Chapter 3 – Conflict and Peacebuilding: Background, Challenges and Intersections with Education

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Abstract
This chapter presents an overview of the diverse nature of Myanmar’s conflicts and investigates their root causes. This includes a brief look at the historical dimensions of Myanmar’s long-standing conflicts, before addressing more recent processes of political transition and contemporary conflict dynamics. The chapter then outlines the renewal of peace negotiations, with a particular focus on the inter-election period of the Thein Sein government prior to the change in political rule in 2016. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the position that education occupies within the peacebuilding architecture.

Introduction
The multiple, simultaneous nature of Myanmar’s conflicts, stemming from long rooted historical grievances as well as more recent triggers, presents a pattern of complex issues and actors within which to situate the role of education. This chapter aims to introduce this context of the various conflicts and peace processes in Myanmar which provide a backdrop for the research conducted and is further explored in the subsequent chapters. In so doing, I draw on experiences in the context and existing literature, as well as data collected with those involved in the peace processes and education reforms.

The chapter starts with a brief discussion summary of key historical events that informed Myanmar’s independence transition, followed by an outline of the antecedents to the conflicts, covering the origins of the ethnic civil wars and the dominance of the military junta. Additional dimensions to the conflicts are also introduced including some of the historical political, economic and socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the current climate of a complex interplay between inter-religious, inter-community and inter-ethnic hostility. This is accompanied by a discussion of political transitions since 2010 and the resurfacing of religious tensions which have preceded current hostilities in Rakhine State.

I then outline the status of peace processes, providing some background on the nature of the peace negotiations to date and identifying some of the key actors involved in forging ceasefire agreements between ethnic armed groups and the state. The chapter concludes by exploring the location of education within the broader peacebuilding architecture of Myanmar, and the implications for current approaches to education reform efforts. A key point to make about the analysis in this chapter is that much of it explores the evolution of

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change, rather than its outcomes, as both the peace process and education (as well as broader socio-political and economic) reforms are in a state of transition.

**Historical Context to Myanmar’s Conflicts**

Prior to the Anglo-Burmese wars of the mid-19th century, the territory that became Myanmar was ruled by a series of powerful, and at times overlapping, kingdoms. Of particular relevance for the geographical orientation of this research, the Buddhist Mon kingdoms exerted substantial power in South East Asia and dominated the southeast territories that stretched from Bago (then Pegu) across Thailand until the 18th century (South 2008). The influence of these successive kingdoms has left a distinctive legacy in Mon State of pride in pre-colonial history and ethnic identity constructions, including language and religion (Lall & South 2013, 11). These legacies continue to hold influence and resurface in education settings, where much history teaching has focused on the pre-colonial kingdoms (Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012).

Following a piecemeal process of colonisation dating from the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824, Myanmar, then known as Burma, was fully under British control by 1885 and largely remained so until independence in 1948. Yangon (then Rangoon) was established as the capital and colonial rule shaped the legal, administrative and education systems. This impact is enduring and is particularly evident in issues of language of instruction in the education systems, where English use remains prominent (British Academy & École française d’Extrême-Orient 2015, 5). Likewise, agreements made between the British administration and the varied ethnic groups over the extent of their autonomy continue to be a source of contestation and a driver of conflicts (TNI 2013). Dissent always accompanied imperialism and was commonly met with brutal suppression. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s nationalist movements gained traction, with monks, university students and workers organisations all leading protests (Holliday 2011, 36-7), fomenting a pattern of civil resistance to oppressive leadership which would become a recurrent feature of Myanmar’s modern history. World War II brought further disruption to colonial rule and an unsettling of variant alliances during the Japanese occupation between 1942 and 1945. By the end of the war, General Aug San had emerged as a leading independence hero and was instrumental in negotiating the transferal of administrative powers back to a national government. However, conflicts were already beginning to surface amongst a climate of dissatisfaction in the ethnic territories as well as emerging political and ideological divisions.
The Panglong Conferences

The original Panglong Conferences of 1946 and 1947 were held with General Aung San and representatives of several ethnic minority states in Panglong, Shan State, to discuss the transition to independence and culminated in the signing of the Panglong Agreement by the Kachin, Shan and Chin (Holliday 2011, 39). The Agreement proposed uniting the so-called Frontier Areas, as they had been termed under colonial rule, under a federal union which offered autonomy and possibilities for succession to the ethnic States. However, after Gen. Aung San’s was assassinated immediately prior to the official handover of power, the Agreement was never fully enacted by the new incoming government and continues to be a point of contention behind the ethnic civil wars (Raw 2016; Metro 2013).

In 2016 the newly inaugurated NLD government relaunched the national political dialogue process, started under the previous USDP government, dubbing the biannual gatherings “21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conferences”. The first of these large-scale national events, held in September 2016 this time in Nay Pyi Taw, was attended by 750 representatives from the government, political parties, state military and ethnic armed groups, who were given the opportunity to outline their positions and expectations for the peace processes (Nyein 2016). This was followed in May 2017 by a second six-day conference to begin debating the process forward in earnest. Conclusions over progress have been decidedly mixed and are greatly overshadowed by ongoing military offensives in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine States. While the events have signalled a renewal of dialogue, there remain significant concerns about the willingness of all parties to reach compromises (Lynn & Slow 2017; TNI 2017).

On July 19th 1947, General Aung San was assassinated along with six of his cabinet colleagues. However, despite the event shattering the cohesion of the transitional government, preparations for the transferal of power, and the drafting of the new constitution, continued, with independence formally occurring on January 4th 1948 (Holliday 2011, 39). After this uneasy passage to independence, conflicts continued to intensify with the outbreak of civil wars lead by ethnic armed groups multiplying (TNI 2013). Largely on the pretext of this instability the military was able to dominate the political arena through successive military coups throughout the 20th century, consolidating military control over all areas of public life and heavily restricting civil liberties.

Dimensions of Myanmar’s Post-Independence Conflicts
This section further introduces the multiple points of tension which have emerged through Myanmar’s conflicts in the 20th century, outlining additional dimensions, albeit briefly, to these conflicts and the factors that influence and sustain them. It is recognised that these dimensions are highly interdependent and intersect to form a web of influences, motivations and exacerbations that contribute to the historic and current climate of conflict in Myanmar. The emphasis here is on introducing the origins and implications of the conflicts, and an examination of the state of peacebuilding efforts will follow in the subsequent sections.

