

# Conflict Impacts on Gender and Masculinities Expectations on People with Disabilities in Kachin State

## A Rapid Assessment



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**KACHINLAND**  
RESEARCH CENTRE

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# Conflict Impacts on Gender and Masculinities Expectations on People with Disabilities in Kachin State: A Rapid Assessment



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## Abbreviations

CSO	Civil society organisation
DPO	Disabled persons' organisation
EAO	Ethnic armed organisation
FGD	Focus group discussion
GOM	Government of Myanmar
IDPs	Internally displaced person
KDG	Kachin Development Group
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KII	Key informant interview
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KMSS	Karuna Myanmar Social Services
KRC	Kachinland Research Centre
MWD	Man/men with disabilities
PWDs	Persons with disabilities
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
WWD	Woman/women with disabilities

## Executive summary

In Myanmar there is increasing awareness that gender is important in governance, in understanding conflict and building peace. Since women are often missing in formal settings, programming on ‘gender’ has frequently translated into a focus on ‘women and girls’, usually as conflict victims contrasted with men as perpetrators of violence. The ‘other side of gender’, i.e. the experience of men and boys in conflict, is less well understood from a gender perspective at the global level and even less studied in the conflicts in Kachin state in Myanmar.

Conflict-related violence, whether through landmines or armed violence, and the attendant lack of access to medical services, increases the numbers of people living with disabilities yet they tend to be missing from the voices consulted by policy- and decision-makers. While the majority of combatants are male, so are high numbers of conflict casualties and victims, yet the impacts of conflict on men’s experiences and vulnerabilities are little understood. This rapid assessment sought to address this gap by assessing the conflict impacts on gendered expectations on people with disabilities, with a particular focus on masculinities. This is important because gender-blind approaches to provide services to persons with disabilities (PWDs) may miss important dynamics, and because the voices of PWDs have been missing from discussions around peace and conflict.

Based on 161 interviews and six focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with men and women with disabilities and 19 key stakeholder interviews in government- and Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO)-controlled areas, including the capitals and internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, the rapid assessment found current services at the most basic level, informed by neither a gender nor a socially created disabilities perspective. Such an approach is urgently needed, requiring capacity-building of service providers and camp volunteers, but also of the PWDs themselves. This should include modules on basic gender equality, disabilities awareness and discussion of the conflict impacts.

**Gender expectations and challenges:** The conflict made it more difficult for men and women living in IDP camps in general to perform the conventionally assigned gender roles within the family and the community: to protect and provide for the men; to care for the children and community for the women. It is particularly challenging for displaced men and women with disabilities. Barriers to getting married were a particular concern for PWDs, and vulnerability of female PWDs, especially girls, to sexual harassment in the camps.

**Conflict impacts** range from the devastating loss of limbs or organs through landmines or conflict-related violence, to large-scale displacement due to fighting. Displacement has broken the coping mechanisms and income-generation systems of men and women with pre-existing disabilities, negatively impacting on family dynamics and exacerbating domestic violence. Better-structured and coordinated support is urgently needed to improve mobility in

IDP camps, through a barrier-free environment, as the lack of accessible walking paths and inadequate sanitation facilities form significant barriers for PWDs' coping mechanisms and dignity.

**Psycho-social issues:** Men with disabilities and their families reported common mental health problems, depression, despair, in the face of the economic challenges and inability to live up to masculinity expectations. The interviewers heard frequently about challenges related to family unity and threats of family breakdown under the pressures. Tailored and dedicated support to address these are needed.

**Veterans with disabilities face specific struggles:** As soldiers, they would have been living up to the ultimate masculinities ideals of protecting their family and community. They may be used to the social respect accorded to this position, or to their guns. For former combatants who lost limbs in sacrifice to the greater ethnic good, the change in status to somebody requiring support may be especially challenging, particularly where their service and sacrifice may not be sufficiently recognised. While they continue to receive salaries, their mental health was a particular concern requiring support. Current mechanisms of segregating recently maimed veterans are exacerbating isolation and trauma, and better integration into inclusive communities could be much more supportive of adjusting to new realities.

**Livelihoods:** The conflict and displacement have had a devastating impact on PWDs' incomes and occupations, and due to the impairments and barriers that limit their participation in livelihood activities, they face more difficulties in finding alternative incomes. Earning an income was a mechanism for both men and women with disabilities to prove themselves to their families, earning respect alongside the income. While the current provision of assistive devices and monthly cash support is a vital lifeline to PWDs, more consistent and comprehensive support is needed to enable them to earn income with dignity where possible. This support should be adapted to the severity of the impairments and seek to equip the PWDs with the skills and resources to earn their livelihood where possible, rather than provide one-off donations in the charity model. PWDs whose impairments are so severe that they cannot do so should be supported with sustained financial support to ensure their physical and psycho-social needs are met.

**Discrimination:** Apart from veterans with disabilities, PWDs of all ages, and even the children and family members of PWDs, encounter discrimination and stigmatisation rooted in ignorance, stereotypes and fear. There is a great need – and great potential for beneficial impact – for awareness raising on how disabilities and gender inequalities are socially constructed, that disabilities are neither contagious nor the fault of the person with disability. Civil society but also church and education institutions should play a key role in this. This effort should involve transforming rigid gender norms around masculine and feminine roles to focus more on individual qualities of tolerance for diversity, inclusion, compassion, kindness, courage,

mutual support and continuous learning from each other. For those who can overcome the conventionally accepted gender roles and expectations by embracing more open gender roles, the family environment has become more stable and harmonious, despite a lack of income opportunities and the challenges of displacement.

In the current **peace process** in Myanmar, there is a need for an inclusive peacebuilding approach that offers all citizens including PWDs space and agency to contribute towards long-lasting peace. In order to formulate an inclusive approach, the stakeholders could explore opportunities to engage with PWDs in community-based peace and reconciliation processes. PWDs must be a part of a positive peace in the future in Kachin, their needs met and their voices heard. They have a right to receive information about the peace process to IDP camps and through disabled persons' organisations (DPOs), and DPOs should explore mechanism for feeding back concerns or support mobility-impaired members to participate in peace-related discussions, where they want to participate.

## 1. Introduction

Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000, there has been an increasing awareness that gender is important in understanding conflict and building peace. Since women are often missing in formal settings, programming on ‘gender’ has frequently translated into activities or research focused on ‘women and girls’, usually as conflict victims contrasted with men as perpetrators of violence. This kind of stereotypical understanding of gender in relation to conflict is problematic. The ‘other side of gender’, i.e. the experience of men and boys in conflict, is less well understood from a gender perspective at the global level and even less studied in the conflicts in Kachin state in Myanmar. In relation to conflict, men, like women, are often victims of the conflict and not necessarily always perpetrators of violence. While the majority of combatants are male, so are high numbers of conflict casualties and victims, yet the impacts of conflict on men’s experiences and vulnerabilities are little understood. How conflict changes the gender expectations on men is a topic that has been neglected in research on the relationship between conflict and gender to date.

Conflict-related violence, whether through landmines or armed violence, and the attendant lack of access to medical services, increases the numbers of people living with disabilities. However, they tend to be missing from the voices consulted by policy- and decision-makers. In Kachin state, this is partly due to a lack of disability-inclusive policies, mechanisms to support their participation in the peace process, reduced mobility, and partly due to lower educational and income level. These factors combine to hinder their voices reaching decision-makers or the wider public. According to the 2014 Census, the 4.6% of the population of Myanmar that live with disabilities tend to have lower literacy, school completion and labour force participation rates compared to the national average.<sup>1</sup> Mobility and speech impairments form barriers to the participation of these conflict victims in needs assessments and dialogues about peace and conflict.<sup>2</sup>

This study aims to enhance understanding of this issue in Kachin state in Myanmar in relation to the conflict that resumed in 2011 after the breakdown of the 17-year ceasefire between the Government of Myanmar (GOM) and the Kachin Independence Army/Organisation (KIA/O), the largest armed group in Kachin. The armed conflict in Kachin state is deeply entrenched in political grievances over ethnic and religious identity issues, which led to the

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1 Disability Statistics in Myanmar: Highlight from 2014 Population & Housing Census, Presentation given at United Nations Headquarters, New York, 9 March 2017, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/48th-session/side-events/documents/20170309-2L-Khaing-Khaing-Soe.pdf>

2 In the case of Kachin, the first needs assessment was undertaken in 2016 by the Kachin Development Group. This shows how PWD issues have been neglected in the general discourse.

founding of the KIA/KIO in 1962. Before the armed rebellion, Kachin had been the most peaceful state in the Union of Burma since Independence. The KIA/KIO subsequently engaged in continuous active fighting with the Tatmadaw. Intermittent and abortive peace talks in the 1970s and 1980s failed to reach a ceasefire agreement.

The end of the Cold War, however, brought a change in the general political milieu of Myanmar, both within the Tamadaw leadership circle as well as among ethnic armed organisations. Kokang (MNDAA), National Democratic Army Kachin and United Wa State Army agreed ceasefires with the military government in 1991, and the KIA splinter group, Kachin Defense Army, a year later. In this new political climate, the KIO leadership negotiated and reached a ceasefire agreement with the then military government in 1994 with a clear demarcation line between the two sides. The ceasefire lasted until 2011, when war resumed after a series of skirmishes in the Mali-Dabak hydropower areas.<sup>3</sup> Since then, thousands of civilians have had to flee from their home villages. By September 2018, 98,000 IDPs remained in camps in government-controlled and KIO-controlled areas, 14,000 of them displaced in 2018.

