

WHY GENDER MATTERS IN CONFLICT AND PEACE

Perspectives from Mon and Kayin States, Myanmar



Gender and
Development
Initiative



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Manufactured in July 2015

Shorter and updated version of the June 2015 report "Why Gender Matters in Conflict and Peace - Perspectives from Mon and Kayin States, Myanmar".

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ISBN 978-1-63214-011-1

Produced by: UN Women Myanmar

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Cover Photo: Salween/Thanlwin river, Mawlamyine, Mon State, 2014. **Photo:** Julie Marie Hansen

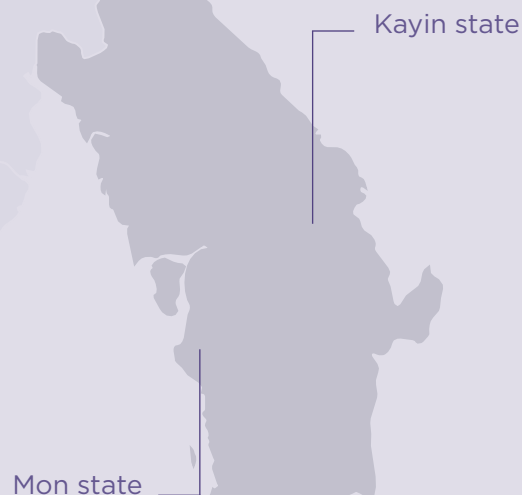
Designed by: Regional communications team, UN Women Asia-Pacific

Graphics Designer: Pairach Homtong **Printed by:** Star Empire

JULY 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our hearty thanks to all the respondents who willingly received us and patiently shared their perspectives during the interview meetings.

Our special thanks go to Ms. Mi Kun Chan Non and Ms. Cherry Soe, Mon Women's Network.

We would like to express our immense gratitude to the researchers and authors Julia Palmiano Federer (lead researcher, swisspeace), Julie Marie Hansen (research assistant, swisspeace), Salai Isaac Khen (lead researcher, Gender and Development Initiative-Myanmar), and Naw Lar Say Waa (researcher, Gender and Development Initiative-Myanmar), Jean D'Cunha and Astou Damba (researchers & writers, UN Women).

We gratefully acknowledge the technical guidance and financial support from UN Women, without which this paper would not have been possible. We would like to particularly thank Jean D'Cunha, UN Women, and Rachel Gasser, swisspeace, for their technical and advisory support throughout. Special thanks also go to Annemarie Sancar, swisspeace, for her useful comments and reviews of the text, and to Roberta Clarke and Nahla Valji, UN Women, for the unflinching support.

We thank Gretchen Luchsinger for efficiently editing the text, Julie Marie Hansen for the photographs, Ye Ye for the translation, UN Women Bangkok for the design and layout, and Star Empire for the printing.

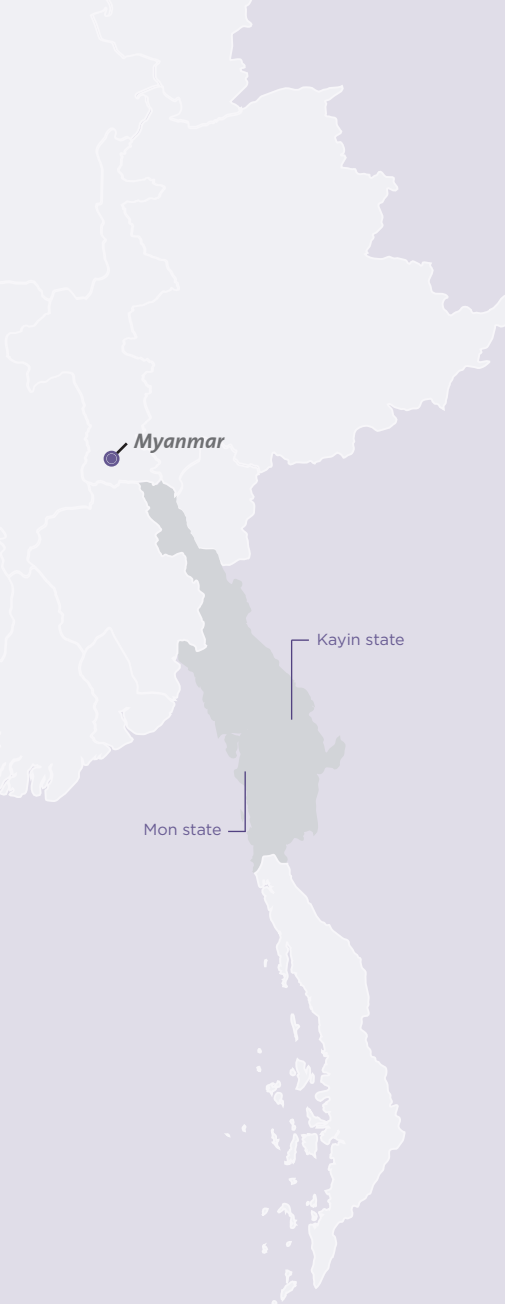
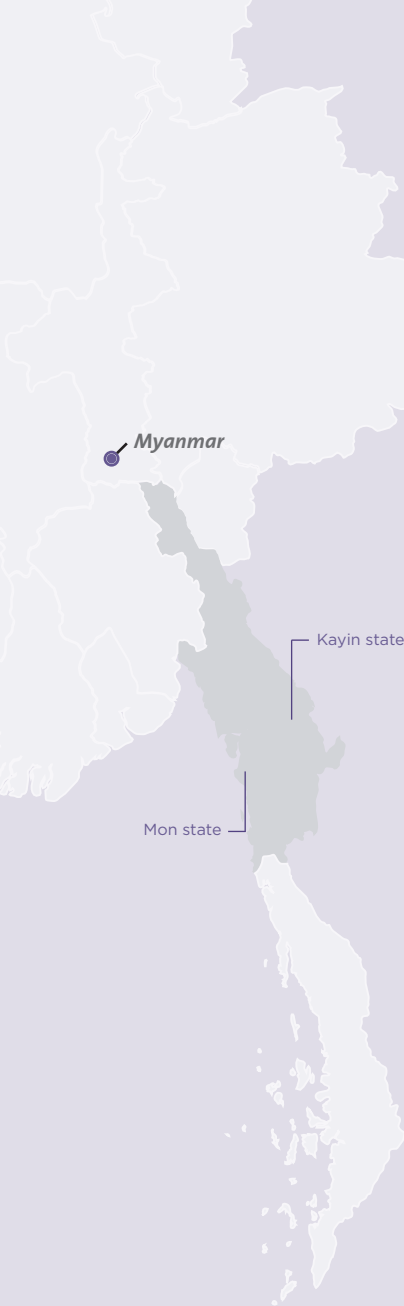


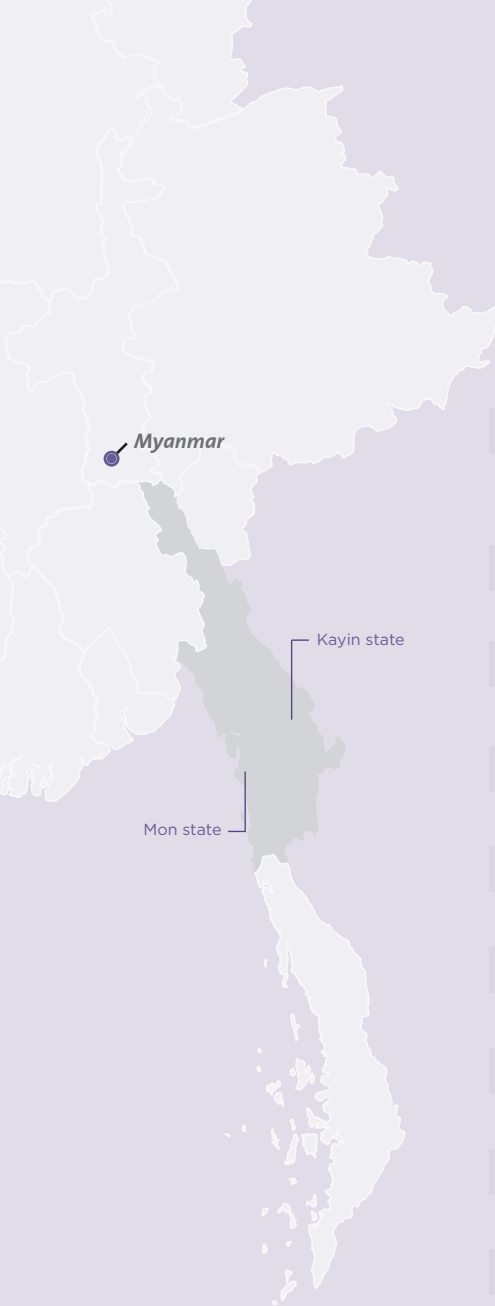


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ACRONYMS

BGF	Border Guard Force
CBO	Community-based organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DKBA	Democratic Karen Benevolent Army
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
HURFOM	Human Rights Foundation of Monland
ICBL	International Campaign to Ban Landmines
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNLAPAC	Karen National Liberation Army (Peace Council)
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNU	Karen National Union
KWO	Karen Women's Organization
MAMD	Mon Army Mergui District
MNLA	Mon National Liberation Army
MWN	Mon Women's Network
MWO	Mon Women's Organization
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NMSP	New Mon State Party
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
UPWC	Union Peacemaking Work Committee
WCRP	Woman and Child Rights Project
WLB	Women's League of Burma

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The Context: Ethnic Conflict in Myanmar

Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse countries, with 135 officially recognized ethnic groups, including the largely Buddhist Burmese-speaking Bamar majority, while non-Bamar ethnic groups form 40 percent of the population. Political and ethnic disputes in Myanmar date back to the pre independence era, with aspirations of ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) ranging from calls for secession to demands for equal rights in a federal democratic country.¹ At this point, secession is no longer a demand, although integration into a genuine federal democracy is strongly on the agenda. The Panglong Agreement of 1947 guaranteed the establishment of a federal union and autonomy for ethnic groups.² The provisions of the post Panglong 1947 constitution also met some of the demands of the ethnic groups, but the failure to realize the spirit and content of these agreements set the stage for protracted civil conflict between ethnic armed organizations and Burma's newly independent central government, spanning over six decades.³ This resulted in loss of life and property, economic deprivation, depletion of human and social capital, migration, displacement, and prolonged insecurity and instability.

While a British-inherited parliamentary model of government articulated the concept of a nation in "heterogeneous but unified" terms, there were escalating tensions between majority and minority groups, with talk of secession from the union.⁴ This paved the way for a military coup in 1962 with the Burma Socialist Party at the helm of government from 1962 to 1988. This was a period marked by nationalization of economic activities and industries; the adoption of an isolationist foreign policy; emphasis on a concept of state that was comprised of several nations; exacerbated tensions and conflict;⁵ a decline in assets and resources, and deprivation for many. In 1974, a new Constitution transferred power from the armed forces to the People's Assembly, albeit governed by military leaders.⁶ But social unrest continued, entrenching fear and mistrust among and between the Government and the people.