Military Control and Ethnic Conflicts
Multiple civil wars broke out in 1946 and 1948, initially with the fracturing of the communist movements and disillusionment on the part of Arakan Muslim groups, followed by claims for autonomous rule by Mon, Karen and Pa-Oh ethnic minorities. The 1950s and 60s saw increasing numbers of ethnic armed groups engaging the central government in civil war,
including the newly redefined New Mon State Party (NMSC), Karen National Union (KNU),
Karen National Progressive Party (KNPP) and Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), as well as
Kachin, Shan, Palaung and Lahu military groups reacting against the new government’s failure
to respect the “spirit of Panglong” (Metro 2013). Central to these initial conflicts were claims
to self-determination on the part of ethnic groups who did not see themselves as ever having
been part of a fully unified Myanmar. A sense of injustice was further fuelled by the perceived
backtracking of the newly independent central government which rejected the forming of a
federal union, instead stressing an agenda of unification and centralised control (BNI 2014).
The civil wars and consequent fears for the stability of the newly independent country
provided the setting and opportunity for the state military, the Tatmadaw, to assert greater
influence during the post-independence period from 1948 culminating in the eventual
military take-over in 1962. Upon taking control, Gen. Ne Win, author of the coup, reportedly
declared “Federalism is impossible. It will destroy the Union” (TNI 2013, 3). The concern that
federalism would result in a weakened national state was countered by promoting a discourse
of national unity, which denied cultural and religious plurality and allowed the enactment of
increasingly restrictive and oppressive policies by the ruling junta. These policies consolidated
political and economic power for the military at the expense of civil liberties across the
population, and prompted an increase in both political and ethnic resistance (Holliday 2011,
59). The ethnic conflicts are therefore intrinsically linked to the pro-democracy struggles,
despite the tendency to approach these conflicts independently.

Pro-Democracy Struggles
Successive military juntas from 1962 to 2011 reinforced an environment of authoritarianism
and oppression during which democratic opposition and social activism were highly
constrained and fraught with risk. While opposition was present throughout the military
dictatorships, the late 1980s saw civil dissatisfaction with the ruling junta galvanised in
response to currency devaluations in which many lost their savings (Holliday 2011, 54). The
resultant widespread demonstrations of 1988, which reached a head in August (giving name
to the 8888 movement), propelled many democracy activists into the spotlight, including the
founders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) the late Win Tin and Daw Aung San Suu
Kyi, daughter of Gen. Aung San. Students were at the forefront of these demonstrations, in
part led by the same unions that had previously supported independence movements. The
resultant popular uprising provoked a violent response from the ruling military in which
hundreds of protestors were killed. The uprising however did trigger elections in 1990,
overwhelmingly won by the NLD, but which provoked a greater backlash from the military
 junta who refused to relinquish power and instead reorganised as the State Law and Order
Restoration Council (SLORC). NLD party members, student union leaders and other
democracy activists were arrested and imprisoned, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi who
spent a total of 19 years under house arrest. Subsequently, many activists and members of
the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) fled into hiding in Myanmar’s densely
forested east, forming armed resistance groups from where they continued their campaigns
for democratic change. Others fled into exile across the Thai border, engaging transnational
networks of political and social activism (Maber 2016b). The legacy of these struggles is
tangible, particularly in tertiary education systems associated with dissent (Lall 2008; Maber
and has been echoed by contemporary student protests where members of the contentious student unions newly found themselves subject to arrest and detention.

September 2007 again saw tens of thousands of protestors take to the streets of Yangon, Mandalay and other cities. The mass demonstrations originally started as a result of fuel price hikes due to the removal of subsidies. Protestors were then joined by large numbers of monks and nuns who were motivated to demonstrate against violence on the part of security forces directed towards protesting monks in Pakokka, giving rise to the popular terming of the movement, the Saffron Revolution (Walton & Hayward 2014, 11). The military response was brutal and in several cases fatal. 1,072 protestors, including many monks, were arrested for political activities in the aftermath of the demonstrations with prison sentences being conferred of up to 65 years (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict 2009, 10).

Resource Driven Conflict Dimensions
Myanmar’s richness in natural resources and the vast disparity in wealth distribution have long been in tension and recent state-led resource extraction activities are currently generating new, more class-based conflicts overlaying ethnic grievances. Gem, jade, gold and copper mines, oil and gas extraction sites and pipelines, hydropower dams, as well as logging sites and opium fields punctuate the landscape of the ethnic territories and are all sites of contention. While the military junta dominated these, benefitting particularly from agreements with China over hydroelectric power and Thailand over the oil and gas production, the ethnic military and political groups maintain they should have greater economic control of the resources in their areas as well as determination over the use of land (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2014). Many of the project sites for resource extraction are targets for violence and the increased militarization that they attract from government forces exacerbates tensions with non-state armed groups and local communities alike (BNI 2013, 1; WLB 2014, 22). Similarly, the extreme poverty that is experienced by many across all of the ethnic territories is seen as a direct result of government policies, such as the 4-cuts (pya ley pya), to undermine the ethnic groups struggle for self-determination through limiting access food, funds, information networks and recruitment (Laungaramsri 2011, 102; Myanmar Peace Monitor 2014; WLB 2014). Vast disparities in income distribution also fuelled urban unrest as wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small number of business tycoons with close ties to the military (BNI 2013, 17).

Migration, Displacement and Exile
Both within Myanmar and beyond its borders, displacement has affected those fleeing the ethnic civil wars, exiles from political tyranny, those whose homes have been lost to communal violence, forced relocations to make way for hydro-electric dams or economic development sites, as well as those affected by environmental disasters, such as Cyclone Nargis which struck in 2008. Internally, up to 300,000 have been displaced in IDP camps for much of the last 10 years (Myanmar Peace Monitor, 2014), with Kachin State and Rhakine State seeing the highest levels of displacement. This figure rises to 650,000 when accounting for those displaced outside the formal camp settings (TNI 2013, 10). Across Myanmar’s borders, refugees have fled overland and by boat to Bangladesh, India, China, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia. Thailand has historically been the most established site of refuge and
exile with nine official refugee camps established along the Thai border continuing to house up to 130,000 refugees (TBC 2013, 16). A further 2 million migrants are thought to reside in Thailand both legally and undocumented (TBC 2013, 19). The communities along this border region have in many cases been resident for up to 30 years, and have been associated with pro-democracy campaigning and human rights monitoring as well as providing a base for ethnic minority resistance from the Eastern states (Maber 2016b).

While displacements are continuing, particularly with a recent surge of civilians to the West fleeing attacks in Rakhine State as discussed further below, communities on the Eastern borders are increasingly facing the possibility of repatriation back to Myanmar (UNHCR 2014; Maber 2016b). Adequately addressing the situation and needs of returning refugees and migrants remains a key concern before repatriation attempts accelerate. Particularly in relation to education, the issues of accreditation for prior learning and recognition of skills for students and professionals alike are a priority for consideration.

**Processes of Political Transition and Reform (2010 – 2015)**
The approval of the 2008 constitution, adopted at a time of immense distress within the country in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis, paved the way for the military to manage a controlled transition to civilian rule. Elections were held in late 2010, the first since the NLD’s annulled victory of 1990, and marked an official end to the military junta’s leadership which had endured in its various guises since 1962. Although this lead to the inauguration of a nominally civilian government, the process orchestrated through the new constitution ensured that the military retained a designated 25% of parliamentary seats and veto powers, entrenching military influence in all aspects of politics (GEN 2012). At the time, the elections were criticised by many international actors for not being free and fair (UN 2010). A major objection was the refusal to allow democratic opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to stand in the elections, leading to their boycott by her party, the largest of the opposition, the NLD. Unsurprisingly, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured victory, with President Thein Sein (himself a former military general) taking office in early 2011 (UN 2010; Hlaing 2012) and many of the same military political figures reappearing in the newly reformed parliamentary bodies.

