

Love thy Neighbors, Fear thy Neighbors:

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF SHAN AND PALAUNG COMMUNITIES IN SHAN STATE



APRIL 2017



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ACRONYMS

AA	Arakan Army
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organization
LP	Listening Project
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NLD	National League for Democracy
PSLF	Palaung State Liberation Front
RCSS	Restoration Council of Shan State
SLCA	Shan Literature and Culture Association
SNDP	Shan Nationalities Democratic Party
SNLD	Shan National League for Democracy
SSA-N	Shan State Army-North
SSA-S	Shan State Army-South
SSPP	Shan State Progress Party
TCLC	Ta'ang Culture and Literature Committee
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army
TNP	Ta'ang National Party
TSYU	Ta'ang Students Youths Union
TYO	Tai Youth Organization
UP	Unity Preservation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Myanmar's peace process was initiated by the U Thein Sein presidency in 2010. Various peace negotiations and talks have since been held and multiple ceasefire agreements have been adopted. The process culminated in the first Union Peace Conference, the so-called 21st Pang Long Conference, soon after the National League for Democracy (NLD) government came to power in 2016. Although various negotiations have taken place during the on-going process, several Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs), especially those that have not signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), have been excluded. Moreover, civilian voices, especially those of victims from the areas affected by the armed conflict, have usually been ignored. Some ethnic groups are convinced that they are powerless to negotiate for their interests and ethnic rights in the political arena. Consequently, Ta'ang (Palaung), Arakan, and Ko Kang groups have formed the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Arakan Army (AA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) respectively, in order to effectively claim their right to participate in the political reform and peace processes.

Tensions and conflict between several EAOs make the ongoing process even more complicated. Unfortunately, the government and Tatmadaw have taken no responsibility in resolving armed conflicts among different EAOs and communities. This is especially the case in the conflict between the TNLA and RCSS, a conflict that has created increasing tension between Shan¹ and Palaung² communities.

For as long as Shan and Palaung communities have lived in close proximity, they have co-existed peacefully. They maintained good social, economic, traditional, and religious relations. Their interrelations moreover led to the adoption of cross-cultural traditions. Administrative issues never arose between the communities, because each ethnic group would elect a leader to administer its respective group. Indeed, until the armed clashes between the RCSS and the TNLA broke out in 2015, there had never been violent conflict between Palaung and Shan groups.

The conflict between the RCSS and the TNLA began as a territorial dispute in May 2015, when the RCSS's Battalion 701 soldiers returned to their base in Nam Kham, crossing TNLA territory. The TNLA accused the RCSS of intruding, and ambushed them, while the RCSS claimed that they had informed the TNLA about their movements. During ensuing armed clashes, villagers became victims of extrajudicial killings, arrests, interrogations, forced recruitment, forced taxation, forced labor, and landmines. This led to fear, and suspicion among

¹ The Shan people refer to themselves as 'Tai'. However, since internationally they are known as the 'Shan', this report will use 'Shan' instead of 'Tai'.

² The Palaung people prefer to be addressed as 'Ta'ang'. However, internationally they are known as the 'Palaung'. The Shan usually refer to the Palaung as 'Palaung' or 'Loi'. This report will use 'Palaung' instead of 'Ta'ang'.

villagers, a situation worsened by the fact that the TNLA is often referred to as ‘the Palaung’ while the RCSS is often referred to as ‘the Shan’. As the armed clashes between the RCSS and the TNLA intensified, the tension between the Palaung and the Shan communities became ever more tangible.

In response to the news about the conflict between the Palaung and Shan communities in Nam Kham, Zaelant, Namtu, and Kyaukme, this Listening Project was carried out to elevate victims’ and civilians’ narratives about their relationships before and after the fighting between the RCSS and TNLA broke out. To better understand the long standing relationship between the Palaung and Shan, Mong Hsu Township was also targeted, although it has experienced no violent conflict. A total of 394 participants – including ninety victims, community-based organizations, religion-based organizations, and community leaders – participated in the project. First-hand data was gathered with listening research methodology, using guided questioning and conversation with participants. Field research and data collection took place in sixty villages in Kyaukme, Namtu, Mong Hsu, Nam Kham and Muse (Zaelant) townships in Shan State. Conversations and answers from participants were then carefully analyzed and the results were discussed with civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties, and religious leaders in a two-day Report Back Workshop.

The findings of the Listening Project indicate that the Palaung and Shan people in Nam Kham, Kyaukme and Namtu co-existed peacefully until the fighting between the RCSS and TNLA broke out in 2015.

In Kyaukme Township, the killing of seven Shan villagers on February 7th 2015 (Shan National Day) by the TNLA was the main cause of ethnic tension between the Palaung and Shan communities. Since the armed conflict between the RCSS and TNLA broke out, distrust between the communities has led to reduced communication and social distance. Because of security concerns, trade between the groups has also decreased.

In Namtu Township, the recent conflict between the RCSS and the TNLA stirred up the Palaung and Shan peoples’ historically peaceful relationships. In fact, people that were displaced due to the conflict now blame mostly the other ethnic group for their suffering.

Similar to Kyaukme and Namtu townships, the Shan and Palaung communities in Nam Kham Township had good socio-economic relations until the fighting between the RCSS and TNLA broke out. As a result, villagers stopped going to social events hosted by villagers from the other ethnic group and, in some cases, villagers have started carrying knives to protect themselves from each other.

The Tatmadaw’s four cuts strategy forced Palaung internally displaced persons (IDPs) to relocate to Zaelant, a Shan village, in 1992. Problems between the Palaung and Shan started after the Palaung villagers submitted a request to the Thein Sein government, to be recognized as a separate village track from Zaelant, without consulting with Zaelant’s Shan villagers. The

resulting worsened relations have been exacerbated by recent fighting between the RCSS and TNLA.

Finally, in Mong Hsu Township, where no violence has taken place between the RCSS and TNLA, the socio-economic, religious, traditional, and administrative relations between Palaung and Shan communities remain strong. For instance, until this day Palaung IDPs in Hai Pa receive aid from Shan communities.

Based on the findings of this project, it can be concluded that the armed clashes between the RCSS and TNLA negatively affected villagers in the conflict area, especially due to the resulting human rights violations. Moreover, rumors and hate speech used within the communities and, especially, on social media, have caused increasing tension. The government has not taken any action on the Shan/Palaung ethno-conflict, and acts of Tatmadaw are seemingly carried out to further provoke the RCSS and TNLA. Both Shan and Palaung people criticized the Tatmadaw for strategically benefiting from the ethno-conflict.

This report recommends that the TNLA and RCSS stop using civilians in pursuit of their strategic interests, and to resolve the conflict using political means. The government and Tatmadaw should further take a mediation role in solving the conflict between the RCSS and TNLA, as well as the ethno-conflict in the Palaung and Shan communities.

APPEALS FROM THE SHAN AND PALAUNG COMMUNITIES

Table 1. Recommendations from Shan and Palaung communities to the Government and Tatmadaw

Recommendation To Government	Recommendation to Tatmadaw
Rule of law should protect citizens.	Initiate peace talks instead of fighting.
Implement 21 st Pang Long peace process effectively.	Allow people to live peacefully.
Encourage national peace talks.	Stop laying landmines in or near the villages.
Encourage and implement NCA among all ethnic armed groups, based on inclusiveness.	Stop fighting in or near villages.
Take care of victims and IDPs	Stop burning villages.
Build good schools for the villages.	Stop confiscating and destroying people's property.
Provide farmland to farmers.	Implement the NCA.
Provide temporary or permanent land and support to IDPs and for IDP camps.	Respect human rights.
Provide security to people.	
Respect human rights.	

Table 2. Recommendations from Shan and Palaung communities to the RCSS and TNLA

Recommendation To RCSS	Recommendation to TNLA
Initiate peace talks instead of fighting.	Initiate peace talks instead of fighting.
Allow people to live peacefully.	Allow people to live peacefully.
Don't fight during students' exam period.	Don't fight during students' exam period.
Stop capturing innocent citizens.	Stop burying landmines in or near the villages.
Act according to the needs of the people, not according to own strategic goals.	Stop capturing innocent citizens.
Stop fighting in or near the villages.	Don't fight in or near the village.
Implement and respect the NCA.	Sign the NCA.
Stop fighting TNLA: the Palaung and Shan are like family.	Stop fighting RCSS: the Palaung and Shan are like family.
Be considerate to people who suffered due to the conflict.	Be considerate to people who suffered due to the conflict.
Stop camping in the villages.	Stop killing innocent civilians.
Be an army to protect people so that others cannot oppress them.	Stop forced recruitment.
Stop killing innocent citizens.	Stop destroying and confiscating people's properties.
Stop the armed conflict.	Stop using forced labor.
	Stop the armed conflict
	Stop camping in the villages.

Table 3. Recommendations from Shan and Palaung communities to the SSPP and Shan and Palaung civilians

Recommendation To SSPP	Recommendation to Shan and Palaung People
Collect less tax from the people.	Shan and Palaung people should form a joint committee to solve the communal conflict in the society.
Stop forced recruitment.	Both Palaung and Shan people should frequently meet and talk to clear up misunderstandings.
Be an army to protect people.	Don't spread rumors and hate speech personally, or on social media, that make people hate or misunderstand each other.
Sign the NCA.	If the conflict between TNLA and RCSS escalates, the Palaung and Shan people should demonstrate.
Take up a mediation role in the recent RCSS and TNLA conflict	Don't trust rumors.
	Don't fully trust social media.
	Regard the conflict as an armed conflict between the RCSS and TNLA, rather than a conflict between Shan and Palaung.