Economic and political tensions climaxed in 1988, when a university student uprising was quashed. Many protestors fled to the jungles and hills and took up arms against the government alongside the EAOs, leading to the establishment of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), which declared martial law in 1989. Throughout, civilians adversely impacted by the conflict fled to border regions, leading to the emergence of camps for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Between 1989 and 2010, over 30 EAOs either surrendered or entered ceasefire agreements with the SLORC.⁷ But mutual trust was eroded when the Government did not accept demands for a political dialogue on a federal union and when it sought to transform EAOs into Border Guard Forces (BGF) or militia under *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar Army) control. While some EAOs conceded to this, about 21 others did not and the conflict continued, with many of these EAOs involved in peace negotiations with the current government.⁸

¹ Human Rights Watch 2012, pp.22-23.

² The Panglong Agreement was signed on 12 February 1947 by the government of Burma and representatives of the Shan, Kachin and Chin ethnic groups. See United Nations Peacemaker 2014, The Panglong Agreement 1947: <http://peacemaker.un.org/myanmarpanglong47>.

³ Hlaing 2013, p.3.

⁴ Ibid, p.5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Silverstein 2004, p.79.

⁷ Khen and Nyo 2014, p.14.

⁸ Ibid, p.14.

The Current Peace Process

Elections in 2010 brought a series of political and economic changes that infused new life into the troubled peace process. President U Thein Sein's electoral victory transformed the military regime into a quasi-civilian Government, and in 2011, the President issued the 1/11 Peace Call, officially inviting EAOs for peace talks. As part of U Thein Sein's overall reform agenda, bilateral ceasefire agreements were renewed at state level in February 2012 and were signed with 14 EAOs. Further milestones in the peace process include signing of a Deed of Commitment for Peace and National Unity on 12 February, Union Day, wherein signatories⁹ committed to "building a union based on democratic and federal principles in the spirit of Panglong and in accordance with the outcomes of political dialogue to ensure freedom, equality, justice and self-determination for all citizens". On the 31st March 2015, the government and the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) made up of 16 EAOs signed the Affirmation on finalizing the draft nationwide ceasefire agreement, with negotiations continuing towards signing a nationwide ceasefire agreement.¹⁰

Focus, Rationale and Methodology of this Study

In Myanmar, as in many other parts of the world, politics, conflict and peace negotiations are considered "male domains". With some exceptions, women's experiences of armed conflict and contributions to peace are largely unrecognized, undocumented and unaccounted for. But many Myanmar women who have experienced armed conflict are engaging within their communities in creative strategies to mitigate its impacts, and to make and sustain peace. However, these efforts are not accorded sufficient formal or other recognition by the Government, by ethnic armed organizations and society at large. Women and their priorities are consequently not adequately included in the country's current peace process.

This publication entitled, "Why Gender Matters in Conflict and Peace: Perspectives from Mon and Kayin States", explores how conflict in Mon and Kayin states, as examples, have affected men and women differently, and documents women's locally rooted response strategies and longer term contributions to the peace process. It probes the basis for these gendered¹¹ impacts of conflict and women's unrecognized contributions to peace, and foregrounds women's priorities for conflict resolution and prevention and for long-term peacebuilding.

The publication argues that including women and their priorities in all aspects of Myanmar's peace process is a woman's right. Women also have a right to seek redress and reparation for damage, loss and harm that they have suffered. Including women equally with men at all stages of the peace process and addressing their priorities in peace agreements and post-conflict planning would demonstrate the Government of Myanmar's commitment to constitutional provisions of gender equality and women's rights, and to international human rights agreements that it has endorsed.¹² Such a move would also signal responsiveness to calls for inclusion by gender equality and women's empowerment advocates in Myanmar. The publication concretely demonstrates the potential difference that including women and their priorities would make to the effectiveness and sustainability of Myanmar's peace process—a relatively under-researched subject.

⁹ Signatories included the President, Union Ministers, ethnic affairs ministers, political party leaders, parliamentarians, *Tatmadaw* representatives, and ethnic armed organizations – KNU, KNU/KNLPAC, DKBA, RCSS.

¹⁰ Khen and Nyo 2014, p.14.

¹¹ The term "gender" is used as a conceptual category and a methodological tool of analysis in conjunction with other interfacing identities, primarily economic and ethnicity - to the extent possible. Gender as a conceptual category refers to the social construction of masculinity and femininity as articulated at individual levels, and in social, economic and political structures, institutions and processes, at different levels.

¹² These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, the Millennium Declaration, 2000, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008. As a member state to the UN, Myanmar is also party to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and related resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122.

In investigating the gender-based impacts of conflict and contributions to the current peace process in Myanmar, the publication is guided by the definitions, principles and standards of gender equality and women's rights as enshrined in the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, the 2000 Millennium Declaration, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and related resolutions.

The research used qualitative mapping anchored in testimonies, key informant interviews and focus group discussions as its technique. Secondary research and analysis complemented this. A total of 112 respondents: 64 in Mawlamyine (Mon state) and 48 in Hpa-an (Kayin state) were interviewed from May to December 2014. Respondents included government representatives, members of ethnic armed organizations, parliamentarians, members of community-based organizations (CBOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) working on the current peace process and women's rights, members of religious groups engaged with conflict-affected communities and women, community leaders and ethnic Mon and Karen women and men.

Mon and Kayin states were selected for this research because they were once sites of conflict; current conditions of ceasefire render data collection relatively easier; there is geographical proximity between the two states and UN Women's peacebuilding work under the UN Southeast Peacebuilding Fund Project was located here, requiring understanding of context on women, peace and security.

SECTION 2: SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF MON AND KAYIN STATES AND HISTORY OF CONFLICT

Both Kayin and Mon states are located in the south-east of Myanmar.¹³ Mon state has a population of 2,050,282 people – 48 percent males and 52 percent females, while the population of Kayin state is 1,574,079 – 49.3 percent males and 50.7 percent females.¹⁴ Mon and Kayin states have a predominantly rural population with 72 percent and 78 percent of the people, respectively, living in rural areas.¹⁵ Both States are ethnically diverse. The range of ethnicities in Mon state includes the majority Mon ethnic group as well as Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Karen, Rakhine, Shan and Pa-O.¹⁶ Most people in Kayin state belong to the Karen ethnic group. People from non-Karen groups such as the Shan, Pa-o, Mon and Bamar ethnicities also reside there. The majority of residents of Mon and Kayin states are Buddhists, but smaller Christian, Muslim and Hindu communities are also present.¹⁷

Both states depend extensively on agriculture. Land consequently constitutes an important asset for local people in both states, though ownership tends to be informal and customary legal rights to land prevail. Mon state in particular thrives on rice, a range of cash crops, including vast rubber plantations and seasonal fruits.¹⁸ The relative stability in Mon state since the 1995 ceasefire (with exceptions in some townships, specifically Ye and Yebyu) has enabled it to establish its local economy, markets and a variety of industries in recent years. These include mining (antimony, granite and gold), rubber and coal. Fishing and salt production are important in the coastal west. The state capital Mawlamyine is an important trading and shipping hub for the south-east of Myanmar, especially because of its proximity to the Thai border. These improvements notwithstanding, labor force participation rates are low at 61.0 percent, unemployment rates (15-64 years) high at 6.2 percent and employment to population ratios (15-64 years) low at 57.2 percent. Many sectors continue to remain underdeveloped with socio-economic indicators suggesting unmet development needs. For example, out of 114,187 urban households and 308,425 rural households in Mon state, a far greater proportion of urban households used electricity compared to rural households (67 percent vs. 24 percent) and a greater proportion of rural households used candle light compared to urban households (38 percent vs. 15 percent).¹⁹ 85 percent of urban households had access to improved sources of drinking water compared to 62 percent of rural households.²⁰

Like Mon state, Kayin state thrives on rice, and cash crops. Rubber and sugarcane cultivation has expanded recently, with huge acreage under plantation. Animal husbandry is another important income generator. Agriculture remains the dominant source of livelihood for many in the state, with small businesses, cross border trade, internal or international migration to countries like Thailand and Malaysia providing other income earning opportunities – given the shortage of employment. Literacy levels and labor force participation rates (15-64 years) in Kayin state are among the lowest in Myanmar at 74 percent,²¹ and 60.7 percent respectively²² and unemployment rates (15-64 years) are high at 7.5 percent.²³

¹³ Mon state is bordered by the Andaman Sea on the west, Kayin state to the east, Bago Region to the north and Tanintharyi Region to the south. Kayin State comprises a long stretch of mountainous land running along part of the country's border with Thailand. The state is also bordered by the Mandalay Region and Shan State at its northernmost tip, and by Kayah State to the north-east. Along the western border are Mon State and the Bago Region.

¹⁴ Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015, p.2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.5.

¹⁶ UNHCR 2014, p.1.

¹⁷ UNHCR 2014a, p.3; UNHCR 2014, p.3.

¹⁸ Cash crops include corn, groundnuts, sunflowers, cashew nuts, sugarcane, coffee, cardamom, coconuts, palm oil, cocoa. UNHCR 2014, p.7.

¹⁹ Calculations made from the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015, pp.241-242.

²⁰ Calculations made from the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015, p.244.

²¹ Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015, p.25.

²² *Ibid.*, p.29.

