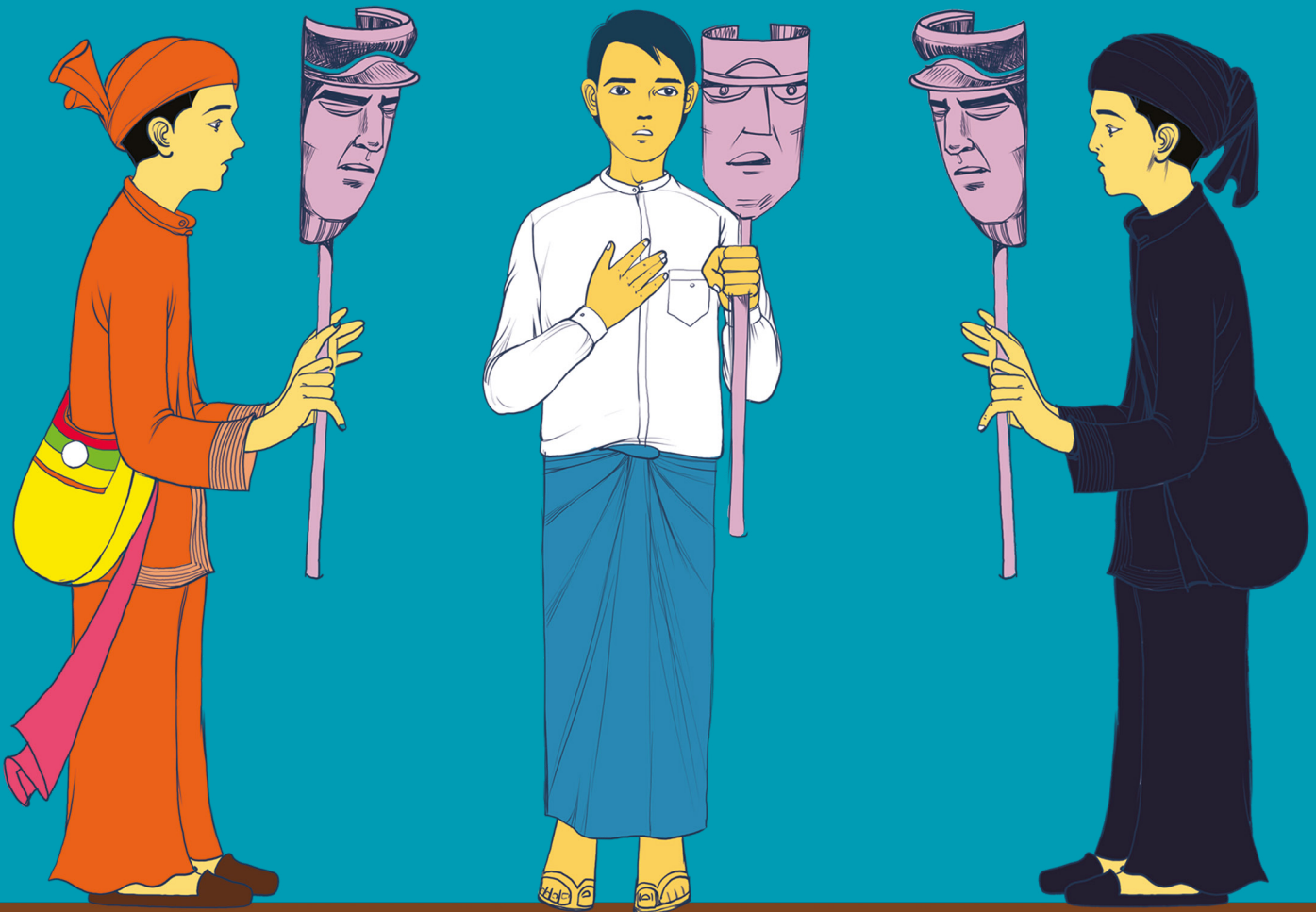


Behind the masks

Masculinities, gender, peace and security in Myanmar



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Behind the masks

Masculinities, gender, peace and
security in Myanmar

Jana Naujoks and Myat Thandar Ko

November 2018

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Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organisation
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
EAO	Ethnic armed organisation
EBO	Euro Burma Office
FGD	Focus group discussion
GAD	General Administration Department
GBV	Gender-based violence
GPS	Gender, peace and security
IDP	Internally displaced people
JMC	Joint Monitoring Committee
KII	Key informant interview
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
LGBTQ	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer
NCA	National Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	National League for Democracy
PNA	Pa-O National Army (military wing of the PNO)
PNLO	Pa-O National Liberation Organisation
PNO	Pa-O National Organisation
PTE	Phan Tee Eain (Creative Home)
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
SAZ	Self-Administered Zone
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SOGI	Sexual orientation and gender identity
SSA	Shan State Army
SSR	Security sector reform
TGO	Thingaha Gender Organisation
UPC	Union Peace Process
UPDJC	Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee

Executive summary

Myanmar, once mysterious to the world after its decades' long isolation, is marked by diversity and multiple ethnicities, languages and religions. It has been affected by decades of an authoritarian regime and different interconnected layers of conflict, ranging from national-level ethnic political conflicts and the pro-democracy struggle to broader social-level land conflicts and conflicts at the household level, such as domestic violence. In Myanmar, as in other countries, conflict and violence affect men, women, boys, girls and those with diverse gender identities differently.

There is increasing awareness that gender is important in understanding conflict and accumulating evidence that links inclusion to the sustainability of peace. A growing number of programmes are dedicated to addressing this. However, the 'other side of gender', that is, the experiences of men and boys, is less well understood. Expectations of masculinity are an often overlooked (or over-simplified) driver of conflict and peacebuilding, but can also, if sometimes counter-intuitively, lead to increased vulnerability for men and boys, especially related to violence.

This is important because masculinity norms can be mobilised or manipulated into violent action by elites – for instance, by invoking the expectations on men to be protectors of their community from perceived external threats. Conflict analyses and interventions that overlook this gender dimension are incomplete, and they could miss entry points for peace or misunderstand the full impacts of their intervention. Peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be effective if they consider comprehensive analysis of the conflict dynamics which identifies the dual impact of gender norms on conflict and of conflict on social gender norms.

This report aims to analyse conflict, armed actors and peacebuilding efforts from a comprehensive gender analysis perspective, considering the different impacts of conflict on women, men and those with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI) in Myanmar.

Key Findings

The two case study locations of southern Shan state and Tanintharyi region provide examples of the different types of vulnerabilities that men experience, such as:

- challenges of living up to the social expectations of providing for the family and donating to religious and social causes;
- challenges faced by non-binary men who do not comply with strict social gender norms;
- political imprisonment in dire conditions with lasting physical and socio-economic impacts;
- vulnerability to armed violence and conscription into armed groups, with veterans of both state and non-state armed groups facing particular challenges related to economic issues, social status and enduring influence of military indoctrination shaping social interactions;
- forced labour or forced portering, for which there was never any recognition of the harm caused or any compensatory, restorative measures.

A forthcoming report, 'Pulling the strings: Masculinities, gender and social conflict in Myanmar' will cover vulnerabilities related to more local-level conflicts, including land conflicts, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), substance abuse and migration.

The dual expectations on men to protect and provide for their family, linked with efforts to maintain or increase their status, can drive engagement in armed violence or, conversely, in peace efforts. The gap between the social expectations on men and their lived experiences can negatively affect men's psychosocial well-being and drive harmful behaviours. The harmful psychosocial consequences of frontline combat and economic challenges are issues to be considered when designing demobilisation and reintegration programmes, to support former combatants to find non-violent livelihoods. A comprehensive gender analysis should form the basis of such a programme design.

The focus of many women's organisations has been on counting the number of women participants in the peace process, advocating for a 30% quota and highlighting the pervasive issue of sexual violence in conflict. There has been less of a focus on integrating gender across the five political dialogue sectors. This should not always take the form of standalone, women-focused activities: the peace process would be considerably strengthened by applying a strong gender analysis across the sectors, from the social sector to the economic, natural resource management and security sectors. A stronger analysis of the different gendered experiences in these sectors increases the likelihood of addressing the varied needs and priorities of the diverse stakeholder groups. It also increases the likelihood of reaching a sustainable and inclusive peace agreement. This is not a job for women only: men can be actively involved in this analysis and in promoting gender equality of the process.

The implementation of any eventual peace agreement will also need to be monitored in terms social inclusion and gendered impacts. The current focus by women's organisations on women's participation runs the risk of encountering backlash or resistance against programming that is perceived to be neglecting men and their concerns. By considering all genders, it can illustrate more clearly why gender matters to men as well as women in the conflict and post-conflict phases – and why both should play an active role in creating a more peaceful and gender equitable Myanmar.

Key recommendations to government, ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and civil society actors supporting peace and security processes in Myanmar

- Promote gender equality and diversity as being central to peace and peacebuilding.
- Ensure that gender mainstreaming involves more than just 'adding women' – it should be based on comprehensive gender analysis at the beginning, for implementation planning and monitoring of gendered impacts.
- Recognise men's gendered identities and how expectations drive their behaviour choices, whether violent behaviour in conflict or peacebuilding behaviour.
- Recognise and address male vulnerabilities, such as those of men with disabilities, non-binary men, former political prisoners and forced labourers, displaced and internal migrants as well as veterans.
- Support men's potential to advocate for peace and gender equality – mandating men to take action.
- Prevent backlash against women by engaging men.
- Support a gender sensitive psychosocial support and transitional justice or reconciliation process.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to Myanmar

Myanmar is marked by multiple ethnicities, languages and different interconnected layers of conflict, ranging from the household level (domestic violence), broader social-level land conflicts to national-level ethnic political conflicts. The history of Myanmar/Burma¹ has been complex and conflictual. It has encompassed multiple precolonial ethnic kingdoms and wars between them, the three wars with Britain between 1824 and 1885 leading to colonial rule, the independence struggle at first with and then against the Japanese occupation during the Second World War, and a brief parliamentary era between independence in 1948 and 1962, when decades of military regimes rule commenced. Historical records indicate that these eras were largely shaped by men embedded in patriarchal structures, with men assuming most positions of authority and women's contributions receiving limited attention – with the exception of some powerful historical queens and prominent female political and social commentators during the independence struggle.²

The newly independent state experienced rapidly proliferating social and ethnic conflict, from the Communist Party of Burma³ to numerous ethnic groups seeking to secure ethnic and territorial rights through armed force.⁴ The frontline combatants were predominately male, although women played important roles in the ethnic and political opposition groups. The Burmese military government, which included few women officers then in mainly medical roles,⁵ kept these demands at bay through counterinsurgency measures involving high levels of violence against ethnic (or politically opposed) civilian men, women and children. Later, they resorted to negotiating ceasefires, which devolved autonomy to armed ethnic and other insurgent groups, allowing the exploitation of natural resources (especially timber, gems and jade) to mutual benefit.⁶ Over the decades, armed opposition was pushed to the borderlands where it was increasingly normalised. Meanwhile, the central state became increasingly militarised, authoritarian and intent on disseminating a deeply conservative form of Bamar language, culture and Buddhism to ethnic areas and groups, in what has come to be known among ethnic minority groups as 'Burmanization'.⁷ Starting in 2009, the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) subsequently sought to integrate these predominantly male insurgent groups into Border Guard Forces under its control from 2009 onwards.⁸

Meanwhile, a broad-based movement for democracy led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi peaked in 1988, with mass participation of both men and women. While the National League for Democracy (NLD) saw a subsequent electoral landslide victory, this did not result in the military handing over power to them. Instead, the movement was violently repressed. The 2007 'Saffron Revolution' was

-
- 1 The names Burma and Myanmar are to some degree used interchangeably by the majority Bamar population. The British Empire incorporated the former Bamar kingdom as well as surrounding areas into one colonial administrative unit over which they had varied levels of actual control. In 1989, the military regime changed the state name to 'The Union of Myanmar'
 - 2 M. Ditlevsen, *Social issues – The situation of women*, in M. Gravers and F. Ytzen (eds.), *Burma/Myanmar – Where now?*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies: Copenhagen, 2014. See also A. Phayre, *History of Burma*, London: Trübner & Co, Ludate Hill, 1883
 - 3 B. Lintner, *The rise and fall of the Communist Party of Burma*, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1990
 - 4 A. South, *Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict*, Routledge, 2008
 - 5 First recruited into the Burmese Armed Forces in 1954, women were only hired for medical roles between 1961 and 2013. M. Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar armed forces since 1948*, International University of Japan, 2009; and T. McLaughlin, *First women graduate from officer training*, Myanmar Times, 30 August 2014, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/11487-first-women-graduate-from-officer-training-school.html>
 - 6 K. Woods, *Ceasefire capitalism: Military private partnerships, resource concessions and military state building in the Burma China borderlands*, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38:4, 2011, pp.747–770
 - 7 M. Smith, *State of strife: The dynamics of ethnic conflict in Burma*, 2007
 - 8 P. Keenan, *By force of arms: Armed ethnic groups in Burma*, New Delhi: Vij Books, 2013

again marked by widespread protests against the regime, with widely respected monks joining lay men and women of all ages to call for change. This movement was also met with heavy-handed repression by the military,⁹ but ushered in a slow, gradual transition to a more democratic form of governance. This began with a 2008 Constitution written by the military, and the formation of U Thein Sein's nominally civilian but military-dominated government elected in 2010. In 2015, the NLD won another landslide election and the following year formed a government de facto led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Since then, the military has formally handed over power, but in fact retains a decisive role in ruling the country, controlling three key ministries directly (Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Border Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs) and 25% of parliament at union and state or region level. This secures an effective veto power to major changes such as to the constitution.

Since 2010, the former and current governments have been engaging in a peace process with several of the primarily ethnic armed organisations (EAOs), culminating in the signature of the 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), which despite the name is partial in scope. Only eight out of the 21 armed groups signed the ceasefire, with a further two signing in 2018. Importantly, however, some key stakeholders have yet to be included in this process, such as some of the other EAOs and vital social demographic groups such as women and youth.

Key implementation mechanisms have neither committed to nor implemented the 30% quota to date.¹⁰ While a process of political dialogue between the relevant actors is slowly progressing, "there is little doubt that the process has significant flaws".¹¹ Thus, a final and sustainable peace agreement seems unreachable in the context of continued and escalating armed violence – particularly in Kachin, northern Shan state and Rakhine states, as well as clashes in Chin and Kayin states. Since the NCA signature, over 150,000 civilians have been displaced by military offensives in Kachin and northern Shan states; 8,500 have been displaced by fighting between the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Tatmadaw; and over 700,000 have fled from Rakhine into Bangladesh.¹² In 2008, Duffield, writing about the impact of decades of chronic emergency on the people, described Myanmar as:

*"A(a)n internationalised battlespace where the people's multiple masters have established competing regimes of truth and legitimacy. Between and around these defining poles lie a medley of different actors – government bureaucracies, ceasefire groups, non-ceasefire groups, businessmen, aid agencies and donor governments – that are either trying to coerce, tax or dispossess the people, or else, protect, educate and better them."*¹³

Despite the many significant political and economic changes to Myanmar over the decade since these comments, this description remains apt for the conflict-affected states where the ethnic minority groups are located.

