

# Pulling the strings

Masculinities, gender and social conflict in Myanmar



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**Jana Naujoks and Myat Thandar Ko**

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# Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 Background to Myanmar	8
1.2 Why men and masculinities?	9
1.3 Project background	11
1.4 Methodology and limitations	11
<b>2. Gender, conflict and peacebuilding in Myanmar</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 National overview	13
2.2 Research sites	14
Map 1: Research locations	14
Map 2: Southern Shan state research sites	15
Map 3: Tanintharyi region research sites	17
<b>3. Key thematic findings</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1 Masculinities and SGBV	20
3.2 Gendered expectations, local conflict resolution and land conflicts	24
3.3 Conflict, masculinities and substance abuse	28
3.4 Masculinities in migration and displacement	33
<b>4. Conclusion and recommendations</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Annexes</b>	<b>42</b>
Annex 1: A note on research methodology challenges	42
Annex 2: Research activities and participants	43

# Abbreviations

<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisation
<b>EAO</b>	Ethnic armed organisation
<b>FGD</b>	Focus group discussion
<b>GAD</b>	General Administration Department
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GPS</b>	Gender, peace and security
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>KII</b>	Key informant interview
<b>KNU</b>	Karen National Union
<b>NCA</b>	National Ceasefire Agreement
<b>NLD</b>	National League for Democracy
<b>PNA</b>	Pa-O National Army (military wing of the PNO)
<b>PNO</b>	Pa-O National Organisation
<b>PTE</b>	Phan Tee Eain
<b>SAZ</b>	Self-Administered Zone
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and gender-based violence
<b>SOGI</b>	Sexual orientation and gender identity
<b>TGO</b>	Thingaha Gender Organization
<b>WLB</b>	Women's League of Burma

## Executive summary

The Union of Myanmar is a complex country context marked by ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. It has been affected by decades of an authoritarian, isolationist regime and numerous interconnected conflicts, ranging from national-level ethnic political and armed conflicts and a pro-democracy struggle, to broader social-level land conflicts. It has also seen conflicts at the household level, such as domestic violence. In Myanmar, as in other countries, these numerous forms of violence affect men, women, boys, girls and those with diverse gender identities in different ways.

There is increasing awareness that gender is important in understanding conflict and working towards peace and social cohesion. A growing number of development programmes are dedicated to addressing this. In practice, such programmes have largely focused on women's participation in political and peacebuilding processes. This focus on increasing women's meaningful participation in arenas and activities formerly dominated by men is an important aspect of peacebuilding. However, there is another 'side' to the gender inequality dilemma, which is less well understood – one that deals with the experiences of men and boys. Social expectations around masculinity are often overlooked (or oversimplified). Masculinities, that is, the social expectations of men to act or behave in certain ways because they are men, can be drivers of conflict or violence. However, limiting work on this to 'men-engage'-type approaches focusing mainly on mobilising men to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) can mean overlooking how social expectations of masculinities can also lead to increased vulnerability for men and boys, which is often not recognised or addressed by peacebuilding programming.

Understanding masculinities is important, because these masculinity norms – these social expectations – can be mobilised to manipulate the taking of violent actions. For instance, society may invoke the expectations on men to be protectors of their community from perceived external threats, including land confiscations for development projects. Where this means confronting more powerful actors such as state agencies, frustration and pressures can turn into violent action.

Conflict analyses and interventions that overlook this gender dimension are incomplete, and risk missing important entry points for peace. Such projects can also risk misunderstanding the full impacts of their interventions. Peacebuilding efforts are more likely to be effective if they are informed by a comprehensive analysis of conflict dynamics, which considers the dual impact of gender norms on conflict and of conflict on social gender norms. Social expectation on men can shape conflict dynamics, such as by their joining armed groups and perpetuating violence, but the occurrence of conflict and violence can also influence expectations on men. For example, when communities have been displaced from their farmlands by conflict, men may be expected to migrate for work in order to be able to provide for their family.

This report aims to analyse social norms, their construction and their implications, at the household and community levels, 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 society. Two research locations, one in southern Shan state and one in Tanintharyi region, provide examples of how expectations of masculinity can drive behaviour that exacerbates or leads to an increase in violent conflict, and pose different types of vulnerabilities for men living in these conflict contexts. The main areas of analysis include:

- how gender hierarchies and expectations of masculinities link to the perpetration of SGBV, recognising that men and boys can also be the victims of SGBV;
- rural communities' vulnerability to land dispossession and associated loss of livelihood leads to grave challenges for men to live up to social expectations of protecting and providing for their family, while gender norms can also be subverted by communities strategically choosing women to lead protests over land confiscations to prevent violence against male protestors;
- how social expectations of masculinity link to male vulnerability to drug and alcohol addiction, and the assumption of associated social ills of SGBV and criminal violence;
- vulnerabilities of men and boys forcibly displaced by conflict or land confiscations, and the subsequent challenges of living up to gender expectations of providing for the family. These are also experienced by economic migrants, while high levels of in- and out-migration are impacting gender dynamics at the household and social level in both destination and native locations.

International Alert's previous report 'Behind the masks: Masculinities, gender, conflict and peacebuilding in Myanmar' assessed the social construction of masculinities in relation to armed actors and laid out the specific vulnerabilities of non-binary men, political prisoners and forced labourers. The report analysed masculinities in the peace process and offered suggestions on how to engage men to proactively engage with gender, peace and security (GPS) issues.

The current report draws on the same primary research to argue that dual expectations on men to protect and provide for their family, linked with efforts to maintain or increase their status, can drive engagement in violence or, conversely, in efforts to resolve conflicts. The gap between the social expectations on men and their lived experiences can negatively affect their psycho-social wellbeing and drive harmful behaviours, such as drug abuse and perpetration of SGBV, and is particularly intense for forcibly displaced men or economic migrants in precarious conditions.

## Report findings in brief:

### SGBV

**Social expectation of masculinities by both men and women play a key role in driving the perpetration of SGBV, condoning violence, invisibilising perpetrators and shifting the blame to the victims of such violence.** The general public tend to blame the women victims and survivors of SGBV for dressing or behaving against traditional gender expectations, such as being out in the evenings or consumption of alcohol. In order to address this problem and better support survivors, community and civil society leaders need to better understand the root causes of SGBV – i.e. gender inequalities, an unfounded sense of male entitlement to women's bodies and lack of understanding of the vital concepts of consent. A broader social norm change is needed to shift the blame on to perpetrators rather than victims, and to create social attitudes that do not excuse or facilitate such crimes.

However, the possibility of men and boys becoming targets of domestic and sexual violence must also be recognised, and service and support provided to them. There are double stigmas for male victims as this entails the secondary trauma of having broken gender norms that expect men to be protectors against or even perpetrators of violence rather than victims of it.



## LAND CONFLICT

**Local dispute resolution over land issues has been traditionally dominated by elite male leaders, benefiting those at the upper levels of society through a patronage system, to the exclusion of women and men of lesser age or status.** The expectation on men to defend family lands (and associated livelihoods) in the face of superior powers, such as the military, government or corporations, can exacerbate gender pressures that can lead to frustrations, migration, marital breakdown or increases in domestic violence. Loss of lands and livelihoods can push families into poverty and is contributing to high levels of migration and drug abuse. Civil society organisations (CSOs) addressing land conflicts should place greater emphasis on including diverse stakeholders and views in participative decision-making to resolve land conflicts, for instance by supporting the capacities and opportunities for women and youth to engage in decision-making and settling of conflicts. Supporting women to actively engage in addressing land conflicts can be a strategic way of addressing these issues, as women have been socialised into more constructive and peaceful approaches to conflicts. Increased non-violent conflict-resolution skills for men and boys that value fairness, justice and participation are needed.

## DRUGS

**Gendered expectations on men to provide for the family in difficult economic situations can drive substance abuse and increase associated levels of violence; approaches to address substance abuse will be more effective if informed by a gender analysis.** In all research locations, respondents voiced grave concerns about high rates of drug abuse and its harmful social impacts as a key issue. Gendered expectations of men to provide for the family or to demonstrate their strength, courage and masculinity perpetuate this crisis, particularly in the context of a difficult economic situation where decent jobs are lacking. Peer pressure and internalised expectations of meeting the provider norms can combine to drive feelings of frustration, which in turn link to the consumption of drugs. CSOs, particularly women's organisations, expressed perceptions of drug addiction fuelling domestic violence, SGBV and criminal violence amid widespread calls for more effective law enforcement. Entry points to address the drug crises must be informed by a gender analysis and will be more effective if they focus on the underlying gender norms and expectations on adolescent and older men. Major efforts by civil society, government, faith, business and political/community leaders are needed to jointly put an end to the drug epidemic.

## MIGRATION

**The modalities of how people migrate, whether due to conflict or for economic reasons, are influenced by gender expectations, but also shape gender dynamics.** Movement of people within and out of Myanmar is high, due to a mix of active conflict, natural disasters, land grabbing, and lack of economic and education opportunities. Forced displacement can leave families in poverty, creating major difficulties for men to meet gender expectations of protecting their family or providing for them. These frustrations can contribute to mental health issues, such as depression and suicidal tendencies. They can also spur violence against others, including domestic violence. Economic migration levels were also high in the research areas, with some gender differences in migration depending on locations: in southern Shan, women tend to migrate to urban centres and men tend to migrate further away for higher salaries, while, in Tanintharyi, these trends are changing with daughters increasingly migrating and taking on the role of supporting the families through working abroad. The long-term impact of these high migration levels should be monitored and addressed, with particular attention to the impact of migration on gender expectations.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to Myanmar

Myanmar/Burma<sup>1</sup> is marked by multiple ethnicities, languages and different interconnected layers of conflict, ranging from the household level (domestic violence), and broader social-level land conflicts to national-level ethnic political conflicts. The history of Myanmar has been complex and conflicted. 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 – first with, and then against, the Japanese occupation during the Second World War, followed by a brief parliamentary era between independence in 1948 and 1962, when subsequent decades of military regime rule commenced. Historical records indicate that these eras were largely shaped by men in patriarchal structures, with men assuming most positions of authority and women's contributions receiving limited attention – with the exceptions of some powerful historical queens and prominent female political and social commentators during the independence struggle.<sup>2</sup>

The newly independent state experienced quickly proliferating social and ethnic conflict, from the Communist Party of Burma<sup>3</sup> to numerous ethnic groups seeking to secure ethnic and territorial rights through armed force.<sup>4</sup> 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, who were then in mainly medical roles,<sup>5</sup> kept these demands at bay through counterinsurgency measures involving high levels of violence against ethnic (or politically opposed) civilian men, women and children.

Later, the military government 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.<sup>6</sup> Over the decades, armed opposition was pushed to the borderlands where armed and political violence was increasingly normalised.

Meanwhile, a broad-based movement for democracy led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi – a rare woman leader – 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. In 2007, the 'Saffron Revolution'<sup>7</sup> was 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

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- 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, Ludgate 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 as nurses between 1961 and 2013. M. Myoe, *Building the Tatmadaw: Myanmar Armed Forces since 1948*, International University of Japan, 2009; T. McLaughlin, *First women graduate from officer training*, Myanmar Times, 30 August 2014, <https://www.mmtimes.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.747–70
  - 7 A broad coalition of students, democracy supporters and monks and nuns joined in widespread economic and political protests against the military regime and dire economic situation, with saffron referring to the colours of the monks' robes.

also met with heavy-handed repression by the military,<sup>8</sup> but ushered in a slow, gradual transition to a more democratic form of government. This began with a 2008 Constitution written by the military, and the formation of 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 (defence, home and border 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 and key conflict issues such as land rights.

Since 2010, the former and current governments have been engaging in a peace process with several of the primarily ethnic armed organisations (EOs), 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 initially signed the ceasefire agreement, 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 EOs and vital social demographic groups such as women and youth.

Key implementation mechanisms of the ceasefire and peace process have neither committed to nor implemented the 30% quota to date.<sup>9</sup> While a process of political dialogue between the relevant actors has begun, and is slowly progressing, some peace actors have noted that "there is little doubt that the process has significant flaws".<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Why men and masculinities?

