padoh Kwe Htoo Win from the KNU described the conferences: "We could not openly talk about or discuss the constitutional amendment, the Tatmadaw did not want to talk deeply about it, as it is not the main subject matter of the conferences". As a result, after UPC had assembled three times, the 51-point agreement is too general, according to the interviewed EAO representatives.

The NLD government has also failed to coordinate with Ethnic Political Parties (EPPs) and EAOs. Khu Oo Reh recommended that

"The NLD needs to have a well-prepared strategy to have a strong coordination with EPPs. If the NLD solely approves the amending process of the constitution without good coordination with EPPs, the process will surely fail. This is because the image of NLD is not as good as before, and they are losing some public support, from the allied parties' supporters as well".

In relation to this, Sai Wansai pointed out that if the amendments lead to a minimum devolution of power, the ethnic conflict will go on. But with maximum devolution, the ethnic conflict could be defused. To achieve this, the NLD government has to coordinate with EPPs.

The interviewed signatory EAOs seem to pin their hopes on a drastically amended 2008 Constitution, which

should provide for the establishment of a genuine federal union. In contrast, the non-signatory EAOs want a new constitution that would provide a confederate type of system. Nonetheless, if the result of the current constitutional amendment provided for maximum devolution with a strong political decision-making power for the state level and less power in the union center, the EAOs would likely accept the amended constitution. Moreover, according to the EAO participants, the constitutional amendment must include articles that are undemocratic or go against the principles of federalism. Padoh Kwe Htoo Win stated that

> "When it comes to amending the constitution, not only the sections of the constitution but also the basic principles must be amended. For us, amending the basic principles should be a priority, as they are the essence of the constitution".

This view was echoed by U Kyaw Min San: "When amending the constitution, we have to change the related sections also. We cannot only focus on one particular section".

Finally, since the aim of constitution-making is to build a developed country and guarantee sustainable peace and unification, not only the civilian government but also other stakeholders need to participate in the process:

> "In my point of view, the constitution has to work two jobs in my country, one is peace and another one is country development. So, approaches are very important for that. So, we need to modify the approaches, which are from common deals of all stakeholders. The civilian government is not the only one to make the constitution. The main problem of the constitution is that it is not representing the unification of diversities of the country. Thus, we need all-inclusiveness", said Naw May Oo.

According to Dr. Khin Zaw Win, the government needs to create different ways for the public to participate in the constitution-making: "We need to think about all-inclusiveness in the constitution-making. Firstly, law experts, especially constitutional law experts, and civil society organizations need to bring the voices from the public". In

contrast, according to both U Kyaw Min San and Dr. Khin Zaw Win, if the current civilian government negotiates through an elite-level dialogue with closed-door negotiation, the constitution amendment cannot guarantee peace.

Ethnic Armed Organizations' Preferred Constitution-Making Process

Some of the participants argued for the constitution-making to be applied in parallel with the peace process. For instance, General Sumlut Gun Maw expressed this by saying,

> "When we describe the peace process, all the implementations of different parts, such as reconciliation, state-building, trust-building process, including the concern over the constitution, have to be done in parallel. However, in reality, the state-building process and peace-building process go on separately. Both of them have to go together."

This view was shared by constitutional law expert Naw May Oo: "The constitution and the peace process have a direct relationship, so if we do not discuss the constitution in the peace process, it will not be effective for peace in the country". In contrast, the participant from the KNPP believes that political settlement from a peace agreement is essential in order for constitution-making to take place in the first place. Therefore, a complete peace agreement should be established prior to entering the constitution-making process. Khu Oo Reh argued that

> "We first need to achieve a peace agreement. After that, the constitution-making (whether adoption or amendment) should be initiated based on the contents of that peace agreement. This is the procedure of how the peace process should be. However, the real situation of our current peace process is not like this. We do not have a strong peace agreement yet. The NCA is just a ceasefire agreement, not a peace agreement".

Sai Wansai also stated that "ideally, the peace negotiation process has to be in place or agreed upon first. And with this agreement, a new constitution can be drawn, which

would cater to the real genuine federalism that all could agree on and live with". In reality, the lack of a peace agreement is a serious concern for the constitution-making process within the framework of the NCA. Another challenge is the forming of the Union Peace Accord due to the rigid timeline:

> "The timeline must not be too long. Right now, when each side of the platform goes on separately, the timeline can be made as long by the opposite sides as they want. One group can draw the timeline without containing mutual consent. This is an important issue", said General Sumlut Gun Maw.

Moreover, there are still a lot of difficulties and challenges to obtaining political settlement. For instance, the Tatmadaw and EAOs have different views on federalism, mainly related to the terms 'union' versus 'federalism'. Khu Oo Reh explained:

> "Contrary to the concept of EAOs, Myanmar prefer to use the term 'union' instead of 'federalism'. For us, the term 'union' emerged from the concept of 'unitary' [as in a unitary system of government]. On the other hand, for the EAOs, federalism is the only common political target for all of us. Because, our country was actually formed by the principles of 'coming together', which means that independent states came together to build the federal country for the common interest, based on equality. So, currently, it is so necessary to write state constitutions [sub-state constitutions] if we accept the concept of 'federalism'".

The EAO participants are mainly concerned with achieving political and economic self-determination and equal rights; therefore, federalism is their main political target. Consequently, sub-state constitutions become crucial for them. Padoh Kwe Htoo Win from the KNU expressed his opinion:

> "Sub-state constitutions are essential for EAOs in order to build the federal state. Moreover, according to the nature of our state, the nation should be formed by the togetherness of the

states based on the concept of 'coming-together'. By the federal term, the states must share mandate power and authority with the central government. However, in reality, the central government controls all the states, and provides some limited authority to the states. Obviously, this is incompatible with the federal principles. At this point, the federalism that is contained with the features of power sharing mechanisms, decentralization modes, must come about as a political settlement through the peace process".

Sub-state constitutions might result from political settlement, as they deliver improved constitutional space autonomy for the marginalized, sub-state entities, especially in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Accordingly, sub-state constitutional frameworks are essential for addressing sub-state demands for self-governance. Politically, the issue of 'no separation' status is a serious concern for the Tatmadaw, when it comes to writing the sub-state constitutions. However, EAOs prefer to focus more on the right to self-determination. These kinds of different concepts tend to create challenges for the making of sub-state constitutions. Even though it is difficult to apply, if the results of the constitution-making process provide enough space for the role of sub-state constitutions, violent conflict could be managed and prevented.

In Myanmar's case, political settlement through a peace negotiation process has to precede drafting the constitution, and not the other way around, if real reconciliation and peaceful co-existence are to be achieved. Since constitutions and constitution-making can be essential tools in transitional post-conflict periods, a peace agreement that is formed in parallel with political settlement needs to be established first. Indeed, the interviewed EAOs preferred transitional political arrangements (either in a peace agreement or a stand-alone document), which can lead to a final constitution along with the peace agreements. Unfortunately, though the forming of the UPC was intended to fill this gap, the results from the UPC did not fully support the constitutional arrangements. Moreover, the serious challenge for EAOs, the Tatmadaw, and the NLD government in discussions related to constitutional issues is the gap in the conceptual views of each party, for instance relating to the terms 'union' and 'federalism'.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of the present research was to examine how constitution-making can be applied as a conflict resolution tool for the peace process of Myanmar. Moreover, the purpose of the current study was to determine the common points of concern and challenges for constitution-making with the aim of contributing to its betterment. The investigation assessed how the 2008 Constitution and constitutional issues were viewed and applied by different actors in the peace process, including EAOs and civil society experts, and how they would prefer the constitution-making process to be framed in order to build sustainable peace in Myanmar. The findings have shown that different stakeholders from EAOs (signatory and non-signatory to the NCA) and civil society have the same perception; namely, that the 2008 Constitution does not fully provide for federalism and democracy. EAOs do not accept the 2008 Constitution, since it lacks ethnic and self-determination rights as well as federal principles. Furthermore, the participants in this study expressed the need for an all-inclusive constitution-making process. According to our findings, the 2008 Constitution does not support peace- and state-building, and the participants in this study believe that the peace process is strongly related to the constitutional matters.

The present findings confirm that the current constitutional amendment process is not the preferred path for the EAOs; however, they agree that the results emerged from this constitutional amendment could contribute to the peace process if the amending process includes the concerns of other political entities, such as EPPs and EAOs. At this point, the implementation of the concept of 'federal principles' is really essential to be discussed, since it is generally the common political goal for both signatory and non-signatory EAOs. Taken together, these results suggest that the impact of the current constitutional amendment to the 2008 Constitution on the peace process depends on how bold the current NLD government is prepared to go when decentralization is concerned. This means that if the constitutional amendment only provides a minimum devolution of power, the ethnic conflict will go on. On the other hand, if it could distribute a maximum devolution,

with strong political decision-making power at state level and less power at national level, the ethnic conflict could be defused.

Taken together, there are a number of important changes that need to be implemented in the constitution-making process of Myanmar:

1/ The constitution-making process should be deeply, effectively discussed and resolved in the peace negotiations. Specifically, the current government should strongly assert the concerns related to constitution-making in the negotiation process through the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre. The government should deal with constitutional issues with the aim to build peace inclusively, not just as a political interest in itself.

2/ Political settlement between the conflicting parties needs to be achieved along with a peace agreement reached through political dialogue.

3/ The government should enhance the role of sub-state constitutions supporting federal principles by allocating effective participating powers to EPPs, both in the national constitution-building as well as sub-state constitution-making process. If there was a proper platform through which EAOs could be involved, this would really support the peace-building process by representing all the diverse entities and applying the distribution of power.

This study contributes to the understanding of the view of the constitutional issues which also needed to be resolved in the peace process; the constitution thus far has not been sufficiently included in peace negotiations. Moreover, the findings reported here shed new light on the fact that EAOs and civil society have serious concerns about the issue of constitution-making in the peace negotiations. However, one limitation of this study is the lack of opinions from the Tatmadaw, one of the main actors of the peace process. Therefore, further research should explore the views of Tatmadaw representatives on constitutional issues. In addition, further research should also focus on determining how the barriers to political settlement should be overcome.

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The Deadlocking Factors in Myanmar's Peace Process

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Abstract

Myanmar is a country with one of the world's longest-running civil conflicts. Myanmar's successive governments have been trying to end these decades-long conflicts, and the current peace process plays a crucial role in the country's development. However, Myanmar's peace process is moving forward very slowly with little progression. For instance, only 10 out of 18 government recognized ethnic armed organizations have signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement thus far. It appears then that the peace process is blocked over some issues and it is necessary to identify problems first before seeking solutions. This research examined significant factors delaying the current Myanmar peace process, so that concerned parties can consider the ways forward after recognizing these blocking factors.

Qualitative methodology was applied and in-depth interviews with four high-level members of ethnic armed organizations were conducted.

The proposed formation of a single army and commitment to non-secession, different interpretations of the text of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, non-inclusion of some ethnic armed organizations, the role of the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee, the absence of national-level political dialogue in Shan and Rakhine States, and the lack of unity among ethnic armed organizations were identified as deadlocking factors of the current peace process in this research. To be able to move forward, these factors need to be addressed.

According to the results, stakeholders need to develop trust-building strategies and open way for inclusiveness among the key players in the peace process. Moreover, to build trust and unity among ethnic armed organizations, they need to hold informal gatherings and conferences to discuss and decide on common objectives.

Acknowledgement

Introduction

Myanmar is a multi-ethnic country with a long history of armed conflict between the military (Tatmadaw) and different ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). The origins of this conflict date back to the failure to implement the *Panglong Agreement*, which was signed in 1947 by General Aung San and ethnic national leaders from the frontier areas (Shan, Kachin, and Chin). In the agreement, the ethnic leaders agreed to accept independence from the British and to form the democratic Union together. Therefore, it was the Panglong Agreement that gave birth to the present Myanmar, granting ethnic minorities their rights, self-determination, and even the right to secede after a ten-year period (Sakhong, 2017). Unfortunately, the head of the Panglong Agreement General Aung San was assassinated on 19th July 1947 and the Panglong Agreement was never implemented.

Myanmar gained independence from the British in 1948, after which a parliamentary system of government was set up. Yet, within only four months of achieving independence, armed conflicts between the then Burma Communist Party and some ethnic groups broke out, particularly the Karen revolutionary group (Walton, 2008). In 1962, citing armed conflicts and state instability, General Ne Win took power in a military coup. Under Ne Win's military dictatorship, the promises of the Panglong Agreement were neglected and ethnic groups were politically, socially, and economically marginalized. This is one of the main reasons numerous EAOs emerged and have been fighting with the government for decades.

In 2010, after decades of oppressive military rule, the political transition from dictatorship to democracy began and the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party won the general elections, though there were many accusations of electoral fraud. On 18th August 2011, the president of the quasi-democratic government U Thein Sein formally offered peace talks to EAOs in a nationwide peace dialogue, and between 2011 and 2013, bilateral agreements between the government and 15 different EAOs were signed (Min Zaw Oo, 2014). In November 2013, the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordinate Team was formed as the main EAO negotiating body, at that time comprising of 16 EAOs, that drafted the text of the *Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement* (NCA). The NCA was signed by the government and eight EAOs on 15th October 2015; two more EAOs signed the NCA in 2018.

The NCA is not only a ceasefire agreement, but also a framework under which the current formal peace process has been driven. The goal of the NCA is "to end decades of violence between ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar army and to pave the way for political dialogue that will eventually lead to peace and reconciliation" (Kipgen, 2015, p. 409). In general, the text mentions ending armed conflicts, holding a political dialogue, and finding political solutions by forming a democratic federal union (National Reconciliation and Peace Centre, 2015). In accordance with this, the Union Peace Conference (UPC), also known as the 21st Century Panglong, has been held three times. The UPC aims to unite all ethnic nationalities and find solutions in order to build a democratic federal union through dialogue. The three rounds of the UPC have so far resulted in agreement on a total of 51 principles, covering political and economic issues as well as social and land rights. However, key political and security concerns have been excluded from the agenda of the UPC, such as equality, self-determination, and non-secession from the union.

Obstacles to Achieving Peace

According to Nyan Hlaing Lynn (2017), there are seven obstacles to achieving peace in Myanmar and the biggest one among them is persuading all ethnic armed groups to sign the NCA. Indeed, despite continuous peace talks, most of the strongest armed groups are still non-signatory, and armed clashes continue in many ethnic regions. Moreover, even though the non-signatory EAOs were allowed to attend sessions of the 21st Century Panglong Conference as observers, they were forbidden from participating in the talks and decision-making. Since inclusive participation of all ethnic armed groups is vital for a successful peace process, bringing the non-signatory groups to the formal peace negotiation table remains a great challenge for the government.

