

# Schooling and Conflict: Ethnic Education and Mother Tongue-based Teaching in Myanmar

Ashley South and  
Marie Lall

February 2016



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## **Preface**

Education and language policies and practices are at the heart of ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. For decades, the state has emphasized a centralized, Myanmar language only education system that many ethnic groups felt provided no place for their own languages to be practiced which by extension, threatened their cultures and ethnic identities. The country's democratic transition of the past few years, however, has enabled issues of mother tongue-based education (MTB) to be discussed more openly, and growing acceptance of decentralization within the government at all levels and among the wider public is providing an opening for consideration of how MTB education can be productively integrated into the education system.

The discourse on inclusive education and language policy in Myanmar is still very nascent, although it is a critical element in the ongoing search for a lasting peace in Myanmar. Given that different education systems from the one administered by the state have emerged in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups, it is important to understand these existing education structures to better assess their strengths and weaknesses and the potential for convergence with state standards.

In this context, The Foundation is pleased to present this research report on the state of MTB education in contested areas in Myanmar, specifically in the Kachin, Mon and Karen context, by Ashley South and Marie Lall who have long been engaged in researching this important topic. While ethnic education and MTB teaching have become more prominent in the peace process dialogue, it is also important to remember that how they will be formulated and implemented will have life-changing impact on Myanmar's students and children living in conflict-affected areas.

We hope that the Foundation's research agenda, of which this paper is a part of, will support key actors and the wider public in contributing to an inclusive discussion in and around the peace process. The primary funding for this report came from the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which was managed by the Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), with additional contributions from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and The Asia Foundation. The views expressed in the report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, the United States Government, DAI, DFID or the Foundation.

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## Acronyms

AMDP	-	All Mon Regions Democracy Party
BMWEC	-	Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee
BGF	-	Border Guard Force
CBO	-	Community Based Organisation
CEC	-	Central Executive Committee
CESR	-	Comprehensive Education Sector Review
CSO	-	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	-	Department for International Development (UK)
DKBA	-	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
DP	-	Development Partners
EAGs	-	Ethnic Armed Groups
EFA	-	Education for All
EPIC	-	Education Promotion Implementation Committee
GoM	-	Government of Myanmar
IDP	-	Internally Displaced Person
KDA	-	Kachin Defence Army
KED	-	Karen Education Department
KIA	-	Kachin Independence Army
KIC	-	Kachin Independence Council
KIO	-	Kachin Independence Organisation
KNLA	-	Karen National Liberation Army
KNPP	-	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	-	Karen National Union
KTCS	-	Kachin Theological College and Seminary
KRC	-	Karen Refugee Committee
KRCEE	-	Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity
MoE	-	Ministry of Education
MLCC	-	Mon Literature and Culture Committee
MNEC	-	Mon National Education Committee
MNS	-	Mon National Schools
MT	-	Mother Tongue
MTB	-	Mother Tongue-Based
MSLBC	-	Mon Summer Literacy and Buddhist Culture
NBF	-	Nationalities Brotherhood Foundation
NCA	-	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NDAK	-	New Democratic Army-Kachin
NGO	-	Non Government Organisation
NLD	-	National League for Democracy
NMSP	-	New Mon State Party
PEPC	-	Parliamentary Education Promotion Committee
SLORC	-	State Law and Order Restoration Council
UNICEF	-	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development
USDP	-	Union Solidarity and Development Party

## Executive Summary

This report focuses on two main issues: mother tongue-based (MTB) teaching in state and non-government schools in Myanmar<sup>1</sup> (i.e. what languages are used in classrooms); and the relationship between various types of schools in the country, particularly those administered by the government and by Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) (i.e. the relationship between state and non-state education systems, in the context of the peace process). By ‘ethnic education’ we mean teaching provided by ethnic nationality stakeholders, both civil society and EAGs. ‘Mother tongue-based teaching’ is instruction in a child’s first language (L1), usually with a gradual transition to a second language (L2) or foreign language. In MTB programmes, students have the opportunity to learn core concepts primarily in a familiar language (L1), and later learn the vocabulary for those concepts in a new language (L2). MTB education is especially beneficial in early childhood programmes: preschool and the early grades.

This report focuses primarily on the situation in Kachin and Mon States, and parts of neighbouring States and Regions, together with some coverage of the situation in Karen (Kayin) areas and elsewhere. This limitation reflects the time and resources available during the research, and the need to focus in depth on particular communities. Focusing on Kachin and Mon allows for an examination of two contexts where key EAGs agreed on ceasefires with the Myanmar (then military) government—the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) in 1994 and the New Mon State Party (NMSP) in 1995. The KIO ceasefire broke down in 2011 and returned to armed conflict, while the NMSP truce has held, despite considerable political stress. Our focus allows for a ‘controlled comparison’ between the two contexts.

The audiences for this report include international stakeholders (including donors and aid agencies) wishing to gain a better understanding of ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar. The report is also intended as a resource for political leaders and other actors from within the country’s diverse ethnic communities, seeking to develop evidence-based policies in relation to these topics (for example, in the context of any political dialogue coming out of the peace process or broader political reforms in Myanmar).

This is not a mapping exercise. A number of stakeholders requested anonymity, both for themselves and the programmes they are implementing in often still dangerous or uncertain circumstances. Rather, we identify key issues and explore some possible ways forward in providing equitable education and MTB teaching for all of Myanmar’s children. The report focuses on basic education (pre-tertiary schooling). It does not address further or higher education, or teacher training, except in passing. Nor does it address the situation of education for migrants from Myanmar, in Thailand or other neighbouring countries.

### **Methodology**

Research took the form of interviews and focus groups using a semi-structured questionnaire. Each interview was based on a core set of research questions, and prefaced by introductory comments guaranteeing the anonymity of informants.

Interviews were conducted with representatives of the KIO, NDA-K, NMSP, KNU and DKBA, including education department officials, and with a selection of civil society actors, as well as teachers, parents and students. This involved travel on both sides of the Thailand-Myanmar border, and also the China-Myanmar border. We spoke to over 100 people and conducted 25 focus groups and larger meetings. In addition, dissemination events were held in Myitkyina and Mawlamyine in October and December 2015, where we discussed the research findings and policy options with local stakeholders, in order for this report to reflect local realities. This said, both the report and the recommendations ultimately represent our own analysis, as informed by local stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> We use ‘Myanmar’ (or before 1988, when the military government changed the name of the country, ‘Burma’) to refer to the country. ‘Burmese’ refers to the language of the majority *Bama* (Burman) community (*Bama saga*).

## ***Main findings***

### The importance of MTB teaching

Schooling in ethnic mother tongues is valuable in a multi-ethnic country like Myanmar, for both educational and political reasons. Many interviewees talked about the strong link between using ethnic languages and pride in maintaining ethnic identities. Ethnic nationality people also talked about experiencing policies of forced assimilation on the part of the Myanmar state and Army. Many ethnic stakeholders still regard the government *as* the military. It will take generations to overcome such fears and mistrust.

Recent developments in education and broader political reforms in Myanmar have seen the beginnings of introducing MTB teaching into government schools. In some areas (e.g. parts of Mon State) this has included the teaching of ethnic languages during school hours—one of the main demands of many ethnic nationalists. This is a positive development, although for many ethnic stakeholders this is only a relatively small step in the right direction. As yet, there has been no progress towards teaching subjects in government schools *in* ethnic languages.

Most stakeholders agreed that ethnic nationality schoolchildren in Myanmar should learn Burmese (*Bama saga*) and perhaps English as a common language (*lingua franca*). To be effective, other subjects should be taught in the mother tongue, at least at the primary level—rather than just teaching the mother tongue (L1) as a subject lesson in the curriculum. A range of opinions exist regarding the use of MTB teaching in government schools. Many stakeholders would like to see MTB teaching at the primary level, along with some teaching of Burmese, with transition in middle school to mostly teaching in Burmese, while keeping modules for the ethnic nationality language and culture/history through the end of high school. There are also voices (for example, in Kachin) that reject teaching and learning in Burmese totally, wanting to replace Burmese with English.

The promotion of MTB teaching in schools raises questions regarding who would pay for teachers and classroom materials, and how to find suitably qualified and experienced teachers. Several stakeholders complained about the quality of ethnic nationality materials currently used in schools — often translations from Burmese language books — as not adequately reflecting the culture and history of minority communities.

### Language policy and practice, and conflict

Language and education policy and practice are deeply implicated in ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. Since at least the advent of military rule in 1962, the state has been perceived and experienced as pursuing a more-or-less explicit project of forced assimilation vis-a-vis ethnic nationality communities. Ethnic nationality elites (EAGs and civil society actors) have resisted ‘Burmanisation’ through a number of strategies, including armed conflict and the development of education regimes which preserve and reproduce their languages and cultures, under often very difficult circumstances. As indicated in TABLE 1 below, there is a great variety of non-state ethnic education regimes in Myanmar. The relationship between locally-owned and -delivered education regimes and EAGs varies considerably, on a case-by-case basis. In addition to the important leading roles of political elites, non-state education regimes should also be understood as organic parts of broader societies in non-government-controlled areas.

**TABLE 1: Typology of ethnic education provision in Myanmar [progressing from those closest to government system to those further away]**

Type	Characteristics	Examples
<u>Type 1 – Ethnic-input schools</u>	Government-run schools with civil society input.	• Government-run schools, with some teachers (and teaching materials) provided by the local community or civil society.



<u>Type 2 – Mixed schools</u>	Government schools in EAG-controlled and contested areas, with some EAG and/or civil society input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes schools in remote areas that accept volunteer teachers.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 3 – Hybrid schools</u>	Part government, part EAG; sometimes also input from civil society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NDAK schools in Kachin ceasefire areas.</li> <li>• IDP schools in Kachin areas.</li> <li>• Schools which were previously under the authority of EAG education departments, but have now been ‘flipped’ (or ‘poached’) by the government’s Ministry of Education.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 4 – EAG (government curriculum) schools</u>	Schools managed by EAG, with no government teachers, but which use government curriculum (often in translation) and where children can sometimes transfer to the state system after a test or local arrangement. Curriculum is supplemented by ethnic nationality-oriented materials, especially for history and social studies, but sometimes also other subjects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NMSP/MNEC Mon National Schools.</li> <li>• KIO schools (teach government curriculum in Jingphaw etc., and later in Burmese).</li> <li>• Some Karen schools, particularly those supported by the community with limited KNU/KED input.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 5 – EAG schools</u>	Schools built and run by EAGs and/or associated civil society groups, with separate MTB curriculum; no recognition/ accreditation or possible transfer for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KED schools, and ‘community schools’ in areas under KNU authority or influence; refugee camp schools.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 6 – Civil society private schools</u>	Separate MTB curriculum and different teaching methods; no recognition/accreditation or possible transfer for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community supported schools in northern Shan and Kachin States.</li> <li>• Some Karen schools in KNU-controlled areas (sometimes administered and funded by churches).</li> </ul>
<u>Type 7 – Foreign curriculum schools</u>	Curriculum developed in/by another country, allowing (some) students to transfer to other schools in that country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools with Indian curriculum in Kachin; some Karen mission schools.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 8 – Supplementary schools</u>	Schools that focus on ethnic language and/or culture/religion, but teach after the government classes are over – either summer schools or afternoon/evening schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly provided by civil society groups; often linked to the <i>Sangha</i> (monkhood) and the churches.</li> </ul>

Conflict and peace are key variables in shaping education policy and practice in ethnic areas, and education is also a key variable in the peace process. There is a direct correlation between conflict and how people feel about what language and curriculum their children are taught. Armed conflict makes parents and communities less inclined to accept government schools and Burmese language education—rather, conflict is an incentive to create separate (or parallel) systems. Ethnic education regimes tend to be more separatist in character when conflict is rife, and less separatist (more willing to engage, and perhaps integrate with state systems) when ceasefires are in place. To the extent that ethnic education regimes reflect more ‘separatist’ or ‘pro-union’ sentiments, they also play roles in socialising children into such attitudes and understandings.

In the Kachin context, the resumption of armed conflict since 2011 has led to greater pan-Kachin unity, and cohesion around an ethno-linguistic core, identified particularly with Jinghpaw identity (a finding confirmed in numerous interviews and focus groups, in April-May and October 2015). Significant elements among non-Jinghpaw communities seem not to object to adopting this dominant dialect as a Kachin *lingua franca*, although some sub-groups find the dominance of Jinghpaw problematic. Associated with massive and widespread human rights abuses, the renewed fighting has alienated many of those in the diverse Kachin ethno-linguistic community who previously were willing to consider a future as part of Myanmar. Since the resumption of armed conflict, KIO-administered schools increasingly have been switching to Kachin and English, and teaching less Burmese. This is part of a general move to disengage from government education, and to develop a more distinctively Kachin school system.

The Karen National Union (KNU) agreed a preliminary ceasefire with the government in January 2012, bringing to an end more than 60 years of armed conflict. Over several decades, the KNU-administered Karen Education Department (KED) has developed an impressive education system based on the efforts of Karen communities and with support from international donors and NGOs (including some of those who have supported refugees in neighbouring Thailand). Well-suited to local needs, and containing much good practice, this system diverges significantly from the government education regime, not least through the promotion of Karen (mostly Sgaw dialect) language, with only a limited focus on Burmese. Lacking recognised qualifications, KED school graduates find it difficult to enter the government education system or access opportunities in Myanmar or abroad. In the context of the KNU ceasefire, and an emerging peace process which is likely to include the return and reintegration of displaced communities, Karen educators are considering the future of the KED education regime and its relationship to government.

In contrast, the NMSP agreed on a ceasefire with the government in 1995, which despite considerable tensions has held for two decades. In this context, the NMSP’s Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) has developed an MTB education regime in which Mon is used at the primary level, transitioning to Burmese at middle school, and more-or-less following the government curriculum. Graduates of the MNEC’s Mon National Schools speak fluent Mon, but can also sit government matriculation exams in Burmese language.

#### Ceasefires, ethnic education and MTB teaching; ‘federalism from below’

Our previous research (Lall and South 2013) described and analysed how the NMSP ceasefire allowed an MTB-based education system to expand into government-controlled areas. Ceasefires have generally resulted in greater collaboration between state and non-state systems. However, many ethnic nationality stakeholders remain concerned that MTB teaching is still largely absent from government schools. There are also concerns that the government is using ceasefires to expand its authority into previously inaccessible, conflict-affected areas, including through building schools and providing teachers to remote communities.

In the context of their respective ceasefires (in 1994 and 1995), the KIO and NMSP expanded their education systems, under difficult circumstances and with very limited funding. In the Mon context, notwithstanding a range of views regarding the peace process, there is a growing convergence between state and non-state education systems. The MNEC curriculum is broadly the same as that found in government schools, with additional modules on Mon history and language. In the Karen context, and increasingly in Kachin, there is a significant gap between the locally-owned and implemented education system and that of the state.

We argue that ethnic education regimes in Myanmar are ‘building federalism from the bottom up’, with local stakeholders developing their own systems of education governance, in the absence of an elite-level political settlement. Despite great difficulties in securing financial and human resources, the KIO, NMSP and Karen/KNU school systems are locally-owned and delivered, and support MTB teaching, particularly at primary level. Non-state education regimes are concrete examples of self-determination in Myanmar, in a context where elite-level political discussions around the peace process have yet to begin in a substantive manner, and which are likely to be drawn out over a considerable period of time. This approach to education (one of the key issues of concern to ethnic communities) might be termed ‘federalism from below’, inasmuch as ethnic education systems represent concrete examples, or living images, of what federal political and administrative arrangements for a future Myanmar might look like and how they might function. Issues of language and education policy need to be addressed as part of a structured political dialogue, which most ethnic stakeholders hope will lead to a federal settlement to end decades of ethnic and state-society conflict in Myanmar. Of course, federalism as a concept in political science and constitutional arrangements has a long history, with an extensive literature including structural arrangements between different subnational segments. While ethnic communities in Myanmar may not have such intra/inter-communal considerations in mind when devising their education systems, there is nevertheless a strong element here of self-determination, speaking to one of the main aims and struggles of ethnic nationality communities during decades of conflict in Myanmar. We further argue that various stakeholders’ positions on language policy (in schools, and broader governance) are good indicators of where these actors stand on a range of issues in relation to the peace process (see below).

The peace process in Myanmar has had both positive and negative impacts on ethnic education and MTB teaching. Overall, there is a lack of connection between education issues, and the politics of the peace process—other than widespread local resentment of government expanding its authority into previously autonomous, ethnic nationality-populated areas, including through education provision and school building. Ethnic stakeholders are concerned that international aid agencies and donors are, perhaps inadvertently, supporting a government strategy of extending state structures into conflict-affected areas without taking into account existing local activities and services or the impacts on peace and conflict dynamics.

Chapter 6 of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which the KNU, but not the KIO or NMSP, has signed, acknowledges the roles of signatory EAGs in the fields of education, health, natural resource management and security, and provides for international assistance in these sectors, in partnership and cooperation with the government. The NCA signatory groups’ administrative and service delivery roles, having been acknowledged by the government, are now challenged to re-invent themselves as post-insurgent organisations. Those EAGs which have signed the NCA were removed from the Unlawful Associations (Law 17/1), making their engagement with international development partners much easier.

As noted, many of the key issues in relation to ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar must be discussed as part of a structured multi-stakeholder debate—as part of a political dialogue, either coming out of the peace process (as envisaged in the NCA) or in relation to broader political reforms and elections in Myanmar. In the meantime, there is an urgent need to support EAG and associated civil society provision of education and other services, during the probably lengthy and contested ‘interim period’, between the agreement of an NCA (and earlier bilateral ceasefires) and negotiation of a comprehensive political settlement. Although more ‘political’ and inherently sensitive than health issues, some of the needs and challenges related to education and language policy may constitute relatively ‘low hanging fruit’ in the peace process, topics which could be addressed post-NCA in fast-track talks, to provide concrete benefits to conflict-affected communities (‘peace dividends’). Unfortunately, discussion of education issues was largely absent from the recent election campaign, beyond some criticism of the government’s handling of the new education law.

#### Language and education policies - proxies for broader political positions

Stakeholders in ethnic education in Myanmar often only engage substantively with others in their network who share similar values and political approaches. This leads to a somewhat siloed, contentious, and politically fragmented approach to education, which reflects elements of the broader Myanmar political culture.

Positions held on language and education policy indicate or reflect the identities and interests of different stakeholders, in terms of the kind of country they want Myanmar to be, and vis-a-vis the peace process. Debates regarding the status and future of ethnic education reveal views on the appropriate relationships between State and Union governments and ethnic nationality polities. The following table illustrates this proposition in terms of ‘ideal types’, with actual positions varying on a case-by-case basis.