This research did not set out to provide a general needs assessment for PWDs living in IDP camps. It is intended to be a rapid assessment of the impacts of conflict on PWDs from a gender perspective, with special consideration of expectations of masculinity. In so doing it did not treat PWDs as a homogenous category. The research sought to gauge gender differences in the experiences and expectations of men and women with disabilities; the intersectional differences between different men that disabilities would seek to recruit. WD based upon their income level; the differences between veteran PWDs and civilian PWDs. This study includes a rapid assessment of those providing services for PWDs and their approaches. The issues addressed include livelihoods, how the conflict changed gender expectations, stigmatisation and discrimination, safety and protection issues, and PWDs' attitudes towards peace and conflict. This is important because gender-blind approaches to providing services to PWDs may miss important dynamics, and because the voices of PWDs have been missing from discussions around peace and conflict.

Throughout, the research sought to identify and highlight the social barriers in the community that limit or restrict the participation of PWDs rather than focusing on the impairments of a person, as guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of PWDs and domestic law for PWDs which recognize that disability-based disadvantage and exclusion arise as an outcome of the interactions between people who have impairments and the social attitudes, institutional and environmental barriers they face due to the failure of society to take account

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3 D. Seng Lawn, A critical review of development policy and processes in Kachin state (1994–2010): Development from above, Unpublished Paper, Myitkyina: Kachinland Research Centre, 2017

of diversity.

The report has been structured as follows: this introductory chapter outlines the rationale of the research and its significance; the second chapter states research objectives, research design and its limitations; the third chapter elaborates the key research findings on how the conflict has impacted PWDs' gender expectations and the consequences for livelihoods and attitudes towards peace; the final chapter summarises the key research findings and draws policy recommendations for stakeholders and policy-makers.

## **2. Research design and limitations**

### **2.1. Research objectives**

- a) To understand the impact of conflict on gender dynamics among persons with disabilities.
- b) To improve the understanding of how the socialisation of masculinities impacts Kachin men and boys living with disabilities both in an IDP camp setting and in the community.
- c) To draw recommendations to humanitarian, conflict and peace-building practitioners on implementing more inclusive, comprehensive and gender-equitable approaches in their work.

### **2.2. Research design**

The research focuses on questions related to gender and conflict, dynamics of PWDs, mapping of service providers, and attitudes to peace and conflict. These overarching questions are framed in a way that they can generate information on how the conflict impacts on gender expectations, especially on masculinity, livelihood, and understanding of peace and conflict. See Annex 1 for the research questions.

#### **Methodology:**

The research employed qualitative research methods consisting of semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with service providers, authorities and male and female PWDs, and structured FGDs with male and female PWDs.

The field research data collection team was trained in masculinities, gender, disabilities, peace and security at the end of August 2018. In this training the first three days focused on the key concepts of gender, masculinities and conflict, drawing on International Alert's prior research in southern Shan and Tanintharyi. This was followed by a day of disabilities awareness training. Kachinland Research Centre (KRC) and Alert then worked together to elaborate the research questions, interview questionnaire and research methodology and agree which key stakeholders to interview. The research questions were piloted at Jan Mai Kawng School for the Blind (Myitkyina) in early September and revised before the next step in data collection.

The research data collection was carried out by the KRC field research team between 12 September and 27 October 2018 in a rapid assessment approach. Geographically, the research was conducted in two areas under Ethnic armed organisation (EAO) (KIO) control, namely Laiza and Mai Ja Yang along the Sino-Myanmar border, and three areas under GOM control: Bhamo, Myitkyina and Waimaw. Please see Annex 2 for more detail on the IDP camps

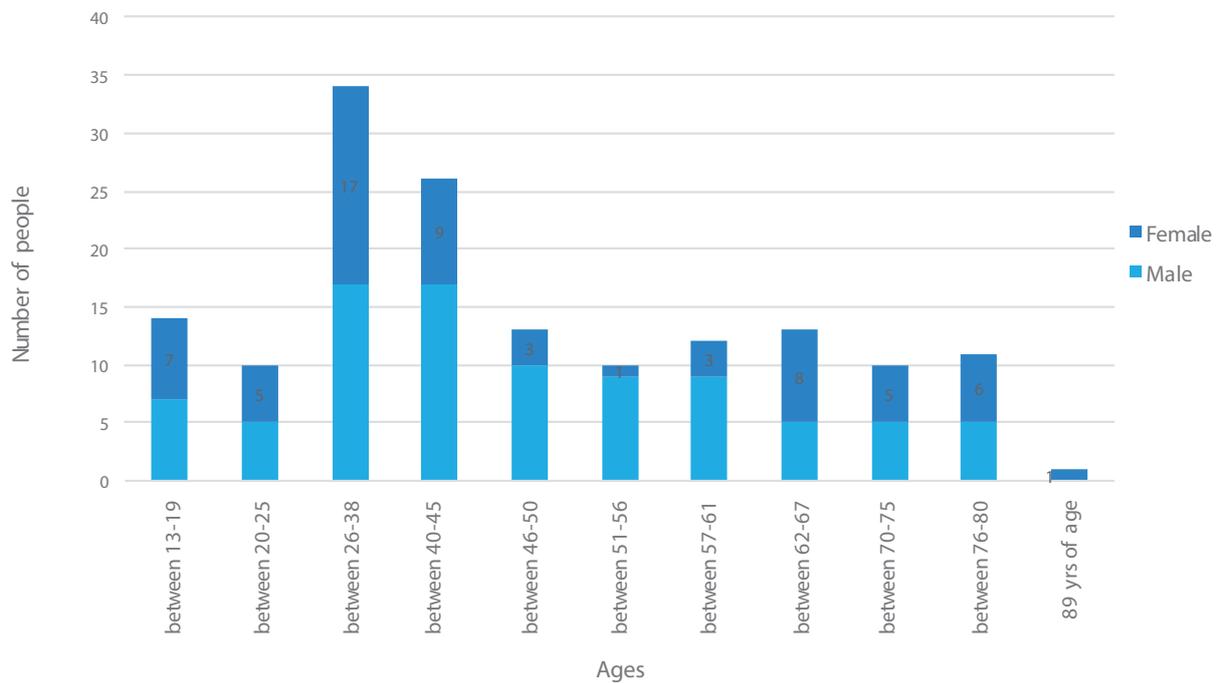
and key stakeholders interviewed.

The field research team completed a total of 166 interviews: 141 interviews with PWDs, 6 FGDs and 19 KIIs (see Table 1). In total, 45% of the PWDs interviewed were female (64 women with disabilities) and 55% were male (77 men with disabilities).

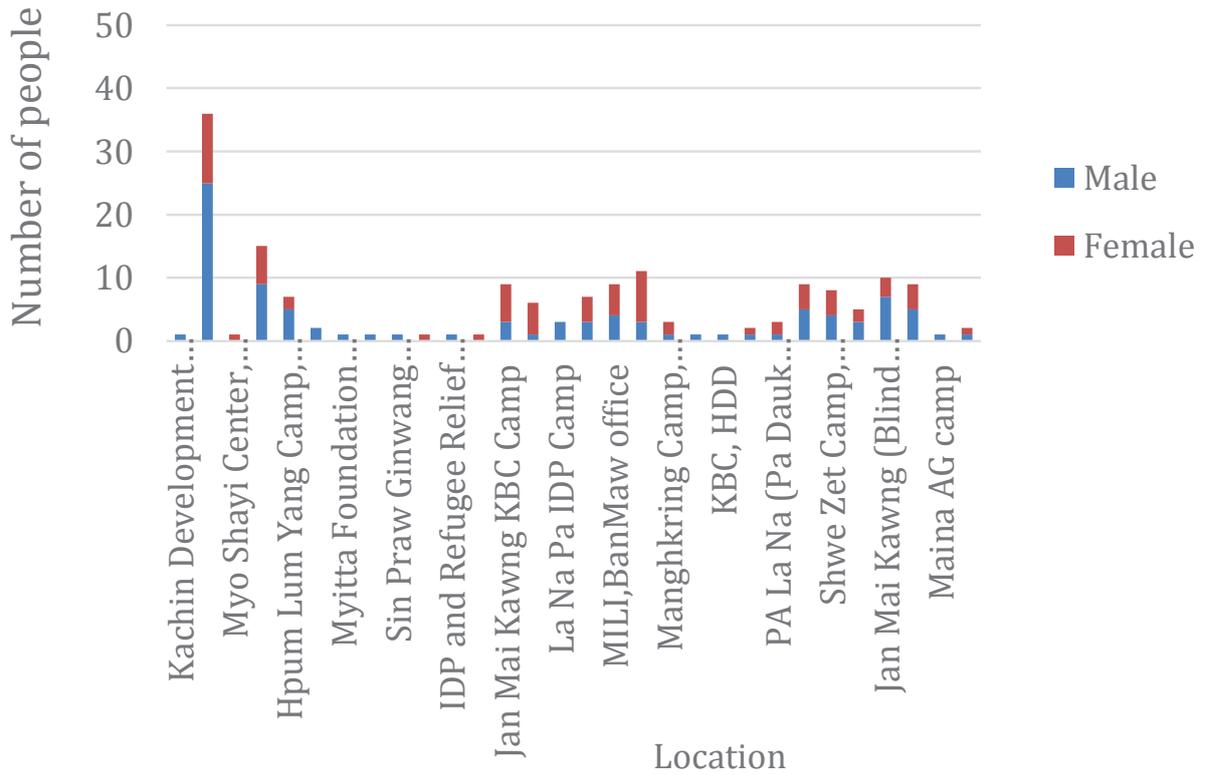
**Table 1: Locations and types of interview**