9 Documented in the 2008 Danish documentary film by Anders Østergaard, #2Burma VJ: Reporting from a closed country

10 AGIPP, If half the population mattered: A critique of the Myanmar Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and Joint Monitoring Committee Framework from a gender perspective, Policy Brief 4, Yangon, 2018

11 P. Keenan, Negotiation and attrition: The current state of the Myanmar peace process, Background Paper No. 1/18, Euro Burma Office (EBO), April 2018

12 Burma's dead-end peace negotiation process: A case study of the land sector, Press statement by Karen Peace Support Network, 5 July 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/KPSN.karen/photos/pcb.2126340674309529/2126340437642886>

13 M. Duffield, On the edge of 'no man's land': Chronic emergency in Myanmar, Department of Politics, University of Bristol, 2008

1.2 Why men and masculinities?

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 affirmed the right of women and girls affected by conflict to participate in decision making related to peace and security as well as the obligation of states and international actors to protect them, provide relief and prevent violence. Since then, there has been increasing global awareness that gender is important in understanding conflict and working for peace, with growing efforts to implement this.¹⁴ Academic research has demonstrated that peace negotiations are more likely to lead to a successfully implemented agreement if women are meaningfully involved in the negotiations as well as in the implementation.¹⁵ However, in Myanmar, none of the formal peace talks to date saw meaningful participation of women or inclusion of a comprehensive substantive gender perspective (see Section 3.4 for more detail).¹⁶

Strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding and reducing the impact of violence and conflict on the lives of women and girls requires a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of gender norms, gender identities, and gendered experiences of both conflict and peacebuilding. Since women are often missing in formal settings, a focus on 'gender' often is used to mean 'women and girls'. However, the 'other side of gender', that is, the experiences of men and boys, is not as well understood. While important efforts have been made to date in Myanmar to better integrate gender in peacebuilding, critical examination of core issues around the interplay between masculinities and conflict/peacebuilding have so far been largely absent in formal and informal peacebuilding efforts. The research for this report sought to better understand the social expectations on men and boys in Myanmar, and how these expectations drive or hinder their engagement in conflict, violence or peacebuilding.

In Myanmar, as in other countries, conflict and violence affect men, women, boys, girls and those with other gender identities differently. Access to resources, power and decision making can vary greatly depending on an individual's gender, age, ethnicity, geographical location, wealth, marital status, sexual orientation or disability.¹⁷ The intersection of these different identity factors can subsequently strongly affect an individual's agency and power, with multiple various factors augmenting vulnerabilities. Thus, while men customarily enjoy higher positions than women, a wealthy urban woman from the majority Bamar group is likely to have more access to resources and influence than a young man from a minority ethnic group in a remote, conflict-affected area who is expected to join an armed group. Similarly, an upper-class gay man in Yangon may have more freedom to live according to his identity than a lower-class transwoman who migrated from a rural area, works as day labourer and faces high social stigma.

Expectations of masculinity are an often-overlooked (or over-simplified) driver of conflict and peacebuilding, but also an important, if sometimes counter-intuitive, factor leading to increased vulnerability for men and boys. Therefore, understanding the various ways in which men and boys act, and are expected to act, as men of a particular age, class, ethnicity and so on in particular conflict-affected or peacebuilding contexts will assist peacebuilding actors to better understand these dynamics and mitigate them through policy and practice. Men and boys are involved as

14 UN Women, *Women's meaningful participation in negotiating peace and the implementation of peace agreements – Report of the Expert Group Meeting*, 2018

15 T. Paffenholz, A. Potter Prentice and C. Buchanan, *Fresh insights on the quantity and quality of women's inclusion in peace processes. Expert views on findings from the 'Broadening participation' and 'Civil society and peacebuilding' projects*, Geneva: The Graduate Institute of Geneva and Crisis Management Initiative, 2015

16 FGDs in Yangon, June 2017

17 H. Myrtilinen, J. El-Bushra and J. Naujoks, *Re-thinking gender in peacebuilding*, London: International Alert, 2014, <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/rethinking-gender-peacebuilding>

fighters, negotiators and peacebuilders; they are victims, perpetrators and survivors of violence and intimidation, defenders and aid givers, advocates, media and by-standers; enablers, spoilers and neutrals. The expectations placed on them often perpetuate violent conflict as well as violence in the private sphere, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), through the relegation of women and girls to subjugated positions in society. Paradoxically, this also increases men's own vulnerabilities to violence and exclusion. Yet, despite the fact that discussions on conflict and peacebuilding are traditionally focused on men, men's own gendered identity as men and how this affects conflict and peace are seldom discussed in peacebuilding policy, practice and research globally.

This is important because masculinity norms can be mobilised or manipulated into violent action by elites – for instance, by invoking the expectations on men to be protectors of their community from perceived external threats. Conflict analyses and interventions that overlook this gender dimension are incomplete, and could miss entry points for peace or misunderstand the full impacts of their intervention. Peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be effective if they consider comprehensive analysis of the conflict dynamics which identifies the dual impact of gender norms on conflict and of conflict on social gender norms. In Myanmar, this is only starting to be assessed, such as by Hedström and Brenner exploring how gendered identities are mobilised by elites in Kachin.¹⁸

1.3 Project background

This research was conducted by International Alert in partnership with Phan Tee Eain (PTE) and the Thingaha Gender Organisation (TGO), with funding from the Paung Sie Facility (previously known as the Peace Support Fund). The overall goal of the research is to enhance efforts to build peace in Myanmar through the integration of comprehensive approaches to gender: firstly, by creating a better understanding of conflict-affected men and masculinities; and secondly, by supporting the integration of this understanding into the work of the diverse range of actors engaged in peacebuilding work.

1.4 Methodology and limitations

The qualitative research approach sought to provide snapshots of the overall topic of gender, masculinities and peacebuilding in two case study locations (Tanintharyi and southern Shan). The researchers acknowledge that actors, trends and conflicts vary significantly across different locations, ethnicities and socioeconomic classes in Myanmar. Thus, the research does not claim to be representative of Myanmar as a whole, but aims to serve as a guide for understanding a range linked to masculinities, and more broadly, gender, peace and security in Myanmar.

Masculinities refer to the socially created expectations on men to act and behave in certain ways because of their gender. These expectations vary depending on various other factors such as age, socioeconomic background, religion, ethnicity and location.

¹⁸ J. Hedström, *Gender and Myanmar's Kachin conflict*, New Mandala, 2015, <http://www.newmandala.org/gender-and-myanmars-kachin-conflict/>; D. Brenner, *Authority in rebel groups: Identity, recognition and the struggle over legitimacy*, *Contemporary Politics*, 23(4), 2017

The research team conducted 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 85 key informant interviews (KIIs) in Yangon, southern Shan state and Tanintharyi region between June and November 2017, involving 162 male and 97 female research participants. FGDs and KIIs were conducted with the following groups: national and international civil society organisations and women's groups; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) rights organisations; local authorities and government stakeholders, political parties, veterans, former political prisoners and armed organisations; religious leaders, lawyers, media, private sector actors and university students; and conflict-affected communities, including land rights and human rights activists. The joint methodology design and analysis were further informed by a review of the existing literature and current policy debates on gender, peace and security (GPS) in Myanmar and globally.

The research was conducted in Yangon (to get a national overview perspective with stakeholders operating at the national level, including stakeholders from other conflict-affected areas, such as students from Kachin) and in two conflict-affected case study areas – southern Shan state and Tanintharyi region. These were selected due to their experience of and exposure to conflict, as well as their relative accessibility and safety for the research team. PTE led the research in Tanintharyi, in Dawei, Yebyu and Launglon townships, which comprised mainly Tavoyan people as well as the KNU Liaison office and a Karen member of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC). In southern Shan state, TGO led the research in Taunggyi and several rural villages with both ethnic Pa-O and ethnic Shan residents, close to the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone (SAZ) but not inside it.¹⁹ The research participants were selected by the national project partners based on their experience and insights, drawing on existing networks. In order to protect the confidentiality and security of research participants and to ensure conflict sensitivity, we are only referencing their locations by state or township without naming villages, organisations or names of individuals.

¹⁹ The exact locations of the research are withheld in order to respect the confidentiality of the participants.

2. Gender, conflict and peacebuilding in Myanmar

2.1 National overview

Myanmar has multiple ethnicities, languages and different interconnected layers of conflict. These conflicts range from national ethnic political conflicts over the shape of the political state and autonomy of different ethnic regions,²⁰ to conflicts over land between individuals, communities, private sector and governments,²¹ to interpersonal conflicts and violence including high levels of domestic violence.²² The peace process is making important progress, but respondents assessed it as lacking inclusivity (not all armed groups are included, women and youth remain underrepresented) and marred by delays and controversy, such as around the national dialogues in Shan state.²³

The Terms of Reference for the Political Dialogue Framework for the Union Peace Process contains a commitment to 'try' for 30% participation by women and an agenda point on social issues, including a point on human rights and gender equality.²⁴ However, gender issues should not always be addressed as a separate, stand-alone initiative. It is key that gender considerations are integrated across all discussion points, as each issue will affect people of different gender identities differently. With that said, gender and masculinities issues are of particular relevance to discussions of the political dialogue chapters on security (including SGBV, reintegration of former combatants, and security sector reform (SSR)), land and natural resource management, humanitarian and resettlement issues (especially internally displaced and returning refugees). The gendered dimensions of violence and displacement, including the impacts on men, and masculinities, are not fully understood or addressed through the current peace process and peacebuilding projects in Myanmar²⁵ – a gap which this research aims to fill through contextualised analysis of masculinities in Myanmar.

Gender considerations are currently too inconsistently integrated in key peacebuilding measures such as ceasefire monitoring, SSR or disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR).²⁶ For instance, AGIPP observed that "gender equity and issues relevant to women are not included in the security sector policy proposal" from the May 2017 Union Peace Conference (UPC).²⁷ At

20 A. South, *Ethnic politics in Burma: States of conflict*, 2008

21 Human Rights Watch, 'The farmer becomes the criminal' – Human rights and land confiscation in Karen state, 2016; Committee for farmers and workers receives more than 4,800 complaint letters, *Eleven*, 1 April 2017, <http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/local/7290>; Transnational Institute, *Access denied land rights and ethnic conflict in Burma**, Burma Policy Briefing No. 11, Amsterdam, 2013; N. Scurrah, K. Woods and P. Hirsch, *The political economy of land governance in Myanmar*, Vientiane: Mekong Region Land Governance, 2015; and J. Naujoks, R. Barclay et al, *Forest law enforcement governance and trade: A conflict sensitivity analysis*, Yangon: International Alert, 2017

22 A government survey found that one in five women (20%) in Myanmar have experienced domestic violence. Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) 2015–16, Myanmar: Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports, 2017. See also Gender Equality Network, *Behind the silence: Violence against women and their resilience*, Yangon: Gender Equality Network, 2015

23 Shan national dialogue in doubt after public consultation cancelled, *The Irrawaddy*, 5 January 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/shan-national-dialogue-doubt-public-consultation-cancelled.html>

24 Unofficial translation of the Framework for Political Dialogue, Chapter 2- j, Ethnic Peace Resources Project, 22 December 2015, <http://www.eprpinformation.org/files/recent-events/the-framework-for-political-dialogue-unofficial-translation--22dec2015--eng.pdf>

25 Interviews with civil society organisation (CSO) stakeholders in Yangon, June to October 2017

26 Interview with Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process, Yangon, July 2017

27 Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP), *Analysis of Myanmar's Second Union Peace Conference – 21st century Panglong from a gender perspective*, 2017, p.4, https://www.agipp.org/sites/agipp.org/files/agipp_upc_analysis_paper.pdf

best, there are efforts to increase women’s numbers in meetings and processes.²⁸ Yet, without a more nuanced understanding of the gendered nature of these male-dominated and structured processes, the gender transformative impact of such activities will remain limited. This is important at all levels, across all public decision-making processes, from national to sub-national levels of dialogue (such as in Kayin and Tanintharyi) and NCA and interim arrangements, for government actors as well as on the side of ethnic groups. In July 2018, the UPC agreed on four points – prohibiting discrimination based on gender difference, preventing gender-based violence (GBV), requiring a 30% quota for women’s participation and supporting gender equality.²⁹ As the wording is not definitive (“to be encouraged”), however, implementation will be key.

2.2 Research sites



28 FGD with women’s organisations in Yangon, June 2017

29 The Global New Light of Myanmar, 17 July 2018, p.6

MAP 2: SOUTHERN SHAN STATE RESEARCH SITES



The research was conducted in two Pa-O villages in southern Shan state, in a mixed ethnicity area called Koban north of Taunggyi. The area has a history of being heavily affected by conflict and fighting prior to the ceasefire between the Pa-O National Army (PNA, the military wing of the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO)) and the Tatmadaw was agreed in 1991. This eventually resulted in the creation of the Pa-O SAZ (a semi-autonomous region) in the 2008 constitution. The research communities were located close to but not inside the Pa-O SAZ. While there has been no open fighting in southern Shan since the ceasefire, fighting and armed violence persist in the neighbouring areas of northern Shan state, with spill-over impacts.³⁰ Fighting has escalated since 2015 in northern Shan state. The Ta'ang Women's Organisation has documented over 100 cases of human rights violation, including torture, rape and killings.³¹

30 These include hosting IDPs from areas affected by more active fighting, and reduced mobility when armed violence is reported in the area; for instance, some research interviews had to be rescheduled.

31 Ta'ang Women's Organisation, *Trained to torture*, June 2016, <http://en.palaungwomen.com/index.php/82-reports/97-trained-to-torture>

While the research area is formally under government control, there is little reach of government administration, law and order, or provision of social services. Meanwhile, the PNO and other EAOs retain a significant influence in the villages and over social dynamics.³² Trust and confidence in the central government are low.³³ As a consequence of long decades of conflict and rural remoteness, there is an acute lack of employment, income and education opportunities, further exacerbated by conflicts over land. All of these contribute to high levels of out-migration of young people, and coincide with issues related to drug trade and abuse.³⁴

Different generations were shaped by different phases of the conflict. The older generation who came of age before 1990 were affected by open violence and fighting between the Tatmadaw and various EAOs (including the PNA).³⁵ Before the ceasefire, they experienced direct exposure to violence, witnessing violence and dealing with loss, being forced to serve as porters or guides, as well as lack of education because teachers did not come to conflict areas. Others were conscripted into ethnic armed groups to protect their communities from those perceived as threats: the Tatmadaw, the Communist Party of Burma until 1989, and other ethnic factions such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA).³⁶ This contributed to deep-seated traumas for many.