**TABLE 2: Mapping positions on language and schooling, and political demands**

Political demand	Schools	Language in governance
Independence for ethnic polities (secession, separatism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently-owned, administered and financed schools (perhaps under EAG authority).</li> <li>• Focus on ethnic languages (and English, Chinese?); less (but not necessarily zero) Burmese language provision.</li> <li>• Curriculum significantly different from government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of ethnic language/s in government administration (justice system etc.).</li> <li>• Limited use of Burmese; some use of English, Chinese?</li> </ul>
‘Strong federalism’ (radical autonomy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently administered and financed schools (perhaps with funds from Union government).</li> <li>• Focus on ethnic languages (and English) <i>and</i> Burmese.</li> <li>• Curriculum related to Union government, but with significant local variation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Burmese (common Union language, <i>lingua franca</i>) and ethnic language/s in government administration (justice system etc.).</li> </ul>
‘Weak federalism’ (decentralisation) - ‘Union Ethnic Nationalities’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools could be either government-run (in context of nationwide education reform), or locally administered; significant finance from State and/or Union government.</li> <li>• Burmese language, and ethnic languages (and English?) - as subjects rather than medium of instruction.</li> <li>• Curriculum based on Union government, but with some local variation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burmese as primary national language (<i>lingua franca</i>); some provision for ethnic language/s in government administration.</li> </ul>

Ethnic nationalist (EAG, but also civil society and community-led) education activities are representative of broader struggles for self-determination. Responses to ‘Burmanisation’ and centralisation may be plotted along a continuum, ranging from demands for outright independence from a Union for which many ethnic people feel little sympathy (secession, or separatism), through varying forms of autonomy and decentralisation (varieties of federalism). At one end of this spectrum would be the ‘Union Karen’ (Thawngmung 2008, South 2008) and other ethnic groupings, which while self-identifying with their ethnic community, nevertheless express a fairly strong association with the Union. In relation to education, separatist agendas can be represented by schools featuring little or no Burmese language teaching, using a MTB curriculum often radically different from that of the state. A more federalist approach would be represented by the promotion of MTB teaching in schools which also teach Burmese, and broadly follow the government curriculum, modified according to local

contexts and conditions. In relation to school ownership and administration, the former positions demand locally-owned schools, administered by ethnic political authorities. A more federalist approach could also imply non-state school ownership, but with a curriculum and administration linked to the government system, or could mean greater focus on MTB teaching in state schools. In addition to the politics of these positions, important practical considerations remain, including accreditation and funding.

We argue that positions in relation to education can be taken as proxies of different actors' views regarding a broader range of state-society issues, and the distribution of power and resources between the central government and ethnic polities. In this framing, the NMSP (MNEC) model has achieved a fairly high degree of local self-determination in education, while retaining links to the Union. This was previously the case with the KIO system, which under pressure of the resumption of armed conflict seems to be moving towards a more separatist model, similar to that adopted historically by the KNU.

Similar mapping may be applied to positions in relation to language use and policy in schools and in governance functions more broadly. Most stakeholders accept the necessity of teaching children Burmese, as a common/Union language or *lingua franca* (in some cases together with English, due to its international status). The degree to which Burmese and/or ethnic languages (with the emphasis on the plural, as explored below) should be used for public administration, government and legal processes are indicators of how different actors view the distribution of power between the (Burman) centre and (ethnic) periphery in a reforming Myanmar. These positions can be taken as rough proxies for other sectors in relation to such issues as natural resource management and revenue sharing and distribution between the Union government and ethnic States. For example, those who seek to use ethnic languages as a primary medium of administration in ethnic States can be expected to adopt strong/maximalist positions regarding the extent to which natural resource revenue and other financial and political goods should be retained at, or redistributed to, the local/State level, and may even argue for complete separation of the ethnic polities from the Union. Moderates may adopt positions according to which ethnic languages are used together with Burmese, or in a supplementary manner at the State level—corresponding to varying degrees of autonomy or decentralisation, including various forms of federalism. While such arguments are rarely explicit among ethnic educators or activists, exploring different positions in relation to language and education can help to reveal the kind of country people imagine or desire Myanmar to be. Within this discussion, further reflection is required on the position of 'minorities within minorities'—ethnic communities with different identities, usually reflected in different languages, to those of the locally dominant minority (e.g. Kachin linguistic sub-groups, the variety of Karen ethno-linguistic communities), and their possible vulnerability in the context of a potentially totalizing dominant local ethnic/national identity.

#### Educational reforms, elections and the peace process; 'convergence'

The state's unwillingness to countenance the existence, or support the development, of locally-owned education regimes is changing. The U Thein Sein government has promoted significant reforms in education, including elements of decentralisation. Education reforms have opened some space for MTB education in government schools, although not to the extent demanded by most ethnic educators. While it is increasingly possible to teach ethnic languages in government schools, there is as yet very little practice of teaching other subjects in mother tongues.

What has not yet been considered in any depth, however, is the relationship between state and non-state basic education provision in conflict-affected areas, and how this relates to the peace process. As noted, Chapter 6 of the NCA acknowledges signatory EAGs' authority in a number of fields, including education. If and when political dialogue begins, either as a result of the peace process or as framed by parliamentary politics, education issues are expected to constitute a major locus of debate. One of the key issues emerging from the peace process is the status of and future of EAGs' governance regimes, and service delivery systems, which are often implemented in partnership with associated and/or affiliated civil society actors. Will education and other service delivery systems under the authority of EAGs be gradually, or more rapidly, displaced by the state system, continue in parallel with that system, or undergo a process of 'convergence'? This key issue has received little focus in relation to 'interim arrangements' covering the period between the agreement of ceasefires (includ-

ing the NCA) and a final negotiated political settlement after decades of armed and state-society conflict in Myanmar.

Thus far, those engaged in the broader movement of political reform in Myanmar have largely addressed education and peacebuilding as separate issues; likewise, state, international (donor) and other actors in the peace process have largely ignored issues of language and education. The November 8, 2015 elections in Myanmar represented an opportunity to discuss these issues on the national political stage, and bring them onto the (crowded and contested) agenda of the future government. Ethnic political parties in Myanmar might have been expected to play a leading role in such debates. However, with some exceptions (particularly in Rakhine and Shan States), ethnic parties did not perform well in the polls. Issues of ethnic education and MTB teaching were largely absent from pre-election policy discussions.

### Needs

The priorities expressed by teachers and other stakeholders interviewed during our research centred on regular salaries, better teacher training, improved school buildings and furniture, and more appropriate teaching materials. Another identified need was accreditation of schools adopting curricula and language policies different from those of the government system (e.g. KNU/KED schools, and increasingly also in Kachin).

Needs are particularly acute among displaced communities, including refugees in neighbouring countries, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The renewal of conflict between government forces and the KIO has had a direct impact on the education of tens of thousands of children—as has been the case for many decades across much of southeast Myanmar. Due to particular vulnerabilities as a result of their status as forced migrants, refugee and IDP children have special needs for assistance and protection, as specified in international (1952 and 1967) refugee law, and the 1999 UN *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.

### ***Policy Options/Recommendations***

- A sustainable resolution to Myanmar’s long-standing state-society and ethnic conflicts will be difficult to achieve without significant education and language policy reforms. Political leaders should negotiate the relationship between state and non-state education systems, and where possible oversee their gradual convergence. This, in the context of a reforming state system, should move more towards a federal relationship between the central government and ethnic States. MTB teaching should be introduced in all (particularly government) schools, so that non-Burmese speaking children can be taught most subjects in their own language (L1), at least through primary school.
- There are understandable historic reasons for the emergence of separate education systems, often developed under EAG authority in areas affected by armed conflict, using curricula different from government schools, and teaching Burmese only as a subject-lesson. Efforts to provide MTB teaching demonstrate the commitment of communities and other stakeholders to provide education under often very difficult circumstances. However, these separate systems have some distinct disadvantages: limited options for school graduates if they cannot speak Burmese and have no recognised qualifications, and difficulty for graduates to reintegrate with Burma, or consider themselves citizens of the Union. Furthermore, separate systems marginalise already poor and vulnerable communities, which is an issue of equity. A system of accreditation and transfer should be negotiated that includes Burmese language training for those who want to join government schools. The administration of such a transfer (or bridging) program needs to be made as simple as possible, and government teachers should not be expected to bridge the language deficit without proper support.

“Ethnic schools ... need recognition by the government, so students can switch to the same grade, with the help of special language upgrading classes. They [the government] need to make rules for this, so that this arrangement is spread throughout the country.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As per the Methodology section, we conducted dissemination events in Myitkyina and Mawlamyine, and in KIO and NMSP areas, in October and December 2015, in order to triangulate and receive feedback on our findings and recommendations. The quotes illustrating policy options are taken from participants in these two events.

- Stakeholders expressed a range of opinions in relation to ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar. Many prefer the following model: teaching a curriculum broadly similar to that of the government, but with extra modules on ethnic history and culture; teaching in local languages through primary school, switching more to Burmese at middle school, and in high school mostly teaching in Burmese with the mother tongue as a taught subject (i.e. the MNEC ‘Mon model’).
- The main advantage is that graduates can switch between government and non-government schools (particularly in Grades 5 and 9), become fluent in both L1 and L2, and receive recognisable qualifications.
- However, for KIO schools that have been teaching the government curriculum, the resumption of armed conflict in 2011 has led to state authorities removing the transfer option (see Section 3). This is a very serious development, which effectively excludes children in KIO schools from transferring to government schools, and effectively bars KIO high school graduates from entering state tertiary education institutes.
- Locally-owned schools are concrete examples of self-determination in practice (‘federalism from below’). These schools should be recognised by the government as part of its commitment to Education for All.<sup>3</sup> If this is not the case, then the government should be required to offer alternative education in these areas—something which would be very difficult to achieve without damage to the peace process, and would greatly increase funding requirements for education in ethnic areas. Given the government’s commitment to providing quality education in local languages to ethnic nationality communities, partnerships should be developed between state and non-state education providers in remote and conflict-affected areas. The status of independent ethnic schools needs to be negotiated as part of the peace process; they will not fit easily into the ‘private school’ sector. In the meantime, in the process of greater decentralisation and ongoing political dialogue regarding the future of state-society relations in Myanmar, ways should be found to provide government funds for teacher salaries and building maintenance in non-state schools.

“The world is a global village. We want our children to speak Mon, and they need the Burmese language also, because that is the language of the government. For future opportunities, we need to teach them English as well. We cannot focus only on Mon. At primary level, all three languages should be included.”

- Reform of the state education sector is already underway, and likely to continue in the future. In several States (e.g. Mon), local languages are being introduced as a taught subject in government primary schools. Reforms need to move toward MTB teaching (teaching other subjects *in* ethnic languages), and toward greater local control and ownership of education (decentralisation). This could include the training and hiring of teachers who have links to EAG schools, yet without ‘poaching’ them from local school systems.

“If the government really wants peace, they need to accept real federalism, including in education. If the national curriculum is linked with ethnic education systems, then there can be common standards and quality control.”

- These issues need to be addressed during structured, multi-stakeholder political dialogue —either as framed by the peace process, or as part of broader political reforms in Myanmar. Such debates will need to address issues of resources and identify the necessary human and financial capital.

“If we use our mother tongue in schools, this is practicing federalism. Donors should know that we are working for change. They should support non-government groups’ efforts in the field of education.”

“Our [Kachin] community does not believe in government education. The education that we are striving

<sup>3</sup><http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Myanmar/Myanmar%20EFA%20implementation%20and%20Tentative%20Follow%20up%20workplan.pdf>

for today is leading to separation, not federalism. Our schools will teach and use whatever curriculum they want to.”

- In the interim, while negotiations and political struggles to reform the state education system are underway, it remains important to support and further improve non-state education regimes. The government should recognise and support, or at least encourage donors to fund, locally-owned education systems based on commonly agreed minimum educational standards.

“Ask donors why, if ethnic systems are working well, they don’t provide proper funding? They should give directly [to ethnic school systems], and not in drips and drabs. Donors should offer a percentage [of the aid provided to] government, for the State level and for the ethnic groups’ education systems. This should be transparently divided and worked out. The government is using [the aid] for their own benefit. That is not acceptable.”

- The main ethnic nationality languages should be recognised as official languages of the relevant States, in public administration and access to justice, as well as schooling. Resources should be made available to develop teaching materials and expertise in these languages. Further research and discussion is required regarding the status of, and educational opportunities for, ‘minorities within minorities’ in Myanmar’s heterogeneous society.

“We should not hate Burmese, we need to speak Burmese for the Union, but we need Mon as an official language also.”

“Every university in Myanmar should have one ethnic language department. If they don’t have research, the language won’t last.”



## Section ONE : Objectives of the Project

Academic and policy literature on Myanmar has largely bypassed the relationship between language, education, state-society and armed conflicts, and their resolution. This study aims to address these omissions, by exploring how language and education have featured in a half-century of armed ethnic conflict in Myanmar, how these issues structure and feature in the on-going peace process, and how an exploration of key actors' positions in relation to language and education can help to illuminate the dynamics of the peace process, as well as the pedagogy of language learning and use in a reforming Myanmar.

The aim of the research and dissemination project was:

- To further understanding of the places of language and ethnic cultures in conflict and the emerging peace process in Myanmar;
- To enhance understanding of the central importance of mother tongue-based (MTB) education, both for ensuring good learning outcomes for children from minority communities and promoting the peace process.

The research links the politics of language and MTB learning to the literature on ethnic politics in Myanmar, peacebuilding, and education in conflict contexts. The findings aim to enhance public participation in a key facet of the peace process, as well as promoting a normative agenda supporting MTB education as a public good in Myanmar. The project and report also examine options for sustainable funding for locally-owned MTB education systems among Myanmar's minority communities, and explore how these issues are framed in current and pending education law and policy in Myanmar. However, this has not been a mapping exercise, and this report does not engage with issues of which donors are funding what, where, and how.

### 1.1 Methodology

The researchers undertook a series of discussions with Kachin and Mon education officials and political leaders to gain acceptance of the project. Extensive preliminary discussions were also undertaken with other stakeholders from these two communities as well as with Karen and other ethnic groups.

Particularly in the Kachin context, where often intensive armed conflict continued throughout the period of research and writing, the project was implemented under conditions which potentially threatened the safety and security of key informants and their projects. We therefore agreed at the outset to redact some information on Kachin (and to a lesser extent, in relation to other contexts) in order to protect informants. As noted, the research was not intended as a mapping exercise, but rather to identify and discuss key issues and explore possible ways forward. Therefore, the sometimes limited information provided here regarding specific activities on the ground (especially in Kachin) should not be taken to indicate a lack of engagement with key stakeholders.

Each semi-structured interview was based on a core set of questions, and prefaced by introductory comments guaranteeing the anonymity of informants. This approach is in line with British Education Research Association ethics rules.

Research took the form of interviews and focus groups, on the basis of a semi-structured questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with representatives of the KIO, NDA-K, NMSP, KNU and DKBA, including education department officials, and with a selection of civil society actors from ethnic communities, as well as teachers, parents and students.<sup>4</sup> This involved travel on both sides of the Thailand-Myanmar border, and also the China-Myanmar border. Overall we spoke with over 100 people and conducted 25 focus groups and larger meetings. In addition, dissemination events were held in Myitkyina and Mawlamyine in October 2015, and later in KIA and NMSP-controlled areas, where we discussed the research findings and policy options in depth with

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<sup>4</sup> Given the sensitive nature of the research, and at the request of several interlocutors, we do not divulge the names of these individuals or organisations.

local stakeholders in order that this report should reflect and speak to local realities.<sup>5</sup> This said, the report and recommendations ultimately represent our own analysis, as informed by local stakeholders.

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<sup>5</sup> Local stakeholders sometimes spoke more freely in private conversations or small groups, than in larger focus groups and dissemination sessions. In private conversation, ethnic education actors were often willing to envisage various forms of relationship with the state and government education system, while in larger groups a common denominator tended to emerge, with participants reluctant to acknowledge any willingness to engage the state. During larger group sessions, individual stakeholders often emerged as 'spokespeople' for their respective ethnic communities, in a way that at times limited the possibilities of wide-ranging debate.

## Section TWO : Background

This section provides some background on the pedagogical and political importance of mother tongue-based (MTB) education, and ethnic education systems, as well as on the Myanmar reform and peace processes. Although these elements are interlinked, scholarly commentary and policy literature have largely bypassed the relationship between language, education, state-society and armed conflicts, and their resolution.

### 2.1 MTB and ethnic education in Myanmar

Ethnic nationality educators, politicians and activists have been demanding and strategising for local control over education and MTB teaching since before Burmese independence in 1948. Mon and other Buddhist monks were prominent in providing non-formal teaching during the colonial period (and before); likewise Christian churches were at the forefront of developing scripts for and teaching literacy in ethnic minority communities, such as the Karen and Kachin (South 2003: ch.2).

Since the late 1940s, the right to MTB language education has been one of the issues at the heart of Myanmar's prolonged state-society and armed ethnic conflicts. At a minimum, ethnic nationalists have demanded the teaching of minority languages in schools (particularly state schools); a stronger version of this position is to demand teaching of the curriculum in the mother tongue (at least through primary schooling).

Language policies are not only linked to concerns of learning and cognition in schools. In many developing countries, especially nations made up of diverse ethnic groups and subject to state-society (including armed) conflict, there tends to be a concern among state authorities that promotion of minority languages and ethnic identities will lead to greater divisiveness. Government and non-state educational regimes often use language policy to serve an instrumental purpose, such as building a national identity. This can discriminate against 'others', including vulnerable minority groups, and can lead to resentment, resistance, and conflict. Education and language use in these cases underpins and even causes conflict between the majority and minority groups.

In Myanmar, a half-century of military rule between 1962-2011 saw the consolidation of state power under a regime identified with the Burman (*Bama*) ethnic majority, which makes up about 60% of the population (Houtman 1999). According to Robert Taylor (2015: 278), the state-socialist government, which dominated (then) Burma for the first quarter century after the military coup, "undertook a number of policy innovations designed to better integrate minority ethnic border regions with the core of the country ... Schools were required to teach in the national language, Burmese... [In 1964] the government opened the Academy for the Development of National Groups at Ywathitkyi, Sagaing Division", the graduates of which were dispatched across the country "to integrate the population." During this period, Burmese (the majority language) became the sole language of governance and education, with ethnic minority (or 'ethnic nationality', as many groups prefer to be designated) languages suppressed and marginalised.<sup>6</sup> The perceived 'Burmanisation' of state and society has constituted one of the prime grievances of ethnic nationality elites, which have mobilised minority communities to resist militarised central government authority, in the context of the world's most protracted armed conflict (Smith 1999, South 2011).

Despite and because of the repressive system, EAGs and ethnic civil society have developed MTB education systems to serve their ethnic communities in their own language as well as preserve their culture, literature, and traditions in wake of the Burmanisation policies. The systems and histories of the Mon, Karen, and Kachin education organisations are described below, and form part of a range of EAG governance regimes and service delivery systems which have developed beyond the state over the past half-century in Myanmar (mapped by Kim Jolliffe 2015).

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<sup>6</sup> The 1974 Constitution made Burmese the country's official language. Jaquet (2015: 21) reminds that, even before independence, political leaders such as General Aung San regarded the Burmese language as a proper basis for cohesive national identity and unity.

### **2.1.1 Mon**

The Mon population consists of about 80,000 Mon speakers in Thailand (out of a total population of c.60 million), and 750,000 in Myanmar (total population c.52 million)—with perhaps 1 million people self-identifying as Mon, including people who do not speak the language fluently (South 2003). The vast majority of the Mon population is Theravada Buddhist.