²³ *Ibid.*

Mon state is considered one of the oldest civilizations in Myanmar. Mon kingdoms struggled to retain power as new ethnic groups, including the Bamar, arrived from the north. The latter's incursions resulted in the defeat of the last Mon ruler in 1757.²⁴ The current armed conflict dates back to the late 1940s when Myanmar became independent from the British in 1948. The Mon believed that they were largely excluded from the Panglong Agreement in 1947, with its promises of autonomy and internal administration for the Frontier areas.²⁵ Therefore, the Mon People's Front launched an armed resistance in 1948, but eventually surrendered when the Government promised the Mon people autonomy.²⁶ Those skeptical of this promise being fulfilled created a splinter group in 1958, the New Mon State Party (NMSP), that continues to be the dominant EAO in Mon state today. In 1971 the NMSP formed a military wing called the Mon National Liberation Army (MNLA). Fighting between the NMSP/MNLA and the Government ensued, resulting in villages and communities in the region suffering the consequences, including of the Government's "four cuts strategy"²⁷, which cut off support (information, recruits, food supplies and funds) thought to be passing through Mon civilian villages to EAOs. This resulted in the displacement of hundreds of rural ethnic villages. Reports suggested military imposition of forced labor, arbitrary detentions, and confiscation of property. Women and girls faced sexual and other violence by perpetrators on both sides of the conflict. Ongoing violence led to the emergence of 3 main ethnic civilian refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border – Halochanee, Bee Ree and Tavoy. The NMSP signed a ceasefire agreement with the government on the 29th June 1995. This was broken in 2010 when the NMSP rejected the government proposition to transform into a BGF.²⁸

The Kayin region was for long ruled as part of many Burmese kingdoms and dynasties. Following the two Anglo-Burmese wars in the 1800s, the last dynasty of Myanmar, the Konbaung Dynasty, was defeated by Britain and the Kayin region came under British colonial rule. In 1947, with Myanmar's independence in sight, Kayin leaders began a movement for the region's self-determination and an independent Kayin state. In Kayin state, the Karen National Union (KNU) was formed in 1947 as a result of a strong sense of nationalism and dissatisfaction with a Bamar-dominated independent Myanmar. The KNU refused to sign the 1947 Panglong Agreement and demanded the right to decide their future in either an independent state named Kawthoolei or an autonomous region.²⁹ When in 1949 its demand for self-determination remained unfulfilled, the KNU took up arms against the new Central Government, mobilizing a military wing called the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).³⁰ Despite a history of splits and the existence of a number of ethnic armed organizations in Kayin state,³¹ the KNU remains a significant political force for the Karen people. Ceasefire negotiations with the KNU had been afoot since 1989.³²

²⁴ HURFORM 2012.

²⁵ Ethnic areas were referred to as Frontier areas in The Panglong Agreement 1947.

²⁶ Independent Mon News Agency 2013.

²⁷ U Ne O 1996.

²⁸ UNHCR 2014, p.6.

²⁹ UCPD n.d.

³⁰ Despite a history of splits and the existence of a number ethnic armed organizations in Kayin state – the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, now renamed the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (still DKBA), KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC), Brigade 5 and others, each with their own equation with the government, the KNU remains the most significant political force for the Karen people. UCPD n. d.

³¹ These include the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, (DKBA), KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KPC), Brigade 5 and others.

³² UNHCR 2014, p.6.

Ceasefire agreements were renewed at state level in February 2012 as part of President U Thein Sein's overall reform agenda. Both the KNU and NMSP were among the 14 EAOs that signed bilateral ceasefire agreements with the government in January and February 2012, respectively, while the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA)³³ signed a ceasefire agreement with the government in 2011. The NMSP, the KNU and the DKBA are part of the 16-member Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT).³⁴

In both Mon and Kayin states local people identified important improvements in their communities since the signing of bilateral ceasefire agreements. These include greater security, increased freedom of movement, a decrease in human rights abuses like torture and killings, improvement in livelihoods. However, some people remain skeptical about the sustainability of the peace process.



Photo: Julie Marie Hansen

³³ Most DKBA troops are breakaway factions of the KNU, separating from it in 1994. They agreed to join the government's BGF under the command of Myanmar officers on 18 August in 2010.

³⁴ Euro Burma Office 2013.

SECTION 3: THE ROLE AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN MON AND KAYIN STATES IN PEACE AND CONFLICT

Women in Mon and Kayin states play a plethora of roles, and the armed conflict and socio-economic changes have only increased their number and their complexity. But women are overwhelmingly defined as home makers, primarily responsible for “the kitchen and the family.”³⁵ Men are considered the main breadwinners who dominate the public sphere in agricultural and plantation work. This position influences decision-making dynamics in the household: the man is expected to be solely responsible for the family’s economy and as such takes on the role of decision-maker.³⁶ In turn, women are expected to respect and obey their husbands, given his superior position. For example, as a show of respect, a Mon woman must wait until her husband is also home before eating a meal.³⁷

Gendered stereotypes interact with low levels of socio-economic development in both states (though Mon state is marginally more developed), to marginalize women more than men in socio-economic and political life. Kayin state, for example, has among the lowest literacy levels in Myanmar at 74 percent – 78.4 percent for men and 70.9 percent for women. Literacy rates for Mon state are much higher at 86.6 percent – 89.5 percent for men and 84.2 percent for women.³⁸ Labor force participation rates (15-64 years) in Mon state stand at 61.0 percent – 81.2 percent for men and 43.0 percent for women, while in Kayin it is 60.7 percent – 81.4 percent for men and 41.2 percent for women. Unemployment rates (15-64 years) are high in both states – 6.2 percent in Mon – 6.1 percent for men versus 6.4 percent for women; in Kayin unemployment rates (15-64 years) estimated at 7.5 percent are higher – 7.8 percent for men compared to 7.1 percent for women.³⁹ Gender also interacts with other variables such as age, religion, ethnicity, geographical location, socio-economic and political background of families to more specifically determine women’s position and status on the socio-economic scale.

“They only consider women as a cook at home. They don’t want to give women a place. When I talk, I have the right to speak because of my old age. Before, I didn’t even get the chance to talk in any places. Also in religion, women have to stay behind. This is because of the conservation of old tradition of Myanmar.”

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 14 August 2014

Despite women’s relegation to domesticity, their specific contribution to the dominant source of livelihood in both states – the agricultural sector and their reliance on it as a means of livelihood cannot be overlooked. In both states women represent almost half the agricultural work force. However, gender role stereotypes underpin the nature of work women and men do, the nature of assets owned and who owns them, and the benefits enjoyed. Land titles whether reflecting ownership or user rights are rarely in joint names of men and women or solely in the name of women. Like in many other states across Myanmar that are heavily reliant on agriculture, men are socially expected to carry out ‘heavy’ agricultural work such as ploughing the fields, raising large livestock while women do the ‘lighter’ work like breeding small livestock such as pigs and chickens.⁴⁰ Women grow kitchen, gardens process or prepare food, collect fuel and water, and engage in small trade and marketing - all while managing complex and multiple responsibilities as primary caregivers in the home.⁴¹ In Kayin state, there is occasional flexibility in the gendered division of labor: in some households, men help with domestic work

³⁵ WCRP 2009, p.19.

³⁶ Ibid, p.19.

³⁷ CPCS 2010, p.286.

³⁸ Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population 2015, pp 24.

³⁹ Ibid, pp.29.

⁴⁰ FAO 2011.

⁴¹ Ibid.

and childcare.⁴² Married and unmarried women are increasingly moving outside the household in search of work to boost their families' incomes.⁴³ The need for additional sources of household income has led to many women migrating to neighboring countries when job opportunities are not available in their towns or villages.⁴⁴

While Mon and Karen women are actively engaged in community work, this is often in the realm of women's traditional domains such as social welfare and the preservation of culture and religion. Christian women often play lead roles in church support groups and Buddhist women are often responsible for exercising oversight over temple offerings and alms. However, women are rarely community leaders. This position is occupied by men,⁴⁵ resulting in village headship traditionally being male-dominated. Likewise, women are also excluded from becoming religious leaders.⁴⁶

Women in Mon and Kayin states continued to play traditional roles during conflict – cooking, cleaning, caring for their children, the ill and elderly in their own households and their larger conflict-affected communities. But conflict also thrust women in both states into non-traditional roles as female combatants, for example. Women were also active supporters of ethnic armed organizations providing information alerts or carrying messages. According to female respondents in Kayin state, village leaders would send women to be messengers and representatives of the village to liaise and trade information between the KNU and the *Tatmadaw*:

“They don't send men. If men are sent, they will be killed by the other side. Women like to do it because they don't want her husband to be killed.”

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 5 October 2014

Respondents further noted that although there was the risk and fear of sexual assault while waiting in the shelter where the messenger is stationed, women are sent anyway on the premise that they are at less risk, leaving them to protect themselves.⁴⁷

Women became heads of households when men fled the village, migrated, were engaged in active combat, or were killed or disabled in conflict. They served as community leaders playing leading or supporting roles in community-based or civil society organizations and also assumed village headship in a few cases. Some Mon and Karen women have also been engaged in current political and peace structures and processes.⁴⁸

Even as women assumed non-traditional roles in conflict or in other crisis situations, these roles are underscored by traditional gender stereotypes. Women continued to bear the responsibility for care work in difficult circumstances and gender relations remain largely untransformed. In other words, these new roles are seen to be taken on only in crisis, while the “normal paradigm of woman is to the private sphere as man is to the public sphere” prevails. Reversions to traditional roles occur, unless halted through challenges to discriminatory stereotypes in the first instance and through persisting and pervasive efforts to sustain changes and transform conventional gender relations.

⁴² Some women in Mon state also work in trade, moving goods across the Myanmar-Thailand border. In general, however, economic participation among women is low. This may be partly due to stereotypes in Mon society that promote negative connotations around “working women.” These inhibit women's economic participation and are further reinforced as women internalize them.

⁴³ WCRP 2009, p. 19-20.

⁴⁴ Many of these women work in unprotected informal sectors, such as fishing and agro industries, and in construction in Thailand. WCRP 2009, p. 19-20.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Interview, Hpa-an, 5 October, 2014.

⁴⁸ These roles will be dealt with in greater detail in sections 5 and 6.

The non-traditional roles of female combatants that both Mon and Karen women have assumed alongside men in a male-centered institution, is a case in point. Interviews with a former female combatant in Mon State reveal that despite receiving the same training as male soldiers, they were still separated into their own units, replicating the 'woman's domain.' The term 'female combatant' appears to be a misnomer. While their role in a women's wing sets them apart from other women in communities affected by conflict, female combatants do not normally engage in front line combat, but are relegated to back office roles and are assigned woman-oriented tasks - cooking, gardening, teaching, providing first aid and nursing male combatants back to health. They are marginalized from strategizing and decision-making and experienced similar fears and limitations as civilian women when they do participate in these strategy meetings.

“Women in the NMSP women’s unit were restricted to the headquarters, although they were also trained as back up to the soldiers on the frontline. In the headquarters, the women were responsible for growing and preparing their own food, teaching younger soldiers Mon history and other subjects.”

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 26 July 2014

“While we were asked to join meetings, my unit leader suggested the right things, but men present at the meeting did not accept her suggestions – they think her opinions are meaningless. My leader even faced verbal attacks, and she had fight to keep her say.”

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 26 July 2014

Female combatants went back into their communities after the ceasefires. They either got married, stayed single or performed some jobs in the community.⁴⁹



⁴⁹ Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state 26 July, 2014.

SECTION 4: THE GENDER-BASED IMPACTS OF CONFLICT IN MON AND KAYIN STATES

The socially determined roles that women play in Mon and Kayin societies determine how they are directly or indirectly affected by armed conflict. In conflict situations traditional gender roles face upheaval, influencing the way men and women navigate and experience the impacts of conflict within their family units and their communities. This process is often under-examined or ignored, let alone analyzed through a gender lens. As noted earlier, armed conflict has also to some extent created new opportunities for women, including earning an income and performing non-traditional roles. Yet these can prove burdensome when combined with already existing responsibilities as primary caregivers and mothers within the family unit, amid the heightened insecurity of conflict. This section qualitatively disaggregates a range of specific risks, challenges and impacts of armed conflict that women and men across both Mon and Kayin states experience differently.