INTRODUCTION

Since the national elections in 2010, change in Myanmar has been fast-paced. The main political actors such as Tatmadaw (army of Myanmar), the government, and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) have shown genuine intention to end the armed conflict that has been ongoing for over six decades. During the Thein Sein presidency, the government and EAOs made significant progress by signing 34 bilateral ceasefire agreements. In 2015, after two years of negotiations, the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was introduced and signed by the government and eight EAOs. Unfortunately, the most active of EAOs could not reach to agreements and refused to sign the agreement. This fostered partition among signatory EAOs and non-signatory EAOs, and led to continued fighting between Tatmadaw, the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the Arakan Army (AA), the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA).

Civilians in northern Shan State are caught up between the different political interests of signatories, non-signatories, and Tatmadaw. The Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS; political wing of the Shan State Army-South (SSA-S)),³ one of the signatories of the NCA, has been making an effort to secure its territories in northern Shan State. Meanwhile, the TNLA, is not recognized by the government and Tatmadaw as negotiation partner in NCA deliberations. Consequently, the TNLA continues to fight against Tatmadaw, in order to effectively claim their right to participate in the peace negotiations.

Conflict between the RCSS and the TNLA began as a territorial dispute in May 2015, when the RCSS's Battalion 701 soldiers returned to their base in Nam Kham, crossing TNLA territory. The TNLA accused the RCSS of being intruders, and ambushed them, while the RCSS claimed that they had informed the TNLA about their movements. During ensuing armed clashes, villagers became victims of extrajudicial killings, arrests, interrogations, forced recruitment, forced taxation, forced labor, and landmines. This led to fear, suspicion, and distrust among villagers, a situation worsened by the fact that the TNLA is often referred to as 'the Palaung' while the RCSS is often referred to as 'the Shan'. As the armed clashes between the RCSS and the TNLA intensified, the tension between the Palaung and the Shan communities became ever more tangible. Rumors and hate speech have been widespread among the communities and have caused distrust and hatred between them. Indeed, members of some communities have started carrying arms in order to defend themselves.

Neither the government nor Tatmadaw have taken a mediation role in dealing with the EAOs' ongoing conflict. To make matter worse, the government refuses to comment and has taken no action to diffuse the tension between Shan and Palaung communities.

1.1 Background of the Listening Project

Kaw Dai Organization previously published two reports: *A Voice of War Victims and the Needs of the People of Shan State* and *Caught up In Between*, a listening project in Bahmo district Kachin State. These reports have been used by different organizations when negotiating for their rights. For instance, the Tai Leng Youth used the *Caught up In Between*-report as a reference at the Pang Long Youth Conference on human rights violations.

This Shan/Palaung Listening Project was initiated after Kaw Dai Organization received numerous reports about the Shan/Palaung conflict and observed increasing tension between the communities, especially in Nam Kham and Namtu Townships, after the fighting broke out between TNLA and RCSS. In order to gain in-depth understanding of the conflict between the Shan and Palaung communities, a Listening Project (LP) approach was chosen. The following report aims to identify the root cause of the tensions, in order to bring a halt to rumors and hate speech, and to restore peace in the communities.

³ For purposes of this report, the RCSS/SSA-S will be referred to as the RCSS.

The hypothesis of the LP is: a) armed violence between the RCSS and TNLA is the root cause of the tension between the Shan and the Palaung; or b) the Shan and Palaung have a history of hatred and tension, and conflict can be provoked at any time.

1.2 Aims of the Listening Project

The main aim of the report is to create an opportunity for locals, victims, community based organizations (CBOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs) in different townships in the affected areas to speak out about the conflict. Other goals include:

- Finding a way to reduce tensions between the Palaung and Shan communities;
- Creating mutual understanding regarding the conflict in both Shan and Palaung communities;
- Encouraging political parties to address this issue in peace talks and political dialogue;
- Making RCSS, TNLA, Tatmadaw, and SSPP aware of the situation and hopefully prevent further manipulation of civilians and abuse of human rights in the affected areas;
- Supporting future reconciliation between the Palaung and Shan

II. METHODOLOGY

In order to encourage victims and villagers in the chosen townships to share their experiences, and to establish their concerns, needs, and demands, *listening techniques* were used. Listening techniques were chosen because of their broad application and avoidance of preconceived theories or ideas. The teams used pre-established guided open questions and informed participants of their interest in any related information and specific examples. Listening teams further invited people to share their life stories, if willing. Thereby, respondents' deepest concerns regarding specific issues were captured.

Interviews were held with one or two individuals at a time, but in some cases in groups. LP teams visited communities and started up conversations and interviews with whomever was available and willing to talk. In some cases, based on suggestions and with the cooperation of local organizers, specific houses were visited and people interviewed.

The data obtained was analyzed using both *variable-oriented* and *case-oriented analysis* (Huberman and Miles). Typically, the general data collected included biographical information, village contexts, and the socio-economic, religious, traditional, and administrative interrelations. Based on these variables, the interrelations between the communities were analyzed using variable-oriented analysis. Collected information not fitting within these variables were analyzed using case-oriented analysis.

This report does not use the names of respondents for security reasons. The situation between the RCSS, TNLA, and Tatmadaw remains tense. These armed groups are still operating in and around the villages, and villagers fear reprisals from all sides if their names were to be published in the report. However, respondents' names were recorded for purposes of research

reliability. LP teams did not record the names of perpetrators, but kept record of which camps they were from and the dates of occurrences.

2.1 Listening Team and Facilitation

The listening teams and data collectors were made up of locals from the five townships: Nam Kham, Muse (Zaelant), Mong Hsu, Kyaukme, and Namtu. Ten villagers per township were trained in data collection. The teams consisted of five Palaung and five Shan people, as the aim was to target both Shan and Palaung households. The fifty people from the selected townships were in charge of collecting information in the villages. In addition, eight people from Kaw Dai Organization were in charge of organizing research trainings, video-recordings, and consulting with research experts.

2.2 Report Participants

The data collectors collected information in Nam Kham, Muse (Zaelant), Mong Hsu, Namtu, and Kyaukme townships. A total of 394 households were involved in the listening sessions across the five regions. Almost all participants, of both Palaung and Shan ethnicity, gave one-on-one interviews except for the interview in Hai Pa Camp for internally displaced people (IDPs). Acknowledging that diverse opinions were needed in order to thoroughly understand the conflict's cause, Kaw Dai developed criteria that would involve a diverse range of people from different backgrounds.

2.3 Process of Listening Activities

2.3.1 Stage One: Data Collection Training

In Phase I of the Listening Project the fifty chosen villagers from the selected townships were trained in data collection. The trainings were conducted in Nam Kham and Kyaukme townships. Data collectors from Muse (Zaelant) Township joined the training in Nam Kham, while those from Namtu and Mong Hsu joined the training in Kyaukme. Each training took five days. During trainings, the importance and priority of respondents' and victims' consent was emphasized, and interviewers were trained to ask open questions. To promote consistency in analysis of the issues, interviewers were provided with guided questions to use in the interviews.

2.3.2 Stage Two: Data Collection

The Kaw Dai teams and local organizers from Palaung and Shan communities worked together to conduct the LP in Nam Kham, Muse (Zaelant), Kyaukme, Namtu, and Mong Su townships. These townships were selected to establish the opinions and concerns of respondents regarding their needs and experiences, and the effects of the conflict, and to hear their suggestions to stakeholders. The data collection teams worked with respected heads of villages or locals authorities to approach the victims and villagers.

2.3.3 Stage Three: Report Back Workshop

After the fifty data collectors finished conducting their interviews, the Kaw Dai team collected the information in a Report Back Workshop. During the workshop, interviewers presented their findings on the different kinds of issues that villagers in the five townships have been facing.

The Kaw Dai team sat with interviewers, one by one, to understand all words and quotations. To more thoroughly understand the collected data, CSOs, political parties, religious leaders, and village leaders were invited to participate in the Report Back Workshop for one day. The workshop provided the scope of issues and concerns of the people from the five regions.

2.3.4 Stage Four: Data Synthesizing, Analyzing and Report Development

The final report was prepared by **Sai Phong Khong, Nang Kant Kaw Yawt Hseng, and Sai Hleng Kham** with the assistance from the research advisors: **Dr. Sai Oo**, Research Director at Pyidaungsu Institute, and **Pauline Eloff**, legal researcher at Pyidaungsu Institute. The two research advisors provided supervision and valuable suggestions on how to organize, synthesize, and analyze the data, and develop the report.

2.3.5 Stage Five: Report to Stakeholders

The reporting team approached the RCSS, TNLA, SSPP, and the government to share their conclusions after the report was written up and translated into English, Burmese, Palaung, and Shan.

2.3.6 Stage Six: Publishing and Outreach Conference

Finally, an outreach conference was organized which included Palaung and Shan CSOs, academic professors on conflict resolution, members of parliament, religious leaders, and locals. The conference was arranged to present the findings of the study and to hear feedback from stakeholders with the objectives of:

1. Building awareness of the conflict and its effects on the communities;
2. Giving input to members of parliament for effective action;
3. Establishing mutual understanding on the root causes of the conflict and its impacts;
4. Building confidence and trust between the two ethnic groups.