However, despite the contentious transferal of power, President Thein Sein began a process of widespread reforms, particularly seeking to expand economic opportunities with international partners (Hlaing 2012; Chalk 2013). While this economic expansion served the agenda of political and military elites who benefitted substantially from the process (Turnell 2015), the political and social reforms also created opportunities for civil society movements to expand, particularly aided by the relaxing of censorship laws, and exiled activists began to re-engage with government authorities in the hope of influencing reforms (Bächtold 2015). From 2011 onwards, the majority of detained political prisoners were released encouraging the lifting of economic sanctions on the part of Western governments (although restrictions remained in place for many individuals associated with the former military regime), and international and regional trade agreements flourished. Typifying the emergence of Myanmar as a potential economic partner, the country held the yearly chair of ASEAN for the first time in 2014 under the theme “Moving Forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community”
(Government of Myanmar 2014), reflecting the dual designs of the government on brokering a large-scale peace deal and ensuring economic security.

During this period, reform processes were instigated across multiple sectors: sectoral reviews and legislation packages were initiated in education, land use, manufacturing and rule of law, amongst others. Censorship was relaxed and telecommunications expanded, bringing affordable mobile phones to the country for the first time in 2014 (Dolan & Gray 2014). Each process brought new frictions and doubts over the sincerity, and durability, of the reforms (Bhatia 2013; Huang 2013). Likewise, academic as well as popular opinion remained divided as to the motivations behind these reforms and the commitment to democratic change, with some viewing the political transition as a calculated opportunity for the military to consolidate legitimised authority (Jones 2014; Global Witness 2015; Bhatia 2013), while others saw greater progress in the expansion of civil political space (Singh 2013; OECD 2013).

However, the increased possibilities for co-operation nonetheless changed the landscape of political manoeuvring. Having boycotted the 2010 elections, the NLD did contest the 2012 by-elections, winning the majority of contested seats and ensuring a position for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi within the parliament. Subsequent elections were held in late 2015, this time under greater scrutiny, resulting in an overwhelming victory for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s NLD. However, as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi herself is barred from occupying the position of President in the Constitution, the NLD took office in at the start April 2016 under the official leadership of President Htin Kyaw. Nonetheless maintaining her leadership of the party, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was instead appointed to the newly established role of State Counsellor. As yet there has been insufficient opportunity to gauge the full impact of this transition from military dictatorship to democratic transition, however constraints have evidently remained and new challenges emerged. Despite obvious progress, power has still largely resided in the hands of a minority of elite who have an inconsistent record of accepting change. In addition to the continuation of the unresolved ethnic conflicts, there has been a rise in intercommunal violence (highlighted below) inflamed by a rhetoric of ultra-conservative Buddhist nationalism, primarily targeting Muslim minority communities in the western region of Rakhine (Walton & Hayward 2014). This ongoing climate of conflict and increasing religious violence suggests that although transition is underway, sustainable transformation may remain elusive.

Contemporary Conflict Dynamics

Amongst the many changes that have taken place over the last few years of Myanmar’s transitions, conflict has continued to intensify in several regions of the country. While the research for this book was undertaken in areas that have experienced greater stability in recent years, other areas of the country have been experiencing an increase in military offensives. In Kachin and Northern Shan States fighting renewed in 2011 after the breakdown of ceasefire agreements and has continued through both election cycles. In particular, clashes between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), and the Tatmadaw have escalated, resulting in the displacement of over 100,000 civilians currently living in temporary shelters in continuing insecurity (Pistor 2017). Since the NLD took office, military assaults have intensified in 2016 and 2017, significantly
undermining the legitimacy of renewed peace processes and further accentuating mistrust in
government-led peacebuilding efforts (Naw & Barter 2017).

In Rakhine State reports continue to emerge of the widespread humanitarian
emergency as hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya are fleeing violence and
persecution in the state for neighbouring Bangladesh (UN 2017). The extent of the atrocities
reported during military “clearance operations” 2 against communities perceived to be
illegitimate or hostile are deeply worrying and worsening as accounts of the violence are still
being revealed (OHCHR 2017a; 2017b). However, while military assaults against ethnic
minorities elsewhere in the country have often been met with indifference amongst the
general populace, the so-called clearance operations in Rakhine State have found significant
popular support, fuelled by a rise in prominence of religious conservatism, debates over
national identity and a proliferation of misinformation on social media. Navigating the
voracity and diversity of emotions surrounding the issues of identity, legitimacy and threat
presents a challenge, including for international researchers, as Rosalie Metro has eloquently
discussed in her opinion piece “We Can Oppose Ethnic Cleansing Without Accepting
Simple Answers” (Metro 2017). The complexity underlying tensions and triggers belie simple
summaries, and it is beyond the scope of this work to do justice to a detailed analysis of these
conflicts. The discussion below therefore is intended to provide background to the context of
religious tensions which have increased in recent years and subsequently erupted into the
current crisis.

**Rising Religious Tensions**
Recent years have seen a rise in religious conservatism allied with Burmese nationalism which
has resulted in violent inter-communal conflicts between Buddhist majority and Muslim
minority communities. Sporadic outbreaks of violence between 2012 and 2014 included
rioting, assault and arson in Rhakine State, Meikhtila, Lashio and Mandalay resulting in over
200 fatalities (Walton & Hayward 2014, 8). Violence centred between Buddhist and Muslim
communities, with the Muslim ethnic minority group, the Rohingya, in Rakhine State coming
particularly under attack as perceived non-legitimate residents. During this period, instability
in Rakhine State resulted in the displacement of between 130,000 and 140,000 civilians, many
of whom continue to be sheltered in IDP camps (UN OCHA 2013; Myanmar Peace Monitor
2014). Muslim schools were in some cases a target for this violence, with 4 teachers and 32
students at one school in Meikhtila being among those targeted and killed in 2012 (GCPEA
2013).

The influence of religion has been prominent throughout Myanmar’s political and
cultural history and continues to shape the landscape of transition, with religious affiliation
infused with constructions of national and ethnic identity. 88% of the 56 million population
are estimated to be Buddhist (Department of Population 2016), leading to a frequent
association between national identity and Buddhism, reinforced through media and public
discourse as well as education practices (Salem-Gervais & Metro 2012; Walton 2013).
Christian communities account for an estimated 6.2% of the population of Myanmar, while

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2 This neutralising phrase is rapidly becoming the government and military’s preferred framing of the atrocities,
as illustrated by statements from the President’s Office (OHCHR 2017b).
Muslim communities constitute a further 4.3% of the population, with the remaining 1.6% of the population identifying as Hindu (0.5%), Animist (0.8%), with another religion (0.2%) or with no religion (0.1%) (Department of Population 2016).