Location	KII	FGD	Key Stakeholders
Laiza	50	3	8
Mai Ja Yang	7	1	4
Bhamo	9	1	1
Myitkyina	46	1	4
Waimaw	29	0	2
	<b>141</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>19</b>

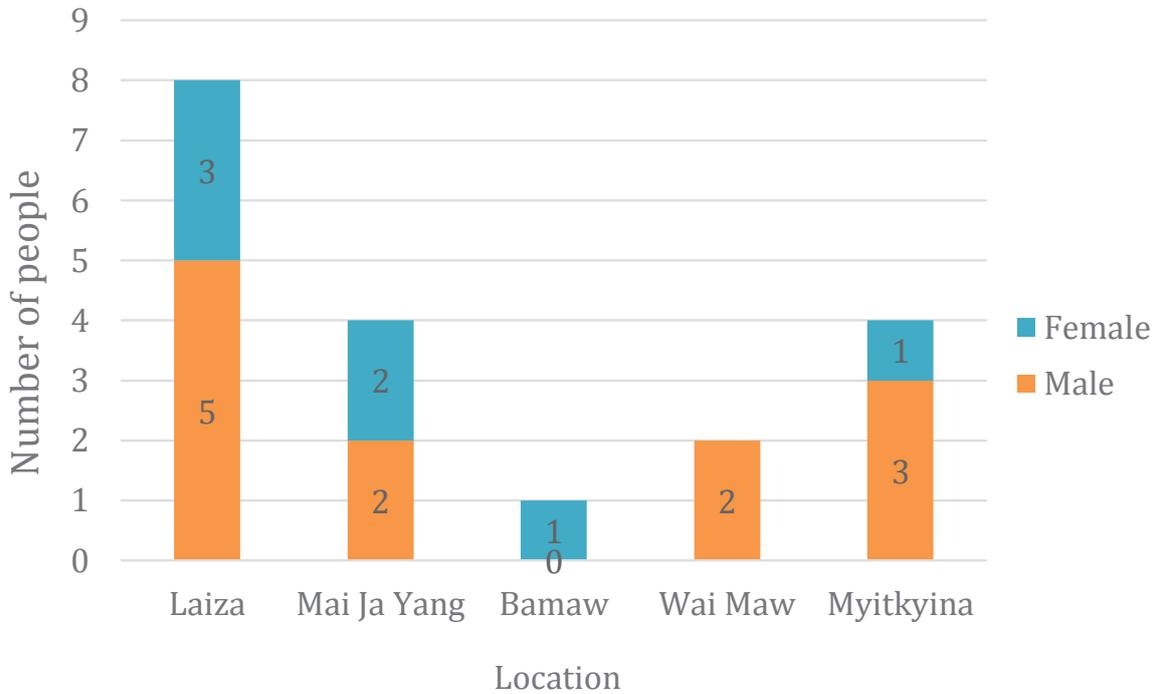
**Figure 1: Age of the informants**

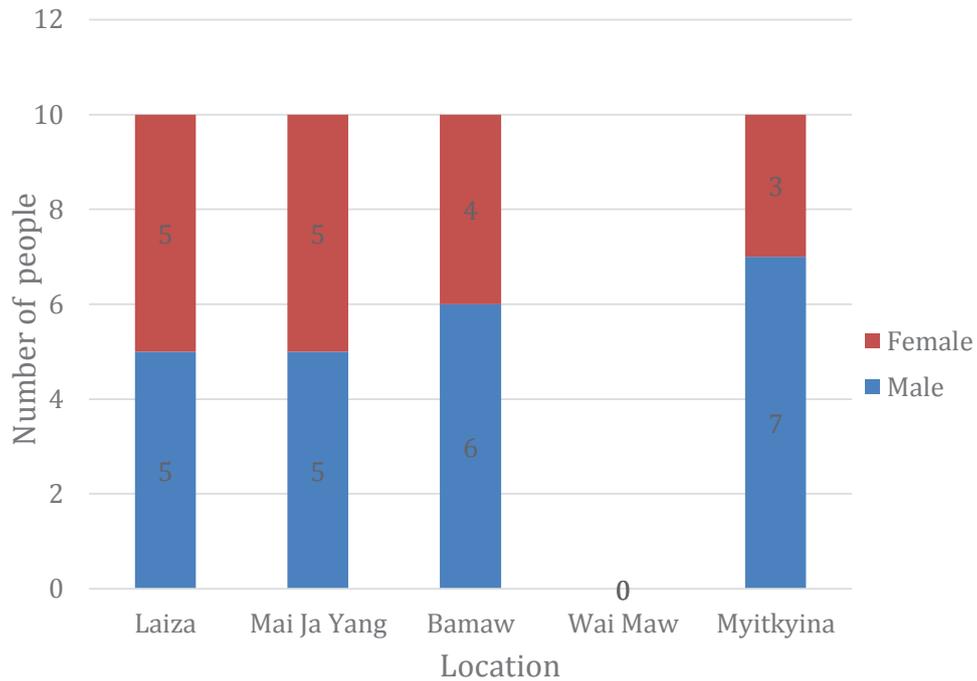
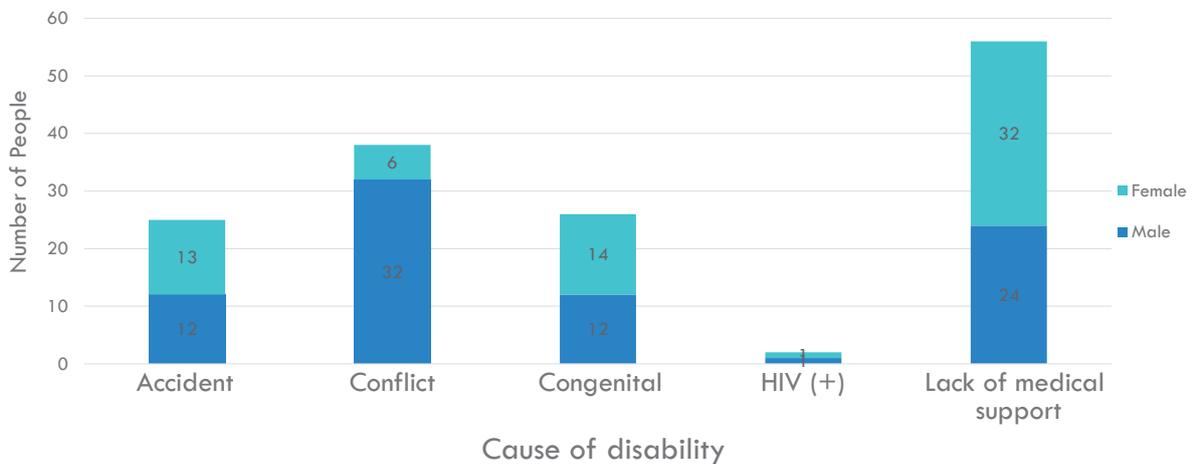


**Figure 2: Location of interviews**



**Figure 3: Key stakeholders with CSOs, DPOs and authorities**



**Figure 4: FGDs in Government-controlled area and EAOs****Figure 5: Cause of disabilities**

After the completion of field research, the data was jointly analysed by KRC and Alert in a four-day analysis workshop from 31 October to 3 November 2018. This workshop drew on the actual interview data collected as well as the reflections and observations of the field researchers from the data collection.

The draft was peer reviewed by PWDs and service providers to validate the analysis and recommendations. The feedback received was incorporated into the final version presented here to inform public and policy discussions.

### 2.3. Limitations

Due to time limitations, this research was intended as a rapid assessment, rather than covering all aspects of masculinities in relations to gender dynamics and conflict. In terms of geographic coverage, this study was conducted in selected key locations; however, the conflict and gender dynamics may vary significantly in different regions of Kachin state and other parts of the country. The research concentrated on government- and KIO-controlled areas, and there may be similarities and differences to the situation in militia-controlled areas where there is probably less support available. The current study was also not able to include a more thorough investigation into issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which would require building up more trust with the PWDs and suitable referral and support mechanisms, as well as spaces with more privacy and confidentiality for interviews than IDP camps provide.

Due to technical limitations, persons with intellectual impairments or audio impairment could not be interviewed. The interviews focused on persons with mobility impairments, visual impairments and physical disabilities. Separate research would be needed to identify the specific needs and vulnerabilities of persons with intellectual and audio impairments. This research presents a first rapid assessment of this topic, which identified key issues to be considered and highlights areas where further research and programming support are needed.

### 3. Key research findings

#### *Overview of service providers and services*

In terms of service providers and authorities, the assessment identified few organisations that focus primarily on PWD issues. Although most of the organisations are fully aware of the importance of social integration while dealing with PWD issues, they cannot fully commit to the issues due to other larger humanitarian needs related to IDP issues. Therefore, most are unable to offer additional support beyond primary activities such as providing general assistive devices<sup>4</sup> and monthly cash allocations to the PWDs on their lists.<sup>5</sup> General civil society organisations (CSOs) such as Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), Karuna Myanmar Social Services (KMSS) and Nyein Foundation provide cash support of 80,000 MMK (equivalent to about US\$51) per PWD per month in GOM-controlled areas and 100,000 MMK (equivalent to about 64 USD) in EAO-controlled areas. It should be noted that the research encountered some confusion regarding differences in definitions of PWDs and divergent criteria for receiving such monetary support. While the GOM only recognises four categories of PWD (physical, seeing, hearing and intellectual or learning impairments), other organisations apply significantly more: some follow the six Washington criteria,<sup>6</sup> while others apply broader definitions, which include people with HIV/AIDS.