Abuse, Torture, Killings, Arbitrary Detentions

As with many other conflict-affected areas in Myanmar, the military government used the four-cut strategy⁵⁰ to sever links between EAOs and the civilian population. This strategy included cutting off food, funds, information and recruitment and resulted in deprivation of basic necessities of life and human rights violations.

Evidence from both Mon and Kayin states show that men have been the primary victims of physical abuse, torture and killings, whereas women have been disproportionately affected by sexual and gender-based violence. A 2014 report from the Human Rights Foundation of Monland (HURFOM) proffers anecdotal evidence of cases as recent as 2007 of torture, beatings, physical abuse and the killings of ethnic civilians at the hands of the *Tatmadaw*. According to the report, these cases affected both men and women, but most involved men as victims of beatings and killings, even as women faced added violations such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).⁵¹ While many men have fled, given their greater likelihood of being killed, tortured, arrested or forced into hard labor, many women in conflict zones stayed behind:

“Even the village was destroyed at that time—if the villagers are only women, they sell products in the market; if it’s only men, they are taken as porters.”

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 17 October 2014

Respondents identified perpetrators of human rights violations in Kayin state from both sides of the conflict.⁵² The local Karen Human Rights Group claims that while many human rights abuses are perpetrated by the *Tatmadaw* and its associated groups, local EAOs are also complicit in carrying out abuses.⁵³ Women, children and men were subjected to arbitrary detention in Kayin state, both by the *Tatmadaw* and the EAOs mostly under the suspicion of associating with the ‘enemy.’

⁵⁰U Ne Oo 1996.

⁵¹ It is important to note that while there are less documented cases of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by members of armed ethnic organizations or civilians living in conflict-affected areas, respondents have stated that these cases have also taken place.

⁵² Men’s focus group respondent, Hpa-an, 6 October, 2014.

⁵³ KHRG 2014.

“If children’s fathers were in EAOs, the children and family are arrested by the military. They are kept for a while and then released. The village militias from the EAO put many people in jail, because they suspect them of sharing information.”

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 6 October 2014

Respondents noted that men who were suspected by the *Tatmadaw* of being in the EAO or associated with the group, were arbitrarily detained, and during detention were often tortured and even killed. Women suspected of association with EAO members were subjected to arbitrary detention and torture to elicit information on the location and activities of the men.⁵⁴

Forced Labor

Forced labor, particularly forced recruitment as porters, was common during the armed conflict.⁵⁵ While the most recent UNHCR report states that most of Mon state has been spared forced labor, reports of these violations still emerged around Ye Township (due to its location near Three Pagoda Pass).⁵⁶ According to reports, the *Tatmadaw* regularly recruited local ethnic civilians to carry food supplies and ammunition - often unbearably heavy loads across long distances, and undertake construction.⁵⁷ Forced labor affected men and women differently. Both secondary sources and interview respondents reported that men, particularly strong and healthy male villagers, were more likely to be forced to be porters than women. Porters often faced inhumane conditions, in which many were threatened with death if they failed to comply or complete the given task. In some cases, those who were too weak or injured, were killed. These porters have also been found to double as human minesweepers for the *Tatmadaw*, often forced to walk ahead of them to detonate any anti-personnel mines planted in conflict areas.⁵⁸

The fear of being forced into labor was a key reason for men fleeing when the *Tatmadaw* raided villages:

“Men who are young and strong flee because they are the ones who will be made porters if they stay. The elderly, sick, women and children stay behind in the village.”

— Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 6 October 2014

As a result, women who stayed behind often shouldered the sole responsibility for ensuring family survival. This led to increased workloads causing physical and emotional stress and other health concerns. They were also faced with the risk of sexual violence, injury or death.⁵⁹

With men fleeing villages because of the threat of forced portering during armed conflict, women were often recruited in their place.⁶⁰ A respondent for this study noted that female porters had to carry out camp services such as cooking and cleaning, setting up tents and constructing shelters.⁶¹ Other tasks reportedly included burying deceased soldiers, and carrying torches at night while wounded soldiers were transported back to camps from the front line.⁶² Women porters faced verbal abuse and other

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ While reportedly Mon state has largely been spared from forced labor, some reports of these violations have emerged around Ye Township due to its strategic location near Three Pagoda Pass. In Kayin state various groups have reported forced labor, including as porters, as a widespread human rights violation. For example, the Karen Women’s Organization (KWO) in a 2007 report suggested that 90 per cent of human rights abuses related to forced labor. UNHCR 2014, p.9; KWO 2007.

⁵⁶ UNHCR 2014, p.9.

⁵⁷ They also had to build roads, army camps and other buildings, and function as sweepers for mines. Human Rights Watch 2011; WCRP 2005; HURFOM 2014, p.48; KWO 2007.

⁵⁸ Reckinger 2008.

⁵⁹ KHRG 2006, pp.26-27.

⁶⁰ KHRG 2006, p.26-27.

⁶¹ Male interview respondent, Yangon, 13 October, 2014.

⁶² KHRG 1993.

forms of physical abuse such as beatings, as well as having to live in harsh conditions with little food and water; little or no medical attention or treatment; and difficulty in maintaining privacy, personal and sanitary hygiene - all while walking for long periods carrying heavy loads with no breaks.⁶³ Many female porters were raped while working for government military troops and some were forced to serve as “comfort women” for soldiers.⁶⁴ Women who fell pregnant as a result of rape faced stigma upon returning to their villages. Many sought abortions, which resulted in health concerns from unsafe abortions and financial debt from accessing abortion services.⁶⁵

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

While there are numerous reports from local groups and women’s organizations documenting sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by the *Tatmadaw*, EAOs and civilians, against women and girls in Mon and Kayin states, there remains a lack of comprehensive and systematic national or state level data.⁶⁶ Both female and male respondents identified rape as a critical concern for women and girls in armed conflict that has had significant impacts on their sense of safety and security, mobility, and thus their everyday lives and livelihoods.⁶⁷ In comparison, they noted no reported cases of rape or other sexual violence against men and boys, although here too data are lacking, and it is not possible to conclusively say that such cases have not occurred. Respondents noted that sexual and gender-based violence is generally not considered a “male” concern—it is seen as an issue that does not affect men and boys.⁶⁸ This may well be due to the inability to cope with the perceived threat to masculinity.

Reports from women’s and human rights groups in Mon and Kayin states increasingly support the view that women were especially targeted for sexual and gender-based violence. In both states, rape and sexual slavery were reportedly used by the Myanmar military as punishment for supposedly supporting EAOs or having family members in them. Women and girls were used by the military as “comfort women” during forced labor and forcible recruitment as porters, or raped when soldiers entered villages when deployed or when they were confiscating land.⁶⁹ Respondents also maintain that there is widespread impunity related to crimes of sexual and gender-based violence and access to justice is limited:

“Some women are raped by civilian men or the Army. But they stay silent. They go to the hospital. But mostly it is children who are raped and sometimes they are killed after the rape. The rapist threatens the parents and the children do not want to speak out. So cases almost never go to court. In my village, no rape case went to court.”

- Interview with a CBO representative, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 16 October 2014

The culture of silence around rape contributes to impunity. Interview respondents cited several reasons for this: the lack of political will to deal with rape, as both the government and EAOs see rape as a minor concern that should not be turned into a larger public issue.⁷⁰ In some cases, the rape is settled

⁶³ KHRG 1993.

⁶⁴ KWO 2004, p.17.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Available data show only the tip of the iceberg. In a 2004 report, the KWO documented 125 cases of rape against women and girls in Kayin state by government military soldiers within an 18-month period. It claims that the figure is much higher, however, and that hundreds of more women and girls have been subject to the same violation. Similarly, despite relative stability since the 1995 ceasefire between the Government of Myanmar and the NMSP, a WCRP report from 2005 cited 37 cases of sexual violence against a group of at least 50 women and girls aged 14-50 years in Mon areas between 1995 and 2004. Respondents also report rape by civilians and EAOs and that rape is trivialized by all categories of perpetrators. This together with fear of retribution for reporting rape and other sexual violence and an inadequate justice system are important reasons for low reporting rates. KWO 2004, p.10; WCRP 2005, p.12.

⁶⁷ Sexual and gender-based violence has left survivors with mental health problems that in some cases have led to suicide. Rape resulting in pregnancy has affected women’s physical and emotional health, including through unsafe abortions. KWO 2004.

⁶⁸ It could also indicate shyness and discomfort to talk about its perpetration against men and boys, as it is seen as “demasculinizing”.

⁶⁹ WCRP 2005.

⁷⁰ Respondents claimed that the vast majority of rape cases against women and girls are not reported to authorities or settled formally. While respondents did not explicitly state why this was the case, secondary sources and responses from similar contexts in conflict-affected areas across the country

informally with the perpetrator being asked to pay financial compensation to the victim's family or marry the victim. Other causes for impunity include outdated legal systems – the Penal Code of 1860⁷¹ and customary practice, as well as plural legal systems with differing and discriminatory standards; the lack of legal mechanisms with independent judiciaries; the lack of faith that women and communities have in law enforcement and the justice system to hold perpetrators to account; discriminatory procedures that place the onus of responsibility on the survivor and probe the sexual history of the victim, insensitive interrogations and lack of confidentiality in trials expose the victim publically. This results in stigma and shame to the survivor and family, reinforcing trauma.⁷² In many cases, women and community leaders do not dare to report cases for fear of serious reprisals.⁷³ Finally survivors may lack knowledge of their own rights and how to seek redress. All of this inhibits reporting the violation.

Landmine Accidents

Although landmines are indiscriminate forms of warfare and do not differentiate between genders, the gender-based division of roles in armed conflict creates different risks for men and women, boys and girls.⁷⁴ In most landmine-affected countries, 85-90 percent of landmine victims are boys and men.⁷⁵ Respondents claimed that this is because more men enter contaminated areas either as combatants laying landmines, as forced porters on the front lines, or as male household heads who go to the forest to collect products or travel between villages—all largely male roles. Those who survive mine accidents but sustain injuries are often unable to earn an income, causing psychological and emotional stress of not being able to fulfill their socially prescribed role as the primary breadwinner. Men are sometimes stigmatized by the family and community when disability causes job loss. The situation leads to low self-esteem and reportedly to alcoholism, with negative implications for women and children in the form of domestic violence and emotional stress.⁷⁶ Some respondents maintained that disability resulted in idleness which was at variance with traditional expectations of men as active and capable of undertaking “heavy” labor and providing for the family.

