

Education Analytics Service (EAS)

Non-State Actors in Basic Education:

Myanmar Case Study

August 2016

Prepared for DFAT

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This report was commissioned through the Education Analytics Service – an Australian Government, DFAT-funded initiative. The views in the report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of DFAT or of any other organisation or person.

Table of contents

List of Acronyms 4

1 Executive Summary 5

2 Introduction 6

2.1 Typologies of state and non-state actors 6

3 Education context in Myanmar 7

4 Non-state actors in education 9

4.1 Non-Formal Education 10

4.2 Private Schools 11

4.3 Ethnic Education Department Schools 11

4.4 Mixed Schools 13

4.5 Community Schools 13

4.6 Monastic Schools 13

4.7 Refugee and Border Education 15

5 Policy Considerations 15

6 Conclusion 17

7 References 18

List of Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Reform
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KSEAG	Karen System Education Assistance Group
MEDG	Monastic Education Development Group
MINE	Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
MNS	Mon National School
MEC	Myanmar Education Consortium
NEL	National Education Law
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NFPE	Non-Formal Primary Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1 Executive Summary

The education system in Myanmar is a product of decades of internal conflict, which has created a diverse network of education providers catering to different population groups. The national education system is by far the largest provider of basic education, followed by the monastic school system and different ethnic education systems (of which the Karen education system is the largest). Other actors in the provision of education services include the community, NGOs, civil society groups, faith-based organisations and the private sector.

The dynamic mix of state and non-state actors in the education sector is further complicated by the different interactions they have with each other, particularly in ethnic and conflict-affected areas where control of the education system is more fluid. For example, ethnic education departments administer their own education system, but are reliant on external funding and resources from the local community or NGOs to support education delivery. In some ethnic-controlled areas, there are mixed-schools which offer the national curriculum and receive some funding from the government, but are operated by the ethnic education department.

Recent reforms in the education sector have provided an opportunity for greater improvements in education service delivery, including the government's commitment to increase education spending, free universal primary education and provision of free textbooks. A stronger regulatory framework, through the development of the National Education Sector Plan and introduction of the National Education Law has also contributed to better service delivery in the education sector. This has created opportunities for engaging with non-state providers including formal recognition of the monastic school system, greater collaboration with ethnic education departments at the local level, and promotion of private sector engagement.

There is limited data on education quality and access across all state and non-state schools, particularly those in poor and remote regions. However, some studies have shown positive achievements in the education system where: 1) communities have had a strong engagement which promotes greater access and higher retention rates, and 2) where effective coordination between government and local school authorities have created opportunities for accreditation and transition of students into the formal education system. At the policy level, NGO's have played a significant role in facilitating dialogue between the government and non-state providers, which has led to a greater recognition of ethnic issues and inclusivity in the Comprehensive Education Sector Review process.

2 Introduction

Over the last two decades, sustained efforts by the international community have led to considerable growth in access to education for children across the globe, particularly in low income countries. Between 1990 and 2011, the World Bank reported an increase in the net enrolment rate in low-income countries from 55 percent to 80 percent, and an increase in the primary school completion rate from 46 percent to 68 percent (World Bank, 2014). These gains have been a result of increased investments by donors and domestic governments in the education sector, backed by more effective education policies. However, despite this positive trend, 60 million primary school children in developing countries remain out of school and many of those who attend school are not achieving the minimum standards in literacy and numeracy (Steer, 2015). In order to close this gap, UNESCO estimates that the cost of delivering good quality universal education from pre-school to junior secondary school by 2030 in low-income countries will be approximately \$10.6 billion, which is more than four times the current levels of commitments by international donors at \$2.3 billion (Steer, 2015).

The pressure will be predominantly on donors and domestic governments to fill the fiscal gap. However, there is a mix of non-state actors (including religious and charitable organisations, private foundations, and for-profit and not-for-profit providers) already active in the education sector who provide an additional source of finance in the education sector. The growth in private education providers over the last two decades is thought to have contributed to the increase in access to primary education in developing countries, where the percentage of students attending private primary schools has doubled from 11 to 22 percent (World Bank, 2014).

While the scale of private contribution to education and its impact is not clear, the growing presence of non-state actors in the education sector is becoming an important issue for donors and governments. Much debate centers on education as a human right, where education is seen as a public good and should be the responsibility of the state. The provision of private education raises concerns over issues of equity, quality and ownership. On the other hand, other commentators see the increasing role of non-state actors in education service delivery as an opportunity to increase access and quality through improved interactions between government and the private sector. Recent studies have shown that some countries have been successful in providing equitable access to quality education for all children (both in public and private schools) by increasing oversight and coordination with the private sector, underpinned by a strong regulatory environment (World Bank, 2014).