2.4 Challenges and Limitations

2.4.1 Local Cooperation

Initiation of contact in Nam Kham, one of the chosen townships was challenging because of the distrust between local communities due to the ongoing conflict. Kaw Dai Organization had to first arrange a meeting to explain the purpose of the project. Six important groups - Unity Preservation (UP), Tai Youth Organization (TYO), Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD), Shan Nationalities Democratic Party (SNDP), Shan Literature and Culture Association (SLCA)–Nam Kham, and a group of prominent monks – participated in the meeting. Because it was the first time that opponent groups came together to discuss face to face, the meeting was challenging in many ways. While the SNLD, the TYO, and the monks agreed to help the Listening Project, the SNDP, the UP, and the SLCA were hesitant to cooperate because they worried the project might worsen relationships between Palaung and Shan groups. After a Q&A session, the SLCA and UP agreed to cooperate. Although the SNDP agreed on the concept of this Project, they assumed that it was not the right time to conduct the project as it could escalate the existing conflict between Shan and Palaung communities.

2.4.2 Instability and Security Issues

Most of the areas visited by the LP teams remain unstable. In some instances, violent conflicts took place either before or after our visits to the region. For instance, one day before arriving in Mong We, a village in Nam Kham, fighting took place between Tatmadaw and the TNLA, as a result of which a child got hurt. One day after LP team left Mong Wee, the Tatmadaw and the TNLA fought again. Par Leng is also a very dangerous village. TNLA is very active in this village and Tatmadaw camps in Mang Kone, a village situated a few miles from Par Leng. Moreover, the RCSS is also active in the region. Although Kaw Dai Organization was in contact with all stakeholders during the LP, it could not be certain if and when the conflict would break out again.

2.4.3 Transportation

Since some of the villages are in very remote and mountainous areas, the LP teams had to travel with motorbikes on narrow, bumpy lanes over mountain roads, next to deep valleys. One of the team members got hurt because of an accident while driving on such a road. Additionally, traffic jams were a concern when arranging the workshop. The LP team planned to arrive Nam Kham two days before the Report Back Workshop to finalize arrangements. The team left Lashio on the morning of January 3rd. Usually, it takes five hours to get to Nam Kham from Lashio. However, due to heavy traffic on the main road, a whole day was wasted and consequently, the LP team had to rush the Report Back Workshop preparations.

2.4.4 Festivals

There were some scheduling difficulties because of festivals both Ta'ang and Shan. Due to multiple Shan and Palaung cultural activities, trainings and meetings had to be arranged according to trainees' availability. For instance, the LP Report Back Concept was supposed to be finished in December. However, since December was a busy month for the Palaung and Shan groups because of preparations for their New year, the LP team had to conform to the available dates.

2.4.5 Ongoing Conflict

To arrange the Report Back Workshop in December and January was challenging because of the ongoing conflict in the chosen regions of Kyaukme, Nam Kham, Muse (Zaelant), and Namtu.

III. CHARACTERISTIC OF TARGET AREAS

The majority of Palaung villages are situated on the mountain ranges of Shan State. Palaung people prefer elevated regions where they can grow tea and practice shifting cultivation. Based on their farming and living patterns, Palaung villages are formed with few individual households. The availability of farmland usually dictates the formation of their villages. Mostly they are scattered around the mountain ranges. Thus, it is hard to find a large concentration of Palaung in any region. The only concentrated Palaung Township is Namsan. Outside of Namsan, the Palaung are dispersed across Shan State. Labor intensive activities, such as the collection of forest products, are usually carried out by Palaung communities.

While Palaung people prefer the elevated regions, the Shan prefer valleys because of their focus on irrigated farming. Irrigated farming demands intense labor, thus the Shan villages are usually composed of numerous households. The Shan people live mostly in Shan State, although some are spread across Myanmar.

In Shan State, the Palaung live together with Shan in Namsan, Kyaukme, Marn Tong, Lashio, Nam Kham, Muse (Zaelant), Mong Hsu, Mong Yai, Nam Tzane, Mong Gune, and Kun Hein. The armed conflict between RCSS and TNLA, and communal conflict between Shan and Palaung communities are taking place in Kyaukme, Namtu, Nam Kham, and Muse (Zaelant) townships and consequently these regions were targeted for this project. Since, the aim of the study was to examine the relationship between the Shan and Palaung, it would not have been complete without adding one area unaffected by the armed conflict. Consequently, Mong Hsu was added as a research site. The villages were chosen in order to accommodate research needs. By targeting Shan, Palaung, and mixed villages, an in-depth understanding of the interrelationship between Shan and Palaung peoples could be reached.

3.1 Location One: Nam Kham

Nam Kham is located on the border of China and Myanmar. It houses a population of 107,034.⁴ The township is surrounded by vast rice fields, and Shwe Li River runs by it. Due to its economically strategic location, the town has a very diverse ethnic make-up.

In late May 2015, relationships between Shan and Palaung communities started getting tense because of violent territorial disputes between the TNLA, RCSS and Tatmadaw. Tensions escalated when 62 houses from Ho Pang village were burnt down. This event drew the attention of Kaw Dai Organization, after which this project was initiated.

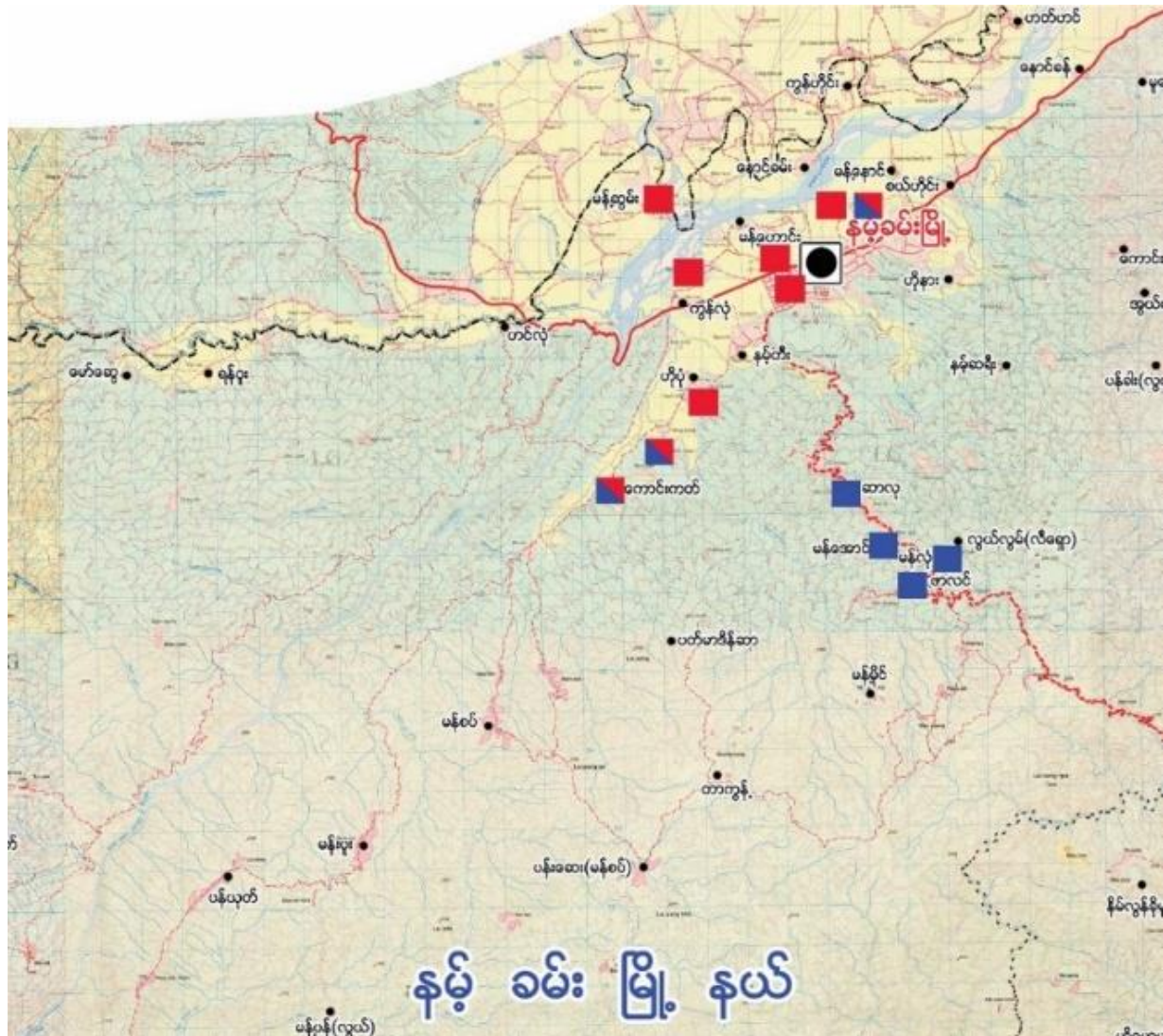


Figure 1 - Map Nam Kham

⁴ Retrieved from Myanmar Information Management Unit, Population & Population Density in Shan State (2014 Census)

3.2 Location Two: Zaelant

Zaelant is a village track in Muse Township, about five miles away from Muse. In 1992, Tatmadaw implemented their infamous Four Cuts Strategy in Palaung villages such as Marn Kang, Mai Sak, and Nam Kat, as a result of which Palaung villagers had to leave their homes. Tatmadaw's Major Maung Par met with the head of village of Zaelant (a Shan village), requesting that Zaelant help the Palaung IDPs. The people of Zaelant agreed to help by providing the Palaung IDPs with temporary land (for three years). Since then, the Shan and Palaung people lived together peacefully. This ended when the Palaung in Zaelant sent out an official request to the Union Government under President Thein Sein to establish a separate village track from Zaelant, without consulting the Shan community. As a result, the relationship