The younger generation who grew up in or after the 1990s, by contrast, have been shaped by a more ambiguous situation characterised by post-conflict fragility rather than open violence. The main conflict impacts have been marginalisation, poverty, and a lack of economic and educational opportunities. Social norms against intermarriage between ethnic groups persist, such as between the Pa-O and the Bamar. The ethnic organisations continue to have significant authority over civil and justice issues, although it is not always clear to the community members whether somebody is acting, for example, as part of the PNO or the PNA.³⁷ Despite the signing of the NCA, a number of our respondents stated that the situation in their region does “not feel like peace” to communities who face land grabbing and the potential loss of their livelihoods.

In the post-conflict setting, the expectations on serving combatants also appear to be in flux: displays of strength and potential to exercise violence used to be perceived as demonstrations of positive ‘protector’ masculinities. However, in the absence of an acute threat, such displays of power and control are starting to be interpreted as predatory rather than protective by some community members interviewed. The challenge for peacebuilders will be how to engage with these changing gendered expectations of a ‘good man’ to support attitudes of peace and tolerance, and prevent aggression, predation and violence in a context of economic pressures, lack of rule of law and, reportedly, high drug abuse issues. This could combine addressing the causes of frustrations, such as lack of a decent income and corruption, alongside providing constructive, non-violent ways of dealing with anger and stress and competition, and placing higher value on nurturing, emotionally literate behaviours in men.

Interview participants saw men in the research communities as facing changing expectations from the different individuals and groups in their social environment: elders and leaders, parents and peers, both male and female. Parents who still expected their son to enter an armed group also

32 For a brief history of the Pa-O National Organisation and its historical roots, see R. Christensen and K. Sann, *The Pa-O: Rebels and refugees*, Bangkok: Silkworm Books, 2006

33 Roundtable discussion ‘Does gender matter for men? Broadening the conversation on gender and the peace process’, organised by Thingaha Gender Organisation and International Alert in Taunggyi, 31 January 2018

34 Interviews by authors in Shan state, August to September 2017

35 History of armed opposition, Burma Link, <https://www.burmalink.org/background/burma/dynamics-of-ethnic-conflict/history-of-armed-opposition>

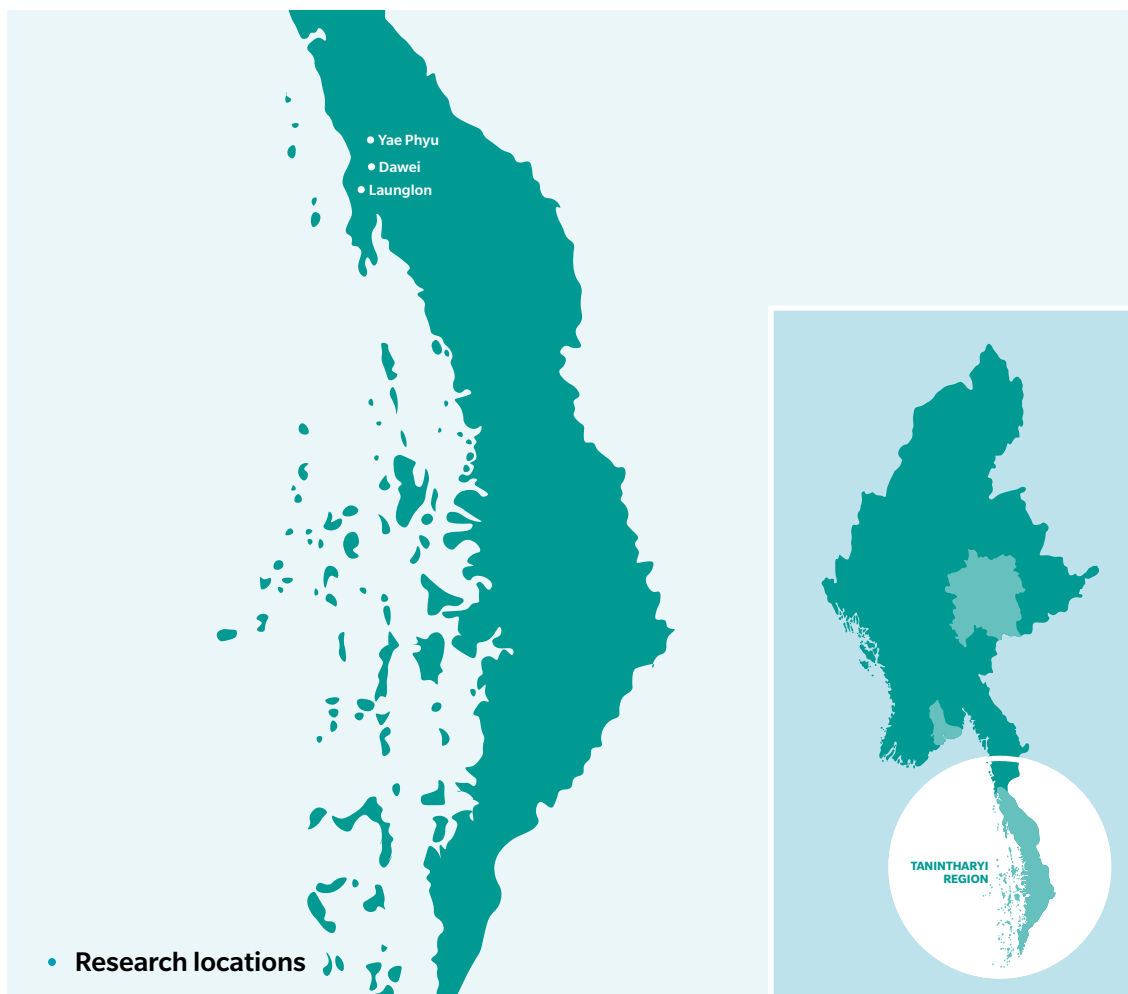
36 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

37 Analysis discussion with field coordinators, September 2017

expected them to rise through the ranks and access more power, and accordingly more benefit to their family – such as in the form of exemptions from the collection of donations or alleged links to economic opportunities, including those related to illicit natural resources.³⁸

Decision-making structures: The local decision-making and power structures in the research communities are multi-layered. Overall, these communities are dominated by older men of the main religion and ethnicity who decide on social, religious and ceremonial matters, while village and village tract administrators act as the intermediary authorities under the PNO leaders. With links to enforcement capabilities, that is, armed actors, the PNO effectively exercises significant influence in advising village leaders. Nevertheless, the channels of power and hierarchies are complicated and lack transparency. These dynamics can contribute to grievances by civilian, male community leaders and members regarding a perceived lack of respect towards or adequate consultation with them, with community members remaining unclear over who to call on when problems arise. As one participant noted, “we have many fathers”.³⁹ This statement highlights the fact that while women play a role in organising social matters such as weddings, care work, funerals and preparations for religious festivals, they are largely absent in formal decision-making structures. This entrenches the association between power and masculinity, shaping the social expectations of appropriate behaviour for men and women, both young and old.

Map 3: Tanintharyi region research sites



38 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

39 Ibid.

The second case study of coastal Tanintharyi provides a very different setting, although one marked by similar issues around land conflict, migration, poverty and historical violence leaving lasting conflict impacts. The research was conducted in Dawei and Yae Phyu with predominately Tavoyan⁴⁰ stakeholders. It was further informed by interviews with strategic Karen stakeholders to provide some insight into conflict dynamics related to the largest ethnic actor in the NCA/21st Century Panglong Union Peace Process.

There are two key and interlinked conflict dynamics of relevance to this paper: 1) armed conflict between central state and non-state armed groups primarily in northern Tanintharyi; 2) repression during the military dictatorship.⁴¹

1. Armed conflict between the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA) and the newly independent Burmese state commenced not long after independence after the KNU's formation in 1947.⁴² This was followed by conflict between the central, military government and other armed groups (such as the New Mon State Party (NMSP)/Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA) or the All Burma Democratic Student Front (ABDSF)). These conflicts entailed high levels of violence and displacement, with an estimated 80,000 people displaced in Tanintharyi or fled to refugee camps on the Thai border, although some have now returned.⁴³ The armed conflict ended following a ceasefire between the KNU and the Tatmadaw in 2012. The KNU is the largest ethnic armed group to subsequently sign the NCA in 2015 and join the peace process, although fierce debates remain within Karen stakeholders about the direction and success of this process.⁴⁴
2. Tanintharyi region (especially Dawei) was shaped by the violent crackdown of the democracy movement by the military regime, peaking in 1988 and 2007.⁴⁵ In the Tavoyan regions, the civil war has long ended, and the region feels at peace now.⁴⁶ However, traumatic memories still linger from the heavy-handed repressions and forced labour during the military regime, which have left lasting hostility and resentment towards the central government and Tatmadaw.⁴⁷

Expectations on men and boys: Expectations were seen to come from families, community and society, and from peers, politicians, elders and religious leaders. The main expectation on men was to support the family financially, which increasingly necessitated migration to access jobs. Respondents pointed to a change in social dynamics, however, with the expectation of financial support recently shifting to daughters, who were seen as more reliable than sons given young men's perceived susceptibility to drug abuse and other social ills while away.⁴⁸ This shift in expectations seems to have exacerbated frustration among young men unable to find work they consider suitable, and coincides with escalating drug abuse and reported increases in SGBV. Both

40 The Tavoy see themselves as a distinct ethnic group, but are not recognised as such by the central government, which considers them as a Bamar sub-group.

41 Note: Historical and current land grabs and associated conflicts form a third dynamic, which will be the subject of a forthcoming companion publication.

42 P. Keenan, Op. cit., 2013

43 K. Jolliffe, Ceasefires, governance, and development: The Karen National Union in times of change, Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2016; and Su Myat Mon, Karen group says plan to protect forests ignores people's rights, *Frontier*, 11 April 2018, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/karen-group-says-plan-to-protect-forests-ignores-peoples-rights>

44 Mon News Agency, KNU affiliate calls for thorough review of the peace process, 8 June 2017, www.bnionline.net/en/news/mon-state/item/3132-knu-affiliate-calls-for-thorough-review-of-the-peace-process.html; see also L. Weng, Tatmadaw using ceasefire to gain upper hand, KNLA deputy chief says, *The Irrawaddy*, 24 April 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/tatmadaw-using-ceasefire-to-gain-upper-hand-knla-deputy-chief-says.html>

45 Kills in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

46 KII with representative from regional parliament, Dawei, July 2017

47 Key informants spoke of hating the Tatmadaw, and Tatmadaw veterans based in Dawei spoke of social discrimination by the Tavoyan people. KIIs and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

48 Kills in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

emerged as a major concern for respondents. There are strong, heteronormative expectations for young men to get married to ‘become (adult) men’. However, the conflict and lack of work was considered to have contributed to the formation of short-lived underage marriages or couples, which often break down.⁴⁹ Thus social roles are changing, but norms and expectations remain unchanged – creating divergences between expectations and lived reality. This can generate frustrations, which could be mobilised into conflict.

Impact of conflicts on men and boys: For Karen men and boys, the conflict impacts (displacement, historical violence, lack of economic opportunities) could lead them to join the KNU to work towards a better future for their ethnic group, whether in the military or social wings. For Tavoyan men, this is not a consideration as there is no ‘Tavoyan ethnic’ armed group and they would not sign up to another ethnic association.

Power and decision making: Despite women being very economically active, most decision making is done by, and most power resides with, men. Overall, society expects women to follow male leaders, and strong gender stereotypes mean that people have more trust in men to lead and make decisions.⁵⁰ However, a few notable women have been able to take up positions of power – for example, the female Chief Minister and successful business woman Daw Lei Lei Maw.⁵¹ However, despite being a woman, Daw Lei Lei Maw was not considered an advocate by women’s organisations or to be strong on gender issues.⁵² A male civil society respondent agreed that qualified women can reach senior levels, but only with family and community support.⁵³

At the community level, the common perception is that only the household head, who is predominantly a man, can stand for village administrator elections, discouraging women from standing for this position. Moreover, only the household head can vote in these elections, which serves to exclude many women from the process.⁵⁴ Civil society staff in Yangon affirm that this regulation is not in force, but in rural areas this perception prevents women from leadership.⁵⁵ Currently, only 87 out of the 16,000 village tract administrators (less than 1%) are women.⁵⁶ Due to out-migration of men, there are “increasing number(s) of female-headed households in south-eastern Myanmar”.⁵⁷ Women-headed households tend to be single-parent families facing economic pressures, which means they are unlikely to have sufficient time to take on additional roles beyond the household.⁵⁸

49 KIIs and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

50 Ibid.

51 MIMU and IFES, 2015, Myanmar Election Maps 2010–2015

52 KIIs in Dawei, July to September 2017

53 KII in Dawei, 11 September 2017

54 The elected Ward or Village Tract Administrators may also be more accountable to the GAD-appointed (and therefore military-controlled) Township Administrators, who can dismiss them, than to their village or ward. Aung Khaing Min and Ye Min Naung, Toward a more people-centered government, Mizzima, 10 May 2018, <http://www.mizzima.com/news-opinion/toward-more-people-centered-government>

55 Land and Gender workshop hosted by USAID, 7–8 December 2017, Green Hill Hotel, Yangon, Myanmar

56 Htoo Thant, Training for women ward administrators, Myanmar Times, 22 May 2017, <https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/26085-training-for-women-ward-administrators.html>

57 Myanmar Information Management Unit and Peace Support Fund, Situation analysis of south-eastern Myanmar, Yangon, 2016

58 KIIs in Dawei, July to September 2017

3. Key thematic findings

3.1 Gendered expectations

In line with previous work documenting the strong gender social norms and hierarchies in Myanmar,⁵⁹ research participants pointed to a strong hierarchy, with men being perceived as superior, more important, educated, capable of leadership and decision making. General expectations on men related to leadership of the family, community and politics, being strong and tough, respected, having integrity, being brave and having no fear.⁶⁰ Men should be reliable, earn money, but also work for the social good of the community, particularly in terms of donations to religious institutions and community events. Similar attributes were generally expected of women, in addition to caring responsibilities for the family and household, but men were largely acknowledged to enjoy more freedom (mobility) than women.⁶¹

Cultural assumptions of men's superiority are rooted in a concept of 'hpon' – a kind of 'masculine power' or honour, which is perceived as unobtainable to women.⁶² This is partly attributed to traditional, unscientific interpretations of menstruation as 'dirty', relegating women to a secondary status of inferiority to men. Various traditional practices derive from this which are still practised and continue to discriminate against women, such as denying women access to some parts of holy sites and temples, and strict expectations of laundry practices.⁶³

Keeler's study of masculinities and Buddhist monks in Mandalay further illustrates the emphasis on status and hierarchies, whereby "masculinity is characterized by autonomy... While femininity and non-normative masculinity are thought characterised by attachment, which is seen as the less-valued but still essential counter and complement to autonomy".⁶⁴ One consequence has been that male leaders refer to issues deemed as masculine (war, violence, territorial control) as the 'real' or 'hard' issues, that is, important, in the peace process in contrast to the 'soft' issues associated with women (health, education, social issues, prevention of violence), which are accorded less importance.⁶⁵

The following quote by a former Tatmadaw combatant illustrates not only the patriarchal belief in gender hierarchies, but also the belief that entering the military is noble and nearly god-like.