In October 2000, the United Nations adopted Security Resolution 1325, which affirmed the right of women and girls affected by conflict to participate in decision-making related to peace and security. UNSCR 1325 also affirmed the obligation of states and international actors to protect women and girls affected by armed conflict, provide relief and take measures to prevent further violence. Since then, there has been increasing awareness among governments, armed actors,<sup>11</sup> civil society as well as civilians enduring conflict that gender is an important factor in understanding conflict and working for peace. Academic research has documented strong correlations between levels of gender equality and levels of peacefulness,<sup>12</sup> and suggests that gender inequalities, violence, conflict and fragility are mutually reinforcing.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, 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 procedures.<sup>14</sup> However,

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

9 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: AGIPP, 2018

10 P. Keenan, *Negotiation and attrition: The current state of the Myanmar Peace Process*, EBO Background Paper No. 1/18, Euro Burma Office, April 2018

11 Partnership for Peace Consortium (PfPC) of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes (Security Sector Reform Working Group and Education Development Working Group) (2006) *Handbook on teaching gender in the military*, Geneva: DCAF and PfPC, 2006

12 M. Caprioli, *Primed for violence: The role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict*, *International Studies Quarterly*, 49(2), 2005, pp.161–78; IEP, *Structures of peace: Identifying what leads to peaceful societies*, Sydney, New York and Washington DC: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2011; E. Melander, *Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict*, *International Studies Quarterly*, 49(4), 2005, pp.695–714

13 H. Wright, *Gender, peace and security and the post-2015 framework*, paper presented to the Expert Group Meeting on Structural and Policy Constraints in Achieving the MDGs for Women and Girls, Mexico City, Mexico, 21–24 October 2013, UN Women, New York, [www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/58/EP2-Hannah-Wright%20pdf.pdf](http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/58/EP2-Hannah-Wright%20pdf.pdf)

14 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

in Myanmar, meaningful participation of women and the inclusion of a comprehensive substantive gender perspective has not yet made its way into the peace process,<sup>15</sup> nor into parliamentary politics. The Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies with access to justice for all and accountable and inclusive institutions are interdependent – one cannot be achieved without the other.<sup>16</sup>

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. As women are often missing in formal settings, a focus on ‘gender’ is often used to mean ‘women and girls’. However, the ‘other side of gender’, that is, the experiences of men and boys, is less well understood. While important efforts have been made to date in Myanmar to better integrate gender perspectives 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.

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.<sup>17</sup> 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 land resources and influence than a young man from a minority ethnic group in a remote, conflict-affected region facing displacement due to a major dam or mining operation. Similarly, an upper-class gay man in Yangon may have more freedom to live according to his identity without facing violence than a lower-class transwoman who migrated from a rural area, works as a day labourer and faces great social stigma.

Social expectations of masculinity (by men and by women) are an often overlooked (or oversimplified) driver of community tensions and conflict, 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 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 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.

<sup>15</sup> FGDs in Yangon, June 2017

<sup>16</sup> OECD, *Gender equality and women’s empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected situations: A review of donor support*, OECD Development Policy Paper, No. 8, October 2018, p. 19

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

This is important because masculinity norms can be mobilised or manipulated into violent action by others. For instance, senior elite men can invoke the expectations on men to be protectors of their community from perceived external threats, whether that threat is perceived to stem from a certain ethnic or religious group, or whether it is a large company planning a mine, dam, banana plantation or mall on a community's lands. Conflict analyses and interventions that overlook this gender dimension are incomplete, and could miss entry points for the building of peace or social cohesion. They risk misunderstanding the full impacts of their intervention. Community-level 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 in the work of Hedstrom and Brenner, who explore the ways in which gendered identities are mobilised by elites in Kachin.<sup>18</sup> There are also several 'men-engage'-type efforts, which target men as potential perpetrators of SGBV and seek to prevent this, by turning men into 'champions' for gender equality or against SGBV. While there is value in this approach and the goal is important, a critical assessment of conflict-affected masculinities in Myanmar reveals a broader spectrum of issues to address.

### 1.3 Project background

This research was conducted by International Alert in partnership with Phan Tee Eain (PTE) and the Thingaha Gender Organization (TGO), with funding from the Paung Si Facility (previously known as the Peace Support Fund). The overall project goal 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 research approach sought to provide snapshots of the overall topic of gender, masculinities and peacebuilding in select case study locations. The researchers acknowledge that actors, trends and conflicts vary significantly across different locations, ethnicities and socio-economic 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, GPS in Myanmar.

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 CSOs and women's groups, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) rights organisations, local authorities and government stakeholders, political parties, veterans, former political prisoners, armed organisations, religious leaders, lawyers, media, private sector actors, 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 GPS in Myanmar and globally. Due to time and budget restrictions, the research is limited to a qualitative methodology of semi-structured interviews and FGDs.

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

**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, socio-economic background, religion, ethnicity and location.

**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 research was conducted in Yangon, in order 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. Research was also conducted in two conflict-affected areas: southern Shan state and Tanintharyi region. These locations were selected due to their community's experience of and exposure to conflict, as well as the relative accessibility and safety for the research team. PTE led the research in Tanintharyi, in Dawei, Yebyu and Launglon township, which comprised mainly Tavoyan people, as well as the Karen National Union (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.<sup>19</sup> The research participants were selected by the project partners based on their experience and insights, drawing on existing networks. In order to protect the confidentiality and security of research participants, this report only references their locations by state without naming villages, organisations or individuals.

<sup>19</sup> 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

The Union of Myanmar is a complex country context marked by ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. It has been affected by decades of an authoritarian, isolationist regime and numerous interconnected conflicts, ranging from national-level ethnic political and armed conflicts<sup>20</sup> and a pro-democracy struggle,<sup>21</sup> to broader social-level land conflicts.<sup>22</sup> It has also seen conflicts at the household level, such as domestic violence.<sup>23</sup>

The Framework for Political Dialogue for the Union Peace Process and the principles agreed in July 2018 contains a commitment to 30% participation of women in all peacebuilding processes, frameworks and mechanisms, as well as the construction, adoption and implementation of a national gender equality policy and prevention of SGBV.<sup>24</sup> However, as the wording relating to this 30% women's quota is not definitive (i.e. the Framework for Political Dialogue merely states that such representation is "to be encouraged"), implementation of the quota will continue to be a challenge.

The gendered dimensions of violence and displacement, including the impacts on men, and masculinities, are not fully understood or addressed through current peacebuilding projects in Myanmar<sup>25</sup> – a gap that this research aims to fill. Importantly, 'gender issues' should not always be addressed as a separate, stand-alone initiative focused on women. This is because all key topics, from security to natural resource management, are gendered, i.e. women and men face different barriers in access and expectations related to their gender. Gender should not be an 'add-on', but integrated as a lens of analysis for better understanding the core problems and for identifying solutions that address men's and women's different needs. It is key that gender considerations are integrated in all discussion points of the national political-level dialogues, as each issue will affect people of different gender identities differently. This applies to discussions of land and natural resource management, economic opportunities and the associated migration issues, as well as resettlement issues (especially related to internally displaced and returning refugees).

<sup>20</sup> A. South, 2008, Op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> B. Matthews, Myanmar's agony: The struggle for democracy, *The Round Table*, 82(325), 1993, pp.37–49

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), 'The farmer becomes the criminal': Land confiscation in Burma's Karen State, Washington, DC: HRW, 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 et al, Forest law enforcement governance and trade – A conflict sensitivity analysis, *Yangon: International Alert*, 2017

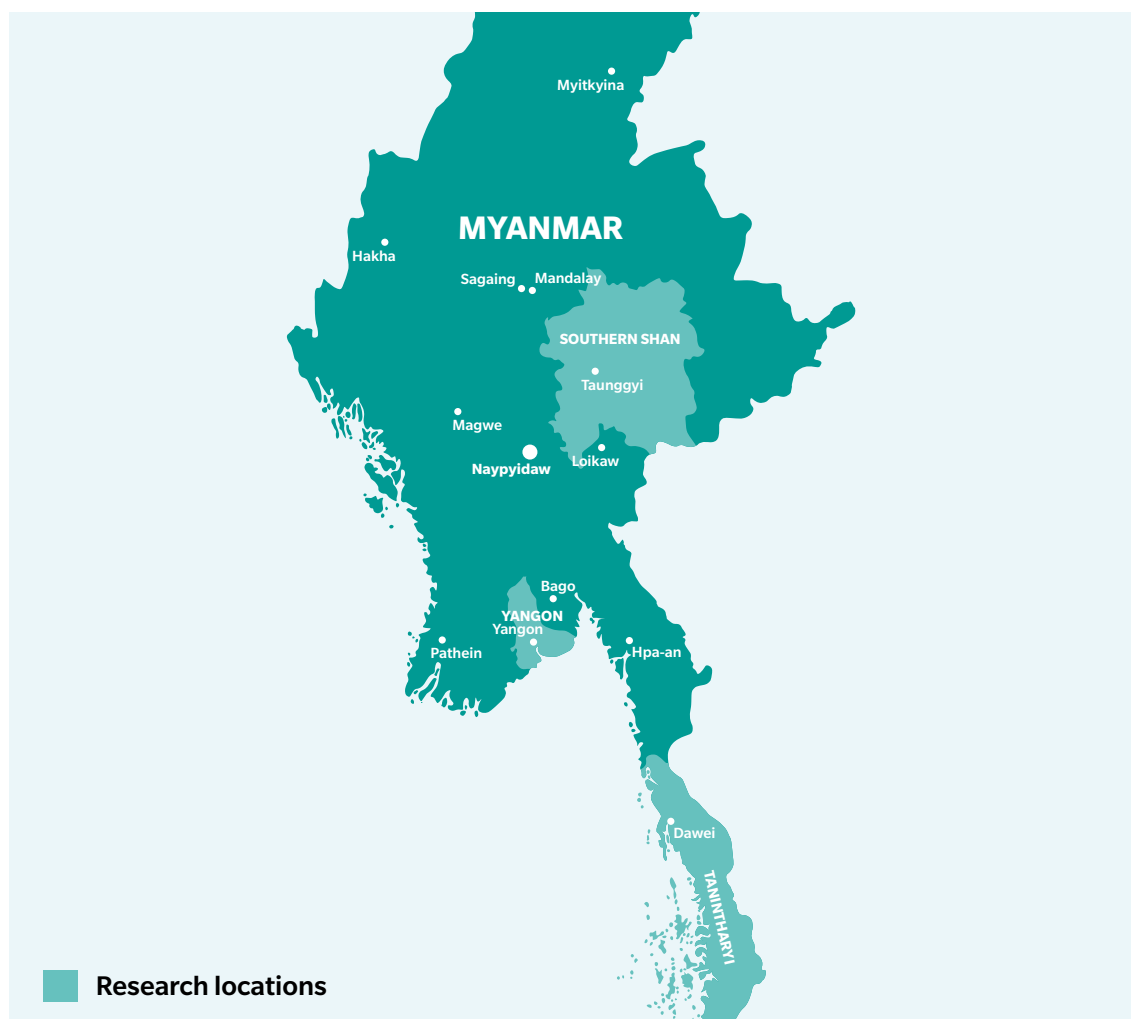
<sup>23</sup> A government survey found that one in five women (20%) in Myanmar have experienced domestic violence. *Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) 2015–16*, Myanmar: Myanmar Ministry of Health and Sports, 2017. See also Gender Equality Network, *Behind the silence: Violence against women and their resilience*, Yangon: Gender Equality Network, 2015.

<sup>24</sup> 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>; *The Global New Light of Myanmar*, 17 July 2018, p.6

<sup>25</sup> Interviews with CSO stakeholders in Yangon

## 2.2 Research sites

MAP 1: RESEARCH LOCATIONS



### SOUTHERN SHAN STATE RESEARCH SITES

The research was conducted in two Pa-O villages in southern Shan state, in Koban, a mixed ethnicity area north of Taunggyi. The area had a history of being heavily affected by conflict and fighting, prior to the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Pa-O National Army (PNA, the military wing of the Pa-O National Organisation (PNO)) and the Tatmadaw in 1991. This eventually resulted in the creation of the Pa-O SAZ (a semi-autonomous region) in the 2008 Constitution, which is close to the research communities. While there has been no open fighting in southern Shan since the ceasefire, fighting and armed violence persist in the neighbouring regions of northern Shan state, with spill-over impacts.<sup>26</sup> The conflict-related fighting has escalated since 2015 in northern Shan states, with the Ta'ang Women's Organization documenting over 100 cases of human rights violations, including torture, rape and killings.<sup>27</sup> This violence interrupts livelihoods and fuels migration and displacement, as farmers are afraid to access lands outside the village for fear of landmines or being detained by armed actors.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Ta'ang Women's Organization, *Trained to torture*, June 2016, <http://www.burmapartnership.org/2016/06/trained-to-torture-systematic-war-crimes-by-the-burma-army-in-taang-areas-of-northern-shan-state-march-2011-march-2016>

<sup>28</sup> K. Schrengenberger, *Peace hopes in tatters in northern Shan state*, 30 April 2018, *Frontier Myanmar*, <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/peace-hopes-in-tatters-in-northern-shan-state>



MAP 2: SOUTHERN SHAN STATE RESEARCH SITES



While the research area is formally under government control, there is little reach of government administration, law and order, or provision of social services into this region. Meanwhile, the PNO and other EAOs retain a significant influence in the villages and over social dynamics.<sup>29</sup> Trust and confidence in the central government are low.<sup>30</sup> As a consequence of long decades of conflict and rural remoteness, there is an acute lack of employment, income and education opportunities, issues that are further exacerbated by conflicts over land. All of these issues contribute to high levels of out-migration of young people, and coincide with issues related to the drug trade and abuse.<sup>31</sup>

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

30 Roundtable discussion 'Does gender matter for men? Broadening the conversation on gender and the peace process', organised by Thingaha Gender Organization and International Alert in Taunggyi, 31 January 2018

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

Different generations have been shaped by different phases of the conflict. The older generation – those who came of age before 1990 – were affected by open violence and fighting between the Tatmadaw and various EAOs (including the PNA).<sup>32</sup> Prior to the signing of the 1991 ceasefire, they experienced direct exposure to violence, both witnessing violence and dealing with loss, and were forced to serve as porters<sup>33</sup> or guides. Additionally, this generation faced a dearth in education because teachers had little access to conflict areas. Others were conscripted into ethnic armed groups to protect their communities from those perceived as threats, such as the Tatmadaw, the Communist Party of Burma (until 1989), and other ethnic factions such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA).<sup>34</sup> These processes and circumstances contributed to deep-seated traumas for many older generation community members.