2.1 Typologies of state and non-state actors

Studies looking at the role of non-state actors in education is complicated by the complexity of interaction between public and private providers, including funding arrangements, oversight, ownership and management. For example, many non-state providers are publically funded, while some are not funded by the state but fall under the management of the government ministry of education. There are private schools that are not-for-profit and those that charge a fee. In addition, the provision of formal versus non-formal schooling further blurs the distinction between what is public and what is private. For example, both the government and the private sector offer non-formal schooling to children in rural and marginalized areas.¹

¹ 'Formal education' refers to traditional schooling, often implemented by the government but can also be provided by non-state actors; 'non-formal' education is used to describe education activities (usually part-time) implemented by a range of providers including NGOs, community groups and faith-

Given the lack of clarity around the role of state and non-state actors, Steer et al. (2015) offers a framework based on a continuum of provision and financing (Figure 1). Instead of classifying schools on an 'either/or' dichotomy, they found it more useful to identify the types of schools based on the varying degrees of relationship with the state and the financial incentive of the provider (for profit/not for profit). They therefore, propose eight different categories of schools based on a combination of three separate criteria: fee paying/non-fee paying; state/non-state financed; state/non-state provided. State provision is defined by the level of management and oversight by the state, from schools that are fully state-run (e.g. government school) to those that are partially-administered by the state (e.g. community schools). School financing varies according to the type of arrangement with the state, ranging from fully-funded schools to those that receive partial support in the form of subsidized teacher salaries, infrastructure or land. In recent years, there is a growing number of schools that are funded by the private sector, for example through impact bonds, philanthropic funds or private investments. These schools are further divided based on whether they are driven by social or financial gains.

This case study will refer to Steer's typology as a starting point in assessing role and impact of non-state providers in Myanmar.

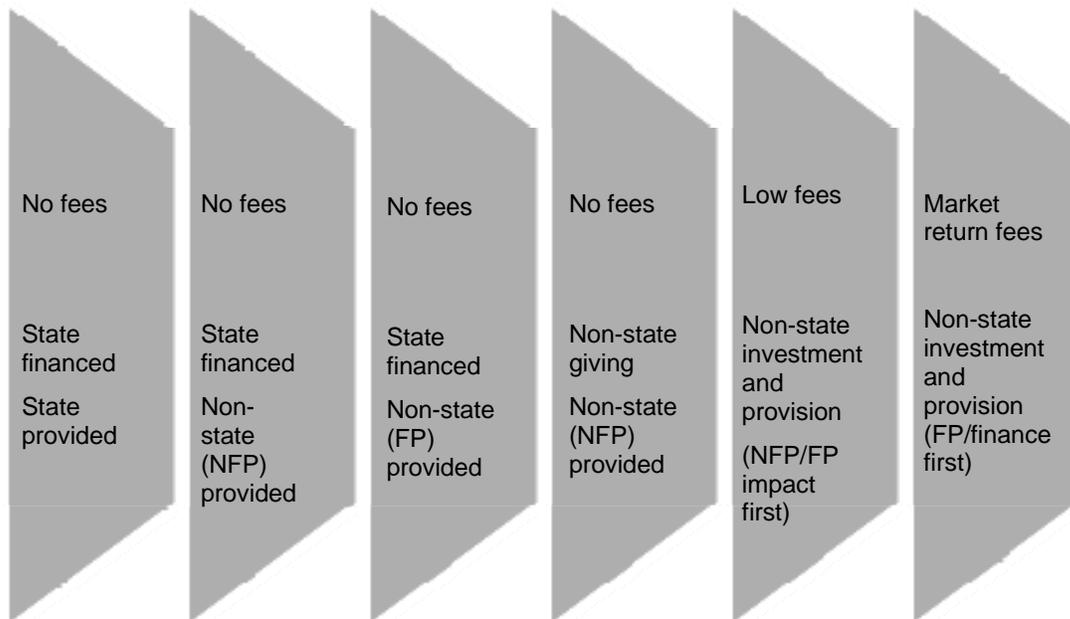


Figure 1: Steer's Typology of State and Non-state actors on a Continuum

Adapted from Steer et al., (2015)

3 Education context in Myanmar

Decades of political instability and civil conflict has left the education system in Myanmar in a state of neglect and disrepair. This, coupled with consistent low levels of spending has led to low enrolment and completion rates, poor learning outcomes and inequalities in access to and quality of education across the country. The situation was exacerbated in ethnic and border regions where conflict often caused schools to close and made school access almost

based organisations. Both formal and non-formal education programs can be funded by the state or from private sources.

impossible for internally displaced populations. Education and its role in defining national identity has long been recognised as a driver of conflict which has further widened the gap in education access and quality between different regions and ethnic groups in Myanmar.

