The report on Education and Peacebuilding in Myanmar is part of the work of the Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding, which is co-led by the Universities of Amsterdam, Sussex and Ulster, and supported by UNICEF’s Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy (PBEA) programme. This report addresses three thematic Research Areas in the case of Myanmar:

1. **Policy**
   - How is peacebuilding integrated into the education sector at macro and micro policy levels?

2. **Teachers**
   - What is the role of teachers in the peacebuilding process of a country?

3. **Youth**
   - How do formal/non-formal peacebuilding education programmes address the agency of youth?

The report draws on the theoretical framework developed for this broader consortium (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, Smith, 2015). This gives a distinctive focus on the role of education within cultural, political and economic processes of conflict and peacebuilding from a “4Rs perspective”, including the strongly interconnected dimensions of, Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, and Reconciliation (for further information see Research Briefing 2, Theoretical and Analytical Framework).

This 4Rs framework combines social justice and transitional justice thinking to develop a normative framework for the study of education and peacebuilding, which recognises the multiple dimensions of inequality and injustice that often drive contemporary conflicts and the need to address the legacies of these conflicts in and through education.

**Conflict Within the Historical and Contemporary Context of Conflict Affected Myanmar**

Conflict within Myanmar largely falls into three interdependent movements: the struggle of armed ethnic groups for greater self-determination; the pro-democracy movements resisting oppressive practices by the military-dominated State; and the more recent resurfacing of inter-religious tensions. Since 2011, the government initiated multiple reform processes, including an education sector review. However, actual transformations towards a more sustainable peace remains volatile given the positive as well as negative impact that international aid has had on building confidence in the peace process, and considering the security and economic focus of the current government’s peacebuilding agenda. Myanmar’s education system is symptomatic of its weak state institutions that are unable to provide for the welfare of its citizens, leading to relatively poor access indicators, particularly for marginalised groups. Such inequities (along ethnic, class and gender lines) exist between different regions of the country and disaggregated analysis of enrolment data is limited. Finally, although slowly increasing, the government spends relatively little on the education sector in comparison to, for instance, the defence budget.

**Policy Challenges of a Situation in Flux**

A central issue in the current landscape of Myanmar is the ongoing processes of peace negotiations between the government and multiple ethnic armed groups (EAGs), which are as yet unresolved after six decades of fighting. The primary rationale for education reform at present is driven by an imperative to modernise the education system for Myanmar’s integration into ASEAN and the global economy, and to improve inclusive access to quality education provision from a human capital and economic development paradigm. Analysis of draft texts of the National Education Sector Plan (NESP) and Education Law suggests that “peacebuilding is everywhere and nowhere”: everywhere in the sense that there seems to be a recognition of the need to place education reform process in the actual context of inequalities and frustrations; yet it is nowhere as a peacebuilding logic or language is notably absent from key reforms. A key tension exists within this reform package between the aim to deliver quick, visible peace dividends, and the desire to take an evidence-based, systematic approach to the education sector as a whole.
**Teachers’ Roles in Ongoing Processes of Peacebuilding and Conflict**

Teacher’s space for manoeuvre as potential peacebuilders is constrained and conditioned by a range of issues, including how they are perceived and framed by a range of actors, systems of teacher governance and accountability, professional development opportunities and the curriculum they work with. Traditionally, teachers have been held in high esteem within communities across Myanmar. However, the status of the profession has been undermined by chronic underinvestment in the education sector, leading to teachers suffering material hardship. There exist continuing *material imbalances in resources and provision of teachers* between the government and the monastic, ethnic and community education systems. Despite moves to decentralization, the continuation of a centralized system of governance limits management of teachers to ensure their suitability within their working environment. Current flaws in the process of teacher recruitment, training and promotion lead to a concentration of inexperienced and unqualified teachers in primary education. As part of the broader reform agenda, Myanmar’s primary level basic education curriculum has been undergoing reform since March 2014. The revised curriculum, which is currently awaiting approval from the minister, does not explicitly refer to peacebuilding. However, specific components of envisaged content, including the reduction of references to the military in social studies, indicate a commitment to the opportunity to *delegitimise violence*.

**Youth’s Restricted Space for Peacebuilding in and Beyond Education**

The absence of data on youth was perceived to undercut effective policymaking tailored to the specific (economic, but also political and socio-cultural) needs and concerns of youth across the country. In the absence of state level youth policy or a dedicated Ministry/Minister, there is both limited acknowledgment of the political citizenship rights of youth, nor recognition of cultural and linguistic identities and needs in policy and programmatic responses. Within the priorities and programming of international actors, there is acknowledgement that Myanmar’s youth has been neglected. The dominant perception of youth as a potential security threat leaves little space for youth to employ political, economic or socio-cultural agency for peacebuilding. A major societal challenge in Myanmar is the absenteeism and high dropout rates in formal schooling, which was largely understood as a product of family poverty, financial pressures and inadequate education provision.