Also underlying current hostilities are conflicting notions of recognition, legitimacy and national identity. Changes to citizenship laws in 1982 resulted in citizenship being denied to many who had previously been recognised as citizens including ethnic groups which were no longer legitimised, to those whose parents did not both hold citizenship and to those not born within Myanmar. As part of the military junta’s attempts to push a unifying rhetoric, the new citizenship laws reverted to pre-colonial, highly subjective definitions of ethnic groups which predated 1823, and offered full citizenship only to those who could prove ethnic and territorial connections to these groups, setting up arbitrary notions of the ‘indigenous’ and ‘authentic’ inhabitants of geographical territories (TNI 2014, 5). The Muslim communities in Rakhine identifying as Rohingya were reframed as “Bengali illegal immigrants” (Fortify Rights 2014, 11; TNI 2014, 11), setting up hostilities with ethnically recognised Rakhine Buddhist communities. Without full citizenship status, those whose citizens’ rights were revoked by the 1982 act are denied access to university enrolment, land ownership and inheritance.

While religious violence has historical precedence, tensions have been inflamed by the recent emergence of controversial ultra-nationalist movements, known as the 969 and the MaBaTha, led by a small number of extremist Buddhist monks who claim to seek to defend the Buddhist majority from perceived threat. Originally a fringe movement, the alarming support that the MaBaTha and 969 have received in recent years has resulted in their amassing startling political influence. The impact and influence of increased religious conservatism is particularly evident at a policy level in the rapid approval in 2015 of a package of legislation, known as the ‘Protection of Race and Religion’ bills which reinforce an association of national identity with Buddhism (GEN 2015). The legislation includes provisions to restrict interfaith marriage and women’s choices for religious conversion, and allow for limitations to birth numbers or mandated birth spacing in communities that are (perceived to be) rapidly expanding (Walton, McKay & Mar Mar Kyi 2015). The bills, and the political support they received, further validate constructions of Buddhist national identity and also reinforce gender inequalities limiting women’s rights to choice and self-determination.

**Ethnic Grievances and the Role of Education**

Having discussed the historical and contemporary contexts to Myanmar’s varied conflicts and political transitions, the focus now turns to outlining the ethnic grievances that inform positions within peace negotiations and the role that education has played within these. Acknowledging the plurality of priorities and stances adopted by the different Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs), their varying historical roots and contexts, as further discussed in the subsequent section, there are nonetheless certain grievances that are shared by many groups in relation to treatment by the state and military forces. The summary table below lists these grievances, drawn from peace documentation and secondary sources. Two fundamental grievances which are common across the range of actors relate to political autonomy in a federal state and cultural recognition, as one peacebuilding staff member of an international donor summarised: “This is about recognition. This is about having their rights” (int. 76). For
analytical reasons we have categorised these grievances according to their economic, socio-cultural, political and environmental nature, however many of these grievances evidently overlap between those categories.

**Table 3.1 Shared grievances for ethnic armed groups**

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<tr>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Control over natural resources and unequal distribution of revenues</th>
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<td>Land rights and ownership</td>
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<td>High levels of poverty in ethnic states</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of infrastructure (electricity, transport, roads)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Forced labour (incl. in economic development projects &amp; military porters)</td>
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<td>Arbitrary taxation</td>
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<td>Social / Cultural</td>
<td>Low levels of literacy in ethnic states</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lack of protection for cultural practices and heritage sites incl. banned celebrations of festivals</td>
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<td>Lack of recognition of ethnic languages incl. learning in mother-tongue</td>
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<td></td>
<td>High incidence of drugs in ethnic areas (selling or addiction)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Threats to religious freedoms</td>
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<td>Political</td>
<td>Claims for a federal union and political authority</td>
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<td>Failure to respect Panglong Agreement</td>
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<td>Restrictions on forming political parties</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rejection of 2008 Constitution</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Human rights abuses incl. military violence against women, arbitrary detention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Land confiscation and relocations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Impact of development projects and extraction sites incl. hydro-electricity dams, industrial zones, mines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of drug cultivation in some territories</td>
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Within these grievances as listed above, it already becomes apparent that education has substantial relevance. The politicisation of education under the military regime, as well as the lack of appropriate resource allocation to the education sector as a whole, have had significant impacts on matters of access, quality and relevance in contemporary Myanmar (as explored further in Chapters 4 and 5). Such issues have consequently exacerbated educational grievances, adding fuel to conflict drivers. The desire to preserve ethnic cultural heritage and the sense of threat posed to this identity by the Bamar majority state is reflected in the significance of the role of education in building an ethno-national state. As expressed by the same donor staff member as cited above:

> [That] is what this conflict is about. It’s about recognition of the culture or rights or their identity or their ethnicity and in education it’s key, they want to see formal school with teachers that are allowed to train or to teach in their ethnic languages. So this is what they said conflict is about. (int. 76)

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3 Sources: Ethnic Armed Organisations Conference (2013); Working Group For Ethnic Coordination (2013); BNI (2014); TNI (2013).

4 In 2000, the Ministry of Education received only 7.5% of the national budget, while the Ministry of Defense was allocated 40% (CRPP, 2000 cited in Lwin, 2000). Although since reforms began in 2011 education budgets have increased they remain low (MoE 2013; UNESCO 2014), and have been a point of contention for student protestors and opposition groups (int. 110)
One of the key issues to bear in mind is that the positioning of social service delivery as a point of negotiation is not only an abstract desire to preserve cultural identity and autonomy, but relates to very tangible consequences for current services that are already being administered by ethnic organisations in the absence of the state. Unresolved issues of decentralisation and education autonomy are therefore central to addressing ethnic concerns, where there is a desire to protect services from the perceived dominating authority of the central government. While under-resourcing is a driver of the conflicts, an expansion of state services, including MoE basic education schools, is not always the desired solution. Suspicion persists that the centralised education system serves the interests of the majority rather than ethnic minority populations, which problematises the issue of redistribution and a ‘simple’ expansion of state provision of resources to education and its delivery. Although this is not the case universally in all the conflict-affected states, in Mon state where much of our research was conducted, the establishment of parallel systems of education by the Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) occurred as a direct result of the New Mon State Party (NMSP) extending its authority beyond military action to social service provision tailored to a Mon-identity construction. Education in MNEC schools therefore prioritises Mon history and culture with Mon language as the medium of instruction for primary levels (WPRC & HURFOM, 2015), an issue which is further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. The impact of state-provided education being perceived as a tool of the government to dominate and manipulate populations has significant implications for pathways forward to address both conflict drivers and educational grievances.

Outlining the Peace Processes
While ceasefires were sought by the successive military regimes throughout the 1990s, they were not accompanied by meaningful peace dialogues nor the withdrawal of troops by either party, resulting in the multiple disintegration of the agreements and cyclical recurrence of fighting (Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict 2009, 9). In 2011, President Thein Sein renewed peace talks leading to new ceasefire agreements being signed with four non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and a further nine the following year, meaning that of the 17 major NSAGs engaged in combat 14 are now engaged in ceasefire arrangements and some peacebuilding dialogue (BNI 2014, 4). Three remained officially combatant, with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) resuming fighting in the same year, 2011. As highlighted above, sites of conflict remain at their most severe in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan States (including extensive fighting in Northern Shan State despite the ceasefire with SSA-N). In the previous years there have also been on-going occurrences of military violence in Kayin State particularly around the Myawaddy-Mae Sot border (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2015).