Following general elections in 2010 which transferred military rule to a nominally civilian government, a series of reforms were initiated to improve social and economic development in the country. This included prioritising investments in the education sector, which saw a renewed commitment to increase education expenditure from 0.7 percent GDP in 2010-2011 to 2.1 percent GDP by 2013-2014 (UNESCO, 2014). In 2013-2014, about two thirds of the education budget was allocated towards basic education and a third to secondary education. However, despite an increase in education expenditure, Myanmar still remains on the bottom tier internationally, and is well below its ASEAN neighbours, whose average not including Myanmar, is currently 3.6 percent GDP (World Bank, 2015).

There are currently 43,000 basic education schools² in Myanmar (90 percent of which are found in rural areas), serving 8.5 million students (UNESCO, 2014). Myanmar has one of the lowest enrolment rates in the region. Data for the primary net enrolment rate varies widely between 85 percent in 2012 according to the Ministry of Education and 93 percent based on the 2010 Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (World Bank, 2015). Girls account for 49 percent of total primary enrolment (MEC, 2016). While most children in Myanmar are attending school, it is estimated that only 74 percent complete primary school (UNESCO, 2014). It is estimated that only 38 percent of students starting in grade one make it to the 11th grade, with most dropping out along the way (World Bank, 2015). While the majority drop out at the transition point between primary and middle school, a recent study has revealed that there is a considerable drop out rate within grades 1-4 (Save the Children, 2014).

Education quality is also found to be lacking, which affects children in rural and conflict areas disproportionately. An Early Grade Reading Assessment of sample schools in the Yangon region found as many as nine percent of third graders in 2010 cannot read a single word (World Bank, 2015). A similar assessment conducted by UNICEF in 2012 revealed that only 75 percent of grade 3 students could master basic competencies in mathematics and Myanmar language (World Bank, 2015). In terms of education equity, data indicates that children from poor rural households lag behind the rest of the country across multiple indicators. For example, 46 percent of children from the richest income quintile attend pre-school compared to 7.6 percent of children from the poorest income quintile (World Bank, 2015). At the primary level, almost 95 percent of children from the richest income quintile attend primary school compared to 81.4 percent of children from the poorest quintile (World Bank, 2015).

Despite the poor levels of education access and learning outcomes for children in Myanmar, there are grounds for optimism. The widespread reform process initiated by the government in 2011 has created an unprecedented opportunity for Myanmar to transition towards an education system that can deliver equal access and quality outcomes for all its children. Since then, there have been various education policies and regulatory frameworks put in place to support significant changes in the education sector. For example, the collaboration between the government and donors in the Comprehensive Education Sector Reform (CESR) process has led to a more coherent and coordinated approach in the education reform agenda. In line with the CESR, the government has also strived for free and compulsory primary education, distributed free textbooks for all primary students, provide scholarships to outstanding students and stipends for students from poor households, and increased infrastructure funding to build more schools in border areas. These policies have contributed to a greater demand for education services. Compared to figures in 2001-2002,

² MOE figures include middle school and high school under the 'basic education' category because in Myanmar, these schools often include primary level classes (cited in UNESCO, 2014).

there has been a 10.4 percent increase in the number of basic education schools, 30.4 percent increase in the number of teachers, and a 24.5 percent increase in the number of students in 2013-2014 (UNESCO, 2014). Across all but one state, statistics show that the gross enrolment rate increased between 2010-11 and 2012-13, which coincided with the introduction of free textbooks and learning materials (UNESCO, 2014).

The introduction of 2015 the National Education Law (NEL) and National Education Sector Plan (NESP) also contributed to broadening reforms in the education sector. This includes the enactment of the Private School Registration Law in 2011 which allowed private schools to open across the country and by 2013-2014, there were 159 private schools established, most of which were high schools (UNESCO, 2014). Similarly, amendments under the National Education Law allow for the use of ethnic languages alongside Myanmar as the language of instruction in primary school, thereby providing greater access to the formal education system for children from ethnic areas. Changes to the NEL also recognises the important role of ethnic education systems and the need to support greater integration into the national system.

The recent installation of the first democratically elected government in March 2016 signals a renewed commitment to social and economic reforms in the country, including a more inclusive education system that delivers quality education for all. The new government is also prioritising peace negotiations with armed ethnic groups, in an effort to consolidate the national ceasefire agreement initiated by the previous government in 2015. This provides a platform for discussions on the future structure of a national education system that can deliver equal access and quality educational outcomes for an ethnically diverse population that is characterised by high levels of poverty and protracted conflict.