"Man is more noble than woman, so parents usually wish to have a son. There are two options for noble men: to become a god or a soldier." – Interview with Tatmadaw veteran

In the Pa-O region, where the older generation had experienced violent armed conflict before the ceasefire, there were similar expectations on men (physical strength to do hard work, to

59 See, for example: Annami Löfving, Aye Thiri Kyaw and Mi Mi Thin Aung, *Raising the curtain: Cultural norms, social practices and gender equality in Myanmar*, Yangon: Gender Equality Network, 2015

60 FGDs in Yangon, southern Shan and Tanintharyi, June to September 2017

61 Ibid.

62 F. MacGregor, *Military skirts issue of powerful women*, Myanmar Times, 16 October 2015, <https://www.mmtimes.com/opinion/17047-military-skirts-issue-of-powerful-women.html>; see also Löfving et al, Op. Cit., p. 34

63 These traditions prohibit the washing of women's longyis (skirts) or underwear together with men's clothes, and prescribe a hierarchy of laundry: women's laundry has to be hung below male laundry. These expectations increase laundry work, which is seen as women's role. Interviews in Yangon, June to September 2017

64 W. Keeler, *The traffic in hierarchy: Masculinity and its others in Buddhist Burma*, Honolulu, HA: University of Hawaii Press, 2017

65 Interviews and FGDs, Yangon, June to October 2017

lead) but with the additional expectation of protecting the family and ethnic community, and willingness to sacrifice their life through fighting if needed. These seem more shaped by potential expectations on men by communities in conflict, and echo the ones mentioned by the KNU-related interviewees.

In both locations, while social norms and traditions prohibit men from taking multiple wives, there were anecdotal references to such behaviour. In the Pa-O region, a rich businessman with strong links to the EAO was rumoured to have three wives, but was beyond social criticism due to his wealth and powerful connections. This indicates that social gender norms are malleable depending on other identity factors, particularly status, wealth and powerful connections. Thus, gender identities and expressions are shaped not only by sex but also by ethnicity and class, with different expectations on richer and poorer men or different barriers faced depending on ethnicity and religion. For instance, those coming from areas designated as 'black' areas⁶⁶ face restrictions in accessing certain opportunities, such as education in military institutions. Differences between ethnicities also shape the significant social barriers to intermarriages between ethnic groups (such as Pa-O-Bamar or Tavoy-Bamar) or legal barriers to marriages between religions due to the four Race and Religion Laws, which were widely supported by some Buddhist women despite vigorous opposition by a national coalition of women's and civil society organisations.⁶⁷ This can lead to significant bureaucratic challenges as well as social stigma for interreligious couples when seeking to marry or register children.⁶⁸

The FGD participants in southern Shan state also raised concerns around the collection of *Ahlungwe* ('donations')⁶⁹ by armed actors⁷⁰ for pagoda and road construction. Women headed households are expected to contribute less, and there are exemptions for teachers and the elderly who compensate by volunteering social services, or for family members of those serving in the EAOs. This was widely accepted during the conflict, but since the ceasefire the interviewees saw the EAO family member's exemptions as increasingly causing community resentment. This is taking place in a context where the overall social perception of the EAO is also changing: from protector of the ethnic community against acute external threats during the war, to a situation where the central government is no longer seen as a threat, whilst research participants perceive members of the EAO as increasingly linked with the collection of *Ahlungwe*⁷¹ and land grabbing.⁷²

However, the community members reported feeling unable to meet these financial expectations. Failure to donate the expected amounts was met with public shaming (public cuffing, name calling) and threats.⁷³ It is the men of the household who are called upon and punished, alongside the village leaders held responsible for the village contribution overall.⁷⁴ This highlights the expectations on men to provide financially – for the household and for the communal good. If

66 Dating back to the Tatmadaw's 'four cuts strategy', insurgent-held areas were often referred to as 'black' areas, mixed control areas as 'brown' and areas under state control as 'white', although in practice the situation is more complex. Joliffe, for example, identifies six types of situation: K. Joliffe, *Ethnic conflict and social services in Myanmar's contested regions*, Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2014, p.12

67 M.J. Walton, M. McKay and Ma Khin Mar Mar Kyi, *Women and Myanmar's 'religious protection laws'*, in *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, Taylor & Francis, 2015

68 Interview with key informant, Yangon, July 2017

69 *Ahlungwe* refers to donations, in theory voluntary but in practice often associated with strong expectations.

70 FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

71 Collection of donations, essentially informal taxes, is also an issue in other areas of the country, with EAOs arguing that they need it to survive while the economy is restarting after war. Saw Myat Oo Thar, *Public needs to know code of conduct, says Mon Border/Security Minister*, Karen Information Center, 22 February 2018, www.bnionline.net/en/news/public-needs-know-code-conduct-says-mon-bordersecurity-minister

72 For example, the lands of four households in Hopone were reported as having been confiscated by the EAO and GOM. Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

73 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

74 Ibid.

they fail to live up to these expectations, the repercussions for their perceived masculinity involve public shaming, such as being slapped in public, undermining their social status as household or village leader. Ideas about male honour are mobilised to manipulate them into specific actions (contributing labour or *Ahlungwe*).

BEYOND THE GENDER BINARY

Currently, public awareness and understanding of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI, see textbox) are limited across Myanmar, with some increasing understanding in state capitals but very little in rural areas. Socio-cultural prejudices are based on perceptions of diverse SOGI as punishment to be suffered for past sins or bad karma from a previous life, which severely prejudices the general public.⁷⁵ This drives high levels of social discrimination and pressure to conform to expectations and to heteronormative marriages. A Tanintharyi based LGBTQ organisation spoke of parents beating or threatening their son if he is perceived to ‘act soft’, obliging him to either get married or become a monk⁷⁶ as they see no other choices as acceptable. In schools, teachers apply high pressure on gender-non-conforming boys (pointing out their manners, forcing them to change their clothes) in order to change their behaviour, leading many to drop out before completing high school – which affects their subsequent work opportunities and earning potential.⁷⁷

Gender identity: A person’s internal sense and experience of their own gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth or with the traditional categories of man/male and woman/female.

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ability and social class, which overlap to create interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Originally coined by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw.

LGBTQ: An abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer people that is widely used in the Western world and which has been adopted by a variety of international institutions. Other formulations include LGBT+, LGBT* and LGBTI (the ‘I’ stands for ‘intersex’).

Sexual orientation: An individual’s emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction to a given sex or gender.

SOGI: Sexual orientation and gender identity, or SOGI, is an acronym used by a variety of organisations and researchers to refer to issues of gender and sexuality. It does not indicate a particular group, as all humans have a sexual orientation and multiple gender identities.

The social acceptance is *intersectional* (see textbox), varying between locations and different classes, religions and ethnicities. Class and wealth play a key role, and people with diverse SOGI from the rich elite were reported to be more socially respected than those from poorer, lower classes who encounter more discrimination.⁷⁸ Similarly, a few notable high-profile gay or

⁷⁵ Yangon-based LGBTQ organisation that worked with International Alert on an SGBV prevention project, 2016

⁷⁶ Interview in Dawei, 5 July 2017

⁷⁷ Interview with LGBTQ organisation, Yangon, October 2017

⁷⁸ Ibid.

transwomen are famed for their success in fashion, make-up or performance arts. In general, people in urban settings appear to be more aware and tolerant than those in rural locations. Regional variations are also evident: some interviewees thought that levels of awareness and acceptance of SOGI were higher in Tanintharyi than in other regions, due to the influence of Thai media and high migration to Thailand, where diverse SOGI enjoy more social acceptance.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, interviewees in Tanintharyi recognised people identifying as LGBTQ to be among the most vulnerable and discriminated against within families and communities, encountering both verbal and mental violence and harassment.

Interviewees in southern Shan state reported minimal understandings of diverse SOGI in rural settings. In the rural Shan research village, a gay man initially encountered discrimination and was pressured into marrying a woman, but found more acceptance of his sexuality after his marriage broke down.⁸⁰ High heteronormative pressures indicate limited scope to live out other, non-binary forms of masculinity. Not much is known about the experiences of people with diverse SOGI in non-urban settings, indicating that more research is needed, particularly in ethnic areas.

In Taunggyi city, a gay interviewee spoke of general social pressure to conform to expectations but also of individually varying levels of acceptance, leading him to “dress and act like a (*heteronormative*) man to visit his parents or (places of worship)”.⁸¹ He described verbal and physical violence towards him by his family in their attempt to change his behaviour to align with the heterosexual norm, but added that this changed after he became a professional beautician. Earning an income, donating (*Ahlungwe*) to social causes (such as internally displaced people (IDPs)) and respect for his skills seem to have met the benchmarks of what it means to be a good man and son.⁸²

This interpretation of masculinity seems to align with another phenomenon that emerged from the interviews: the differences in how gay men, transmen and transwomen are reportedly treated. Transmen, locally referred to as ‘tomboys’, seem to receive comparatively less social discrimination and abuse, and are viewed as more socially acceptable and less transgressive than transwomen.⁸³ This may be linked to their ability to take on work that is traditionally considered masculine (such as taxi driving) and more respected.

The widespread discrimination against LGBTQ people is rooted in a lack of awareness and deeply anchored, harmful cultural practice: in traditional comedies, films and puppetry, for instance, LGBTQ characters are frequently portrayed negatively, as sexually predatory, comic, sad, desperate, taking sexual advantages or criminal caricatures. The general public genuinely do not understand SOGI (some think “they are ‘choosing’ to be crazy”⁸⁴). This contributed to low self-esteem and mental health challenges by people identifying as LGBTQ. Respect for gender diversity along with gender equality constitute one of the social norm changes that should be supported by organisations working for peace and social cohesion in Myanmar. SOGI concerns should be represented in future political dialogue or UPCs so they can be addressed.

79 Interviews in Dawei, July to September 2017

80 Interviews in southern Shan, July to September 2017

81 Interview in Taunggyi, August 2017

82 Ibid.

83 Transwomen were reported as receiving the highest level of discrimination, with the exception of some high-profile, wealthy beauticians and fashion designers or those from rich elites. KII in Yangon, October 2017

84 Meeting with LGBTQ organisation, Yangon, 2017

3.2 The gap between expectations and lived experiences

Contrary to widely held expectations on men to be active leaders, protectors and providers, living up to such expectations has been difficult for many during the days of the military regime, ethnic and political conflicts and endemic poverty. While a small military and business (and now political) elite thrived, many men in Myanmar have experienced diverse factors of vulnerability and powerlessness that do not fit the patriarchal narrative ideal of strong men in leadership positions – particularly those affected by conflict, forced labour and displacement or political prisoners. Men living with disabilities face particular and gendered challenges not covered in this report, but in forthcoming research.⁸⁵

The majority of rural people want to work their land and raise their children peacefully (about 70% of Myanmar's labour force depends on agriculture⁸⁶), but have had to bear various harmful impacts of conflict: experiencing, witnessing and being forced to commit violence, forced portering and labour, forced recruitment into armed groups. In addition, indirect conflict impacts have been faced: displacement due to conflict or land grabbing, lack of education and economic opportunities, migration or getting involved in drugs (use and sale) due to lack of other opportunities. Men still face particular discrimination, such as being subject to extra scrutiny at drug checkpoints and possibly checkpoint fees, complicating everyday activities such as buying agricultural inputs or selling agricultural products.⁸⁷ Strangers to the area can face even more suspicion and scrutiny, including IDPs, but especially those of different ethnicities.

Interview participants generally saw men in the role of taking leadership in conflict and peace, disseminating information, taking responsibility and sacrificing their lives for their beliefs in active armed conflict. This aligns with social expectations of men as being the 'appropriate' person to participate in, and lead, war and conflict resolution. It partly stems from men's perceived greater physical strength than women and greater experience outside of the home than women.⁸⁸ Those involved in defending or re-claiming lands were considered trustworthy, heroes and role models – and accorded corresponding higher social capital and status. Men who avoid conflicts or civic engagement were seen to do so in order to focus on their family, business or children's education, or, for younger men, due to lack of parental permission.

As a counterpoint, women's organisations interviewed portrayed men's roles in conflict as initiators of conflicts, domestic violence, gambling and drug selling (entailing discrimination, stigma and family separation). They compared the many domestic and economic responsibilities that women face in rural settings (often as the primary prime agricultural labourer, in addition to looking after children and all household chores) to men's responsibilities (heavy lifting related to clearing fields and occasional house construction). In this regard, many pointed to tropes of rural men as 'lazy, no-good drunkards' – highlighting an apparent lack of positive engagement and roles for these men.⁸⁹ Men involved in violence and armed conflict were dismissed as 'walking on the edge of the knife', foolhardy, criminal and destroying family life, which contradicts the expectations on men.⁹⁰

The rigid gender expectations on men (to protect, to provide and to lead) contrast sharply with the lived experiences of many men in Myanmar. For example, some men have faced, or still face in

85 International Alert and Kachinland Research Centre, report forthcoming in December 2018.

86 Food and Agricultural Organization, Myanmar at a glance, <http://www.fao.org/myanmar/fao-in-myanmar/myanmar/en>

87 FGDs, southern Shan, July to September 2017

88 FGD, Yangon, June 2017

89 Interviews and FGDs, Yangon, July to September 2017

90 Interviews and FGDs, Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

some locations, open violence and risks of violence in Kachin, northern Shan and Rakhine states; others face economic challenges nationwide in an economy struggling to recover from decades of mismanagement and isolation, sanction and conflict. Chris Dolan has called this phenomenon ‘thwarted masculinities’,⁹¹ particularly acute in displacement and conflict settings. One of the consequences are negative mental health impacts such as depression, anxiety, withdrawal or suicidal tendencies. These can take shape in the form of violence against themselves (risk-taking behaviour, substance abuse, suicide attempts) or violence against others (e.g. domestic violence).

Of the estimated two million people living with depression in Myanmar, there appear to be more women than men.⁹² However, “men are far less likely to seek professional help due to a cultural norm that men should not show weakness”, not even to their own family.⁹³ This fits with a broader cultural climate of societal stigma around mental health illnesses, where blame is placed on “evil spirits, character weakness or punishment from ancestors” in a country which has the highest suicide levels in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.⁹⁴ Suicide is gendered: government

data shows that men account for more than 70% of suicides in Myanmar, mostly fatal, while less than 30% of suicide attempts are made by women and only one third of these are fatal.⁹⁵

The need for psychosocial support across the country is a serious issue that should be addressed. Such efforts will need to overcome the gendered barriers arising from current masculinities that prevent men from seeking and receiving psychosocial support. Public debate needs to undergo a transformation to enable constructive, healing engagement with mental health, including for men. For example, there needs to be increased social acceptance of the desire to reflect on and open up about feelings and traumas, particularly for diverse SOGI and victims of conflict and displacement.