Women are burdened with increased workloads and livelihood-related responsibilities, if a landmine victim is the main income provider. At the same time, they must perform their roles within the household as mothers and primary caregivers.⁷⁷

attributed underreporting to the victim's fear of reprisal or stigmatization; the lack of legal mechanisms in place; and administrative structures (local and national) lacking the political will and mechanisms to address cases. They maintained that mechanisms of legal redress were limited.

⁷¹ S 375 of the Penal Code, 1860 prohibits rape which it defines as sexual intercourse with a woman either without her consent, against her will, with consent obtained by fear or threat of injury or death, with consent obtained through deception, or if the woman is under 14 years, provided she is not married to the man. The Code states that “penetration is sufficient to constitute sexual intercourse necessary to the offence of rape”. While many national laws focus on penetration and coercion as key elements, recent definitions in international law define a range of violent sexual acts as rape. The World Health Organization defines rape as “physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object”. WHO 2002, p.149. The Code of Criminal Procedure does not contain any specific provisions regarding prosecution and testimony in rape cases. There are few – if any – legislative protections for taking evidence from victims of rape. The Code of Criminal Procedure and the Evidence Act do not provide appropriate protection during witness examination. In cases of rape and sexual assault, government hospitals must obtain permission from the local police before they are permitted to examine and treat patients, in order that evidence is not destroyed. This is concerning, as women need to be assured the right to medical treatment regardless of whether or not they choose to report the crime. The legislation also does not indicate whether uncorroborated evidence from the victim will be accepted by a Court. According to S 114A of the Evidence Act, if the woman states that she did not consent, the Court is to presume that she did not. This runs the risk of not convicting the perpetrator if judges believe it is unfair to convict on the uncorroborated evidence of a woman. The lack of clear legal direction regarding prosecution of rape means that decisions related to weight and admissibility of evidence will be left to judicial discretion. See KWPN and GEN 2013. Moreover, it is not uncommon for the woman to be pressured to marry the rapist, or for the rapist to pay financial compensation to the victim and/or her family or appease the community through some in-kind service such as a good meal.

⁷² Attitudes treating rape and sexual assault as shameful have often led to female survivors being stigmatized by their families and community. Some female survivors of rape were afraid that their husbands would blame them for being raped. Some husbands directed their anger at their wives' being raped towards the survivor herself, rather than the perpetrator. This anger was expressed by abandoning the woman, or by verbal and physical abuse. KWO 2004.

⁷³ Interview, Mawlamyine, 17 October, 2014.

⁷⁴ Myanmar is not yet party to the international mine ban treaty. The heaviest deployments of landmines have been in Shan and Kayin states, but Mon state is one of several areas in south-east Myanmar affected by mines. Landmines have been used by both the government, military and ethnic armed groups, although according to some, the latter tended to inform villagers not to go where the landmines were or told them where to walk. UN Mine Action Service 2003; Interview Hpa-an, 6 October 2014.

⁷⁵ Gender and Mine Action Programme 2012.

⁷⁶ While respondents did not explicitly note the impact on women, responses from similar conflict-affected areas stated that in households where the lack of livelihoods led to male alcoholism, women faced higher risks of domestic violence.

⁷⁷ Gender and Mine Action Programme 2012.

“These families are mostly farmers. So when the man gets injured, there is no more income. For the wife, it is a burden, and she gets stressed. She has to manage the childcare and earn the income, and at the same time care for her husband.”

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 5 October 2014

Social attitudes and arrangements around gender in many contexts tend to marginalize women from education about landmine safety and access to care when they suffer injury. In the focus groups conducted for this project, the majority of respondents, especially women, had limited knowledge of the location and prevalence of landmines in Mon state. Women also face higher risks of being stigmatized when they are injured, and young unmarried women found it difficult to get married.

Death of Household Providers

Gender differentials revealed themselves clearly in discussions on the death of a household provider. The death of the male household provider in armed conflict had a significant economic impact on women and the household. Women bore the burden of being the sole income earners in an overall crisis situation as they often received no compensation for the death of their husbands and they had to continue raising their children and playing their community roles. When they did find work, they were often paid less than men for the same tasks. The impact extended to children, who often faced psychological problems and had to leave school to work in order to help support their families. This was more so for girls, reinforcing a vicious cycle of discrimination and inability to graduate out of poverty, especially for girls, as withdrawal from school impacts employment opportunities.

“My mother was only 24 years old when my father died. After he died, the family no longer had an income. My siblings and I helped to maintain the family. My older sister helped my mother, and I started working. Most of my siblings including me had to drop out of school to work. I worked as a cowboy, looking after cattle.”

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 6 October 2014

In contrast, interview respondents noted that if the woman is killed, the situation is not as difficult for men, who “simply” get a new wife.

“He gets another woman. It doesn’t affect him.”

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 16 October 2014

Respondents noted that economic hardship for the family may be less when the woman dies and the man continues to support the family. However, the family tends to disintegrate socially and emotionally when the wife dies, as children may be sent to boarding school or are raised by relatives, and this often has negative implications.

Loss of Livelihood, Land Confiscation and Appropriation of other Assets

Respondents maintained that the loss of property, assets - especially land - and livelihoods in conflict had one of the biggest negative effects on families and communities, as for many families in Myanmar, forests and farmlands are the lifeline.⁷⁸ Land confiscation affects men and women differently and results in different psychosocial impacts stemming from existing gender roles. Often male farmers who had taken loans on their land fell into debt, and faced greater risks of physical abuse.⁷⁹ Female respondents (and interestingly, no male respondents) explained that as most men in these states are heads of households and property owners, with social pressure and responsibility to be protectors and stewards of their physical property and households, seizure or loss of property, assets and livelihoods was traumatic. It represented a loss of status, honor, self-esteem and a threat to masculinity. The inability of men to fulfill their traditional roles in refugee or IDP camps, or those experiencing difficulties finding paid work, caused some men to fall into depression and engage in substance abuse. As a consequence, women often faced domestic violence.⁸⁰

Land ownership or user rights are overwhelmingly registered in the names of men, marginalizing women from control over major productive assets and related resources like credit. This created economic, emotional and social hardship for women who become new heads of households, especially in an environment of unlawful land grabbing and confiscation, or in the event of the death of a spouse or divorce.

Even if land was not confiscated, the inability to travel from IDP camps to tend and harvest crops or the appropriation of crops, or the inability to tend the land led to economic losses and had negative impacts on nutrition and food security.⁸¹

Respondents also noted that women who stayed behind in villages were vulnerable to extortion, and cited instances where soldiers would demand livestock and valuables from women in the absence of men. This was also done when male members were suspected of being part of the EAO.⁸²

Displacement and Migration

One way that men and women in Mon and Kayin states coped with conflict is by fleeing conflict-affected areas or migrating. This has resulted in large numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, and internal and overseas migrants.⁸³ Interview respondents stated that more men cross the border to actively look for work as construction workers, traders in shoes or textiles, etc. Yet women, particularly in Mon communities, have increasingly been securing public employment, including overseas as domestic workers, in informal manufacturing, construction and agro industries, especially in Thailand where there is demand for such work.⁸⁴ Women faced high risks of being trafficked and once again being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence in the course of migration on in sites of employment. Many women living in IDP camps have experienced sexual violence in the camps, for

⁷⁸ In Mon state, after the 1995 ceasefire, foreign investors eager to profit from the "last frontier of Asia"—an area rich in natural resources—began investing in largescale development projects in the region which has resulted in cases of land confiscation and extortion.

⁷⁹ HUFORM 2014, p.34.

⁸⁰ Interview, Hpa-an, 6 October, 2014.

⁸¹ TBC 2003.

⁸² KHRG 2006, pp.26-27.

⁸³ In Mon state, clashes between the NMSP and the *Tatmadaw* culminated in the fall of the NMSP Headquarters at the Three Pagoda Pass in 1990, causing thousands to flee to refugee camps in Thailand, and displacing up to 35,000 people in Ye Township alone. After the 1995 ceasefire, the conflict abated somewhat, except for sporadic clashes in the mid-2000s resulting in IDP levels rising from 31,000 to 48,700 from 2003 to 2004. According to a situation update by UNHCR in August 2014, an estimated 35,000 IDPs remain displaced in Ye Township. UNHCR estimates approximately 11,000 refugees from Mon state remain in Thailand, most originating from Bilin and Thaton townships. A 2014 UNHCR report records the current number of registered refugees (mostly in Thailand) originating from Kayin state at 52,276, while the latest estimate taken from The Border Consortium places the current number of IDPs in the state as 89,150 as of 2012. UNHCR 2014, p.1-2; UNHCR 2014a, p.3.

⁸⁴ WCRP 2009, p.20.

example when walking home alone or working in plantations.⁸⁵ In addition to sexual abuse, they receive lower wages than men and are responsible for providing for families after husbands or sons flee conflict or migrate.⁸⁶

"I divorced my husband over two years ago, and I need to care for and feed my children who attend school while I try to find work. In the camp many people work on the farm, but farm owners do not hire female laborers because they think women cannot work as hard as men. The male workers get paid 150 Thai Baht per day, and women should be able to work the same job for the same salary. It is very difficult for women who do not have a husband to get a job on the farm. If we could just get enough rice, I think we would not face such difficulties. Many women work hard and still only have enough money to buy food, but nothing extra."⁸⁷

IDPs and migrants are not entirely convinced that their safety and security will be guaranteed during and on return to their original homes. Nor are they convinced that there are adequate jobs available for them. Many fear reprisals. Many are unsure about getting their lands back. This coupled with a lack of widely disseminated, accurate information on organized safe repatriation and reintegration opportunities back home, makes return and resettlement a sensitive issue.⁸⁸



Photo: Julie Marie Hansen

⁸⁵ HURFORM 2012, p.36.

⁸⁶ HURFORM 2012.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

SECTION 5: MON AND KAREN WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO PEACE

Women are not just victims of conflict. They draw on their local knowledge, attributes and skills, leadership abilities and networks, developed through their socially mediated roles. They use this to contribute to a better understanding of peace, to meet the survival needs of families and communities, to mitigate, resolve and prevent conflict, and to engage in long-term recovery and peacebuilding.

Women's Contribution to a Comprehensive Definition of Peace

The Mon and Kayin experiences demonstrate that women view peace not just from the perspective of an absence of hostility, tension and violence, but as a situation marked by justice, equality, freedom and development for all—the absence of which are root causes of conflict. They believe that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace. These notions stem from their socially mediated nurturing and care giving roles, and their lived experience of the damaging short- and long-term impacts of conflict on entire communities.

“Women have the same right in every sector like economic, business and social, etc. If we regarded that women should only participate in business but not in politics, we cannot gain a perfect peace. In order for the peace to be perfect, all humans have a right to participate in it including the women. Therefore, we could accomplish it at once. We don't need to re-consider again and we will not waste time. For example, if we exclude women and only men did it and got all the agreement, our development will be slow if we only include women only after the agreement. It will be like we start all over again and it is a waste of time.”