4 Non-state actors in education

Traditionally, education was seen as the responsibility of the state who is by far the largest education provider in Myanmar. In 2012-2013, there were 35,500 government primary schools, serving about 5.2 million students (World Bank, 2015). Non-government schools including private schools, ethnic and monastic schools fill the gaps where government provisions do not exist or are inadequate. Private primary schools are almost non-existent, although private high schools account for approximately five percent of enrolments (World Bank, 2015). The ethnic and monastic education systems are thought to account for less than one percent of total enrolments, or roughly 500,000 children, mostly from poor and conflict-affected regions of Myanmar (World Bank, 2015, MEC, 2016). The 2015 Education for All National Review reported an 81 percent increase in the number of monastic schools between 2001-2013, with a corresponding increase of 46 percent of students attending these monastic schools (UNESCO, 2014). Although non-state providers have only a marginal share of education service delivery in Myanmar, they play an important role in providing access to education in ethnic, remote and conflict-affected areas. Table 1 draws on various data sources to provide a representative picture of students and schools³ in Myanmar, as at academic year 2013-14. However, caution should be taken when interpreting the data, as statistics on enrolments and schools are notoriously unreliable and often vary widely according to different sources.

³ MOE figures include middle school and high school under the 'basic education' category because in Myanmar, these schools often include primary level classes (cited in UNESCO, 2014).

Table 1: Number of Government, Private, Monastic, Ethnic Schools and Students in 2013-14

	No. of Schools	No. of Students
Government	43,181	8,597,348
Monastic	1,564	275,000
Ethnic	3,065	319,957
Private	159	46,665
Total	47,969	9,238,970

Note: 1) Figures for government schools and students adapted from UNESCO, 2014. MOE figures include middle school and high school under the 'basic education' category because in Myanmar, these schools often include primary level classes.

2) Figures for Monastic and Ethnic schools and students adapted from MEC, 2016

3) Figures for Private schools and students adapted from UNESCO, 2014

A stocktake of recent literature identified seven types of non-state and mixed state/non-state education providers in Myanmar, described below. Table 2 classifies these seven types of education services based on Steer's typology.

Table 2: State and non-state providers in Myanmar based on Steer's typology

		Provision	
		State	Non-state
Finance	State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Schools* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed-schools Monastic Schools
	Non-state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-formal Primary Education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myanmar Non-Formal Education (World Vision) Private Schools Ethnic Education Department Schools (eg. Mon National School) Community Schools Refugee Camp Schools

* Government Schools are not the focus of this case study and has not been included in the discussion

4.1 Non-Formal Education

In addition to state and non-state provision of formal education, there are a number of initiatives that support part-time non-formal education. These programs are primarily offered to out-of-school, over-aged and poor children who may have missed the opportunity to complete primary education or who may have never attended school. Non-formal education can be provided by the government, NGOs or community groups from various funding sources.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education (MoE), with support from UNICEF and UNDP established the Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) Program which provided second chance education for out-of-school children. The program runs for two years and comprises two levels: Level 1 is equivalent to the lower primary level and Level 2 which is equivalent to the upper primary level. Students who complete Level 2 (recognised as the completion of primary school) are able to transfer to lower secondary school at Grade 6 in the formal

education system. Since 2001, the NFPE program has expanded across the country from 11 townships with 254 students to 80 townships (24 percent of all townships across the country) serving 7,553 learners by 2013-2014 (UNESCO, 2014). This represented a 627 percent increase in the number of townships covered by the program and 2874 percent increase in the number of students participating. Of the 80 townships providing NFPE, 16 were supported by MOE, 35 by UNICEF, 27 by local donors, and two by community members (UNESCO, 2014). Interestingly, MOE data reveal that the number of out-of-school students decreased between 2012-13 and 2013-14 in townships where NFPE had been operating for a long time, suggesting that the program had been successful in targeting out-of-school students who may have completed the program and transitioned into the formal education system.

Other providers of non-formal education include World Vision and the Episcopal Commission for Education. World Vision's Myanmar Non Formal Education (NFE) program provides basic literacy, mathematics and essential life skills training for children aged 8-18 years who have not been to school before, children who have dropped out of primary education or children who cannot access the formal system. At present, World Vision is operating 99 NFE centres across 25 townships, which serves nearly 3,000 out-of-school children (UNESCO, 2014). The Episcopal Commission for Education has been implementing its Access to Support Basic Formal Education in the Catholic Church of Myanmar since 2008. The funding supports teacher training, leadership workshops and community awareness in rural and remote villages where basic education schools do not exist. Currently, the program supports an estimated 270 teachers and 7,000 children in four states and two townships (UNESCO, 2014).