Another significant obstacle to achieving peace is the issue of establishing a single national army, followed by the principle of non-secession and the right to self-

determination for ethnic minority groups, that make up a 'package deal'. In principle, EAOs accept the idea of a single army, but its structure and responsibility need to be discussed before full agreement. Instead, it appears that "the Tatmadaw has urged them [EAOs] to accept the basic principles without knowing the full extent of the conditions of the proposed single army" (Nyein Nyein, 2018). The issue of non-secession, proposed by the Tatmadaw and related to self-determination, also remains unresolved.

The above factors are the most explicit and most frequently discussed in previous literature on Myanmar's peace process. However, there is reason to believe that there are also some implicit peace-delaying factors. For the peace process to be successful, it is necessary to identify both implicit and explicit problems before seeking solutions. Therefore, this research paper will explore how various stakeholders involved in the Myanmar peace process see the deadlocking factors and the ways forward.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology was used in this study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews: because this study aimed to get in-depth information on the perspectives of different peace actors, being able to follow up immediately with relevant questions was crucial. Another reason why the researchers chose the interview method was due to the diverse and high positions of the respondents; it would have been very difficult to organize for all participants to be present at the same time and place. Since the research respondents were from different backgrounds and organizations, three separate interview guides were created: one for signatory groups, one for non-signatories, and one for peace scholars. Each interview guide included 15 open-ended questions in total, organized into three sections.

The interview questions were formulated based not only on literature sources but also on updated information from both press and social media. For the questions to properly reflect the current peace process, the researchers had to review and analyze the NCA text as well; in fact, most questions were created based on the NCA. After the main interview questions were drafted, the researchers discussed these with research mentors, peer researchers as well as outsiders who have a lot of experience in research and are strongly committed to and involved in the current national peace process. After several rounds of editing, the questions were finalized and translated from English to Burmese. Next, a small pilot study was done by conducting an interview with a senior officer who works for an NCA signatory EAO office. After the pilot study, the researchers further developed the interview questions by considering more follow-up questions and re-structuring.

Participant Selection and Procedure

For this research, the researchers purposely selected four participants from four different entities that occupy important roles and have a unique position in the peace process. In the sample, top leaders from both NCA signatory and non-signatory EAOs were included. These respondents included one participant from the New Mon State Party, one from the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), and one from the All Burma Students' Democratic Front. To include an independent stakeholder, the researchers also interviewed a well-known scholar from a civil society organization called Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security who has been involved in the Myanmar peace process. Hence, a stakeholder sampling strategy and an expert sampling strategy were used in this study.

The interviews lasted around 1.5 hours on average. Before conducting the interviews, the researchers sent an invitation letter, informed consent form, and a research concept note to the participants. The researchers also asked for permission to use each participant's name, organization, position, and to publish the analysis of the interview in a research paper. At the beginning of the research interviews, the researchers spent some time building trust with the participants before starting the conversation. After the data collection was finished, the researchers restated the information that the participants had given to confirm understanding and avoid misinterpreting data.

Findings and Discussion

This research confirmed that the current Myanmar peace process is mainly deadlocked over the issues of establishing a single army, non-secession and self-determination, which have been mentioned previously. At the same time, this research found other important factors that are delaying the current peace process; namely, different understandings of the NCA, the unclear role and responsibility of the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC), the exclusion of some EAOs in the formal peace process, and the inability to conduct national political dialogue.

One interesting thing that all participants mentioned during the interviews was that although the NCA is not a perfect ceasefire agreement, it is the greatest achievement so far in the history of Myanmar's peace process: "It is the NCA that allowed us to talk about the word federal, which was a taboo in the past during the military regime. Even in the Panglong Agreement, the word federal was not included", said Min Zaw Oo, Executive Director of Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security. He added, "The NCA is not the problem, it is pretty good in principle. But, the problems occur because the peace negotiating parties do not follow the principles of the NCA during the implementation process". Therefore, the problem is not due to the principles themselves but their implementation.

Formation of a Single Army

In principle, EAOs agree that there should only be one army in a federal country; the question is, however, how this army should be formed: "EAOs are not against the idea of a single army. They have already accepted it in principle. They just want to know what principles will it be based on" said Min Zaw Oo during the interview. He added, "The key problem is how to reform the security sector. The Tatmadaw urged EAOs to disarm first and negotiate about political issues [afterwards]. But EAOs' concern is that if they disarm, will the Tatmadaw step back from its political roles?" Hence, it seems that EAOs and the Tatmadaw have different approaches to what should be done first, disarmament of EAOs or the Tatmadaw's going back to the barracks. Regarding security sector reform, Nai Ong Ma Nge, Executive Committee member of the New Mon State

Party, suggested that "it is too early to discuss the issue of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration/security sector reform at the moment. It should be discussed later, only when EAOs and the Tatmadaw begin to trust each other more; then we can work it out".

Non-Secession

Another major blocking issue is non-secession from the union. The Tatmadaw asked EAOs to guarantee that they would not secede from the union; only after that, the right to self-determination would be granted to the ethnic groups. However, EAOs refuse this proposal, reasoning that it deviates from federal principles and is not included in the text of the NCA either. With respect to this, Min Zaw Oo said,

> "In fact, it is not necessary to discuss the issue of non-secession anymore, because the signatories already agreed on the three national causes in the NCA Chapter 1 (A): non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of the solidarity, and perpetuation of national sovereignty. In return, the Tatmadaw agreed on federalism".

Another respondent, Nai Ong Ma Nge said, "If the Tatmadaw had not raised the issues of non-secession and single army, the peace process would have reached far by now".

Different Understandings of the Text of the NCA

During the interview, All Burma Students' Democratic Front's Central Committee member Mi Su Pwint said, "from the beginning, EAOs and the Tatmadaw have had different understandings and concepts. Now, this is creating a deadlock, because they did not conciliate each other's understanding". Nai Ong Ma Nge added,

> "When we were planning to draw the political framework in the second step [of the NCA], the concepts and definitions from each side became different. And, the concepts and definitions of a 'federal union' and the words 'federal

democracy' and 'democratic federal union' became controversial. So, the deadlock started when defining these terms".

In fact, the basic principles of the NCA's first article are still controversial. These principles are the Tatmadaw's three main national causes of non-disintegration of the union, non-disintegration of solidarity, and perpetuation of sovereignty, as well as EAOs' proposal of federalism, equality, and self-determination. Specifically, the Tatmadaw has proposed non-secession but some EAOs cannot accept it. However, the Tatmadaw has argued that the three main national causes that are already included in the NCA's basic principles do, in reality, mean non-secession. This suggests that the Tatmadaw and EAOs did not have a clear understanding of these issues before adopting the NCA, which has led to a deadlock in the current peace process.

Non-Inclusion

Although the NCA is nationwide, many EAOs are still not formally included in the NCA process. Therefore, having them sign the NCA and including them in the current peace process is still seen as one of the major challenges:

> "To make an estimate, the power of signatory EAOs may be only 25 percent of the power of 11 non-signatory EAOs. So, how much does it matter if we get Pyidaungsu Accord in the NCA, if we build the union state without the consent of the KIO, United Wa State Army, National Democratic Alliance Army, Arakan Army, and other non-signatories, the deadlock will happen again", said Naing Ong Ma Nge.

For instance, the KIO, one of the strongest armed organizations, has not signed the NCA because armed organizations whose territories are located closely to its own were not allowed to sign the NCA by the U Thein Sein government. If the KIO had signed the agreement without its neighbors, it would have been difficult to solve conflicts over territory in the north. General Sumlut Gun Maw, the Vice President of the Kachin Independence Council, explained the KIO's reasons for not signing the NCA further:

> "The text of the NCA is not perfect yet and the monitoring mechanism has its weaknesses. And, both sides have a different understanding of the basic concepts. For instance, without discussing and negotiating a clear understanding of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration/ security sector reform or political mapping, it is difficult to implement the NCA after signing it".

Hence, there are some EAOs who still need to sign NCA, and as long as there are non-signatories, this NCA peace process cannot be successful in the nationwide sense.

The Role of the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee

The JMC was formed in accordance with the enactment of the NCA agreement. However, even though the JMC is responsible for implementing and monitoring troop-related provisions and the military code of conduct and ceasefire-related rules and regulations, according to the interviewees, the JMC cannot fully carry out its responsibilities and duties yet. For instance, Mi Su Pwint said that

> "There is recurrence of conflicts due to the incapability to set ceasefire territories. Consequently, the Karen National Union and the Tatmadaw accuse each other of crossing over to each other's territory and shooting at the other. Bystanders (monitoring committee) find it difficult to say who is trespassing, because there are no ceasefire-related territories".

General Sumlut Gun Maw also pointed out that "there is no clear definition of military matters and ceasefire-related territories. Rules and regulations are not exactly written in the code of conduct".

The constant occurrence of conflict among NCA signatory EAOs as well as between them and the Tatmadaw points to the weakness of the JMC in implementation and monitoring. Some participants said that clashing on the ground affects the political dialogue. Therefore, the participants suggested that to overcome the deadlocked situation, the JMC must become a strong mechanism

to implement and monitor troop-related provisions, the military code of conduct, and ceasefire-related rules and regulations. As Nai Ong Ma Nge concluded, "People only see the NCA as a deadlocking factor, but they do not see that the problem of the JMC is the problem of the NCA".

Absence of National-Level Political Dialogue in Shan State and Rakhine State

To be able to hold the UPC – 21st Century Panglong, the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee has the responsibility to propose issues that come out from national-level political dialogues. Even though the UPC has been held three times, there are still some NCA signatory EAOs like the Arakan Liberation Party and Restoration Council of Shan State that are finding it difficult to hold national-level political dialogues. For instance, in 2018, Shan public consultation meetings were blocked by the Tatmadaw. Mi Su Pwint said,

> "Because of this controversy, the Shan did not give any advice or comments on federal principles, because they could not hold a national-level political dialogue. They said that since they did not hold a national-level political dialogue, they could not give any comments. So, the political dialogue has been receiving proposals only from the Karen, Pa-O, and Chin national-level dialogues. Therefore, it has become difficult to move the political dialogue forward and wait for them, because the Rakhine and the

Shan have not had the chance to do it yet. And then, the Tatmadaw makes excuses that situation in Rakhine is unstable".

Most of the participants said that the Tatmadaw is worried that if some ethnic-based political dialogues are held, some of the EAOs would have a better relationship with their ethnic people and would be able to do more military recruitment. Furthermore, the participants stated that the Tatmadaw's worry is that some ethnic people would call for independent states to be built. Nai Ong Ma Nge suggested that if the Tatmadaw and the government were suspicious of the national-level political dialogues, they should participate in them, watch, and record them. Regardless of the reason, as long as Rakhine and Shan people do not have the chance to hold public consultation meetings for the national-level political dialogue, the current peace process will continue to be deadlocked. Therefore, the national-level political dialogue must be inclusive of all signatory EAOs.

Lack of Unity among EAOs

This study found a lack of unity not only between the Tatmadaw and the EAOs, but also between signatory EAOs. These EAOs have different backgrounds and political interests. "We still are not able to come together and find common ground until now. Regarding this, there are problems even with whom to invite for meetings. There is still a lot to be done for unity and understanding on our side", said Mi Su Pwint.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has sought to find the deadlocking factors of the current Myanmar peace process under the NCA's political dialogue framework. This was to recommend evidence-based solutions to the key players in Myanmar's peace process in order to overcome its difficulties. The present findings confirm that there are many obstacles to the current peace process: the issues of the formation of a single army, non-secession, different understandings of the NCA's basic principles, non-inclusion, the role of the JMC, lack of a national political dialogue conference, and lack of unity among EAOs. The findings of this study provide a new understanding of the power imbalance between the key stakeholders and of the lack of trust in the peace negotiations. This impacts the NCA political dialogue framework and implementation process. Based on these findings, the researchers suggest the following actions be taken by key stakeholders:

1/ First, it seems that the suggestions for the single army and non-secession were discussed too early; trust among the stakeholders needs to be built first and then these issues can be discussed when both sides are ready to talk.

2/ All keys players need to think through the meaning of the NCA rules and regulations. Thus, a common understanding of key issues of the NCA should be agreed upon.

3/ The peace process needs to be made inclusive. Without the non-signatory groups, the peace process in Myanmar will never achieve sustainable results.

4/ Unity must be built between different EAOs. Common political goals are important for the EAOs in order to have bargaining power in the negotiation process.

5/ The role of the JMC must be redefined. The role of the JMC is also related to trust and the power imbalance in the committee roles, because the JMC does not have clear responsibilities or authority.

6/ Ethnic minority groups should be encouraged to hold national-level political dialogues. The national political dialogue conference issue has been a contentious issue among the NCA signatory groups and the Tatmadaw.

Therefore, all stakeholders, especially the key players in the peace process, need to reflect on the obstacles to the process and find ways to overcome these blocking factors with inclusiveness and common goals. Further research should focus on determining different stakeholders' perceptions, including from the Tatmadaw, government, signatory and non-signatory groups, and other civil society organizations.