FORCED LABOUR

In Tanintharyi, interviewees recounted routine experiences of forced labour by the military, especially for the construction of 160 km of railway between Dawei and Ye between 1994 and 1998. Tatmadaw soldiers informed local leaders how much labour they needed so that the leaders would decide who to send. Each household had to contribute, which meant that some had to send young or old members, usually male, although women were sent by households with no alternatives.⁹⁶ The impact was *intersectional*: richer families were able to pay others to go on their behalf, while poorer men were obliged to go to support their family. The railway construction entailed backbreaking work in dire, perilous conditions, with little food, water and shelter being provided.⁹⁷ The forced labour saw high fatalities due to many accidents, high malaria infection rates and exposure to wild animals, as well as physical violence and constant threats by the Tatmadaw and the foremen. Forced labour also reduced the labour available for household farming and, as a result, the family income.

91 C. Dolan, *Collapsing masculinities and weak states – A case study of northern Uganda*, in F. Cleaver (ed.) *Masculinities matter! Men, gender and development*, London: Zed Books, 2002; and C. Dolan, *Social torture: The case of northern Uganda 1986–2006*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009

92 Global Burden of Disease Study, cited in N. Baker, *The black dog in Myanmar*, Myanmar Times, 7 April 2017, www.mmtimes.com/index.php/lifestyle/25638-the-black-dog-in-myanmar.html

93 *Ibid.*

94 *Ibid.*

95 Nyein Ei Ei Htwe and Myint Kay Thi, *Suicide in Myanmar: The hanging question*, Myanmar Times, 6 July 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/suicide-myanmar-hanging-question.html#.W0GwDXJab5U.facebook>

96 Interviews in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

97 *Ibid.*

While these human rights abuses occurred decades ago, the memories of the trauma remain unresolved and the resentment towards the Tatmadaw and central government continues to fester in the absence of any recognition or compensation to this day. Such feelings are also linked to the perceived inability of the affected men to protect their families or themselves from this forced labour – which contradicts expectations of what it means to be a good man.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Perhaps the most striking example of powerlessness is the experience of political prisoners, many of whom were arrested when participating in the pro-democracy movement at a young age. As political prisoners, they were extremely vulnerable, lacking most dimensions of self-determination, unable to earn an income, see or communicate with their family, experiencing abject vulnerability in prisons that were unsafe, overcrowded, lacking food, hygiene and adequate medical services, and with little hope for the future.⁹⁸ Prisoners including political prisoners were vulnerable to ‘institutionalised’ torture and physical violence by guards,⁹⁹ with some of the induction routines explicitly intended to break down morale by making detainees “feel terrified, depressed and inferior”.¹⁰⁰ For instance, prisoners were forced to use female suffixes and titles (*shint* and *Ma*) “designed to degrade them” and their masculinity.¹⁰¹

After release from prison, the challenges they face are far from over. Despite some high profile former political prisoners such as the State Councillor and over 100 MPs and NLD functionaries, the general public do not understand the differences between political and criminal prisoners. Former political prisoners struggle to earn livelihoods and rebuild fulfilling lives.¹⁰² They are undeservedly tarnished with the stigma of criminality, socially and by potential employers, often with little income and they experience health problems due to the abysmal prison conditions.¹⁰³ The families of political prisoners often suffered from the lack of earnings from male political prisoners, as well as social and state backlash and discrimination.

Some interviewees thought that a majority of male political prisoners were supported by their families, although “men are less attached to family and can cut off the kindness they feel for family when they engage in politics”, while female political prisoners received less understanding and support from their family while suffering more from being separated from them.¹⁰⁴ This is symptomatic of traditional gender expectations, which limit men’s ability to reflect on and share feelings even in such difficult situations. The same interviewee acknowledged nevertheless that some men do care deeply about their family and being separated from them.¹⁰⁵

While the worst abuses of routine torture during the military regime may be in the past, the issue of political prisoners remains a pressing concern today, with Amnesty International documenting an “alarming escalation of politically motivated arrests and imprisonment”.¹⁰⁶ In March 2018, 128

98 Interviews with male and female former political prisoners and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, Yangon and Dawei, July to October 2017

99 Amnesty International, *New expression meets old repression – Ending the cycle of political arrests in Myanmar*, London, 2016, p. 12

100 Win Naing Oo, *Cries from Insein*, All Burma Students’ Democratic Front, 1996, p. 6

101 *Ibid.*, p. 15

102 Interviews with male and female former political prisoners and the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, Yangon and Dawei, July to October 2017

103 *Ibid.*

104 Interview with former political prisoner, Yangon, October 2017

105 *Ibid.*

106 Amnesty International, *Myanmar: Political imprisonment in numbers*, March 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/03/myanmar-political-imprisonment-in-numbers>

political prisoners were still in prison or awaiting trial.¹⁰⁷ The Assistance Association for Political Prisoners calls for urgent reform of the prison system to eliminate human rights violations, despite these occurring out of the public eye and prisoners receiving little sympathy from the public in terms of deserving better conditions or support.¹⁰⁸

3.3 Masculinities and armed groups: Conscription, coercion, in service and thereafter

Talking about conflict violence and security conjures up images of armed male soldiers handling guns. This is the quintessential image of masculinity during conflict, intrinsically linked with violence – whether to defend communities or the nation, or in the form of a threat of violence by ‘the enemy’. The research aimed to better understand how and why people join armed service, the experience of men in service, and their experience afterwards. The section begins with perspectives on ethnic and other armed groups, while the second part focuses on the Tatmadaw.

Non-state armed groups

JOINING AND CONSCRIPTION

During the violent conflict and before the ceasefires, Shan, Pa-O and Karen respondents reported viewing the EAOs as protectors of the ethnic community against a central military regime perceived as violent and exploitative. Being a member of an EAO was not associated with any stigma in the eyes of the ethnic communities, but was more of a source of respect, a sense of ‘doing your duty’ to protect the community.¹⁰⁹ However, while some recruitment into the armed groups was an actively voluntary choice, conscription was common and recruits were more likely to be sent by the head of the household or community leaders in order to meet recruitment quotas set by the armed group.¹¹⁰ For example, during the intense conflict and periods of open war, the PNA commonly informed the Pa-O village council how many they required, and left the council to select the men.

The selection process was not always clear to the community, although usually fathers and young men would be selected to protect their village,¹¹¹ invoking the ‘protector’ ideal of expected masculinities. Only men were conscripted into the armed group in the research villages. They joined to protect their village, but often served in other locations. Due to the risks and poor conditions, some young men would flee from their village to hide when recruiters approached. Richer households were reported to have paid others to take their place when selected, showing how income levels influenced the participation in and exposure to armed violence.¹¹² Poorer men would be paid to replace them, facing violence and lethal danger in order to support their families at home. As combatants, they faced a ‘kill or be killed’ setting, where no prisoners were taken alive and injured combatants were likely to be killed by the enemy.¹¹³

Before the ceasefire, the Pa-O research site experienced some fighting between EAOs, such as between the SSA and the PNA. Interviewees reported that during these fights, the enmity

107 A further 120 charged for political activities were awaiting trial outside of prison. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, March month in review, Chronology and current political prisoners list, March 2018, <http://aappb.org/2018/04/aapp-monthly-chronology-of-march-2018-and-current-political-prisoners-list>

108 Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, Prison conditions in Burma and the potential for prison reform, AAPP, Yangon, 2016

109 Discussion with field focal points at analysis workshop, Yangon, 2007

110 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan and Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

111 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

112 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan and Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

113 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

remained on the battleground between EAOs – between armed combatants – rather than between the ethnic groups or villages. When members of these EAOs were back in their villages, they could work in the fields near each other's villages or meet with each other without problems or violence.¹¹⁴ Thus, the conflict and violence was perceived as being between the ethnic armed factions and not between the ethnic villages.

Since the ceasefire, the dynamics of conflict and armed groups are changing in both locations. In the southern Shan research area, voluntary service to the armed groups has decreased as young men have become more interested in education, employment, business opportunities, or in working for civil society and social development. Forced recruitment into armed groups is no longer reported, although some parents have allegedly 'sent' their children to armed groups if they feel unable to control them (for instance over drug abuse issues).¹¹⁵ This demonstrates the generational hierarchies and continued authority of parents over adult sons (culturally, children are considered under the control of their parents until they are married, regardless of their age).

FORCED LABOUR

In both research locations, being forced to act as guides or porters to the Tatmadaw were recalled as a problem in the past, but no longer an issue since the respective ceasefires.¹¹⁶ The Shan village recounted forced recruitment in the past, mainly by the Tatmadaw who forced villagers (usually men aged over 15) to act as porters, labourers or 'human shields' by walking in front of the troops.¹¹⁷ They were also recruited as guides for their knowledge of local paths and shortcuts, for instance, to evade EAO positions and avoid gunfights. A key factor in forcible recruitment was the physical proximity of villages to military stations and strategic locations: closer proximity meant higher exposure to forced recruitment, and remoter villages were less likely to be targeted. Community members did not recount the EAO forcibly recruiting porters or guides; they only recalled them requesting food and shelter when passing through the area. There was no stigma reported in relation to returned forced porters/guides or EAO combatants, as it is widely understood that they had little choice about joining.¹¹⁸ However, in other areas of active conflict, forced portering has been reported more recently¹¹⁹ and seems to follow similar gendered patterns.

In conclusion, we can see that the reasons for joining armed groups are gendered, and that they are changing over time, altering depending on the conflict dynamics.

IN SERVICE

The men serving on the frontline, whether Tatmadaw or other armed groups, faced similar experiences: severe physical hardship, lack of food and comfort, lack of communication with families and wives, and experiencing, witnessing and engaging in violence. The constant physical threat and exposure to violence had lasting emotional and mental impacts, for which combatants received little support.¹²⁰ Both Tatmadaw and armed groups soldiers largely served away from their communities, rarely seeing their families and wives. The veterans interviewed served long before the era of mobile phone communication, when letters could take months while phone

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ FGDs and interviews in southern Shan and Tanintharyi target villages, July to September 2017

¹¹⁷ FGDs and interviews in southern Shan, July to September 2017

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Interview by author in Kachin, January 2017. See also <http://www.theborderconsortium.org/news/conflict-and-abuse-in-southern-shan-state/> and <http://www.mizzima.com/news-domestic/six-shan-ni-farmers-missing-after-clashes-kachin-state>

¹²⁰ Interviews with veterans, Taunggyi and Dawei, July to September 2017

lines were scarce, expensive and not private.¹²¹ Within the ranks, soldiers reported feeling unable to talk about fear and grief to their seniors, because they wanted to appear capable and eligible for promotion. Even among their peers, competition for promotions meant they found no space to open up about the emotions related to physical violence and threat, stating that “it was very difficult”.¹²² Assessing the long-term consequences of such trauma was beyond the remit of this project, but it can be inferred that it has taken its toll on personal relationships with spouses and children.¹²³ Trauma can lead to a range of mental health problems, including depression, and can influence decision making and daily interactions with other men and broader society for years.

AFTER SERVICE

Ethnic ex-combatants are generally respected for their service to the community and are still consulted on conflict issues, or for their remaining good connections to the current EAO leadership. Thus, they retain social and political capital. Men who did not serve lack such social capital, receiving less opportunities to organise or lead community events, although no active stigmatisation was mentioned by interviewees. The Pa-O research village is perceived as being safer since one of the respected founders of the PNLA lives in the community, sharing his experience as a role model to encourage young men to live honourably and protect their community.¹²⁴ EAO leaders are expected to be honest and moral role models – for instance, “they should not have two wives”, which is seen as immoral behaviour. Apart from their social capital, however, there are few formal pensions or benefits available to the EAO ex-combatants interviewed after service. Interviewees state that there were no ex-combatants with physical disabilities requiring special assistance, as injured combatants generally did not survive.¹²⁵

Psychological trauma is likely to be high among former and serving members of the ethnic armed groups, although it is not discussed much. They rarely talk about peers who died in battle, only to state that “they finished their duty”.¹²⁶ As a consequence, the surviving combatants have limited space to verbally or emotionally process the loss of comrades, or their experiences of violence and facing their own mortality. This could impact their engagement in the peace process and in rebuilding their communities, including the model of masculinity they pass on to their children.

After the NCA, some PNA members were able to attend government military training centres for technical training, which was financially sponsored by private businessmen. Nowadays, younger men take up higher roles in the EAO because they are more educated, holding qualifications which were not accessible to the older men who came of age during heavy conflict. This change could upset traditional age-power dynamics between men in the EAO, and impact how former combatants feel about the peace dividend. If the older men (still serving or not) do not feel that their years of service and sacrifice are sufficiently acknowledged, they could become spoilers to the peace process – for example, by glorifying violence and conflict when speaking to young boys, sowing the seeds of future violence or undermining the new, younger leadership in participating in peace negotiations.

¹²¹ Interviews with veterans, Tanintharyi and southern Shan, July to September 2017

¹²² Interviews with veterans, Taunggyi and Dawei, July to September 2017

¹²³ For more on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), see US Department of Veteran Affairs, *How common is PTSD*, <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/ptsd-overview/basics/how-common-is-ptsd.asp>; and S.L. Ray and M. Vanstone, *The impact of PTSD on veterans' family relationships: An interpretative phenomenological inquiry*, *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 46(6), 2009, pp.838–847

¹²⁴ Interviews in southern Shan, July to September 2017

¹²⁵ Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Tatmadaw

REASONS FOR JOINING

Interviewees gave slightly different but parallel reasons for joining the Tatmadaw. Some joined for the expected glory and service to their country – in line with the ‘protector’ ideal but not linked to feeling threatened. Others joined for more economic reasons – to provide for the family, to get a job with benefits (income, housing, pension, healthcare),¹²⁷ for a career or education opportunities during the decades of low economic prospects. For instance, a recent ex-combatant interviewed in Dawei spoke of joining voluntarily to gain a career and status, having been partly inspired by the patriotic army-focused movies. He joined against the desires of his family, who saw the Tatmadaw as oppressing democracy and worried about his safety.¹²⁸ In a similar vein, Tavoyan interviewees in Tanintharyi recounted that while recruitment into the Tatmadaw was a frequent occurrence, this changed after the violent oppression of the 1988 and subsequent democracy movements. They argued that “people hate the Tatmadaw” in ethnic areas and would be unlikely to join.¹²⁹

The history and strategy of the Tatmadaw have been covered extensively in previous literature and will not be repeated here.¹³⁰ However, key features of the Tatmadaw as an institution are relevant to shaping or being shaped by masculinity expectations and norms in the case study locations. Firstly, the Tatmadaw claims to draw its legitimacy from maintaining the unity of the union of Burma, regardless of the costs, taking on this role and elevating it above the seemingly weak post-independence democratic institutions. The Tatmadaw’s emphasis on a united Burma/ Myanmar shaped its efforts to build a unitary Myanmar-speaking, Buddhist nation as part of the post-colonial state-building process.¹³¹ In line with this, “non-Buddhist officers or officers with non-Buddhist spouses were unlikely to climb beyond the rank of major” in the Tatmadaw from the late-1990s onwards, despite there being no official regulations to this effect.¹³² In pursuit of this goal, the Tatmadaw repeatedly demonstrated willingness to use force against political opponents and ethnic minority groups, including civilians of all genders and ages. This marginalised different ethnicities, languages and religions, despite the multi-lingual, multi-religious ethnic diversity.¹³³

Throughout the interviews, respondents varied markedly on their opinions of the Tatmadaw, indicating huge diversity of public opinion. Broadly, it seems that the image of and public respect for the Tatmadaw has changed over time: from independence heroes, to military coup, to violent suppressors of the democracy movement. The shooting of unarmed democracy protestors (including young and old, students and revered monks) in 1988 and 2007 led to a low point in the national public image of the Tatmadaw in Bamar areas.