The younger generation – those 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 on this group have been social 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 on 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.<sup>35</sup> A number of respondents stated that, despite the signing of the NCA, the situation in their region does “not feel like peace” to communities who face land grabbing and the potential loss of their livelihoods. The high levels of land conflict contribute to feelings of insecurity.

### EXPECTATIONS ON MEN AND BOYS

In the post-conflict setting, 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. 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, widespread drug abuse issues.

### 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”.<sup>36</sup>

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

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

33 Being obliged to carry equipment including weaponry or supplies for military actors.

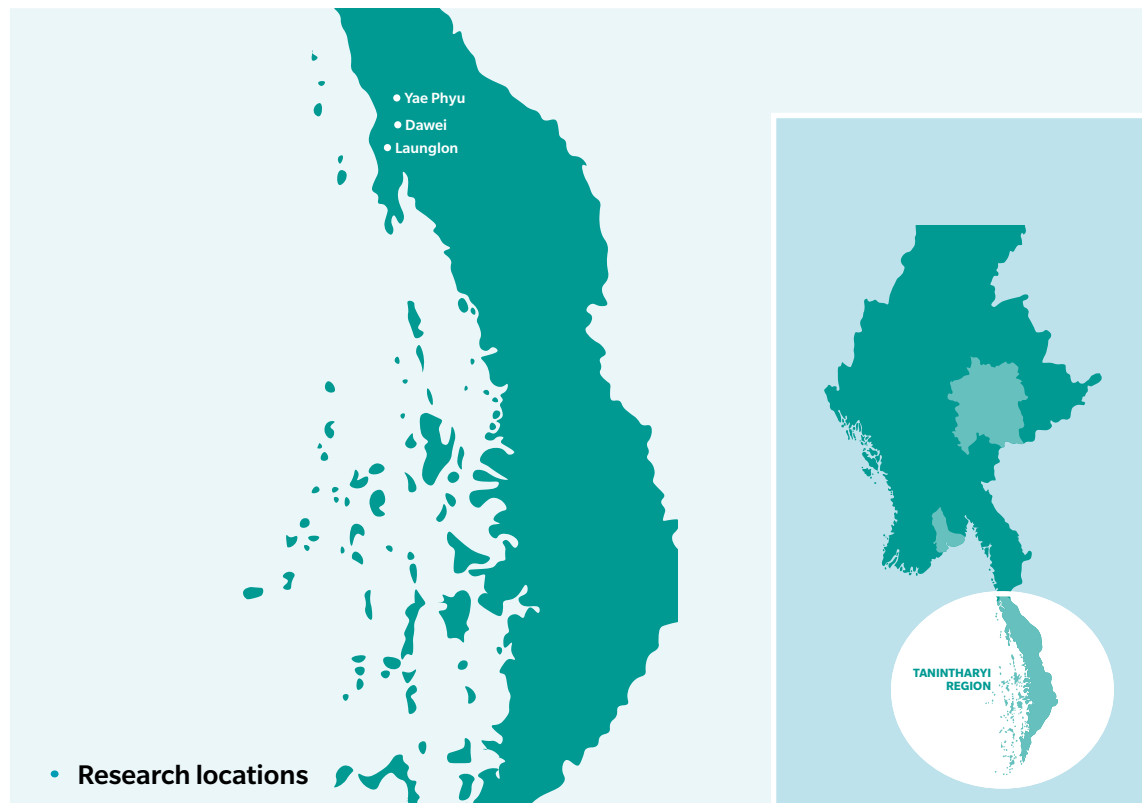
34 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

35 Analysis discussion with field coordinators, September 2017

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

masculinity, shaping the social expectations of appropriate behaviour for men and women, both young and old. However, the research encountered some vocal women among the emerging youth leaders, fearlessly raising their concerns about social issues such as SGBV and drug abuse. This could herald changing dynamics in future generations.

### MAP 3: TANINTHARYI REGION RESEARCH SITES



### TANINTHARYI REGION RESEARCH SITES

The second case study of coastal Tanintharyi region 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 predominantly Tavoyan<sup>37</sup> stakeholders. It was further informed by interviews with strategic Karen stakeholders. The research discussions with the Tavoyan participants centred on social cohesion and local-level conflicts issues, including land conflicts. Tanintharyi is multi-ethnic and multi-religious, with some intercommunal harmony issues between different religions.

There are two important interlinked conflict dynamics of relevance in Tanintharyi region: (1) armed conflict between central state and non-state armed groups primarily in Northern Tanintharyi; and (2) repression during the military dictatorship.<sup>38</sup> A third key dynamic involves the historical and current land grabs and associated conflicts as well as diverse social cohesion issues of SGBV and drug abuse that are at the centre of this report. In addition, research participants brought up further local conflicts relating to electricity provision and fishing rights, and growing concerns about increasing cases of child rape. Participants also expressed that in recent years

37 The Tavoyans 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.

38 Repression methods including forced labour and political imprisonment are discussed in more depth in Alert's companion publication, J. Naujoks and M. Thandar Ko, *Behind the masks – Masculinities, gender, peace and security in Myanmar*, Yangon, 2018

there has been a general rise in armed criminal violence since the border with Thailand was opened, bringing easier access to conflict areas and to arms black markets by the Thai border. While the conflict-related violence has decreased, respondents perceived armed criminal violence to be increasing.

The third – and active – dynamic relates to conflict over land use and possession between individuals, communities, companies, government and military all over Tanintharyi region. Despite ongoing improvements in land use policy and land registration, “the history of land seizures makes the issue especially sensitive”.<sup>39</sup> Conflicts over land occur within and between communities,<sup>40</sup> between armed groups (such as occasional clashes over territory between the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and KNU in Yebyu township),<sup>41</sup> between communities and the government, such as over conservation areas,<sup>42</sup> the Special Economic Zone and Deep Sea Port,<sup>43</sup> and the military as well as private sector actors, including so-called crony companies.<sup>44</sup>

### EXPECTATIONS ON MEN AND BOYS

Expectations were seen to come from families, community and society, and from peers, politicians, elders and religious leaders. For instance, when experiencing land grabbing, families usually look to the father of the household to protect their land and livelihood, often requiring men to migrate to support their family if their land was taken. 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.<sup>45</sup> 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 emerged as a major concern for respondents. There are strong, heteronormative expectations for young men to get married in order to ‘become (adult) men’. However, interviewees also perceived the conflict and lack of work as contributing to the formation of short-lived underage marriages or couples, which often break down.<sup>46</sup> Marriages are increasing between local girls and in-migrants, as many local young men have migrated abroad, while others marry later, after returning from migration. 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.

Interviewees raised drug abuse abroad and in the community as a major concern. The government or government officials were seen as being involved in land conflicts and drugs, for instance police officers were alleged to be more involved in drug smuggling than in protecting

39 Myanmar Information Management Unit and Peace Support Fund, *Situation Analysis of South-eastern Myanmar*, Yangon, 2016

40 The communities gave an example of men from two neighbouring communities who owned some land but sought to take some from the other community. This case was taken to the courts but initially was released with a warning, and a second time with very low compensation to be paid (5000 MMK ~ under US\$4), which did not provide a deterrent to such land grabs. Some cases lead to physical violence.

41 Min Paing, NMSP, KNU and Tanintharyi Region Gov’t to meet to solve territory dispute, *Mon News Agency (MNA)*, 24 January 2017, [www.burmalink.org/nmsp-knu-tanintharyi-region-govt-meet-solve-territory-dispute/](http://www.burmalink.org/nmsp-knu-tanintharyi-region-govt-meet-solve-territory-dispute/)

42 We will manage our own natural resources: Karen indigenous people in Kamoethway demonstrate the importance of local solutions and community-driven conservation, *Dawei, Myanmar*

43 This includes both direct land grabs, with official estimates that 32,274 people would be displaced from the direct SEZ area, as well as indirect land grabs “because of speculation and large-scale financial investment in the region, as an indirect ripple effect of the establishment of the SEZ” affecting potentially up to 500,000 people. E. Loewen, *Land grabbing in Dawei (Myanmar/Burma): A (inter)national human rights concern*, Paung Ku and Transnational Institute, 2012, p.5f

44 K. Woods, *Intersection of land grabs and climate change mitigation strategies in Myanmar as a (post) war state of conflict*, The Hague: International Institute of Social Science, 2015

45 KIs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

46 KIs and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

communities.<sup>47</sup> The Department for Social Welfare's (DSW) efforts to support rehabilitation and prevent drug use were highlighted but not considered sufficient.

The main impact of conflict has been loss of income and livelihoods due to land grabbing, decreasing men's roles and leadership within the family. The frustration of men not being able to fulfil their livelihoods can lead to 'harsh' behaviour including domestic and other types of violence, such as physical violence between fishermen in competition over fishing rights and livelihoods.<sup>48</sup> There seem to be several components of masculinist behaviour (economic pressure to provide for the family and exploitative labour conditions, pressure to demonstrate strength and power over others to maintain status, anger management issues coupled with reckless drinking leading to impaired judgement and propensity to violence) that drive this violence.<sup>49</sup>

### 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.<sup>50</sup> However, a few notable women have been able to take up positions of power – for example, the female Chief Minister and successful businesswoman Daw Lei Lei Maw.<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> A male civil society respondent agreed that qualified women can reach senior levels, but only with family and community support.<sup>53</sup>

At the community level, the common perception is that only the household head, who is predominantly a man, can stand for village administrator elections. This attitude discourages women from standing for such a position. Moreover, only the (predominantly male) household head can vote in these elections, which has the effect of excluding many women from the process.<sup>54</sup> Civil society staff members who were interviewed in Yangon affirmed that, while this regulation is not in force, in rural areas the perception of this practice prevents women from striving to achieve leadership roles.<sup>55</sup> Currently, only 87 out of the 16,000 village tract administrators (less than 1%) are women.<sup>56</sup> Due to out-migration of men, there are "increasing number(s) of female-headed households in south-eastern Myanmar".<sup>57</sup> 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. These historical gendered power structures continue to shape women's and men's roles in addressing local issues, such as on SGBV or land conflicts.

47 Kills and FGDs in Dawei, July to September 2017

48 Meeting with local resource person, September 2017

49 In neighbouring Mon state, 47 men were killed on fishing boats in the last year, assumed to be due to fights fuelled by alcohol and an environment of 'bullying' by superiors. Naw Betty Han, 47 fishermen killed in Mon State seas, Myanmar Times, 16 January 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/47-fishermen-killed-mon-state-seas.html>. Other voices also suspect this casualty rate to be linked to illicit smuggling. Discussions with civil society, Yangon, March 2018

50 Kills and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

51 Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) and International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), 2015, Myanmar Election Maps 2010–2015

52 Kills in Dawei, July to September 2017

53 Kill 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.mmtimes.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

## 3. Key thematic findings

### GENDERED EXPECTATIONS

In line with previous work documenting the strong gender social norms and hierarchies in Myanmar,<sup>58</sup> participants pointed to a strong hierarchy, with men being perceived as superior, more important, educated, and 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.<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup>

For Buddhists in Burma (both Bamar and other ethnicities), cultural assumptions about men's superiority are rooted in a concept of 'hpon' – a kind of 'masculine power' or honour, which is perceived as unobtainable by women.<sup>61</sup> This is exemplified in traditional attitudes towards menstruation as being 'dirty', as well as other cultural practices that relegate women to a secondary status, and construct them as being inferior to men. The various traditional practices derived from these attitudes perpetuate discrimination against women, such as denying them access to some parts of holy sites and temples, and strict expectations of laundry practices.<sup>62</sup> The following section assesses the impact of these gender norms on masculinity expectations in relation to SGBV, land conflicts, migration and substance abuse.