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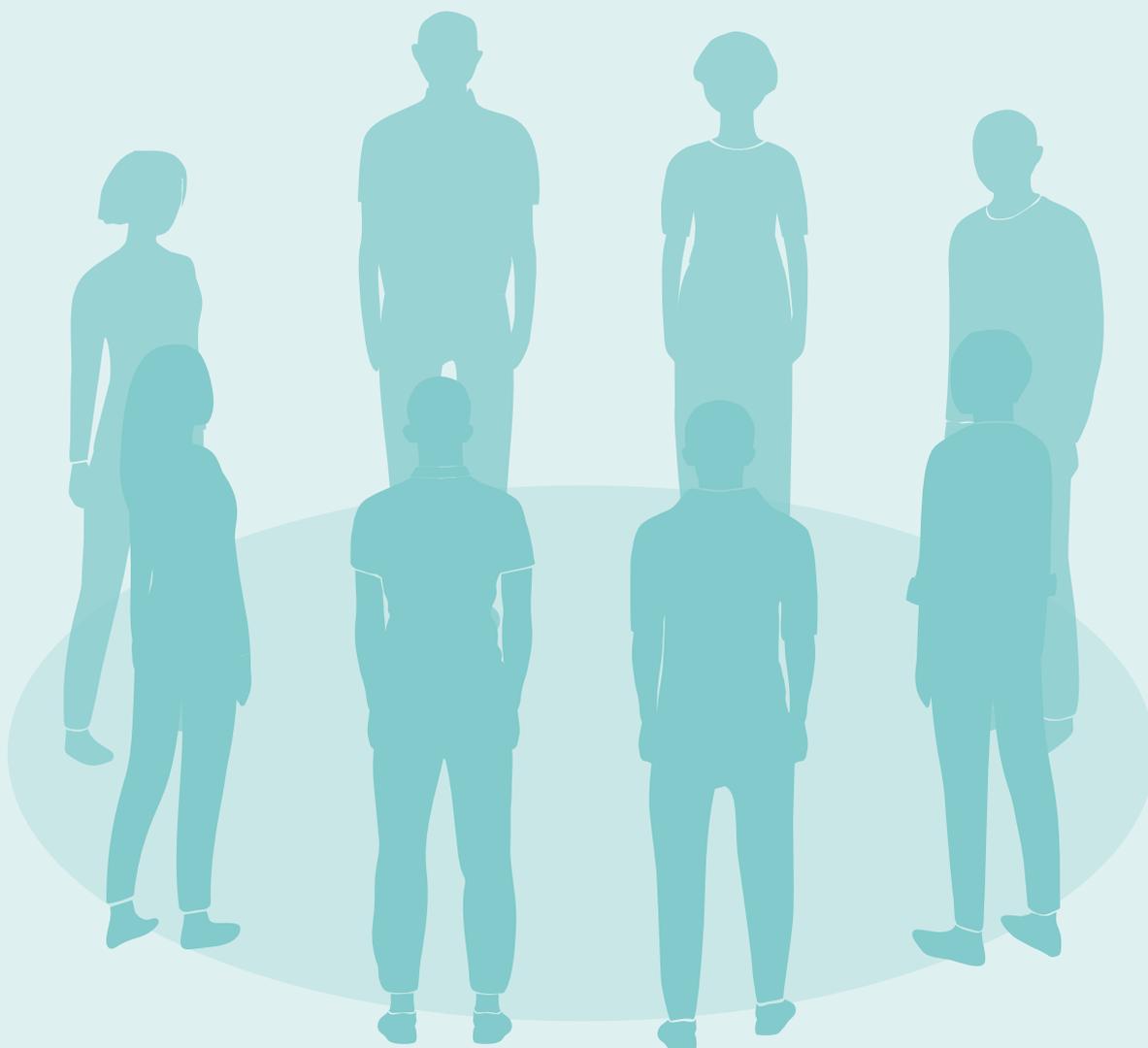
PART II

PERSPECTIVES OF GROUND-LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS OF MYANMAR'S PEACE PROCESS

Collaboration as a Plus for Peace: Increasing Youth Participation in Myanmar's Peace-Building Process through Collaboration

Htet Lynn Oo and Myo Myo Kyaw
Edited by Radka Antalíková, PhD

Abstract

Previous studies have already investigated youth participation in Myanmar's peace process; however, collaboration of youth among themselves as well as with other actors has not been specifically examined. In order to fill this gap, the purpose of this current research is to determine the level of collaboration of youth with the government and adults as well as collaboration among diverse youth groups in order to contribute to the increasing of youth participation in the peace-building process of Myanmar. The study used qualitative methodology with a purposive sampling strategy, conducting three focus group discussions with 18 youth participants in total, divided into three groups in three different areas: urban, rural, and conflict-affected. The study identified different types and levels of collaboration as well as barriers to collaboration. The findings suggest that a strong collaboration among youth groups, intergenerational collaboration, and collaboration between youth and the government are important ingredients for increasing youth participation in the Myanmar peace-building process.

Acknowledgement

Introduction

Youth are commonly considered change-makers in society, since "youth are at the forefront in any kind of revolution and are likely drivers of change" (Bennett, Karki, & Nitu, 2012, p. 8). Similarly, many previous studies have emphasized youth's significant capabilities to take on the role of peace-builders (e.g. McEnvoy-Levy, 2001). It has been argued that even though youths in conflict-affected areas and situations often grow up in parallel with conflict escalation, they still have a lot of unique skills to contribute within peace-building processes; for instance, they "maintain a clear vision of what peace should be and of a future without violence" (Conciliation Resources, 2018, p. 5). Moreover, Del Felice and Wisler (2007) pointed out that young people in general are more open to change, future-oriented, idealistic, innovative, and possess courage, one of the useful capabilities for building peace. Youth are also more flexible and it is easier for them to forget the past than for the older generation. This quality can be very helpful for a post-conflict reconciliation process.

Historically, Myanmar's young people, especially university students, have played a significant role in the political and social changes of Myanmar's society. For instance, they participated as frontline actors in the early anti-colonial and independence movement (Aung Saw Oo, 1993; Thar Nyunt Oo & Ingjin Naing, 1997), in the protest for holding an appropriate funeral for U Thant (Selth, 2018), in the Four Eights Uprising, and more recently, students and young people joined the 2007 Saffron Revolution (Sithu Aung Myint, 2018) as well as initiated a strike against the National Educational Law in 2015 (Thet Ko Ko, Wei Yan Aung, & Vrieze, 2015). When it comes to peace-building activities, youths were the initiators of peace marches in 2012 and 2013, demanding an end to civil war, as well as of the National Youth Congress and National Ethnic Youth Alliance, whose representatives were invited to attend the second 21st Century Panglong Conference as official youth observers (Paung Sie Facility, 2017). On the whole, all these events show the crucial role of youth in the political and peace development in the country. Moreover, one of the important underlying factors that can be seen in the various activities calling for independence, democracy, and peace is strong collaboration between youth groups and other civilians, among different youth groups as well as some collaboration with the government. Hence, this paper argues that a successful collaboration and partnership between youth and other stakeholders is crucial for increasing youth participation in Myanmar peace-building process and, consequently, for achieving sustainable peace in the country.

However, previous research (Grizelj, 2016; Paung Sie Facility, 2017) has identified a number of barriers to youth participation in Myanmar's peace process, such as socio-cultural norms and perceptions, the non-inclusive nature of peace negotiations, legacy of fear and mistrust, limited financial and technical support, socio-economic barriers (education, migration and displacement, drug usage), hierarchical society, inequality between central and peripheral areas, and division within and between youth organizations and networks. It can be argued that one of the reasons for the existence of these barriers is weak collaboration between the responsible parties. For example, the hierarchical culture of Myanmar's society widens the intergenerational gap, creating a number of challenges for youth to engage with adults. Next, mistrust towards the government, the non-inclusive nature of peace negotiations, and the lack of an official channel for youth to engage with the parliament might be hindering the youth-government collaboration. In addition, division within and between youth organizations and networks could be overcome by increasing their collaboration. Hence, a lack of or weak collaboration seems to be the underlying obstacle to youth participation in peace-building activities. That is why the current research will investigate the levels of collaboration between youth and the government, between youth and adults, and among diverse youth groups, as well as the factors hindering collaboration between them all.

Methodology

This study used qualitative methodology, specifically semi-structured focus group discussions. This way, the participants could reflect on their previous experiences of collaboration in their contexts and exchange their ideas with each other. Moreover, the discussion alerted them to think of the respective collaboration levels and make them aware of ways to improve collaboration in their community. The focus group discussion guide questions were open-ended to enable participants to discuss and generate their ideas and experiences freely. The questions were created based on various literature sources, especially research papers and articles conducted on the issue of youth participation in peace and politics in the Myanmar context (Grizelj, 2016; 2018a; 2018b). Firstly, the questions were formulated in English and then translated into Burmese. To ensure the questions were clear to future participants, a small pilot study was conducted at the Salween Institute of Public Policy with ten university students. Moreover, by conducting the pilot study, the researchers practiced skills needed to facilitate and intervene in discussions.

Sample, Sampling, and Procedure

The sample included 18 participants in total (nine males and nine females), divided into three groups, based on where they lived and worked. Six of the sample participants were recruited from rural areas (a village in Ayeyarwaddy Region), five were from urban areas (Yangon), and seven were from conflict-affected areas (Myitkyina, Kachin State). The reason why the sample groups were based on location was to document and analyze diverse voices and ideas of many youth, not only those from urban areas and conflict-affected areas that are studied rather often, but also those from rural areas that typically have less experience in participating in research. A non-probability sampling strategy, specifically purposive (selective) sampling, was used in the study, selecting young people who have already experienced working in civil society organizations (CSOs), active young community workers, and youth activists that could provide the researchers with important information. The participants were recruited by local young people who had contact with the researchers.

The focus group discussions were conducted in February 2019. At the beginning of the focus group discussion, the researchers introduced themselves and explained their research project and the research institute. The researchers explained the informed consent form and asked the participants to sign it if they agreed to participate. Then, the participants were asked to introduce themselves to each other. In that way, they got to know each other and became more comfortable sharing their ideas. All the focus group discussions took about two hours. After the focus group discussions were completed, the participants were debriefed and the researchers explained how the data generated from the discussions would be applied in their research paper. Moreover, the researchers opened the floor to raise any questions related with the research project from the participants. In addition to that, researchers promised to send the research paper to the participants once it was published.

Findings and Discussion

Collaboration among Youth Groups

According to the discussion of participants in focus group discussions, there is a willingness among youth to collaborate with each other. They believe that an existence of a strong collaboration among youth groups would be more effective to achieve their goal, especially when advocating for a specific policy or campaigning for a specific group. One of the participants from the rural area said that "events run with strong collaboration among youth groups are more successful than those which are organized by adults". Moreover, based on the participants' experience, the collaboration among youth groups can be differentiated into two types: issue-based and identity-based. Issue-based collaboration is typically a short-term collaboration based on an escalation of a specific issue. One of the participants said that "it is very easy to call and organize the youth to join immediate actions like demonstrations" (urban area participant). After that action is completed, the collaboration ends. On the other hand, there is also collaboration based on identity, such as ethnicity and religion. For example, in Kachin State, there is strong collaboration among church-based youth.

At the same time, identity-based collaboration also divides the youth groups and decreases inter-youth group collaboration. For instance, based on specific churches, there are different youth groups in the Kachin community, and the collaboration among these groups is weak. One of the participants from the Kachin community said, "I have never seen a collaborated event by the Kachin Baptist Convention, Roman Catholic, and Assemblies of God youth groups". Apart from religious identity, ethnic identity also creates divisions among the youth groups. A participant from the Kachin community stressed the link between separated existence of sub-ethnic groups in Kachin State and the subsequent weak collaboration between them. Hence, while the youth groups may be internally strong, there is evidence of weak collaboration among youth from different sub-ethnic and religious groups. These divisions lead to misunderstanding and misperceptions among youth groups, which then lead to even more divisions. In accordance with this, previous literature has also mentioned that most of the division among youth organizations occurred along ethnic,

religious, and gender identity lines (Paung Sie Facility, 2017). Grizelj (2016) similarly mentioned that "many youth-led organizations have ethnic, religious or political foundations. This can be considered as both the strength and the weakness. . . it can also reinforce the existing divides" (p.6).

Moreover, it was found that different levels of education also divide the youth groups. One of the participants of the urban focus group shared his experience with respect to the collaboration of youth groups on university campus. He differentiated between three youth groups: the outstanding students, the average students and the inactive youth group. He said that "the outstanding students live and work within their own group, they already have enough skills and good ideas, but they neither try to collaborate with nor empower the other youth groups". Similarly, in the rural area, there is weak collaboration between the educated and illiterate youth, which leads to a gap between these two demographics. All in all, this evidence shows that the collaboration level among youth groups is weak; youth do not have a stable relationship among themselves to build strong collaboration. At the same time, the focus group participants believe that there needs to be strong collaboration between youth groups. Relating to the two types of collaboration identified in the data, both issue-based and identity-based collaboration are important not only for peace-building but also for youth participation in peace-building activities.

Collaboration between Youth and Adults

According to some of the participants' discussions, the collaboration between youth groups and CSOs led by adults has increased compared to the previous years. These CSOs are gradually giving space to youth in terms of chances to speak and raise their voices in meetings or at fora. One of the participants shared that, in her experience,

> "the elder generation collaborate with youth when making some policies such as the internally displaced people policy or social policy. Besides, they prepare courses, fora, and workshops

together. Especially, in the Kachin Youth Movement, the religious leaders and community leaders helped the youth to meet with the government" (conflict-affected area participant).

However, another participant said, "When we talk about these adults, they can be divided into two groups; adults between 35 and 50 years old and adults over 50 years old". He continued,

> "Adults who are over 50 years old share their experience with and support the youth. So, the youth are comfortable working with those adults. However, adults who are between 35 years and 50 years old think of themselves that they are still young and they can work like a youth because they still have the experience of youth. Thus, it is difficult for the youth to work with such kind of adults" (urban area participant).

Collaboration between Youth Groups and the Government

Through the discussions, it was found that the collaboration level between youth groups and the current government has increased during recent years. One of the participants mentioned that "the collaboration of the current government with youth groups has increased compared to the previous government by doing youth fora or workshops together with their local government" (urban area participant). However, even though some collaboration can be seen, the level of collaboration is still insufficient. Specifically, one participant mentioned that "even though there is considerable collaboration between high-level officials and youth groups, the collaboration between the lower level of government officials and youth groups is still low" (urban area participant). Some participants pointed out the relationship between the level of collaboration and the location where they grew up. They stressed the fact that there tends to be more collaboration in urban areas than in rural and conflict-affected areas. For example, one participant said that "collaboration in urban areas is higher than in rural and ethnic areas because the youth in rural and ethnic areas do not have enough resources, such as money or places for gathering to have meetings like the youth

in urban areas do" (urban area participant). Another participant mentioned that "youth from border areas do not have any trust in government officials because of their traumatizing experiences concerned with the brutal actions of the military regime" (urban area participant).

Barriers to Collaboration

The education system, individual personal attitudes, previous political systems, distrust in the government, lack of transparent information and low media literacy, religious influence, weak organizational structure, and low interest of youth in social movements are most important factors preventing strong collaboration among youth groups, between youths and adults, and between the youth and the government. First, the current Myanmar education system does not provide youth with enough skills and knowledge for collaboration and teamwork. One of the participants stated that "education teaches students to compete with each other and to be divided, not to collaborate and work together" (urban area participant). Moreover, Myanmar education does not provide young people with the adequate skills necessary for peer communication; it does not encourage the behaviors of active listening and mutual respect. Previous literature has also indicated the limitations of Myanmar education system in terms of analytical, critical thinking, and life skills (Paung Sie Facility, 2017). Consequently, the collaboration among youth groups cannot be built and strengthened.

Some participants highlighted personal interests and attitudes of specific individuals as the factors preventing strong collaboration. One of the participants shared his experience of working at a university campus, saying that "among youth groups, the number of people who want to lead is more than the number of followers" (urban area participant). Another participant said, "Some organizations that are led by adults recognize youths' voices and they let the youth participate in decision-making. But it happens only sometimes". The participant continued, "In the 2015 election campaign, adult party members from one of the political parties told the youth that 'You all should be in the party, you are the future of the country, but don't speak at this time. You can speak when you are over 30 years old'" (urban area participant).