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 29 July 2014

Women's Response to Survival Needs of Families and Communities, often as Household Heads

Women in Mon and Kayin states had to respond to and cope with crisis so that their families and communities survived.⁸⁹ In their traditional domestic and care giving roles, women took care of the acute daily sustenance needs of their families and communities - caring for the ill and elderly and nursing wounded family members.

Women became protectors, income earners and heads of households when men fled, migrated or were killed or injured in conflict. Respondents reported that while men traditionally took care of larger livestock, women took up this role.⁹⁰ They also embarked on income-generating activities traditionally meant for men, including transitioning from developing kitchen gardens to farming where possible; going to the forest to cut down trees to sell as firewood; running small businesses; selling fish, vegetables or groceries; or even owning and working on rubber plantations.⁹¹

Women in these new roles turned to their social networks and communities for assistance and especially relied on them for survival. In situations where women had nothing, relatives looked after them, or where family sources of livelihood — for example, livestock were confiscated, lands seized or crops destroyed, villagers lent their cows to plough the fields.⁹²

⁸⁹ Oo and Kusakabe 2010, p.488.

⁹⁰ Interview, Mawlamyine, 31 October, 2014.

⁹¹ Interviews, Mawlamyine, 16, 17 and 18 October, 2014.

⁹² Interviews, Mawlamyine, 16 and 18 October, 2014.

Women's Recognition of Early Warning Signs of Conflict

Mon and Karen women recognized indicators of conflict that signaled the outbreak of conflict. These included military preparations and intensification of activities, weapons stockpiling, troop movements in the vicinity of their villages, troop entry and army deployment to their villages, violence between drug dealers followed by conflict between the military and EAOs, the increase in harassment and violence against women; and the sounds of exploding landmines and gunfire. Women could predict conflict was brewing when men in the village held secret meetings. They verified information from passersby or the radio.

"We could tell something was going to happen when the men talked together secretly."

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 6 October 2014

Women's Informal Early Response Strategies to Avoid Conflict

Information Dissemination, Facilitating Flight and Concealment

Women acted immediately to prevent the outbreak of conflict. They disseminated information through their family and community networks by word of mouth to alert the community and EAOs of possible conflict. Women obtained information from passersby or from the radio and informed combatants about when and where it was safe for them to move. Through their community networks, knowledge of the local terrain, and adept word of mouth communication, they devised means of concealing themselves or family members in areas around their homes – from deep holes in the ground covered with bamboo and grass, to wells, toilet areas, unused lofts and stables. They assisted quick flight of male family members to avoid torture and death. Women also ensured men were in hiding as troops approached, so as to avoid violent confrontation:

"When the troops come in, the woman tells her husband to hide. Then when the troops leave, the woman goes to the hiding place and calls the husband to come back."

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 16 October 2014

Skillful Negotiation and Tension-diffusing Strategies

Women used skillful communication and tension-diffusing strategies to avoid confrontation and conflict with *Tatmadaw* soldiers and armed combatants. They often successfully persuaded parties to the conflict not to engage in combat in civilian inhabited areas, so as to avoid loss of lives and property. They negotiated with EAOs not to come to the villages to collect taxes on crops at harvest time, as the *Tatmadaw* also came to the villages at the same time. They negotiated instead that the community would pay them the taxes outside the village, thus preventing combat between the two conflicting parties in civilian sites. Women also communicated and interacted tactfully and graciously with the military when demands were made about the whereabouts of husbands suspected of being in or associated with EAOs, so as to minimize the risk of being assaulted.

Women's Contributions to Protecting Themselves, Families and Communities

Self Protection

Respondents stated that women had fewer options than men to physically protect themselves, their families and their communities, especially when men had to flee and women consequently had to stay behind. But they managed to protect themselves, in addition to taking up new economic and social responsibilities as primary breadwinners and heads of household. As one female respondent stated:

"You have to protect among yourself. If you are alone, then who will protect you?"

- Interview, Mawlamyine, Mon state, 27 July 2014

Women employed several protection strategies, including avoiding being in the line of direct conflict; staying at home after dark; being tactful and negotiating with or confronting perpetrators of violence; moving in groups and being accompanied by parents, elders and men to avoid sexual violence; fore-warning communities about particular perpetrators; reporting sexual violence with the intent to seek justice and ensure deterrence.

Protecting Men

Women have also protected the men fore-warning them about impending conflict, hiding them, facilitating flight and by staying behind in the village and taking over their roles including as village heads, household heads, forced porters, lest the men got tortured and killed.

"In my township, the village administration is mostly women [...] Because the army come to the village and ask for information, and if the leaders are men they are beaten and tortured. So no men dare to be the head. They assign women because they see them as free from torture or beatings."

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 5 October 2014

Protecting Families

Women also took household preparedness measures. They prepared and packed "family kits" that included food rations and other essentials required if the family needed to flee. They stored food reserves in safe places and organized how to flee safely with children and small animals. They sent children to relatives in non-conflict sites.

"Women are used to the long conflict, they are well-experienced in moving around and fleeing all the time. They keep food rations which they save and hide away elsewhere, and keep food reserves in the house. They put their small livestock in baskets so they can carry them easily when they need to run away. They carry the food reserves in baskets. There are big and small baskets the children take the small baskets, so they are ready to run. The women arrange all of this."

- Interview, Hpa-an, Kayin state, 5 October 2014

Women's Participation as Negotiators, Technical Advisors and Observers in the Current Peace Process

Women as Lead Negotiators and Members of Negotiating Teams

Out of the 14 EAOs that recently signed bilateral ceasefires agreements with the government, 3 from Mon and Kayin states had women in their negotiating teams. These are the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP)⁹³ and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)⁹⁴. The KNU had at least 3 women members in its cease fire negotiating team between 2011-2012, at the time of its 14th Congress.⁹⁵ Though the numbers are still low, it holds promise for the future, as younger women see them as role models. The participation of these women at the peace table is due to their senior decision-making positions within the three non-state armed groups.⁹⁶

Since 2015, a Karen woman is now part of the negotiation team that represents the ethnic armed groups in their efforts to negotiate the nation-wide ceasefire agreement with the government.⁹⁷

Women technical experts and advisors to ethnic armed organizations

As bilateral ceasefire negotiations proceeded between the KNU and the government in 2011-2012, a female legal expert joined the KNU peace negotiation team.⁹⁸ Mon and Karen women have been contributing to national peacebuilding and have been advising the leaders of ethnic armed organizations on shaping some of the peace processes to reach a comprehensive peace agreement. Some of them have been coordinating and facilitating the meetings of the armed groups in order to prepare a national level peace plan, and have gained trust and respect as a result of their neutrality, expertise, and level of education. Examples of such women in prominent advisory roles could transform the leadership's perception of the role of women in peace processes and enhance women's participation.⁹⁹

Mon and Karen Women among Observers at the Peace Table

Individual women and women representatives of some women's civil society groups have had seats at the peace table as observers. But the numbers of male observers at the peace table outstrips women. Interestingly both government and ethnic armed organizations such as the NMSP and KNU have been inviting local Mon and Karen women and international observers (individuals and representatives of civil society, including women's organizations) to the peace talks, as they consider them knowledgeable and flexible on issues being discussed between the government and ethnic armed organizations. They are also regarded as more neutral with no vested economic or political interests.¹⁰⁰

⁹³The NMSP had one woman, Mi Sar Dar in the negotiating team. She was a member of the Central Committee and Head of the Education Department. However she was not involved in the recent meetings.

⁹⁴The KNPP has one woman member, Maw Oo Myah (alias Daw Dae Dae Paw), who is the Religious and Cultural Minister of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP).

⁹⁵This included Naw Zipporah Sein, who was the General Secretary of the Karen National Union at the time and also a lead negotiator, Naw May Oo Mutraw former spokesperson of the KNU and Naw Blooming Night Zan, Head of the Karen Refugee Committee. However, Naw Zipporah Sein's has been promoted to Vice-Chair of KNU, and was on the negotiating team and so are the other women.

⁹⁶Interview with Ja Nan Lahtaw, Deputy Executive Director of Shalom Foundation, in November 2013, Yangon.

⁹⁷Naw Zipporah Sein, the deputy chair of KNU.

⁹⁸Khen and Nyoi 2014.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰The following women were invited as observers to the peace negotiations: Kristine Gould, a military strategist from the United States and Emma Leslie, Director of a Regional NGO were invited by the KNU to its negotiations, while a businesswoman from Dawei Princess Company, a Myanmar oil, gas and mining company was invited by the government negotiation team to be observers to the process. Mai Chin Chin, a member of the Chin Peace and Tranquility Committee (CPTC) was invited by the Chin National Front; Margaret Tomo was invited by the UPWC for talks with the KNPP; Dr. Anna May Say Pa, former Principal of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Naw Susanna Hla Hla Soe, Director of the Karen Women's Empowerment Group and Nant Khin Aye Oo member of the Karen Affairs Committee were invited by KNU. Mi Kun Chan Non, vice-chairperson of the Mon women's organization was invited by the NMSP. Khen and Nyoi 2014.

While women's role as observers is limited to listening, observing and providing feedback after meetings, it gives them a good understanding of the discussions and negotiating process. Moreover, observer roles provide a channel for women to communicate with the government and with decision-makers.

Role of Mon and Karen Civil Society Organizations in the Peace Process

Women's civil society groups in Mon and Kayin states are active on women, peace and security issues, advocating with armed groups, union and state governments to include women and their priorities in the peace process. They have this through letters of appeal, discussions and dialogue with concrete recommendations including calling for the cessation of armed hostilities and a nation-wide ceasefire agreement. They are also actively engaged in awareness-raising among communities on peace negotiations.¹⁰¹

Further, women's organizations in Myanmar, including ethnic women's networks have been organizing conferences that articulate a women's peace agenda. Some of these include, the Myanmar Women's Forum on Women, Peace and Security in 2012, 2013 and 2014; the National Women's Dialogue on Peace, Security and Development, November 2013, in Yangon – of which ethnic women's organizations from Mon and Kayin states have been a part, as well as large conferences by ethnic women's organizations such as the Mon Women's organization, the Chin and Kachin women's organizations and others.

Most recently an Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process in Myanmar has been formed to better co-ordinate civil society work on women, peace and security. The alliance is mapping the work done on women peace and security and developing a robust work plan on the issue. Women's groups from Mon and Kayin states are a part of the alliance.