As the research in the subsequent chapters of this collection was undertaken in the build up to the elections of 2015 and before the NLD took office, this section explores in more detail the peace negotiations that were being undertaken at that time. Acknowledging that there are multiple dimensions to Myanmar’s conflicts, including political and religious tensions, this section examines formal policy arrangements directing attention particularly to the processes of formulating and articulating this policy more so than its enactment. It
therefore takes as its focus the conflict and peace negotiations between the government and the ethnic armed groups.⁵


After taking office in 2011, President Thein Sein sought to renew peace negotiations, consolidating bilateral ceasefire agreements with 14 EAGs during the course of 2012 (EBO 2013). These agreements formalised or replaced many previous ceasefire arrangements that had frequently not articulated concessions by either party, nor resulted in a reduction in fighting. As such, they demonstrated a new commitment by the USDP government to engage in peace dialogues, as was acknowledged by several of our respondents, including an international staff member involved in the peacebuilding sector we interviewed:

> There’s not a great track record of written agreements being signed between the parties to the process. So the fact that the government was able to do that and was eager to do that is positive. (int. 94)

Commitment was also made to secure a nationwide ceasefire agreement (NCA), initially anticipated to be signed in mid-2013 (Crisis Group 2015). However, in the lead up to the general elections of November 2015, there was still a lack of agreement over the signing of this NCA, resulting in a rushed and unfinished process of dialogue that came under significant scrutiny during the subsequent election. With multiple interests and agendas evident across the large numbers of actors and parties involved, the process was lengthy and delicate, but arguably some progress was made, as expressed at the time by the same respondent as above: “*The trajectory is broadly upwards and the achievements of the last couple of years are substantial. Not irreversible, but substantial*” (int. 94).

The figure below aims to provide an overview of the various governmental and non-government actors involved in the process of peace negotiations, as well as the status (and absence) of the different national and bilateral ceasefire agreements.

**Figure 3.1 Status of peace negotiations prior to elections, October 2015**

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⁵ As illustrative of the overlapping conflict dimensions, the All Burma Student Democratic Front, although a non-state armed group (NSAG) and not an ethnic armed group (EAG), is included in the ethnic ceasefire negotiations as a UNFC alliance member.
As of November 2015, eight EAGs had agreed to sign the NCA, falling short of 15 that the government had hoped would sign, out of a total of over 20. A major point of contention (explored further below) had become the issue of which groups are included under the agreement; the ethnic coalition, also named the Union Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC), contended that a further six of its members that were excluded from the NCA should also be added (EBO 2015). Additionally, combat is still active, most intensely in Kachin and northern Shan states with multiple EAGs, raising doubts as to how representative the NCA could be.6

Some international commentators have noted the perceived lack of agreement or coordination amongst the multiple EAGs (Kuppuswamy 2013, 3). However, such a perspective risks ignoring the question of why it should be expected that the various ethnic groups, whose motivations for armed struggle and whose experiences and arrangements with the state have been quite different, should have a unified response. One of the key challenges for peacebuilding initiatives in Myanmar is the very different states of conflict that affect the different regions. So while populations in Kachin and Northern Shan states are experiencing active fighting, continued casualties and ongoing displacement, Mon state has seen relative stability since the 1994 ceasefire agreement. This has evident implications for the expectations and aims of the different ethnic parties. While there are similarities and overlaps in the grievance expressed by ethnic actors, as indicated in the section above, there are also variations in the details, contextualisation and desired responses. Additionally, this also impacts the priorities of different regions in terms of service delivery and the extent to which issues of social service delivery, including access and control, may feature on the peacebuilding agenda for different groups. Consequently, states such as Kayin, Kayah and Mon that have established parallel systems of education closely linked to the EAGs may prioritise education issues within peace agreements more so than Chin state, which does not have such equivalent non-state education structures.

Ethnic alliances and fractions within them have been a feature of the conflicts since the 1950s (Keenan 2015), reflecting the different historical positions and ideologies behind the movements. Conversely, however, the desire for federalism has been a common motivation for the multiple groups and the UNFC has presented this as a united goal. Additionally, the UNFC has sought greater inclusion of periphery EAGs within the national-level dialogues. These overlapping issues and interests, therefore, reinforce the need for a contextual, and sub-national or local understanding of both the interconnected as well as the different conflict drivers.

The Roles of Varied Actors in the Peace Process

As highlighted in the diagram below, the process of peace negotiations in Myanmar between 2011 and 2015 reflects the nature of the conflicts, which had not seen significant international involvement. While previous ceasefire agreements under the military junta were directly between the Tatmadaw and the individual ethnic armed groups on an ad hoc basis, the peace processes initiated in 2011 were largely led by the new USDP government. The Tatmadaw,

6 The 8 EAGs signing the NCA are the Karen National Union (KNU), the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army (DKBA), the Karen Peace Council (KNU/KNLA-PC), the Chin National Front (CNF), the Pa-Oh National Liberation Organisation (PNLO), the Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), the Restoration Council Shan State (RCSS/SSA-S) and the All Burma Students’ Democratic Front (ABSDF) (Linn 2015; Keenan 2015).
however, continue to play a significant role in the process, both in terms of military representation in negotiations and also with regard to political influence within parliament and the ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP).

**Figure 3.2 Actors in the peace process, 2011-15**

Peace negotiations took place between government and EAG representatives, with a small number of international observers from the UN being present at some meetings. Additionally, local facilitators, such as from Nyein (Shalom) foundation, participated as mediators in some dialogues. The major peace supporting organisation through the negotiations was the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC), subsequently replaced in 2016. Established in 2012 by the government and led by USDP Minister Aung Min, the MPC was seen as more closely aligned with government interests, despite being ostensibly designed to be a neutral organisation (int. 22). International support for the process was largely limited to funding through specific multi-donor peace funds, with financial support for the MPC largely coming from the Norwegian-led coalition of donors, the Peace Support Donor Group. Other internationally funded support initiatives included the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative, which concluded activities in 2015, and the Euro-Burma Office which continues to report on progress from Chiang Mai and also supports the Working Group on Ethnic

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7 Some additional international observers have in the past attended isolated meetings including delegates from China and the UK.
Coordination to facilitate inter-ethnic collaboration. These initiatives largely worked to increase discussion and contact to raise periphery support for peacebuilding in communities beyond the peace negotiations. The Japanese Nippon Foundation played a slightly different role to other international donor organisations and has worked in more direct contact with the EAG representatives to the UNFC to formulate their peace plans during negotiations. While there was little civil society consultation on the government side of the process, EAGs were and continue to be more closely associated with youth and women’s organisations. Consequently, civil society groups such as the Karen Women’s Empowerment Group (KWEG), the Karen Youth Organisation (KYO), the Shan Women’s Action Network (SWAN), or the Chiang Mai-based Women’s League of Burma (WLB) – among others – have promoted awareness of the peace processes in their communities, however their direct involvement remains limited.