4.2 Private Schools

Until 2011, private schools were officially banned in Myanmar, although some continued to operate. Political support for private schools was adopted as education policy "to promulgate relevant laws for the participation and contribution of private sectors in education services" (UNESCO, 2014). This directive led to the enactment of the Private School Registration Law in 2011, allowing private schools which follow the national curriculum to open officially across the country. There are currently 159 private schools in Myanmar which serve 46,665 students, over 58 percent are made up of high school students, followed by middle school students (27 percent) and primary school students (14.7 percent) (UNESCO, 2014). Private schools typically have smaller class size (about 30 students) and student-teacher ratio (15:1 on average) and is perceived to offer more personal attention to its students (UNESCO, 2014). However, there is no data on student performance to attest to this.

The private sector also has a sizeable stake in the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) services⁴. The number of ECCE services has expanded considerably since 2005-06, from over 7,500 to about 12,000 in 2013-14 serving 480,000 children (UNESCO, 2014). Of these, over 29 percent are operated by the private sector. Most ECCE facilities (34.8 percent) are run by INGOs, NGOs, FBOs, CBOs and foundations, 29 percent are administered by the government and a small number are offered by communities (UNESCO, 2014).

4.3 Ethnic Education Department Schools

Ethnic minority groups make up about one third of the population in Myanmar. Each ethnic group has their own language, culture, territory and natural resources which they fiercely protect as part of their national identity. Education, and its role in the formation of national identity has been a catalyst in the ongoing power struggles and armed conflict between

⁴ ECCE services include Early Childhood Development Centres, day-care centres, home visits, mothers circles, preschools and school-based preschool classes.

ethnic communities. However, the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Accord (NCA) in October 2015 provides a framework for engaging ethnic groups into the political process, including discussions around the future of ethnic education systems.

Education services in ethnic areas are complex and involve multiple actors, including the MOE, ethnic education departments, faith-based organisations, community groups and civil society organisations. The interaction between different education providers makes it difficult to classify the types of education services offered in ethnic areas. In government controlled ethnic areas, the majority of children (approximately 730,000) have access to government schools (MEC, 2016). In regions where there are rebel factions with a functioning ethnic civil administration, ethnic education departments provide management and oversight of the education system including curricula, teacher recruitment and development, education policies and assessment frameworks (MEC, 2016). Data on the number of schools and students in ethnic areas are limited, but it is estimated that ethnic education departments provide learning opportunities for approximately 320,000 students at over 3,000 institutions (MEC, 2016). There is little information on learning outcomes for students in ethnic schools, although some evidence suggests that the drop out rate is particularly high for children aged from 12 years and affects more boys than girls (MEC, 2016).

Overall, ethnic education systems have substantial needs (Lall & South, 2012). Many schools are under-resourced, lack adequate school infrastructure and teaching and learning materials (Lall & South, 2012). Teachers and education officials lack training and do not receive adequate salaries compared to teachers from government schools. Many rely on the community for food and accommodation. At the primary level, many teachers have not completed high school (and sometimes not middle school). Some ethnic education departments have improved basic standards in teaching through the establishment of mobile teacher training teams which provide in-service training in remote locations (Lall & South, 2012). Other teacher development programs are offered over the summer holidays or short-term training activities conducted by NGOs and faith-based organisations (Lall & South, 2012). A small number of committed young teachers are admitted into teacher training colleges.

Funding and support for ethnic education schools vary from across different states. In some areas, schools are supported by NGOs associated with the ethnic authorities, which provide financial support, teacher training and curriculum development. For example, in Karen state, teachers at Karen Education Department schools receive an annual stipend from a NGO consortium known as the Karen State Education Assistance Group (Lall & South, 2012). The consortium also provides basic teaching and learning materials. KSEAG supports one of the largest network of schools in ethnic areas, estimated at 1,300 schools and 142,000 students (MEC, 2016). The Karen ethnic education department schools also receive additional funding from private sponsors such as missionary organisations, community members and cross-border organisations who are sympathetic to the Karen national struggle (Lall & South, 2012). Other local organisations, such as Shalom and Metta, also provide support to ethnic education departments, mostly in developing administrative capacity (MEC, 2016). UNICEF provides language enrichment programs as well as the provision of learning materials (MEC, 2016). Most ethnic education schools in Karen state provide free education, although families may have to pay a small entrance fee as well as uniforms and books.