Women's Contribution to Long-Term Peacebuilding

Women have been playing important roles in support of the peace process and have been engaged in a range of long-term peacebuilding activities. Many women are engaged in building networks among important peacebuilding actors, including CSOs and religious leaders as well as with national political and international actors; coordinating among stakeholders in the peace process; dealing with media; providing technical advice and managing logistics. A female respondent talked at length about the women-only logistics team used by the KNU on a trip in 2012 for the first round of union ceasefire discussions. Women were responsible for planning the trip, arranging accommodation and transportation. The women were all volunteers and according to the respondent, were motivated to provide support after seeing a Karen woman, Naw Zipporah Sein, in a leadership position in the 2012 bilateral ceasefire talks.¹⁰²

Mon and Karen women have demonstrated their ability to work with the dominant EAOs in their states, including to begin calling their attention to gender equality and women's rights issues such as women's right to representation in governance structures and the peace process; ending sexual and gender-based violence. For example, the Mon Women's Organization's connection to the NMSP allows it to advocate for women's greater participation in formal decision-making roles. In 2012, the MWO submitted an official statement to the NMSP urging a 30 percent quota for women's participation in the peace process. They did not receive a reply, but were able to formulate this due to their legitimacy as an established organization that represents the interests of NMSP constituencies in the areas that they administer. The MWO also partners with the NMSP and other actors to respond to women's issues in

¹⁰¹ Discussion with women in Mon and Kayin states in July and October 2014.

¹⁰² Interview, Hpa-an, 6 October, 2014.

conflict-affected areas. For example, if a case of sexual and gender-based violence is reported to the village head in sites in which the MWO has a presence, the village authority is required to notify the MWO. When the NMSP had to release control of many of its areas after the ceasefire, it relied on MWO, HURFOM and other CBOs to liaise with them and share information so that villagers and community members needing assistance could be reached out to.

CBOs and CSOs are also well placed to engage with international actors via funding, capacity-building, advocacy, and research partnerships. They have also demonstrated skill in local, national, regional and global networking. This has resulted in securing national and international resources to support their advocacy and capacity-building for a women's peace agenda. For example, HURFOM, in Mon state as a human rights organization, was able to appeal to international donors, and now has a field reporter who can document and collect data in new areas. This has resulted in better and more consistent, targeted and concerted national and international advocacy for accountability to women and their concerns.

Women have established CSOs and CBOs and networks of these to mobilize community action on a peace and development agenda. These organizations address the concerns of children, youth, women and men on a range of issues and organize a wide range of activities— data collection on human rights and women's rights abuses; access to education, health care, vocational and skills training, land rights; dismantling barriers to women's participation in politics and the peace process through awareness-raising and information-sharing; addressing sexual and gender based violence; engaging in peace education in communities as well as support and service provision in IDP and refugee camps.¹⁰³

Women lead many of these organizations and have developed an understanding of the development needs of children, the ill, the elderly in their communities. They have also developed leadership, planning, organizational, communication, advocacy and negotiating skills in the process.

¹⁰³ While not an exhaustive list, the following provides an overview of some of the local organizations in which women work towards building peace in Mon and Kayin states: the Mon Women's Organization, the Mon Women's Network, the Girl Aspiration Project (GAP), the Mon Youth Progressive Organization (MYPO), the Myanmar Youth Educator Organization (MYEO), the Border Health Initiative (BHI), the Mon National Teacher Group, Shin Saw Pu, Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), the Civil Society Development Network, and the Mon Civil Society Organization Network; Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People (CIDKP); the Hpa-an Diocese Mothers' Union; the Hpa-an Karen Baptist Christian Social Service and Development Department (Kayah Hpu CSSDD); the Hpa-an Thu Group; the Karen Affairs Committee; the Karen Development Committee (KDC); the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN); the Karen Development Network (KDN); the Karen Environmental and Social Action Network (KESAN); the KHRG; the Karen Unity and Peace Committee; the KWEG; the KWO; Sar Mu Htwaw; and the Shalom Foundation, Karen State Office.

SECTION 6: AN ANALYTICAL PROFILE OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE AND PEACE STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES IN MON AND KAYIN STATES

The preceding sections clearly lay out how Mon and Karen women have been impacted by conflict and the various ways and levels at which they are contributing to different aspects of the peace process. However, they are vastly underrepresented in formal political structures and institutions, and the peace architecture (including at senior levels), that seek to mitigate conflict and contribute to lasting peace and development.

In Mon state, the NMSP makes strategic decisions through a Central Committee¹⁰⁴ and a Central Military Committee,¹⁰⁵ among others. Currently, only 1 out of 32 Central Committee members is a woman. Also, in the All Mon Regions Democracy Party¹⁰⁶, women are vastly underrepresented. The party's Women's Affairs Department consists of three women and two men, and is currently led by a man.

By contrast, the KNU is the only armed organization in the peace process that has one woman out of 10 men in top-level leadership positions in its Central Executive Committee.¹⁰⁷ The group's Central Committee has 45 members, only two of whom are women.¹⁰⁸ However, there are no female state ministers in the Kayin state government and there is only one female Member of the Union Parliament from Kayin state.¹⁰⁹

Out of the 14 non-state armed organizations that have bilateral ceasefires agreements with the government, 3 have had women in their negotiating teams - the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). The NMSP had one woman in the negotiating team.¹¹⁰ The KNU had 3 women members in its cease fire negotiating team between 2011-2012, at the time of its 14th Congress.¹¹¹

Respondents noted that the most common barriers to women's participation in politics, decision-making and the peace process were the following: widely internalized perceptions of men as public figures, leaders, political strategists, combatants and women as caregivers and homemakers; the structure of the peace talks that by and large includes parties to the conflict and combatants; low value placed on women; resistance by those in power (mostly men) and fear.

¹⁰⁴ Containing chairman, vice-chairman, general secretary and joint secretary positions.

¹⁰⁵ Containing commander-in-chief and deputy commander-in-chief positions.

¹⁰⁶ This party is part of the state political system, not to be confused with the NMSP or another EAO.

¹⁰⁷ Khen and Nyoï 2014, p.31.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p.43.

¹⁰⁹ Nan Say Awar from the Phlon-Swaw Democratic Party.

¹¹⁰ Mi Sa Dar was a member of the Central Committee and Head of the Education Department. However, she is not involved in the recent nation-wide ceasefire agreement negotiations.

¹¹¹ This included Naw Zipporah Sein, who was the General Secretary of the Karen National Union at the time and also a lead negotiator, Naw May Oo Mutraw former spokesperson of the KNU and Naw Blooming Night Zan, Head of the Karen Refugee Committee. Naw Zipporah Sein's has been promoted to Vice-Chair of KNU, and is currently involved in the nation-wide ceasefire negotiations. The KNPP had one woman member, Maw Oo Myah (alias Daw Dae Dae Paw), who is the Religious and Cultural Minister of the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Khen and Nyoï 2014, p.31.

More women respondents emphasized that social pressure to remain in secondary household roles, the lack of family or community support and the lack of time as well as financial means kept women from actively engaging in politics and the peace process, while men had more freedom, money and time. More male respondents argued that women lacked confidence and a thorough understanding of politics, and that this hampered their political participation and engagement in the peace process.

Despite women's inadequate representation in politics and decision-making and in the formal peace architecture, it holds out the promise for the future as many women and increasingly also men begin to recognize women's value in the peace process.

SECTION 7: MAKING THE CASE FOR INCLUDING WOMEN AND THEIR PRIORITIES IN MYANMAR'S CURRENT PEACE PROCESS

As noted in the introduction, including women and their priorities in all aspects of Myanmar's peace process is a woman's right. Women also have the right to seek redress and reparation for damage, loss and harm suffered in conflict. Including women equally with men at all stages of the peace process and addressing their priorities in peace agreements and post conflict planning would demonstrate the Government of Myanmar's commitment to constitutional provisions of gender equality and women's rights, and to international human rights agreements, that it has endorsed. Such a move would also signal responsiveness to calls for inclusion by gender equality and women's empowerment advocates in Myanmar.

Further women make up 52 percent of Myanmar's total population and 52 percent and 51 percent of the population in Mon and Kayin states respectively. Mon and Karen women in conflict-affected communities bring their experiences, local knowledge, attributes and skills, leadership abilities and networks, developed through their socially mediated roles, to contribute to a better understanding of peace, to meet the survival needs of families and communities, to mitigate, resolve and prevent conflict, and to engage in long-term recovery and peacebuilding. The following section argues that including women - more than half the human population - and their priorities in all aspects of the peace process would enhance the inclusiveness and sustainability of Myanmar's peace process.

Women's Unique Understanding of Peace, and Greater Desire for Peace

- The Mon and Kayin experiences demonstrate that women view peace not just from the perspective of an absence of hostility, tension and violence, but as a situation marked by justice, equality, freedom and development for all—the absence of which are root causes of conflict. They believe that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace. These notions stem from their socially mediated nurturing and care giving roles, and their lived experience of the damaging short- and long-term impacts of conflict on entire communities.
- As elsewhere, Mon and Karen women are neither the main ignitors of conflict nor the majority of combatants. While men tend to be pre-occupied with combat, many women have a great desire for peace, as they realize that conflict cannot generate healthy socialization, stable human beings and communities. This desire is demonstrated by the numerous ways in which women contribute to conflict prevention, protection and peacebuilding and help foster more inclusive development—through education, for instance, and alternatives to arms.

Women's Unique Knowledge and Understanding of the Impacts of Armed Conflict on themselves and Families

- Women have their own unique knowledge of the specific impacts of armed conflict garnered through their direct experience in the different roles they play as combatants, nurturers, protectors, conflict mitigators, peace advocates and peacebuilders; and through the active role they play in monitoring the situation on women's human rights
- Women clearly demonstrate an understanding of how conflict impacts their children, other family members and communities. Their socially mediated roles give them insights into the problems and needs of groups other than themselves. They know, for example, what it means for themselves and their families when husbands have to flee to avoid torture, death or forced portering; or when male family members are disabled or die in conflict; or when women and girls are sexually abused; or the effects of being a child soldier. They understand and deal with long-term impacts of exclusion from education on children and society. They experience and address the impacts of inadequate nutrition, clean water, sanitation and healthcare services. They know what it means to live in constant fear and hate and endure severely restricted mobility.

Women's Ability to Best Represent their Own Interests

- Women are best able to represent their own priorities in ways in which they can contribute to all aspects of the peace process, given their in-depth understanding of how they experience and cope with conflict, and how they contribute to peace.
- Women are able to forge cross-ethnic and cross-sectoral alliances with other women and ally with a range of stakeholders to obtain a common women's peace agenda. The networks that women from Mon and Kayin states have forged within each of these states and beyond, testify to this.