One participant from the rural area stated, "Some adults don't accept the agenda and ideas of youth because youth are young. Some adults have the misperception that youth don't have enough experience and they cannot work as well as them". It appears then that even though the elder generation repeatedly says that youth should be supported, in reality, they do not recognize and trust the youth's efforts. Indeed, there are several social norms that affect intergenerational collaboration, for example, it is considered rude if young people argue with older people even if the latter are wrong. In general, "Pervasive age-related socio-cultural norms perpetuate hierarchical views that youth do not have the capability, experience, or ability to lead" (Paung Sie Facility, 2017, p.24). The existence of the traditional, hierarchical social structure is an underlying factor contributing to the intergenerational gap and different understanding between generations.

Some of the participants pointed out that the political culture and the experiences under the military regime make youth groups hesitant to participate and collaborate in peace-building activities. One of the participants from the Kachin community said, "As we used to be victims of the previous brutal political system, we are afraid of religious and political affairs". Another participant mentioned the role of parents in this regard. Since most parents have experiences of political uprising and violent actions of the military regime, they are very strict when it comes to allowing their children to participate in protests or movements. The participant said, "My mother did not allow me to join the anti-war movement; she said if you want to die and be arrested, go and join". These restrictions by parents prevent youth from joining various events even if they themselves are enthusiastic. Some participants mentioned that most adults are afraid of the risk:

> "Due to the wrong governance system of the military regime, adults are afraid of risk. When youth submit a program or project, adults are afraid of the risks arising from that process. Youth do not look at those risks and then youth and adults cannot adapt to each other", a participant from the rural area said.

Distrust of youth towards the government can be seen as another barrier of the collaboration between youth groups and the government. Still now, most youth do not trust the government, which leads to lower youth engagement and interaction with the government, contributing to weak collaboration between them. Additionally, youth are afraid of working and collaborating with the government; they feel too uncomfortable and insecure to do so. One participant expressed that

> "the government went to our camp [internally displaced people camp] and offered an opportunity of delivering training and giving jobs to the youth there. But the youth were still hesitant to go and attend the training, because they were afraid of the government" (conflict-affected area participant).

Another participant added that "it is rare for youth to join government offices according to the tradition. The community views government staff as enemies" (conflict-affected area participant). Some participants expressed their distrust towards the government's capabilities. One participant said that "most people in the high positions of the government are not so qualified in my opinion, I mean not all government officials. The government is still weak when it comes to accountability and responsibility" (conflict-affected area participant).

Weak access to correct information and low media literacy seem to also impede collaboration. One participant said that "weak media literacy awareness creates an information gap between youth groups and increases chances of misunderstanding among them" (urban area participant). Lack of transparency is also one of the main causes of weak collaboration between adults and youth. One participant argued that

> "there is no transparency between youth and adults both in urban and rural areas. The adults only know and focus on what they are doing and the youth also. Sometimes, when the youth have a meeting, it ends within the youth and what youth are doing does not reach the adults" (conflict-affected area participant).

When it comes to social barriers to collaboration, most of the participants pointed to religious restrictions. One of the participants from the Kachin community said

that "some religions are formalistic and conservative. So, they do not allow their religious youth to participate in external youth movements, specifically in politically related events". Even though internal collaboration among the church-based youth organizations is high, it is at the same time limited, since they focus on internal religious and cultural matters rather than external ones. Moreover, religious leaders influence the participation and collaboration of youth groups. Some religious leaders are flexible and open-minded but some are conservative. So, the collaboration level among youth groups also depends on the personality and beliefs of their religious leaders. Similarly, one participant mentioned the role of university authorities in the collaboration among youth groups on the campus: "On the university campus, the university authorities make the student unions more and more divided. At some universities, the rectors create students' unions on the campus and this tends to split the student groups there" (urban area participant).

Another factor is the low interest of youth in participating in social and political events. One of the participants stated that "youth are not interested in development trainings, peace, or political events" (conflict-affected area participant). Moreover, in rural areas, the number of youths is really low compared to the number in urban areas because of migration. The lack of employment opportunities might be the reason why youth are not interested in social movements and they focus on earning a living instead. Moreover, the lower number of youths in rural areas can be a confounding factor of weak collaboration among youth groups in these areas. Even when youth are interested in participating in politics, there is still a lack of job opportunities, which makes it difficult for them to participate without being concerned about their livelihood. One participant said, "In Myitkyina, there is a lack of job opportunities. Youth are chasing job opportunities and some youth go to Yangon or other places to work. Thus, they cannot focus on collaborating with adults" (conflict-affected area participant). Having enough livelihood opportunities might be a solution for increasing youth participation in a peace-building process. On the other hand, unemployment can be one of the big causal factors pushing youth to become violent. High rates of unemployment encourage youth to join armed groups and commit acts of violence, since taking up arms often becomes the only option for youth to earn money in conflict-affected areas (Conciliation Resources, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of the present research was to examine the level of collaboration among youth groups, collaboration between youth and adult groups, and collaboration of youth with the government, with the aim of contributing to increasing youth participation in the peace-building process of Myanmar. Previous literature has identified division among youth groups and intergenerational gap, and the present findings confirm that collaboration on these levels is quite low. The study also found similar barriers as the findings of previous literature, such as personal attitude of adults, government staff, authorities; fear of risks because of the previous military regime and distrust in the government; weak education system; lack of job opportunities; etc. Despite many barriers, the study found two kinds of collaboration among youth, namely issue-based collaboration and identity-based collaboration. It seems that if youth have common goals, and if adults and the government give youth the space needed by appreciating their efforts and supporting them, youth have more willingness to participate and to collaborate with adults and the government. Hence, the results of this research support the idea that strong collaboration among these groups is needed to increase youth participation in the peace-building process and collaboration among all actors should be balanced. Thus, all main actors, youth, adults, and the government need to change their individual mindsets about each other for mutual trust first. Then, they must find possible ways to overcome certain barriers, such as the weak education system or lack of job opportunities, to increase youth participation in peace-building activities for sustainable peace in Myanmar.

To our knowledge, this research is the first report investigating three levels of collaboration; most previous studies on youth participation in relation to the peace process have not focused on collaboration of youth with other actors. Having done so, this study found additional factors affecting youth participation, such as the influence of religious identity on collaboration and new angles of looking at collaboration (identity-based or issue-based). Moreover, similar studies rarely reach rural areas and include the voices of youth there, which the current study did. On the other hand, it is unfortunate that the study did not include the voices of adults, government officials, and authorities as focus group participants; the results of this research are only derived from the discussions and perspectives of the youth participants. Yet, when collaboration on such three kinds of levels is discussed, the perspectives of the other two groups, adults and the government, are also needed in order to bridge the gap between these actors and to create new paths for youth to increase their participation in the peace-building process.

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1/ The government should implement curriculum reform and teacher capacity development training, integrating concepts of teamwork into the basic education curriculum. During the process of curriculum reform, the government should seek advice from not only local and foreign experts but also from local organizations and think-tanks. The government should hold public consultation workshops and this way, make an assessment based on feedback from parents, teachers, children, and youth.

2/ The government should create an official platform for youth to be able to engage with them comfortably and efficiently. The government could strengthen the existing Youth Affairs Committee; alternatively, it could resume the committee of youth affairs in parliament.

3/ The government should extend constructive engagement to youth in rural and ethnic areas, holding events like the All-Round Youth Development Festivals held in Yangon and Mandalay, and more talks and round-table discussions in rural and ethnic areas.

4/ Both union and state government should appreciate and recognize youth efforts by sending appreciation letters to specific youth groups and/or by attending their events. Moreover, the governments should provide financial and technical assistance to youth groups from different corners without discrimination based on the geographic location, ethnic, or social status.

5/ Youth should implement mutual recognition programs for youth and elder generations, educating and raising awareness on generation-gap-based problems, like literacy talks on generational issues, workshops, fora, essay competitions, fun fairs, and so on.

6/ Youth-focused organizations should initiate inter-ethnic reconciliation exchange programs, and religious leaders should foster more inter-religious fellowships.

7/ The government, community leaders, traditional leaders, and youth groups should try to have a youth center at least in every township of the country, accessible to all youth groups without discrimination. Here, the youth groups should collaborate among themselves by holding inclusive youth fora and youth gatherings.

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Htet Lynn Oo is a young and active Burmese peacebuilder from Ayeyarwaddy Region. He is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in International Relations at the University of Yangon. He participated in short-term courses in Human Security Development and Energy Science at Kyoto University, Japan, and Leadership at Indiana University in the United States. Additionally, he has the experience of attending workshops and trainings in Thailand, Malaysia, and Cambodia. Previously, he worked as a Program Intern at the Salween Institute of Public Policy, and at the moment, he is working as a Book Reviewer at the Institute of Strategy and Policy – Myanmar. He is also one of the Council Members of Ambassador Youth Council in the United States' Embassy to Myanmar. Moreover, he is working as a Trainer and Project Leader at Myanmar Youth for Peace Development (a youth-led initiative). Recently, Htet Lynn Oo has been selected to attend the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Regional Workshop for Advancing Gender Equality in Brunei in October 2019 and his research proposal won the Emerging Young Researchers Initiative of the Institute of Strategy and Policy – Myanmar. His future plan is to conduct more evidence-based research to provide effective and adequate data for policy makers as well as pursuing a Master's Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies abroad.

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From Margin to Center: Experiences of Political and Social Marginalization of Ethnic Minorities in Karenni State

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current political marginalization of people living in Karenni State and, in this way, to contribute to the transformation of the structure of political institutions. The study used qualitative methodology and included 15 participants of different ethnicities living in Karenni State. The study found that the ethnic minorities in Karenni State are being discriminated against by the government with respect to their culture, religion, and ethnic origins. Specifically, the findings showed institutional discrimination against the ethnic minorities, minorities' lack of trust in institutions, lack of participation in decision-making processes, lack of access to information, social services, and civic engagement, and their experiences of and perceptions of conflict and violence. It was found that all of these themes are related to the concept of Burmanization. Taken together, these results indicate that there is ongoing forced cultural assimilation of ethnic minorities by the dominant majority ethnic group, the Bamar. In general, these findings suggest that the political representation of ethnic minority people needs to be considered in order to ensure all-inclusiveness in relevant institutions and decision-making processes, which could help end the cycle of conflict in Karenni State. The study contributes to our understanding of political and social marginalization in Karenni State and the root causes of the current escalating conflicts between the ethnic minorities and the State Government as well as to some practical solutions to these problems.

Acknowledgement

Introduction

"Burma is our country, Burmese literature is our literature; Burmese language is our language" was the slogan of Dobama Asiayone (Tarling, 1992, p. 289), one of the oldest political institutions structurally promoting Bamar supremacy, operating since precolonial times. This policy affected all Bamar-dominated political institutions and the discrimination against frontier populations continued under the military regime after gaining independence from the British (Smith, 1994). Until today, Burma[1] is a country with strong social structures from which people from minority groups have suffered social injustice and inequality due to the imbalance in power sharing. There are many kinds of discrimination and violations in this social system, such as poverty, discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and these have been repeatedly perpetrated.

Historically, Karenni people have hardly ever had any willful engagement with the Burmese government. In 1875, the British declared Karenni State independent, which meant it belonged neither to Burma nor to the British. After U Nu gained power over the country, Karenni State refused to join the union, so the Burmese Army invaded in 1948 (Smith, 1994). The invasion marked the beginning of over 70 years of civil war, making it one of the longest running conflicts in Burma. Since the beginning of the conflict, the Karenni people have faced a series of violence by General Ne Win and consecutive governments throughout the 1980s until the present day (Smith, 1994). Although Karenni armed groups have made several attempts to implement peace agreements with the military/government, these have always failed. As a consequence, in rural areas of Karenni State, there are people living in poverty, with poor infrastructure and low literacy rates, without educational opportunities, healthcare facilities, and with a general lack of development. Moreover, there are thousands of refugees and displaced persons from Karenni State across Thailand and Burma (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees South-East Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2014), and there is no reliable data for the amount of deaths from the many armed conflicts and abuses.

The Karenni people have always felt like they do not belong to Burma as they believe they have been marginalized politically and structurally and treated like they do not exist (Smith, 1994). Political marginalization is the exclusion of individuals or groups from political participation and decision-making processes (Watts, 2002), while social marginalization typically refers to procedures through which members of a society are excluded from the labor market and social welfare (Democratic Dialogue, 1995). Political and social marginalization are closely connected; people who are socially marginalized cannot participate actively in politics either. Furthermore, if particular people cannot participate politically, they cannot be politically represented either and consequently, they do not have political power, since they cannot be law- and policy-makers. Therefore, the consequence of exclusion from political institutions is that public policy cannot reflect marginalized people and in turn, those people cannot access public services and legal protection. Finally, political and social marginalization can lead to conflict, since having formal, structural power can lead to control of and access to resources (Watts, 2002).

Inclusive political institutions with specific structures that consider ethnic perspectives and represent the whole Burma could be the key to reduce the tension between non-Bamar ethnic people and Bamar-dominated government and act as a strategy for conflict resolution. At the same time, there is a need for political participation of populations that have been historically marginalized. In line with this, a previous report on Karenni State published by Transnational Institute argued that "Kayah [Karenni] State should become a centerpiece for enlightened and inclusive change, ending the decades of ethnic conflict, political marginalization, and socio-economic neglect" (Kramer, Russell, & Smith, 2018, p. 133). Hence, the reason for conducting this research project is to acquire evidence for achieving an inclusive political institutional structure, which would genuinely represent the ethnic people in Karenni State and operated on principles of equality and justice, and, in this way, to help inform solutions to the country's long-running civil war in order to bring sustainable peace among its ethnic minorities. Specifically, the current research will investigate how people from Karenni State experience social and political marginalization as well as explore ways how to improve the participation of ethnic minorities in decision-making processes.

Methodology

This study used qualitative methodology, specifically, face-to-face in-depth interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, because this way, researchers could follow up by asking more detailed questions to get relevant information about specific topics. Moreover, by employing open-ended questions, participants were free to express their opinions in their own words. In addition, it was judged as very important for the researchers' and participants' relationship to have the opportunity to respond immediately and freely. In the interview guide, 11 questions were included. Firstly, the participants' sense of belonging in Burma was discussed, followed by asking about the benefits and challenges stemming from being a part of Burma. Secondly, the participants were asked whether they have felt included or marginalized when it comes to their access to social services and benefits from Karenni State's natural resources, followed by questions about their experiences with the state and national governments. Thirdly, questions were asked about the participants' representation and participation in government institutions and the current national peace process. Finally, questions about the participants' vision for the future of the country and their recommendations for a more inclusive political decision-making process were included. The questions were first formulated in English and then translated into Burmese. To make sure the chosen method was appropriate for the local context, a small pilot was conducted with a Karenni woman working in Yangon. Through this pilot study, valuable feedback was received, specifically with respect to the clarification of identity and ethnicity in the interview questions.