In the last few years, there has been a marked upswing in popular support for the Tatmadaw as protectors of the nation from perceived internal and external threats, amidst military and religious leaders voicing a narrative of threat from extremist terrorism linked with Islam.¹³⁴ According to one report: “Since ... 2011, Myanmar has been troubled by an upsurge in extreme Buddhist

127 “We joined military service because we had nothing to eat.”, cited in A. Kirkham, *Listening to voices: Perspectives from the Tatmadaw’s rank and file*, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2015, p.39

128 Interview with ex-combatant, Tanintharyi, July 2017

129 Interviews and FGDs, Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

130 P. Keenan, *Op. cit.*, 2013; M. Callahan, *Making enemies: War and state building in Burma*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003; and A. Kirkham, *Op. cit.*, 2015

131 P. Keenan, *Op. cit.*, 2013

132 Before then, there was no evidence of discrimination on racial or religious grounds in promotions, with Christian officers in senior command positions and some Kayin, Kachin and Chin officers promoted to brigadier general. M. Myoe, *Op. cit.*, 2009, p.199

133 P. Keenan, *Op. cit.*, 2013

134 Discussions in civil society meetings in Yangon, June to December 2017

nationalism, anti-Muslim hate speech and deadly communal violence, not only in Rakhine state but across the country.”¹³⁵ This has recently been manifested in mass rallies in Yangon and other places in support of the Tatmadaw, where speakers insisted that “Tatmadaw is protecting the life of the people”.¹³⁶ The military has thus been re-cast in line with protector norms in the public narrative – at least in Bamar majority areas and, to some degree, in Rakhine.¹³⁷ In ethnic areas, the opinions are more likely to be negatively shaped by current or past experiences of violence and conflict.¹³⁸

IN SERVICE

As alluded to above, recollections of frontline service by Tatmadaw veterans highlighted similar challenges, including physical hardship, restrictions on their movements and freedoms, and exposure to and perpetration of violence. Although we were not able to interview actively serving soldiers, a CPCS report¹³⁹ revealed attitudes that were in favour of peace, but doubtful of the likely success of the current peace process – understandably so considering the ongoing fighting. Most of the soldiers wanted to stop fighting and live in peace, hoping that an eventual peace would bring increased developments. One soldier stated: “If the whole country has peace, we won’t have to kill our own people. Instead we can focus on the country’s development.”¹⁴⁰ They were divided on whether they would cease being a soldier if there was peace, but were united in requesting higher salaries and economic reintegration support if leaving the army. The soldiers recognised the widespread poverty and exclusion as causes of the conflict and key issues to be addressed in the peace process. They did not know much about the peace process, but were concerned that ethnic nationalism posed the biggest challenge to the peace process. They reflected on the worries of their families for their safety, as well as their own fears in this regard. They all agreed on their obligation to obey orders, an experience which has had a long-lasting impact, shaping attitudes and behaviours long after leaving active service.

AFTER SERVICE

After service, the challenge for former combatants is generally reintegrating into civilian life and livelihoods. According to a Tatmadaw veteran focus group in Dawei, veterans all receive some pension and support from the veterans’ association, although they would like the military to arrange land access for them and higher pensions to elevate their current living standards.¹⁴¹ The amount of support to veterans was seen as varying, depending on the regional commanders. Disabled soldiers receive healthcare, prosthetics¹⁴² and government housing, but pensions barely provide a living for former lower ranks.¹⁴³ Ranked officers with disabilities fare better depending on their education levels: they are more likely to be given administrative roles providing better incomes, such as in the military’s economic holdings.¹⁴⁴ Generally, experiences varied according to rank: higher ranks can retire earlier and move to other ministries; lower ranks serve until retirement age at 60. Some Tatmadaw veterans we spoke to had found work in the private sector,

135 International Crisis Group, *Buddhism and state power in Myanmar*, Asia Report No. 290, Brussels, 2017, p.i

136 Myo Htet Paing, *Rally denounces attempts to break peace process*, Eleven, 2 May 2018, www.elevenmyanmar.com/politics/13345

137 In Rakhine, attitudes are complex, with the Tatmadaw seen as protection from a perceived Islamist terrorist threat. At the same time, tensions remain high between ethnic Rakhine and the central Bamar government, culminating in the killing of seven Rakhine protestors in Mrauk U in a violent police crackdown in January 2018.

138 Interviews in Taunggyi, Yangon, Dawei and Myikyina, June to September 2017

139 A. Kirkham, *Op. cit.*, 2015

140 *Ibid.*, soldier quotes, p.29

141 FGD with veterans, Tanintharyi, August 2017

142 Interviews with veteran associations, July to September 2017

143 Htet Khaung Linn, *On society’s fringes, disabled Tatmadaw veterans languish in poverty*, Myanmar Times, 11 October 2016, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/23003-on-society-s-fringes-disabled-tatmadaw-veterans-languish-in-poverty.html>

144 *Ibid.*

while others had not and relied on other incomes for the family. Retiring thus meant a double-blow to them, ending their roles and status as both protector and provider of the family.¹⁴⁵

Tatmadaw mottos: *“No peace”, “Non-stop fighting, non-stop shooting”, “Never give the enemy a chance”* – Tatmadaw veterans FGD, Dawei, August 2017

Some key features of military training and mindset remained active. All of the veterans continued their strong links to Tatmadaw networks and communication with former colleagues. The command structures stayed intact, with all FGD participants wearing the same veteran longyi and responding in order according to rank. Generally, the veterans proclaimed they were satisfied with and proud of their life as soldiers. The mottos they learned in their training and service still guided them, as they were eager to explain (see textbox). This has a lasting influence on their attitude to the peace process: they did not believe in the peace dialogue and thought the Tatmadaw should never stop fighting, that they should not negotiate as this gives the enemy a chance to grow stronger: “If there is no enemy, there is peace – so you should kill all your enemies to get peace.”¹⁴⁶ These attitudes and militarised mindsets should be considered when designing and implementing peacebuilding efforts, as veterans could potentially act as spoilers to the peace process at local and national levels.

This risk is particularly acute in situations where the veterans, who expect pride and recognition of their service and sacrifice, do not receive this status – for example, where they are living in areas with ethnic groups who have different perceptions of the Tatmadaw. Some communities see the Tatmadaw as grabbing land, food and shelter or killing people, while the EAOs are seen as protecting the ethnic community.¹⁴⁷ EAO (KNU and MNSP) combatants returning from the field were sometimes welcomed back with victory flowers, while the Tatmadaw were not.¹⁴⁸ There are social divisions between the local communities and current and veteran Tatmadaw soldiers who settled in the area – with the memory of atrocities against the democracy movement and the railroad forced labour still strongly active.¹⁴⁹ Tatmadaw veterans in Dawei described encountering discrimination in the job market and against their children in schools.¹⁵⁰ However, even the battle-hardened, militarised former Tatmadaw were able to modify their behaviour in some way for the sake of their relationships: those married to Tavoyan wives noted that they “have to be very patient with them for the relationship to work” as they are strong in their ethnic identity and do not speak as “softly” as Bamar women.¹⁵¹ This shows that the apparently ‘immutable’ gender norms can adapt to other social dynamics when necessary or in a changed context, suggesting that national-level gender norm change is possible.

Thus, not only do former combatants need support with reintegrating into civilian society, but building sustainable peace will also require civilians to be willing to engage with soldiers and veterans as humans, and to recognise them as individuals with feelings and past traumas who have had to make hard choices for their families. In part, these choices were influenced at the individual level by men seeking to live up to social expectations, to protect the nation or national

¹⁴⁵ Interviews, Taunggyi and Dawei, July to September 2017

¹⁴⁶ Veterans FGD, Tanintharyi, August 2017

¹⁴⁷ FGDs, Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Interviews with civil society stakeholders and politicians in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

¹⁵⁰ Veterans FGD, Tanintharyi, August 2017. Similar concerns about social rejection by ethnic communities are shared in the Kirkham, Op. cit., 2015 report.

¹⁵¹ FGD with veterans, Dawei, August 2017

unity and to provide for their family. In this sense, their motives were not dissimilar to those of veterans who served on the opposite sides.

The social rejection from civilians, particularly ethnic communities, also emerged in the CPCS report. Their 'listening' research process also described the transformative experience of the listeners: Tatmadaw soldiers could be 'humanised' and viewed as ordinary people experiencing daily struggles. Replicating this more broadly could contribute to everyday peace at community level in the many locations in which rank and file soldiers and veterans live among citizens. Such a transformation of civilian–military relations might also potentially contribute towards a movement to reform the institutional culture and structures, whether as part of a formal SSR process or not. Ideally, such an SSR process would entail training on gender, peace and security for all soldiers, enabling them to better recognise the expectations they face and to make more informed choices about their actions within the army, at home and in wider society.

3.4 Men as peacebuilders – and enablers or gatekeepers of women's participation

The previous sections have reviewed the assumed links between men and leadership in all areas, including in politics, armed conflict and therefore also in the peace process. Men are assumed to be intrinsically linked to exercising violence, and therefore also to ending violence. This last section will consider the traditional gender norms in relation to conflict resolution and assess how this plays out across the different levels of the peace process in terms of enabling or hindering participation: at the top level of the Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC), at the 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conferences, and at the local, community level.

TRADITIONAL GENDER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION OR PEACE ENGAGEMENT

When asked about women's participation in the peace process, one of the Tatmadaw veterans stated that "Women can destroy the nation".¹⁵² This refers back to the last Burmese Queen Supaylat of the Kongbaung dynasty, who was partly blamed for the defeat to the British and subsequent colonisation. Hundreds of years later, she is still cited as a reason to keep women away from political decision making. Men are traditionally expected and approached to handle conflicts, while women are not.

For example, within the General Administration Department (GAD), men were more often approached to resolve conflicts than women of the same rank and age.¹⁵³ As a result, men develop more experience in addressing conflicts and more status for doing so. Men engaged in resolving conflict and violence peacefully were seen as wise and good role models, and therefore regarded with respect. When dealing with conflicts, a key informant reported that men mostly use power or status-based decision making as a means to settle conflicts,¹⁵⁴ rather than approaches aimed at reaching consensus or win-win solutions. Listening to both sides of the conflict before making a decision was not seen as a required procedure, particularly where the conflicts are over land or property between people of different religions, where religious solidarity was seen as priority. Women were seen to employ more negotiation and compromise strategies – likely to derive from their socialisation, which values harmony and avoiding being seen as difficult or contrary. This is also likely related to the fact that they enjoy less status and power than male counterparts, which

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ KII, Yangon, July 2017

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

requires them to convince rather than merely to make and enforce decisions.¹⁵⁵ Regardless of gender, more systematic training on due process in conflict resolution (such as listening to both sides prior to deciding) will improve the likelihood of just settlements being made.

PEACE PROCESS OR LOCAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In southern Shan state, before the 1990s, the conflict dynamics sometimes allowed community elders to negotiate between the armed groups and the Tatmadaw to prevent fighting in or near the village by letting one group know when the other was around to avoid armed confrontations. This was sometimes successful in preventing armed violence harming the village.¹⁵⁶ These negotiators tend to be former male village leaders who no longer play formal roles but are still highly respected by the community – people of prior influence. Engagement in these conflict resolution efforts further increases their influence and social standing. These individuals, predominantly male, can negotiate with senior EAO leaders about issues they have not been able to resolve, such as drug or murder cases within the community. Those taking actions to resolve conflicts develop their leadership skills and become more powerful. However, it is often those already in strong positions of power and social standing (male-dominated and masculine-coded) who get involved in conflict resolution efforts, thus leaving young or marginalised men and women on the side-line.

PEACE PROCESS TO DATE

The highest level of the peace process is led by the UPDJC, chaired by the State Counsellor. The UPDJC includes only 11 women (including the State Counsellor) out of its 75 members (five of whom are in the 'social affairs' chapter) from three blocs: government, parliament and military; EAOs; and political parties.¹⁵⁷ Another crucial component of the peace process are the 21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conferences. These are multi-stakeholder processes with limited participation; hence the selection of delegates has been crucial. Previously, mainly older men with military backgrounds were selected to participate in the NCA negotiation – those who were directly involved in the armed conflict. After the ceasefire, the political dialogue is focusing on issues for which military battlefield experience is less relevant – such as social issues, the economy and the future political federal structure. Women and civilian men can bring experience and skills related to these topics to strengthen the process. EAOs are increasingly interested in civil society stakeholders with skills in these areas; however, there can be a trust deficit between armed and civilian actors. Building up trust and personal relationships with the EAOs is key for civilians and women to participate, even from within the same ethnic groups. In addition, some ethnic women groups are vocally opposed to some of the EAO negotiating approaches, which complicates their participation on an ethnic basis. Thus, a separate mechanism for ensuring women's participation, or at least representation of their concerns, should be considered.

The formal UPC is largely dominated by men, apart from the dialogue on social issues, in which more women participate – in line with gender norms which view social care aspects as feminine. At the UPC in May 2017, women representatives varied between 33% in the social sector, to 18% in political and 21% in economic sectors, and to only 14% and 9% in the land and environment sector and security sector, respectively. At the most recent UPC in July 2018, women accounted for 17% of the official delegates from government, politicians, Tatmadaw and NCA signatory EAOs, marginally more than the 15% of the previous year, but significantly below the 30% agreed in the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Interviews in southern Shan, July to September 2017

¹⁵⁷ KII with CSO, Yangon, July 2017; and President's Office website, <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/notifications/2017/02/17/id-7287>

NCA.¹⁵⁸ When key process-related roles such as facilitators and technical assistants are included, it rises to 22%.¹⁵⁹ Women's participation has increased each year, although it remains below the agreed minimum.

TABLE: PARTICIPATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY PANGLONG UNION PEACE PROCESS CONFERENCES¹⁶⁰

	Total delegates	Female delegates		
		2017	2018	
Government officials and lawmakers	150	40	40	27%
Tatmadaw	150	10	10	7%
Politicians (from 23 parties)	150	26	28	19%
NCA signatory EAOs (8 in 2017, 10 in 2018)	150	19	31	21%
Civilian experts	100	10	13	13%
Total	700	105	122	17%

The principle of women's participation has gained recognition after sustained advocacy from Myanmar's extensive women's organisations and networks, and development partners considering it a prerequisite.¹⁶¹ The EAOs have mostly accepted this and the government is getting closer; the Tatmadaw remains further below the 30% target for women's participation than other stakeholders. Women participants are also increasingly accepted for their expertise. Civil society discussions are experiencing higher participation by women – for instance, the Tanintharyi Civil Society Peace Forum discussions achieved 60% women's participation.¹⁶² However, the quality of participation is also important, rather than quantity alone: thus, the question remains whether women's concerns and priorities are being accepted and addressed.