International actors have been very much on the periphery of these negotiations, with occasional UN observers permitted to attend. As the International Crisis Group noted: “the peace process is home-grown, without any international mediators, and it should remain so – this has been one of its great strengths” (2015, 2). Those in the international community supporting in the process similarly articulated the position that “we want to respect the national nature of the peace process” (int. 51, UN representative). However, as highlighted by those involved in negotiations, the absence of international agendas does not necessarily reduce complications:

Being a locally owned process is what you want, and you want international stakeholders, donors to ideally support local solutions. But there is a balance, because where there’s local ownership there’s also entrenched biases and mistrust, and that runs very deep. (int. 94)

The UNFC at times requested more international observers to be part of the process (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2014), reflecting an underlying anxiety over power structures within negotiations. However, occupying this position with neutrality is a challenge. Amongst both local and international policy makers there was a sense that Myanmar’s recent history of isolation and lack of international, or at least Western, engagement amplifies the challenges for new international connections: “it makes it incredibly difficult for international partners to influence the process” (int. 94). Equally, even when invited, the role and communication pathways for international actors is not always clear, as one international staff member:

Unlike other post-conflict or conflict settings where they have maybe as their counterpart a ministry of peace and reconciliation, we don’t have that yet in Myanmar. (int. 51)

Further, international involvement which has largely involved funding being directed through local partners, has also been contentious. Between the elections, international donors fomented closer ties with the USDP government through bilateral trade agreements and development partnerships, and were consequently increasingly seen as allied with state authorities over ethnic concerns. This has been visible for example in hostile community responses at a local level to the Norwegian-led multi-donor funded Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI) (KCSN 2014). This also has continuing implications for education policy,
where the same international partners (including the EU, JICA, and the World Bank) continue to participate in the formulation and implementation of education reforms as well as funding peace initiatives. The nature of these relationships as well as the peace agreements more broadly remain precarious: “A small thing can undermine it and we should be very careful that we are not overly enthusiastic” (int. 51).

**Women in Conflict, Peace and Reform Processes**

In recent years women’s rights activism in Myanmar has garnered greater space for advocacy and increased brought attention to the ongoing gender inequalities they experience across Ethnically aligned women’s organisations, many originating in the 1990s, have frequently been associated with the ethnic armed struggles for auto-determination (Hedström 2016), navigating a precarious path between rejecting the frequently violent subjugation of women by the military state and simultaneously renegotiating gender roles within their ethnic traditions (Laungaramsrı 2011). Combined with cross-border networks with exile groups in Thailand, these women’s organisations balanced seemingly non-political endeavours (providing education and healthcare to women and children in conflict) with more overtly politicised campaigns such as reporting on the systematic rape and abuse of ethnic women by the military (WLB 2014). Sexual and gender violence, experienced by many women across social, political and geographical divides (see for example GEN 2015), has also been pervasive across Myanmar’s conflicts and has been well documented by ethnic women’s associations and humanitarian organisations (see for example KWO 2010; SWAN 2002). Widespread incidents of rape and sexual assault by military personnel have been reported, leading to an understanding of such violence as deliberate attempts to undermine community cohesion (Laungaramsrı 2011; WLB 2014). However despite women’s distinct experiences of conflict and their contributions to ethno-nationalist struggles, they have been largely absent from previous attempts to negotiate peace.

Prior to the 2011 renewal of the peace process, the former ceasefire arrangements were arrived at solely by closed and often unwritten agreements between the military commanders of the Tatmadaw and the EAG in question (Lahtaw & Raw, 2012: 7). Consequently, women played no part in these negotiations as they were, and largely continue to be, excluded from active participation and leadership roles in the military and EAGs, reflecting women’s marginalisation from positions of leadership more broadly. As the current process of peace negotiations is more open (to media, observers and small numbers of participants beyond the armed groups), there has been hope for a greater inclusion (Lahtaw & Raw 2012, 7). Small numbers of women have also participated in the formal meetings as representatives from the EAGs, including most prominently Naw Zipporah Sein of the KNU, herself a former teacher, who led the UNFC Senior Delegation. However, overall the space available for women to participate in the peace process has been disappointing, with government representation and government associated organisations such as the Myanmar Peace Centre being notably male dominated (Swedish Burma Committee 2013; AGIPP 2015).

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8 Examples of such organisations include the Shan Women’s Action Network and the Karen Women’s Organisation. See also Maber (2016a).

9 Although the majority of its 13 member organisations are based within Myanmar, the Women’s League of Burma (WLB) itself is based in Chiang Mai, Thailand.
This reflects women’s (lack of) inclusion in the political and reform environment broadly, where even in those spheres, such as education, where women have traditionally played a greater role, they continue to be marginalised and excluded from positions of influence (Maber 2014). Additionally, despite superficial commitments to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UN 2000), references to women are overwhelmingly absent from the ceasefire texts, including the national ceasefire agreement. The absence of women from peace negotiations and documentation is particularly concerning given the impact of conflict on women’s lives (WLB 2014), and reflects the reluctance of national and international policy makers to demonstrate genuine commitments to addressing women’s concerns. There are indications that this is beginning to change, thanks in part to the efforts of civil society activists and organisations such as the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process, launched in 2014, which have brought increased attention to the need to ensure women’s participation and distinct contributions to peacebuilding do not remain neglected. However, there continues to be a need to genuinely listen to and actively address women’s priorities, including, fundamentally, by ensuring greater representation in with political and decision-making arenas (GEN 2015; AGIPP 2015; 2017).

The Political Nature of Peacebuilding

While, as noted above, the commitment to securing nationwide peace agreements drew praise, particularly from the international community, the motivations behind these peace efforts have also been questioned. In line with a dominant international agenda that promotes a liberal peacebuilding model (as discussed in Chapter 2), the peacebuilding discourses have typically incorporated a strong economic rationale. President Thein Sein himself summarised the USDP government’s motivations as:

A failure to end the conflict with ethnic groups would be an obstacle to economic development and that is why efforts are being made to end the conflicts is the key foundation to peacebuilding in the country. (Kuppuswamy 2013, 5)

In addition, there have been questions around the sincere drive or prioritisation for the USDP government to foster processes of national (ethnic, political and economic) reconciliation, as the status quo might actually serve better the aims of the government and army (Kuppuswamy 2013, 8). However, many saw the NCA as a legacy for President Thein Sein, suggesting that the failed attempts to secure a complete NCA before the November 2015 elections reflected a failure of the USDP to win confidence in its leadership.