The Mon *Sangha* has been involved in education and preserving local language and culture for centuries. Since the pre-colonial period, the Mon Buddhist monkhood was responsible for recording and reproducing elements of Mon national and religious history, and transmitting the Mon language in a context where many observers expected this to die out (South, 2003:20). Under the U Nu parliamentary government of the 1950s, schools in some areas were permitted to teach ethnic languages (particularly after the main Mon insurgent group agreed on a ceasefire in 1958: South, 2003:7). However, school curricula were centralized following General Ne Win's military coup in 1962, and regulations were passed requiring that all subjects be taught only in Burmese. Conflict between the NMSP and the government had been raging since independence in 1948. Following a ceasefire with the government in June 1995, the NMSP controlled a 'ceasefire zone' where the NMSP exerted varying degrees of military and administrative influence in Mon-populated areas of Mon and Karen States. In February 2012, NMSP leaders re-confirmed a ceasefire with the new government.

In 1972, the NMSP Central Education Department was established. The fledgling school system was reformed in 1992, with the formation of the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC),<sup>7</sup> and foundation of the first Mon National High School. At the time of the 1995 NMSP-SLORC ceasefire, the Mon National School (MNS) system consisted of 76 schools (including one high school),<sup>8</sup> which were located in the NMSP 'liberated zones' (most of which were transformed into 'ceasefire zones', in June 1995) and in the three main Mon refugee camps (South 2003). Research conducted in 2011-2012 established that the ceasefire allowed for the Mon education system to spread to the government controlled zones, with some two-thirds of MNS operating outside of the ceasefire areas (Lall and South 2014).

Since the mid-1990s Mon has been taught as part of the curriculum in 'mixed schools'. These institutions are government-run schools, where the MNEC provide (and usually support financially) one or more teachers, and also have some input into the syllabus, especially for history. The relationships between state and non-state education regimes vary between township, districts, and villages. In most cases, cooperation between the Mon and the state education authorities is based on personal relationships in the local (district/township or village) setting.

In addition many Mon monasteries continued to teach elements of the Mon language and culture through the Mon Summer Literacy and Buddhist Culture (MSLBC) trainings in a number of monasteries that have expanded over the years. While the extent of MSLBC training activities has expanded as a direct result of the increased space created by the NMSP ceasefire, Mon armed groups were not directly involved in these initiatives.

### **2.1.2 Karen**

During the colonial period, Christian missionaries, and later government officials, encouraged a sense of national identity among the previously scattered Karen community, leading to the emergence of Karen social and political movements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Smith, 1999). At the time of independence in 1948, the Karen nationalist movement was well organised, with Western-educated elites making various territorial and political

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<sup>7</sup> MNEC Aim: "To create a society that ever continually makes learning for its capacity improvement so as to build a federal union state that is destined to provide its people at least with basic education and enables all ethnic groups of people to peacefully coexist." MNEC Objectives: "For all Mon children to access basic education; To maintain unity in diversity; To develop friendliness among the ethnic nationalities; To maintain and promote ethnic culture and literature; To develop technological knowledge; To produce good sons and daughters of the nation; To help the outstanding students attain scholarship awards for continuing their education up to the international universities."

<sup>8</sup> In 1995 there were also 227 'mixed' schools (see Section 3.3).

demands on the new Union government. This resulted in an armed conflict that only ended with a ceasefire in 2012. Following the military takeover of Burma in 1962, Karen and other minority language provision was suppressed. Nevertheless, some churches and monasteries continued informally to teach local languages (particularly Christian Sgaw and Buddhist Pwo dialects). Only a minority of the Karen population live within the borders of the official Karen State (established in 1952), with large Karen speaking populations living in Yangon, Ayeyarwady and Tanintharyi Regions, eastern Bago Region and Mon State.

The education system in Karen-populated areas is highly diverse, reflecting the heterogeneity of this community, numbering approximately 5-7 million people in Burma (South, 2011).<sup>9</sup> Most schooling is organised and owned by communities, with varying degrees of external support. In government-controlled parts of southeast Burma, as elsewhere in the country, most, but not all, children have access to state schools (Kyi, et al, 2000). In areas controlled or influenced by the DKBA/BGF and other Karen 'ceasefire groups' (e.g. the KNU/KNLA Peace Council in central Karen State) there is a degree of stability for civilian populations. Some schools have been built by the government, and in some cases teachers and rudimentary teaching materials supplied. In such 'mixed' schools,<sup>10</sup> resources are sometimes supplemented by materials and teachers supplied by border-based CBOs. Although government schools in Karen ceasefire areas follow the state curriculum, and thus teach only Burmese, local Karen ceasefire group authorities usually allow summer literacy and culture activities to be implemented.

The KNU instigated schools in areas under its control in the 1950s. In the 1970s an education department was established, based on the high school at the strategically important village of Wangka (Kaw Moo Rah), halfway up the Thailand-Burma border (near the Thai town of Mae Sot). In recent years the KNU Education Department has been referred to as Karen Education and Culture Department, and more recently the KED (Karen Education Department).

Other Karen EAGs also administer schools in their areas of authority. For example, there are nearly 100 schools in areas under the control of the authority of the Democratic Karen Benevolent/Buddhist Army (DKBA). Another ex-KNU faction, the KNU Peace Council, administers about 30 schools (including two high schools) with c.3,000 students.

In addition to state and non-state provision of formal education, a number of part-time and informal initiatives exist. As well as civil society programs in Karen languages, these include a number of training initiatives implemented by international and national NGOs both inside government-controlled areas and in the opposition-oriented borderlands. These various initiatives indicate that Karen and other communities in Myanmar value education highly. As well as being a field of action for political elites, education activities are deeply embedded in organic communities, as part of lived social reality.

As noted, in the context of the Myanmar Army's brutal counterinsurgency campaigns since the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Karen and other ethnic nationality citizens have fled the country, with many entering refugee camps in neighbouring Thailand (The Border Consortium 2015). In 2015, some 30,000 children attended 80 schools in the seven Karen and two Karenni refugee camps in Thailand. These receive assistance from a range of international NGOs, and are administered by the Karen and Karenni Refugee Committees respectively, with education organised by the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE), and the Karenni Education Department (under the authority of the KNU and KNPP respectively).

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<sup>9</sup> Karen dialects occupy the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan languages. There are some 12 Karen language dialects, of which the majority speak Sgaw (particularly in hill areas and among Christian communities) and Pwo (especially in the lowlands and among Buddhist communities). The size of the Karen population is unknown, no reliable census having been undertaken since the colonial period. Many commentators emphasise the Christian identity of the Karen. However, not more than 20% of the Karen population are Christians. There are also some small populations of 'Karen Muslims'.

<sup>10</sup> 'Mixed' schools are establishments jointly administered by government and non-state actors (see Section 3.3).

### 2.1.3 Kachin

Kachin dialects are different branches of the Tibeto-Burmese language family. There are some 630,000 Jingphaw speakers in Myanmar, 37,000 in China (Jingpo) and 5,000-6,000 in India. While some animists remain up in the hills, and there are a few Buddhist Kachin, the great majority in Myanmar are members of various Christian denominations. It is significant that the Kachin almost certainly make up a minority of the population of Kachin State (with many tens of thousands of Kachin people living in neighbouring northern Shan State: Jaquet 2015: 17-18).

The largest and politically most significant EAG which remains on a war footing with the government and also with the Myanmar Army, the KIO was established in 1961,<sup>11</sup> and fought for over three decades for freedom and self-determination for the Kachin people. Following a 1994 ceasefire, 17 years of relative peace allowed conflict-affected communities to take the lead in their own rehabilitation (with assistance from the KIO and Kachin CBOs), as a strong and dynamic civil society sector re-emerged within the diverse Kachin society. Nevertheless, the 1994 ceasefire is widely regarded as a failure, as it did not result in a political settlement to end decades of armed ethnic conflict, despite the KIO's good faith participation in the then-military government's National Constitution Convention. Furthermore, the KIO ceasefire broke down entirely in June 2011, when the Myanmar Army launched new offensives against the organisation.

In the nearly four years since fighting started again in Kachin areas, the KIO has lost territory, much of it of significant strategic importance. Furthermore, there has been widespread civilian suffering, with over 100,000 people internally displaced ('internally', because neighbouring China has been unwilling to accept refugees from Myanmar on anything other than a very short-term basis). These people have 'voted with their feet', as some 80% have chosen to flee to KIO-controlled areas, rather than remain under the authority of the Myanmar government. As well as the cost in human suffering, the renewed conflict has seriously undermined Kachin trust in the government, in the peace process, and receptivity to the idea of a 'union' of Myanmar.

In the KIO headquarter areas, the organisation acts as a well-functioning and efficient government. Technically, the KIO is a political vanguard party, with the government of Kachin areas being administered by the Kachin Independence Council (KIC). The KIO/KIC administers departments including education, health, and agriculture, each with their respective and effective bureaucracies and training centres. Larger towns and villages have electricity and internet access, and many of the trappings of a *de facto* nation-state, including, for example, systems of car registration, traffic police, and fire brigades.

The KIO's evident capacity stems in part from the widespread support of the Kachin civilian population. Furthermore, unlike EAGs in southeast Myanmar (e.g. the NMSP), the KIO has access to significant financial resources, including through the jade trade. Also, in recent years at least, the KIO and associated civil society actors have not been able to rely on support from China, or sympathetic NGOs or international donors in the neighbouring countries but have had to rely on and develop their own resources and capacities. Another factor is the previous 17-year KIO ceasefire, which allowed a 'breathing space' for the organisation to rebuild and expand its organisational functions and infrastructure in the 'liberated zones', and also, until the resumption of armed conflict, in many government-controlled areas.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the renewal of armed conflict since 2011, few of the Kachin people interviewed seemed willing to support the status quo, and viewed their community and nation as dominated and oppressed by an alien and arrogant, aggressive, and still highly militarised government based at Naypyidaw. A strong version of Kachin nationalism would argue for complete autonomy within a federal union, giving nearly all powers to ethnic states. Many Kachin nationalists would in fact go further, and one increasingly hears calls for a completely independent Kachinland (and to limit teaching of the Burmese language in Kachin areas). Although perhaps difficult to achieve, given the geopolitics of the region (i.e. China's presumed lack of support

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<sup>11</sup> Other Kachin armed groups include the ex-communist New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) and ex-KIO Kachin Defense Army (KDA), both of which agreed on ceasefires with the government in the 1990s (South 2003: ch.5).

for outright Kachin independence), such sentiments and demands cannot be easily dismissed, given the high levels of capacity and national spirit demonstrated by the Kachin activists (and access to substantial natural resources which could finance such a project).<sup>12</sup>

Historically, Kachin demands for quality education were not necessarily framed in terms of MTB learning (Sadan 2013: 377-78,<sup>13</sup> and personal communication). The KIO Education Department was established in 1978-79, and reformed in 1992. In 2015, it administered 180 schools, including 25 Middle Schools and four High Schools, with 26,879 students and 1,591 teachers. The KIO Education Department established a Teacher Training School in 1997, which was upgraded in 2007. At present, KIO schools teach the government curriculum,<sup>14</sup> with additional modules covering Kachin language and culture. Kachin (Jingphaw) readers for different grades have been (or are in the process of being) developed by KIO Education Department. From 1993-2011, KIO high school graduates could matriculate at associated government schools, but this has been entirely curtailed since the resumption of fighting in 2011. Following this return to armed conflict, the KIO schools have switched to more Kachin and English, and less Burmese. This is part of a general move to disengage from the government education system, and develop a more distinctively Kachin school system. The KIO Education Department wants to develop an “international curriculum, oriented more towards overseas study”, than convergence with (or placing students into) government basic and higher education systems. The KIO Education Department pays teacher salaries (previously with some support from a national NGO, receiving international funds).

Teaching in KIO schools is usually conducted in local languages (especially Jingphaw), even though materials are mostly in Burmese, which causes problems for both teachers and students, and slows down the learning process. Jingphaw is the language of instruction (around Laiza), but teachers often ask students to write in Burmese, which is problematic, as many students don't understand Burmese.

KIO school graduates often attend one of the tertiary education institutes at Mai Ja Yang (a KIO-controlled town on the China-Myanmar border),<sup>15</sup> or the KIO Agriculture School or Chinese Junior College in Laiza; very few presently go to (or want to attend) government colleges. “KIO education policy is to be independent and not rely on the government. However, if there was real reform in the government system (including Kachin teaching materials in school, and genuine federalism) that would be best; otherwise we will stay as a separate education system.”<sup>16</sup> Following the breakdown of the KIO ceasefire in mid-2011, government education authorities banned children from KIO schools switching to state schools.<sup>17</sup> Some 700 graduates of KIO high schools have effectively been excluded from government tertiary education institutes, furthering Kachin grievances and leading to the reinforcement of separatist sentiments in relation to ethnic education in Kachin.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2 The peace process and the Ethnic Armed Groups

Many armed organisations seeking to represent ethnic aspirations and grievances have been fighting the government for decades, but most are now engaged in an emerging, but in many ways still problematic and contested, peace process. This research focuses on the experiences of three ethnic groups: the Kachin, Mon and Karen, and on EAGs and others seeking to represent these communities' grievances and aspirations, including in the fields of languages and education.

As noted, the KIO and NMSP agreed on ceasefires with the then-military government in the mid-1990s. For a decade and a half, both groups maintained uneasy truces, which allowed for the limited rehabilitation of con-

<sup>12</sup> On diverging narratives, identities and interests in relation to the Kachin conflict, see Jaquet (2015).

<sup>13</sup> “What Kachin elites ... wanted was education, not prescriptively education in Jinghpaw, even though these demands for the support of local languages within regional educational systems have subsequently evolved” (Sadan 2013: 378).

<sup>14</sup> For example, Mon Seng Primary School, visited 20/4/15; Hpun Lum IDP Camp and school, visited 21/4/15.

<sup>15</sup> Kachin and Mon higher education activities include the new Mai Ja Yang College, the Mai Ja Yang Institute of Education, the Intensive English Program, and the Federal Law College at Mai Ja Yang, the KIO Agriculture College at Alen Bum (near Laiza); and the NMSP-established (but now substantially independent) Post-10<sup>th</sup> Standard School in Sangkhlaburi (Thailand) and the NMSP headquarters area.

<sup>16</sup> Kachin School teacher.

<sup>17</sup> Documentation supplied to the researchers.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews mid-December 2015.

flict-affected communities and the re-emergence of rich civil society networks, within and between ethnic nationality communities in Myanmar. Most commentators have regarded the ceasefires of the 1990s in Myanmar as a failure, as they did not result in political negotiations to address the social, political, economic, and cultural issues underlying decades of armed conflict in the country. Nevertheless, in the context of the previous round of ceasefires, the KIO and NMSP (and some other groups) expanded their already existing education networks, to provide mother tongue teaching to children in their areas of control ('ceasefire zones') and in adjacent government-controlled areas. In contrast, the KNU did not agree on a ceasefire in the 1990s. In a context of continued armed conflict across much of southeast Myanmar, the KNU-administered education system developed a separatist outlook and syllabus, with KNU high school graduates (many of whom actually studied in refugee camp schools in neighbouring Thailand) finding it difficult to return to Myanmar and join government schools.

Despite political difficulties, the NMSP ceasefire has persisted, and was renewed in February 2011. Although the current peace process in Myanmar remains problematic, the persistence of the NMSP ceasefire provided a unique space for the Mon education system to flourish. However, disappointed by a lack of donor support for a system widely regarded as a model of best practice for ethnic education schooling in Myanmar, NMSP educators were faced with a dilemma: whether to embrace a closer relationship with the (reforming) state education structure, or to follow the Kachin model, and develop a separate education system. The government (at Union and Mon State levels) has recently passed legislation and made statements allowing for, and indeed encouraging, MTB education in ethnic nationality-populated areas at the primary level (see below). As state schools are not well equipped to deliver these services (lacking appropriate teaching materials, or qualified teachers), an opportunity exists for Mon educators to 'fill the gap'. In this case, political negotiations will be necessary in order to ensure the continued local ownership of Mon education regimes. This will be particularly important, as many in the Mon nationalist and wider ethnic opposition community remain deeply distrustful of both a Myanmar government they suspect of continuing to pursue forcible assimilationist policies ('Burmanisation'), and of the peace process currently underway.

The KNU education system is a remarkable testimony to the resilience of and commitment to education in Karen communities. Nevertheless, in order to be viable in the long term, this regime will need reform, including particularly a strategic re-imagining of the relationship between the Karen and state education regimes in terms both of syllabus and administration. In the broader peace process, the KNU has been the most pro-active and creative of the nearly 20 EAGs involved in peace talks with the government, as indicated by the leading role played by the KNU in negotiations towards the NCA. There is reason to hope that Karen educators will share this spirit of engagement, and re-imagine and reform their system in the context of a change in Myanmar.

On 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015, in Naypyidaw, leaders of EAGs (including the KNU) signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) with the Myanmar government and Army. After two years of often fraught negotiations, this document remains problematic and divisive, as indicated by the decision of some 10 EAGs not to attend the event or sign the NCA (including the KIO and NMSP).

For most of the last 20-plus years ethnic issues in Myanmar have been marginalised, as the international community and other actors focused primarily on struggles between the military government and predominantly urban-based pro-democracy forces in the country. One of the most interesting and important developments of the last four years has been the prominence of ethnic issues on the national political agenda, as represented by the peace process, which emerged under the U Thein Sein government in late 2011. For the first time since independence, leaders of Myanmar's long (and often violently) suppressed ethnic nationality communities have been able to articulate their grievances and aspirations on the national political stage. Concerns persist that after the November elections (see below) attention will again switch to issues of representative democracy, with the 'ethnic question' slipping back to the sidelines. Myanmar's next government will have a crowded agenda, with many contentious and difficult issues to address. In this context, it seems unlikely that the key issues in the peace process will get much attention, at least until the second half of 2016. In this case, the NCA represented an opportunity to 'tie-in' progress on at least some of the issues with which ethnic communities and their leaders have been struggling for decades.



For many actors and observers, however, the NCA is not a credible document, reflecting the problems with the peace process. Many of those EAGs which refused to sign the NCA are calling for a fully 'inclusive' agreement, including three small groups with few if any soldiers, and three EAGs which have re-emerged since the beginning of the peace process. In contrast, government negotiators (and particularly the Myanmar Army) insist on dealing only with established EAGs. This has been an issue of considerable dispute within and between EAGs and their various alliances, as well as with the government.

Further problems are associated with the contents and credibility of the NCA itself. A structured process of political dialogue is supposed to begin within 90 days of signing the NCA, but at the time of writing it is unclear whether credible discussion can begin during a period when key stakeholders will be negotiating the make-up of the next government, the person of Myanmar's next president, and debating a series of policy issues in parliament (including the national budget). While some stakeholders identified with the present government and parliament have been willing to enter preliminary discussions around a framework for political dialogue, key actors are ambivalent at best. For example, while the National League for Democracy (NLD), which won the November 8 election with a resounding majority (taking more than 70% of the vote), may be willing to talk about dialogue, leading members of Myanmar's most popular political party have limited respect for most EAGs, as indicated by discussions between the researchers and a leading NLD politician. Elected politicians regard legitimacy as a product of parliamentary process, rather than being achieved through armed struggle. Our research is based on an understanding that the country's better-established EAGs enjoy significant (albeit often contested) legitimacy within the communities they seek to represent as a result of the long years of struggle. However, not all mainstream politicians in Myanmar see things this way.