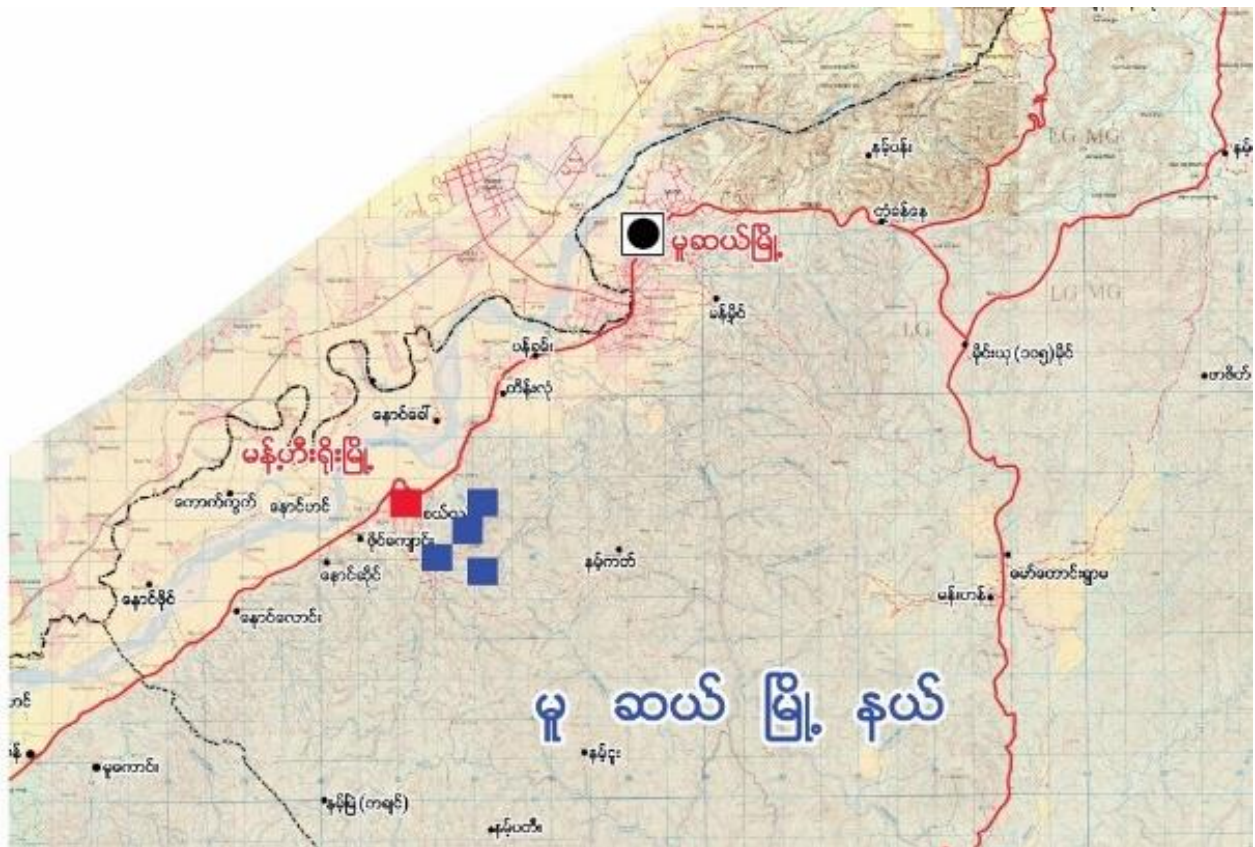


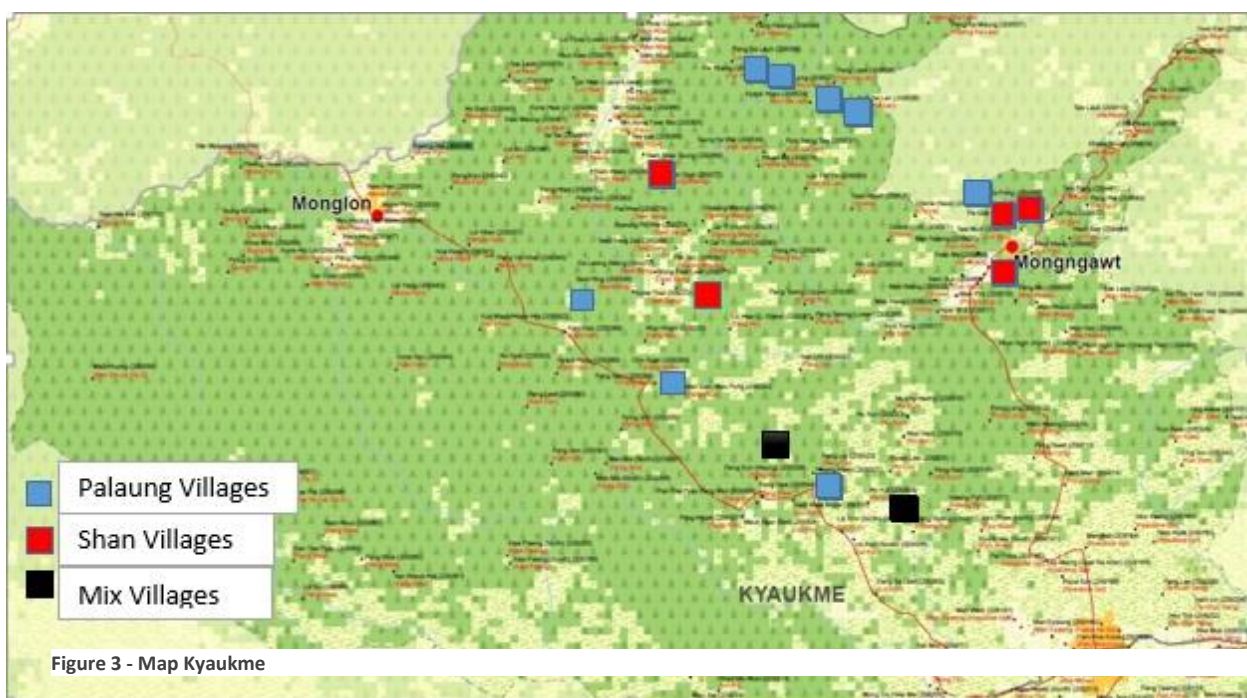
Figure 2 - Map Zaelant

between the Shan and Palaung worsened, and tensions have been exacerbated by the RCSS/TNLA conflict.

3.3 Location Three: Kyaukme

Kyaukme Township is situated by the Mandalay-Lashio national highway, with a population of 172,109.⁵ It is known for its tealeaf products. Tea plantations are positioned on the sloping elevated land and are farmed by Shan and Palaung communities. The Palaung occupy the elevated hill regions where they practice shifting cultivation, while the Shan stay near the valleys in order to practice irrigated farming.

The SSPP, RCSS, TNLA, and Tatmadaw are active in Kyaukme. The frequent armed clashes between these groups cause many difficulties for local civilians. Various human rights violations are committed by all armed groups, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, forced displacement, forced recruitment, forced labor, forced taxation, and placing of landmines. Because of the ongoing conflict, over seven thousand IDPs have been forced to leave their villages in Kyaukme.

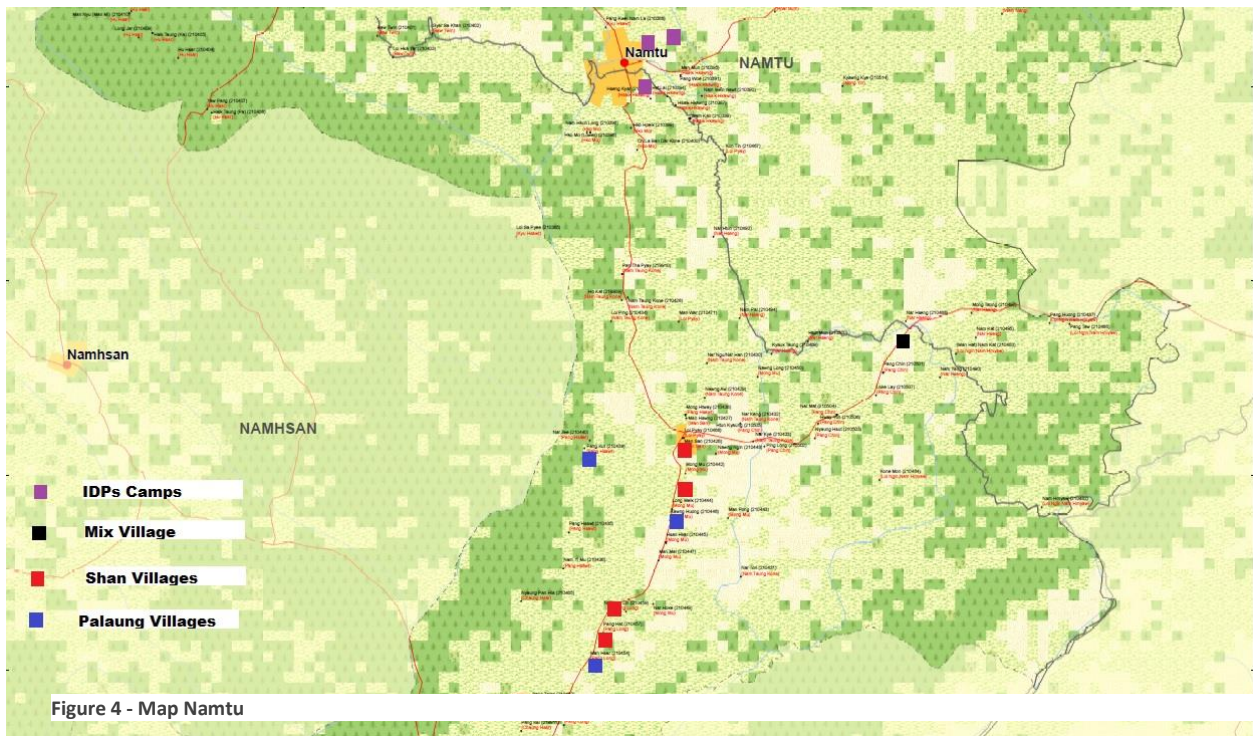


⁵ Retrieved from Myanmar information Management Unit, Population & Population Density in Shan State (2014 Census)

3.4 Location Four: Namtu

Namtu Township is in Lashio district and houses 50,423 households.⁶ The RCSS, SSPP, TNLA, and Tatmadaw are active in Namtu.