Equally, some ethnic and civil society organisations remain suspicious of the process which they perceive to be designed to appease international donors and trade partners in order to secure greater financial benefits (Lintner 2015). Others also suggest that the quest for the NCA diverted attention away from meaningful political dialogue at a state level, trapping the process in a “holding pattern” (int. 101, conflict advisor) which undermined

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11 This view was expressed by several interviewed in the context of the research, including in ints. 9 and 110 with community leaders engaged in peace and education advocacy.
confidence in the peace processes more broadly, as another international conflict advisor working in the peace processes expressed:

As far as explicitly implementing word for word the [bilateral ceasefire] agreements, it hasn’t happened. And there’s a few reasons for that, I guess the main one has been this diversion of attention to a nationwide ceasefire agreement. (int. 94)

Consequently, the extension of the ceasefire negotiation process to the detriment of implementing agreements already in place undermined peacebuilding momentum and failed to address the causes of conflict. As the same advisor highlighted: “implementation arrangements is one main criticism of those bilateral agreements. KNU signed, you know, three years ago - where’s the peace dividend?” (int. 94). It is arguably this notion of reconciliation, as it has been expressed under Union rubric without emphasis on subsequent peace dividends, which is problematic for many ethnic constituencies. Attempting to delay political dialogue therefore undermines the deeply political nature of the ethnic conflicts. Pointing to the counter-productive implications for the peacebuilding process of the pursuit of a national ceasefire agreement disconnected from dialogue on political and socio-cultural grievances, the respondent continued: “you’re not going to get military successes without thinking about the interim arrangements for the provision of social services, so it’s a big obstacle” (int. 94). Likewise, the fundamentally political claim by the EAGs to federalism remains an unresolved point of contention. As this central driver of conflict is left undisussed, it is difficult to build trust in ceasefire arrangements, a point acknowledged by donors and policy makers: “I think the suspicion on the part of the ethnic organisations will always be that you are trying to get them subsumed into a unitary public system” (int. 3).

The hope, with both the bilateral agreements and the continued push for the NCA, seems to be that if the documents of peace are in place, they can be added to later on – either to include more parties, or to flesh out specificities. However, this liberal model of peacebuilding, which sees the quest for negative peace prioritised, does not support building trust that these agreements will be any more meaningful than the previous broken ceasefires of the 1990s. Equally, the lack of a peace dividend, or tangible benefits at a local level, does little to dispel the suspicion of shallow motivations on the part of the government, whether it be the USDP government of the time or the newly incumbent NLD. A clear logic emerges from interviews with international organisations that highlight a chronological approach to peace processes which prioritise a negative peace, taking the NCA as the starting point that will later be followed by political dialogue across the EAGs (ints. 3, 13 and 101). This chronology also reflects the government’s own projected pathways for peace negotiations, that saw union level political dialogue and the implementation of “regional development tasks in terms of education, health and communication” (Myanmar Peace Monitor 2014) as occurring only after the NCA had been achieved. However, as has been highlighted above, attempting to separate out military, political and social issues within the peacebuilding framework may not serve the ends of advancing confidence in the peace process as key conflict drivers are neglected.

As was consistently expressed by international and national actors involved in the peace process, the nature of negotiations is “very fluid, complex and very political” (int. 83). These political elements are reflected in multiple ways, including in: the motivations of ethnic
armed groups; the manoeuvring of the USDP ahead of the 2015 elections; the continued political influence of the Tatmadaw; and the renewal of peace processes after the NLD’s election victory. The attempt to segment the peace process, so that political dialogue is withheld until after agreement has been reached on a nationwide ceasefire, risks failing to acknowledge these influences.

**Peace Processes and Challenges for Reforms Post-2015**

Upon taking office in 2016 the NLD government relaunched the peace processes under a rhetoric of reconciliation. The MPC was replaced with the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC) by the President’s Office and, as discussed at the outset of this chapter, negotiations were restyled as large-scale “21st Century Panglong Union Peace Conferences”. As yet, however, these events have centred on establishing stakeholders’ positions and have afforded little tangible progress in advancing the substance of agreements or commitments to the NCA (TNI 2017). Apparent movements towards democracy and achieving durable peace also risk being overwhelmed by the current crises, as conflicts intensify and trust in a genuine commitment to reconciliation is undermined.

There are indications however that the space for incorporating discussions of social service provision into peace negotiations may be expanding with some towards a more inclusive style of deliberation (Walton 2017). Likewise, efforts to incorporate youth movements into peacebuilding discussions have also been apparent, with youth representatives invited to take part in discussions held before the launching of the official peace dialogues (Phyo 2016; PSF 2017). In the current policy environment, reforms are progressing across multiple sectors simultaneously and just like the wider peacebuilding process described above, the education reforms continue to be no less politically charged. The reforms in the education sector, and specifically the passing of the National Education Law in 2014, were some of the most overtly political and contentious policy changes introduced by the USDP government and continue to pose considerable challenges. Beyond this, the reforms coincide in their agendas, as one peacebuilding policy maker commented of the education reforms:

> They are doing and preparing things which are supposed to be discussed in the peace process. Most of the provisions are the foundation of peace building from [an] education perspective. (int. 13)

Treating these reforms independently without establishing links between them can therefore reinforce territorialism and potentially lead to further mistrust. An expansion of these intersections follows in the sections below.

**Locating Education Within the Peacebuilding Architecture**

At an overt level, education has not featured prominently in the text of peace agreements for the bilateral ceasefires or the NCA. Indeed, the peace process and the education reform processes have been kept separate, with many key stakeholders interviewed on the government side not seeing a connection. Although in broad terms references to the need to consider responsibilities for social service provision feature in the documents reviewed in the context of the research (NCA draft 2015), largely the assumption appears that education, and social services broadly, will feature more prominently in subsequent discussions:
There’s an awareness, there’s an appreciation of the significance, but it’s just not at
the forefront of these negotiations...There’s a lot of expectation that these sort of
issues need to be dealt with in a more consolidated way through the political dialogue
process. (int. 94)

Following the pathway laid out for negotiations, political dialogue after the signing of the NCA
is therefore anticipated to address social issues including education. As one observer
highlighted:

Particularly post [bi-lateral] ceasefire agreements, that’s when it becomes important.
That’s when the ethnic armed groups often begin to look around at what their role is
and what they’re doing [with regards to social services]. (int. 3)

However, while social service delivery may not prominently feature in the phrasing of the
ceasefire agreements, participants in peace talks commented on the frequency with which
issues of service provision, and in particular education, are mentioned within current
discussions (int. 101). This suggests a potential disconnect in the extent to which agreements
are fully addressing the grievances articulated by the ethnic groups as well as the variations
in priorities for different actors. The demand for a federalist union reflects the desire of ethnic
groups to exercise autonomy over their resources, human as well as natural, and to protect
their cultural identity. Education is therefore central to the ethnic desire for self-
determination, and connects closely to their demands for education in terms of
redistribution, representation and recognition.