Youth identified *various factors which undermined their agency*, including: lack of access to quality and relevant education, restricted political engagement, lack of job opportunities and low salaries, lack of access to health facilities and reproductive health awareness and poverty. *Education was seen as a key contribution to the transformative strategies* identified by youth in relation to their agency as peacebuilders.

**Ways Forward**

**Better Consider the Role of Education in and Within Peacebuilding Processes**

1. At present, there is a stark divide between the national peace process and education reform. As ways forward:
   a. Educational actors need to better understand the key grievances of the multitude of non-state actors and civil society to formulate appropriate policy responses.
   b. On the side of the (inter-)national peacebuilding community, there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the foundational importance of equitable social service delivery that is both quantitatively and qualitatively supporting the construction of a sustainable peace.
   c. There is a need to move education reform beyond the modernisation paradigm, and to situate it with processes of building a citizenry that is inclusive and reconciliatory.
2. New opportunities exist to make inclusion, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding central pillars for further reform. To date, peacebuilding principles are notably absent from key reforms.
3. Venues for more effective engagement and multi-stakeholder participation in processes of education reform need to be considered, to avoid the creation of new grievances.
4. Stronger reform is needed of existing language of instruction policy. The inability for children to learn and use their mother tongues in schooling has been a long-standing grievance of various ethnic groups.
5. The gendered experiences and outcomes of schooling for boys and girls vary and must be better considered.

**Supporting the Role of Teachers and Teaching/Learning to Foster Peacebuilding**

1. From a peacebuilding perspective, teacher education could benefit from greater coherence and logic, with particular attention to the constraints within which teachers work.
2. Opportunities to bring teachers together across the various (non-)state education sectors could be increased.
3. In the urge to draw on so-called international best practices, the valuable contextual knowledge and practical wisdom of current teachers working in diverse communities within the country may be side-lined.
4. There are concerns that bridging the parallel systems and offering greater standardisation may not acknowledge the particular needs, challenges and expected roles of teachers vis a vis their communities - teacher accountability might be better managed within the profession itself, and ideally at the level of the school or township.

5. Teachers are acutely aware of the inequalities that exist in terms of the resourcing and distribution of learning materials (i.e. textbooks, school uniforms etc.). It is critical from a peacebuilding standpoint, that promises of change are followed by meaningful action.

6. Policies that aim to redistribute resources related to teaching and learning should better consider consequences in terms of equity within and across the various education sectors.

7. To ensure the adequate representation and recognition of women’s voices in administrative and policy-making roles in education, avenues for the promotion of women into key decision-making roles in the education sector need to be strengthened.

8. Significant issues remain in how teachers are deployed and managed within the state system and at the school level. In particular:
   a. Greater consideration must be given to the needs of particular school communities, as well as the qualifications, language(s) spoken, experience, background, and obligations (i.e. family) of individual teachers.
   b. Schools and townships across the country should maintain a standard teacher : student ratio that needs to be regularly monitored, with processes of deployment/ redeployment responding to changes in enrolment numbers.
   c. At the school level itself, school leaders and township education officers should (be made able to) ensure that teachers’ time and skill levels are being efficiently and effectively utilised across all grades.

9. Curriculum reform should provide teachers with training and a greater sense of autonomy to contextualise content and to be able to incorporate principles of peacebuilding. Reform of the assessment system, and the consolidation of an overcrowded curriculum will be essential.

10. Appropriate school facilities should be made available to all students and teachers in Myanmar, including those outside the state system.

Supporting the Socio Cultural, Political and Economic Agency of Youth in Peacebuilding

1. There is a strong desire and need for increased physical and virtual spaces available for youth to learn and connect both formally and informally.

2. There is a clear need for greater coherent policy development and institutional co-ordination at national and state level on youth related issues including under/unemployment, marginalisation, and disempowerment from political processes.

3. There is an urgent need for greater and meaningful representation of diverse youth voices in political processes at multiple scales.

4. (Formal and non-formal) education can contribute to youth political empowerment by equipping them with knowledge and understanding of political processes.

5. Policy and practice must move beyond considering youth as a singular entity, and better acknowledge the distinctive, contrasting priorities of various youth constituencies.

6. The impact of gender, sexual orientation and sexual health and reproductive rights require greater systematic consideration within and throughout education experiences and interventions.

7. In the reform of the formal education systems, attention needs to be paid to ensure relevance of both content and learning experiences.

8. There is a need for a greater variety of flexible and continued learning opportunities responding to the diverse needs of different youth constituencies.

9. The strengths of non-formal educational initiatives – recognition of pre-existing youth agency and experiences and their ability to attend and respond to their diverse contexts and challenges – can be built upon in the formal and non-formal system.

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