### 3.1 Masculinities and SGBV

Violence in Myanmar is committed on different levels, by different stakeholders, towards different targets. Violence is practised along ethnic lines, between ethnic armed groups and the central Myanmar state and military, between different ethnic groups over territory, and there is also communal violence within communities. Beyond the political realm, violence is perpetrated at the interpersonal and domestic level, within families, and between intimate partners. In the Myanmar cultural context, GBV, especially domestic violence, is normalised through deeply entrenched practices, which result in harmful impacts on women and girls.<sup>63</sup> With one in five women affected, rates of domestic violence tend to be high<sup>64</sup> but socially accepted.<sup>65</sup> In both research locations, the expectation of men was to resolve conflicts through dialogue without resorting to violence, to protect the family and keep them safe. However, interviewees in Yangon, Tanintharyi and southern Shan state agreed that, in practice, domestic violence is widespread and frequently tolerated.<sup>66</sup>

58 See, for example: A. 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.

59 FGDs in Yangon, Shan and Tanintharyi, June to September 2017

60 Ibid.

61 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>

62 These traditions prohibit the washing of women's longyi (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

63 The Gender Equality Network, *Behind the silence: Violence against women and their resilience*, Myanmar Yangon, Myanmar, February 2015

64 The Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) 2015–2016 conducted by Myanmar's Ministry of Health and Sports found that one in five women (20%) in Myanmar have experienced domestic violence, based on data from 12,885 women and 4,737 men across 15 divisions and states. Due to significant social taboos forming barriers to reporting, the real rate can be assumed to be considerably higher than the reported rate.

65 Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

66 Research interviews and FGDs in Yangon, Tanintharyi and southern Shan state, July to September 2017

Myanmar is currently seeing an increase in reports of sexual assault cases with 1,405 rapes reported in 2017 (508 adult women victims and 897 child victims) – over 300 more than the previous year.<sup>67</sup> It is unclear whether the incidence of sexual assault has increased, or whether improved awareness about this problem has brought about an increase in reporting. Women activists – those working to address human rights, conflict and gender issues – face specific forms of GBV, as well as different risks. For example, as one activist noted, “protesters are often pushed around by the police and their clothes are ripped”<sup>68</sup> to shame them. These actions by police are significantly more shameful for women than for men; participants explained that men’s honour can withstand torn clothing, while women’s honour and status is diminished if their bodies are exposed.

Sexual violence is hugely stigmatised, and there is limited public awareness of resources or support for victims. Paradoxically, the victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence are blamed and stigmatised more than the perpetrators are – from Dawei to Taunggyi, respondents reported that having been raped is seen as the victim’s fault, and brings shame to the victim.<sup>69</sup> The exceptions to this are perpetrators and victims of child rape. The older a female victim is, the more likely she is to be blamed for crimes perpetrated against her.<sup>70</sup> While it is nonsensical to blame the victim rather than the person who perpetrated the violence against them, sadly this does fit with global trends of harmful social practices of victim stigmatisation.<sup>71</sup> Less blame or stigma is levelled at male perpetrators; especially if there was alcohol involved, people don’t see it as the perpetrator’s fault because allegedly “boys can’t be expected to control themselves” – a bias held by both young men and women.<sup>72</sup> Stigma is neither an inevitable nor unavoidable consequence of sexual violence – it is socially created and maintained and therefore can, and should, be changed through dedicated actions such as awareness raising and behaviour change activities.

Respondents considered certain locations to be particularly risky for sexual assault and, consequently, women were blamed for being in those locations. In Dawei this was near the deep sea port, near drug users or drunkards, or in places with no electricity. In Shan, respondents thought sexual violence was more of a risk in urban than rural areas around the clubs, KTV, restaurants and beer stations, as well as in locations frequented by drug users.<sup>73</sup> These locations are coded as masculine, and women are considered at risk when breaking gender norms by being there. This contrasts with a recent review of reported incidents of sexual violence from 1998 to 2016, which found that, statistically, the second most dangerous locations for sexual violence were camps for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>74</sup> This data points to a need for increased protection and prevention efforts within these camps.

In both research locations, the general public and some of the political and civil society leaders lack an understanding of the root causes of SGBV – gender inequalities and male entitlement. Most people think that SGBV occurs due to the consumption of alcohol and drugs, or the

67 The data on child rape is not sex-disaggregated. Htike Nanda Win, Sexual assault cases rising in Myanmar, Myanmar Times, 19 February 2018, [www.mmtimes.com/news/sexual-assault-cases-rising-myanmar.html](http://www.mmtimes.com/news/sexual-assault-cases-rising-myanmar.html)

68 Free Expression Myanmar, FEM and gender, <http://freeexpressionmyanmar.org/about/fem-and-gender/>

69 Research interviews and FGDs in Yangon, Tanintharyi and southern Shan state, July to September 2017

70 Ibid.

71 The phenomenon of stigmatising survivors of SGBV is a global problem. H. Stauffer and E. Hall, No Shame in Justice – Addressing stigma against survivors to end sexual violence in conflict zones, Milton Keynes: World Vision, 2015; and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Workshop Report: Preventing sexual violence initiative: Shaping principles for global action to prevent and tackle stigma, Wilton Park, UK, 28–30 November 2016

72 Interviews in Dawei, July 2017

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

74 The highest incidence was in ‘uncoded’ places so we cannot draw conclusions from this, but inside the home was the third highest incidence. S. Davies and J. True, The scourge of sexual violence in Myanmar, Australian Institute of International Affairs, 11 June 2018, [www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/scourge-of-sexual-violence-myanmar/](http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/scourge-of-sexual-violence-myanmar/)



increasing availability of online pornography.<sup>75</sup> There is limited understanding of how gender inequalities create cultures of entitlement that legitimise SGBV, apart from among CSOs working to raise awareness. Awareness raising needs to be targeted at both young men and women to change expectations and behaviours in order to reduce the levels of SGBV.

Domestic violence in southern Shan is perceived to have decreased since the conflict, as there are now more opportunities to raise awareness among the community. According to community perceptions, sexual violence is rare in the villages.<sup>76</sup> Respondents could not recall any cases of conflict-related sexual violence by the EAOs or the Tatmadaw, although this may be in part due to the high social stigma effectively preventing disclosure of such incidents, particularly to external researchers. While domestic violence is normalised, sexual violence is widely condemned in the village, and a recent perpetrator was brought to the authorities for justice by the victim's father and other armed men.<sup>77</sup> After a gang rape at a festival, the PNO, who were in charge of festival security, tracked down and arrested the perpetrators and collected 6 million Myanmar Kyat (MMK) (ca US\$4,400) in compensation for the victim.<sup>78</sup> In both cases, after having not been able to live up to the protector norms by preventing the crime, the male community members and PNO acted to secure justice and punishment after the violence had been perpetrated, belatedly acting as 'protectors' or possibly as a deterrent to other perpetrators.

In contrast to the rural area, Taunggyi city experiences higher levels of intimate partner violence and sexual violence associated with the consumption of alcohol and drugs. Respondents expressed concerns about the spiking of drinks of girls who would otherwise not consent to sexual relations.<sup>79</sup> Respondents mentioned female students from rich families being targeted with drugs and sexual violence, in order to gather compromising blackmail material in order to extort money.<sup>80</sup> Interviewees thought that, within the same township, knowledge about such behaviour would spread, and 'good boys' would not be friends with the perpetrators, a form of peer-based social control operating. This could be an entry point for spreading awareness among students to increase the social costs of such abusive behaviour and thereby reduce the incidence. This would be in line with shifting blame (and consequences) from the victim to the perpetrator.

In recent years, there has been increasing attention to child rape cases in Tanintharyi, with victims as young as two years old.<sup>81</sup> Interviewees highlighted that the initial cases drawing attention were committed by migrants from other areas. One possible contributing factor for this could be that the migrant men are further away from their family and social structures that normally provide moral guidance and deterrence. They are marginalised, isolated from family and friends, not a part of the surrounding community, working in hard conditions for small salaries in insecure jobs, and the cumulative impact of this fragile existence in contrast to internalised and external unrealistic expectations of being a breadwinner, tough and strong, may have also contributed to this crime. In such positions of relative powerlessness and exclusions, sexual abuse can be more about (re) asserting power and control than about sexual gratification. This finding suggests that different entry points can be taken to address this crime, such as promoting more gender-equitable norms with less pressure on men to demonstrate power 'over' others, and more appreciation of power 'with' others, drawing strength and positive self-identity from contributing to the community.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> KII in Dawei, July to September 2017



After the initial cases by migrants raised awareness about the issue, incidents of child rape within local families are being increasingly reported.<sup>82</sup> Media coverage has focused more on selected, high-profile rape and child abuse cases than the everyday issue of domestic violence, which is much more widespread but less sensationalised. A broader social norm change is needed to change the culture of entitlement and male dominance to one of respectful, consensual relationships – a transformation that will require increasing the awareness of both men and women. There are also few reports of SGBV or harassment in the workplace such as agricultural plantations, although this may be more due to lack of confidence in reporting mechanisms than because they do not occur. There have been no reports of sexual violence related to land conflicts, as there have been in other contexts.

In addition to high levels of domestic violence, intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence, a horrific dimension of sexual violence has been documented consistently over the years in Myanmar: sexual violence in conflict. The report ‘License to rape’ detailed 173 incidents of rape and sexual violence against 625 girls and women, perpetrated by Tatmadaw troops (mainly officers) in Shan state between 1996 and 2001, alleging the use of rape as a strategy of war.<sup>83</sup> The Women’s League of Burma (WLB) subsequently documented 100 more cases since 2010 but argued that they are only ‘the tip of the iceberg’ of unreported sexual violence. The WLB accused the Tatmadaw of continuing with the same pattern and the same impunity as before the democratic transition.<sup>84</sup> Research by Monash University analysed counts of reported sexual violence in relation to the intensity of the conflict as tracked by Uppsala University and found that sexual violence increased just before and during periods of conflict escalation.<sup>85</sup> Rates of sexual violence were particularly high in IDP camps, so special efforts at prevention engaging men and boys should be targeted there, alongside services for survivors.

### **SGBV AGAINST MEN AND BOYS**

Both women and men, boys and girls as well as gender-non-conforming people can be targeted with SGBV, yet in Myanmar the term is frequently interpreted as ‘violence against women’. For example, a recent report on service provision for GBV victims<sup>86</sup> made no reference to the fact that sexual and domestic violence can and does also get directed at men and boys.<sup>87</sup> There was also no discussion of women’s roles in upholding social gender norms perpetuating GBV (for example, the formative role of the mother-in-law in promoting such gender norms excusing SGBV). Most of the ‘engaging men’ approaches focus on engaging men as potential perpetrators of SGBV.<sup>88</sup> There is very little space to reveal or discuss violence against men, which means there is even less support available to them than to women victims. Male victims face even higher levels of stigmatisation for revealing abuse due to the gender norms expecting men to be ‘strong’ and able to defend themselves from harm. Seeking help for abuse is difficult for men as it requires their admitting that they have been unable to live up to these norms, and risks their facing derision and denigrations to add to the trauma.

At a global level, the majority of gender-based or sexual violence is also understood to be perpetrated against women and girls. However, there is a growing evidence base showing

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN) and the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF), *License to Rape, Thailand*, 2002, [http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/License\\_to\\_rape.pdf](http://burmacampaign.org.uk/media/License_to_rape.pdf)

<sup>84</sup> WLB, *Same impunity, same patterns: Sexual abuses by the Burma Army will not stop until there is a genuine civilian government*, Yangon: WLB, 2014; see also Ta’ang Women’s Organization, 2016, *Op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Note that these figures should be considered with some caution as data collection on sexual violence is notoriously difficult, particularly in conflict contexts with limited functioning referral systems, and tends to be significantly underreported. S. Davies and J. True, 2018, *Op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> Gender Equality Network, *Service provision for gender-based violence survivors in Myanmar*, Yangon, Myanmar: GEN, 2018

<sup>87</sup> A campaign in Australia argues that one in three victims of domestic violence are male but receive less support.

<sup>88</sup> Interviews with CSOs in Yangon, July to September 2017

that significant sexual violence is committed against men in conflict contexts.<sup>89</sup> During the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the majority of this sexual violence against men was committed in detention,<sup>90</sup> as well as in displacement<sup>91</sup> and within security forces.<sup>92</sup> Within Myanmar, it will be important to implement initiatives to screen vulnerable men for sexual torture, particularly those in or emerging from prisons and detention centres, and within armed groups. Interventions should also be implemented to ensure that these male victims can access medical and psycho-social support.

The research participants demonstrated a near-total lack of awareness of sexual violence against men. There were some incidents reported against boys as part of the broader national increase in child rape cases, discussed above. The other types of sexual violence against men were perceived to be by police officers against non-binary men, or rape/sexual exploitation by men against boys with incidents reported in schools by teachers or men in charge of dormitories.<sup>93</sup> CSOs have a role to play in raising awareness about this issue, providing sensitive support to survivors regardless of their gender, and including this issue in any potential security sector reform or transitional justice programme.