Future political dialogue is likely to be framed both by the peace process and by the outcome of the elections and parliamentary politics, with EAGs invited to participate as just one among a set of stakeholders, rather than the key interlocutor position they enjoyed with the present government. Agreeing to the present (albeit flawed) NCA does not preclude the EAGs attempting to negotiate a better deal next year, although from what is likely to be a more marginal position. Regardless of such considerations, education and language policy are likely to remain key concerns of ethnic communities and elites in Myanmar.

As noted, Chapter 6 of the NCA acknowledges EAGs' authority in the fields of education,<sup>19</sup> health, natural resource management and security, and provides for international assistance in these fields with the joint agreement of government and EAGs. There is a need to support EAG provision of education and other services, during the probably lengthy and contested 'interim period', between the agreement of an NCA (and earlier bilateral ceasefires) and negotiation of a comprehensive political settlement. This is relevant also for those EAGs which have not signed the NCA, but do have bilateral ceasefires with the government, such as the NMSP. The status of the KIO is more problematic in this respect, but in principle an end to conflict in Kachin areas should be possible if key stakeholders have the political will.

One of the key issues emerging from the peace process concerns the status and future of EAGs' governance regimes and service delivery systems, which at present are often implemented in partnership with associated and/or affiliated civil society actors. Will education and other service delivery systems under the authority of EAGs be displaced by the state system, continue in parallel with the government system, or undergo a process of 'convergence'? In this context, ethnic stakeholders are concerned that international aid agencies and donors are inadvertently supporting the government strategy and practice of expanding state structures into conflict-affected areas, without taking into account existing local activities and services, or the impacts on peace and conflict dynamics. The evidence suggests that the peace process has already allowed government

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<sup>19</sup> Education is mentioned four times in the NCA: in Article 9 (a): "Both parties agree to jointly strive to provide necessary development assistance to improve the livelihoods of civilians in the fields of health, education, nutrition and housing, and regional development"; Article 9 (h): "In accordance with the laws, no educational opportunities shall be prohibited; there shall be no destruction of schools or training facilities; and no disturbances to school staff or students"; Article 9 (k): "There shall be no destruction of public facilities such as hospitals, religious buildings, schools, and medical clinics without credible reason. No stationing of military bases shall be permitted in such public facilities"; and Article 25 (a), as above.

systems to extend their reach into ethnic areas that have been under EAG authority. This includes government schools with government teachers who do not speak the local ethnic language. Such developments are likely to undermine confidence in the peace process, among communities emerging from decades of armed conflict.

## 2.3 State education reforms

The education sector in Myanmar has been in crisis since at least the 1962 military coup. According to the census conducted in April 2015, nationwide about one-third of children (35.72%) are out of school (approximately 4.5 million children), with 12-18 year-olds (secondary school students) particularly affected.<sup>20</sup>

Education reforms have been one of President Thein Sein's main priorities, after national reconciliation with the NLD, peace with EAGs, and economic reforms that would bring international agencies and investment back to Myanmar (Lall 2016). In the summer of 2012 Myanmar embarked on a Comprehensive Education Sector Review Programme (CESR), a three-phase process resulting in the production of a comprehensive education plan in the summer of 2014. The CESR education consortium was led by UNICEF and closely supported by donors and development partners such as AusAID (now Australian DFAT) and the World Bank. The MoE invited all interested development partners to take part, and many took the opportunity to engage with the ministry for the first time. Their focus was mostly on reviewing state education and the formal sector around the country.<sup>21</sup>

The CESR's responsibilities encompassed all sectors of teaching and learning, from early childhood to higher education, and involved a wide range of ministries and departments with a stake in education policy.<sup>22</sup> After the first phase of work, proposals under consideration by the CESR included increasing basic education from 11 to 12 years, and changing teachers' career structures. The former could resolve the time crunch teachers face to cover the curriculum, although the practicalities of such a transfer are complex. The latter is particularly important as teachers who want to get promoted move to the secondary schools, resulting in high student-teacher ratios in primary schools with the least experienced teachers teaching these classes. The CESR also reviewed language policies (including the teaching of English) and recommended the translation of textbooks into ethnic languages.

Finding that the CESR process was taking too long to feed into the legislative process, and wanting to secure a set of education laws well in time for the 2015 elections, the President's Office constituted the Education Promotion Implementation Committee (EPIC). To the surprise and consternation of all seven involved, development partners were called at short notice to the meeting in Naypyidaw on 7 October 2013, where the Office of the President announced the convention of a National Seminar on Pragmatic Reforms for Education, which would take the lead on education.<sup>23</sup> EPIC took up residence only a few hundred metres away from the CESR in the Diamond Jubilee Hall on the Yangon University Campus. The three components included a task force of deputy ministers from the 13 ministries directly involved in education (and their Director Generals), an advisory group consisting of retired MoE officials, academics and other national experts, and 18 working groups covering specific areas of education reform, with two co-leads—one from government and one from the group of experts totalling over 200 people. EPIC had limited contact with the CESR teams and the involvement of development partners was severely reduced, not least because all meetings were held in Burmese. The EPIC reports were submitted by the end of January 2014.

There is also a Parliamentary Education Promotion Committee, which has been involved in the education reform process. This is comprised of ten USDP members, three NLD members and two MPs from the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party, and was tasked to develop an overarching education 'mother law' to provide

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<sup>20</sup> Drop-out rates in Mon and Karen States are about the national average, at 64%.

<sup>21</sup> Terms of Reference for Myanmar Education Sector Review (4 July 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Border Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Ministry of Cooperatives, Ministry of Finance and Revenue, Union Attorney General's Office.

<sup>23</sup> The development partners were assured that this was not intended to replace the CESR nor to do similar work twice, but that EPIC and the CESR were complimentary to each other. In reality, however, this was a move to retake control of the process without having to shut the CESR down or make the development partners' work redundant (conversations with relevant people in the President's office).

a framework for education reforms. In September 2014 the New Education Law was passed.<sup>24</sup> The National Education Sector Plan (2016-21) is expected to introduce a new curriculum, reform student assessment, and increase child-centric approaches to education as the leading pedagogy. It is also expected that there will be a new school-level quality assurance system that will include the assessment of teaching standards. All this will of course deeply affect the teaching profession.

A new education ‘mother law’ was passed in parliament in September 2014,<sup>25</sup> resulting in mass protests on the streets by students who believe that the government retains too much control over education matters. Much of the argument is around decentralisation and local power, and it remains unclear whether significant fiscal decentralisation via technology will take place, and at what level (State/Region or Township) policy decisions will be made.<sup>26</sup> The hope of ethnic elites is that if education policy decisions are decentralised to State governments, then State parliaments will be able to engender a debate on issues of language and culturally and context-adapted curricula. Already, State/Region governments in a number of areas (Mon State, Bago and Tanintharyi Regions) have begun to introduce minority languages into government school curricula at the primary level (see Section 3). This has been the result of pressure both at the Union level (from the executive, and particularly on the part of ethnic nationality parties in parliament), and due to activism on the part of civil society and political parties. However, such initiatives remain under-resourced, in terms of both the availability of MT-speaking teachers and funds to pay them, as well as the limited supply of quality teaching materials. In this context, there is a risk that state schools newly required to teach minority languages may ‘poach’ teachers from EAGs and other locally-owned and delivered education systems—a development which would exacerbate conflict, rather than addressing one of the key grievances of ethnic communities.

## 2.4 The 2015 elections

On November 8, 2015, Myanmar held its first reasonably free and fair election since 1990. As anticipated, the NLD won a landslide victory, taking 79% of seats (390 at the Union level, compared to the governing USDP’s 42). Ethnic political parties won 11% of seats at the Union level. The NLD achieved majorities in all State and Regional legislatures, except Rakhine and Shan, and Kachin (where the party was victorious in 49% of seats). This was a massive and historic achievement.

Ethnic parties generally did poorly. In Shan State, one interesting outcome was the reasonably good showing on the part of Ta’ang and PaO parties. The other ethnic parties who picked up some seats are mostly those that contested the 1990 elections, but boycotted the 2010 polls. After the previous elections, 2010 ethnic political parties had constituted the first legitimate opposition in the USDP-dominated parliaments. They were able to establish limited power bases in ethnic areas because the NLD had refused to contest the elections. Over the next four years, the 2010 political parties had been involved in discussions to establish a framework for political dialogue through the peace process. Their influence in State parliaments had begun to affect policy making with regard to education and ethnic language use in government schools, and they had developed a clear political voice, including establishing the 15-party Nationalities Brotherhood Foundation (NBF).<sup>27</sup>

In general, education issues were little discussed during the election campaign (beyond criticism of the USDP for suppressing student protesters). In the November 2015 elections a large majority of Myanmar’s citizens voted for change: out with the military-backed government, and in with ‘The Lady’. Many citizens who iden-

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<sup>24</sup> There have been mass protests led by students against the law. It was revised, but not to everyone’s satisfaction, in March 2015; see Lall (2016).

<sup>25</sup> A revision of this law was passed in June 2015.

<sup>26</sup> November 2012 Draft Framework for Social and Economic Reforms (FESR), quoted below, indicates that the GOM plans to work with a distributed (or deconcentrated) model of education management. “GOM attaches high priority to developing a participatory process of local budgeting, which should reflect local priorities and needs while corresponding with national policy directions, by delegating decision-making authority over expenditure compositions (between recurrent and capital expenditure) as well as inter-sectoral allocations (between sectors) under the guidance of local parliaments.” However, GOM still retains the budgetary controls over health and education expenditure for transitional adjustments, which may be a future subject of decision for fiscal decentralization” (FESR, November 2012 Draft: 29).

<sup>27</sup> The NBF started in 2011 as the Nationalities Brotherhood Forum.

tified proudly with their ethnic nationality (i.e. Karen or Mon or Chin) nevertheless voted for the NLD, the long-standing symbol of opposition to military rule. The ethnic vote was further weakened by the multitude of parties seeking to represent minority communities. Furthermore, much of the country's Muslim community was disenfranchised.

Given this poor electoral performance of ethnic political parties, the main EAGs might be reassured that their role as primary representatives of ethnic communities' grievances and aspirations had not been subsumed. On the other hand, Myanmar's new leaders-elect are unlikely to accord EAGs a high degree of political legitimacy, given the NLD's commitment to achieving political authority through democratic elections. Among the many questions raised by the election results is whether a future NLD-led government will be able to transform the lives of conflict-affected communities, or if these areas continue to be dominated by militarisation and violence.

Following the NLD's landslide victory, the future roles and status of ethnic political parties remain unclear. Research shows that they are frustrated at having had only limited roles to play so far in the peace process—despite their often under-appreciated efforts in State-level reform and particularly in the field of education (Lall 2015).

## Section THREE : Themes and Issues

### 3.1 Language rights

A prominent Kachin community leader and development worker said (11/6/15) that, “ethnic education can fuel conflict, or can be part of the healing process.” She went on to note that: “we learn to be protective, including of our identities, because we are insecure. The international community must understand that unless ethnic issues are addressed, there will be no real peace in Myanmar.” A Mon interlocutor put this particularly strongly: “If Burmese leaders ignore mother tongue language issues and the voices of ethnic people, then ethnic nationalities may choose to leave the Union—there is no trust in the government.”

Following the outbreak of widespread ethnic insurgency in newly independent Burma in the late 1940s and early 1950s (Smith 1999), it became apparent that the civil war would be protracted. Some of the better established armed groups began to turn their attention to providing basic services to communities under their authority or influence, including in the field of education.

In general, ethnic nationality respondents expressed strong perceptions (and experiences) of the suppression of minority languages and cultures on the part of a Bama-dominated state: “Ethnic people don’t have rights to learn their own languages in school, and so the majority community dominates us ... government doesn’t want to let ethnic people study their own languages” (interview 7/7/15). Ethnic people feel discriminated against as their cultures and languages have not been included in the official state curriculum.

Mon villagers (visited 7/15) gave a number of reasons for sending their children to Mon National School: “because we want them to learn Mon, as well as English and Burmese; to support our own language and community, and nation, otherwise Mon will disappear; because we are poor; because we need to stand in our own land, and want our own administration and Mon government; because we want our children to have the same opportunity as others. In the past, we lost the opportunity to learn our own language and we need MNS to reintroduce our language and culture and build the nation.” In several areas, government schools (often newly built, see below) are available in the vicinity of MNS. However, a commonly expressed view was that: “We don’t like having a government school in the village, but we are under control of the military [government] so we have no choice. We don’t really want to learn Burmese, but because of the military government we have to.”<sup>28</sup>

Some respondents (2/15) pointed out the connection between self-determination in language usage, and the broader theme of political self-determination and federalism in ethnic nationality elites’ political campaign for federalism in Myanmar (see below). A Mon villager said: “we want MTB education in order to preserve and promote our national survival and identity; this is our basic right. If the government wants peace, then they must recognise ethnic languages as part of the federal political solution for Myanmar. In the NMSP’s Mon National Schools we can learn real Mon history and students can know and maintain their national identity.” Similar views were expressed by a Kachin EAG leader: “we want to legally use our language and build our own schools and universities, to study our own philosophy and literature.”

### 3.2 Relationship between education and conflict<sup>29</sup>

Recent quantitative analysis indicates that ethno-linguistic issues are often at the heart of armed conflicts worldwide (Borman, Cederman and Vogt 2015). This is the case also in Myanmar, where conflict and peace are key variables in shaping education policy and practice, especially in ethnic areas—and education is a key variable in the peace process.

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<sup>28</sup> The researchers had only limited access to parents who send their children to government schools.

<sup>29</sup> On the relationship between armed and state-society conflict and education in the Karen context, see Lall and South, *Comparing Models of Non-state Ethnic Education in Myanmar: the Mon and Karen national education regimes* (‘Journal of Contemporary Asia’ 2013).

In general, since 2011, the resumption of armed conflict has led to greater pan-Kachin unity and cohesion around an ethno-linguistic core. Significant elements of the non-Jingphaw communities seem not to object to adopting this dominant dialect as a Kachin common language (although some sub-groups find the dominance of Jingphaw problematic). Many members of the ethno-linguistically diverse Kachin community are deeply hurt and angry at what they perceive as the state armed forces' unilateral and brutal offensive. Associated with massive and widespread human rights abuses, which have been well documented over a period of many years, the renewed fighting has alienated those in the community who previously were willing to consider a future as part of Myanmar. While there are still debates within the Kachin community regarding whether Kachinland could be part of a (federal) union, the majority of opinion tends towards a more robust separation from Myanmar. The resurgence of fighting appears to have severely damaged, if not completely broken, trust in the government, among many if not most Kachin communities. Nationalist support for the KIO has increased significantly since the outset of fighting, whereas before the resumption of armed conflict in 2011 sections of the Kachin nationalist community had become quite alienated from the KIO, some of whose leaders were perceived to have benefited financially from post-ceasefire business opportunities. This is especially true among young people, a particularly mobilised sector of the community.

Over the past three years Kachin society has seen a resurgence of nationalist spirit. In Myitkyina (the Kachin State capital), Laiza and Mai Ja Yang (the main KIO-controlled towns on the China border) or other centres of the Kachin community, there is a palpable feeling of national pride and identity. This is framed in terms of a strong patriotic spirit, in the context of defiant resistance to what is widely perceived and experienced as an alien, violent and predatory central government and Army. Some of our interlocutors were clear that they no longer see the necessity of using Burmese at all, not just their children learning Burmese in school. Many feel Burmese needs to be replaced by English as the language of communication with other Union members, including when it comes to administrative issues such as the justice system.

Numerous Mon (and other) interlocutors talked about the strong correlation between using ethnic languages and pride in and maintenance of ethnic identity. Many people also talked about the perceived and experienced policy of forced assimilation on the part of the Myanmar state and Army in relation to ethnic communities. The armed struggles of EAGs for self-determination (among other things) were often presented in terms of the preservation and protection of ethnic communities' identities and languages.

A prominent Mon politician told us (7/7/15) that: "language policy and practice in Myanmar went downhill in the colonial times, and got worse after independence, but things really deteriorated after Ne Win took power and we Mon became like a slave colony." According to a Mon political activist (6/7/15): "All ethnic people are trying to get MTB teaching in schools, but the government hasn't allowed it because of their policy of Burmanisation and centralisation; they want everyone to speak Burmese. If Burmese leaders ignore federalism, the Civil War will never stop." Although problems persist, for example, in terms of livelihood and access to human rights, villagers reported that access to education improved greatly over the 20 years since the NMSP ceasefire.

A number of interlocutors (e.g. Kachin NGO leader, 7/4/15) spoke about the pressure which renewed fighting in Kachin has created, particularly among Kachin grassroots activists, to disengage the KIO education system from that of the government. A Kachin educator said (22/4/15): "we can't trust a Burmese, so we need to develop a separate Kachin school system." According to KIA Deputy Chief of Staff, Sumlut Gun Maw: "we have to undo half a century of damage to Kachin education inflicted by the Burmese government."

Until 2011, all children in KIO schools were allowed to sit the government high school 10<sup>th</sup> standard exam.<sup>30</sup> However, after the ceasefire broke down, state authorities refused to allow students from KIO areas to sit government exams, further exacerbating the breakdown in relations between Kachin communities and the state. A Kachin educator talked about the overwhelming sense of fear among many Kachin communities, particularly since the resumption of fighting in 2011. This led to children living in areas under the control or authority of

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<sup>30</sup>Interview with KIO (2/6/15).

the KIO being denied the right to basic education. He mentioned that different positions are held in relation to education, among different communities: “in some areas, they don’t want Burmese language or culture at all, because of their very different history.”<sup>31</sup>

The renewal of conflict between government forces and the KIO has had a direct impact on the education of tens of thousands of children, as has been the case for many decades across much of southeast Myanmar. Even in areas remaining under KIO control, destruction has been extensive, with the main KIO Education Department-run high school near Laiza being forced to relocate. A new high school is being planned in the vicinity of the IDP camps outside of Laiza, to accommodate the huge influx of new civilian refugees, including many children.<sup>32</sup> Schools in the IDP camps use the KIO curriculum (government teaching materials, with extra readers provided by the KIO, see below).

In Kachin areas, the Christian churches (particularly Catholic and Baptist) have for many years sent volunteers (often recent graduates, sometimes with little teacher training) to teach in remote areas.<sup>33</sup> This has become much more difficult since the outbreak of fighting in 2011, and the significant deterioration of security in many rural Kachin areas. The resumption of armed conflict since 2011 has greatly affected the quality of schooling in rural areas. A number of informants talked about the “military occupation” of Kachin areas, resulting in decreased opportunities for children to learn their own ethnic languages. Also, many communities were disrupted and displaced (see below), leading to increased financial hardships, which for many families has raised increased obstacles to sending their children to school.