On the ground, this leads to multiple, divergent lists of PWDs between camp leaders and CSOs. Complications can result, for example, when different organisations want to distribute different items or cash but use different sets of criteria. Some IDPs in camps stated that they received less than the supposed amount – or less than others – as the local camp leadership agreed to split the total funds received for a smaller list of PWDs between all of the PWDs on its own, more comprehensive list of PWDs, or vice versa. This seems like an area where joint counting and allocation cooperation would be more suitable.

An additional complexity is that people with impairments (loss of limbs) may be included in lists of PWDs by camp leaders against their will, based on the camp leader's observation, despite their preference not to be considered as PWDs because they feel they can

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4 These tend to include wheelchairs, tricycles, walking sticks and crutches, though the availability depends on the areas. For instance, eye protection glasses for the visually impaired or blind are only available in the GOM-controlled area.

5 S. Awng Ja, Personal Interview, KBC, KBC Office Myitkyina, 15 October 2018. H. Roi Ji, Personal Interview, Nyein Foundation, Nyein Office Myitkyina, 12 October 2018. This was also mentioned by interviewees from Je Yang IDP camp, Myusha Hpyen Hpung (People's Militia) (MHH) from Laiza and from Maina IDP Camp in Waimaw during the interviews.

6 The Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability, available at <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Washington-Group-Short-Set-of-Questions-on-Disability.pdf>

function and earn their livelihood well. General knowledge and application of an approach that understands disabilities as socially constructed do not seem to have reached the beneficiaries and ‘frontline’ volunteers, where a charity or medical model and sometimes paternalistic approaches seem to be more common.

At the moment, there is no dedicated psycho-social support available for PWDs. This seems to be a significant gap for people who have survived traumatic violence related to the conflict, including displacement and, for some, loss of limbs to landmines. From the researchers’ observations, traumas seemed more evident in EAO-controlled areas, while GOM areas have experienced less direct violence. This may stem partly from the fact that in EAO areas the disabilities seemed to be incurred more recently and people were still traumatised and adjusting, while in GOM areas the interviews included more people with congenital disabilities who appeared to be more reconciled with their life. However, some IDP camps in EAO-controlled areas have community halls that provide a place for PWDs to socialise and interact together, which serves the most basic function of mutual support through exchange with others to reduce feelings of isolation and depression. The community halls to some extent replicate the tea shop functionality as hubs for exchange and socialising; however, this included replication of the gender patterns with domination by men with disabilities and only few women with disabilities using them. Targeted action should be taken to make these inviting to both genders.

Based upon the interviews with the service providers, there does not seem to be a written policy and manual for supporting or engaging with PWDs to date, although some are in development. For instance, the Myitkyina Education Centre for the Blind is in the process of developing a tailored manual related to PWDs.<sup>7</sup> This is intended as a guidance manual for service providers to develop a better understanding of how to take care of PWDs. KBC, KMSS, Kachin Development Group (KDG) and Nyein Foundation work with PWDs only as a part of their larger IDP programming. In doing so, they currently do not apply a systematic gender distinction or analysis. In a way, what these CSOs share in common is an approach lacking in gender sensitivity.

The research participants were mixed genders and ages, but primarily included people with mobility and visual impairments. The research concentrated on IDPs with disabilities, plus additional interviews with non-displaced PWDs in Laiza and Myitkyina were conducted for comparison. One of the features was that the disabilities of many of the IDPs in EAO-controlled areas seemed to be conflict-related, incurred through landmines, conflict violence, while fleeing from fighting, or due to lack of timely medical support. Meanwhile, in the GOM-controlled area, most of the PWDs reported that their disabilities were congenital or stemming

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7 L. Gam H pang, Personal Interview, Jan Mai Kawng School for the Blind, (Myitkyina), Myitkyina School for the Blind (Myitkyina), 26 October 2018

from accidents. In part, this may be due to perceptions that stepping on a landmine can incur charges for ‘destruction of government property’, adding further problems for PWDs. This acts as an incentive for landmine victims to blame traffic or other accidents for their disabilities, potentially distorting numbers.

According to the field research, the impact of conflict cuts across different spheres of the lives of PWDs. The conflict created new challenges for them to perform the expected roles within the family and community. Like many IDPs, PWDs are also facing immense problems of livelihood due to the conflict. Worse still, they are facing double discrimination and stigmatisation by the camp community as PWDs and the host community in general as IDPs. The conflict made them more vulnerable; especially for those PWDs displaced into IDP camps in KIO-controlled areas, where they remain exposed to the risk of conflict-related bombings. The camp infrastructure and environment also made women PWDs feel less secure and safe as the IDPs camp locations are exposed to motor shellings and aerial bombing during the active fighting between the Tatmadaw and KIA.<sup>8</sup> The conflict also influenced PWDs’ views on the issue of peace and conflict differently.

### 3.1. Gender expectations and challenges

The conflict made it more difficult for men and women living in IDP camps in general to perform the conventionally assigned gender roles within the family and the community. It is particularly challenging for displaced men and women with disabilities.

In the Kachin community, men are traditionally expected to be the head of the family, the primary breadwinner, the protector of the family, immediate blood relatives and the land. In contrast, Kachin women are expected to be the homemaker, mother, organiser of family members and relatives, including caring for the old, young and sick. The conflict dynamics have had a considerable impact on the conventional gender roles, and even more so for the PWDs living in IDP camps, by creating multiple additional challenges for them to overcome. Both men and women are expected to marry and have children to continue the clan, but disabilities can form significant barriers to marriage. Unmarried PWDs spoke of wanting to get married, but struggling to find a spouse.

A male PWD from Woi Chyai IDP Camp in Laiza recounted how the conflict has upset the gender roles in the family, creating tensions for the couple:

*“Though I am a disabled person, before the war broke out I could help my wife in many ways. When the war broke out in 2011 we had to flee to our slash and burn cultivation field, and she had to carry me on her back while fleeing. After that I think she was*

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8 FGD, Je Yang IDP Camp (Laiza), 17 September 2018

*totally disappointed with me...and we also lost all our family properties.”*

He was unable to protect his family and lands from the conflict, and while fleeing his wife ended up protecting him by carrying him, in a reversal of gender expectations. In this case, the problem arose when the male PWD could not play the expected gender role, and his partner stopped recognising his role, which resulted in a strained relationship. He was unable to repair the broken relationship with his wife, in his view mainly because he could not perform the expected gender role as the protector of the family and the property.<sup>9</sup> In some cases this can result in relationship breakdown.

In other cases identified by the research, the man with disabilities’ families have accepted the contravention to conventional gender roles yet the man’s perception about himself is problematic. This arose mainly where the men feel unable to live up to conventional gender expectations as the primary breadwinner and head of the family, even though his family members still view him as the head of the family. This can result in enormous mental stress for the PWD living in IDP camps. An male PWD reflected how, though he is still the head of family, lack of income opportunities make it difficult for him to perform the role. He said,

*“In the family I am the head of the family. I oversee things in the family. But it is now extremely difficult for me to perform the family responsibilities due to lack of income.”<sup>10</sup>*

In addition to the lack of income, the problem can also relate to the husband’s inability to take care of household chores.

The inability to live up to these conventional gender expectations is particularly problematic for male veterans with disabilities, who can no longer perform the aforementioned masculinity roles in the family. All of the veteran PWDs interviewed were male, as women KIA members are less likely to serve at the frontlines. One veteran said,

*“I have gone through many depressing things. I could not earn money, though my children are still in school. I felt quite depressed because I cannot earn money for my family and cannot perform family responsibilities.”<sup>11</sup>*

As soldiers, they would have been living up to the ultimate masculinities ideals of protecting their family and community. They may be used to the social respect accorded to this

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9 WCC 10, Personal Interview, Woi Chyai IDP Camp (Laiza), 18 September 2018. 51 year old man with multiple disabilities, due to a bullet passing through his head in a battle before the ceasefire.

10 HLYC 3, Personal Interview, Hpum Lum Yang IDP Camp (Laiza), 20 September 2018. 45 year old man with physical impairment; he lost one leg due to a landmine accident. Although he was able to maintain his formal title as the head of the family, problems arise due to his reduced ability to earn money for the family.

11 JYC 5, Personal Interview, Je Yang IDP Camp (Laiza), 15 September 2018. 48 year old man with physical impairment; he lost one leg due to gun fighting and a bullet passed through his leg.

position, or to their guns. For former combatants who lost limbs in sacrifice to the greater ethnic good, the change in status to somebody requiring support may be especially challenging, particularly where their service and sacrifice may not be sufficiently recognised.