### 3.2 Gendered expectations, local conflict resolution and land conflicts

#### LOCAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Most local-level conflicts are resolved by religious leaders – in part out of customary respect accorded to them, and in part as respondents tended to trust them more than the government and saw them as more reliable in resolving cases. At the community level in both areas, most people would hesitate to deal with government authorities.<sup>94</sup> However, religious and community leaders apply traditional, customary and non-formal practices, which tend to reinforce gender inequalities. For example, a church-based structure consisting mainly of male leaders may not provide the most gender-sensitive, trust-inspiring environment for dealing with SGBV survivors. This can form barriers to accessing justice among marginalised people such as younger men, men from poorer or rural backgrounds, minority ethnic groups, or diverse SOGI, as well as women with these backgrounds.

Respondents in Tanintharyi lauded Christian religious leaders for arranging food and education for the many orphans from conflict areas, but worried about potential conversions of Buddhist orphans. Religious discrimination against Hindus and other religious minorities was also mentioned in the interviews, such as difficulty in securing permits for religious ceremonies or residency/ID cards for minorities.<sup>95</sup> This has to be considered against the broader national picture of existing leaders and elders (predominantly male, dominant ethnicities) leading conflict or peace negotiations, participation in which further reinforces their status compared to others, such as women, more junior people or older men not in leadership positions. On a smaller, less nationally dominant scale, respondents observed a similar trend of the same few, formidable female leaders being consistently involved in most high-profile events while younger,

89 Sexual violence against men occurred in 25 conflict-affected contexts between 1998 and 2008. C. Dolan, *Into the mainstream: Addressing sexual violence against men and boys in conflict*, A briefing paper prepared for the workshop held at the Overseas Development Institute, London, 14 May 2014

90 All Survivors Project, *Legacies and lessons: Sexual violence against men and boys in Sri Lanka and Bosnia & Herzegovina*, 2017

91 UNHCR and Refugee Law Project, *Working with men and boy survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in forced displacement*, Need to know Guidance 4, Geneva: UNHCR, 2012

92 C. Watson, *Preventing and responding to sexual and domestic violence against men: A guidance note for security sector institutions*, Geneva: DCAF, 2014

93 Interviews and FGDs in Shan state, July to September 2017

94 FGDs in Shan and Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

95 Interviews and FGDs in Dawei, July to September 2017

second-generation women leaders frequently struggle to find the space or confidence to exercise their voice.<sup>96</sup> In both cases, there are ‘feedback loops’ where those of prior status and leadership roles can enhance their status further by engaging in these negotiations.

This matches the discussion at national level where Yangon-based civil society recounted that **men are traditionally expected – and therefore approached – to handle conflicts**, while women mostly remain side-lined. Interviewees recounted that, for male and female General Administration Department (GAD) officers of the same ranks, male officers were approached more often to resolve problems and conflicts.<sup>97</sup> Men were reported to be mainly using dispute-settlement approaches of arbitration and decision-making based on their power and status, and rarely using fact finding or consultations to hear both sides (especially where conflicts are between different religions).<sup>98</sup> These approaches reinforce the power and position of those with status, while marginalising those of lesser formal and economic status, such as women (with the exception of a small elite of politically and economically influential women leaders) and younger men, those of lower income classes, lesser education, gender-non-conforming or from poorer, rural backgrounds.

## LAND CONFLICTS

Interviews and FGDs highlighted land conflicts as a key problem throughout the country. These conflicts stem, in part, from incomplete land registration processes in rural and remote areas, particularly for lands that are owned communally. These issues are common in post-conflict or conflict-affected contexts. Land governance in Myanmar is complex, governed by over 50 different – and sometimes contradictory – laws from different governments since colonial Burma,<sup>99</sup> including the 1894 Land Acquisition Act, which remains the basis for continuing land confiscations.<sup>100</sup> Approximately 17 different government departments are involved in land governance, in addition to the respective ethnic organisations’ administrations.<sup>101</sup> For instance, the 2012 Virgin, Fallow and Vacant Land Law undermines customary communal land tenure systems and access, which is a particular concern to ethnic communities and IDPs who fear losing their lands. Unreliable land registration procedures are a further complication, in particular for women, with interviewees echoing perceptions of corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies laid out in the literature.<sup>102</sup>

Communities have frequently been displaced from their land due to conflict, land grabs by the military,<sup>103</sup> the government or companies linked to the previous governments, construction of contentious development projects like dams, reservoirs, roads or business use (e.g. palm oil, mines).<sup>104</sup> For a population in which 70% rely on rural agriculture, land grabbing directly threatens

96 Engagement in and discussion with AGIPP, May 2017 to May 2018

97 KII, Yangon, July 2017

98 Interviews and FGDs with CSOs in Yangon, June to July 2017

99 Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business, *Land rights and business in Myanmar*, forthcoming

100 Land Acquisition Act, cited in HRW, 2016, Op. cit., p.54

101 J. Naujoks et al, *Forest law enforcement governance and trade in Myanmar: A conflict-sensitivity analysis*, Yangon, Myanmar: International Alert, 2017, p.25

102 Research interviews in Yangon, Shan and Dawei, June to September 2017, and J. Naujoks et al, 2017, Op. cit.; see also Myanmar Corruption Report, <https://www.business-anti-corruption.com/country-profiles/myanmar/>

103 Over 30,000 cases of land grabs were reported in the first two years to the Farmland Investigation Commission set up by the military-backed government in 2012. Thin Lei Win, *Conflict and powerful companies stoke land disputes in Myanmar’s Kachin*, Thomson Reuters Foundation, 23 February 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/myanmar-land/feature-conflict-and-powerful-companies-stoke-land-disputes-in-myanmars-kachin-idUSL8N1622WY>. See also Transnational Institute, 2013, Op. cit.

104 T. Kramer and K. Woods, *Financing dispossession*, Transnational Institute, 2012; J. Buchanan et al, *Developing disparity*, Transnational Institute, 2013; and Displacement Solutions and Norwegian Refugee Council, *Restitution in Myanmar, Building lasting peace, national reconciliation and economic prosperity through a comprehensive housing, land and property restitution programme*, 2017

livelihoods, as access to land is a survival issue for rural households. Land grabbing and related displacement has not only grave financial but also emotional and mental trauma impacts when families lose their properties, assets and ancestral lands – it represents a loss of security, which affects the whole family, both men and women, and the relationships between them.

However, protests against land grabbing have been criminalised, and lengthy, expensive legal processes increase the barriers for grassroots activism, as the affected communities are often already struggling to subsist without their farm produce or income.<sup>105</sup> Interviewees stated that, while upper socio-economic classes might be more involved in leadership related to land conflicts, they do so without directly engaging in physical violence.<sup>106</sup> The face-to-face conflict involving violence is often carried out between lower socio-economic groups: between the farmers facing land loss and impoverishment, and police making arrests at demonstrations as the frontline government actors.

In southern Shan state, respondents mentioned various conflicts over land in and around the research locations, with land disputes between different ethnicities (Shan and Pa-O), between villagers and leaders, as well as instances of land grabbing by companies, the EAO and the government.<sup>107</sup> Land conflicts between Shan and Pa-O would be taken to the Settlement and Land Record Department (SLRD) for resolution, though these are often referred to the EAO to resolve them. Unresolved cases tend to be referred to the Shan state parliament (*Hluttaw*), although this process has not yet resulted in a resolution. While such conflicts have not led to open violence to date, there is a risk that the latent conflict could erupt into violence as the villagers have traditional weapons.<sup>108</sup> People currently engaged in negotiations regarding land conflicts were reported to need a good reputation among the community, mainly former male village leaders.<sup>109</sup>

In Tanintharyi, land grabbing is perceived as a major issue for many communities, with allegations of land grabs by the government, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the military, as well as private sector actors, for plantations, malls, infrastructure and conservation purposes.<sup>110</sup> The communities do not always understand who is claiming their land, particularly with private sector actors, or complex projects like the Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ).<sup>111</sup> The Dawei SEZ is a large-scale planned bilateral economic cooperation project envisioned with a deep sea port, industrial estate and a road/pipeline/rail link to Bangkok.<sup>112</sup> Transnational Institute estimates that up to 500,000 people could be indirectly affected by road construction, water route changes, loss of fishing, land speculation and environmental impacts.<sup>113</sup> Current preparations have entailed large-scale land confiscations mired in controversy, protests and allegations of lack of due process, inadequate consultations, communication and compensations, with no site-wide social and environmental assessment conducted to date.<sup>114</sup> The anticipated job opportunities have not yet materialised despite communities having already experienced land or livelihood losses, leaving them in perilous economic situations and forced to rely on migrant labour.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> KILs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017; see also HRW, 2016, Op. cit.

<sup>106</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state and Tanintharyi region, July to September 2017

<sup>107</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>108</sup> Traditional single shot weapons, sticks. Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>109</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>110</sup> KILs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

<sup>111</sup> KILs in Dawei, July to September 2017

<sup>112</sup> Tavoyan Women's Union, *Our lives not for sale: Tavoyan women speak out against the Dawei Special Economic Zone project*, Mae Sot, Thailand, 2014; and Dawei Development Association, *Voices from the ground: Concerns over the Dawei Special Economic Zone and related projects*, Tanintharyi, Myanmar: Dawei Development Association, 2014

<sup>113</sup> E. Loewen, 2012, Op. cit.

<sup>114</sup> KILs in Dawei, July to September 2017; see also Tavoyan Women's Union, 2014, Op. cit. and Dawei Development Association, 2014, Op. cit.

<sup>115</sup> KILs in Dawei, July to September 2017

In both case study locations, **land ownership and inheritance are dominated by men, as men are the formal heads of the households.** In some cases, women inherit land or successfully insist on being registered as a land owner.<sup>116</sup> Women's right to own lands was confirmed in Article 75 of the 2016 National Land Use Policy, but implementation of this has been limited and requires overcoming significant bureaucratic challenges including lack of awareness in the male-dominated GAD/Settlement and Land Records department.<sup>117</sup> This is further complicated by the fact that, as a post-conflict area, much of the land ownership is not formally registered (people only have tax documents), which exacerbates land conflicts.

### GENDER DYNAMICS OF LAND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Consequently, **actions to protect the family lands are often led by men as the land owners, in line with the expectations on men to be leaders and protectors of the household.**

Where men take leadership in resolving land conflicts/reclaiming land, this takes time away from earning income to provide for the family. Interviewees reported that women provide support with the legal process, logistically, with food, or with prayer offered to bless the land and return it to them,<sup>118</sup> which seems to be in line with overall gender norms ascribing nurturing and supporting behaviour to women. According to the interviews, religious leaders do not usually engage in land conflicts, although they mobilise their constituencies for other social good, such as building churches/temples, or caring for orphaned children.<sup>119</sup>

Tavoyan interviewees reported some older men mobilising others, including younger men, to take action in protests over land or other issues without getting physically involved themselves.<sup>120</sup> It was unclear if this was out of concern about social issues and injustices or motivated by wanting change (or compensation) without taking on the risks of personal action, such as in the case of absentee landlords from outside of the community. Those involved in resolving land conflicts become more trusted and respected in the family and community, they can develop their leadership skills and become more powerful through recognition for their actions. As it is often those already in strong positions of power and social standing (male-dominated and masculine-coded) that get involved in land conflict-resolution efforts, **this creates a feedback loop reinforcing their status.** They are considered good people, good role models able to provide guidance to the young. Thus, certain men with higher social capital can further increase this by working to resolve conflict issues, leaving young men, marginalised men or women on the side-lines.