Kachin interlocutors expressed a wide range of opinions and positions in relation to education. A Kachin ceasefire group leader (May 2015) noted that his group had received significant government support to build schools and spread education to previously under-served communities. He complained that the recent outbreak of fighting, which involved his group on the side of the government against the KIA/KIO, has disrupted teaching in some ceasefire areas.

In Karen areas education has been deeply affected by the conflict that raged over decades, and that only came (more or less) to a halt in 2012. Many conflict-affected communities supported local schools, with various combinations of government and KNU-provided teachers. In the decades after the KNU went underground in January 1949, a non-state system of schools developed. These schools generally used variations of the Burmese government curriculum, often with additional materials provided by missionaries and others (sometimes based on the British Indian model). It was only in the 1990s, when international NGOs began to support schools in the Karen refugee camps on the Thailand border, that the KNU/KED curriculum began to diverge significantly from that of the government.

Many school-age Karen children from the conflict-affected southeast have to cross the border and enter refugee camps in order to gain access to education. Until about 10 years ago there was little distinction between the KNU-administered education regime ‘inside’ Karen State and the schools in the camps. Students and teachers circulated between the two sets of establishments, which shared curricula, staff and materials. However, with the advent of large-scale external support from the late 1990s, teaching standards and the quality of learning materials available in the camps improved significantly. A two-tier system emerged, with the larger, indigenous school system in the conflict-affected zones of southeast Burma increasingly seen as a ‘poor cousin’ of the refugee camp regime. This period also saw a ‘brain drain’ of Karen education personnel, away from the KNU and community (non-state) systems, towards employment in international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). As a result of such developments, a Karen student cohort has emerged which enjoys little connection to the (admittedly, often poor quality) education system in government-controlled areas. Although this may not have been donors’ intention, several informants noted that the development of a separate Karen

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<sup>31</sup> Interview (3/6/15).

<sup>32</sup> Other KIO institutions have also been displaced, for example, the Agriculture College, moved from further north to the vicinity of Laiza (currently housed in the old KIO Economic Department premises).

<sup>33</sup> On the roles of the Kachin churches in politics, culture and education, see Jaquet (2015: 24-35).

education system, based in the refugee camps, has led to the production of school graduates qualified to work for aid agencies and/or opposition groups, or possibly to go into exile in third countries, but who are largely unable to matriculate in Myanmar, and thus enter the government higher education system. This phenomenon is perhaps best illustrated by the limited Burmese language skills possessed by most graduates, as a result of the Karen school system’s emphasis on English and (Sgaw) Karen languages. This focus has led to Burmese being consigned to a subsidiary ‘foreign language’ status. Karen high school graduates’ limited mastery of Burmese will make it difficult for them to integrate into government structures of higher education or administration in the future (although this is not necessarily the intention of the Karen education authorities). The Karen education system has helped to reinforce a separatist identity among its students. One of the challenges facing Karen political and education leaders in the context of the peace process is how to build on the strengths of a school system which includes some very good practice in the field of MTB education, while articulating a vision and practice for the future of the KED system, *within* a (democratic, federal) Union.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3 Models of MTB education systems

The following typology identifies the wide variety of different types of ethnic education provision in Myanmar, along a continuum moving from closest to furthest from the government system (see TABLE 1). In all of these types, the local community often provides very significant support to schools and teachers.<sup>35</sup>

**TABLE 1: Typology of ethnic education provision in Myanmar [progressing from those closest to government system to those further away]**

Type	Characteristics	Examples
<u>Type 1 – Ethnic-input schools</u>	Government-run schools with civil society input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government-run schools, with some teachers (and teaching materials) provided by the local community or civil society.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 2 – Mixed schools</u>	Government schools in EAG-controlled and contested areas, with some EAG and/or civil society input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Includes schools in remote areas that accept volunteer teachers.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 3 – Hybrid schools</u>	Part government, part EAG; sometimes also input from civil society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NDAK schools in Kachin cease-fire areas.</li> <li>• IDP schools in Kachin areas.</li> <li>• Schools which were previously under the authority of EAG education departments, but have now been ‘flipped’ (or ‘poached’) by government Ministry of Education.</li> </ul>

<sup>34</sup> The revised KRCEE curricula may address some of these issues.

<sup>35</sup> See Lall and South (2012).



<u>Type 4 – EAG (government curriculum) schools</u>	Schools managed by EAG, with no government teachers, but which use government curriculum (often in translation) and where children can sometimes transfer to the state system, after a test or local arrangement. Curriculum is supplemented by ethnic nationality-oriented materials, especially for history and social studies, but sometimes also other subjects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NMSP/MNEC Mon National Schools.</li> <li>• KIO schools (teach government curriculum in Jingphaw etc., and later in Burmese).</li> <li>• Some Karen schools, particularly those supported by the community with limited KNU/ KED input.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 5 – EAG schools</u>	Schools built and run by EAGs and/or associated civil society groups, with separate MTB curriculum; no recognition/ accreditation or possible transfer for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KED schools, and ‘community schools’ in areas under KNU authority or influence; refugee camp schools.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 6 – Civil society private schools</u>	Separate MTB curriculum and different teaching methods; no recognition/ accreditation or possible transfer for students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-supported schools in northern Shan and Kachin States.</li> <li>• Some Karen schools in KNU-controlled areas (sometimes administered and funded by churches).</li> </ul>
<u>Type 7 – Foreign curriculum schools</u>	Curriculum developed in/by another country, allowing (some) students to transfer to other schools in that country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools with Indian curriculum in Kachin; some Karen mission schools.</li> </ul>
<u>Type 8 – Supplementary schools</u>	Schools that focus on ethnic language and/or culture/religion, but teach after the government classes are over – either summer schools or afternoon/evening schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly provided by civil society groups; often linked to the <i>Sangha</i> and the churches.</li> </ul>

The following section provides some details on the new types of schools that were identified during the research.<sup>36</sup>

## **TYPOLGY**

### **Type 1 - Ethnic-input schools (government-run schools with civil society input)**

In Kachin State in particular (but also elsewhere), many schools which are now under government administration were founded during the colonial period and previously run by Christian missionaries. These mission schools were closed or taken over by the government in the 1960s, but are still seen by many Kachin as a good model: “We had MTB teaching in the missionary schools until 1962, when the Ne Win government banned ethnic language teaching. Now we are on the way to democracy, so we want to start this again.”

In Bago Region, there are approximately 330 government schools in (Sgaw) Karen populated areas, with about 40,000 students (January 2015). In many of these, local communities and CBOs provide significant support to teachers, including local volunteer MTB teachers and ethnic language materials; in the context of education

<sup>36</sup> The mapping of the EAG education initiatives in Mon and Karen State has been detailed in Lall and South 2013. The schools and systems described below have not been previously researched.

reforms, there is growing official patronage of this approach (see below).<sup>37</sup>

**Type 2 - Mixed schools (government schools in EAG-controlled and contested/mixed authority areas, with some EAG and/or civil society input)**

Mon 'mixed schools' are government schools which teach Mon language and history during school hours, as an additional curriculum item, depending on negotiations most often with individual government school head teachers. Similar 'mixed' schools exist in many Karen areas.<sup>38</sup>

**Type 3 - Hybrid schools (part government, part EAG)**

This refers primarily to schools that were run by EAG Education Departments, but which have for funding reasons accepted links or integration with the government system. A few MNEC schools have chosen this path, with teachers who might now be on the government payroll. Many IDP schools also fall into this category as they utilize volunteer teachers as well as government teachers. Usually the schools use the government curriculum, even if the teaching medium is the local ethnic language. In some cases additional materials are provided by the EAG (e.g. KIO) Education Department. New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDAK) schools also fall into this category as they have been built and administered by the armed group (which agreed on a ceasefire with the government in late 1989), yet teach in Burmese, using government curriculum and their own local teachers, as well as government-provided teachers.

**Type 4 - EAG (government curriculum) schools (schools built and managed by EAGs, with no government teachers, but which use government curriculum, supplemented by MTB-oriented materials)**

### **3.3.1 KACHIN**

This Type included most KIO schools, at least until 2011.<sup>39</sup> Following the resumption of armed conflict, the KIO school system, and broader Kachin education regimes, are moving away from education connections with the state of Myanmar, and government curriculum. They require Jingphaw textbooks, especially for primary level, but many Kachin (and other ethnic nationality) educators would prefer to produce their own materials rather than translating from existing government Burmese language books. Most Kachin educators want to transition to Burmese at middle school level, but also to teaching Jingphaw through high school. Many Kachin (including non-Jingphaw) suggest that all children should learn the dominant dialect (Jingphaw as the official language). In general, there is a feeling that: "we are part of Burma and teach the Burmese language in school, but children should also know especially Jingphaw names of animals, plants, etc." Burmese is generally introduced early, but not always given a great deal of focus; English is taught from late in primary school, although this varies from school to school. Non-Jingphaw subgroups (e.g. Lachek and Maru) reportedly "may need more Burmese." According to the understanding of Kachin IDP teachers, KIO policy is that: "when children finish school, they should speak Kachin, for their national identity, but they should also be able to speak Burmese."

The head of the KIO Education Department, Sumlut Gam (KIC Councillor; KIO CEC and head of KIO peace delegation) said that: "the KIO are not just warlords, but political actors also; trust is broken between the government and Kachin people, so we have to develop our own resources and capacity; we can do our own exams etc., and develop our own teacher training college and materials, rather than sending students to government schools, as before." The third ranking official in the KIO Education Department, Htawng Ka Ya Saw said that: "the KIO Education Department was born out of the Kachin revolution. Our mission is to prepare the Kachin new generation, and promote student-centred teaching, rather than rote learning."

Kachin IDP villagers told us (20-22/4/15) that: "Children attending government schools can only learn Kachin at home or in church." "The best option is to reform the government school system, to respect and reflect ethnic identity, otherwise, a separate Kachin school system is good." One female teacher said: "we don't want to live

<sup>37</sup> However, informal research indicates that not all villages want ethnic language classes in their school, some preferring instead to focus on English and Science.

<sup>38</sup> For more details see Lall and South (2013).

<sup>39</sup> Before the recurrence of fighting in mid-2011, the KIO asked Baptist and Catholic churches to take over some schools in KIO areas.

under the Burmese education system, because of our past experience of atrocities and mistrust, we don't trust the government even 1%"; "recently, the government has authorised teaching in ethnic languages in Kachin schools, but we don't want their narrative [teaching materials]"; "we would never accept the government to come here and build a school."

### **3.3.2 MON**

As described in the background section, the MNEC education system retains the advantages of indigenous language education at the primary level, whilst the Mon National Schools prepare graduates to sit government matriculation exams and integrate with the nationwide higher education system, thereby allowing students of this non-state system to integrate with the state education regime should they (or their parents) so wish. Due to difficulties in securing financial support, the MNEC no longer has funding for pre-service teacher training, but continues to provide in-service training to its teachers, including through three mobile teacher training teams. Increasingly MNEC teachers are also able to join in-service teacher training organized by UNICEF for government teachers.

During a village visit (7/15), parents said they sent their children to the Mon National Schools (MNS) because of their national identity, and because the MNS are cheaper than government schools. Teachers often have a sense of responsibility, or themselves are graduates from the Mon system, and want to give back to the community: "I am a product of the MNS, so I want to support the MNS. The community lacks teachers, and I want to meet that demand. We want to preserve Mon literature and language and maintain Mon ethnic identity through the MNS. If there were no MNS, people who can read and write Mon would disappear. I became a teacher because I want to promote [the] Mon language and nation, and to help our community." There are also those who want to maintain a separate system from the government and retain independence: "We want to run our school independent of government schools, but there are many challenges. Government schools can train many people, and we want to show that we can do that also."

Mon parents at a village with a MNS and a government school (5/15) said that: "Many parents send their children to the government school, so they can speak proper Burmese and get recognised qualifications, but our children are often intimidated in government schools." The reality described by some was that because "The MNS is cheaper, so poor people send their children here."

#### **Type 5 – EAG schools (built and run by EAGs and/or associated civil society groups, with separate curriculum)**

This type includes most of the Karen Education Department (KED) schools,<sup>40</sup> as well as the schools in refugee camps in Thailand serving Karen refugees. As mentioned in the background section, the KED administers over 1,000 schools; half in mixed administration areas where government sometimes imposes teachers (Type 2, above), and the rest in KNU areas. This Type refers to the latter schools. Although many teachers do use Burmese in lessons, at least part of the time, the majority of classroom teaching is in Karen (mostly, but not only, the Sgaw dialect),<sup>41</sup> and English, therefore making it difficult to integrate with the government system. A senior KNU official said that: "KNU education policy is currently based on the previous situation of armed conflict, and very 'independent'. It is a challenge for us to reform the KNU education system, and move forward in the context of the peace process. KNU education policy supports nationalism, and is based on federal principles. The KED curriculum was developed with help of NGOs."

Furthermore there are about 30,000 children in some 80 schools in the seven Karen and two Karenni refugee camps on the Thailand side of the border.<sup>42</sup> These schools receive assistance from a range of international NGOs, and are administered by the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE), and the Karenni Education Department. Both of these entities are constituted under the authority of the respective EAGs, the KNU and KNPP. For local stakeholders, the Karen (and to a lesser extent Karenni) education systems cross the border, with little to distinguish the camp schools from those 'inside Myanmar' in terms of curriculum or admin-

<sup>40</sup> The KED is a body of the KNU. It employs 17 staff at headquarters level, and about 30 Area Teacher Trainers in the KNU's 7 Districts.

<sup>41</sup> On Karen dialect groups, and the politics thereof, see South (2011).

<sup>42</sup> The Border Consortium (2015).

istration, except that the latter generally receive less funding. Karen schools ‘inside’ are sometimes referred to as “community schools”, and include a range of different institutions, both those directly administered by the KED, and those which are primarily supported by the community with limited input (teacher support and teaching materials) from the KED. It is worth noting that the schools run by the KIO Education Department will likely fall into this category if they decide to abandon the government curriculum.

#### **Type 6 – Civil society private schools that have a separate MTB curriculum**

This category includes the community-run schools in Kachin and northern Shan States that are funded and managed by a Kachin CSO with international support. Local Kachin educators wanted a different model, and so are developing their own: “de-coupled from the government system, until the state system undergoes significant reform”—which is viewed as unlikely in the near term. This is presented as a “community transformation initiative”, rather than an education project per se, locally-owned, and significantly different from the state system. It is also not presented as linked to the KIO Education Department. The schools themselves are self-funding and parents in focus group discussions said they have no interest in preparing students for government exams. While several of those associated with this system acknowledge issues of accreditation—chiefly, the path to achieve recognised qualifications for high school—no satisfying solution is yet available beyond graduates possibly entering MIT BARS, or KTCS, or “an answer will be found in the future”. According to the research children in these schools reportedly learn Burmese very well; a few children come from non-Jingphaw families (e.g. Shan).

#### **Type 7 – Foreign curriculum schools (allowing students to transfer to other schools in that country)**

These schools are few and far between, however, in Laiza (KIO headquarters area) there is the Nawng E Hku (Summa Zone) Mission High School (visited 20/14/15), an Indian English-language model. Established in 1992 (before the 1994 KIO ceasefire), it previously used the KIO/government curriculum; in 2010 this was changed to an English medium curriculum from India (Nagaland), based on the “‘Oxford standard’, in order to be able to study abroad.” The Summa Zone School occasionally sent graduates to government universities, but not since fighting resumed in 2011. Burmese history is not taught, but they do teach Burmese language as well as Chinese, and of course Jingphaw. Graduates become pastors or KIO officials and many have the opportunity to study tertiary education in India (sometimes with mission funding, but more often due to family connections or wealth as it is difficult for non-elite children to study overseas). Indian higher education is seen as being of higher quality than the Myanmar higher education system and there has been a long tradition of students from Myanmar’s Northwest studying in India’s Northeast.<sup>43</sup> There is no government (or official international) recognition of the Summa Zone School qualifications, “but no problem, we are looking for recognition from India or elsewhere.” There are also some foreign curriculum (mostly missionary-run) schools in areas of Karen State under the control of the KNU.

#### **Type 8 – Supplementary schools (summer schools or afternoon/evening schools)**

Often established and administered by religious organisations (e.g. *Sangha*, or churches), this category includes the Mon *Sangha*-led Mon Summer Language and Literature Trainings, as well as similar summer schools run by the church in Karen state.<sup>44</sup> In Kachin state the churches have also been active in teaching bible studies and a variety of Kachin dialects to children during the holidays and on weekends.

### **3.4 Policy issues**

When discussing schools, curriculum and language with ethnic educators, policy issues in a complex and fast-changing scenario recur often. Questions include what, if any, relationship the EAG education department and individual schools should have with the government education authorities. Language policy at the

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<sup>43</sup> There is evidence in India’s Northeast that quite a number of Kachin and Chin students illegally cross the border and manage to register in universities as locals. Indian higher education is free and living is relatively cheap. The state governments do not seem to follow up on reports that ‘foreigners’ might be studying as Indians (information based on Marie Lall’s field visits to NEHU in Meghalaya, Imphal University in Manipur and Nagaland University in Kohima, Nagaland).

<sup>44</sup> On Mon summer literacy and literature/history teaching activities, see Lall and South (2012).

Union level is moving, with the importance of ethnic languages increasingly recognised, especially by State governments. However, the status and future of non-government schools and teachers that span the typology described above remains unclear.

### **3.4.1 MON**

A number of discussions with Mon interlocutors focused on whether the MNEC's (NMSP) Mon National Schools (MNS) should remain independent schools or should be recognised by the government. Myanmar now has the option of private schools (recognised in legislation), but these have to be self-funded. If the government were to provide some level of recognition, and with it some support for teacher salaries, this would most likely entail a loss of independence for language and curriculum policy for the MNS. This would also affect the status of teachers who are not trained by the government system. The MNEC would like 'official recognition and support', yet without the loss of autonomy—something that seems impossible to achieve under the current education system. Fears were expressed about the government using such issues to take over the Mon education system. Already, there are a few examples of individual MNS being 'flipped' into becoming government schools, usually through the persuasion of local (Township) level education officials, by offering the schools and teachers better resources and salaries.<sup>45</sup> Concerns were also expressed about the government building state schools in the vicinity of MNS, causing competition and frustration. Several interlocutors expressed a preference that the MNEC should concentrate its schools in places where there are no government schools.

The fact that the government has been debating the need for ethnic language education was seen as a positive step. However, several people stated that the MNS will still be needed because of the Mon schools' special roles in reproducing national culture and language. According to a prominent Mon nationalist politician, "the Mon State government's new policy regarding teaching ethnic languages is welcome, but currently all school-books focus on Burmese language and culture, with ethnic textbooks just translated from the government version. We need to develop new ethnic nationality-produced textbooks, not just copy from the government." He went on to say that "MTB teaching after school hours is no good, because children are already overloaded with academic study and tired by then. The mother tongue teaching should be taught during school hours as a proper subject." Several Mon interlocutors acknowledged (often somewhat grudgingly) that the Mon State government and political parties deserved some credit for the introduction of Mon language in government schools, including in some areas during the regular school day. There is further debate regarding whether teaching the mother tongue as a subject (as is currently proposed by the State Government) is enough, as the prime demand of EAGs has been to use ethnic languages as a medium of instruction (as proposed by UNICEF and practiced by MNS), especially in primary schools. This means that MNS are still required and necessary, especially in majority Mon speaking areas, even if government schools decide to teach Mon as a subject.<sup>46</sup> Several Mon interlocutors pointed out the relative coherence of their national identity, based on a language/script and culture that dates back at least 1,500 years (South 2003: ch.13). The Mon are thus presented with fewer problems regarding which sub-set of ethno-linguistic identity should be prioritised as the common national standard, in comparison with some other groups in Myanmar (see below, for the cases of the Kachin and the Karen).