Namtu has a background similar to Kyaukme, with numerous armed clashes taking place between the four groups. As a result, civilians face various human rights abuses. To this day, intense fighting between RCSS and TNLA, and between TNLA and Tatmadaw takes place. Since violence broke out between the TNLA and RCSS in 2015, tensions have arisen between the Shan and Palaung communities in Namtu.⁷



⁶ Retrieved from Myanmar information Management Unit, Population & Population Density in Shan State (2014 Census)

⁷ For example, after the 2015 clashes broke out, a Shan man and Palaung woman who were married began having family problems due to the conflict between RCSS and TNLA. After a few quarrels, the woman went back to her community. When the husband went after his wife, he was killed.

3.5 Location Five: Mong Hsu

Mong Hsu is in southern Shan State and houses a population of 72,752.⁸ The Palaung people in Mong Hsu migrated there from Mong Lurn around 150 years ago, in order to find a place where they could practice shifting cultivation.⁹ Since then, they moved all over Mong Hsu Township, forming villages in the elevated mountain areas as well as in other locations, together with Shan communities.

No fighting has taken place in Mong Hsu between the RCSS and the TNLA. However, fighting in the region broke out in 2015 between Tatmadaw and the SSPP/SSA. Consequently, many Palaung villagers living in the mountains fled their homes and sought refuge at Hai Pa, a Shan village. Villagers from Hai Pa supported these IDPs by establishing a base for them and providing them with land and food. Despite tensions between the TNLA and RCSS, Shan and Palaung communities in Mong Hsu continue helping each other and living together peacefully. This persuaded the LP team to include Mong Hsu as a research site.

3.6 Demographics of Respondents

As shown in the Figure 5, 55% of the interviewed respondents were Shan and 43% were Palaung. The remaining respondents were of mixed ethnic heritage. Of the respondents, 53% were male, and the rest female. The LP team tried to have a gender-balanced research. (see Figure 6).

The LP analysis is based on the regional context. Thus, the age range to be approached was not set in advance. Of the respondents, 47% were between 41 and 60, 19% was between 31 and 40, 17% was between 21 and 30, and 15% was between 15 and 20. The remaining 2% was over 60-years old (see Figure 7). One of the reasons for these demographics is the small amount of young people living within the communities. Most young people in the visited areas live abroad as migrant workers or unrecognized refugees. Elderly people stay behind in the villages and survive through received remittances, as well as by practicing small scale farming.

In addition, elders were often approached for interviews because of their ability to reflect on the situation between Palaung and Shan before and after the conflict broke out. They are able to speak of the relationships between the communities and how they changed after the fighting broke out, as well as about the causes of the conflict. Elderly people spend most of their time within the community, unlike youths, and are therefore knowledgeable about their village context.

⁸ Retrieved from Myanmar Information Management Unit, Population & Population Density in Shan State (2014 Census)

⁹ Estimation made by an elderly man from Wan Suk. Some villagers commented that the Palaung came to their villages three generations ago.

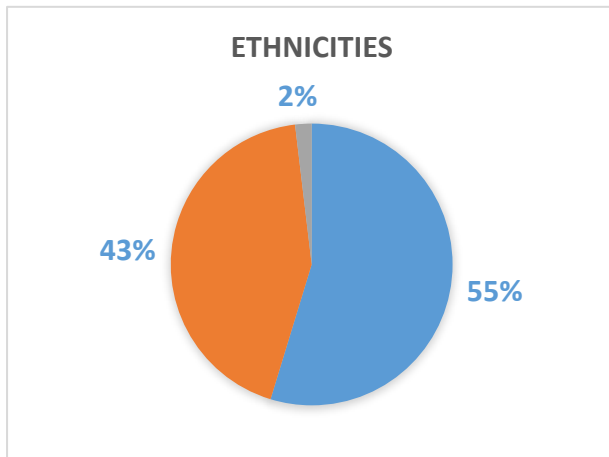


Figure 5 - Ethnic Demographics

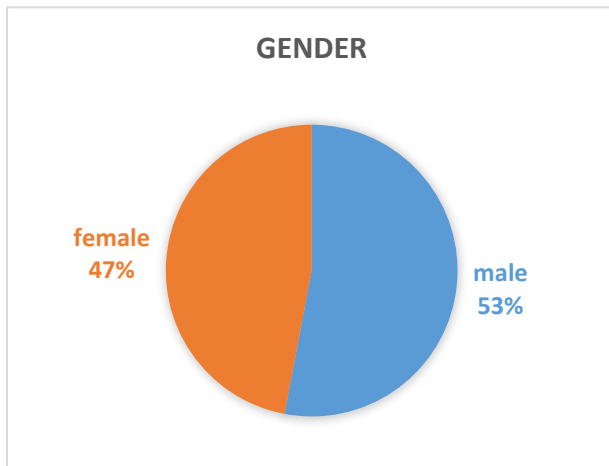


Figure 6 - Gender Demographics

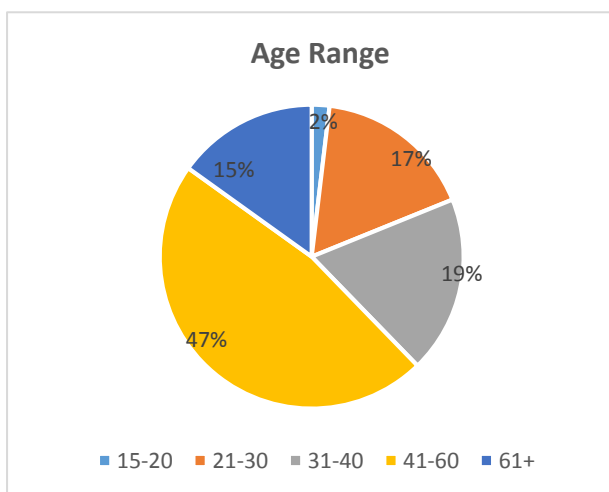


Figure 7 - Age Demographics

IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE LISTENING PROEJCT

4.1 Causes of tension between Palaung and Shan communities

In the different regions visited by the LP team it was repeatedly stated by participants that relationships between Palaung and Shan communities were good until violence broke out between the RCSS and TNLA in 2015. More specifically, causes of the tensions between Palaung and Shan communities can be sorted into seven categories.

4.1.1 Distrust Due To Armed Conflicts and Their Consequences

Numerous respondents explained that the Palaung and Shan communities have lost trust in each other because of their support of the TNLA and RCSS respectively. Shan and Palaung villagers inevitably become involved in the armed conflict in various ways, such as through forced recruitment, labor, taxation, and so forth. Indeed, both Palaung and Shan people are used by their respective armed groups for strategic purposes. The LP team found that this has led to partition between the two groups, which creates misunderstanding, and has led to reduced socio-economic relations. The distrust and misunderstanding had been exacerbated, not by hatred between the groups, but because communities feel uncomfortable talking about the situation.

4.1.2 Rumors and Hate Speech

Rumors are another cause of tension between Palaung and Shan communities. Rumors and hate speech are spread by word of mouth and through social media. Multiple respondents, of both Palaung and Shan ethnicity, commented that social media and comments on social media created more tension between the communities. For example, rumors and hateful comments about the TNLA torturing Shan people were spread over social media, creating fear and distrust, and straining the relationships between the groups. To make matters worse, civilians do not refer to the TNLA or the RCSS. Instead, the TNLA is referred to as ‘the Palaung’, while the RCSS is referred to as ‘the Shan’.

4.1.3 Deprivation of Liberty and Interrogation

Many respondents described situations where civilians were arrested and interrogated by the EAOs. Victims of such deprivations of liberty were often beaten and otherwise abused. Many arrested civilians have not yet returned. Such experiences have made villagers feel less secure, restricted their ability to move around freely, and has added to the suspicion between Shan and Palaung villagers.

4.1.4 Forced Recruitment

Forced recruitment was a common theme during the LP, addressed by most respondents. People from different regions and townships have been forcibly recruited by both the RCSS and TNLA. In fact, some villages are expected to deliver a quota of villagers to join the respective EAO. If villages cannot meet this quota, or if villagers refuse to join the armed groups, the respective EAOs demand fines. Family members of villagers forcibly recruited by

armed groups become reluctant to communicate with members of the other ethnic group, due to their family member's involvement in the conflict.