Sample, Sampling, and Procedure

A non-probability sampling method, specifically a snowball strategy, was used in this study; the participants were recruited by referral from their circle of acquaintances.

Moreover, the participants were chosen for their work experience in the community and knowledge of the political situation by using purposive sampling. In addition, the researchers tried to include multiple sub-ethnic groups of the Karenni people and to include both women and men. The final sample included 15 participants in total, eight female and seven male participants of different ethnicities: Kayan, Kayaw, Karenni, Bamar-Kayaw, and Karen. Before the data collection, the researchers contacted people from Karenni State who are working in civil society organizations (CSOs) and explained their research project to them. The researchers had previously already networked with people working in CSOs from Karenni State and thus, they were able to build trust through these networks.

The data was collected in Loikaw, Karenni State, in February 2019. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, either in the participants' offices or homes or at the researchers' accommodation, which were considered safe and secure places for the participants. First, the researchers introduced themselves and gave leaflets to the participants to introduce the research institute. Then, the purpose of the research was explained and the participants were asked to verbally give informed consent to participate in a recorded interview. The participants were told that their names and organizations would not be described in the report and that this descriptive information was only for the researchers' use. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to skip questions or completely withdraw from the interview if they wished. After that, the researchers started asking the interview questions. After the data collection was completed, the participants were debriefed by asking them if they would like to add more information, in case any additional information which was not included in the questions was relevant, or if they had any questions themselves.
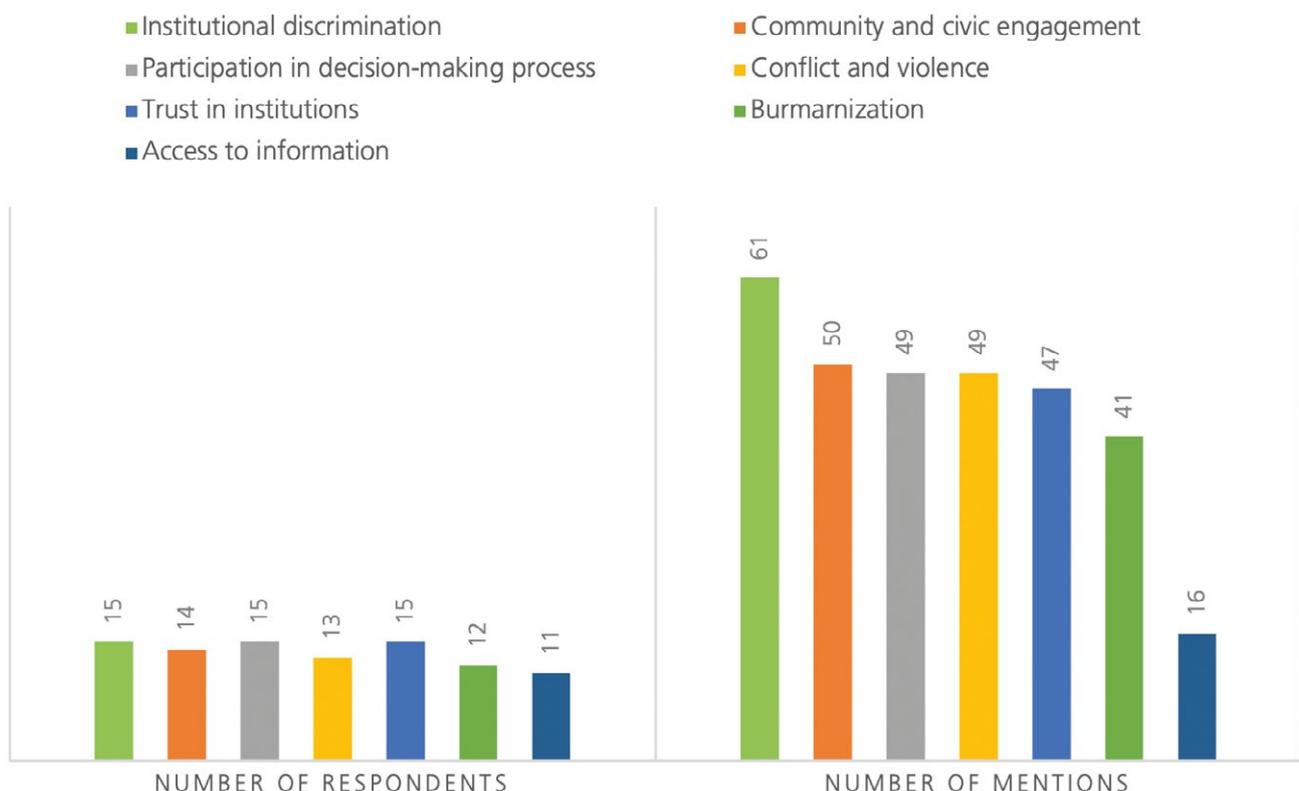
Findings and Discussion

This research used a multi-dimensional approach to measuring political and social marginalization in the experiences of people from Karenni State. The measurement was originally based on the following dimensions: (1) conflict and violence, (2) security, (3) community and civic engagement, (4) access to information, (5) trust in institutions, (6) participation in decision-making processes and (7) others, from the *Dimensions of Political Marginalization* framework (World Bank, 2014). However, during the data analysis, the researchers realized that some dimensions were overlapping and, at the same time, a lot of findings were classified in the "others" category. Therefore, conflict and violence and security were combined into one dimension, "conflict and violence", and two new dimensions called "Institutional discrimination" and "Burmanization" were added, maintaining a total of 7 dimensions.

Participation in Decision-Making Processes

People's participation in decision-making is one of the most important things for a democratic country, since it is their fundamental right (Tafjord, 2007). However, all participants mentioned that they do not have rights to participate in decision-making processes, such as those relating to political issues and natural resources (see Figure 1). Government institutions are very centralized and the posts of decision-makers are generally occupied by Bamar people from upper Burma, while local people are employed as lower-level staff. For example, participant KN9 said that "there are no ethnic people in the director positions or chief of administration positions at the district and township levels of administration". Moreover, the participant explained that the current chief minister of Karenni State is from a local ethnic group,

Figure 1: The Participants' Experiences of Marginalization.

Legend:
- Institutional discrimination
- Participation in decision-making process
- Trust in institutions
- Access to information
- Community and civic engagement
- Conflict and violence
- Burmarnization

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 15, 14, 15, 13, 15, 12, 11

NUMBER OF MENTIONS: 61, 50, 49, 49, 47, 41, 16

but he does not have a mandate for decision-making; instead, all decisions come from the central government. Similarly, participant KN10 argued that "we already have the skills but positions are filled with their people in a form of Burmanization".

In addition, all participants expressed that they did not feel they were getting benefits from their state's resources and that all decisions with regard to these also came from the central government. For instance, the hydroelectric power plants in the state only distribute electricity to areas outside the state. Participant KN10 said, "Mineral extraction projects began in 1830 and hydroelectric power plants started from 1964 in the state. But we are still trying to get electricity until now. I don't think it is fair for us".

Institutional Discrimination

All participants mentioned that they have experienced discrimination; in fact, they mentioned this the most frequently out of all themes, precisely 61 times (see Figure 1). Discrimination exists when a specific group of people suffer from unequal treatment due to their ethnicity, religion, race, or social class and it can happen in many forms, individually and institutionally, with the intentions of favoring dominant groups (Krieger, 1999). *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology* by Turner (2006) describes *institutional discrimination* as an indirect form of discrimination that results in exclusion of minority groups from participation in institutions or from access to resources. Having unfair and unequal chances for employment in government institutions was an example given by the majority of participants. Participant KN7 from the government education department stated, "When it comes to an opportunity for promotion, the people at the highest positions in the department have a tendency to give such chances to those who are of the same ethnicity as them in the first place". Concerning this, KN13 said,

> "…if we look at General Administration Departments in the state, it is rare to see local ethnic people in higher positions and only people from the mainland govern us. Also, if we have a look at the rights of the government staff, the local staff from the State do not get the

permission to stay at housings provided by the government and almost all of staff living in these housings are from the mainland. Although these kinds of practices are not officially legalized, we can see obviously how the system of the State Government treats the local ethnic people differently".

Subsequently, the participant described the centralized hiring structure in institutions and gave the specific example of the selection process for the head of departments in state universities. The order from the central government typically comes with a restricted degree as a requirement for the particular job position. As a result, chances are automatically blocked for local ethnic people with ordinary degrees, while candidates who possess specific qualifications set by the government, which are not available in Karenni State, are selected. In addition to this, KN10 talked about the impact of matriculation examination marks on the admission to Loikaw Technological University. Generally, the marks of local students are lower, because they have to learn from teachers who not only have less experience but also do not have enough knowledge of the local context, while students from big cities like Yangon or Mandalay can learn with well-experienced teachers, so in the end they gain higher marks.

Conflict and Violence

Conflict, violence, and civil war have created immense political instability in Burma. If people feel fear, situations of conflict and violence can be harmful for them both mentally and physically. Thirteen participants in total talked about conflict and violence (see Figure 1). Most of these participants mentioned that they are still concerned about fighting. Participant KN4 said, "I always feel fear of war. I am not safe; it can happen anytime". This is because the Karenni National Progressive Party has not yet signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Participant KN14 said that "currently, there is only a state-level bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Karenni National Progressive Party and the military, which means that there can be war anytime. This situation can be further intensified by the military's expanding troops. Such activities are one of the blocking factors in the peace

process". Moreover, participant KN10 criticized the peace process, saying that the current government only cares about ethnic armed organizations that are powerful. He said that "[the] dialogue is based on power. I think that is very wrong".

Lack of Access to Social Services and Community and Civic Engagement

Fourteen participants talked about their experience with community and civic engagement and the lack of social services in their area (see Figure 1). Mostly, they mentioned that they have limited educational opportunities: there are not enough schools, the teachers are from upper Burma and typically do not want to stay in the area for too long. In addition, some areas are not reachable by the government education system and the government's criterion of a minimum 45 students necessary to operate a basic education school often cannot be fulfilled. For instance, participant KN6 said that "even though the government criteria of the school are not met in our area, we need the school. In the end, local people who are interested in working as volunteer teachers go there". Due to difficulties in access, and because there is not enough trained medical staff available, healthcare facilities are also still lacking in Karenni State. Participant KN7 stated that most doctors who come to their area have been demoted in other parts of the country and are not really skillful. According to Hamilton and Svensson (2014),

> "poor public service provision may not only increase the risk of falling into poverty and reduce the ability to transition out of it, but may create a vicious circle where poor public service provision results in the state's legitimacy being questioned and a general distrust in the political system, including reduced political participation" (p. 4).

Community and civic engagement are very important for community development and for promoting people's participation in decision-making processes. Yet, some participants mentioned that there are no consultations with local people to solve community problems and address community needs. Participant KN1 suggested

that the government needs to "carefully and respectfully listen to the voices of people from Karenni State… They need to welcome and open the way for people to participate". Similarly, participant KN5 said that the government does not have a proper policy and program for youth empowerment; he wants real community representatives in youth committees. If people are empowered and engage more with the government, they will become more willing to participate in decision-making, because they will trust government institutions more. At the same time, by the government providing better access to social services such as education, healthcare, and transportation, people could in turn participate more in political activities. All of these factors overlap and could together support active citizenship and democratic transition.

Lack of Access to Information

Eleven participants talked about the lack of information access, mentioning it 16 times in total (see Figure 1). The participants felt there is no transparency about the government's project implementation; for example, participant KN1 said that the local people do not know about fiscal sharing between the national and state levels. "We do not know how many investments there are in Karenni State. We didn't get information about how much the Union Government shares back to Karenni State and where they use that money". Moreover, there is no information about the peace process either. Participant KN9 mentioned that most ordinary people are interested in the peace process, but they "do not know about the peace process. They can get information only from Facebook and media. People do not have information, they cannot participate".

Lack of Trust in Government Institutions

Most participants indicated that they do not have trust in the acts of the Karenni government (Kayah State Government), since there is little participation of local ethnic people in its decision-making processes that affect the local community. KN6 stated, "Although the current government was elected by the people in Karenni State, the control and power are still centralized and

the local authority here is only on the surface". Local ethnic mobilizers and those who have genuine interest in the democratic transition are only at the ground level and cannot get involved at the decision-making level. Moreover, local ethnic people living around economic development project areas suffer from environmental damages, but responsible people from the State Government who give permission for these projects do not take any responsibility for this or offer any compensation. Lack of transparency in resource allocation and revenue sharing from investments in the State creates low trust in the work of the State Government. Yet, previous research about Karenni State has shown that trust-building is essential to attaining sustainable peace (Kramer, Russell, & Smith, 2018). In addition, Levi (1998) argued that a real civilian government should base its activities and policies on the desires of its citizens, which in turn will enable the government to gain the citizens' trust and respect.

Experiences of Burmanization

Burmanization refers to the Bamar ethnic group dominating decision-making roles and forcing assimilation to their culture and religion through laws, policies, and activities. Many research studies have previously described Burmanization (Berlie, 2008; Gravers, 2010; Holmes, 1967; Karlsson, 2012; Kham, 2016; Lewis, 1924). In the current study, even though the interview guide had originally not included questions about Burmanization, all interviewed participants mentioned it and thought it was an important factor in Burma's political and peace process (see Figure 1). Specifically, most of the participants talked about the statue of General Aung San being erected in minority areas, including Loikaw in Karenni State, saying that local people were not happy about it. Even though Karenni youth had protested against the statue, the local government built it anyway. The protesters believed that the statue of Aung San was not appropriate for

Figure 2: The Cycle of Marginalization.
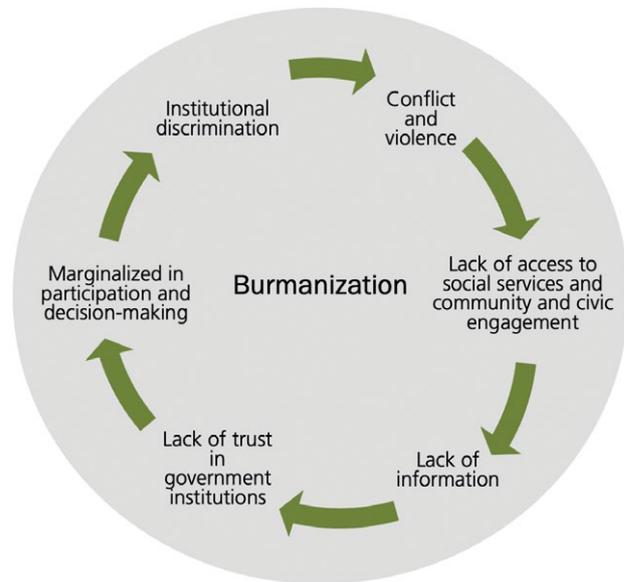
their ethnic identity and their state, a clear example of Burmanization occurring at the time of the current study.