The Mon National School (MNS) is another well-established ethnic education system operating in Mon state. Currently there are approximately 142 MNS and 105 'mixed-schools' which serve 30,000 children (MEC, 2016). In the Mon system, the language of instruction at the primary level is Mon and at middle and high school, subjects are taught in Burmese and explained in Mon. Therefore, students in middle and high school are taught the same curriculum as students in the government system, with additional subjects in Mon language and culture. However, as ethnic schools are not recognised by the government, there are limited opportunities for MNS students to transfer into the national education system. Similar to other ethnic department schools, teachers in the Mon system are less qualified and

receive a lower salary than their government counterparts. Most teachers have only reached Grade 10 and only 20 percent have attended some form of higher education such as 'distance university' (Lall & South, 2012). Due to the low salary, Mon officials report a low retention rate of Mon teachers, which means every year 40 to 50 new teachers have to be recruited and trained (Lall & South, 2012). As the government does not recognise ethnic education systems, there are also very limited pathways for Mon teachers into the national education system. The Mon school system is heavily reliant on international donors and some local community support (Lall & South, 2012). As this is not a sustainable approach, the Mon education committees and their CBO partners have trialled a community-based income generating model to support schools as well as encourage community participation in education (Lall & South, 2012).

4.4 Mixed Schools

Some schools in ethnic areas have evolved into 'mixed-schools' where education provision is shared between the government and ethnic education department through an informal partnership. The relationship between the government and non-state providers differ according to townships, states and villages. A study of non-state providers in Mon state found that the formation of most mixed-schools has been based on the personal relationships between state and ethnic education authorities at the local level. (Lall & South, 2012). Most mixed schools offer the government curriculum with extra modules on the local language and culture. Others have refused to incorporate the ethnic curriculum into their syllabus. Some schools receive infrastructure funding from the state and government-appointed teachers, while others receive funding for teacher salaries and teaching materials from non-state authorities (Lall & South, 2012). Additional resources are sometimes provided by CBOs. There are currently 105 mixed-schools operating in Mon state, serving 17,000 students (MEC, 2016). There is no available data on student learning outcomes for mixed-school students.

4.5 Community Schools

In remote communities, monastic and community schools often fill the gap where government and ethnic education departments do not have a presence. Community schools are run by the community and are generally free to attend. However, students sometimes have to pay a small school entrance fee and learning materials (Lall & South, 2012). In many villages parents are expected to contribute food to supplement low teaching salaries (Lall & South, 2012). Some community schools are affiliated with MOE schools so students are able to take the national exam (MEC, 2016). However, most offer an informal education service to children and are not recognised by either the government or ethnic education system. Community schools use a combination of curricula provided by the government and ethnic education authority as well resources produced by local and external agencies including Christian and Buddhist organisations (Lall & South, 2012). The number of community schools is unknown. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some designate themselves as community schools in order to distance themselves from the ethnic authorities and avoid punishment from the Burma Army (Lall & South, 2012).

4.6 Monastic Schools

Monastic schools are a network of schools operated by monasteries and nunneries and provide access to learning opportunities for children from poor and remote areas. Monastic schools were allowed to reopen in 1992 and since then have expanded quickly (MEC, 2016). The number of monastic schools increased by 81 percent between 2001-02 and 2013-14 and the number of students attending monastic schools in that time increased by 46 percent (UNESCO, 2014). There are currently 1,600 monastic schools nationwide, providing education to almost 275,000 students, making it the second largest provider of education in the country (MEC, 2016). The majority (over 70 percent) of monastic schools provide primary education (UNESCO, 2014). There is marginal gender disparity (52:48) favouring

boys and the five year survival rates are equal across both genders (UNESCO, 2014). The Myanmar Education Consortium's⁵ (MEC) work with monastic schools indicate that these schools have a high dropout rate most likely due to opportunity cost factors relating to economic activities (MEC, 2016).

Recognising the reach and scale of monastic education, the government has recently amended the National Education Law to formally recognise monastic education. As a result, monastic schools are now administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) and are supported by the MOE in curriculum development and student assessment. State recognition of monastic schools has enabled monastic students to take the national exam and transfer into government schools or progress into higher education. In reality, there is evidence that this only occurs where there is strong coordination with the national authority at the local level (MEC, 2016).

The government also provides funding support for teachers at the primary level, but this is only one quarter of the salary of teachers at government schools (MEC, 2016). In some areas, this has resulted in a low teacher retention rate as many pursue positions in the national education system which offers better pay. Similar to the ethnic education system, there is a lack of data on teaching quality and learning outcomes in monastic schools. However, 's experience working with monastic schools suggests that their autonomy has allowed a greater degree of responsiveness to local contexts and the highly regarded status of monasteries in local communities contributes positively to the demand for education (MEC, 2016).