Women's Knowledge, Skills, Resources and Efforts on Conflict Resolution and Prevention, Protection and Peacebuilding

- As section 5 of this publication on Mon and Karen Women's Contribution to Peace demonstrates, women have a unique understanding of peace that embraces equality, justice, freedom and development for all – and not just the absence of overt hostilities and armed conflict. Women are not the ignitors of conflict and more women desire peace than men, given women's deep experience and understanding of the long-term impacts of conflict on themselves and their communities.
- Women have responded to the survival needs of their families and communities, in crisis contexts, often assuming the role of household head in the absence of male members of the family. This has meant taking on non-traditional work, workload increases, bearing greater emotional stress, taking decisions. Better placed women and families have looked after badly impacted relatives and shared their resources with them.
- Women have a good understanding of the warning signs of conflict – troop movement, weapons stock piling, harassment of women and girls, to name a few.
- They have taken quick action to avoid conflict, such as information alerts by word of mouth and by deploying their social networks; facilitating flight and relocation of male members of the family; used tension diffusing strategies such as gracious interactions with the military and distracting communication. They also skillfully advocated with the military and EAOs to fight outside the village to save lives and property.
- Women have protected men by allowing them to flee while they stayed behind to hold up the family and community; assuming roles of village heads as men needed to flee to avoid arrest or torture.

They have taken household preparedness measures such as safe storage of valuables, household preparedness kits, including baskets with small animals if quick flight was warranted; relocation of children and fragile family members to non-conflict sites. Women have protected themselves by staying out of the line of direct conflict, moving around in groups, and negotiating skillfully with perpetrators of violence.

- A few Mon and Karen women are represented in government political structures and in those of EAOs. A few have also been on the bilateral ceasefire negotiating teams in 2011-12; served as technical advisors to EAOs and were invited as observers to the bilateral ceasefire negotiations.
- Women's civil society groups in both states are advocating with government and EAOs to include women and their priorities in the peace process and in long-term development planning and implementation.
- Finally women have formed various CSOs and CBOs working on community awareness-raising to include women and their priorities in the peace process, and are through these organizations also addressing long-term development needs of women and other sections of the community.

Women's Greater Ability to Address a Wider Range of Interests and Priorities in Peace Agreements than Men, making for Greater Inclusiveness and Sustainability

- Women in their socially prescribed nurturing and caregiving roles have a good understanding of the impacts of conflict on children, the disabled, the ill and the elderly and other groups.
- Further, Mon and Karen women in their peacebuilding work engage with varied populations, including children, youth and religious groups, understand and address the development needs of different vulnerable groups. They are thus more likely than men to represent not just their own interests, but those of other groups on social and economic issues such as health, education, water, sanitation, livelihoods, shelter, safety and security, etc. This makes for more representative, comprehensive and sustainable peace agreements.

Women's Complementary Skills in Peace Processes

- In the first instance, as noted earlier, women tend to have a different vision of peace than men. Women's knowledge, skills, resources and leadership styles developed through their socially mediated roles tend to be complementary to those of men. Women tend to be better listeners, more patient and intuitive, more flexible and able to find points of consensus and compromise. They are better able to diffuse tensions and are better multi-taskers. This can only make for quicker, more effective peace negotiations and agreements. Data from Mon and Kayin states show that women have demonstrated abilities to form networks and alliances, build trust between different communities; and engage with both political and international actors through advocacy. Women's civil society and community-based organizations have transmitted knowledge and experience through awareness-raising initiatives that created more conscious constituencies, including on women's concerns from a rights perspective. Women's invaluable knowledge, skills, resources, social and political linkages and demonstrated leadership in CBOs and CSOs engaged in peacebuilding and development work needs to be capitalized on as integral to the peace process. This will make for more inclusive and sustainable peace and development, and be an important indicator of the success of the current reform process.

Inclusion of Women and their Priorities Optimizes Investments in Long-term Recovery and Peacebuilding

- Further, more equal representation of women and their priorities in all aspects of peace processes is critical to addressing women's long-term recovery and development needs. Where women's issues are not included in peace agreements from the outset, it becomes increasingly difficult to address them later on.¹¹²This is because the amount of 'gender-based expenditures' in post-conflict budgets is partly determined by the prior analytical and planning instruments that identify needs and enable priority-setting. Less than 3 percent of the indicative budgets of Post-Conflict Needs Assessments or Poverty Reduction Plans worldwide are dedicated to women's and girls' specific needs. The exclusion of women-half the constituency from peacebuilding and poverty reduction efforts fails to optimize the resources invested in reconciliation and recovery. This potentially undermines the pace of recovery and the equitable distribution of peace dividends.

Much needs to be done, to ensure the inclusion of women and their priorities meaningfully and effectively in all aspects of the peace process.

¹¹² Nicol 2012, p.3.

SECTION 8: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study makes the following recommendations for action towards the above end, through multi-sector partnerships between government, ethnic armed organizations, ethnic women's groups, civil society organizations, the media and international organizations:

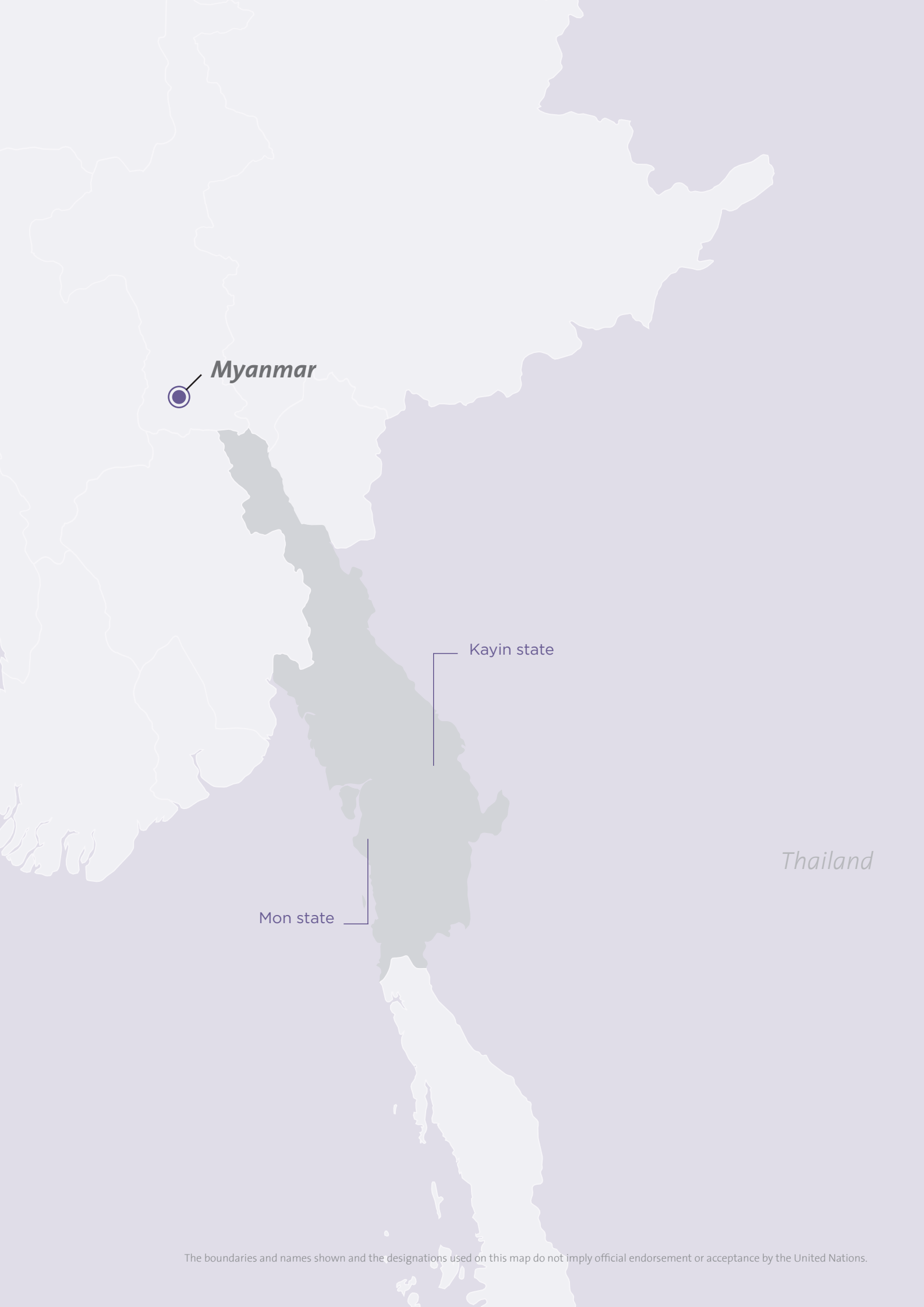
- Develop and disseminate sex-disaggregated data on women, peace and security, and undertake a gender analysis of relevant peace and security issues rife in local contexts, in line with CEDAW, 1979, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995, and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions.
- Include provisions on gender equality and women's rights in Myanmar's prospective nationwide ceasefire agreement, and its implementation.
- Develop and implement well-resourced National, Regional/State Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security with gender-sensitive targets and indicators, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions.
- Adopt and implement the National Law to Prevent Violence against Women and provide accessible psycho-social support, health services, legal aid, emergency shelters and employment for survivors of all forms of violence, in normal times and in conflict.
- Ensure well-resourced post-conflict economic policies, plans and programs which enhance women's economic empowerment, especially of the most vulnerable groups of women.
- Ensure that Myanmar's draft land use policy and proposed revisions to the Farmland Law and the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law, 2012, incorporate the suggestions of women engaged in agriculture and of gender equality and women's rights advocates. This should include women's equal rights to secure land tenure, independent or joint titling, access to the range of productive resources in agriculture, women's perspectives on land use and development and access to a range of remedies and reparations in the event of land confiscation.
- Pursue security and justice sector reform through the introduction and implementation of gender-sensitive mandates, standard operating procedures and gender-sensitive capacity-building so personnel at all levels of these sectors in government and non-government controlled areas enhance security for women and their access to justice.
- Ensure increased representation of women, especially ethnic women, and their priorities, in post-conflict governance mechanisms, including conflict-monitoring mechanisms, mechanisms for political dialogue, in senior positions in government and in the security and justice sectors (in government and non-government controlled areas).
- Disseminate information and build women's capacities on the following: data collection and analysis; the international human rights architecture on women, peace and security; the national peace architecture and process; collaboration with government and non-state actors to formulate, implement, resource, monitor and evaluate policies and programs on women, peace, security and development; and on practical skills related to advocacy, coalition-building, communication, negotiation and mediation.

- Build capacities of government and non-state institutions in all sectors and at all administrative levels to formulate, implement, resource, monitor and evaluate policies, laws, plans and programs addressing women's rights in peace, security and development.
- Promote gender sensitive education, including peace education and conflict sensitivity training, for and through all media, both state and private, and through revised educational curricula for students.
- Support networking and coalition-building among women's and peace organizations and support the work plans that they develop and implement on women, peace and security.

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