All in all, according to the analysis, Burmanization appears to be the underlying mechanism of all the other dimensions of political and social marginalization found in this study, connected to each other in a cycle of marginalization (see Figure 2). Specifically, Burmanization is systematically marginalizing and discriminating against ethnic people, preventing them from being represented in institutions, leading them to distrust said institutions. Similarly, access to social services and information, community and civic engagement, and trust towards institutions are connected to political participation. If people cannot participate in political activities, they cannot be included in decision-making processes. These are the root causes of the ongoing conflict.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of the present research was to explore experiences of people living in Karenni State and, based on that, to determine what kind of political institutions would be able to support the peace-building process in Burma. The findings confirmed a lack of ethnic minorities' participation in decision-making processes, discrimination they face in state institutions, and impacts of the long history of conflict and violence in the country. The findings also showed that the lack of access to social services and information, community and civic engagement, and lack of trust in institutions are all related to Burmanization. Taken together, these results indicate that there is ongoing forced assimilation by the dominant majority ethnic group, the Bamar. The Bamar dominate both political and social institutions, their supremacy and hierarchy policies and activities marginalize ethnic minorities, limit their access to information, and prevent their participation in decision-making. Importantly, our results provide evidence for the cycle of ongoing conflict and civil war in Burma. On the whole, these findings should be considered when forming inclusive political institutions with true representation of ethnic minority people in order to welcome them in the critical decision-making processes, and in this way, to bring the cycle of conflict to an end.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of sampling, since the participants were selected based on their experience working with political institutions, and hence, the findings cannot reflect experiences of all people from Karenni State. Similarly, further studies should be carried out in order to explore ethnic minorities' representation in the government and military institutions across the country, not only in Karenni State. Finally, the timeframe of the data collection unexpectedly coincided with the protest against General Aung San's statue in Loikaw. This had some impact on the study, since participants responded with the current situation in mind and many of their answers were directly related to the causes of the protest.

There are a number of important changes that need to be made in order to achieve the vision of people from Karenni State:

1/ Firstly, and most importantly, the Union Government must recognize ethnic identities' historical background in order for them to have a sense of belonging to the union. Moreover, it needs to engage and consult with CSOs, ethnic armed groups, political parties, and respective ethnic civilians from Karenni State when critical decisions that could have an impact both on the peace-building process and in nation-building are being made. Forced assimilation into the Burmese culture, symbols, and religion should be avoided.

2/ While forming a coalition government (including ethnic political parties) to reconcile more with ethnic minorities through the reformation of the 2008 Constitution, the Union Government should decentralize administrative functions and government institutions in order to improve the quality of service delivery for all.

3/ The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement framework needs to be reviewed and space for all stakeholders, including all ethnic leaders regardless of political and armed power, needs to be created.

4/ Restructuring the Tatmadaw in order for it to be inclusive with the representation of ethnic minorities in high positions is strongly recommended to reinforce the trust-building process.

5/ Ethnic armed organizations should have a systematic and strategic approach in the peace process focused on building unity. This could be done by cooperating among themselves in order to find alternative ways of enabling non-signatory groups' participation in the political dialogue.

6/ Providing evidence through research to be used for advocacy is also critical in peace-building. This way, local people's voices in the peace process could be amplified in order for it to become more inclusive when it comes to decision-making. Public awareness about social cohesion should be raised through civic education by CSOs and local members of parliament and ethnic armed organizations should create a channel for public consultation with local communities.

The true desire of people from Karenni State is to achieve equal rights by speaking up about their sufferings as well as by eliminating discrimination against them. Not only listening to the voices of ethnic minorities living in Karenni State, but also the actual implementation of agreements during public consultation from beginning to end is necessary. This kind of practices would help build public trust in political institutions, which in turn would help reduce tension and conflict between CSOs and the State Government and it would move reconciliation forward. This way, the government would become a truly civilian government, representing the voices of ethnic minorities calling for inclusive participation with mutual trust, and overcoming the ongoing conflict in Karenni State.

Endnotes

1. Since the names "Burma" and "Karenni State" were changed to "Myanmar" and "Kayah State", respectively, by Bamar-dominated military government with long-lasting divisive consequences in the state (Kramer, Russel, & Smith, 2018), this report uses the original names.

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Hidden Truths of the Invisible: The Experiences of Double Minorities in Northern Rakhine State during Violent Conflict

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Abstract

In 2012, communal conflicts arose between Muslims and Buddhists in northern Rakhine, later causing one of the world's biggest humanitarian crises of 2017. Since the very beginning of the conflict, the Myanmar military (the Tatmadaw) and the Rakhine ethnic group became the perpetrators of the conflict on the pages of international reports, while the Rohingya ethnic group were described as Muslim extremists and terrorists in local reports. Among these polarized reports focusing on only the primary conflict actors, the situation of other minority ethnic groups directly experiencing the violent conflict has remained invisible, creating a huge gap of knowledge that is necessary to paint a complete picture of the situation on the ground. For this reason, this study investigated the situation of ethnic double minorities during the six-year-long violent communal conflict in northern Rakhine through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The main questions of this investigation regarded: 1) the invisibility of the double minorities; 2) their experiences as a targeted group during the conflict; 3) their security during the conflict; 4) assessment of their citizenship rights, and; 5) their humanitarian assessment after the conflict. The findings showed that these minority groups have a potential to initiate the reconciliation and peace-building process in Rakhine State, as they understand both sides of the conflicts through their experiences. Furthermore, the findings also suggested that limitations and discrimination faced by these minorities in every sector of their daily lives in this country should be eliminated in order to increase their participation in the peace-building process.

Acknowledgement

Introduction

Rakhine State is one of the poorest and least developed states in Myanmar, with the lowest labor force participation rate and the highest unemployment rate in the country. While the state performs poorly on most social development indicators such as access to primary education, healthcare, clean water and sanitation, it also has to face yearly natural hazards like storms and floods (United Nations Children's Fund, 2015). On top of that, the socio-economic status of Rakhine State has been getting even worse since the outbreak of inter-communal conflicts in 2012, which escalated into an armed conflict between a Muslim rebel group later known as the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Myanmar government in October 2016. Thousands of people have been displaced from their homes, suffering from food insecurity, interrupted livelihoods and education as well as a lack of access to markets (United Nations Children's Fund, 2015). In August 2017, the armed conflict reached a climax after ARSA's second attack and a huge military mission by the Tatmadaw, which led to one of the biggest refugee crises of 2017. The report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State (2017; known as the Kofi Annan Commission) affirmed that Rakhine State's poverty rate was 78%, almost double the national rate.

According to a brief search through both local and international media websites, the title of the communal conflict in Rakhine State had gradually transformed from a Buddhist-Muslim conflict in 2012 into a more specific conflict between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims after 2014 (Htet Lynn Oo, Htoo Htet Naing, Kyaw Zin Lin, Myo Myo Kyaw, Saw Mar Gay Htoo, & Thura Aung, 2018). Then, the source of the conflict was not only the religious diversity in the state, but also the right to self-identification of the Rohingya ethnic group. In line with this, most international reports have portrayed the military and Rakhine people as the perpetrators and the Rohingya as the victims, recommending granting citizenship rights to the Rohingya (e.g. Fortify Rights, 2018). In contrast, local reports have presented only the Rakhine ethnics as the victims of the inter-communal conflicts (Htet Lynn Oo et al., 2018). Yet, what both sides of these polarized reports have excluded are the voices and perspectives of other minority conflict actors in the region. As a consequence, unfortunately, the situation of these grassroots level stakeholders and their ideas related

to how they would like to solve the conflict have been forgotten in the Rakhine conflict analysis presented in previous studies.

Double Minorities or Minorities within Minorities

Inside an already multi-ethnic country, Rakhine State is in fact composed of seven official ethnic groups, known as Rakhine, Mro and Khami or Mrokhimi[1], Thet, Daing-Net, Mramagyi, and Kaman. Since the Rakhine are already regarded as one of the minority groups of Myanmar, the other groups living in Rakhine State are typically overlooked in studies on ethnic minorities[2]. Therefore, in this study, they will be referred to as *double minorities*; minority ethnic groups that are parts of a bigger minority ethnic group. Typically, the term double minority refers to a subset of minorities such as sexual minorities, women, and other lower social classes, who are embedded in the officially recognized minorities' category (Das, 2009). According to Beeri and Saad (2014), minorities within minorities are groups who identify themselves separately from a minority population based on their ethnicity, nationality, or religious belief.

Even though the double minorities of Rakhine State have not been described nearly as much as those who are commonly seen as the primary actors of the conflict, there is some evidence pointing to the fact that these minority groups have been victimized during the six-year-long communal conflict. Specifically, one study on the Kaman and Mramagyi showed that these ethnic groups were actually targeted (Myanmar Information Management Unit, 2015). In spite of this, even a major governmental organization such as Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD) does not recognize the Kaman and Mramagyi as victims of violent communal conflicts nor does it include them in its resettlement and development projects (UEHRD, 2018). Moreover, another report found that Mro have negative feelings towards the majority Rakhine and the government administration, based on their experiences in the sectors of governance, resource sharing, livelihoods, public services such as healthcare, education, and transportation, since they have been discriminated against (Nyein Chan Aung, 2018). The

same report also mentions that the local government departments and organizations are mostly dominated by the Rakhine majority and Burmese.

Based on the above, this paper argues that neither governmental organizations such as UEHRD nor international organizations have been able to initiate an effective reconciliation in conflicted Rakhine State, because they have not considered the existing situation of these neglected minority groups. According to a paper titled *Minority Rights: The Key to Conflict Prevention* (Baldwin, Chapman, & Gray, 2007), it is crucial to ensure fully inclusive participation of minority groups when it comes to conflict prevention. Even after a conflict has occurred, the recognition of knowledge and participation of minorities is critical in peace-building and conflict transformation efforts. Hence, in order to fill this gap, this research will explore more effective and inclusive conflict resolution strategies with respect to the conflict in Rakhine State and the ways to overcome challenges faced by its double minorities.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used in this study, because the study's aim was to get an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the double minorities during the conflicts in northern Rakhine. Furthermore, the region still had ongoing armed conflict and was not stable enough for collecting a sufficient number of participants necessary for quantitative or mixed-method research. In order to get a general understanding of the situation of double minorities during the communal conflicts, the researchers met with a young Kaman man who had left his home for Yangon because of the conflict as well as went on a networking trip in four townships of northern Rakhine before the actual data collection. The local context and conversations helped the researchers to identify questions that would be suitable to ask the participants without making them feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

Both individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used in this study, because some participants felt insecure to talk in front of other people, while other participants could not recall their memories without the help of their neighbors. As the stories of the participants were expected to be different according to their respective region and ethnicity, the interviews and FGD guides were semi-structured in order to allow for follow-up questions. The guides included 20 questions in total, organized under five main questions: 1) What are the experiences of local double minorities during the communal conflict? 2) What do they think about the ways the local authorities treated them during the conflict? 3) How did they feel during the conflict? 4) How do they see the rehabilitation process of the government and other organizations? 5) What are their expectations when it comes to the future of their region?

Sample and Sampling

The research participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) members of the Mro, Khami (or Mrokhimi), Thet, Mramagyi, Daing-Net, Kaman, or Hindu[3] ethnic groups who had been directly or indirectly affected by the conflicts in northern Rakhine; 2) active community leaders or social workers of the targeted groups who have broad knowledge about what had been happening throughout the regions, and; 3) community members who have personal experience of the conflicts but are rarely accessible to international or national media. A snowball sampling tactic was employed to find more participants with the help of the existing participants. In the end, a total amount of seven people was interviewed individually and eight people were involved in two FGDs. Each interview and focus group discussion took around 1.5 hours on average. The data collection took place in five regions, including two townships and four villages in northern Rakhine, during January 2019. The interviews were arranged at the homes of the participants, as the conversations were too sensitive to have in public spaces. For the FGDs, these were conducted at community centers, where most active people easily meet and discuss community affairs. Due to the escalating armed conflict in the region, the Thet ethnic group could not be included in the sample, and instead, a Hindu participant agreed to participate.

Verbal informed consent was used in this study instead of a written form because the researchers believed that it may make the participants uncomfortable if they were told to sign a document that is related to very sensitive issues. In the verbal agreement, the researchers promised to keep the profiles of the participants and the locations of the data collection confidential as well as to destroy all data and records after publication.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this study found that the experiences of minorities in northern Rakhine during the conflicts fell under six main themes: 1) their relationship with Muslims, Rakhines and other ethnic groups in northern Rakhine; 2) the impacts of the conflicts on them and their area; 3) their perceptions of the conflict actors and root causes; 4) their perceptions of the Tatmadaw and the government; 5) the assessment of human rights in their regions, and; 6) their perception of the government's rehabilitation and reconciliation process.

Minorities' Relationships with Muslims and Rakhines

The relationships between the double minority groups, Muslims, and Rakhines depended on the regions they live in, the ethnicities they belong to, and on whether specific conflicts affected them directly or not. Before the 2012 communal conflict, most of the participants agreed on the fact that a relatively better relationship had existed: "We always visited their [both Muslim and Rakhine] villages, slept there at nights, and they also always visited us", said Mro participant P 2. Furthermore, besides a social relationship, there was also a better business and trading relationship. According to Mramagyi participant P 3, the two different communities (Mramagyi and Muslims) were supportive of each other in market places, in forests when cutting wood, in the rivers and fisheries and in other such local businesses. However, the results showed that during the 2012 communal conflict, some Mramagyi became directly involved in the conflict on the side of the Rakhines, while other members of the same ethnic group in a different area were able to keep the peace with both Rakhines and Muslims. On the other hand, the Kaman became direct victims of the conflict, because they are Muslim and were regarded to be on the same side as the Rohingya Muslims. As soon as the riots had been stopped, the government separated Muslims and non-Muslims by force into different places.

The relationships between the other ethnic groups and the Muslim groups became totally broken when the 2016-2017 conflicts erupted. As a result of the violent activities of ARSA, a lot of non-Muslim ethnic people did not trust the local Muslims anymore. At the same time,

the relationships between the double minorities and the Rakhines worsened as well. P 1 and P 4 both agreed that the Mramagyi were discriminated against in internally displaced people camps, where the Rakhines did not give them a place to stay or a bed to sleep on: "They [Rakhines] hate us. They even called us 'Mrama dogs'" (P 4). According to these results, it can be concluded that the relationships between the double minorities and Muslims were not broken by their own doing; in several areas, they were separated by force through the government's conflict prevention plans. Moreover, a few successful stories of preventing direct violence during the 2012 communal conflict prove a positive attitude of some minorities towards Muslims. Most of the participants did not see Muslims as their enemies; moreover, they expressed that Muslim communities were economically essential for them. On the other hand, some of the participants were afraid of Muslims, because they thought Muslims were going to seek revenge against Rakhines someday and did not want to be confused for Rakhines. In brief, the participants' fear of both Muslims and Rakhines became very high after the conflicts; however, they still wanted to rebuild positive relationships with those two conflicting groups.