A study conducted in 2013 found that out of 127 randomly selected monastic schools, 70 percent have multigrade classrooms, only 60 percent had both chairs and tables for students and only 29 percent of schools had a library (UNESCO, 2014). In 2011, the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) was formed to support the formalisation and introduction of quality standards across the monastic school system. MEDG support has included the training of school principals and administrators, teacher competency training, and infrastructure funding to improve water and sanitation in schools.

Formal recognition of monastic schools has also allowed them to be eligible for the MOE School Grants Program and Stipend Program, supported by the World Bank (MEC, 2016). This has provided additional funding support for school improvement at the local level. The initiative also supports the training of school leaders and community groups in the management and oversight of school improvement plans. While the program overall has generally been perceived as successful, there has not yet been any reports on the impact of the School Grants program on monastic schools (Save the Children, 2015). However, it was noted that some monastic schools have rejected participating in the program due to a fear of losing their autonomy (MEC, 2016). While monastic schools are eligible to participate in the Stipend program, there is little information on what impact this program is having on the monastic school system. This is most likely due to the infancy of the program. However, general limitations of the Stipend programs was reported to be related to issues of accessibility where the program is only reaching students who live 30 minutes from a school (Save the Children, 2015). This would preclude the majority if not all monastic school students who live in remote areas.

⁵ The Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) is a program funded by the Australian, UK and Danish governments to support NGOs in education service delivery in Myanmar. The program was established in 2013 with an estimated budget of AUD29.6 million. The focus of the program is on education provision for children in poor and remote regions who do not have access to government schools. The majority of MEC's activities is in ECCE, non formal education and emergency education. MEC also provides capacity building support to NGOs and CBOs in engaging with government at the policy level. (MEC, 2015)

NGOs and some private companies provide additional support to the monastic system including teacher training and salary subsidies, uniforms, and sanitation and nutrition programs (MEC, 2016).

4.7 Refugee and Border Education

A discussion on education inside Myanmar wouldn't be complete without mentioning the provision of education in the border areas with Thailand that host refugees fleeing conflict from Myanmar. Education for refugee children is provided through an established network of NGOs with funding mostly from international donors such as the US and EU (Lall & South, 2012). For example, the USAID funded Project for Local Empowerment has been delivered by a consortium of organisations (including World Education, IRC and The Border Consortium) in the border areas. Lall & South (2012) report that the EU provide the bulk of funding to refugee camp education in Karen areas, estimated at 1.5 million Euros per year.

In the Karen areas bordering Thailand, it is estimated that refugee camp schools cater to approximately 40,000 school aged children (Lall & South, 2012). These border-based education systems are well-funded and well-organised by a network of INGOs with better teaching standards and quality of learning materials (Lall & South, 2012). As a result, this created an unintended impact on education in the border regions, where ethnic department schools in Myanmar became less attractive to local populations who preferred to send their children across the border and enter the camps to gain access to a better education (Lall & South, 2012). Many teachers and education officials from the ethnic department schools also left to find employment with the INGOs across the border (Lall & South, 2012). Some commentators have observed that the development of a better education system in the refugee camps has resulted in graduates who are qualified to work for aid agencies, but are unable to matriculate and enter the government higher education system (Lall & South, 2012).

There is also demand for education from children of the two million migrant workers in the border regions, many of whom are originally from ethnic regions of Myanmar. Over the last ten years, a network of schools have been established in towns and villages along the border providing basic education services to migrant children (Lall & South, 2012). Although these migrant schools are administered by the Thai authority, they often share the same teaching materials and curricula with camp schools (Lall & South, 2012). INGOs delivering education in refugee camp schools are working with the Thai government to support the transition of refugee children into Thai schools (Lall & South, 2012).

More recently, there has been greater collaboration between border organisations and ethnic education departments and the government education system within Myanmar. For example, new materials, curricula and methodologies developed in the camps are being distributed to schools inside Myanmar. Some INGOs and CSOs are also gradually moving their programs into the country, such as Save the Children Thailand (MEC, 2016).

5 Policy Considerations

Despite recent efforts to reform the education system in Myanmar, acute challenges remain in providing an accessible and quality education for all children. These challenges are compounded by decades of conflict and a disparate network of independent and semi-independent education providers who have a history of distrust with the government. However, there is an atmosphere of optimism with the installation of a new government this year, who has set the agenda for consolidating the peace process, which includes dialogue on the future role of ethnic and non-state education. This case study has identified various conditions that could promote greater collaboration between state and non-state actors in developing an education system that is inclusive, accessible and creates quality learning outcomes for all children, particularly those from poor and conflict-affected areas.