At the community level in southern Shan state, gender differences are clear: more men are involved in the formal peace process negotiations, while more women are leading at the civil society organisation (CSO) level. Although mostly rural men were involved in fighting and the conflict before the ceasefire, they were perceived to be unable to get involved in the peace process because of insufficient economic resources (i.e. travel costs, need to earn an income). At the community level, male elders only invite the male heads of households to participate in peace-related discussions, openly marginalising women from the discussion.¹⁶³ In one village, the exclusion was explicit: "Women are not allowed."¹⁶⁴ One respondent 'joked' that "if we allow women to participate in meeting, then we have to help in the household".¹⁶⁵ Such remarks may indicate concerns about potential loss of male privileges, and illustrates the linking of (perceived) male superiority with decision-making roles and women's subordination into supporting and domestic roles.

In general, among civil society in the city, there is better recognition of gender as an issue, with equal participation discussed both in terms of ethnic and gender diversity. However, in practice, this is not yet the case. In Taunggyi, male stakeholders say there is no discrimination, yet

¹⁵⁸ Nyein Nyein, Women playing larger role at this year's peace conference, *The Irrawaddy*, 15 July 2018, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/women-playing-larger-role-years-peace-conference.html>

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ KII with CSO, Yangon, July 2017

¹⁶² Communication with Dawei Women's Union, May 2018

¹⁶³ Interviews and FGDs, southern Shan, July to September 2017

¹⁶⁴ Conversation with local resource person, September 2017

¹⁶⁵ Interviews and FGDs, southern Shan, July to September 2017

gendered barriers persist that are less visible but obstructive. For example, a female member of the JMC observed that male members of the committee receive warnings about armed conflict activity through social networks with the EAOs.¹⁶⁶ As a woman, she does not have access to these due to gender barriers and social structures (there are few men-women friendships and EAO women are less likely to warn her). As a result, she has had to face extra security risks when travelling to rural areas. This is one of the hidden barriers that women face in participating in the process dominated by men and their informal exchange networks – barriers that may not be visible to male members linked to these information flows.

It can be difficult to encourage women's participation in contravention of the existing traditions. In mixed group meetings, women may stay very quiet, although they will speak more openly in gender disaggregated groups. CSOs have been encouraging gender equality and women's leadership, but much more is needed to transform roles and expectations of both women and men. Such trainings can incur backlash and condescending attitudes towards men working for gender equality, as was observed in Taunggyi. There is no such condescension towards actors involved in the peace process. Other male interviewees argued that "whether women and men participate is not important, only that the people want peace".¹⁶⁷ This shows a lack of awareness of the importance and benefits of women's participation from the perspective of one who is not excluded from participation. On the other hand, a Tavoyan ethnic party member observed that men have so far failed to reach agreement and that women might achieve peace faster if they get involved "as they have maternal attitudes"¹⁶⁸ or, to be more precise, have been socialised into caring and nurturing attitudes.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

There are few but nevertheless important examples of strong women leaders – such as the State Counsellor, the AGIPP steering committee members and high-profile women leaders participating in the process. Despite the women leaders' encouragement of other women, broader women's participation and their levels of confidence remain low. This leads to a situation where the same few women leaders take part in multiple forums and meetings, rather than meaningful participation by diverse women at all levels of the process. To change this, women leaders are calling on government ministries to amend their rules and regulations to ensure stronger women's participation.¹⁶⁹

Because of the limited numbers of delegates, if one person from each party is invited to an event, dialogue or training, it is unlikely that any group (whether government, EAO or CSO) will send women representatives. In order to support women's participation and achieve gender balanced meetings or trainings, it is better to invite two people from each group and to specify that one should be female. Gender awareness lessons are also needed throughout society and should be included in school curriculums and government and social trainings, as well as organisational policies to implement the 30% quota. This development of women role models was expected to benefit broader society and peace. What is missing from the discourse is an understanding of how patriarchal gender norms negatively impact men too, and of what men can gain as well from increasing gender equality. This could focus their motivation to participate in undoing gender inequalities.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with JMC member, Taunggyi, September 2017

¹⁶⁷ Interviews in Dawei, July to September 2017

¹⁶⁸ FGDs in Dawei, July to September 2017

¹⁶⁹ Interview with JMC member, Taunggyi, September 2017

Male interviewees meanwhile claimed that “there are no barriers to women’s participation”.¹⁷⁰ This view stands in stark contrast to that of the women interviewed, who listed a range of barriers that hinder their meaningful participation: social, cultural, economic, domestic and information. Male interviewees frequently did not seem to understand the multiple and cumulative impacts of these barriers on women’s participation: awareness of male privilege and discrimination against women was lacking, and low participation was explained away as “differences due to personalities” or lack of interest, instead of recognising and addressing the underlying structural issues. These barriers need to be made more visible to the speakers and listeners, to increase understanding and visibility of what are often invisible assumptions. This will require raising the awareness of both male and female participants, so they can engage unconstrained by socialised expectations.

In the Tatmadaw institutional culture, particularly in senior ranks, militarised masculinities are conditioned to conform to a degree of formality and rigidity regarding the process, which may not be conducive to agreeing on compromise solutions. As a result, bilateral pre-meetings have been found to be more productive to prepare the ground so that solutions can be found without either side ‘losing face’ in public meetings.¹⁷¹

Barriers to women’s participation include the following:¹⁷²

- **Childcare and domestic duties:** Most women, including women leaders, are responsible for childcare and domestic responsibilities, making it hard for them to attend meetings. Participation requires arranging childcare or bringing the children, which takes more time and money to mobilise than for male participants. In a peace process characterised by delays and short-notice meetings, this creates considerable barriers for women.
- **Social and gender norms:** Public and political space (including the peace process) is coded as masculine, delegitimising women’s voices and often leading to more subtle forms of discrimination. For instance, male delegates frequently dismiss women’s concerns about health and education of IDPs or SGBV as less important than the ‘hard’ security negotiations around ceasefire conditions or territorial disputes. Women’s qualifications to participate in the peace process are routinely questioned publicly, despite the fact that in parallel structures such as parliament, women on average have more academic qualifications than men.¹⁷³ Only a few men block women’s leadership outright: “If women lead, I don’t want to follow.”¹⁷⁴
- **Misunderstanding of social barriers:** Male stakeholders (and some high-profile women who are not working on gender) see lack of women’s participation as being rooted in their perceived lack of interest, rather than understanding the practical and social barriers that interested women face.
- **Safety and reduced mobility:** Other barriers include outward concerns for women’s safety in conflict areas, in line with gender norms around keeping women safe: women’s safety when travelling to participate cannot be guaranteed. The flawed response, however, fails to address the root causes of inequality or to remove the insecurity, thereby limiting women’s mobility ‘for their protection’.

¹⁷⁰ Quote from male JMC member, Tanintharyi; also KII with CSO, Dawei, 3 July 2017

¹⁷¹ Interview with CSO, Yangon, July 2017

¹⁷² For more details on this, see also: Human Rights Watch, *A gentleman’s agreement*, August 2016; PSF, *The women are ready*; Löfving et al, *Op. cit.*, 2015; as well as the range of AGIPP policy briefs and analysis on their website

¹⁷³ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, K.N.B. Ninh, Mi Ki Kyaw Myint and S. Lee April, *Women’s political participation in Myanmar: Experiences of women parliamentarians 2011–2016*, Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2017

¹⁷⁴ Discussion at analysis workshop, Yangon, September 2017

Free Expression Myanmar argue that women human rights defenders challenging patriarchal power over the most sensitive gender-related taboos (diverse SOGI, sexual violence in conflict, promoting contraception or women's leadership) face increased risks of GBV.¹⁷⁵ The most common attacks are physical attacks as well as character smears, aggravated by Myanmar's history of patriarchy, militarism and religious extremism.¹⁷⁶ Women face considerable risks and social ostracisation if they speak out on these issues, especially on the national stage, challenging patriarchal hierarchies.

BARRIERS TO MALE PARTICIPATION

Women are not the only ones to face barriers to participation in the peace process: male delegates from ethnic minorities also encounter challenges when participating in the peace process. For rural men outside of Dawei, it is mainly lack of access to transport and communication or information flows that prevent them from taking part. They are also more focused on their business activities and earning livelihoods than getting involved in peace activities. Both men and women from rural areas face challenges in accessing transport and information, as well as the acute need to focus on earning a livelihood. Some respondents believed that the easy accessibility to alcohol and drugs prevented men "from being in the right mindset" to participate.¹⁷⁷ At the community level, family members see involvement in the peace process as similar to political involvement and therefore as a risk to the family. As a result, they do not like young men (much less young women) getting involved. This could be a long-term impact of the violent repression of the pro-democracy movements of 1988, the 1990s and 2007.

For most ethnic men, Burmese is not their first language, yet delegates need to be able to communicate and negotiate confidently in Burmese when faced with hostile military, high-ranking opponents in formal public encounters. They face intimidation and Tatmadaw delegates with fixed positions and little scope to compromise. In peace negotiations in other countries, some informal communications between delegates from opposing sides were possible during meals, but since EAOs, military and MPs tend to stay in different types of accommodation in Nay Pyi Daw, such opportunities for informal interaction are rare.¹⁷⁸ In the formal peace process, most of the male participants are of senior level (over 50 years of age), who were involved in the conflict as combatants. Junior-level men have been unable to develop this type of frontline combat experience in times of ceasefire, which the senior leadership uses to undermine their influence.¹⁷⁹

Community-level interviewees expressed concerns that the high-level dialogue does not sufficiently consider the suffering caused by the conflict at the grassroots level. Grassroots level concerns need to reach decision makers, and respondents felt that women are more likely to see the 'small things', such as the impact of conflict on girls' and women's health. To address this, the invitation to participate should be broadened to men, women and all ethnic people, beyond senior ranks, to ensure that grassroots concerns are discussed. Women want to participate in the JMC as well as in the more practical lower-level discussions. The men participating in these forums can make a difference by listening to and respecting the women when they raise their concerns or suggestions.

175 O. Spencer and Y. Yadanar Thein, *Ignoring the real reasons for rape*, *Frontier*, 6 April 2018, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/ignoring-the-real-reasons-for-rape>

176 Ibid.

177 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan, July to September 2017

178 Interview with CSO, Yangon, July 2017

179 Interviews in southern Shan, July to September 2017

4. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has sought to analyse conflict, armed actors and peacebuilding efforts from a comprehensive gender analysis perspective, considering the different impacts of conflict on women, men and those with diverse SOGI. The case study locations provided examples of the different types of vulnerabilities that men experience, such as political imprisonment, forced labour or the experience of non-binary men. A forthcoming report, published separately, will cover vulnerabilities related to more local-level conflicts, including land conflicts, SGBV, substance abuse and migration.

The dual expectations on men to protect and provide for their family, linked with efforts to maintain or increase their status, can drive engagement in armed violence or, conversely, in peace efforts. The harmful psychosocial consequences of frontline combat and economic challenges are issues to be considered when designing demobilisation and reintegration programmes, to support former combatants to find non-violent livelihoods. A comprehensive gender analysis should form the basis of such a programme design.

The focus of many women's organisations has been on counting the number of women participants, advocating for 30% participation, and highlighting the issue of sexual violence in conflict; there has been less focus on integrating gender across all sectors. This should not always take the form of stand-alone, women-focused activities: the peace process would be considerably strengthened by applying a strong gender analysis across the sectors, from the social sector to the economic, natural resource management and security sectors. A stronger analysis of the different gendered experiences in these sectors increases the likelihood of addressing the varied needs and priorities of the diverse stakeholder groups, also increasing the likelihood of reaching a sustainable and inclusive peace agreement. The implementation of any eventual agreement will also need to be monitored in terms social inclusion and gendered impacts. The current focus on women's participation runs the risk of encountering backlash or resistance against programming that is perceived to be neglecting men and their concerns. By considering all genders, it can illustrate more clearly why gender matters to men as well as women in the conflict and post-conflict phases – and why both have a role to play in creating a more peaceful and gender equitable Myanmar.

Recommendations to government, EAOs and civil society actors supporting peace and security processes in Myanmar

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- There needs to be recognition that **gender does not mean only women**. Gender means understanding the socially created differences between women, men and diverse SOGI. This requires considering the relationship of power between the genders. It needs to be approached from an intersectional perspective, which considers how other identity factors – such as age, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, location, education and disability – interact with gender.
- It should be acknowledged that **men and boys form part of the gender, peace and security sector**. They face social expectations to behave in certain ways because they are men or boys. This is important when trying to understand how and why conflict and violence occur, as gender identities are inextricably linked to concepts of power and its demonstration. The dominant ideas of masculinity are closely linked to who exercises violence and in what way. Ignoring or misunderstanding how expectations drive participation in violence and conflict

can mean missing important conflict drivers and lessen the impact of peacebuilding efforts.

- Similarly, all actors should ensure that **men’s potential roles in championing peace and non-violence** are recognised and supported through programming. Measures should be taken to promote the voices of men in speaking out for peace, gender equality and social cohesion against violence. This should be something that young men aspire to. However, there also needs to be accountability given to women’s voices and equal value accorded to women’s perspective – this should not constitute a new form of perpetuating male bias and domination.
- This also means **recognising and addressing the needs of men who are vulnerable** – such as prisoners, former political prisoners, veterans, men with disabilities, displaced or migrant men, recovering drug addicts, or men not conforming to strict heterosexual norms. The term ‘vulnerabilities’ should be used with the greatest care, in view of current masculinities norms, which may prompt defensive reactions and disengagement. However, a failure to address the impacts of vulnerabilities could contribute to a constituency of excluded, frustrated men who may be more likely to be mobilised into violence against themselves (e.g. through substance abuse) or others. Nevertheless, the term ‘vulnerabilities’ should be used carefully considering current masculinities norms, which may prompt defensive reactions and disengagement at the idea of being labelled as vulnerable. The intention here is not to deny agency or compare “who is the most vulnerable”; the key is recognising how different people are differently vulnerable.