However, in Dawei, interviewees highlighted instances of **women taking active and leadership roles in protests**, such as in the Farmers Union. In Yae Phyu area, women take a leading role campaigning on land issues where the military confiscated land, usually leading to peaceful resolution.<sup>121</sup> Women get engaged as their livelihoods and their families are at risk. The strategy of women leading protests and negotiations stemmed in part from observations that male protestors are more likely to get angry and fight with male police officers, and therefore are more likely to be threatened, beaten or arrested by male police officers.<sup>122</sup> Women were assumed to be more likely to (and have since been shown to) negotiate with the officers without getting angry, as they had been socialised to settle conflict by negotiation from a position without power.<sup>123</sup> They

116 Interview with CSO, Dawei, 14 September 2017

117 Discussion at Land and Gender workshop, USAID, 2017, Op. cit.

118 Discussion by participants working on peace issues at a Training on Understanding Masculinities, Gender Peace and Security conducted by International Alert, PTE and TGO, Yangon, 29–30 May 2018

119 KIs and FGs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

120 Ibid.

121 KI with political leader, Dawei, July 2017

122 KIs with CSOs, Tanintharyi, July 2017, and discussion at report validation presentation, Yangon, May 2018

123 KIs with CSOs, Tanintharyi, July 2017

were therefore less likely to be beaten or arrested. This is in contrast to other parts of Myanmar, and globally,<sup>124</sup> where women activists have been far from immune from threats, beatings, abuse or arrest by armed actors, security officials<sup>125</sup> or other actors for their activism, particularly those working on gender issues challenging patriarchal power.<sup>126</sup>

The Tanintharyi case, however, shows an **awareness and strategic exploitation of gendered norms for the cause of opposing land confiscations**. Women taking leadership to protect the family lands extends, but still aligns with, gender norms expecting women to manage the household matters. The reaction from male stakeholders to this was mixed, some frustrated with women taking leadership roles while others saw the strategic value in using the approach offering the best outcomes.<sup>127</sup> For the wider national context, this example demonstrates women's potential in addressing land conflicts and suggests promising opportunities to support these women activists to develop their leadership skills and potential conflict-resolution roles on broader social and political issues in a rights-based approach.

### IMPACTS OF LAND CONFLICTS

Land dispossession can drive subsistence communities below the poverty line and contributes to migration, which many see as the only way forward. Where both parents have to migrate when their lands are lost, their children remain in the care of grandparents in villages populated by elderly and children – with unknown long-term social impacts in terms of male role models. CSOs are also concerned about increased drug abuse, drug selling or illicit jobs, and increased domestic violence as a consequence of land conflicts due to the increased financial pressures on households.<sup>128</sup> The following two sections investigate these concerns further.

### 3.3 Conflict, masculinities and substance abuse

Substance abuse emerged as a key concern for many of the research participants, in Shan and in Tanintharyi, but also in Yangon in discussions with civil society working nationally. Concerns related to drug abuse and associated social ills, as well as drug production and sale, primarily regarding amphetamine-derived synthetic drugs, heroin and, to a lesser extent, opium (a more traditional cash crop). Participants from Kachin, in particular, highlighted the epidemic extent of drug abuse, “nearly all young men have tried them”.<sup>129</sup> This aligns with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) data of increasing seizures of synthetic drugs between 2015 and 2017, with high-volume seizures reported in northern Shan state in early 2018.<sup>130</sup>

124 Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) are often considered particularly at risk of physical and sexual violence, or threats thereof, as well as targeted stigmatisation and defamation campaigns against them to undermine their social standing. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, Information series on sexual and reproductive health and rights – Women Human Rights Defenders, [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO\\_WHRD\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_WHRD_WEB.pdf); Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition, Our right to safety: Women Human Rights Defenders' holistic approach to protection, Toronto, Canada: Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2014; Kvinna Till Kvinna, Suffocating the movement: Shrinking space for women's rights, Sweden, 2018

125 One woman was lethally shot by police in 2014 and two women were arrested and faced criminal charges in 2017 related to protests over the Letpadaung Copper Mine in Sagaing. Amnesty International, Myanmar: Suspend copper mine linked to ongoing human rights abuses, 10 February 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/02/myanmar-suspend-copper-mine-linked-to-ongoing-human-rights-abuses/>; see also WLB, 2014, Op. cit. Women speaking out against the regressive hardline nationalist race and religion laws experienced sexual and death threats from hardliners. F. MacGregor, Myanmar: Women's fight against verbal taboo symbolises wider rights battle, The Guardian, 2 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/02/myanmar-womens-fight-against-verbal-taboo-symbolises-wider-rights-battle>

126 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>

127 Kills in Dawei, July 2017

128 Kills and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

129 FGDs in Yangon, Shan and Tanintharyi, June to September 2017

130 In January 2018, anti-narcotics agents seized 30 million methamphetamine pills and 1.75 tons of pure methamphetamine in northern Shan state in the largest single drug bust in recent history. Tatmadaw seizes K9b in drugs in Shan state, Myanmar Times, 19 February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-seizes-k9b-drugs-shan-state.html>



## SYNTHETIC DRUGS

Engaging in drug abuse or sale was considered shameful behaviour in all research areas – despite this, it is perceived as increasingly common and harmful. Drug users are reportedly mostly, though not exclusively, male in Shan and Tanintharyi, while respondents from Kachin reported less gender differences in drug taking. Interviewees in Taunggyi and Dawei mentioned male drug users persuading their girlfriends to try drugs, sometimes linked to sexual violence or exploitation.

In Dawei, drugs were perceived as a major issue with mostly urban young men (middle school to university age) involved in using, buying, selling and brokering. Key informants perceived drug taking and selling as mainly involving young men, though young women may participate in drug use or selling “if their boyfriend persuades them”.<sup>131</sup> This language reinforces gender norms of women as passive victims, with men being the active and culpable agents. What role potential instigation by women could play is not visible. University students expressed their concerns around high levels of drug abuse among male students, especially where they live away from their families.<sup>132</sup> They also spoke about the pressures to study hard and do well in life, as they are expected to provide for the family.<sup>133</sup> However, there are few well-paid jobs available after graduating, and the young graduates feel overqualified for farming or migrant jobs. This leaves many unemployed and unable to support the family, thus unable to live up to expectations. **These frustrations over difficulties meeting gender expectations may contribute to high rates of drug addiction among this group.**

In the southern Shan research area, drug users are socially stigmatised and parents warn against socialising with known drug users or in drug-use locations.<sup>134</sup> Leaders try to intervene when they become aware of drug abuse, but, if such behaviour continues, they take the offenders to the EAO. In the rural research areas, interviewees considered adolescent men, and in particular school drop-outs, as the most likely to use drugs. Respondents recounted that male agricultural day labourers consume drugs in more remote fields, where they are further away from the eyes of their parents, family and village elders.<sup>135</sup> In these fields, they are free from the family supervision and social control mechanisms that might put a stop to drug taking. In part, this is a reflection of young men’s greater mobility compared to that of **young women who are under closer (nearly constant) family and community scrutiny, which limits the real or imagined opportunities to engage in drug taking.**<sup>136</sup>

## DRIVERS OF DRUG ABUSE

Why do young men take drugs, despite the warnings by elders and authorities? The research pointed to multiple reasons, varying across stakeholder groups and locations. Respondents blamed returnees for bringing back drug habits from other places. The taking of drugs in remoter fields by former farmers, who had lost their own fields due to land grabbing or displacement and were forced to work as daily labour, may also be linked to depression about the loss of their independent livelihoods and change in status from farmer to casual labourer – a move down the hierarchical ladder of masculinities. There is a perception that more mature men, family fathers, may use drugs on purpose “to increase their energy while working” in order to increase their income.<sup>137</sup> This could indicate another link, an expectation on young men to live up to masculinity ideals of physical strength and endurance, which young men aspire to reach through using drugs.

<sup>131</sup> FGD with Student Union, Dawei, August 2017

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> KILs and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

For younger men, there may also be an element of experimentation and peer pressure involved, facilitated by the cheap availability of the pills.<sup>138</sup> Participants mentioned **peer pressure, especially from slightly older young men to their younger peers, to try drugs by insinuating that this experience is required knowledge to be a man** (“*Men should know everything*”), as a way of proving their toughness or strength.<sup>139</sup> Gendered peer pressure can also drive drug taking in an indirect way: common expectations of masculinity are linked to being in a (heteronormative) relationship (“a *real* man has a girlfriend”), and boys who do not face teasing or ridicule from their peers. This reportedly drives some single young men, who may be too shy or weak to attract a girlfriend, to resort to drugs as a means to grow their confidence or physical strength in order to impress girls and to secure a girlfriend, in order to reach this marker of masculinity.<sup>140</sup>

This can be the entry point into a **vicious cycle of addiction**: repeated peer pressure to try drugs leading to frequent use and addiction. This provides a clear example of expectations of masculinities driving behaviour that harms the young men themselves, as well as those close to them. Raising awareness about a broader range of masculinities to aspire to, as well as engaging in conversations around positive relationship models and the dangers of drugs, could work to reverse these trends as drivers of drug taking.

**Harmful expectations of masculinity can drive aspects of addiction and addictive behaviour.** Often drug abuse starts with feelings of frustration or depression, such as stemming from the comparison between one’s actual life and the ideal gender norms and the inability to live up to the ideal (breadwinner, strong leader, wise husband and leader, protector of the family). Illegal substances or alcohol can bring a short-term high or pleasure through a period where these frustrations recede or matter less, or when men *perceive* themselves to be stronger or more confident (while high or drunk). During the inevitable crash after the high, users are once again faced with their initial problems or frustrations, which have not been addressed, causing them to feel even lower than before compared to the drug/alcohol-induced high. This can contribute to the desire to use again in order to return to the high emotional state.

Research participants commonly **assumed a typical drug trajectory**: this starts with peer pressure to try drugs, leading to addiction, and subsequently the need to fund the addiction leads users to become drug sellers. Once they have entered the criminal cycle, interviewees argued that social and physical peer pressure prevents escaping this life, including experiencing threats to inform the police about past criminal activity if they want to drop out.<sup>141</sup> The other **assumed link is between drugs, crime and violence**. Interviewees in all locations saw drug addiction as increasing criminal behaviour, especially theft, and violence, including domestic violence and intimate partner violence. Drug users or sellers are often perceived as armed and violent, with anecdotes recounted about a drug user shooting at police who tried to arrest him in downtown Dawei.<sup>142</sup> Tavoyan interviewees also mentioned widely held assumptions about links between drugs and armed actors from all sides, and allegations that most drugs are imported from northern states.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>138</sup> A group of young male teenagers (14 year olds) responded they had taken drugs “many times”. Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>139</sup> KIs and FGDs in Shan and Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> KIs and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.



**Case study: Drug-related violence in Dawei**

A case of drug-related male violence recently drew widespread attention in Dawei. A young Tavoyan woman and a young Bamar migrant worker met on Facebook and developed an online romance. She did not know that he was a frequent drug user. When they met up, the young man stole her jewellery and motorbike to fund his drug habit, and tied her up and pushed her off a bridge to cover up his crime. Fortunately, she was rescued by a passing boat, and the police were able to arrest the perpetrator.

This story is widely used to highlight the social ills of drugs and the dangers of forming online relationships or trusting strangers: the very young girl (under 20 years of age) was blamed for gullibly trusting a stranger she met online and meeting him alone in a remote location, intertwined with criticism for going out with a non-Tavoyan, Bamar man. This is also emblematic of lingering distrust of outsiders and other ethnicities.

While drug users are generally not considered as a source of conflict, respondents **linked drug use to domestic violence by men, particularly in combination with alcohol consumption.** Participants mentioned one drug user who caused trouble and violence, domestic violence, as well as threatening and throwing stones at his neighbours.<sup>144</sup> He refuses the divorce his wife has requested and prevented his children from studying until relatives sent them to a monastery – and, while generally lacking respect for leaders, he dares not go against religious leaders, which is an illustration of the social hierarchy between men and the esteem in which religious leaders are held. This man was a former EAO combatant dismissed for drug abuse and is perceived as a singular troublemaker rather than the norm of ex-combatants. He does not provide a good example of masculinity norms, but could serve as an example of one man lashing out violently when unable to live up to the aspired ideals, possibly spurred on by having been trained to behave violently in the armed group and war context and traumatised by having experienced violence. He seems to struggle to resolve issues without resorting to violence long after the war has ended. This points to the importance of providing reintegration support to ex-combatants that enables them to live non-violent and productive lives in a civilian setting; the unlearning of violent patterns does not happen automatically and can be supported through a combination of economic and psycho-social support.

The current widespread drug abuse is likely to have a broader social impact in the long term, impacting mental and physical health, income generation, family dynamics and gender expectations. This research did not speak to actual current or recovering drug addicts, but identified the social assumptions about them. More research is needed directly with the affected young men to understand how their ideas of how they should be men are driving drug-taking behaviour in the difficult economic and social conditions, in order to determine effective interventions.