The NMSP leadership generally favours the Indian 'three languages' model for public administration of justice,<sup>47</sup> as well as education, but this would need to be adapted to Myanmar to take account of the situation of 'minorities within minorities' (e.g. PaO in Thaton Township). A Mon politician suggested that "MT education should be introduced in areas which are more than 75% Mon." Several interlocutors proposed teaching in MT

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<sup>45</sup> Given the acute funding crunch experienced by MNEC over the past few years, there is a temptation for teachers who are not receiving an adequate salary to turn to the government.

<sup>46</sup> This is based on the many interviews and focus groups conducted for this study.

<sup>47</sup> India uses the 'three language formula' whereby children learn in the state/local language, Hindi (the national language) and English. Given the large number of Indian languages, not all children are taught in their mother tongue, but this system allows for a majority of children to start school in a language they are familiar with. Citizens can also use the state language for administrative purposes. In parliament any of the 22 official Indian languages as well as English can be used.

for primary level, and switching to Burmese at middle school, while continuing with MT as a subject lesson for middle and high school. “Mon should be an official language of Mon State (together with Burmese and English), and this should be provided for in the constitution. People should have the right to choose using a minority language in government administration and the court system (including legislatures). This is self-determination in language policy. We would need training and resources, including for government staff.” Mon interlocutors mostly preferred that Mon National Schools remain under MNEC, as part of self-determination and federalism. “It is easier for Mon to develop language policy because of a fairly uniform community” (7/15).

A variety of views were expressed regarding the correct relationships and transition between teaching and learning Mon and/or Burmese. As noted above, a common formula called for is the use of Mon as the main teaching language at primary level, with a focus on Burmese from middle school. More than one interlocutor suggested that academic subjects should be taught in Mon (or Karen and PaO, as appropriate) up to 7<sup>th</sup> grade, by which time children should have learned to speak Burmese sufficiently well to be able to absorb the main academic subjects in their second language. This of course poses questions with regard to other minorities whose mother tongue is not Mon, as well as Bamar students whose mother tongue is Burmese and who would then start school in a foreign language. A Mon CBO activist said (27/5/15) “Burmese should be the federal/ Union language ... Burmese is also a ‘mother tongue!’”

### **3.4.2 KACHIN**

There is much ongoing discussion regarding appropriate language(s) for Kachin education. Jingphaw is the dominant dialect within the KIO, and several other key institutions (e.g. many of the churches). Compared to some other ethnic communities in Myanmar (e.g. the diverse Karen groups),<sup>48</sup> there seems to be relatively less of a problem identifying a single dialect (i.e. Jingphaw) as the main Kachin *lingua franca*.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, among some sub-groups (e.g. Lisu, Rawang) there is still some resistance to this approach. As well as sensitive issues of political and social dynamics, a number of recipients talked about the need to identify one main dialect in order to concentrate limited resources on developing ethnic education and MTB teaching. According to KIA Deputy Chief-of-Staff Sumlut Gun Maw (who himself is from the Laiwa sub-group): “Kachin is not yet a nation-state. We need a common language. While we should recognise the variety of Kachin sub-groups, we don’t have the capacity to develop materials in all languages. We need to be pragmatic about what language to promote and reproduce. Remember that China recognises Jingphaw language and identity” (in Chinese, known as Jingpo). The KIO Education Department has already revised Jingphaw readers for primary level, and is working on other levels. The original Kachin readers were written during the British period, and need updating for the “smart-phone generation” (prevalent at least in urban areas).

Kachin education policy depends essentially on whether Kachin pursues a separate political identity, continues in parallel to the government (radical decentralisation/federalism) or develops a negotiated “convergence” with the government system. A respondent from Kachin State Democracy Party said: “If we have authority and power in the state, we will promote education in Kachin state. We will allow private schools to operate. We will update the school curriculum, update textbooks. We will train qualified teachers. Teachers’ current salary is too low, and needs to be increased in order to capture widespread corruption and ‘tuition fees’. Our main policy is to have a federal democratic state.”

The KIO has informed the government that it will submit a proposal about how they want to develop the education system in Kachin. Progress in this respect is doubtful in the short term, given the politics of the NCA and on-going armed conflict in Kachin areas.

In Kachin, there was much less support for the ‘need to know Burmese as a Union language’ than in Mon areas. Most interlocutors (although not all) thought that a focus on Jingphaw and English was needed, reflecting both the effect of the current conflict as well as the resurgent nationalist view that Kachin might not see itself as a

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<sup>48</sup> See Ashley South, *Burma’s Longest War: anatomy of the Karen conflict* (Transnational Institute/Burma Centre Netherlands 2011).

<sup>49</sup> This might also be due to the renewed conflict having united different Kachin groups.

part of the Union. Nevertheless, whilst the nationalist voices are very insistent, there were others who want more autonomy for Kachin State (including presumably its non-Kachin population), but who saw their future within the Union and therefore appreciate the need for children to learn Burmese.

A prominent Kachin development activist said (11/6/15) “Burmese is the Union language; bridging from ethnic languages to Burmese should take place in middle school, and most teaching from then on should be in Burmese with some continued use of ethnic languages and culture” (the ‘Mon model’). She went on to say that “Parents and students should have a choice of different schools—and ultimately it is up to them which ones to send their children to attend. In this kind of market, if schools have accreditation and issue recognised qualifications, parents can take this into account, e.g. in choosing between government and KIO schools; if not using government curriculum, schools should teach to international university entry, but of course not all parents can afford to send their children abroad, and therefore there should be some provision for sitting government exams.”

Discussions about the relationship between the various different types of non-government schools in Kachin State and the government system showed that respondents saw the systems as parallel and separate, both in terms of curricular development and language of instruction. A Kachin educator and churchman said: “the government should recognise KIO schools as private schools.”

### **3.4.3 KAREN**

In Karen-populated areas, the evolution of language and curriculum policy and practice has resulted in a situation where those who have attended government schools speak Burmese, whilst those from KED and refugee camp schools are not as fluent in Myanmar’s *lingua franca*. Whilst the KED wants to maintain its MTB education policy, there is an increasing recognition that post-ceasefire young people who want to go and study or work in Myanmar will find it difficult, as will those families from the camps who return home. Children from camps who do not know Burmese find it difficult to gain acceptance in government schools, and so often depend on the understanding and kindness of the local head teacher (and/or the payment of bribes).<sup>50</sup>

## **3.5 ‘Convergence’**

One of the key issues emerging from the peace process is the status and future of EAGs’ governance regimes and service delivery systems (which are often implemented in partnership with associated and/or affiliated civil society actors). Will education and other service delivery systems under the authority of EAGs (e.g. in the fields of health, access to justice, natural resource management, etc.) be gradually (or more rapidly?) displaced by the state system; continue in parallel with the government system; or undergo a process of ‘convergence’? This is a key issue for the political dialogue in the context of the peace process, and a negotiated political settlement to decades of armed and state-society conflict in Myanmar. However, interim arrangements have yet to be discussed in any detail, and there is a sense that there is little formal planning or communication between the parties so that most local arrangements are at present ad hoc.

### **3.5.1 MON**

Since the 1995 NMSP ceasefire, and especially over the past three years (since the ceasefire was renewed in early 2012), there has been a growing collaboration between state and non-state systems, in the field of education. At present (June 2015) students in the MNEC’s MNS schools in 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades sit government exams, officially as pupils of Associate Schools that have formed partnerships with nearby government schools (especially for those in the final two years of the three MNEC high schools).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Save the Children report forthcoming.

<sup>51</sup> In previous years, these students did relatively well in such examinations, but in 2015 only 22% passed (whereas with government school students, approximately 40% passed). The MNEC has arranged for some of these students to re-sit examinations.

There are a wide variety of views with regard to ‘converging’ the Mon and the government education system. All seem to agree that it is too early to do so, but the Mon education community seems divided as to whether this should even be a long-term aim. Clearly this depends on the conditions under which convergence would take place, but as the position of EAGs change, their administration will also have to be transformed. It is important that local education actors retain control over these changes, so that the Mon stakeholders can own them.

A senior Mon educator told us: “We really want good relations with the government system, and for government schools to accept our students when they transition, to be recognised by the government schools. We don’t want to merge with the government, but to be recognised by them and work together. We want equality with the government within the education system. In the long term, we could consider integrating with the government system, but not for now.”

When asked about ‘convergence’, a group of non-teachers said: “No thanks, MNS should continue to be managed by MNEC, but we are happy to receive salaries/funding from government.” In reality however, funding from the state is likely to come with various forms of control and regulation. Several Mon teachers talked about the importance of teaching Mon at primary school, both languages at middle school, and mostly Burmese at high school, so that children can sit government matriculation exams. This model is one that only MNS provide, and therefore maintaining these schools is of paramount importance to the local Mon speaking communities.

The NMSP (6/15) is very supportive of teaching ethnic languages at primary school “with just a little Burmese”; shifting to 50-50 at middle school, with high school mostly in Burmese, “plus some Mon.” “If the government would accept this model that would be very good for national reconciliation in Myanmar. Just teaching Mon as another subject language would not be enough.”

The government (new education law) has a typology of schools. Questions remain as to which category would best fit the MNEC’s Mon National Schools and how such decisions would affect funding.

Until two or three years ago, the relationship between UNICEF and non-state education providers such as MNEC was rather poor, as the UN agency was considered to be somewhat patronising and instrumental in its attitude to local education actors. Recently, the relationship has been much more constructive, with MNEC and other Mon educators expressing appreciation for UNICEF’s role in bridging and facilitating relationships with government education officials.<sup>52</sup> As part of a ‘bridging activity’ UNICEF provided small grants to 94 MNEC schools in 2015, via Ministry of Education Township Education Offices. This has been useful for local trust-building/peacebuilding, but is perceived by some local stakeholders as risking MNEC schools coming under pressure to become government schools (“an example of government ‘colonisation’ of our schools”). UNICEF has also facilitated the supply of government (Burmese language) textbooks to 10,000 children in MNEC’S MNS (Grades 1-5). UNICEF’s in-service government teacher training activities have also included MNEC teachers. (On UNICEF’s role in promoting State and Union-level ethnic language policy, see below.)

### **3.5.2 KACHIN**

Traditionally, as in the Mon system, children at KIO administered schools were able to sit the government exams in Grade 5 and Grade 9. However, since the resumption of armed conflict in mid-2011, this situation has changed quite dramatically. According to a prominent Kachin leader, if students from rural areas do not have a certificate to move to another school, it is impossible for them to enrol in government schools in urban areas. “In this academic year many students tried to transfer from rural schools to urban schools but were unable to. All 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade students need to have government examinations before they can transfer schools, but the Kachin State Government has decreed that those not on official lists cannot take the exam.”<sup>53</sup> This means that

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<sup>52</sup> Part of this was facilitated by UNICEF’s Mon Situational Analysis (SITAN) in 2013 and 2104, as part of research on bottlenecks for education and health service delivery in light of potential decentralization. One workshop in February 2014 brought Township and State Education officials together with MNEC senior staff to work out possible collaboration.

<sup>53</sup> The researchers were provided with copies of an official government decree to this effect.



a system that used to allow EAG and government education to collaborate has been broken, making the topic of ‘convergence’ quite thorny.<sup>54</sup>

No Kachin respondent seemed to think in terms of convergence—everyone was speaking in terms of separation between the government and Kachin education regimes. One Kachin educator said that: “in the future we hope we will have a federal policy and develop our curriculum.”

### **3.5.3 KAREN**

There have been policy-level and more practical discussions on convergence of service delivery in Karen State in the context of the 2012 KNU ceasefire. Such discussions are likely to be enhanced by the KNU’s signing of the NCA on 15 October 2015. According to a KNU interlocutor (August 2015), convergence has so far been more successful in health than education. A number of meetings have been held between KNU and associated civil society actors and Karen State government officials, and at least one Union-level meeting in Naypyidaw. Convergence in the health sector is relatively unproblematic, as health is not considered as sensitive (“big-P”) politically as education. Furthermore, with widespread drug-resistant malaria and tuberculosis understood as major threats to human security in Myanmar, there is a humanitarian and clinical imperative for convergence in the field of health.

Interlocutors from the KNU spoke of the challenges of integrating KNU/KED and government education systems. Nevertheless, recent meetings between the KED and (government) Karen State Education Department have made some progress, with an informal agreement that children (particularly those returning from refugee camps) can transfer to government schools. In order to be successful however, students transferring between the two systems will need support, as will the schools receiving them. Government schools often use ‘placement tests’ to refuse access to children, due to their limited competence in Burmese or the fact that they have followed a different curriculum. Whilst this is clearly unhelpful to already marginalised children, government schools do not have the resources to support children with language difficulties, in what are already overcrowded classroom conditions. Suggestions by local civil society leaders include for government Township and education officials to develop English as a Second Language type materials, for Burmese language assistance, to help support both students and receiving schools. In the meantime, the KNU and KNU/KNLA Peace Council are planning work with the Karen Literature and Culture Committees for Karen education activities (including fundraising).

## **3.6 Needs and challenges**

Teachers identified chronic needs in Myanmar’s ethnic education sector. Many educators stated that their principal need is for capacity building, including teacher training.<sup>55</sup> Other challenges included the need for better school buildings and furniture, not enough teachers for different subject areas (especially in high school), and therefore not enough time for proper preparation.

A need for better and more regular salaries was also expressed by many (especially Mon) teachers: “MNEC schools face difficulties because of salaries” (7/7/15). It remains unclear and contested who should pay for teacher salaries, and for teacher training and textbook development (and how)—the government, international donors, parents and the community, the relevant EAG, or some combination of the above?

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<sup>54</sup> In 2009 the KIO proposed that over the coming decade the KIO would converge a number of governance and service delivery functions with those of the government, including in the field of education. Although initially positively received, this proposal was shortly afterwards rejected in the context of the 2009-10 Border Guard Force crisis.

<sup>55</sup> Most EAG have their own pre-service teacher training arrangements, often supported by local NGOs (such as Shalom). Usually this kind of training is conducted over a few weeks or months, just before the teachers join a school or just after they have started teaching. However, the training does not compare to the two years that teachers in the government system receive in the Education Colleges. There are great variations with regard to in-service training across EAG and other non-state schools. MNEC teachers are now often invited to take part in UNICEF led in-service training together with government teachers. This however, is an exception, and showcases the start of a more collaborative system in Mon State.

### 3.6.1 IDP camp schools

There are a series of relatively well-established IDP settlements in areas under the control of Karen and Shan EAGs along the Thailand border (The Border Consortium 2015, Jolliffe 2015). Although less well-resourced than the refugee camps in Thailand, educational needs in these settlements are similar, including challenges in relation to ‘convergence’ of state and non-state educational regimes.

There are approximately (7/12/13) 60 schools in the IDP camps in KIO areas of control. International donor support appears to be drying up, resulting in an acute need for funding. In the IDP camps around Laiza, there are a few Shan and Bama families who can reportedly speak Jingphaw (Hpun Lum and Ye Jang IDP camps, visited 21/4/15). As noted above, teaching is mostly in Jingphaw, but most textbooks are in Burmese. IDPs told us that: “most original villages (and schools) are abandoned, with some having become Myanmar Army bases, and then they moved soldiers’ families to them.” Myanmar Army soldiers reportedly often base themselves in schools and churches, believing that this offers them some protection from the KIA. The impact of renewed armed conflict on education was demonstrated during a visit to Lawa Yang, on the “frontline” just outside of Laiza (21/4/15). All of the original villagers have been forced to flee, and the local primary school now constitutes a forward KIA base, just a kilometre or so from the first of a range of hills occupied by the Myanmar Army over the past year.

On the subject of returning to the original villages, one woman said: “you don’t want to die twice, we experienced rebuilding our village after the 1994 ceasefire, only to have to flee again in 2011; now we would need a guarantee of the peace process before returning home. For now it is too early to return home. We don’t want or trust the government here - we only recognise the KIO as our government.” It was also reported that some IDPs in government-controlled areas are reluctant to go back to their old villages, due to improved access to education in the new settlements (national NGO 5/15).

In 2013, the KIO established a new high school at Alen Bum (the old KIO headquarters area near Laiza) for IDPs from the nearby camps (visited 20/4/15). Kachin educators are expecting about 2,000 students for the 2015-16 school year, most of whom will be moving on from primary schools located in the nearby camps. Of the over 100 teachers, 60 are unpaid volunteers (“Kachin patriots”), with the rest receiving some salary from the KIO Education Department.

### 3.6.2 Accreditation

The issue of accreditation is extremely important (and quite controversial) for non-state schools. Put simply, the issue is which authority will issue qualifications to school graduates, and whether these can be recognised for further study or employment purposes in Myanmar and/or beyond.

While issues of ‘convergence’ are central to discussions around the current status and future of the MNEC’s Mon National Schools, accreditation is less of an issue here, as the ‘Mon model’ is based on MNS students sitting government exams and (upon graduation/matriculation) being able to enter the government/Union territory education system. Possible (future) models of Kachin accreditation include: affiliation with government schools (as in the MNEC ‘Mon model’); accreditation through the Kachin Theological College and Seminary or other non-government Myanmar institutions (KTCS has international accreditation, and could potentially look for accreditation for secondary education); focus on developing private schools and preparing for international exams; and possible study overseas (at least for elites).<sup>56</sup> Reportedly, KIO high school graduates can enter Indian and Chinese territory education institutions, without necessarily needing official government certificates, so for some interlocutors lack of accreditation is not such a pressing issue.

Accreditation is a particular issue for Karen and Karenni refugee camp students, and for those attending ‘community’/KED schools in KNU (and KNPP) areas of authority or influence inside Myanmar. Karen CBOs, and supportive international NGOs (statement reportedly forthcoming), are calling the government to recognise

<sup>56</sup> On the role of the KTCS, see Sadan (2013: 381-82).

refugee camp students and teachers' qualifications, and to develop a transition (or bridge) program, to help align (or 'converge') the government and KED education regimes.

The Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC) supports schools along the Thailand border (e.g. around Mae Sot) using Myanmar and Thai government curricula, followed by booster courses in the Myanmar syllabus for high school graduates, who can then sit government matriculation exams. Some have done so successfully, and are now studying (e.g.) at Pa'an College/University in Karen State. Although not a main focus of research for this report, initiatives which seek to bridge the Myanmar and Thai education systems and provide supplementary teaching to help students navigate these complex teaching environments represent a useful way forward.

### **3.7 Political and education reforms**

The Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) has resulted in a National Education Sector Plan (2016-21), which aspires, among other things, to achieve equity and inclusion in education.<sup>57</sup> This would commit the government to restructuring the education system from kindergarten through to 12 years of basic education in line with regional and international standards.