Impacts of the 2012 and 2016-2017 Conflicts

Both directly and indirectly affected regions of northern Rakhine suffered negative impacts of the conflicts. The results of this study showed that it was mainly people's livelihoods and mental health that were affected, the severity of the wounds depending on whether the participants witnessed violence or not and whether they were targeted in the conflicts or not. Of all participants of this research, one participant was directly involved in the 2012 communal conflict and three participants directly witnessed the 2016-2017 conflicts in their respective areas. Mramagyi participant P 1 was severely affected by the violent acts that he had committed: "According to the teaching of Buddha, we should sympathize with and help the innocent Muslims. Honestly, I am afraid of hell. But, it had been already done for the sake of nationalism". In the 2016-2017 conflicts, Hindu participant P 5 and Mramagyi participants P 3 and P 4 witnessed extremely violent situations. As a consequence, P 4 expressed that

she could not concentrate on any work and did not have any motivation to start a business, because the conflict was never-ending and the community always had to be alert to the sounds of bombs.

According to Mro participant P 2, the broken relationship between Muslims and other ethnic groups after the 2012 communal conflict had a huge impact on the local economy: "There were no employees to hire as farmers anymore. The farmers had to go to the townships just to sell their agricultural products as the traders could not reach their villages". Kaman participant F 1.2 said, "During 2012, it was really difficult for us. We could not go to the bazaar. We could not sell anything. We could make our livelihood just around this village". Moreover, all cultivated lands in the village became occupied by the Tatmadaw due to security reasons. F 1.3 stated that all Kaman businesses moved to Yangon as there was nothing left to do in Rakhine State after the 2012 communal conflict. Sadly, these negative impacts got even worse after the 2016-2017 conflicts: "If something [conflict] happened, the transportation was shut down. Then, it became more and more difficult for our livelihoods", said Hindu participant P 5.

Hence, the results presented in this section show that the livelihoods of the people in conflict-affected regions were destroyed both by the conflicts and the security activities of the central government and the Tatmadaw after the conflicts. Instead of reconciling the conflicting communities after the direct violence had ceased, the conflicting groups were separated by force into different places and transportation within the state became very limited, especially for Muslims, due to the so-called security concerns. As a consequence, most of the participants mentioned that the labor market and local businesses declined as almost the whole Muslim population could not visit their localities. In regard to the insecure feelings and traumas, all participants believed that the conflicts were not over yet and feared the re-occurrence of direct violence between Muslims and Rakhines.

Perceptions of the Conflict Actors and Root Causes

Most of the participants thought that their ethnic groups were just victims of conflicts that happened between two majority groups: Rakhine and Rohingya Muslims. At the same time, it seems that the participants perceived the main conflict actors of 2012 to have been different from the ones of 2016-2017: While they mentioned that the ones who had destroyed and burnt down the houses in 2012 were Rakhine, they stated that the 2016-2017 conflicts started only when ARSA began fighting against the Myanmar military, and they strongly believed that ARSA was the main perpetrator. An obvious example of this was the fact that 103 Hindus were brutally killed by ARSA, and some Mros and Mramargyis were also murdered. "Those Bengalis hate Buddhist people and they want to conquer Rakhine State. That is why they tried to kill us", said Mramagyi participant P 4. However, there were also some examples of good relationships and coordination between Muslims and non-Muslims during the conflicts in order to protect their regions from attack. These groups kept community guards mixed from both communities during the conflict until everyone had to flee. "Actually, innocent civilians from different communities, Rakhine, Mro, Muslims or whoever, that did not have any interest in or understanding of any political profit, always have to be the victims", said Mro participant P 7.

Some participants believed that the conflicts were happening due to political intentions of some groups. For instance, the participants mentioned that the human rights movement of Rohingya became noticeable around the world after the conflicts, and that the international community was putting pressure on the Myanmar government to accept the citizenship of the Rohingya. At the same time, there were some groups who were happy to see Rohingya flee away from Rakhine, wishing they would never come back. Some thought that the conflict had happened because Rakhine people were getting jealous of the Muslim communities and began to worry about the future of their state, because they thought the Muslim population had grown too much and their business was better than Rakhines'. On the other hand, some stated that the Rohingya want to conquer northern Rakhine and have their own territory. Among these conflicting views, one participant considered the main reason of the conflict to be the democratic transition. "The root cause that created these conflicts was democracy. People just thought democracy is about asking what they want", mentioned Daing-Net participant P 6. To sum up, according to this study, some

ethnic groups see the conflicts as religious and racial ones, while some groups think the conflicts happened intentionally for political purposes.

Perceptions of the Tatmadaw and the Government

The participants in this study had different opinions on the Tatmadaw and the government as well as on how these handled the conflict, possibly because different ethnic groups had experienced different extents of protection and communication from the government during the conflicts. For instance, the Hindu participant that had suffered direct violence by ARSA mentioned that the military had taken on an essential role in providing security and stability for the region. In addition, some participants clearly stated that the Tatmadaw had had nothing to do with these violent occurrences; they had just been doing territory clearance operations to protect people from terrorists, even providing medical care to the ones who had been injured and sending them to a safe place while the fighting between the Tatmadaw and ARSA was happening. However, there were also some other thoughts on the role of the government and military during the conflict. "No protection was provided by the Tatmadaw during the conflict. We had to struggle by ourselves", said Mramagyi participant P 3. Some participants mentioned that they felt unsafe and insecure when seeing the Tatmadaw in their region:

> "The behavior of the military is different based on whether information can be accessed in the region or not. Sometimes, in very rural areas, they behave unusually, searching for things in innocent civilians' houses. We do not know what they are searching for. But, everyone from both communities feels unsafe about them holding guns right in front of them, although what they are meant for is giving security to the people", said Mro participant P 7.

On the other hand, there were some opinions that the Tatmadaw was not responsible for what happened, and only the government was. "The military can do nothing to prevent the conflict until the martial law is released. They are not the ones who govern the region", said P 1. The distrust in the rule of law by the government played

a big role in the participants' memories. "I went to the Human Rights Commission located in Yangon to request an investigation of a Mramagyi's death. No one paid attention to us. They said they were busy with meetings", Mramagyi participant P 1 said. By looking at these facts, the role of the Tatmadaw in the northern Rakhine and its influence on the local people is undeniable. It is a reminder to everyone who is interested in solving the northern Rakhine conflict to think about whether portraying the Tatmadaw as the main perpetrator that needs to be punished, without recognizing what the other sides had done, can really help bring peace. Based on the findings of this study, we can also assume that even though the people would like to rely on government institutions for justice and the rule of law, the government still cannot meet the demands of civilians. Furthermore, it was found that the government authorities were not responsive enough when the conflict started to happen and spread through the region.

Assessment of Fundamental Human Rights

Regarding the exercise of civil and political rights, some participants believed that the conflict made it neither worse nor better. "Nothing changes. We still need to offer bribes if we want to get National Registration Cards (NRCs)", said Mro participant P 7. According to the Mramagyi participant P 3, none of the people in his village had had NRCs before 2015: "It was in 2007. He [the immigration officer] said we were Kalars and we would not get NRCs". Hindus have also been facing the same situation for a long time. Hindu participant P 5 said, "Only five members of my family have got NRCs, but my eldest son, middle son and my wife still have not gotten it yet". In contrast, the limitations to social rights have increased for the Kaman. After the 2012 communal conflict, the Kaman have been discriminated against by government institutions due to security reasons, as their villages became regarded as conflict zones. Kaman participants F 1.1, F 1.2, and F 1.3 mentioned that they cannot access public healthcare to the same extent as Rakhines because they are Muslim. The situation in the education sector is similar: "It is not easy to reach even Grade 8 and 9. They are intentionally making us uneducated. We are not allowed to study at schools in townships. That is discrimination", said F 1.1. Furthermore, Kaman students

cannot access higher education, as most of them do not have NRCs and cannot travel to Yangon or even different townships in Rakhine State.

According to our research, Muslims and Hindus are always being suspected and assumed terrorists by the authorities. They often experience checks by the authorities because of their appearance. Hindu participant P 5 expressed that "I feel so sad about that. It has been happening for a long time; since the previous regime. We always have to get out of the bus to be investigated at the highway checkpoints". In the political sector, Mro participant P 7 thought they were being marginalized: "The opinions of ethnic groups that do not have armed organizations are usually neglected". Furthermore, some Mro participants felt that they were being discriminated for being Christian, especially regarding job opportunities. The participants also mentioned that they did not have the same status as Rakhines in doing business because of the abusive behaviors of the Rakhine majority. "Nobody in our village is doing business today. We do not dare to go out from our region to do business with Rakhines. We are afraid of them", said Mro participant F 2.3. All in all, this study found that the double minorities in northern Rakhine had faced discrimination and the lack of human rights even before the conflicts. They face many challenges and limitations in their daily lives, being discriminated against in several sectors by both the majority ethnic group and the government institutions.

Perceptions of the Government's Rehabilitation Process

This study found that the people who lost their houses and land during the conflicts of 2012, 2016, and 2017 have still not been rehabilitated. Mostly, the participants mentioned that they had received humanitarian aid, such as basic food and temporary shelters provided by the government, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. However, participants from all ethnic groups agreed that what they needed was not only aid:

"It is good that we get humanitarian aid. But, no one can provide for our lives in the long-term or

take responsibility for our children's education. What we need is not only the aid, but also ways to survive in the future without the aid", said Mramargyi participant P 3.

The study clearly identified concerns about the future, with the participants repeatedly mentioning that creating job opportunities, providing agricultural technologies, effective transportation, and creating markets for local products is urgently needed in their areas. At the same time, the findings showed that the different ethnic groups have been part of separate processes. For example, while the Hindu, Kaman, and Rohingya groups are still living in camps, Mramagyi are already living in new buildings in their original area, supported by the government. Based on these diverse situations, it seems that the members of the different communities do not have trust in the rehabilitation process, since it is creating even more division between them. On the other hand, some participants thought that conflict would happen again since, in their opinion, the Rohingya people want to conquer northern Rakhine for their own territory.

The study discovered that members of these different communities were willing to talk about why conflicts had happened, and negotiate with each other for the future of their communities. In addition, most participants thought that there could be no solution to past conflicts if the main conflict actors did not talk to each other, and they strongly believed that the government should initiate this dialogue. Furthermore, the participants thought future conflict could be prevented if everyone living in the region had equal access to education and livelihoods: "If someone becomes educated, and has the right to work as a teacher using that education, he or she will prevent other members of their community from committing violence as they already possess guaranteed stability to live peacefully", mentioned Hindu participant P 5. This study confirmed what most previous reports about Rakhine State had found: That all communities suffer from poverty, poor social services, and a scarcity of livelihood opportunities. Furthermore, this research found that these factors were perceived as one of the causes of the conflicts, and hence needed to be considered to prevent conflicts from re-emerging.

Conclusion and Recommendations

To summarize the study's key findings, the double minorities are not only affected by the conflicts between Rakhines and Muslims, but also suppressed through institutionalized discrimination by government institutions and through social discrimination by the Rakhine majority group. Based on this, the barriers to their participation in the peace-building and reconciliation process in northern Rakhine are considerable. At the same time, this study found that the double minorities represent potential resources for peace-building, because they do not stand on the opposite sides of the conflicting communities; instead, they are the people on the ground that understand both sides of the conflict well. Therefore, we recommend the following:

1/ The laws restricting the basic human rights of these minorities, such as the right to freedom of movement, the right to education and healthcare, the right to free choice of employment (both in private and public institutions), and the right to equal protection of the law, should be repealed as soon as possible and members of these minorities should be treated equally as all citizens of the country.

2/ The rehabilitation process needs to become more effective than in the past six years, which could be done by the government and policy-makers including grassroots participation in the current peace process of the country.

3/ Peace-builders working for the ongoing reconciliation process in northern Rakhine should offer the double minorities sufficient space, and that by: i) implementing projects where the voices of double minorities can be raised up, ii) creating platforms where double minorities can engage not only with the government but also with both Rakhine and Rohingya communities when it comes to violent conflict prevention plans, and iii) allowing them to represent their ethnic groups in the ongoing national reconciliation process. This way, effective results for the future of northern Rakhine could be reached.

Endnotes

1. The Myanmar government census (Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2014) defines Mro and Khami as different ethnic groups, but some members of these ethnic groups claim that Mro and Khami are the same ethnic group and believe they should be identified as Mrokhimi.

2. The obvious exception is the Rohingya ethnic group that has received a lot of attention since 2012, the year in which the communal conflict started.

3. On National Registration Cards, these people are identified as "Hindu", while this group is not included among the 135 official ethnic groups of Myanmar.

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Public Trust in the Myanmar Police Force:
Exploring the Influencing Factors

Thura Aung and Win Win May
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Abstract

While a number of studies have investigated the factors influencing public trust in the police in developed countries, similar research is still quite rare in developing countries. This study is the first to explore this particular topic in Myanmar, a developing country. Specifically, this study measured the level of public trust in the police and investigated factors that influence public trust in the police by collecting survey data in both urban and rural areas of Yangon Region, Myanmar (N = 401). Using conflict theory as the guiding theoretical framework, the present study examined whether Bamar and non-Bamar from both urban and rural areas expressed different levels of trust in the police. Findings revealed that people from urban areas had a lower level of trust in the police than people from rural areas, while no difference was found between the Bamar and non-Bamar populations. In addition, Myanmar people's attitudes towards the police as a whole were substantially influenced by their perception of police accessibility.

Acknowledgement

Introduction

Public trust is important to police institutions as they have to earn legitimacy from the people. Goldsmith (2005) argued that public cooperation with the police is likely to support police performance when people perceive the police as trustworthy. According to Tyler and Fagan (2008), the public's trust towards the police is widely seen as an important indicator of police performance and fairness of the judicial system. In fact, numerous studies have been conducted on factors that shape public trust in the police. Some of these studies have used the so-called performance theory to explain the cause of trust and distrust in the police (Bouckaert, Van de Walle, Maddens & Kampen, 2002). Essentially, if citizens get good quality police service (good performance), a positive evaluation will be formed; likewise, bad quality service received by citizens (bad performance) will lead to a negative evaluation. For instance, Shoyode (2018) researched about the impact of easy access to the police on public trust through sampling participants from rural and urban areas in Nigeria. The author found that easy access to a police station was one of the important factors that shaped public trust in the police, and that the presence of police officers in this station had a positive impact on trust, while not being able to get help from the police undermined public trust.