PROMOTING GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY TO IMPROVE PEACE OUTCOMES

- Across the board, government, EAOs and civil society actors **should promote gender equality as a right in itself, but also as key to the success and sustainability of the peace process** – and as an essential ingredient of positive peace and transforming the root causes of conflict. This will require reaching out to both men and women to achieve sustainable transformation of gender expectations and social norm change.
- **Respect for gender diversity** is one of the social norm changes that should be supported by organisations working for peace and social cohesion in Myanmar. SOGI concerns should be represented in future political dialogues or UPCs so their concerns can be addressed, with due regard for their security. This will also require ending the pervasive negative portrayals and stereotypes of diverse SOGI in Myanmar films and theatre productions.
- State, political parties, EAOs and civil society actors need to bring out the gender dimensions of each of the components of political dialogue – that is, how men and women are differently involved in and affected by the political dialogue. This will shape how they can support peace in each component. This means **going beyond women-focused projects, and recognising and addressing gender dynamics in broader security and economic issues**. Gender should be treated as an integral component of initial conflict and context analysis, and there should be continual monitoring of the impacts on gender dynamics.
- Actors involved in or supporting the peace process should **take gender seriously**, starting with analysis of conflict contexts and recognising how expectations on men drive their engagement in conflict and violence. It is important here to consider how gender plays out differently in different conflicts for different people, depending on their intersectional gender identities. This will shape their ability and agency to support peace.
- Actors preparing for an eventual **SSR and DDR process** (whether government armed forces, ethnic militaries or CSOs) should seek to understand the gendered nature of recruitment into armed groups, and how these dynamics are changing in different locations. Demobilisation should include support for unlearning violent patterns of behaviour and building more positive identities of democratic citizenship, tolerance and equality. Veterans from all forces will require new civilian livelihoods that enable them to live dignified lives. Psychosocial

support should be available to those who experienced and engaged in violence to avoid negative coping patterns of substance abuse and violent behaviours. Both lines of support will need to be informed by the expectations faced by former combatants from society and their families. An SSR process should entail training on gender, peace and security for all soldiers, to enable them to better recognise the expectations they face and to make more informed choices about their actions in the army, at home and in society.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

- It should be ensured that information about the peace process reaches women stakeholders – for example, by reaching out through women’s organisations and networks, religious associations and Early Childhood Care and Development centres. Where men are informed as head of households by community or CSO leaders, they should be reminded that they are expected to pass on the information to their family members and that the concerns of their family members (including women’s concerns) are also relayed to leaders. Civil society actors soliciting information from the community level should specifically ask male participants about the concerns of women that are not directly represented.
- On a practical level, in order to support women’s participation and achieve gender-balanced meetings or trainings, it is better to specifically **invite one man and one woman from each group**. If one person from each party is invited to an event, dialogue or training, it is unlikely that any group (whether government, EAO or CSO) will send women representatives. This should include covering travel costs for participating women, and potentially for their young children or childcare costs.
- In **trainings**, power, age, gender and education are important elements that shape interaction for and between both participants and instructors. For gender trainings, the gender, age and ethnic mix of the training team should be considered: for example, men may take the learning objectives more seriously when voiced by men, particularly senior men of high status. Gender trainings should not only be offered to women; they should also actively focus on men and aim to give them a clear mandate to promote gender equality. Both can learn from mixed trainings, although segregated sessions may be more appropriate for some issues, for instance when sharing experiences of SGBV.
- Efforts should be made to transform power inequalities through comprehensive approaches based on local gender analysis. Such approaches should be designed and implemented in a way that **avoids backlash** from conservative factions who may perceive their privileges as being threatened or from those who may feel excluded. Perceptions of additional opportunities or unfair advantages for women could lead to a counterproductive backlash against activities or the women participating. **Clear and transparent communication** is needed about the reasons for the intervention (such as the problem analysis or specific data on gender inequalities) as well as the overall goals, methods and opportunities for involvement or feedback.

ENGAGING MEN FOR WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

- Men face specific gendered expectations and should play an active role in working for gender equality. Civil society actors should promote engagement that facilitates men becoming conscious of gender inequalities and that **gives men a concrete and practical mandate to remove inequalities and promote gender equality**.
- The **structural barriers that hinder women’s participation** in the peace process should be **made visible to male participants** in the process – so that both women and men can engage in the process unconstrained by limiting social expectations and so there is better recognition of the value of women’s inputs. Meetings and invitations need to be arranged in sufficient time to enable women participants to make childcare and travel arrangements.

Security concerns need to be addressed considerably, on a case by case basis, rather than using such concerns to restrict women's mobility and thereby exclude them from the process.

- **Participation in the peace process should be broadened** to include men and women of different ethnicities beyond the senior military ranks to ensure that grassroots concerns are discussed. This should include organising grassroots consultations and feedback loops to inform higher-level discussions. Ethnic minority women leaders want to participate in the JMC and in more practical lower-level discussions. The male leaders and representatives currently participating in these forums can make a difference by listening to and respecting women's concerns.
- Gender issues related to peace and security are often mainly discussed in terms of the proposed 30% quota for women's participation. However, **how women participate can be as important as how many** – one or two skilled, experienced women in leadership or presenting roles can have more of an impact than multiple young women being present but lacking the skills, confidence, status or insights to participate effectively. The many active roles that women can play, and the skills they can bring, in peace and conflict must be better understood and supported. This means building the understanding of male actors in these processes and clarifying the role they can play in supporting women's participation.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION, AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

- There is an urgent need for some form of nationwide **truth and reconciliation** process to recognise the injustices carried out under the military regime – including violence against civilians, forced labour in ethnic areas, widespread land confiscations, unfair arrests, criminalisation and maltreatment of political prisoners. This should include elements of truth telling, as well as providing due medical and psychosocial support to male and female victims and survivors, including financial reparations.
- Broader **psychosocial support** is needed to address the legacies of decades of repression and dictatorship, and the individual traumatic experiences encountered. This should include creating a safe atmosphere where all genders can freely discuss fears and concerns, and rebuild negative self-images (such as conflict victim or IDP) into positive ones (active citizen, community leader, caring father or teacher).
- The government should acknowledge the sacrifices made by political prisoners for the country as part of a **transitional justice process**, whether in the form of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission or in other forms (such as recognising political imprisonment as being different to crime-related punishment). Government should also contribute to raising awareness of the public of the need for rehabilitation alongside the necessary financial, vocational and psychosocial support. This could serve to contribute to repairing the self-image of former political prisoners, particularly men, who face challenges in reconciling lost time and old identities with pressure to meet gender expectations on the outside, such as providing for families, not having lived up to expectations of looking after their family members. Such recognition could serve to repair damaged social fabric and foster broader acceptance of less rigid gender norms.

Annexes

Annex 1: A note on research methodology challenges

Researching conflict issues and gender can be challenging, and numerous challenges arose during this research. These included practical challenges of delays due to the needs of target communities – such as farming season in Pa-O region and the monsoon season – as well as security challenges due to the evolving conflict dynamics in Shan state. Scheduled FGDs and visits had to be rearranged for the security of research communities due to active conflict in the vicinity. Access to senior-level political, government and ethnic leaders presented further challenges. For these reasons, the research considered both top-level, ethno-political conflict between different armed actors and broader social conflicts that affect people in their everyday lives, such as land conflicts and drug abuse issues. By better understanding the gendered dynamics of the pervasive, everyday conflict issues, we aim to contribute to more effective, gender transformative peacebuilding at the national level as well.

Our research approach consisting of four research topics was ambitious, in a context where there was little understanding of these topics by research participants outside of academically schooled civil society circles. The topics are delicate and required high degrees of sensitivity and trust to enable participants to open up beyond generalisations. However, trade-offs were needed between taking sufficient time to explain the key concepts (gender, conflict, peace)¹⁸⁰ to participants, while ensuring that the sessions created a space to solicit the views and insights of the participants. For instance, participants thought that ‘conflict’ and ‘peace’ only related to the national-level peace process and did not feel comfortable discussing local-level issues such as land conflicts, drugs or impacts of migration – until further explanations of the concepts of conflict and peace had taken place, which took considerable time. In part, this stems from the sociohistorical background and context, which left many key informants reluctant to speak openly, particularly those within local authority hierarchies. At the community level, only limited discussion of SGBV was possible due to poor understanding and high taboos around this issue. The timing of the research interviews and FGDs coincided with the escalation of the Rakhine crises, which contributed to people’s reluctance to talk about conflict and peace to researchers, particularly those from international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). Translation of key concepts between English and Burmese and ethnic languages (Shan, Pa-O, Karen) were further challenges. For this reason, our research resulted in scoping findings of wider GPS issues, providing a better understanding of what kind of methodology would suit subsequent more in-depth research on the topics. This methodology focuses on building trust and confidence with research participants through more sustained engagement, rather than the adopted methodology of numerous but short interviews with diverse stakeholders. The paper thus points to key avenues for future research to deepen the understanding developed in this broader scoping research.

¹⁸⁰ For example, the word ‘conflict’ is often translated as ‘violence’ in the Burmese language, making it difficult to talk about non-violent or latent conflict tensions. In a context shaped by Buddhism, ‘peace’ was understood by some as a spiritual state only achievable through Buddha.

Annex 2: Research activities and participants

YANGON

Date	Activity	Participants	Location	No. of participants	
				Male	Female
June	FGD	Yangon School of Political Science staff and students	Yangon	4	5
June	FGD	Myanmar Institute of Theology students	Yangon	8	5
June	FGD	Gender Equality Network members	Yangon	0	9
July	FGD	Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process members	Yangon	1	4
June	KII 1	Emilie Röell	Yangon		1
June	KII 2	Kim Joliffe	Yangon	1	
July	KII 3	Euro Burma Office	Yangon		1
July	KII 4	Former ex-combatant/political prisoner	Yangon	1	
July	KII 5	Swe Tha Har	Yangon	1	
July	KII 6	Dr. Dean Laplonge/Expert	Yangon	1	
July	KII 7	Mercy Corps	Yangon		1
July	KII 8	Aryone Oo	Yangon	1	
July	KII 9	Norwegian People's Aid	Yangon	1	1
July	KII 10	AGIPP Steering Committee	Yangon		2
July	KII 11	Kalayana Mitta Foundation	Yangon	1	
August	KII 12	Oxfam	Yangon		1
September	KII 13	MP Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt	Yangon		1
September	KII 14	Trócaire	Yangon		2
September	KII 15	Cate Buchanan	Yangon		1
September	KII 16	Salai Cun Lian Thawn (Pyoe Pin)	Yangon	1	
October	KII 17	Former political prisoner	Yangon		1
October	KII 18	CARE	Yangon		1
October	KII 19	Former political prisoner	Yangon	1	
October	KII 20	Legal Clinic Myanmar	Yangon		1
October	KII 21	Equality Myanmar	Yangon	1	
October	KII 22	Colours Rainbow	Yangon	1	
November	KII 23	Bride Pride	Yangon		1
November	KII 24	Khin Ma Ma Myo (Myanmar Institute of Peace and Security Studies)	Yangon		1

SOUTHERN SHAN

Date	Activity	Participants	Location	No. of participants	
				Male	Female
July	FGD 1	CSOs, networks	Taungyi	1	7
July	FGD 2	Village leaders, elders, farmers	Village A	10	3
July	FGD 3	Villagers, youth leaders, farmers	Village A	8	3
July	FGD 4	Village leaders, elders, farmers	Village B	8	4
July	FGD 5	Villagers, youth leaders, farmers	Village B	11	1
July	FGD 6	Villagers, students, farmers	Village C	9	1
August	FGD 7	Small business owners, villagers, elders, farmers	Village C	5	4
August	KII 1	Beautician	Taungyi	1	
August	KII 2	Deputy Director, MIPSS	Taungyi	1	
August	KII 3	Lawyer	Taungyi		1
August	KII 4	Small business owner	Taungyi		1
September	KII 5	Veteran Association (Tatmadaw)	Taungyi	1	
September	KII 6	Founder, Peace World	Taungyi		1
September	KII 7	Land conflict Para Legal Service Provider	Taungyi	1	
September	KII 8	Interfaith Youth Network	Taungyi	1	1
September	KII 9	Pa-o National Organisation	Taungyi	1	
September	KII 10	Women and Peace Action Network	Taungyi		1
September	KII 11	Pa-O LGBT	Taungyi	1	
September	KII 12	CSO (Inn)	Taungyi		1
September	KII 13	PNA member	Village B	1	
September	KII 14	Shan business owner	Village B	1	
September	KII 15	Shan business owner	Village B	1	
September	KII 16	Pa-O religious leader	Village B	1	
September	KII 17	Pa-O youth leader	Village A	1	
September	KII 18	Pa-O youth leader	Village A	1	
September	KII 19	Pa-O women's leader	Village A		1
September	KII 20	Pa-O women's leader	Village A		1
September	KII 21	Pa-O religious leader	Village A	1	
September	KII 22	Pa-O youth leader	Village C	1	
September	KII 23	PNA member	Village C	1	
September	KII 24	PNO member	Village C	1	
September	KII 25	Village leader	Village C	1	
September	KII 26	Bamar lawyer	Taungyi		1
September	KII 27	Bamar school teacher	Taungyi		1
September	KII 28	Pa-O religious leader	Village C	1	
September	KII 29	Pa-O youth leader	Village C	1	
September	KII 30	Pa-O village administrator	Village D	1	
September	KII 31	Bamar lawyer	Taungyi		1

TANINTHARYI

Date	Activity	Participants	Location	No. of participants	
				Male	Female
August	FGD 1	Community members	Yae Phyu	7	4
August	FGD 2	Civil society members	Yae Phyu	6	3
August	FGD 3	Political parties	Dawei	8	4
August	FGD 4	Students' Union	Dawei	7	4
August	FGD 5	Veterans	Dawei	11	
July	KII 1	Vice President of Regional Parliament	Dawei	1	
July	KII 2	Human Rights Watch	Dawei	1	
July	KII 3	Lawka Alin	Dawei	1	
July	KII 4	Dawei Women's Union	Dawei		2
July	KII 5	Peace Network	Dawei	1	
July	KII 6	Farmers' Union	Dawei	3	1
July	KII 7	Lawyer	Dawei	1	
July	KII 8	Former combatant ABSDF	Dawei	1	
July	KII 9	Former political prisoner	Dawei	2	
July	KII 10	Colors Rainbow	Dawei		1
July	KII 11	Former Tatmadaw	Dawei	1	
September	KII 12	Dawei Development Association	Dawei	1	
September	KII 13	Karen JMC member and religious leader	Dawei	1	
September	KII 14	KNU liaison office	Dawei	1	
September	KII 15	Norwegian Refugee Council	Dawei		1
September	KII 16	RRIP Network	Dawei		1
September	KII 17	Local media	Dawei	1	
September	KII 18	Lawyer (pro bono lawyer network)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 19	Traders' association	Dawei		1
September	KII 20	Takepaw/Thanintharyi Friends	Dawei	1	
September	KII 21	Amyothar Hluttaw MP (NLD)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 22	State and Region MP (TYN)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 23	Director General of Police Force	Dawei	1	
September	KII 24	Secretary, Dawei National Party and Thanintharyi	Dawei	1	
September	KII 25	Regional Vice Secretary (NLD)	Dawei		1
September	KII 26	President (Pa Du)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 27	Ward Administrator (Na Taw)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 28	CEC (DNP)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 29	Ward Administrator (Kadet Gyi)	Dawei	1	
September	KII 30	Thayet Chaung Ze Bin (CSO)	Dawei		1

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