However, in some cases, men with disabilities were able to overcome the traditional gender expectations, and adapt successfully to the new situation. One male group member explained how he reviewed his role in the family after the conflict, saying,

*“We no longer make distinction between husband and wife’s family roles and responsibilities. I also help my wife in doing household chores and other family works.”*<sup>12</sup>

This transcendence of divisions created by gender roles seems to have been key to finding accommodation with the new situation. For those who can overcome the conventionally accepted gender roles and expectations by embracing more open gender roles, the family environment has become more stable and harmonious, despite the lack of income opportunities and the challenges of displacement. Those families can make the best out of limited resources, working together to the best of their capacities for the overall family wellbeing.

On the other side, those who cannot embrace more flexible gender roles can experience grave frustrations due to their inability to meet gender expectations. These frustrations can lead to mental health issues, sometimes manifesting in negative coping mechanisms including alcohol and substance abuse and linked to increases in domestic violence. In the most severe cases, this failure to cope with the situation has led to suicidal tendencies. The interviewees reported cases of suicide of PWDs, particularly among the veteran PWDs.

In some families, the conflict impact has exacerbated pre-existing issue of domestic violence. One woman with disabilities<sup>13</sup> interviewed used to work as a trained midwife in her community of origin. When she was raped and became pregnant, social pressure forced her to marry the rapist. Her impairment from polio could have been a risk factor increasing her vulnerability. Her husband is a violent alcoholic, but in their village she was able to earn money for the family and her husband “could not trouble her much”. Due to the conflict, they had to flee and her younger son incurred a disability due to lack of medical support while fleeing. In the IDP camp, she has been unable to go out and find a job to support her family as she has to look after her disabled child. Her husband is rude to the community and becomes more violent whenever he is drunk, causing direct harm to the whole family and increasing the discrimination the woman with disabilities experiences.

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12 JYC 21, Personal Interview, Je Yang IDP Camp (Laiza), 16 September 2018. 48 year old man with physical impairment.

13 MRCC 5, Personal Interview, Maina RC Camp, 9 October 2018. 46 year old woman with disabilities related to polio due to lack of medical support as a child.

### 3.2. Stigmatisation and discrimination

The community tends to have different stigmas for different types of disabilities. Normally stigmatisation and discrimination are directly related to each other. The word stigma itself is a negative connotation. However, there are some positive biases around traditional perceptions of a particular type of disability as auspicious or associated with good fortune. These positive perceptions beget positive communal and individual attitudes and actions, while negative stigmas beget discrimination against PWDs. Traditionally, the presence of children with autism disease and cleft lips is considered auspicious for the family's wellbeing and wealth. However, negative stigmas have been attached to the blind, physically impaired persons, the deaf, as well as mentally or intellectually impaired persons. People with these kinds of disabilities are often considered inauspicious and less valued as individuals, particularly those with congenital disabilities. Such PWDs tend to be the victims of mocking and discrimination by others. The reason for this is not due to maleficence, but is rooted in a lack of awareness within the community. Veteran PWDs injured after 2011 are an exception to this, as they are perceived as heroes injured while serving to protect the ethnic community.

In the interviews, PWDs recounted discrimination in the family, neighbourhood or community, the camps and the Church. A blind lady from Myitkyina School for the Blind recounted how she had been discriminated against by the family members and the neighbours when she was uneducated:

*“The family members and neighbourhood looked down upon me when I was uneducated. I was like a mocking thing for the kids in the neighbourhood. For now I am an educated person I no longer face such kind of thing again.”*<sup>14</sup>

This illustrates the positive impact that targeted support, such as education tailored to PWDs, can have on their perception in the community and therefore their self-perception and quality of life. It also indicated how disabilities can have multiple interconnected impacts, such as blindness causing exclusion from education opportunities, which then causes further exclusion socially or in the labour market.

Churches as key social institutions in Kachin can play a vital role in enhancing inclusion and social contact for PWDs, or, conversely, act as sites for social exclusion. One woman living with disabilities explained her experience of discrimination within the church congregation:

*“I experienced discrimination while involved in the church activities. When I was a teenage girl I went to participate in the youth activities. While others were playing I had*

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14 MBS 3, Personal Interview, Jan Mai Kawng School for the Blind (Myitkyina), 26 October 2018. 34 year old blind woman.

*to stand alone without doing nothing. I felt really small at that time.*<sup>15</sup>

Another physically impaired woman from Maina IDP Camp recounted how she had been looked down upon by the church members while participating in the church activities:

*“Some kind-hearted people included me in the choir competition last year. But some protested and rebuked for including physically deformed person.”*<sup>16</sup>

In terms of the physical structure, the church building is not accessible for disabled persons, but, as well as in the building, there seems to be less or no social space for PWDs in the church congregation.

An male PWD from Hpum Lum Yang IDP Camp lashed out against the discriminatory behaviours of the church congregation:

*“The primary purpose of the Church is to look after the poor and the downtrodden people. The purpose of establishment of the Church is to look after depressed people, widows and outcasts. But the Church has forsaken those people. They only care about the rich people. Then who will look after those helpless people? While the Church leaders do not think about them?”*<sup>17</sup>

Church leaders and members could play a more significant role in supporting PWD, amplifying their voices and concerns, as well as supporting their engagement in the community free from discrimination. Advocating for this would seem to be an effort worth making considering the role and influence of the Church in Kachin.

Discrimination even seems to appear among PWDs in the camps; for instance, certain types of PWDs such as those who contracted polio have been discriminated against by the camps in terms of access to assistive devices available for the members of the camp. An man with disabilities related polio (PWD) from Hpum Lum Yang said bitterly:

*“I have been living in this camp for three years, it was the first time this year that I got 3000 Kyats and electronic bicycle as an assistive device so far.”*<sup>18</sup>

This could be an area where a lack of understanding and awareness exacerbates prejudices relating to infection or contagion risks, which can result in outright discrimination against PWDs.

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15 Ibid.

16 MRCC5, 2018, Op. cit.

17 HLY 2, Personal Interview, Hpum Lum Yang IDP Camp (Laiza), 20 September 2018. 30 year old man with disabilities related to polio and a lack of medical support as a child.

18 Ibid.

Discrimination also seems to be entrenched in some of the criteria for securing government jobs, both in GOM-controlled and KIO-controlled areas. One of the formal criteria for the post of a schoolteacher is that the applicant has to be “a healthy person”, not a PWD. An male PWD from Hpum Lum Yang IDP Camp summed up this point by saying:

*“They do not want to give us jobs in the government sector. They do not want to use us and employ us in any post. Just recently I asked a local school principal whether I could teach the children. He said no because he is afraid that children will become like me. He is afraid that children will imitate me. So they considered that way. They do not want to employ us in any of the government jobs.”<sup>19</sup>*

It seems that these prejudices run deep, and can contribute to internalised stigmatisation and depression affecting PWDs’ mental health. Paralysed PWDs who are unable to leave their shelter seemed to be the worst affected by depression and loss of hope, with insufficient social interaction.

Mental health issues among PWDs seemed of particular concern for veterans. Recently injured veteran PWDs seem to be kept apart from the rest of society and other PWDs in a secluded area. The thinking behind this approach is to give them the required space to adjust to their new existence. However, such an approach has encountered some challenges. An man with disabilities, from Hpum Lum Yang camp stated how dangerous it is to keep recently injured “fresh” veterans in secluded areas. He said,

*“It would be better to keep fresh veterans with the community. Because things can go wrong; in this condition they make decisions quite fast. In last December there were two fresh veterans who had been kept in the secluded area. One of them attempted suicide. Fortunately we could go there in time and save his life.”<sup>20</sup>*

Depression and suicide are frequent side effects of this segregation, and not unusual forms in which conflict-affected masculinities manifest themselves in times of emotional upheaval.

These suicide attempts, however, underline the importance of addressing mental health issues, particularly for the survivors of violent conflict. Worryingly, this fits into global statistic of higher suicide rates among men than women worldwide. While alcohol is generally banned from IDP camps, interviewees recounted male relatives smuggling in alcohol or drugs to the male PWD, to alleviate depression and sadness. These male solidarity efforts providing narcotic substances can alleviate symptoms but do not address the issue. More support for

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19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

mental health and wellbeing of PWDs should be urgently provided, including for former combatants. This could be in the form of peer-support groups if individual one-to-one counselling is not financially or practically feasible.

Stigmatisation affects not only the individual PWDs, but can even lead their children to face discrimination and harassment in the school and community. Some parents prevent their children from playing with children of PWD parents. For instance, blind children can study together with normal students, but when they sit exams they have to sit under the stairs.<sup>21</sup> According to the interviews with the blind people from Myitkyina School for the Blind, the school curriculum and the exam questions are not friendly for the blind students, as the exam questions include diagrams without proper descriptions. This indicates structurally anchored discrimination within the education system<sup>22</sup> but also indicates clear entry points for how small but strategic changes in the education approach could achieve big wins for the inclusion of learners with disabilities into the education system, laying the foundation for better integration into broader society.

The educational level also plays an important role in boosting PWDs' self-esteem and confidence. A female interviewee at the Myitkyina School for the Blind<sup>23</sup> mentioned how her perception about her disabilities has been conditioned by the educational opportunities. She said,

*“I consider myself as a disabled person. When I had less knowledge I felt completely blind. It was more difficult for me before I got a chance to go to school. There is a popular saying, ‘Being blind is a loss, but deafness is the end.’ Therefore I had considered myself as a lost person. But now I know how to read and write..., and I see light and hope. So now I do not look at what I can't do, instead I look at what I can still do.”*

Education and learning skills can be ways of transforming identities and self-perception.