**DRUG-RELATED JUSTICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT**

Interviewees in all locations perceived the police as unable to act effectively to address drug problems due to alleged corruption and high-level vested interests, with allegations of their giving prior warnings of checkpoints to wholesale traders so that they can avoid them, while small-scale users are caught. Community and youth members called for drug policy reform to change from punitive measures (jail and fines) to more restorative measures, such as social support to

<sup>144</sup> 44 Kills and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

change behaviour, rehab and support to return to work. Current punitive provisions are outdated and incentivise police to charge those caught with drugs for drug sale rather than consumption, regardless of the amount of drugs offenders are arrested with. Trust in law enforcement was low in both research locations with common perceptions of – at best – ineffectiveness or – at worst – corruption.<sup>145</sup> These quotes reflect the perceptions on drug users and law enforcement:

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*“It is common that the troops themselves carry out the drug distribution and ignore the drug sellers they know.”<sup>146</sup>*

*“Although the police arrested them, the drug dealer was released after paying a fine.”<sup>147</sup>*

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Prior to the signing of the ceasefire agreement in southern Shan, the state police were responsible for arresting drug traders. Since then, however, the EAO has formally managed enforcement in their territory. Interview participants voiced suspicions that large-scale drug sellers pay off armed groups and state law enforcement in order to operate with impunity, while small-scale drug users are more likely to be arrested.<sup>148</sup> Respondents also shared perceptions of a **risk to those not using drugs (mainly young men) being threatened into fake drug confessions in order to extort money** from their families: “the youth are threatened to reveal their drug affair and pay money”.<sup>149</sup> This insecurity contributes to the ‘push’ factors influencing out-migration of young men. Community interviews also revealed perceptions that the EAO had only little income (paying only small salaries) before they gained control over drugs (both buyers and sellers) and significantly increased opportunities to generate income, such as from drug-related fines.<sup>150</sup>

A frequent assumption made about conflict and the drug trade in Myanmar is that the drug trade fuels conflict by providing income to fund armed actors.<sup>151</sup> The research did not seek to verify this, but what stands out from the research interviews were three other, related dynamics.

Firstly, it emerged that the economic deprivation of the conflict-affected areas facilitates a situation where people are taking drugs to increase their incomes or as a short-sighted coping mechanism to distract them from situations where they cannot live up to external and internal expectations of a good man/husband/father. Secondly, land grabbing and conflict seem to facilitate increases in drug taking by displaced farmers-turned-casual-labourers, and lead to **increased poppy cultivation as a fallback option in less fertile uplands for farmers displaced from their fields** with legal crops by land or other conflict.

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<sup>145</sup> Interviews and FGDs in Shan, Tanintharyi and Yangon, June to September 2017

<sup>146</sup> FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>147</sup> Interview in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

<sup>148</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>149</sup> FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>150</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

<sup>151</sup> B. Lintner, *Burma in revolt: Opium and insurgency since 1948*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999; and V. Felbab-Brown, *Myanmar maneuvers: How to break political-criminal alliances in contexts of transition*, United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, Crime-Conflict Nexus Series: No. 9, 2017

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*“Lack of land tenure security is one of the reasons why some of our communities have resorted to opium cultivation, as a survival mechanism. In one case, after the Myanmar army confiscated our farmland, and the community had no other option but to start poppy cultivation in remote uplands to be able to feed our families.”<sup>152</sup>*

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Nevertheless, in general, there was a 20% drop in poppy cultivation in Myanmar between 2015 and 2017, according to the UNODC.<sup>153</sup> The third link between drugs and the conflict relates to concerns voiced by Kachin respondents about a **perceived military strategy by the Tatmadaw to foster drug addiction among young ethnic** (particularly Kachin) **men in order to weaken the ethnic groups and EAOs** and undermine their struggle for greater autonomy.<sup>154</sup> This was a widely shared attitude that participants concluded based on the devastating social impacts of drug abuse in some areas of Kachin, and the perceived inaction on the side of law enforcement to end it effectively. More research would be needed to verify the veracity of this, but it is clear that coordinated, major efforts by civil society, faith leaders, business leaders and political/community leaders are needed to jointly put an end to the drug epidemic.

### 3.4 Masculinities in migration and displacement

The movement of people within Myanmar is high, due to a confluence of conflict-related displacement, natural disasters, rural to urban migration for work, migration between different states and regions, as well as people migrating abroad in search of better-paid work opportunities. Nationally, forced displacement continues to be an acute issue, especially in conflict-affected parts of Kachin, Shan and Rakhine state. Displacement also occurs in some of the NCA areas, such as villagers in Mutraw (Papun) after a spate of clashes between Tatmadaw and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). Repeated cycles of displacement have a deeply disruptive impact on people's lives and livelihoods: the Mutraw (Papun) villages face forced relocation for the fourth time.<sup>155</sup> Many of those displaced by conflict return to find their land occupied by others, whether individuals or companies granted concessions in the meantime.

#### CONFLICT-RELATED DISPLACEMENT

Displacement due to conflict remains an acute problem in parts of northern Shan state, and affected one of the Shan families in the Pa-O research village who had been displaced because of the conflict. There is no stigma or discrimination against them because of their displacement, as the villagers have sympathy with victims of conflict violence or displacement, because they need help. In fact, this displaced family seems to have adapted by having a second house and fields in the Pa-O research village, which the Pa-O villagers look after when the family is in their home village<sup>156</sup> – an illustration of strong community cohesion across different ethnicities. In this case, being displaced did not seem to have impacted gender norms, and the father is still expected to feed and protect the family. However, most of the affected Shan villagers will not have the advantage of a second home to flee to, and their ability to cope with displacement depends on their social connections. Three other Shan families were temporarily displaced to the Pa-O village when the rest of the village was recruited by a Shan EAO, but later fled to a displacement camp in another area.

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<sup>152</sup> Statement from the 6th Myanmar Opium Farmers' Forum, Lashio, northern Shan state, 28 May 2018, [https://onlyoffice.tni.org/products/files/doceditor.aspx?fileid=347&doc=a0NMYWVCWHdLZEwrcEIWUDFramducW16Wm5LOHo3NWTZG5LcDImWmEOUT0\\_ljMONy11](https://onlyoffice.tni.org/products/files/doceditor.aspx?fileid=347&doc=a0NMYWVCWHdLZEwrcEIWUDFramducW16Wm5LOHo3NWTZG5LcDImWmEOUT0_ljMONy11)

<sup>153</sup> Tatmadaw seizes K9b in drugs in Shan state, Myanmar Times, 19 February 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tatmadaw-seizes-k9b-drugs-shan-state.html>

<sup>154</sup> Discussion at a workshop on Understanding Masculinities, International Alert, PTE and TGO, 2018, Op. cit.

<sup>155</sup> They were previously displaced between 1992 and 1993, 1995 and 1997, and 2005 and 2008

<sup>156</sup> Interviews and FGDs in southern Shan state, July to September 2017

In these camps, **meeting the expectations to protect and provide are significantly more difficult for men** as there are few income opportunities, contributing to high male migration for work. This research did not include interviews with IDPs as there were no IDP camps in the selected research locations. However, the topic of IDPs was raised frequently by interviewees in Taunggyi who spoke of arranging humanitarian donations to IDPs as part of their peace-related work (rather than about addressing the conflict drivers). Trócaire et al have documented Kachin women IDPs' experiences and high levels of conflict violence against women, including sexual violence by armed actors.<sup>157</sup> Further research is needed to understand the gendered impacts of displacement on male IDPs: what are the impacts of conflict on male family members who are unable to protect their family and villages, who lost beloved family members and their home, but are expected to be strong and stay silent on grief and emotions? These are particularly grave challenges for those who have been injured and face living with disabilities as the result of conflict violence, such as landmines. Some of the displaced farmers in Kachin face the triple challenge of adjusting to the loss of limbs, the loss of their lands and being displaced due to conflict – an immensely difficult situation.<sup>158</sup>

## MIGRATION

Displacement and migration rates were higher before the various ceasefires and during the authoritarian repression. In the research areas, migration of young people remains high to date, although not because of imminent risk of violence. It can be understood more as a conflict consequence: they migrate in order to access education or employment, which are lacking in their areas. Respondents also mentioned some young men being 'sent away' by their parents to study or work in cities or abroad in order to avoid drug dependencies. This hints at the power and authority parents maintain over their adult sons until they get married. Some migration is forced, the Union Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Dr Win Myat Aye has recognised the **risk of increasing trafficking of men, women and children** "into sexual servitude and fishing industry".<sup>159</sup> These trafficking risks are highly gendered, with men more likely to be exploited in the fishing industry in abysmal working conditions and women suffering sexual exploitation.

**Migration in general is gendered.** The research identified differences in how men and women tend to migrate, and noted that, at the same time, these high levels of migration are changing the gender dynamics in the household. In Shan state, women tended to migrate from rural to urban settings (Taunggyi, Mandalay or Yangon), while men migrated further away, abroad, indicating different levels of mobility linked to assumptions about safety and security. Migration levels are very high in Tanintharyi, which shares a long land border with prosperous Thailand and its manifold job opportunities for migrant labour. Interviewees saw the lack of jobs as the key driver of migration, strongly linked to lack of education: young people drop out of school in order to migrate and start earning, or young people with no access to education (such as in remote areas) migrate in search of better opportunities. Fluctuations in agricultural commodity prices (e.g. rubber) also increased migration.

157 N. Pistor, *Life on hold: Experiences of women displaced by conflict in Kachin state, Myanmar*, Yangon: Trócaire and Oxfam, 2017, p.11

158 Discussion at research analysis workshop with Kachinland Research Centre, Myitkyina, October 2018

159 Nyein Zaw Lin, *People are being trafficked into slavery: minister*, Myanmar Times, 30 April 2018, <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/people-are-being-trafficked-slavery-minister.html>

Interviewees in Dawei expressed widespread concerns about **risks associated with in-migration**, such as about perceptions of sexual violence perpetrated by male migrant workers from the dry zone area. This could undermine social cohesion, and the local dialogues about migration and associated changes should be managed carefully and transparently to create a space where people can share concerns but learn facts to counteract malicious rumours and prejudices.

### CHANGING GENDER EXPECTATIONS AND DYNAMICS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Previously, it was mainly men that migrated abroad from Tanintharyi. Now, with many women also migrating for work, the social dynamics and expectations have changed. Interviewees noted that, while parents used to worry about daughters migrating away from their protection, these days they are comfortable with daughters migrating as “they send more money than sons”.<sup>160</sup> Parental expectations have changed: while parents used to look to sons to support them through working abroad, they now increasingly look to daughters to support them. This is slowly starting to have an impact on the traditional social preference for sons over daughters. Respondents criticised sons returning from migration with drug habits<sup>161</sup> – an issue that is also driven by and shaping gender expectations as discussed above. Migration is also seen as a threat to marriages, with rumours of the migrating or remaining spouse engaging in extramarital affairs leading to marriage breakdowns, further weakening the social fabric.<sup>162</sup> One impact of the migration of the young generation is that their small children are frequently left in the care of their grandparents or other family members, with unknown future social consequences.

### FIGURE 1: A SHAN MONK’S CONCERNS ABOUT THE RURAL CHILDREN OF MIGRANT WORKERS EXPRESSED ON FACEBOOK



**Parental and social attitudes about the value of education versus migration for work are also changing.** More boys than girls are dropping out of secondary schools in 12 out of 14 administrative areas across Myanmar.<sup>163</sup> The different socialisation of boys (to be boisterous, playful, adventurous and leaders) and girls (to be obedient, studious and hardworking) translates into gendered experiences in school: while girls work hard and score well in assessments, boys

<sup>160</sup> Interviews and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> According to findings from the 2014 census as well as data from a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA)

are prioritised for leadership positions (although few in numbers). However, overall, “boys tend to receive less support or attention in class and be punished more making their classroom experience a demotivating one that leads to underperformance, an inability to keep up, and a lack of interest in school”.<sup>164</sup> This amplifies the decreasing social value ascribed to school completion, which is respected but does not necessarily result in employment or, crucially, guarantee the ability to support the family. So the marker of adult, responsible behaviour – supporting and providing for the family – is considered to be more important than school completion. Furthermore, educated young people feel overqualified and less interested in farming jobs or migrant jobs, which are the main opportunities in the absence of paying office jobs.<sup>165</sup> While young educated women help in the household, educated young men are seen as spending time with friends in tea shops and not supporting the family, slowly eroding the social favour previously bestowed on young men – and linked to increasing drug abuse problems among the young men who find themselves trapped in the gulf between expectations and reality.

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<sup>164</sup> J. Sail, *Bottleneck analysis: Gender dynamics affecting participation in secondary school education in Myanmar and implications for social cohesion*, Yangon: Montrose, 2016, p.8

<sup>165</sup> Interviews and FGDs in Tanintharyi, July to September 2017



## 4. Conclusion and recommendations

This report sought to assess social conflict issues from a comprehensive gender perspective that takes into account the different gender expectations of men and women in Myanmar society under the first NLD government at a time of tremendous social change. Drawing on field research in Yangon, southern Shan and Tanintharyi, it argues that the specific expectation on men as gendered beings should be considered to better understand how these drive behaviour vis-à-vis their agency and roles in local-level conflicts, such as SGBV, land conflict, drug abuse issues, and migration and displacement.