The location of education, like other social services, within peace negotiations reflects
the interests of those who physically take part in the discussion. The Tatmadaw have neither
experience nor interest in social service provision and consequently are unlikely to prioritise
its role. Likewise, the Union Peacemaking Working Committee (UPWC) was dominated by
political representatives for the USDP, themselves largely former military officials, who were
more commonly drawn from the Ministries of Defence and Border Affairs rather than
Education, Health or Social Welfare. This fuelled the perception that education would not be
a primary concern within the ceasefire negotiations, as exemplified by the words of someone
involved in peacebuilding policy-making:

From my perspective, the main stakeholders in the peace building, they won’t see
education as a tool to solve the conflict for this stage. They won’t see education as a
tool for long-term sustainable peace building process. (int. 13)

This may equally be the case for those representing the EAGs in negotiations, who are largely
senior male combatants. However, the EAGs vary greatly in size, in number and in role,
meaning that they have different motivations and grievances and consequently each interact
differently with concerns over education. In states such as Mon, Kayin and Kayah, where the
EAGs are closely associated with the parallel systems of schooling that operate under their
own curricula, education is a more prominent concern and more closely aligned with ethno-
auto-determination. Likewise, the All Burma Student Democratic Front, while not an EAG, is
also an alliance member of the UNFC, and is likely to prioritise current education reforms
more explicitly in negotiations. Additionally, the protracted nature of the conflicts has led
EAGs and associated community based groups to take responsibility for the provision and
delivery of social services in the ethnic conflict areas where the state has limited access or
may not be welcome. Consequently, for many of these armed groups, the question of
responsibility over service delivery is very much embedded within current processes of peace negotiations, as well as central to claims made for a federal union.

The potential role of education reform in addressing these issues is therefore acknowledged, though still subject to much contestation, as is illustrated by the two quotes below. One international stakeholder involved in observing the peace processes stressed:

I know that this issue of education would be addressed. You know the education law in this country is very controversial, particularly because [of the] diversity of all these ethnicities and how this education would address those issues. (int. 76)

However, a national counterpart revealed a different perspective, seeing more separation between political processes of education reform and the peace negotiations:

In the peace process, people are not much into this education. They don’t talk much about this peace [and] education issue. [But] in the political dialogue [it’s] education policy, education law, at the moment, education. (int. 22)

The importance of inclusion of social sectors, including education, is one of the main arguments put forward by the theoretical framing of the Research Consortium, as outlined in Chapter 2. This claim is supported for the case of Myanmar by a recent (DFID funded) report by Kim Jolliffe for The Asia Foundation. In this report, Jolliffe (2014) argues how interventions in social sectors have a significant potential to contribute to peacebuilding, in a moment when Myanmar’s peace negotiations with contested areas show potential, but are still fragile. This report draws our attention to three important issues to consider here. Firstly, because resistance to the dominance of a Burman-led state by ethnic groups lies at the basis of many of the (ongoing or past) root causes of conflict, efforts to boost the government’s legitimacy through social service provision – including (formal) education – carry a danger of deepening rather than mitigating conflict. The right to provide social services is closely tied to issues of authority, power and legitimacy, and hence are closely related to the ethnic nationalist struggles (2014, 7). This connects to our own analysis that education is deeply political, and for that matter its potential positive as well as negative ‘faces’ (Bush and Saltarelli 2000) are crucial to consider in any holistic peacebuilding approach. Secondly, Jolliffe points us to observe that in the absence of government provision in contested territories, various civil society networks (sometimes but not always connected to ethnic armed organisations) have firmly institutionalized their roles as local social service providers, in some cases supported directly by international aid. And thirdly, we need to recognise how the recent substantial inflow of aid has both positively and negatively impacted on Myanmar’s ethnic conflict, either through strengthening or weakening confidence in the peace process and related (non-)state governance institutions (Jolliffe 2014, 2-3 and 25).

**Addressing Educational Grievances**

The table below summarises the educational grievances that were emphasised by respondents during the research. Drawing on the theoretical framework of the research these grievances are presented in relation to the three dimensions of social justice – issues of redistribution, of recognition and of representation. Opportunities for supporting peacebuilding though education therefore exist in addressing these grievances in ways that are accepted by all parties. Potential routes towards reconciliation are therefore also outlined in the table below. These are seen as suggested opportunities that have begun to emerge
through both the peace and reform process and therefore should not be taken as prescriptive recommendations.

Table 3.2 Educational grievances and pathways for reconciliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational grievances for ethnic actors (based on interview data)</th>
<th>Pathways for Reconciliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Redistribution</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Poor educational outcomes and lack of post-education job opportunities;</td>
<td>● Reform that benefits all parties;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Unequal distribution of education resources incl. financing and material resources (e.g. textbooks);</td>
<td>● Increased support for teachers within all educational sectors through (conflict-sensitive/peacebuilding) training, and fair compensation for well-being;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Deployment of teachers, particularly based on language ability;</td>
<td>● Recognition of the contribution of education and social service grievances to conflict;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Disparity in teacher salaries between geographical locations and ethnic and state systems.</td>
<td>● Consequent acknowledgement among international, state and non-state actors of key position of education in peace process;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Building trust in commitment to both peace agreements and education;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Participation of actors from across educational sectors (state, ethnic, monastic and community) and all (school-community-state-national-international) levels in dialogue processes;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Curricula reform to ensure more inclusive content;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Demands from youth/students call for education that supports critical awareness of the historical/present socio-political and economic situation, and to enhance agency in terms of employment, political empowerment and inclusive forms of socio-cultural identity-formation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recognition</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Language of instruction;</td>
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<td>● Prominence of rote learning of Myanmar;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Suppression of critical thinking skills as mechanisms of manipulation to maintain a pliable population;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Exclusive association of Buddhism with national identity (e.g. through prayer in schools and curriculum content);</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Lack of pathways to accreditation for non-state teachers and students;</td>
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<td>● Lack of acknowledgement of cultures and histories</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Representation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Marginalisation of non-state actors in setting education agenda;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Curriculum content incl. lack of positive representation of ethnic groups;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● History curriculum as glorifying Bamar military campaigns and heroes;</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Discrimination against women from positions of leadership within and beyond education</td>
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The following chapters of this collection reveal further insights into the nature of these educational grievances and the challenges and opportunities which present themselves in seeking to address them.

**Conclusion**

Historical underpinnings to Myanmar’s conflicts indicate the origins of grievances and the deep rooted mistrust that persists in peace processes. Prior to 2011, while the political environment did not allow space for ethnic parties to participate at a national level, the fundamental issues of rights to self-determination failed to be inclusively addressed. While there have been significant steps forward in engaging multiple groups in structured dialogue

12 Although gender inequalities are not limited to ethnic grievances and are felt by all women in Myanmar, ethnic women’s organisations, such as the Mon Women’s Organisations (MWO) have been strong advocates for women’s greater participation in leadership roles.
and negotiation processes, the prioritisation of achieving a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement has continued to promote a liberal peacebuilding model that delays discussion of key grievances. However, without addressing these core grievances there are risks that patterns of conflict recur.

It is recognised that education has and continues to be a key grievance for many of the armed ethnic groups, other elements of civil society, and minority groups. Education reform is therefore deemed vital to securing peace dividends through improved service delivery and a renewed focus on inclusion and equality of provision. Considering the security and economic focus of the USDP government’s peacebuilding agenda, and the convenience of the status quo for those in power, actual transformations towards a more sustainable peace are volatile. At present, this pattern appears to be enduring, as intensifying military offensives undermine the apparent commitment to inclusive peacebuilding. A challenge for Myanmar now is to incorporate a more sustainable peacebuilding approach that matches the rhetoric of reconciliation.

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