### 3.3. Livelihood

Aside from the physical disabilities caused by conflict, the biggest conflict impact on PWDs has been the destruction of livelihoods. The conflict and displacement have had a devastating impact on their incomes and occupations, and due to their impairments they face more difficulties in finding alternative incomes. A woman with disabilities described how they lost their family properties due to the conflict:

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21 FGD, Jan Mai Kawng School for the Blind, (Myitkyina), Mytikina School for the Blind (Myitkyina), 26 October 2018

22 Ibid.

23 MBS 2, 2018, Op.cit.

*“Before the war broke out we ran a shop at the village. Since we had our own shop, we had regular income. Unexpectedly the war broke out and we lost the shop and the credit that they had to reclaim.”<sup>24</sup>*

In the context of active conflict that stymies the licit economy, there are fewer job opportunities for IDPs in general, and even fewer for PWDs, resulting in problems of depression, alcoholism, domestic violence, family breakdown, etc. When facing depression, men with disabilities turn to religion for solace, while among male PWDs more negative coping patterns were reported, such as turning to alcohol. This is in line with gender norms that proscribe women from drinking but are more lenient to substance abuse among men. Even though displaced PWDs want to practise their traditional livelihood skills, such as farming and animal husbandry, the required space and capital to do so are not available.

According to the research interviews, PWDs’ perception around disabilities and gender roles are closely linked with the capacity to generate income and get married (see also section 3.1 above). male PWDs in particular feel more “normal” when they can generate income and provide for the family. We saw this in responses to the question “Do you identify as a PWD?”. Responses varied between those who were able to continue earning an income and livelihood, and therefore did not identify as PWDs, despite lacking certain limbs or other impairments. While those that were unable to earn their livelihood were more likely to identify as PWDs. In an FGD in the Myitkyina School for the Blind, male participants highlighted their ability to navigate and learn and earn, to justify that they are not disabled.<sup>25</sup> This would seem to be in line with expectations of strength, independence and being the breadwinner for Kachin men. The women participants meanwhile talked less about how they saw themselves, and spent more time speaking up on behalf of blind children – perfectly embodying the selfless caring role in line with gender expectations. But overall, earning an income seemed to be a key indicator of social acceptance, with one woman with disabilities. WD reporting problems from her in-laws until she started earning money when their respect followed.

For the PWDs interviewed, the conflict obliterated independent and decent livelihood opportunities. The livelihood problem has become more acute for those PWDs living in IDP camps. Except for the monthly support from the camp leadership, they have little or no job opportunities. The nature of available jobs is seasonal, temporary and physical. For PWDs living in the IDP camps in KIO-controlled areas, the only available jobs are mainly in the monoculture plantation sites, such as banana, sugarcane and tea plantations. Women are preferred as employees in tea plantations in order to pick tealeaves, as women have been socialised more to carry out monotonous work that requires attention to detail. Tea plantations

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24 MRCC 5, 2018, Op. cit.

25 FGD, Jan Mai Kawng School for the Blind (Myitkyina), 26 October 2018

are mainly in the Chinese side. In banana plantations, the main job is to carry banana bundles and spray pesticides, which is considered suitable for men due to the requirement for physical strength. It is mainly women that work at sugarcane plantations. Up to 2015, the daily rate for working in the plantations was around 50 or 60 Yuan. Now the wage has fallen to 30 Yuan due to labour supply exceeding demand.

None of the above-mentioned jobs are accessible to PWDs. The nature of the jobs is physical and the terrain is hilly. Despite poor working conditions for PWDs, the availability of such jobs are seasonal and extremely limited. A woman living in an IDP camp in Myitkyina related how they could not get a permanent job even after living in the IDP camp for seven years and how she has to struggle as a wife and mother:

*“Initially we received 100% of our share of aid from the camp. Since now I could do so temporary jobs they cut our share down to 70%. Now I have to work to support my husband and children. Since my husband is a drug addict he is doing nothing. Since he will create more problems when he goes out, I convince him to stay at home. It is extremely difficult to get a job. Since even for the normal IDP to get a job, it is more so for us. Though I have lived in the IDP camps for like six, seven years, I still do not get a permanent job.”<sup>26</sup>*

This illustrates the intersectional nature of these challenges, where gender identities intersect with disabilities and conflict impacts. It also highlights the length of these ‘temporary’ displacement situations and the importance of using this time strategically to build their capacities so they return home with more skills and options.

During monsoon season, in particular, PWDs cannot work outside due to their physical disabilities and there are no jobs available during the season. Summer and winter seasons are the only two seasons when it is possible to work. Even in those seasons it is extremely difficult to get jobs in the plantations in KIO-controlled areas. Though the owners of the plantations pay the same rate to everyone, PWDs are not on their favoured list. The PWDs have to compete in an unfavourable job market for them. A man with disabilities explained the situation:

*“Here in this camp there is no space for growing vegetables. There is no space for raising pigs. During the summer season we went to banana plantations to carry banana bundles. But it is not available daily. Only after enormous efforts we could manage to get concession maximum for two or three days to work per week.”<sup>27</sup>*

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26 BTHC 2, Personal Interview, Bethlehem IDP Camp (Myitkyina), 22 October 2018. 36 year old woman with polio-related disabilities.

27 JYC 15, Personal Interview, Je Yang IDP Camp (Laiza), 15 September 2018. 60 year old man with physical impairment, he lost one hand due to the conflict. This is partly due to the owners’ perception of PWDs’ capability to do physical labour.

For instance, a man with a disability, eg. with a prosthetic leg mentioned that it is extremely difficult to work more than an hour and a half in an open field; the sweat and heat make it extremely uncomfortable for a person with such a disability.<sup>28</sup> It is more difficult for women with disabilities, especially physically impaired women, to work in the field because the nature of the work demands more physical strength and is not suitable for women. However, there were also some concerns about the health impacts of the pesticides and fertilisers used on the monoculture plantations.<sup>29</sup>

While PWDs living in the conflict zones suffer the brunt of armed conflict, it has also affected PWDs living in non-conflict zones, such as Myitkyina. PWDs living in non-conflict-affected areas also face their share of conflict impacts. The President of Myitkyina School for the Blind explained how the conflict has impacted on the school's livelihood:

*“Due to the conflict the PWD population is increasing. Likewise the volume of donation we received has dwindled; due to the conflict our music band cannot go out and do fundraising shows across the areas. Due to the conflict we cannot go anywhere.”*<sup>30</sup>

A long-term observer and practitioner, working in the field and dealing with PWDs in IDPs, summed up how the conflict has impacted on PWDs' livelihoods:

*“The conflict made disabled person more disabled. It would have been extremely difficult for congenital PWDs or pre-conflict PWDs to flee from the conflict. It will certainly have an impact on their morale. Though they were PWDs before the conflict in the village they must have their own occupations.”*<sup>31</sup>

Lack of a livelihood has a severe impact on PWDs' identities, formed by gendered expectations. Between 2012 and 2014, there were some short-lived programmes in order to enhance PWDs' livelihoods, including the establishment of a small-scale handloom factory, sewing and handicrafts. Unfortunately, the activities had to stop due to lack of market and raw materials. The PWDs fondly remember those programmes and, if opportunity permits, they would like to continue with such income-generating activity support again.<sup>32</sup>

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28 Ibid.

29 Interviews in Je Yang IDP Camps, 2018

30 L. Gam H pang, 2018, Op. cit.

31 H. Nu Ra, 2018, Op. cit.

32 L. Zau Hkam, Personal Interview, In Charge of PWDS at Je Yang IDP Camp, 17 September 2018

### 3.4. Safety and protection

This section draws on the concept of human security and its indicators.<sup>33</sup> If we look from a human security perspective, the presence of PWDs in IDP camps itself is an indicator of the crisis they are facing now. While fleeing from their villages, they faced direct and indirect security threats. Living in the camps, they face more or less the same threats. Direct security threats include violent death or threat to life or further disablement due to the conflict and the use of highly destructive weapons such as landmines. Indirect security threats include deprivation in terms of levels of basic needs and entitlements such as food, safe drinking water and primary healthcare, unemployment, livelihood problem, displacement and environmental pollution.

In particular, during the period of active fighting between the Tatmadaw and KIA, it is not safe to live in the IDP camps in the conflict zones due to occasional mortar shelling and aerial bombing. When asked to draw a picture of an airplane, IDP children could not sketch a normal, commercial airplane but only an aerial bombing airplane. This illustrates how the experience of children growing up in conflict situations shapes them. They were not unique experiences for IDPs living in the camps. When asked whether they wanted to return to their home villages if the situation permits, most of the PWDs interviewed wanted to go back but only if certain security conditions could be guaranteed. As long as military troops remain stationed in the vicinity of their villages and landmine accidents continue, they do not dare to go back.

In the multi-ethnic areas such as Tarlawgyi, though the Red Shans can return or did not need to flee, ethnic Kachin IDPs face more risks in returning home because they are more likely to be suspected of being KIA or KIA informants in the active fighting areas. The PWDs interviewed mentioned the cases of arrest under 17/1 and 17/2 Acts for those who returned to their villages. They expressed concerns in some cases that their land had been confiscated in their absence. A man with disabilities from Shwe Zet IDP Camp<sup>34</sup> stated that he could no longer protect his property at the village,

*“Since I have become a PWD I cannot go back and oversee our family’s land while other people could occasionally go back and do short-term farming and come back. To my most despair I could not even go back and clear our family compound. I am just helpless. As a result some of my neighbours confiscate some of our family land in our absence. Our neighbours did not need to flee. They are Red Shans.”*

33 See D.A. Baldwin, The Concept of Security, *Review of International Studies*, 23(1), 2015, pp.5–23; B. Kanti, The Idea of Human Security, *International Studies*, 3(3), 2003, pp.265–76.