4.1.5 Extrajudicial Killings

The LP team heard various statements regarding the killings of innocent civilians. Such killings were described by respondents in Kyaukme, Nam Kham and Namtu townships.

According to Sai Tun Win, a Member of Parliament for the SNLD, the conflict escalated after the TNLA apprehended six Shan villagers from Mang Kone on the February 6th, 2016. On the next day, these six villagers were killed, along with another civilian, in Ka Law Wong, a Shan village. A similar incident occurred in Mong Wee, Nam Kham on 2nd December 2015, when 23 villagers from Ho Pang, Mong Wee, Marn Tone, and Mong Kark were seized by the TNLA. Eight villagers were released on the 22nd of December, 2015, but the rest were killed by the TNLA (Freedom, 2016).

4.1.6 Landmines

Respondents from seven villages in Namtu Township stated that the TNLA planted landmines near or inside their villages. The TNLA have denied that the landmines were planted by them. Nevertheless, in Panglong, Namtu, for example, villagers stated that the TNLA were based in their village in early 2017 and used landmines in their fight against the RCSS.

4.1.7 Forced Labor

Situations where villagers were forced to be porters for the EAOs were described by numerous respondents, and it seems to be common practice. Such forced labor has sometimes led to injuries and even death.

4.1.8 Confiscation and Destruction of Property

Respondents described how the ongoing conflict has affected their incomes and means of survival. For example, many instances of confiscation of property (e.g. farm animals, clothing, house materials such as roofing, windows, etc.) were described. Furthermore, destruction of property (e.g. rice fields, corn mill, etc.) was a commonly described theme. Often, villagers had to leave their homes without notice due to sudden outbreaks of violence in or near their villages. In such situations they left everything behind. Villagers would return when the situation stabilized, or sometimes they would take the risk to check on their properties, and often they would find their property destroyed and their belongings stolen.

4.2 Inter-dependence between Shan and Palaung communities

4.2.1 Inter-dependence between Shan and Palaung communities in Nam Kham

A. ECONOMIC FINDINGS

Nam Kham is an economic center for people in the region due to its trade route to China. Consequently, all surrounding villages, Shan or Palaung, have relations with Nam Kham. The economic (inter)relations between Palaung and Shan can be subdivided into trade relations and human capital relations.

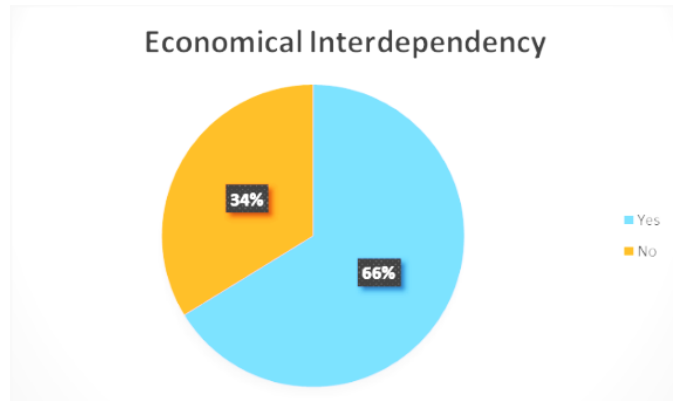


Figure 8 - Economic Interdependence Nam Kham

TRADE

As described above, almost all of the targeted areas in Nam Kham are involved in irrigated farming, with sugar cane and tea plantations being most prevalent, together with charcoal production. According to the findings, the economic relationships between the Shan and Palaung in Nam Kham remain mostly intact due to their interdependence on each other's trade. In areas in or near Nam Kham (e.g. Nong Kong, Nong Tzang, Nam Kham Upper Block) a lot of trading takes place. People from these places often shop in Nam Kham market, but also have their own markets, open garment shops, grocery stores, and so forth. People from mixed villages in the region, such as Kong Kard and Kong Durb, go to Nam Kham to trade. Palaung villagers from near Kong Kard go to Kong Kard or Nam Kham to trade. At the same time, people from Nam Kham go to, for example, Kong Kard market to sell their products and Shan people from Nam Kham similarly go to Palaung villages to sell their products.

"The market is the main place for us to interrelate between Ta'ang and Shan since a long time. The market is a very vital middle ground for us."

Ta Hla Aung, Ta'ang Literature and Culture Association

HUMAN CAPITAL SHARING

Palaung villages Marn Aom and Pha Dang rely on tea farming as their main source of income. The tealeaf products are sold to Shan and Chinese merchants. The Palaung villagers use shifting cultivation in order to grow their crops. During the harvest, Shan people from the region will come to Marn Aom and Pha Dang as day workers.

"When it is time for picking tea, the Shan people come up and pick our tea leaves as daily laborers."

Ta'ang middle aged man, Marn Aom

Although 66% of the respondents stated that Shan and Palaung communities in Nam Kham were economically interdependent because of their trade relations and human capital sharing, 34% of the participants declared not to have experienced economic interdependence, due to

distances between Shan and Palaung villages, and because they trade mainly with Chinese merchants.

B. SOCIAL WELFARE FINDINGS

Respondents in Nam Kham commented that the Shan and Palaung have good social relations, and often join each other's events, such as meetings, funerals, and weddings. The way these relationships are formed and maintained depend on personal and geographical conditions.

In non-mixed villages, villagers keep up relationships with their ethnic counterparts through personal contact and invitation.

For example, when the Shan in Nam Kham celebrate Shan New Year, they invite the Palaung people from Marn Aom to participate.

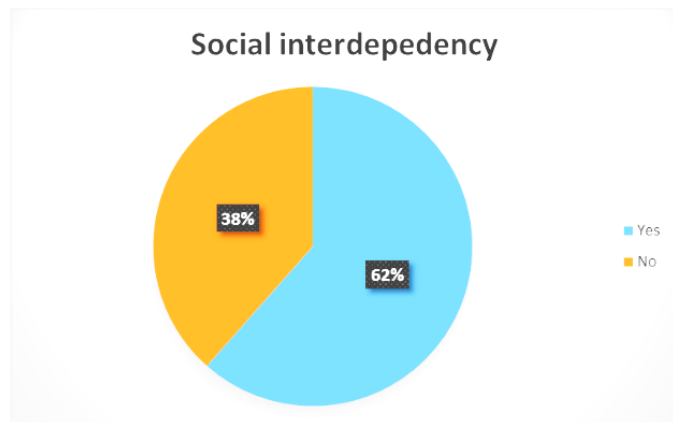


Figure 9 - Social Interdependence Nam Kham

"If we were invited, we went to participate. Sometimes even when we are busy, we go if it is a funeral. If it is a wedding or some other event, it is not that important"

30-year old Ta'ang villager, Kong Kurd

Mixed villages see more social interrelation between Palaung and Shan because of their close proximity.

"If there is funeral, the villagers are bound to pay a bowl of rice to help the family."

38-year old woman, Marn Mai

"Since my wife is a Ta'ang and has relatives at the village on the mountain, if there is anything we need, we go to the Ta'ang village on mountain."

30-year old man, Marn Mai

C. RELIGIOUS FINDINGS

All respondents in the targeted Shan, Palaung, and mixed villages in Nam Kham were Buddhist. Each village has its own monastery. Sixty percent of respondents stated that there is religious interdependence between the Shan and Palaung. In all mixed villages except Kong Durb, villagers share the same monastery. Moreover, the Palaung

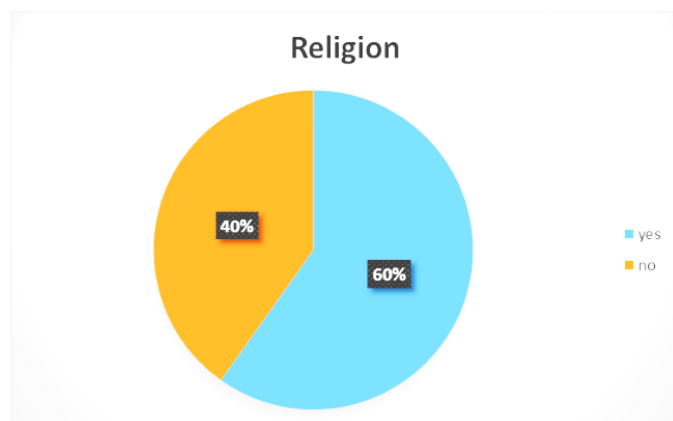


Figure 10 - Religious Interdependence Nam Kham

participate in religious festival, such as Poi Lurn Si,¹⁰ together with the Shan.

“We are the same. The Shan are Buddhist, and we are Buddhist. The Shan have a lovely tradition and beautiful dresses.”

49-year old Palaung man, Marn Aom

“We go to attend the monastery together on the Sabbath day. If a Ta’ang goes there, the monk blesses in Ta’ang. If a Shan goes there, the monk blesses in Shan.”

Palaung villager, Marn Mai

“The majority of the people in Mong Wee are Shan. The head of the monastery is a Palaung and we don’t have a problem with that.”

25-year old woman, Mong Wee

D. ADMINISTRATIVE FINDINGS

In non-mixed Shan and Palaung villages, there is a Shan or Palaung village head respectively. The village heads are elected by the people. People from these villages stated that administrative conflicts between Palaung and Shan villagers has never taken place.

In mixed villages, the Palaung and Shan villagers have their own Palaung and Shan leaders. If issues arise in the village, the two village heads communicate to address the problem. No administrative conflicts were mentioned by villagers from mixed villages. Instead, the respondents from these villages repeatedly stated that they are happy with both leaders and that the villagers live together in peace. Often, villagers reiterated that *“the leaders are fair and good.”*

“We elected our head. He is a good man because he puts people’s needs as priority.”