The new education law and broader political reforms have had both positive and negative impacts on ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar. In many (particularly conflict-affected) areas there is little knowledge, and even less appreciation, of new legislation and practices in the government education sector. It is clear that for many ethnic stakeholders the government still *is* the military. It will take generations to overcome such (well-grounded) perceptions of fear and mistrust. Few ethnic stakeholders, especially in conflict-affected areas, have much trust in the government-led educational or broader reform process.

In February 2015, the Union Parliament passed law on ethnic languages and cultures.<sup>58</sup> It is yet to be seen whether this legislation will have a significant impact on ethnic education.

#### **3.7.1 KACHIN**

Across most Kachin communities, there is little recognition that there is either an education reform or a wider reform process occurring. The KIO Chief Liaison Office said: "the government education system is corrupted and collapsed, and we are very far behind other developing and developed countries. From the KIO perspective, if we continue following this system we would be more degraded and fall further behind. Even though we don't have enough funds, we strive to educate our young people, even though we have conflict in our area."

Kachin language textbooks have not reached all the schools across Kachin, despite some being translated as a part of the CESR. Kachin Christian educators told us that: "there are government schools in remote areas, but many subjects (e.g. maths, geography, history) need to be translated into Kachin as the children don't understand Burmese. That is why we send volunteer teachers to these areas. Last year two women volunteer teachers in northern Shan State were raped.<sup>59</sup> The volunteers use government textbooks, in Burmese, but they have to explain in Kachin."

The Kachin IDP told us (21/4/15) that: "government education reforms are not sincere, and we don't want their schools here, as their school building is just a way of expanding their dominance. Here, the real government is the KIO." A prominent Kachin development worker and activist said (11/6/15): "ethnic education is not just about nationalist politics, but quality of teaching; government schools are very bad and there is a need for reform, including teacher training. There are gaps between educational access and quality in urban and rural areas."

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<sup>57</sup> At the time of writing, the National Education Sector Plan still needs to be confirmed by the government.

<sup>58</sup> *Promulgation of law protection the rights of ethnic people - Ethnic People's Rights Protection Law* (2015 Pyidaungsu Hluttaw Law No. 8), February 24, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> This refers to an incident on January 19-20 2015, when two Kachin Baptist Convention volunteer teachers were raped and murdered in Kawnghka-Chubuk village (Northern Shan State), allegedly by Myanmar Army soldiers.

### **3.7.2 MON**

Language and teaching policy in the state sector has been particularly well-developed during the reform period in Mon State. To a significant degree, this is because of the advocacy and application of representatives of the 2010 Mon political party, the All Mon Regions Democracy Party (AMDP). The Mon State parliament has a language policy committee, and the AMDP (especially Dr. Banya Aung Moe MP) has been advocating for ethnic language use in government schools at the national/Union (Naypyidaw) level. However, as with most of Myanmar's political actors, the two Mon political parties (AMDP and the Mon National Party), do not have detailed policies on education or language policy.

With some support from UNICEF, personnel from the MNEC and the Mon Literature and Culture Committee (MLCC, a long-established CBO) are working with government to produce a Mon Reader for students in government schools through to Grade 4 (so far, Grades 1-3 have been completed).<sup>60</sup> These materials are intended (8 and 9/15) for teaching in school hours. Last year Mon was taught in five or six Townships (including Ye and Mudon); this year, they are planning to teach in government schools in eight Townships. In some areas, government schools in Mon State (1/15) have started teaching Karen and PaO also during school hours (in kindergarten and 1-4 Standards).<sup>61</sup>

In the Karen context (6/15), Jubilee San Hla (the Bago Region Karen Affairs Minister) is overseeing the upgrading of Karen textbooks and readers for teaching Sgaw Karen after-hours in government schools. They have already completed Grades 1 and 2, and are working on Grades 3 and 4.

On the ground however, there are some worrying developments. The government has been building schools in villages close to Mon National Schools, supposedly to attract children and undermine the MNEC, e.g. in Yebyu Township (Tanintharyi Region) and Kya In Seik Kyi (Karen State). Teachers in government schools often do not speak the local language/s, creating further problems. Other complaints include (7/15) that MTB teaching in government schools is done just using translations from Burmese materials, whereas what is required is proper locally-produced resources.

Other key issues include how to relate EAG education (of various Types: see above) to national-level education reform. The Shalom Foundation (4/15) is working with several ethnic communities to identify key issues and national symbols and areas of interest to be included in subnational education curriculums—something possibly to be discussed in the forthcoming political dialogue, in the context of the peace process.

Fundamentally, there is a need for recognition of bilingual education at national/Union-level. To a degree, this is the case with the new education laws, but the problem as ever lies in application and implementation.

#### ***UNICEF and educational reform in Myanmar***

Since 2012, UNICEF have engaged the services of one of the world's leading language policy and planning experts, who also has considerable knowledge of the relationship between language and peace processes - Professor Joe Lo Bianco from the University of Melbourne. Professor Lo Bianco and UNICEF have implemented a research programme, including a series of 'facilitated language policy dialogues' with multiple stakeholders (including government), focusing on the development of language policies for Myanmar. These workshops have discussed a set of principles for language policy in Myanmar (the 'Naypyidaw principles'), with input from senior Department of Education officials and a wide range of ethnic education stakeholders (including the Thailand border-based Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education, MINE). In Mon State (and elsewhere) this initiative has resulted in the formation of a Technical Advisory Group and Steering Committee; it is hoped to establish a similar group and MTB education forum in Karen State. UNICEF is also involved (18/8/15) in language mapping in Mon State and elsewhere, and language teaching needs assessments. (On UNICEF's role in facilitating engagement between the government Department of Education and MNEC, see above.) In the field

<sup>60</sup> Textbook Committee members: Mawlamyine Education College, Mawlamyine University, government Ministry of Education officials, Jaopha and other CBOs, and MNEC.

<sup>61</sup> According to a Mon State government official, there are 382 government teachers who can teach Mon.

of coordination, UNICEF, MNEC, government officials and (some) CBOs attend a quarterly Mon State education meeting.

### 3.8 Links to the peace process

The peace process in Myanmar has had both positive and negative impacts on ethnic education and MTB teaching. Overall, there is a striking lack of connection between education issues and the politics of the peace process—other than experiences of government pushing into previously autonomous, ethnic nationality-populated areas, including through education provision and school building.

Chapter 6 of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA, which the KNU, but not the KIO or NMSP, has signed: see below) acknowledges the roles of signatory EAGs in the fields of education, health, natural resource management and security, and provides for international assistance in these sectors, in partnership and cooperation with the government.<sup>62</sup> The NCA signatory groups' administrative and service delivery roles having been acknowledged by the government, and they are now challenged to re-invent themselves as post-insurgent organisations. Those EAGs which have signed the NCA were removed from the Unlawful Associations (law 17/1), making their engagement with international development partners much easier.

Many of the key issues in relation to ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar need to be discussed as part of a structured multi-stakeholder debate, as part of a political dialogue, either coming out of the peace process (as envisaged in the NCA) or in relation to broader political reforms and elections in Myanmar. In the meantime, there is an urgent need to support EAG and associated civil society provision of education and other services, during the probably lengthy and contested “interim period” between the agreement of an NCA (and earlier bilateral ceasefires) and negotiation of a comprehensive political settlement. Although inherently sensitive and more ‘political’ than health issues, some of the needs and challenges in relation to education and language policy may constitute relatively ‘low hanging fruit’ in the peace process, i.e. topics which could be addressed post-NCA in fast-track talks, to provide concrete benefits to conflict-affected communities (‘peace dividends’), without necessarily requiring constitutional change (but rather, needing political will on the part of the stakeholders).

In the meantime, in the absence of such concrete and relatively political developments, numerous ethnic concerns in the peace process focus on education, and particularly the government’s use of service delivery to expand its authority in previously contested, conflict-affected areas. Examples of new government schools being built in contested areas include (9/14) construction of three new NATALA (Ministry of Border Affairs and Races) schools in NMSP Tavoy District, on the edge of areas controlled by the Mon armed group. Elsewhere, the Department of Education is reportedly building new state schools next to run-down MNEC schools. In this context, ethnic stakeholders are concerned that international aid agencies and donors are inadvertently supporting government strategy (practice) of pushing state structures into conflict-affected areas, without taking account of existing local activities and services, or the impacts on peace and conflict dynamics. The Mon State Chief Minister originally wanted to introduce government teachers into schools built by a Japanese donor, but this move was reportedly blocked by the NMSP.

A number of stakeholders (e.g. 5/15) made observations regarding the impacts of the 1995 NMSP ceasefire on education, positive (MNS graduates can join universities, more travel and freedom) and negative. Despite the general expansion of MNS since the ceasefire, some Mon National Schools have been forced to close, par-

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<sup>62</sup> Article 25 (“Work programs during the interim period”): “We recognize that all ethnic armed organizations who have signed are key parties responsible for promoting development, security, regional stability, and peace for civilians living in their respective states and regions. During the interim period of conducting and implementing peace negotiations, it is agreed to carry out the following programs and projects in consultation with each other in ceasefire areas. (1) Projects regarding the health, education and socio-economic development of civilians. (2) Environmental preservation. (3) Undertaking projects to preserve and promote ethnic culture and literature. (4) Matters regarding peace and stability, and the prevalence of rule of law in the states and regions. (5) The receiving of aid from donor communities both inside and outside the country for regional development and capacity-building projects. (6) Regional development and capacity building. (7) Work regarding the eradication of illicit drugs.”

ticularly in the decade before 2012 (e.g. Ye Township). A number of MNS are also facing financial difficulties, largely because the reforms and the peace process have reduced the available funding on the Thai border as international development partners support the Myanmar government. Nevertheless, assessments of the impact of the ceasefire on education were generally positive. As one Mon educator put it (30/5/15): “before the ceasefire, we had to be secret about our education activities, but now we can be more open.” A Mon villager said (7/15): “Before the 1995 ceasefire there were many clashes in this area, forced portering, land confiscation, forced labour, forced relocation, all of which is much less now; before, the Mon National Schools were secret and underground, but now they can teach openly. After the [February 2012] renewal of the NMSP-government ceasefire, we can travel more openly, with no fear of arrest. The Myanmar Army still sometimes visits (and stays in this monastery), but there are fewer abuses. Life is very much better after the 1995 ceasefire; after the 2012 renewal of ceasefire travel is easier and with fewer checkpoints.”

A senior NMSP leader (28/6/15) stated that: “Ethnic/mother tongue education should be a priority for EAGs in political dialogue. The NMSP should demand that minority children can receive mother tongue teaching in any school, at least through primary level. They should also demand teaching which promotes proper thinking skills.” However, many interlocutors were sceptical about the prospects for significant educational reform in the context of the peace process. A Mon CBO activist said (6/7/15): “promises made in the peace process are not valuable or significant, because they are not based on law.” Government and other interlocutors noted (7/7/15) the difficulty of working with the MNEC, as the NMSP (“the mother organisation”) is still illegal under 17/1 Illegal Associations Acts: “If there is an NCA and comprehensive ceasefire, it would be easier to work with them.” Interlocutors noted that if there is a nationwide ceasefire agreement this should result in the implementation of a Joint Monitoring Committee and Joint Political Dialogue Committee, and beginning of national multi-level little dialogues, which would include input on education.

In Karen State, plans are reportedly well-advanced for the creation of nine new (government) sub-townships, with international (primarily Japanese) donor support. These new settlements are reportedly intended for returning refugees, and include newly constructed schools and other facilities (9/2015).<sup>63</sup> The Karen State Chief Minister (now resigned) reportedly (8/15) told a prominent European donor only to build government-approved schools, but in reality many of the teachers in these new buildings are from the KNU’s KED. In Toungoo District (12/14), KNU 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade is running a school in a government/mixed control area (with semi-official permission), in a manner which would not previously have been possible during the highly antagonistic period before the ceasefire.

The KIO has stated (19/4/15) that international agencies working in Kachin should engage with the Joint Strategic Team of nine Kachin CBOs so that the changes are owned locally. A prominent Kachin political leader said he tried to raise education issues at the policy level in the NCTT, but received little positive response. There is a need for EAGs to develop policies in relation to education, for forthcoming political dialogue. Prior to the resumption of armed conflict in 2011, the KIO did make concrete proposals to the government, but without a positive response.

According to a Kachin church leader, “Education is very important within the peace process. The KIO is aware of this, and is primarily concerned with politics (not money like the Myanmar Army); they have a demonstrated willingness to listen to communities.” Another Kachin Christian educator expressed the hope that: “when the peace talk is more developed, discussion of education will emerge in political dialogue.” Similar hopes were expressed by other Kachin civil society (and political party) actors.

As noted above, there is a wide range of opinions among Kachin stakeholders regarding the politics of education. The NDAK Kachin ceasefire group (Border Guard Force) mentioned that after their 1989 ceasefire with the government they built a number of schools with state support.

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<sup>63</sup> See South and Jolliffe (2015).

## Section FOUR : Findings and Policy Options

### 4.1 Main findings

#### The importance of MTB teaching

Schooling in ethnic mother tongues is valuable in a multi-ethnic country like Myanmar, for both pedagogic (educational) and political reasons. Many interviewees talked about the strong link between using ethnic languages and pride in and maintenance of ethnic identity. Ethnic nationality people also talked about the perceived and experienced policy of forced assimilation on the part of the Myanmar state and Army. Many ethnic stakeholders still regard the government as the military. It will take generations to overcome such perceptions of fear and mistrust.

Recent developments in education and broader political reforms in Myanmar have seen the beginnings of introducing MTB teaching into government schools. In some areas (e.g. parts of Mon State) this has included increasing the teaching of ethnic languages during school hours—one of the main demands of many ethnic nationalists. This can be regarded as a very positive development, although many ethnic stakeholders see this as only a relatively small step in the right direction. As yet, there has been no progress towards teaching subjects in government schools in ethnic languages.

Most stakeholders agreed that ethnic nationality schoolchildren in Myanmar should learn Burmese (*Bama saga*) - and perhaps English – as a common language (*lingua franca*). To be effective, other subjects should be taught in the mother tongue, at least at the primary level, rather than just teaching the mother tongue (L1) as a subject-lesson in the curriculum. A range of opinions exist regarding the use of MTB teaching in government schools. Many stakeholders would like to see MTB teaching in ethnic languages at primary level, along with some teaching of Burmese, with transition in middle school to mostly teaching in Burmese, while keeping modules for the ethnic nationality language and culture/history through until the end of high school. There are also voices (for example in Kachin, see below) that reject teaching and learning in Burmese totally, wanting to replace Burmese with English.

The promotion of MTB teaching in schools raises questions regarding who would pay for teachers and classroom materials, and how to find suitably qualified and experienced teachers. Several stakeholders complained about the quality of ethnic nationality materials currently used in schools, which often are translations from Burmese language books, not considered to adequately reflect the culture and history of minority communities.

#### A fragmented policy environment

It often seems that key stakeholders in ethnic education in Myanmar only engage substantively with others in their network who share similar values and political approaches. This leads to a somewhat siloed, contentious and politically fragmented approach to education, which reflects elements of the broader Myanmar political culture. Positions regarding the provision of education are often polarised, as is the case in wider political debates.

#### Language policy and practice, and conflict

Language and education policy and practice are deeply implicated in ethnic conflicts in Myanmar. Since at least the advent of military rule in 1962, the state has been perceived, and experienced, as pursuing a more-or-less explicit and conscious project of forced assimilation vis-a-vis ethnic nationality communities. Ethnic nationality elites (EAGs and civil society actors) have resisted 'Burmanisation' through a number of strategies, including armed conflict and the development of education regimes which preserve and reproduce their languages and cultures, under often very difficult circumstances. As indicated in TABLE 1, there is a great variety of non-state ethnic education regimes in Myanmar. The relationship between locally-owned and delivered education regimes and EAGs varies considerably, on a case-by-case/group-by-group basis. In addition to the important leading roles of political elites, non-state education regimes should also be understood as organic parts of broader societies in non-government-controlled areas.

There is a direct correlation between conflict and how people feel about what language and curriculum their children are taught. Armed conflict makes parents and communities less inclined to accept government schools and Burmese language education—rather, conflict is an incentive to create separate (or parallel) systems, both in language and curricular content. Education regimes developed by or under the authority of EAGs are shaped by peace and conflict dynamics, tending to be more separatist in character when conflict is rife, and less separatist (more willing to engage, and perhaps integrate with state systems) when ceasefires are in place. Therefore, conflict and peace are key variables in shaping education policy and practice in ethnic areas, and education is also a key variable in the peace process. To the extent that ethnic education regimes reflect more ‘separatist’ or ‘pro-union’ sentiments, they also play roles in socialising children into such attitudes and understandings.

In the Kachin context, the resumption of armed conflict since 2011 has led to greater pan-Kachin unity, and cohesion around an ethno-linguistic core, identified particularly with Jingphaw identity (a finding confirmed in numerous interviews and focus groups, in April-May and October 2015). Significant elements among non-Jingphaw communities seem not to object to adopting this dominant dialect as a Kachin *lingua franca*, although some sub-groups find the dominance of Jingphaw problematic. Many members of the ethno-linguistically diverse Kachin community are deeply hurt and angry at the Myanmar Army’s brutal anti-insurgency campaign. Associated with massive and widespread human rights abuses, the renewed fighting has alienated those in the community who previously were willing to consider a future as part of Myanmar. Since the resumption of armed conflict, KIO-administered schools are switching more to Kachin and English, and teaching less Burmese. This is part of a general move to disengage from the government education system, and to develop a more distinctively Kachin school system.

The Karen National Union (KNU) agreed a preliminary ceasefire with the government in January 2012, bringing to an end more than 60 years of armed conflict. Over several decades, the KNU-administered Karen Education Department (KED) has developed an impressive education system based on the efforts of Karen communities and with support from international donors and NGOs (including some of those who supported refugees in neighbouring Thailand for many years). Well-suited to local needs, and containing much good practice, this system diverges significantly from the government education regime, not least through the promotion of Karen (mostly Sgaw) language and culture-identity, with only a limited focus on Burmese language. Lacking recognised qualifications, KED school graduates often find it difficult to enter the government education system, or access other opportunities in Myanmar or abroad. In the context of the KNU ceasefire, and an emerging peace process which is likely to include the return and reintegration of displaced communities, Karen educators are considering the future of the KED education regime and its relationship to government.

In contrast, the NMSP agreed on a ceasefire with the government in 1995, which despite considerable tensions has held for two decades. In this context, the NMSP’s Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) has developed an education regime in which the mother tongue is used at primary level, transitioning to Burmese at middle school, and more-or-less following the government curriculum. Graduates of the MNEC’s Mon National Schools speak fluent Mon, but can also sit Burmese language government matriculation exams. For students who transition to government schools, this is sometimes difficult, not so much because of language problems, but because of occasional problems with acceptance by the government school system and teachers (political and cultural issues).