Unlike performance theory, conflict theory has highlighted the struggle between social classes when studying the determinants of public trust in the police. More concretely, conflict theory has pointed out that people who are arrested and charged with crimes are mostly from a lower socio-economic level (with low income or unemployed), and, in contrast, rich people tend to be protected by the police (Boateng, 2015). Accordingly, people from higher socio-economic classes are more satisfied with the police, while people from lower socio-economic classes and marginalized groups have negative views of the police (Wu & Sun, 2009). In this respect, differences in attitudes towards the police among ethnic groups living in the United States has been shown in previous research. Specifically, the findings suggested that minority group members, Hispanics and African Americans, had less trust in the police than the majority whites (Tyler, 2005).

The Current Study

In line with developments in the field of police perception studies, this study aims to investigate the level of public trust in the Myanmar Police Force and its influencing factors in order to foster a trusting relationship between the police and civilians in Myanmar. The Myanmar Police Force (MPF) is a hierarchical organization operating under the Tatmadaw (Armed Forces of Myanmar). In 2011, the MPF had around 80,000 members, operating 1,256 police stations in 330 townships and 73 districts (Selth, 2013). Throughout the years, the distribution of police officers across the country has become more equal, expanding to more remote and even ceasefire and conflict-affected areas, even though most of the ethnic armed organizations refuse to receive police administrative centers and rely instead on paramilitaries and the Tatmadaw to send criminals to the closest police station (Selth, 2013). At the same time, the role of the MPF in internal security challenges has extended to issues that had been previously tackled primarily by the Tatmadaw, such as public protests, and its number of combat-ready battalions has increased (Selth, 2013). Moreover, since 2011, a series of reform measures have been implemented with the help from the international community (Myanmar Police Force, 2014).

Since not a single study has been done to evaluate the factors that shape public trust in the MPF, the current study aims to identify these factors by extending the findings of previous studies to the context of Myanmar. First, building on conflict theory, this study hypothesizes that participants from ethnic minority groups will have less trust in the MPF than the ethnic majority. This hypothesis was also formed because historically, the MPF has been made up of mostly Bamar people and due to a Bamar-centric doctrine, promotion of non-Buddhist and non-Bamar personnel to higher ranks has been systematically limited (Maung Aung Myoe, 2009). Second, it is expected that participants without easy access to the MPF will have a lower level of trust in the police than those for whom access is easy. This hypothesis is based on performance theory, which suggests that police with good performance – in this case, with easy access – will have the trust of

the community they serve. Finally, inspired by a study conducted in Taiwan that found a lower level of trust in the police in urban rather than rural participants (Wang & Sun, 2018), the study's third hypothesis will test differences in trust between urban and rural populations in Yangon Region, Myanmar.

Methodology

This study used quantitative methodology, specifically a questionnaire, since it aimed to obtain generalizable results from a large population sample. The questionnaire consisted of 12 questions, most of which were close-ended, answered either *Yes-No* or on a Likert Scale ranging from 1 *(no trust at all)* to 5 *(total trust)*, except the last question, which was open-ended. First, the participants were asked about their level of trust in the MPF's fairness (e.g. "How much do you trust the MPF to make decisions based on the law, not on personal bias?"), effectiveness, and transparency. Then, the questionnaire asked about the participants' previous experience with the police as well as some demographic information. The questions were created based on previous literature about fairness (Tyler, 2014), trust (Clark et al., 2017; Jackson & Bradford, 2010), accessibility (Shoyode, 2018), and contact between people and the police (Worden & McLean, 2017). The questions were first formulated in English and then translated into Burmese. After the questionnaire was finalized, it was tested in a small pilot study to make sure it fit the local context. Based on the pilot study, the survey was revised by changing some Burmese words, adjusting the answering scale, and rewriting the consent form.

Sample, Sampling, and Procedure

The sample included 401 participants in total, divided into four sub-groups: urban and rural, Bamar and non-Bamar. The study used a non-probability sampling method called quota sampling, choosing the same number of participants from each sub-group. Moreover, the study also employed a convenience sampling strategy, recruiting participants by contacting leaders of local organizations and community leaders in rural areas as well as by approaching participants at their homes. Since the aim was to obtain an equal number of participants in each sub-group, different places in four Yangon townships with highly homogeneous populations were selected: urban Insein, Hlaing, and Bahan as well as rural Hmawbi. All data was collected during February 2019.

The procedure with each participant was the same. First, the participants were presented with the purpose of the research and asked to give their informed consent to participate in the study. Then, the participants were given a chance to ask questions if anything was not clear regarding the research survey. If they agreed to participate, the participants began to answer the questionnaire. After the data collection was finished, the participants were debriefed by presenting the purpose of the research project in more detail, being thanked for their participation, and given the contact information of the researchers in case they had any questions or concerns afterwards. Some of the approached participants were afraid to answer the questionnaire as they found the research topic to be too sensitive, or because they did not feel enough trust towards the researchers. For this reason, the majority of the data was collected in the presence of a focal person, and convenience sampling was used to make sure that the participants felt comfortable enough to answer the questionnaire.

Findings

The final sample included 375 participants in total, since 26 questionnaires were invalid for different reasons; for example, some participants were out of the age range from 18 to 75 or did not answer all questions. In the final sample, the distribution of Bamar and non-Bamar in urban and rural areas was comparable (see Table 1). 49.9% of the sample was female, while 83.4% of the whole sample was Buddhist. The mean age was 33.56 years. When asked about their opinion on whether it was easy or difficult to get help from the police in their current community, most of the participants answered it was easy and this was true in both urban and rural areas (see Table 2). Finally, 71.2% of the sample stated that they had interacted with the police at least once.

To demonstrate significant differences between the participants based on ethnicity (Bamar, non-Bamar), location (urban, rural), and accessibility (accessible, not accessible) in their trust (fairness, effectiveness, and transparency) in the police, a between-subjects multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used. Here, the aim was to test for the effect of the hypothesized independent variables (ethnicity, location, and accessibility) on the dependent variable of trust in

the police while controlling for the public's experience with police. The public's experience with the police was entered as a covariate in the analysis, because it has been shown to have an impact on trust in the police in previous literature (Worden & McLean, 2017).

First, the analysis found no significant within-subjects main effect of trust in the police, $F(1.98, 709.29) = 0.77$, $p = .46$, where the trust in the police's effectiveness was rated as the highest ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.02$), trust in the police's transparency as the lowest ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.11$), with fairness between the two ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.07$). On the other hand, tests of between-subjects effects showed that perception of accessibility had a significant main effect on the levels of trust in the police, $F(1, 359) = 35.59$, $p < .001$. Accordingly, participants who felt they had easy access to the police had higher trust in the police ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.90$) than the people who perceived it was difficult to get help from the police ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.86$).

Moreover, the difference between urban and rural areas in terms of the levels of trust in the police was also significant, $F(1, 359) = 50.77$, $p < .001$. Here, the participants from the rural areas had higher trust in the police ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.94$) than the participants from the urban areas ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.76$). However, no significant effect of ethnicity on the levels of trust in the police was found, $F(1, 359) = 0.57$, $p = .45$. Even though non-Bamar participants ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.00$) trusted the police a bit more than Bamar participants ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.88$), this difference was not significant.

Finally, between-subjects interaction effect of ethnicity and location was found, $F(1, 359) = 8.27$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 1). Specifically, in the urban areas, the non-Bamar participants had lower trust in the police ($M = 2.41$, $SE = 0.08$) than Bamar participants ($M = 2.62$, $SE = 0.10$), while in the rural areas, non-Bamar participants had higher trust in the police ($M = 3.40$, $SE = 0.12$) than Bamar participants ($M = 3.05$, $SE = 0.08$). In contrast, even though accessibility itself had a significant main effect on the levels of trust in the police, no interaction effects were found between accessibility and the other independent variables.

Table 1: Distribution of Bamar and Non-Bamar Participants in Urban and Rural Areas ($N = 375$).

	Urban	Rural	Total
Bamar	77	102	179
Non-Bamar	98	98	196
Total	175	200	375

Table 2: Perceived Accessibility of the Police in Urban and Rural Areas ($N = 368$).

	Urban	Rural	Total
Easy to get help	109	146	255
Not easy to get help	60	53	113
Total	169	199	368

Discussion

This study aimed to test performance and conflict theory of trust for their applicability in Myanmar by examining variables that influence Myanmar people's trust in the police institutions. The findings obtained five observable patterns in the Myanmar socio-cultural context. First, the study found that the values of all three variables of trust (fairness, effectiveness, and transparency) were comparably low, and while there was no significant difference between them, transparency was the lowest. Possible reasons for these low levels of trust can be found in the participants' answers to the only open-ended question in this study, where the participants got a chance to express their experience with and perception of the police more freely. A number of participants described unfair and disrespectful treatment by police officers, the officers' corruption and personal bias, as well as the police's lack of readiness and willingness to help; these might be some of the factors causing the public to have a low trust in the police. Additionally, the political systems used by previous Myanmar governments could have made the government institutions generally untrustworthy in the eyes of the public.

The second observable pattern was that the findings of this study did not support the general assumption that participants from ethnic minorities would have less trust in police institutions than participants from the ethnic majority (Tyler, 2005). In contrast, the results of this study indicated that the ethnic minorities had a slightly higher level of trust in the police than the ethnic majority. In theory, democratic societies should have better protection of ethnic minority groups' political rights, more so than any other type of government (Morris, 2011); yet, the maturity of democratic culture in Myanmar is debatable. On the other hand, other factors such as age, gender, class, or income may have trumped the influence of ethnicity on participants' trust in the police force. In any case, it is important to note that the ethnic minority status was not an important determinant of public trust in the police in the present study, because the level of trust in the police was not significantly different between Bamar and non-Bamar participants; in fact, it was comparably low, ranging between neither distrust nor trust.

The third observable pattern revealed that police accessibility was significantly related to public trust in the

MPF: the easier the police could be reached by the public, the more trust there was. This result supported the study's second hypothesis and was also consistent with the previous literature (Shoyode, 2018). Next, the results also revealed a significant main effect of location on public trust in the police, where the participants from rural areas had higher trust in the police than the participants from urban areas. Hence, this observation supported the study's third hypothesis and was consistent with Wang and Sun's (2018) results obtained in Taiwan. Although the findings of these two studies are consistent, their interpretation could be different. Wang and Sun suggested that the urban participants in their study were influenced by media coverage of police misconducts and fear of crime, while in the current study, the participants from urban areas could have less trust in the police due to lack of access to the police. Specifically, the administrative system of the police in Myanmar is different between urban and rural areas; while urban areas have police stations in each township, the rural areas have surveillance officers, one per three villages.

Finally, the present study showed that participants who have never interacted with police officers had more trust in the police than participants who have already interacted with police officers at least once. However, this study only controlled for public's experience with police as an influencing factor on public trust in the police, and the results in this respect were not consistent with the previous literature (Wolden & McLean, 2017).

The current study has some limitations. First, due to some participants' lack of trust towards the researchers as well as lack of familiarity with questionnaires, the findings of this study might not be completely reliable. Second, this study sampled ethnic participants within Yangon and in villages which are not too far from urban areas and have good transportation access to police stations. Hence, the internal validity of this study might not be completely secured; future research should collect data from ethnic minorities in ethnic and more remote areas. Third, the study's internal validity might be threatened also due to the particular situation in the sampled rural areas. Here, the community leader appears to perform most of the tasks that need to deal with the police on behalf of the participants, who as a result only rarely interact with the

responsible surveillance officer. The good relationship between the participants and the community leader and a good image of the surveillance officer might have then contributed to the link between accessibility and trust in this study as well as to the higher levels of trust in rural rather than urban areas.

When it comes to external validity, even though the samples of Bamar and non-Bamar participants from urban and rural areas were sizable and comparable, it is not possible to generalize our findings to the whole population as these samples were not representative. Next, the concepts of trust, accessibility, and the public's experience with the police were operationalized by only a few selected variables; in order to increase the overall construct validity, further studies should include more dimensions of these concepts. Finally, as this study did not use an experimental design, cause and effect relationships between the independent and dependent variables cannot be assumed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of the present research was to examine the level of public trust in the police in Myanmar and its influencing factors. In the research design, the levels of trust were compared between ethnic groups, locations, and areas of different levels of police accessibility, while controlling for the participants' previous experience with the police. To measure public trust, this study used three variables: fairness, effectiveness, and transparency. On the whole, this study showed that the participants who perceived that they had easy access to the police had higher trust in the police. In addition, people from rural areas had higher trust in the police than those from urban areas. Unexpectedly, there was no significant difference in the level of trust between Bamar and non-Bamar participants, but both ethnic groups had quite a low trust in the police.

The scope of this study was limited in terms of collecting data by surveys only. The restrictions were that some participants were not familiar with the survey design, while other people wanted to discuss topics beyond their answers to the survey. Hence, there is a need to explore the public's perception of the police more deeply to let them express their opinions and experiences more freely. Secondly, in the current study, participants' socio-economic status was operationalized through gender, age, ethnicity, and religion, excluding education and income. Further studies should focus on these demographic variables in order to compare the level of trust in the police between the rich and the poor as well as between people with different educational levels.

In spite of these limitations, to our knowledge, this is the first report measuring public trust in the police in Myanmar. The results of this research may be useful to the MPF, as they suggest what needs to be improved based on public perceptions of the institution. To begin with, the overall trust in the MPF in this study was rather low; therefore, the results highlight a need to strengthen police-public relations through improving the police's transparency, effectiveness, and fairness. More specifically:

1/ The MPF should reduce corruption and personal bias among its officers, as the findings showed the transparency to be the lowest among the three types of trust.

2/ With respect to effectiveness, police officers should increase their readiness and willingness to respond immediately when people ask for help.

3/ To improve the MPF's perceived fairness, police officers' treatment of citizens should be more just and fair to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, religion, age, and gender.

4/ The perceived accessibility of the MPF was high in this study; hence, the MPF should maintain the present level of accessibility, since higher levels of accessibility were also associated with higher levels of trust.

5/ Our interpretation of the results obtained in the rural areas suggested that good relationships between community leaders and surveillance officers can lead to higher levels of trust in the police, thus the MPF could increase public trust in itself as an institution by encouraging good relationships between police/surveillance officers and community/township leaders in both urban and rural areas.

Finally, as public trust in the police reflects trust in the government as a whole (Goldsmith, 2005), trust in the government could also be developed by progressing the police's performance and strengthening police-public relations. Currently, police institutions may face challenges in fighting crime if there is no public cooperation. While the public needs the police's protection in their daily lives, the police also require the cooperation of public to be effective. To conclude, public trust is essential for the police to be a legitimate government institution, especially in democratic countries.

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