28-year old woman, Kong Kard

E. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTBREAK OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN NAM KHAM

Although, the Palaung and Shan communities in Nam Kham have been living together peacefully for generations, the outbreak of armed conflict has created distance in their socio-economic relations. The fact that both Palaung and Shan villagers are forced to ‘support’ their respective armed group has led to partition between the TNLA and Palaung communities on the one side, and RCSS and Shan communities on the other.

The Shan and Palaung had good relations until May 1st, 2015, when the armed clashes between RCSS and TNLA broke out. On May 2nd, the TNLA released a statement, claiming that the RCSS’ Battalion 701 had intruded into their territory in Nam Kham. The resulting fighting lasted for five days. On May 6th, 62 houses in Hopang, a Shan village, were burnt down, and

¹⁰ A Buddhist religious festival held in the month of March or April, depending on the fourth month of the lunar calendar.

more than three hundred villagers fled to Mong Wee to seek refuge. The TNLA stated that the fire broke out due to the fighting between them and the RCSS.

On February 11th, 2016, Sai Hla, spokesperson of the RCSS, released a statement claiming that although they had – again – informed the TNLA about the movements of Battalion 701, they were ambushed on November 27th, 2015. After the ambush, 23 Shan villagers from Mong Wee were captured and detained by the TNLA. Eight of the villagers were subsequently released, and the rest remain ‘missing’. According to locals, the remaining fifteen villagers were killed by the TNLA.

Although the conflict between the TNLA and the RCSS started as a territorial conflict in Nam Kham, the involvement of villagers has caused the Shan/Palaung relationship to sour.

“The situation in Mong Wee is now better compared to the time when the RCSS and TNLA started fighting. Mong Wee has diverse ethnicities such as Shan, Palaung, Chinese, Burmese, and Kachin. After 11 men were captured by the TNLA from Mong Wee, the suspicions among villagers started to grow. Villagers of different ethnicities stopped talking to each other. After that incident, the villagers were carrying knives with them to prevent themselves in the village. I worried that the situation might get worse. So, I had to call for meeting to make clear to the villagers that the conflict is between RCSS and TNLA and it has nothing to do with the people. I had to arrange meeting of trust and understanding like that for four times. And the situation is a bit stable now.”

Sai Kyaw Htun, Village Head of Mong Wee

ECONOMICS

In Marn Mai and Marn Kart, two mixed villages, the conflict has not directly affected villagers. However, their economic relationships have been slightly disturbed due to villagers’ reduced mobility because of the ongoing armed conflict.

“When there is conflicts, we do not dare to go beyond the next village (on the way from Nam Kham to Mong Wee). We don’t feel secure.”

52-year old man, Marn Kart, Nam Kham

Indeed mobility is an important factor in Shan/Palaung trade relations and trade in general. The reduced mobility in Nam Kham has led to reduced trade and weakened economic conditions in the region. In Marn Aom village, for example, the charcoal trade has been severely affected by the ongoing violent incidents.

SOCIAL WELFARE

According to the data obtained, the on-going conflict has not affected peoples’ social lives in Marn Mai or Kong Kart. Villagers, to more or lesser extent, maintain their relationships with villagers belonging to the other ethnic group. In fact, these villagers believe that they possess both Shan and Palaung identities, and this is what keeps them living together harmoniously.

“When there are Palaung festivals and celebrations up on the hills, we dress up as Palaung and participate. Whenever there are social activities in Shan village we dress up as Shan because I am both Shan and Palaung.”

35-year old Shan man, married to a Ta'ang woman, Marn Mai

In other villages in Nam Kham, social relations between Shan and Palaung have been slightly affected.

“We do not express this verbally, but things have changed. They keep their distance. My best friend and I don't talk anymore. We are like strangers.”

34-year old Shan man, Nong Khong, Nam Kham

RELIGION

The conflict has seemingly not affected religious relations between the Shan and Palaung in Nam Kham. However, in some instances disappearances have led to tensions in the religious relationships. For instance, on the 1st of July 2016, a Palaung layman (*Pan Ta Kar*)¹¹ from Kone Sar, a Shan village, disappeared. The Palaung villagers claimed that he had been captured by the RCSS, while the Shan villagers claimed that they had found a letter from the TNLA in his house, and that therefore the TNLA had captured him. However, this case has, it turned out to be a conspiracy between certain Shan and Palaung villagers. The government takes no responsibility in confirming causes of disappearances, which leads to suspicions among villagers and which can lead to religious issues. After the incident in Kone Sar, two Palaung laymen from Zae Hai and Ho Naung, Shan villages, were voted to be removed from their positions.

During festivals and cultural activities, changes are also visible. Because of news of frequent capture of villagers by EAOs, villagers feel less secure to visit other villages, which has affected the relationship between the Palaung and Shan.

“After the conflict, although invitations were sent out, the Shan youth didn't come to participate our festival in Marn Aom anymore. I guess they don't feel secure to come into our village because I think they are afraid that they might be caught to be recruited or captured by the TNLA.”

41-year old villager, Marn Aom¹²

ADMINISTRATION

Village level administration plays a major role in combating problems and issues at village track level. Examples can be observed in Mong Wee and Marn Mai, two mixed villages. As soon as the conflict broke out, the Marn Mai village head called for a meeting with his ethnic counterpart and the villagers of Marn Mai, to prevent the spreading of conflict into their communities.

¹¹ Layman (Pan Ta Kar) is a person who leads ritual activities on every Sabbath Day.

¹² Marn Aom is a Palaung village that lies on the hill. Since the conflict between RCSS and TNLA broke out, Shan people have stopped visiting this village.

“The conflict does affect the lives of villagers but it is not that serious because we have a good village leader. As soon as he knew the conflict between Loi (Ta’ang) and Tai (Shan) broke out, he called for a meeting and explained that the conflict was among armed groups, not among our villagers. He also told us not to bring the conflicts into our village.”

55-year old Palaung man, Marn Mai

Similarly in Mong Wee, the village head called for repeated meetings in an attempt to stop the conflict from spreading to his village.

“I called three meetings among the villagers, to talk about the rumors and hatred and to convince people not to exacerbate the conflict. I pointed out that the conflict is an armed conflict, not a conflict between Shan and Palaung villagers.”

Village head, Mong Wee

The violent clashes between the TNLA and RCSS have led to some visible changes in the Palaung and Shan communities. Although villages were not majorly affected, respondents have expressed feeling different than before the violence broke out.

During the Report Back Workshop, respondents stated their belief that a third party is involved in the conflict between the RCSS and TNLA. For instance, both Shan and Palaung participants pointed out that hate speech and rumors posted on social media often come from users that are neither Shan nor Palaung. Respondents are convinced that a third party is intentionally provoking tension between the Palaung and Shan. Indeed, while on the ground relationships have not been affected in a major way, the spreading of rumors over social media has had a major influence on Shan/Palaung relationships.

“Where does the news come from? The news people received from city is very different from that of the reality. We should be careful with the news we received. We cannot trust the news completely. We need to analyze them.”

A Palaung former teacher from Marn Aom, Nam Kham.

On the 5th of June, 2016, 7 people including one driver were captured by the TNLA. One of the victims’ father had requested help from local administrative, Tatmadaw, and political party to search for his son. However, no action was taken by the stakeholders.

“Although I went to ask help from Tatmadaw Regiment 33 three day after my son was captured, they didn’t do anything. As they don’t help, I realized that the Tatmadaw likes what has happened.”

Long Htun Aye or Long Lurn Hsai, Nam Dee.

CONFISCATION AND DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

On the 6th of October, 2016, Palaung villagers owned charcoal trucks were burned down by the RCSS near Marn Hong, Nam Kham Township village because of the villagers’ refusal to pay tax to RCSS. The villagers feel this act as an abusive because it cause difficulties for their livelihoods.

In short, the armed conflict between the TNLA and RCSS has led to small scale ethno-conflict between the Palaung and Shan in Nam Kham. The fact that villagers have been forced to 'support' their respective EAO, the fact that the EAOs have forcibly recruited villagers and confiscated villagers' property for their own resources, and incidents of capture and killing of civilians have divided the communities, and filled villagers with distrust, doubt, and anger. Moreover, rumors and hate speech spread over social media have further complicated the relationship between Shan and Palaung.

4.2.2 Interdependence between Shan and Palaung communities in Zaelant

Until 1992, Zaelant was a Shan village. However, after the Tatmadaw imposed their Four Cuts Strategy in Palaung villages such as Marn Kang, Mai Sak, and Nam Kat, the Palaung were forced to leave their homes. Major Maung Par of Tatmadaw asked Zaelant's village head for help in dealing with the Palaung IDPs. The people of Zaelant agreed to help the IDPs by providing them with temporary land for three years.

The Shan and Palaung lived together peacefully until the Palaung villagers sent an official request to be recognized as separate village track from Zaelant to the Thein Sein government in, without consulting the Shan community in Zaelant. This led to tension between Palaung and Shan villagers in Zaelant.

A. ECONOMIC FINDINGS

Economic and social relations in Zaelant were strong after Palaung villagers came to live in Zaelant in 1992. The communities traded together and with each other, and Shan villagers provided the Palaung with different forms of aid and livelihood necessities. Shan people bought charcoal from the Palaung and Palaung people bought other raw materials from the Shan.