#### Ceasefires, ethnic education and MTB teaching; ‘federalism from below’

Our previous research (Lall and South 2013) described and analysed how ceasefires (particularly in the Mon context) allowed ethnic education systems to expand into government-controlled areas and offer MTB education to more children. Ceasefires between the government and EAGs have generally resulted in greater collaboration between state and non-state systems. However, many ethnic nationality stakeholders remain concerned that MTB teaching is still largely absent from government schools. There are also concerns that the government is using ceasefires to expand its authority into previously inaccessible, conflict-affected areas, including through school-building and the provision of teachers to remote communities.



In the context of their respective ceasefires (in 1994 and 1995), the KIO and NMSP expanded their education systems, under difficult circumstances and with very limited funding. In the Mon context, notwithstanding a range of views regarding the peace process and broader reforms in Myanmar, there is a growing convergence in relation to ethnic education and MTB teaching between state and non-state regimes and systems. The MNEC curriculum is broadly the same as that in government schools, with additional modules on Mon history and language. In the Karen context, and increasingly in Kachin, there is a significant gap between the locally-owned and implemented education system and that of the state.

Despite great difficulties in securing resources (both financial and human), the KIO, NMSP and Karen/KNU school systems are locally-owned and delivered, and support MTB teaching particularly at primary level. Non-state (EAG and community-based) education regimes are concrete examples of ethnic self-determination in Myanmar, in a context where elite-level political discussions around the peace process have yet to begin in a substantive manner, and which are likely to be drawn out over a considerable period of time. This approach to education (one of the key issues of concern to ethnic communities) might be termed ‘federalism from below’, inasmuch as ethnic education systems represent concrete examples, or living images, of what federal political and administrative arrangements for a future Myanmar might look like and how they might function. We argue that ethnic education regimes in Myanmar are ‘building federalism from the bottom up’, with local stakeholders developing their own systems of education governance, in the absence of an elite-level political settlement.

It remains necessary for issues of language and education policy to be addressed as part of a structured political dialogue, which most ethnic stakeholders hope will lead to a federal settlement to decades of ethnic and state-society conflict in Myanmar. Of course, federalism as a concept in political science and constitutional arrangements has a long history, with an extensive literature including structural arrangements between different subnational segments. While ethnic communities in Myanmar may not have such intra/inter-communal considerations in mind when devising their education systems, there is nevertheless a strong element here of self-determination, speaking to one of the main aims and struggles of ethnic nationality communities during decades of conflict in Myanmar. We further argue that different stakeholders’ positions on language policy (in schools, and broader governance) are good indicators of where these actors stand on a range of issues in relation to the peace process (see below).

The peace process in Myanmar has had both positive and negative impacts on ethnic education and MTB teaching. Overall, there is a lack of connection between education issues and the politics of the peace process—other than widespread local resentment of government pushing its authority into previously autonomous, ethnic nationality-populated areas, including through education provision and school building. Ethnic stakeholders are concerned that international aid agencies and donors are, perhaps inadvertently, supporting a government strategy of pushing state structures into conflict-affected areas without taking account of existing local activities and services or the impacts on peace and conflict dynamics.

Chapter 6 of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA, which the KNU, but not the KIO or NMSP, has signed, see below) acknowledges the roles of signatory EAGs in the fields of education, health, natural resource management and security, and provides for international assistance in these sectors, in partnership and cooperation with the government.<sup>64</sup> The NCA signatory groups’ administrative and service delivery roles having been acknowledged by the government are now challenged to re-invent themselves as post-insurgent organisations. Those EAGs which have signed the NCA were removed from the Unlawful Associations (law 17/1), making their engagement with international development partners much easier.

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<sup>64</sup> Article 25 (“Work programs during the interim period”): “We recognize that all ethnic armed organizations who have signed are key parties responsible for promoting development, security, regional stability, and peace for civilians living in their respective states and regions. During the interim period of conducting and implementing peace negotiations, it is agreed to carry out the following programs and projects in consultation with each other in ceasefire areas. (1) Projects regarding the health, education and socio-economic development of civilians. (2) Environmental preservation. (3) Undertaking projects to preserve and promote ethnic culture and literature. (4) Matters regarding peace and stability, and the prevalence of rule of law in the states and regions. (5) The receiving of aid from donor communities both inside and outside the country for regional development and capacity-building projects. (6) Regional development and capacity building. (7) Work regarding the eradication of illicit drugs.”

As noted, many of the key issues in relation to ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar need to be discussed as part of a structured multi-stakeholder debate, as part of a political dialogue, either coming out of the peace process (as envisaged in the NCA) or in relation to broader political reforms and elections in Myanmar. In the meantime, there is an urgent need to support EAG and associated civil society provision of education and other services, during the probably lengthy and contested ‘interim period’, between the agreement of an NCA (and earlier bilateral ceasefires) and negotiation of a comprehensive political settlement. Although more ‘political’ and inherently sensitive than health issues, some of the needs and challenges in relation to education and language policy may constitute relatively ‘low hanging fruit’ in the peace process: topics which could be addressed post-NCA in fast-track talks, to provide concrete benefits to conflict-affected communities (‘peace dividends’).

Language and education policies: proxies for broader political positions

Positions in relation to language and education policy, including especially the appropriate medium/s of instruction, indicate (or reflect) the identities and interests of different stakeholders, in terms of the kind of country they imagine Myanmar to be, and vis-a-vis the peace process. Debates regarding the status and future of ethnic education reveal positions regarding the appropriate relationships between State and Union governments and ethnic nationality polities. The following table illustrates this proposition. These are ‘ideal types’, with actual positions varying on a case-by-case basis.

**TABLE 2: Mapping positions on language and schooling, and political demands**

Political demand	Schools	Language in governance
Independence for ethnic polities (secession, separatism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently-owned, administered and financed schools (perhaps under EAG authority).</li> <li>• Focus on ethnic languages (and English, Chinese?); less (but not necessarily zero) Burmese language provision.</li> <li>• Curriculum significantly different to government.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of ethnic language/s in government administration (justice system etc.).</li> <li>• Limited use of Burmese; some use of English, Chinese?</li> </ul>
‘Strong federalism’ (radical autonomy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independently administered and financed schools (perhaps with funds from Union government).</li> <li>• Focus on ethnic languages (and English) <i>and</i> Burmese.</li> <li>• Curriculum related to Union government, but with significant local variation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Burmese (common Union language, <i>lingua franca</i>) and ethnic language/s in government administration (justice system etc.).</li> </ul>

<p>‘Weak federalism’ (decentralisation) - ‘Union Ethnic Nationalities’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools could be either government-run (in context of nationwide education reform), or locally administered; significant finance from State and/or Union government.</li> <li>• Burmese language, and ethnic languages (and English?) - as subjects rather than medium of instruction.</li> <li>• Curriculum based on Union government, but with some local variation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burmese as primary national language (<i>lingua franca</i>); some provision for ethnic language/s in government administration.</li> </ul>
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Ethnic nationalist (EAG, but also civil society and community-led) activities in the field of education are representative of broader struggles for self-determination. Ethnic responses to ‘Burmanisation’ and centralisation may be plotted along a continuum ranging from demands for outright independence from a Union for which many ethnic people feel little sympathy (secession, or separatism), through varying forms of autonomy and decentralisation (varieties of federalism). At one end of this spectrum would be the ‘Union Karen’ (Thawng-mung 2008, South 2008) and other ethnic groupings, which while self-identifying with their ethnic community, nevertheless express a fairly strong association with the Union.

In relation to education, separatist agendas can be represented by schools featuring little or no Burmese language teaching, using a curriculum often radically different to that of the state, taught in local languages. A more federalist approach would be represented by the promotion of MTB teaching in schools which also teach Burmese, and broadly follow the government curriculum (modified according to local contexts and conditions). In relation to school ownership and administration, the former positions demand locally-owned schools, administered by ethnic political authorities (EAGs, or otherwise). A more federalist approach could also imply non-state school ownership, but with a curriculum and administration linked to the government system—or could mean greater focus on MTB teaching (and instruction in appropriate local cultures and history) in schools which could nevertheless be part of the state system. In addition to the politics of these positions, important practical considerations remain regarding, for example, accreditation and funding.

We argue that positions in relation to education can be taken as proxies of different actors’ views regarding a broader range of state-society issues, and the distribution of power and resources between the central government and ethnic polities. In this framing, the NMSP (MNEC) model can be seen as achieving a fairly high degree of local self-determination in education, while retaining strong links to the (hopefully future federal) Union. This was previously the case with the KIO system, which under pressure of the resumption of armed conflict seems to be moving towards a more separatist model, similar to that adopted historically by the KNU (which may nevertheless be undergoing significant changes).

Similar mapping may be applied to positions in relation to language use and policy in schools, and in governance functions more broadly. Most stakeholders seem to accept the necessity (or desirability) of teaching children Burmese, as a common/Union language or *lingua franca* (in some cases together with English, due to its international status). The degree or manner in which Burmese and/or ethnic languages (with the emphasis on the plural, as explored below) should be used for public administration, government and legal processes are indicators of how different actors view the distribution of power between the (Burman) centre and (ethnic) periphery in a reforming Myanmar. These positions can be taken as rough proxies for other sectors, for example, in relation to natural resource management and revenue sharing and distribution between the Union government and ethnic States. For example, those who seek to use ethnic languages as a primary medium of governance and administration in ethnic States can be expected to adopt strong/maximalist positions regard-

ing the degree of natural resource revenue and other financial and political goods which should be retained at, and/or redistributed to, the local/State level—and in extreme cases may argue for complete separation of the ethnic polities from the Union. Moderates may adopt positions according to which ethnic languages are used together with Burmese, or in a supplementary manner at the State level,—corresponding to varying degrees of autonomy or decentralisation, including various forms of federalism. While such arguments are rarely explicit among ethnic educators or activists, exploring different positions in relation to language and education can help to reveal the kind of country people imagine Myanmar to be, and their hopes (and concerns) regarding the peace process and broader political transition. Within this discussion, further reflection is required on the position of ‘minorities within minorities’—ethnic communities with different identities (usually reflected in different language uses) to those of the locally dominant minority (e.g. Kachin linguistic sub-groups, the variety of Karen ethno-linguistic communities), and their possible vulnerability in the context of a potentially totalising dominant local ethnic/national identity.

#### Educational reforms, elections and the peace process; ‘convergence’

The state’s unwillingness to countenance the existence (or support the development) of locally-owned education regimes is changing. The U Thein Sein government has promoted significant reforms in education, including elements of decentralisation. Discussion and reforms in regard to education policy and decentralisation have opened some space for MTB education in government schools, although not to the degree demanded by most ethnic educators. While it is increasingly possible to teach ethnic languages in government schools, there is as yet very little practice of teaching other subjects in mother tongues.

What has not yet been considered in any depth, however, is the relationship between state and non-state basic education provision in conflict-affected areas, and how this relates to the peace process. As noted, and explored further below, Chapter 6 of the NCA acknowledges signatory EAG’s authority in a number of fields, including education. If and when political dialogue begins, either as a result of the peace process or as framed by parliamentary politics, education issues are expected to constitute a major current of debate. Thus far, those engaged in the broader movement of political reform in Myanmar have largely addressed education and peacebuilding as separate issues; likewise, state, international (donor) and other actors in the peace process have for the most part ignored issues of language and education.

The November 2015 elections in Myanmar presented an opportunity to discuss these issues on the national political stage, and bring them onto the (crowded and contested) agenda of the future government. Ethnic political parties in Myanmar have a particular role to play in this respect. Thus far however, issues of ethnic education and MTB teaching have been largely absent from the (limited) policy discussions around the elections. Likewise, while education and language policy are key concerns of ethnic communities, most EAGs have yet to work at detailed positions on these issues.

One of the key issues emerging from the peace process is the status of and future EAGs’ governance regimes, and service delivery systems, which are often implemented in partnership with associated and/or affiliated civil society actors. Will education and other service delivery systems under the authority of EAGs be gradually (or more rapidly) displaced by the state system, continue in parallel with the government system, or undergo a process of ‘convergence’? This key issue has yet to be discussed much in relation to ‘interim arrangements’ covering the period between the agreement of ceasefires (including the NCA) and a final negotiated political settlement to decades of armed and state-society conflict in Myanmar.

#### Needs

The main needs expressed by teachers and other stakeholders interviewed during our research were for regular salaries; better teacher training; improved school buildings and furniture, and more appropriate teaching materials. Another key need is for accreditation of schools adopting different curricula and language policies to those of the government system (e.g. KNU/KED schools, and increasingly also in Kachin).

Needs are particularly acute among displaced communities, including refugees in neighbouring countries, and IDPs. The renewal of conflict between government forces and the KIO has had a direct impact on the education of tens of thousands of children, as has been the case for many decades across much of southeast Myanmar. Due to particular vulnerabilities as a result of their status as forced migrants, refugee and IDP schools and children have special needs for assistance and protection, as specified in international (1952 and 1967) refugee law, and the (1999) UN *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*.

## 4.2 Policy Options/Recommendations

- A sustainable resolution to Myanmar's long-standing state-society and ethnic conflicts will be difficult to achieve without significant education and language policy reforms. Consider negotiating the relationship between state and non-state education systems, and where possible oversee their gradual convergence, in the context of a reforming state system, which itself should move more towards a federal relationship between the central government and ethnic States. The other main need is for the introduction of MTB teaching in all (particularly government) schools, so that non-Burmese speaking children can be taught most subjects in their own language (L1), at least through primary school.
- There are understandable historic reasons for the emergence of separate education systems, often developed under EAG authority in areas affected by armed conflict, using curricula different from government schools, and teaching Burmese only as a subject-lesson. Such efforts to provide MTB teaching demonstrate the commitment of communities and other stakeholders to provide education under often very difficult circumstances. However, these separate systems have some distinct disadvantages: limited options for school graduates if they cannot speak Burmese and have no recognised qualifications (difficult to work or study in Myanmar); and difficulty for graduates of these schools to reintegrate with Burma, or consider themselves citizens of the Union. There is also an equity issue here: separate systems marginalise already poor and vulnerable communities. A system of accreditation and transfer should be negotiated that includes Burmese language training for those who want to join government schools. The administration of such a transfer (or bridging) program needs to be made as simple as possible, and government teachers should not be expected to bridge the language deficit without proper support.

“Ethnic schools, IDP schools, monastic or other, need recognition by the government, so students can switch to the same grade, with the help of special language upgrading classes. They [the government] need to make rules for this, so that this arrangement is spread throughout the country. There are no rules at the moment and no recognition.”<sup>65</sup>

- Stakeholders expressed a range of opinions in relation to ethnic education and MTB teaching in Myanmar. Many prefer the following model: teaching a curriculum broadly similar to that of the government, but with extra modules on ethnic history and culture; teaching in local languages through primary school, switching more to Burmese at middle school, and in high school mostly teaching in Burmese (with the mother tongue as a taught subject), i.e. the MNEC ‘Mon model’. The main advantage is that graduates can switch between government and non-government schools (particularly in Grades 5 and 9), become fluent in both the mother tongue and Burmese, and receive recognisable qualifications.<sup>66</sup>
- Locally-owned schools are concrete examples of self-determination in practice (‘federalism from below’). Consider recognising these schools as part of the government’s commitment to Education for

<sup>65</sup> As per the Methodology section, we conducted dissemination events in Myitkyina and Mawlamyine and in KIO and NMSP areas, in October and December 2015, in order to triangulate and receive feedback on our findings and recommendations. The quotes illustrating policy options are taken from participants in these two events.

<sup>66</sup> However, for KIO schools that have been teaching the government curriculum, the resumption of armed conflict in 2011 has led to state authorities removing the transfer option. This is a very serious development, which effectively excludes children in KIO schools from transferring to government schools, and effectively bars KIO high school graduates from entering state tertiary education institutes.

All.<sup>67</sup> Otherwise, consider offering alternative education in these areas—something which would be very difficult to achieve without damage to the peace process, and greatly increasing funding requirements for education in ethnic areas. Given the government’s commitment to providing quality education in local languages to ethnic nationality communities, partnerships should be developed between state and non-state education providers in remote and conflict-affected areas. The status of independent ethnic schools needs to be negotiated as part of the peace process; they will not fit easily into the ‘private school’ sector. In the meantime, in the process of greater decentralisation and on-going political dialogue regarding the future of state-society relations in Myanmar, consider providing government funds for teacher salaries and building maintenance in non-state schools.

“The world is a global village. We want our children to speak Mon, and they need the Burmese language also, because that is the language of the government. For future opportunities, we need to teach them English as well. We cannot focus only on Mon. At primary level, all three languages should be included.”

- Reform of the state education sector is already underway, and likely to continue in the future. In several States (e.g. Mon), local languages are being introduced as a taught subject in government primary schools. Reforms need to move towards MTB teaching (teaching other subjects *in* ethnic languages, using MT as a medium), and towards greater local control and ownership of education (decentralisation). This could include the training and hiring of teachers who have links to EAG schools, yet without ‘poaching’ them from local school systems. The best way forward may be to expand the ‘mixed school system’ across areas with ethnic majority populations, and agree locally how much time in primary school should be spent teaching in the mother tongue.

“If the government really wants peace, they need to accept real federalism, including in education. If the national curriculum is linked with ethnic education systems, then there can be common standards and quality control.”

- These issues need to be addressed, and policy worked out, during structured, multi-stakeholder political dialogue, either as framed by the peace process, or as part of broader political reforms in Myanmar. Such debates will need to address issues of resourcing—finding the necessary human and financial capital (and political will).

“If we use our mother tongue in schools, this is practicing federalism. Donors should know that we are working for change. They should also support non-government groups’ efforts in the field of education.”

“Our community does not believe in government education. The education that we are striving for today is leading to separation, not federalism. Our schools will teach and use whatever curriculum they want to. The government does not recognise these schools. What should be done in the future?”

- In the interim, while negotiations and political struggles to reform the state education system are underway, it remains important to support and further improve non-state education regimes. Consider recognising and supporting, or at least encourage donors to fund, locally-owned education systems, based on commonly agreed minimum educational standards. At some point, this issue will need to be addressed, not least because of the large number of private schools in Yangon and Mandalay, etc. Regardless, MTB issues will remain of paramount importance to ethnic communities.

“Ask donors why, if ethnic systems are working well, they don’t provide proper funding? They should give directly [to ethnic school systems], and not in drips and drabs. Donors should offer a percentage [of the aid provided to] government, for the State level and for the ethnic groups’ education systems. This should be transparently divided and worked out. The government is using [the aid] for their own benefit. That is not acceptable.”

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<sup>67</sup><http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Myanmar/Myanmar%20EFA%20implementation%20and%20Tentative%20Follow%20up%20workplan.pdf>

“If we have the power to mould education, we will take all religious practice out of the school. The current government is putting their religion, culture and language in the curriculum. That is Burmanisation. If necessary, we should have mission schools for our religious education.”

- The main ethnic nationality languages should be recognised as official languages of the relevant States, in public administration and access to justice, as well as schooling. Resources should be made available to develop teaching materials and expertise in these languages.

“We should not hate Burmese, we need to speak Burmese for the Union, but we need Mon as an official language also.”

“Every university in Myanmar should have one ethnic language department. If they don’t have research, the language won’t last.”

- Further research and discussion is required regarding the status of, and educational opportunities for, ‘minorities within minorities’ in Myanmar’s heterogeneous society.

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