### SGBV

**Social expectation of masculinities by both men and women play a key role in driving the perpetration of SGBV, condoning violence, invisibilising perpetrators and shifting the blame to the victims of such violence.** The general public tend to blame the women victims and survivors of SGBV for dressing or behaving against traditional gender expectations, such as being out in the evenings or consumption of alcohol. In order to address this problem and better support survivors, community and civil society leaders need to better understand the root causes of SGBV – i.e. gender inequalities, an unjustified sense of male entitlement to women's bodies, and lack of understanding of the vital concepts of consent. A broader social norm change is needed to shift the blame on to perpetrators rather than victims, and to create social attitudes that do not excuse or facilitate such crimes. From a community cohesion perspective, it may be advisable to counteract increasing perceptions of SGBV being linked with male migrant workers – both through raising awareness among migrant workers about SGBV and gender equality, and to free them from the pressures that strict patriarchal expectations of masculinities create. This could also mean identifying non-violent outlets for frustrations through sport or building positive identities through engaging in activities for the social good.

However, the possibility of men and boys becoming targets of domestic and sexual violence must also be recognised, and service and support provided to them. There are double stigmas for male victims as this entails the secondary trauma of having broken gender norms that expect men to be protectors against or even perpetrators of violence rather than victims of it. There is little record of such violence in Myanmar apart from against non-binary men; however, this should be included in the data collected by the authorities and CSOs to ensure it is recognised and recorded.

### LAND CONFLICT

**Local dispute resolution over land issues has been traditionally dominated by elite men and male leaders, benefiting those at the upper levels of society through a patronage system, to the exclusion of women and men of lesser age or status.** The expectation on men to defend family lands (and associated livelihoods) in the face of superior powers, such as the military, government or corporations, can compound gender pressures that can lead to frustrations, migration, marital breakdown or domestic violence. Loss of lands and livelihoods can push families into poverty and is contributing to high levels of migration and drug abuse. CSOs addressing land conflicts should place greater emphasis on including diverse stakeholders and views in participative decision-making to resolve land conflicts, for instance by supporting the capacities and opportunities for women and youth to engage in decision-making and settling of conflicts. Supporting women to actively engage in addressing land conflicts can be a strategic way of addressing these issues, as women have been socialised into more constructive and peaceful approaches to conflicts. Increased non-violent conflict-resolution skills for men and boys that value fairness, justice and participation are needed.

## DRUGS

**Gendered expectations on men to provide for the family in difficult economic situations can drive substance abuse and increase associated levels of violence; approaches to address substance abuse will be more effective if informed by a gender analysis.** In all research locations, respondents voiced grave concerns about high rates of drug abuse and its harmful social impacts as a key issue. Gendered expectations of men to provide for the family or to demonstrate their strength, courage and masculinity perpetuate this crisis, particularly in the context of a difficult economic situation where decent jobs are lacking. Peer pressure and internalised expectations of meeting the provider norms can combine to drive feelings of frustration, which in turn link to the consumption of drugs. CSOs, particularly women's organisations, expressed perceptions of drug addiction fuelling domestic violence, SGBV and criminal violence amid widespread calls for more effective law enforcement. Entry points to address the drug crises must be informed by a gender analysis and will be more effective if they focus on the underlying gender norms and expectations on adolescent and older men. However, prevention and treatment efforts should not miss out on women drug abusers who may be invisibilised due to social expectations and lesser mobility of women and adolescent girls. Young men particularly are also more vulnerable to extortion attempts at checkpoints through allegations of arrests for drug possession. Major efforts by civil society, government, faith, business and political/community leaders are needed to jointly put an end to the drug epidemic.

## MIGRATION

**The modalities of how people migrate, whether due to conflict or for economic reasons, are influenced by gender expectations, but also shape gender dynamics.** Movement of people within and out of Myanmar is high, due to a mix of active conflict, natural disasters, land grabbing, and lack of economic and education opportunities. Forced displacement can leave families in poverty, creating major difficulties for men to meet gender expectations of protecting their family or providing for them. These frustrations can contribute to mental health issues such as depression and suicidal tendencies. They can also spur violence against others, including domestic violence. Economic migration levels were also high in the research areas, with some gender differences in migration depending on locations: in southern Shan, women tend to migrate to urban centres and men tend to migrate further away for higher salaries, while, in Tanintharyi, these trends are changing with daughters increasingly migrating and taking on the role of supporting the families through working abroad. The long-term impact of these high migration levels should be monitored and addressed, with particular attention to the impact of migration on gender expectations.

## Recommendations

### OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS TO CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT ACTORS WORKING ON PEACE AND GENDER ISSUES

- Recognise 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 and needs to be approached from an intersectional angle that takes into account how other identity factors – such as age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic class, location, education and disability – interact with gender.
- Recognise that **men and boys form an important part of the GPS debate**. They face social expectations to behave in certain ways because they are men or boys. This is important when seeking 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 conflict resolution and non-violence** are recognised and supported through programming. Measures should be taken to promote the voices of men in speaking out against violence and for tolerance, gender equality and social cohesion. This should be something that young men aspire to. However, there needs to be accountability to women's voices and equal value accorded to women's perspectives – this should not be a new form of perpetuating male bias and domination
- This also means **recognising and addressing the needs of men who are vulnerable** – such as displaced or migrant men, recovering drug addicts, or men who are victims of domestic or sexual violence or torture. The term 'vulnerabilities' should be used with the greatest care, in view of current masculinities norms, as the idea of being labelled as vulnerable 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 others (towards other ethnic groups or stakeholders perceived as 'others', security forces) or that may result in violence towards stakeholders themselves (e.g. through substance abuse, excessive risk taking or suicide). 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.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS/MEMBERS OF THE NGO AND CSO COMMUNITY

- Address the causes of male frustrations around challenges with meeting gender expectations, such as lack of a decent income and corruption, by providing constructive, non-violent ways of dealing with anger and stress and competition. Support interventions and campaigns that place higher value on nurturing, emotionally literate behaviours in men.

## SGBV

- Bolster programming supporting legal, psychological and medical support for the victims and survivors of SGBV of all ages and genders.
- Raise awareness to end victim blaming and stigmatisation of victims and focus on empathy and support to survivors from both women and men. Conduct campaigns to hold perpetrators accountable – they should be the bearers of any shame or blame.
- Implement awareness-raising measures, including increased programming and other interventions, targeted at both young men and women to change expectations and behaviours in order to reduce the levels of SGBV, particularly in IDP camps. Adopt special efforts at prevention engaging men and boys in IDP camps to mitigate the high rates of sexual violence, alongside services for survivors.
- Work with young men to reverse the peer pressure among them to end and prevent sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment and violence, for example by creating social penalties if they witness their peers sexually harassing women or girls. Support them to identify ways of calling out unacceptable behaviour, and empower them to interrupt harassment where they see it happening.
- Support more gender-equitable norms of being 'good people' rather than narrowly defined roles of 'good men' or 'good women'. Support norms that do not equate 'manliness' with 'power over others', but that value drawing strength and positive self-identity from contributing to the family and community.
- Raise awareness of child rape and institute policies of zero tolerance approaches in schools to

any incidents of child abuse that come to light, and prioritise child safety over any reputational harm. Promptly investigate any allegation of SGBV against teachers or other persons in positions of authority informed by sensitivity to the needs of the victims; ensure swift consequences for any allegations that are verified by the investigation.

- Local and national authorities: disaggregate recorded child rape cases by gender, to improve evidence-based targeting of responses and support.
- Sexual violence against men: Screen men for sexual torture in high-risk locations such as in prisons and detention centres, or within armed institutions and groups where violent hazing or initiation rituals are likely to occur. Ensure that medical and psycho-social support is provided to male victims.
- Broaden campaigns to end domestic violence to ensure male victims are recognised, protected by law and receive support (as all female victims should be).

### Land conflicts

- Promote greater equality in land ownership, including by promoting women's land ownership rights and joint land ownership registration for married couples to acknowledge women's land rights. Conduct campaigns to raise the awareness of male-dominated institutions like the GAD and the Settlement and Land Records Department, as well as the broader public, about women's land rights.
- Support women's potential roles and leadership in addressing land conflicts by ensuring they have access to trainings and legal and campaigning support. Engage women active in land conflict leadership with capacity-building and programmatic support to take broader social and political leadership roles (and conflict-resolution roles) in a rights-based approach.
- Support men engaged in land conflict activism with adopting non-violent, constructive approaches when engaging with security forces and police. Support men and women working together on an equitable basis to protect their lands and legalise land access.
- Support alternative and more participative dispute-resolution mechanisms that aim to build consensus and win-win solutions. Provide dedicated support to more marginalised men (and women) to overcome the entrenched current social gender and age hierarchies, which enable a small elite to exercise most of the power.
- In the short term, ensure that information reaches women stakeholders – where men are informed as head of household, they should be required to pass the information on to all members of their household, including female and younger members, and in return to transmit the views of members of their household to those assembled in heads of household meetings to ensure that all voices and concerns are included, so that better decisions can be taken.
- In the longer term, end the administratively unnecessary (other countries function well without it) distinction between one 'head of the household' and 'dependants' to overcome one of the manifestations of gender inequalities at the household level.

### Drugs

- Conduct research in partnership with the affected young men to understand how their ideas – of how they should behave as men – are driving drug-taking behaviour in the context of difficult economic and social conditions. Draw on this research to determine the most effective anti-drug interventions for different social groups and locations.
- Coordinate efforts by civil society, faith leaders, business leaders and political/community leaders to jointly put an end to the drug epidemic.
- Raise awareness about a broader range of masculinities – or humanity – to aspire to (such as caring friend, reliable community member, supportive father, good listener, honest worker or helpful neighbour), and campaign against narrowly defined masculine roles focused on

economic provision, physical strength or restrictive ideas of masculine behaviour, in order to remove a source of peer pressure and frustration driving men's vulnerability to drugs. Promote conversation and dialogue around positive relationship models and the harmful social impacts of drugs in order to reverse these trends as drivers of drug taking.

- Engage directly with men to stop drug consumption and speak out against taking drugs to their peers, especially younger men who are often led astray by their elder peers. Share personal stories and strategies of resisting peer pressure, and create values of strength in resisting peer pressure rather than strength as daring to abuse drugs. Change the story so that taking drugs is considered a sign of weakness rather than something to emulate, a negative coping pattern rather than a sign of strength or daring.
- Conduct more detailed, localised research to understand the nuanced dynamics of drug production and trade, and how young men are getting involved in this, to better tailor social and law enforcement responses.

### Migration and displacement

- Monitor local responses to migration into the area and the impact on social cohesion, to avoid perceptions of violence linked to migrants and potentially violent local responses to any reported incidents of SGBV committed by migrants. Local dialogues about migration and associated changes should be managed carefully and transparently to create a space where people can share concerns in constructive, non-violent ways, build empathy and tolerance, and learn facts to counteract malicious rumours and prejudices.
- For programming to support displaced households, assess the gender dynamics, including the expectations placed on men and boys, as well as women and girls, and tailor the activities to support gender equality and reduce inequalities. Remove one source of frustration and pressure for displaced men by supporting initiatives encouraging positive roles for men and fathers that are feasible for situations of displacement, focused on their resilience and caring support to their family in times of stress, or creativity in taking on new roles within the household in the displaced setting.
- Facilitate dialogue spaces for men, and boys, about social expectations they face and potential challenges in living up to them – open up space to discuss feelings and concerns, and identify positive, non-violent ways of addressing them to prevent mental health issues.
- Design and implement awareness-raising campaigns about gender equality and core issues of consent for adolescent men in IDP camps, including respectful and sensitive treatment of potential survivors of SGBV.
- Provide awareness raising and support on safe migration for both women and men, including on the pressures of gender expectations and how to engage with them positively.
- Engage and support economic migrants to integrate better into the social fabric of their destination communities to overcome feelings of loneliness and frustration, whether through social activities, sports or music-based activities that provide a stake in society. Raise their awareness about basic gender equality issues, consent and the risks of drug abuse.
- Support the growth of sustainable, decent work in areas of high migration to enable local men and women to earn their livelihoods close to their families and support system. Support respectful workplaces with decent salaries for work in decent conditions, which respect employees' human rights and dignity.

# 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, the project aims to contribute to more effective, gender-transformative peacebuilding at the national level as well.

The 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)<sup>166</sup> to participants, and 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 socio-historical 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, the 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.

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<sup>166</sup> 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 1	Yangon School of Political Science staff and students	Yangon	4	5
June	FGD 2	Myanmar Institute of Theology students	Yangon	8	5
June	FGD 3	Gender Equality Network members	Yangon	0	9
July	FGD 4	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/Tanintharyi 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 Tanintharyi	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

**Total: 162 97**











**International Alert**

Tel: +44 20 7627 6800

Email: [info@international-alert.org](mailto:info@international-alert.org)

**Phan Tee Eain (Creative Home)**

Tel: +95 9 441 111 667

Email: [info@phanteeeain-myanmar.org](mailto:info@phanteeeain-myanmar.org)

**Thingaha Gender Organization**

Tel: +95 9 732 266 31

Email: [thingaha@thingaha.org](mailto:thingaha@thingaha.org)