34 SZC 3, Personal interview in Shwe Zet IDP Camp (Myitkyina), 18 October 2018. 47 year old man, paralysed due to lack of medical support.

In Shwe Zet IDP Camp, IDPs also revealed the risks for PWDs of coming to a GOM-controlled area. Male PWDs with physical impairments are often suspected of being former combatants and face frequent interrogation at military checkpoints. PWDs considered this a major barrier for them to get better medical and educational services.<sup>35</sup>

The interviews in IDP camps along the Chinese border revealed an issue with clean water. In Hpum Lum Yang Camp, a man with disabilities spoke about the dangers of the presence of elephant camps and bamboo shoot factories on the upstream areas:

*“In the upstream areas there are elephant camps. The water contains elephant manure. We have to cook the water to drink. It is not clean. The camp inhabitants were infected by skin diseases such as ringworm after taking bath in the stream.”*<sup>36</sup>

PWD IDPs and non-disabled IDPs are also concerned about the use of sulphur in bamboo factories in the upstream areas. Some interviewees considered the increasing number of paralysed patients and disabled children in the camp as related to the consumption of spoiled foods from the Chinese side, since they have no space to grow their own vegetables and raise domestic animals. On the other hand, they are also concerned with environmental pollution due to the use of pesticides in the plantations around the camps. They fear this could increase the incidence of PWDs among the future generation.

Although PWDs have access to general health services through the camp clinics in KIO-controlled areas, the health services available at the clinics cannot address major sickness. The IDP camps under GOM can access medical services at the General Hospital, which has better facilities than the KIO’s General Hospital. A man with disabilities in a KIO-controlled area summed up the needs for special healthcare:

*“Though there is no barrier in getting general health service it is not effective. Recently my son got malaria and they could not cure him properly and malaria virus entered into his brain and became quite critical. My leg had also undergone the operation now two times and not getting better. The doctor said I cannot go for operation for the third time, and so I am now relying on traditional medicine. But pieces of the leg bone are still coming out and I have to take out with a small pincers.”*<sup>37</sup>

In the interviews with service providers and camp committees, they said they have no major cases related to SGBV. So far, there are no active protection mechanisms to prevent or respond to SGBV cases, but it does not necessarily mean that the camp environment is free and

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35 Ibid.

36 HLYC 2, 2018, Op. cit.

37 JYC 8, Personal Interview, Je Yang IDP Camp, 15 September 2018. 50 year old physically impaired man.

safe for PWDs, especially young girls, from such threats. It may appear so because the community does not want to make it public and visible. In the process, the community might have muted some grievances, especially the voices of the victims. Young female PWDs in particular are not safe when their parents go out of the camp to work as daily labourers. A mother of one such victim from Padaukmyaing IDP Camp stated:

*“It is a shameful thing to tell. A bad guy from the neighbourhood tried to harass her [her daughter]. So she was quite afraid and run around. But the neighbourhood kept saying that nothing happened. It happened when my husband and me went outside the camp to work as a daily waged labourer, and we left her with younger children. We did not know how to express. The neighbourhood blamed us instead. They said nothing happened, though it was just too obvious. We had to undergo such bitter experience.”*<sup>38</sup>

More support is needed here to raise awareness of the risks of SGBV and of gender equality, and to explore options for mutual support groups on this issue, for example inclusive rotating creches for young girls with or without disabilities or buddy systems to look after each other.

In addition, in many settings, men and boys with disabilities, especially those who are mute or have cognitive disabilities, may be targets of SGBV, as it is assumed that they cannot report incidents of abuse or that they will not be believed. Domestic violence can also go the other way, and target men or boys with disabilities who do not conform to stereotypical ideals of masculinities. The research identified the stepson of a male PWD who kept violently attacking his stepfather despite his disabilities, beating him and cutting his neck with a knife. The stepfather had to stay at the monastery for his safety. Family violence against men does happen and it is also very stigmatised to talk about. Efforts to create safe spaces for raising awareness about SGBV should also be inclusive of men and boys and open to potential victims among them.

### 3.5. Attitudes towards peace and conflict

*“For me peace means the conditions which enable us to live happily in our village.”*<sup>39</sup> The PWDs living in IDP camps defined peace in terms of meeting basic needs and safety. For them peace means regular meals, freedom of movement, self-subsistence, and the end of war and the condition to enable them to go home. For them, peace is a practical notion with a concrete influence on their daily life.

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38 PDMC 1, Personal Interview, Padaukmyaing IDP Camp (Myitkyina), 16 October 2018. 19 year old woman with polio related disabilities.

39 MRCC 5, 2018, Op. cit.

A woman with disabilities defines peace in terms of harmonious relationship among the individual, the family, the community and the country:

*“Peace means the existence of happy relationship between individual and the family, and individual and friends; when you can travel freely and safely and you can feel the development of the country.”*<sup>40</sup>

For another man with disabilities, “peace means the entry point for safety and wellbeing.” He disliked the kind of peace achieved during the 17-year-long ceasefire period:

*“When we talk about peace, I do not like that kind of peace during the 17-year-long ceasefire period. We did not even get back our investment we made in our land during the period. The kind of peace I like is long-lasting peace enabling us to live safely and happily. I want a life-long peace. I do not want temporary peace.”*<sup>41</sup>

The same person defines peace in terms of freedom of movement: “When we say peace, it means we can go everywhere safely and freely.”<sup>42</sup> These are calls for a positive peace, without structural violence, where people can earn their livelihood and all their human rights are respected regardless of their identity factors.

The PWDs, especially the civilian PWDs, see the conflict as an unnecessary evil grown out of misunderstanding, greed, bad habits and lack of accommodation of each other.<sup>43</sup> For them the conflict is like a juggernaut, destroying everything in its way. An male PWD from Je Yang IDP Camp stated:

*“Due to the conflict there appeared so many problems. We cannot do anything, especially for disabled people. It will be better if there is no war. Due to the conflict there become more PWDs like us.”*<sup>44</sup>

Conflict for PWDs is an evil, not compatible with their hopes and dreams. They cannot plan things for the future. They cannot have a proper family life. For some, the conflict erased the chance to get married. If not for the conflict, this PWD could have got married and had a family. Due to the landmine he has become a PWD. Despite his parents’ desire for him to get married, he no longer has aspirations for a married life given his disabled condition. A different

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40 MBS 3, 2018, Op. cit.

41 JYC 5, 2018, Op. cit.

42 Ibid.

43 HLYC 1, Personal Interview, Hpum Lum Yang IDP Camp, 20 September 2018. 58 year old man with multiple disabilities.

44 JYC 26, Personal Interview, Je Yang IDP Camp, 17 September 2018. 30 year old man with multiple disabilities.

man with disabilities from Je Yang IDP Camp summed up this point when he said,

*“Before the war broke out, we planned together how to build our village and our families. But now with this conflict we have to give up all our hopes.”*<sup>45</sup>

Most of the civilian PWDs interviewed want peace as soon as possible so that they can return to their homes.

Unlike civilian PWDs, veteran PWDs’ attitudes towards conflict are more politically conditioned. They do not necessarily see the war as an unnecessary evil. In some cases they see the war as a necessary process, which makes Kachin people more united and politically more alert. Since they have lost their limbs and body parts, until and unless the political cause and goal, for which they have sacrificed, are achieved, they would prefer to fight till the end.<sup>46</sup>

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45 JYC 15, 2018, Op.cit

46 FGD, Bum Tsit IDP Camp (Mai Ja Yang), 25 September 2018

#### 4. Conclusion and recommendations

This research sought to address the gaps in understanding of PWDs and the gendered conflict impacts on them. The rapid assessment found current services at the most basic level, informed by neither a gender nor a socially created disabilities perspective. Such an approach is urgently needed, requiring capacity-building of service providers and camp volunteers, but also the PWDs themselves. This should include modules on basic gender equality, disabilities awareness, and discussion of the conflict impacts on them and exploring opportunities to support peace and increased respect for human rights.

Currently, PWDs have suffered a range of conflict impacts on their lives and livelihoods. This ranges from the devastating impacts of losing limbs or organs through landmines or conflict-related violence, to large-scale displacement due to fighting. Displacement has broken the coping mechanisms and income-generation systems of PWDs, both male and female, negatively impacting on family dynamics. PWDs and their families reported common mental health problems, depression and despair, in the face of the economic challenges and inability to live up to masculinity expectations. The interviewers heard frequently about challenges related to family unity and threats of family breakdown under the pressures.

PWDs of all ages, and even the children and family members of PWDs, encounter discrimination and stigmatisation rooted in ignorance, stereotypes and fear. There is a great need – and great potential for beneficial impact – for awareness raising on how disabilities and gender inequalities are socially constructed and how to support inclusion, tolerance and mutual support. Civil society, but also Church institutions, could play a key role in this.