Political will and commitment is the strongest enabling factor in education reform. The Thein Sein government in 2011 initiated a series of reform processes that has translated into improvements in the education sector. This includes the Comprehensive Education Sector Review process and the development of the National Education Sector Plan which was endorsed by the government. Other policy commitments included free education for all as well as the provision of free textbooks, which has led to an increase in the enrolment rate before and after 2011.

An improved regulatory environment has provided space for the private sector to engage in education service delivery. Similarly, changes in the legal framework has supported the formal recognition of monastic schools and an openness to engage with non-state actors in the provision of education services, in areas such as accreditation and formal assessments.

NGOs have an important role to play in facilitating dialogue between state and non-state actors. For example, the Myanmar Education Consortium has taken on a greater role in the policy debate by supporting civil society engagement in the CESR process. MEC has also been successful in advocating for the recognition of children with disability in the drafting of the National Education Strategic Plan. MEC's support for the Pynniya Tazaung Association has resulted in formal recognition of their early childhood education services in the national education system, ensuring sustainability of the program through future government funding for teacher training and support for curriculum development. In Bangladesh, there is also evidence of the successful role NGOs play in facilitating negotiations between state and non-state actors. It was noted that dialogue organised by the NGO, CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education), was critical in the agreement reached between the Government of Bangladesh and BRAC to allow the transfer of ECCE students into government primary schools.

Close coordination between education authorities is important for ensuring more effective and efficient delivery of education services. At the local level, it has been found that better coordination between government and non-government authorities can help students from monastic schools transfer more easily into the national education system. Similarly, a recent review of the School Grant program noted that greater oversight and monitoring from the local education office would promote more efficiency in the management and transfer of funding to schools. On an informal level, a close relationship between local government and non-government actors has often been the catalyst for the establishment of mixed schools in Mon areas.

Collaborative partnerships between the government and non-state actors can enhance education service delivery, particularly for children in remote areas where government schools do not exist. In these areas, non-formal, community and monastic schools have typically provided access to education for the majority of children. These schools receive funding or other types of support from the government, but are administered by the community or monastic system. Collaboration with the government can provide access to additional funding schemes (such as the School Grant program and Student Stipend program) as well as a pathway for students to transfer into the government system at high school. However, caution should be taken when establishing new education partnerships, especially in conflict-affected areas where education is linked to national identity and could fuel conflict if there is perceived threat of government control over ethnic education. Similarly, due to historical distrust of the government, some schools have rejected participation in government-funded programs for fear of losing their autonomy.

Schools that are owned and run by the community has many benefits. Research in the use of mother tongue instruction and localised curricula show flow on benefits to student learning outcomes and teacher retention (MEC, 2016). Schools that are community-based usually offer a curriculum that is culturally adaptable and have the flexibility to trial innovative approach to pedagogy. In ethnic communities, local languages are used as the teaching medium and the curriculum includes local cultural and historical contexts. Mon National

Schools have been able to successfully integrate the national curriculum into their schools by providing mother tongue instruction at the primary level and bi-lingual instruction at the middle and high school levels. Teacher retention has also been shown to be higher in community-based schools, as local teachers are more likely to remain in the community. The community often supplements the low teacher salary with donation of food and board. Studies have shown that active participation and generous contributions by the community play an important role in providing access to education for many remote and conflict affected communities. The Karen school system is “integrated into the existing community structures: helping communities help their own schools” (Lall & South, 2012).

The formation of consortiums is valuable in mobilising scarce resources, where there are diverse education providers with common interests. For example, the Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG) is a consortium of NGOs which provides teacher training and financial support to nearly all schools in Karen state including ethnic department schools, mixed schools and community schools. Similarly, the formation of the Monastic Education Development Group (MEDG) supported by MEC has been instrumental in improving quality and consistency across the monastic system. MEDG has also provided a strong policy voice for the monastic school system which has resulted in their recognition by the government as part of the national education system.

6 Conclusion

This case study illustrates that government commitment to education reform since 2011 has already resulted in significant improvements in education service delivery, particular in relation to education access. However, challenges remain in the achievement of quality standards in teaching and learning for all children across the national and non-state education systems. There is limited data to make judgements about progress and outcomes in the sector, and where data exists, it varies widely from one source to another. This is probably because the reform process is still in its early stages and a coherent system of data collection has not yet been fully established. The data on education access and quality is even murkier in ethnic and remote regions. However, with the government’s formal recognition of non-state actors in the provision of education services, there is scope for a future education system in Myanmar that is more inclusive and better coordinated to meet the needs of all children, especially those from poor and conflict-affected regions of the country.

7 References

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