In the current **peace process** in Myanmar, there is a need for an inclusive peacebuilding approach that offers all citizens including PWDs space and agency to contribute towards long-lasting peace if they want to. In order to formulate an inclusive approach, the stakeholders could explore opportunities to engage with PWDs in community-based peace and reconciliation processes. PWDs must be a part of a positive peace in the future in Kachin, with their needs met and their voices heard. They have a right to receive information about the peace process in IDPs camps and through DPOs, and DPOs should explore mechanisms for feeding back concerns or support persons with disabilities who face mobility and transportation barriers to participate in peace-related discussions, where they want to participate.

## Recommendations

### *Recommendations related to gender expectations*

1. The research findings suggest that there is a need for broad awareness raising programmes for PWDs to facilitate and promote understandings and adoption of more open ideas about how to be a man/women for male/female PWDs. Current rigid gender norms cause frustrations and depression, exacerbating mental health issues. More flexible gender norms that validate and value different ways of doing your best as a person could serve as a mechanism for removing stress and frustration. This could take the form of being a role model in courage and patience in facing the challenges of disabilities and displacement, or contributing in whatever way to the family or neighbourhood through physical action or sharing insights. For example, where the wives of male PWDs or neighbours go to earn incomes, the MWDs can take on more domestic roles to support their family.
2. To raise awareness of communities to be more tolerant and understanding with PWDS and the limitations to their productivity due to impairments and social barriers that limit or restrict their participation.
3. To provide publicly available practical guidance to community members on how to support and ask about offering support for PWDs with dignity, which could be produced by civil society organisations including disabled people's organizations or the relevant authorities.

### *To support peace and reconciliation*

4. For veteran PWDs in the KIO-controlled areas, to reduce and mitigate depression and other mental stresses by integrating them into civilian PWDs community so that they can have better access to mental and spiritual support from the broader society and mutual support from civilian PWDs.
5. PWDs have the right to be informed about the peace process, and the stakeholders concerned could explore opportunities to engage with PWDs in community-based peace and reconciliation processes. PWDs must be a part of a positive peace in the future in Kachin, with their needs met and their voices as the victims of conflict heard.
6. In many of the interviews with PWDs, they expressed that they want to raise their issues in the media. Therefore, national as well as local media, in their effort to support and strengthen the democratisation process in Myanmar, should create space where a more marginalised section of the society can express themselves and their concerns and priorities in the discussion of peace, conflict, democracy and

development.

### ***Psycho-social support***

7. Dedicated, targeted psychosocial support should be provided to PWDs who have been traumatised by accidents, displacement, or the experience of violence. This could be one-to-one support or, where funds and human resources are more limited, as a mutual self-help group which could function as an outlet for frustrations and a source of inspiration.
8. The authorities, camp committees and service providers can open up opportunities for PWDs to engage in sports, and create platforms (such as a talent show) for PWDs to be able to show their talents. Sports and free-time activities are often geared towards the wishes of the male population, so it should be ensured that the wishes of women and girls with disabilities are taken into account too.
9. In both GOM- and KIO-controlled areas, there is a need to create more income-generating activities for PWDs in accordance with their capacities, giving them opportunities to create positive identities for themselves by earning income and contributing to their families.
10. More regular social interaction could make a difference to PWDs with paralysis who are unable to move from their shelter, and work to reduce their depression. Peer support mechanism or ‘befriending’ systems could be set up by camp or religious leaders to achieve this, bearing in mind safeguards to the vulnerabilities to sexual harassment.

### ***Livelihoods***

11. The PWDs want the authorities, service providers and all stakeholders concerned, including individual donors and benefactors, instead of one-off donations, to focus more on long-term livelihood programmes, which can provide technical support to establish sustainable income-generating activities so that they will be able to earn their own livelihood and contribute to their families, and be independent. This will mean moving from a charity model to one that facilitates independent living, regardless of whether they are male or female. The preferred incomes were operating shops or other income-generating activities from their homes or shelters due to barriers to their mobility.

### ***Stigmatisation and discrimination***

12. Parents with disabilities want authorities, service providers, IDP camp committees, schools and stakeholders concerned to provide general awareness raising about

PWDs to non-disabled children and their parents so that their children will not be the victims of mocking, discrimination and other forms of stigmatisation. Faith leaders can also play a leading role here in encouraging respect and tolerance of PWDs in their congregations.

13. Parents with disabilities want their children to be treated in school as equal to other students, and for girls with disabilities to be safe from any sexual harassment.
14. The provision of dedicated schooling specialising in educating children with disabilities should be explored in both GOM- and KIO-controlled areas.
15. Students with disabilities want the school curriculum to be more disabilities friendly and accessible, providing alternative options for disabled students such as braille or audio textbooks, and ensuring accessibility of the facilities. Gender-sensitive, respectful support to schoolgirls with disabilities is particularly important, ensuring that measures are taken to prevent sexual harassment or exploitation.
16. The PWDs object to the stigmatising, belittling and negative depictions about PWDs in popular culture, particularly those belittling PWDs as prospective marriage partners. They want authorities to ban such harmful depictions in popular culture such as video, cinema, music and cartoons, etc.

### ***Safety and protection***

17. PWDs want the authorities and service providers concerned to construct public paths, roads, building and sanitation facilities to be disabilities friendly, particularly in IDP camps and particularly during the monsoon. This means making them accessible for those using mobility devices such as wheelchairs, tricycles, and providing markings for the visually impaired.
18. In order to address the barriers to PWDs' mobility, authorities and service providers should provide assistive devices that are suitable for the given terrains, i.e. sturdier devices than wheelchairs that can cope in IDP camp terrain of makeshift paths and muddy conditions.
19. PWDs also raised the need for clean water (not drinking water) and more accessible medical services, especially in IDP camps in areas under KIO control. Accessible and adapted sanitation facilities are also needed for the dignity of PWD IDPs, and are particularly important for women with disabilities.
20. PWDs also expressed the need for safe locations, which are away from military camps and not exposed to armed attacks.
21. PWDs also want general awareness for the community in order to be able to reduce

- verbal discrimination, harassment and SGBV, and they want better services to protection them from abuses and insecurities.
22. PWDs also want the Tatmadaw soldiers and officers stationed at different checkpoints to know that not all male PWDs (especially landmine victims and physically disabled individuals) are former combatants, to reduce harassment or limitations placed on PWDs suspected of being former combatants.
  23. The victims of landmines, now being categorised as PWDs, want to stop the use of landmines in the armed conflict immediately. There should also be awareness raising for civilians on the risks of landmines, and there is an urgent need for authorities concerned to demine the areas outside of frontline areas to prevent any further people from being maimed by landmines.

## 5. Annexes

### Annex 1 Research questions

1. How has the conflict changed gender expectations?
2. Has the conflict affected different genders differently? If so, what are the dynamics?
3. What are the societal expectations of masculinity? How have they changed over time? Can Kachin male PWDs or IDPs or veteran conditions fulfil those expectations? If so, what are the dynamics? If not, what are the difficulties and consequences?
4. What kind of vulnerabilities do WWD face in general and in IDP context in particular?
5. What types of PWDs are there in the Kachin context? How they are differently affected by conflict? What are their experiences before and after conflict?
6. What are the differences among people with prior disabilities (before the 2011 ceasefire breakdown), conflict-related disabilities and former combatants?
7. What are the major challenges that PWDs face in their daily life? How has their daily life changed due to conflict? Are there gender differences in this regard?
8. Are there different expectations of MWD and WWD?
9. How does the community perceive and respond to PWDs? What kind of social stigmatisations do they face?
10. What kind of special assistances are available for PWDs (including IDPs and veterans) at the community level as well as individual level?
11. What are the support services available for PWDs from the authorities (including government, EAO, CSO, faith-based organisations, etc.)? What kind of barriers do PWDs face in accessing general services?
12. What are the vulnerabilities of PWDs to discrimination, exclusion or different forms of violence?
13. Are there organisations working specifically for gender, IDPs, PWDs and war veterans? Are there differences in their approach?
14. What do peace and conflict mean for these groups of people? What kind of peace do they want to achieve?

15. What are their expectations in the post-conflict context?
16. Do they have a say in the peace process at the community level or individual level?  
If so, how? If not, what hampers them?
17. Do they know the general conditions of their land and property back at home?
18. Can they safely visit their farmlands? If not, what hampers them?

## **Annex 2 Overview of Interviews conducted**

Out of 141 PWD interviews, 50 were from Laiza, mainly from the Woi Chyai IDP Camp in Laiza and the Je Yang and Hpun Lum Yang Camps located along the Chinese border. The seven KIIs conducted in Mai Ja Yang were mainly from Lana Pa IDP Camp, east of Mai Ja Yang and three hours' drive away, and Bum Tsit Pa Camp, four hours' drive away from Mai Ja Yang. The 10 KII conducted in Bhamo were mainly at the office of the DPO Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI). In Myitkyina KIIs were mainly conducted at Zium, Bethlehem, Shwer Zet, Man Hkring, Jan Mai Kawng, Padaukmyaing and Pa.La.Na IDP Camps. In Waimaw it included Mai Na KBC, AG and RC IDP Camps. FGDs were conducted in Laiza, Mai Ja Yang, Bhamo and Myitkyina. Key stakeholders include Kachin Development Group (KDG), Metta Development Foundation, KIO's People's Militia Group (MHH), KIO Health Department, IDP camp leaders and camp committee members, Kachin Women Association (KWA), Kachin Women Association Thailand (KWAT), IDP and Refugee Relief Committee (IRRC), Wunpawng Ninghtoi (WPN), Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI), Myanmar Veterans' Organisation (MVO, Myitkyina) and Department of Social Welfare.