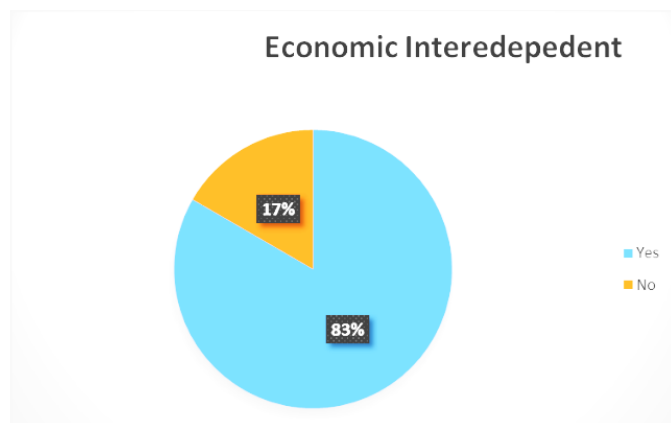


Figure 11 - Economic Interdependence Zaelant

Their economic relationships remained strong until the Palaung community requested to be recognized as separate village track from Zaelant. When discussing economic interdependence, Shan respondents referred mainly to the humanitarian aid they extended to the Palaung IDPs, such as providing different forms of livelihood necessities and even temporary slots of land and shelter.

"In 1992, the Burmese military imposed the four cuts strategy to the Marn Kang, Mai Sak, and Nam Kat. The villagers from the three villages moved down to Zaelant to seek refuge. The Palaung people were given land by the Shan people from Zaelant."

Former head village, Zaelant

B. SOCIAL WELFARE FINDINGS

Two thirds of Zaelant's population stated that they believed that the Shan and Palaung have been socially interdependent since 1992. Zaelant's locals cleared land and measured land slots

to accommodate the Palaung IDPs and spent more than a month to help everyone settle in. The Palaung monks were given places to stay at Zaelant's monastery. In fact, the Palaung Abbot from Marn Kang passed away at Zaelant's monastery.

Villagers from Nam Kat initially refused to move down to Zaelant.

However, when they eventually moved they were left without choice, as there was not enough space left for them. As a result, most of these villagers had to buy land in Johnjo, Muse, to live on. Only in Zaelant land given to IDPs for free.

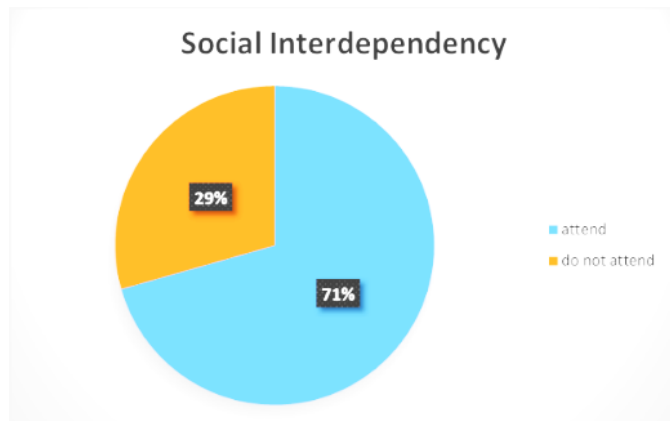


Figure 12 - Social Interdependence Zaelant

C. RELIGIOUS AND ADMINISTRATIVE FINDINGS

Because villagers from four affected Palaung villages had to move to Zaelant as a whole, they brought along their local administrative structures including village heads and social institutions. The Shan community gave the Palaung land for schools and monasteries. Consequently, these communities do not share the same monasteries, despite all being Buddhist.

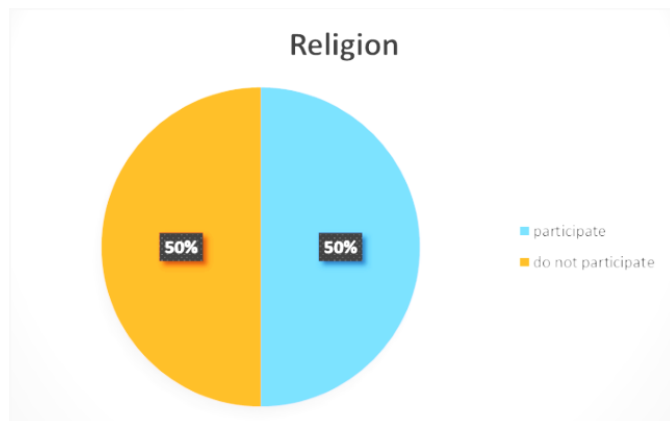


Figure 13 - Religious Interdependence Zaelant

Nevertheless, Shan and Palaung communities participate in each other's events and festivals, on invitation. In addition, issues between the Shan and Palaung have often been resolved by their respective village heads, who will meet to discuss problems.

D. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTBREAK OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN ZAELANT

Between 1992 and 2010, the relationships between Shan and Palaung were good, and kept improving. However, 71% of the participants commented that, since 2010, the relationship has changed a great deal. Respondents described many different factors causing tension between the communities and resulting in conflict, including some unintentional issues.

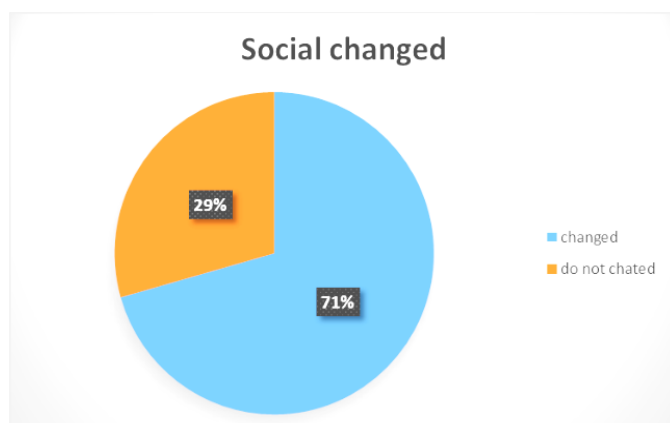


Figure 14 - Change in Relationships Zaelant

ADMINISTRATION

Administrative issues have been a major cause of social conflict between the Palaung and Shan communities.

“We have had difficulties in communication with Shan Head Villager. Sometimes, the local authority from Muse sent an official letter to us Palaung Village in Zaelant, but it does not reach in time. [...] We had to move our whole village; which mean our village head, villagers, abbot, monks, market, school, teachers had to move down altogether. We have our own administrative system. We had to move down with all the administrative system and it is not right to discharge our village heads just like that. It is not right. The people want their own village head, because only a Palaung leader can understand his villagers, they are more close to each other. So we need to ask a separate village track.”

Palaung Local Advisor (Nayaka), Zaelant

“When they¹³ came down, they came down with a whole set. They managed the given land and people on their own. It was like that until 2010 when they wanted to register as a separate village track from Zaelant. It is not that we disagree on the fact that they want their own village track. It is the fact that they want to secede Zaelant land and form a Palaung village track. Now the situation is stable already and even the government agreed to resettle them to their former villages.”

Former village head, Zaelant

LAND

Territorial conflict has also led to tension between Shan and Palaung communities. While the Shan people considered land provided to Palaung IDPs as temporary, the Palaung are of the opinion that they now own the land because they have lived in Zaelant for over twenty years.

“Three Kachin from Palaung villages in Zaelant came to me to sign on the paper stating that they own the land because they wanted to sell their lands. I refused to do it because this is not their place. During the President Thein Sein presidency, the Palaung villages in Zaelant summited a request letter to recognize their village as a separate village track. The request was rejected by the government. The officials from the government came to Zaelant and told the Palaung people to go back to their villages as there is no conflict anymore. I told the officials that the government should do development for their villages first such as good transportation, school, etc. We will let them stay for three more years and during that time the government should develop their regions and get everything ready before they go back. The officials agreed on the request and met with the Palaung people in Zaelant. However, not a single Palaung said anything in the meeting. It was obvious they didn't want to go back. So, during U Htin Kyaw presidency, the Palaung villages resubmitted the proposal again.”

Former Village Head, Zaelant¹⁴

“We can't give the place to Palaung people to own because the place we provided for them includes our historical artifacts and evidence of Tai Kingdom and we have to maintain it. The new marking will divide the city wall and moat in half and we would lose our history along with it. The Palaung people get two places already, they went back to their old village

¹³ Palaung IDPs who were forced to relocate from their Palaung villages in 1992, due to Tatmadaw's Four Cuts Strategy.

¹⁴ This village head arranged aid, land, and shelter for Palaung IDPs in 1992.

for livelihood such as tea plantation and charcoal, and also some business opportunity in Zaelant.”

A Shan villager, Zaelant

“We lost everything when we came down here to Zaelant. We had to start from zero. Yes with the help of Zaelant people, we had 96 acres of land provided to us. And we have never used more than the given land. As we’ve been living here for long, the registration of our villages in the old track was abolished. So, we need to register the current villages into village track.”

Palaung villager, Zaelant

Palaung villagers do not want to move away from Zaelant. They have lived there for over two decades. They have invested in roads, schools, and electricity and if they have to move now they will have to rebuild the entire infrastructure. Nevertheless, in some instances, Palaung villagers who were given land by the Shan, have moved away and sold the land they were living on, even though it was meant to be temporary. This has caused more tension between Shan and Palaung.

“The not so good thing is that some Palaung people sold the land and moved to other places knowing that they have to go back to their old village.”

Palaung village Advisor (Naryaka), Zaelant

“It is not their place to begin with. So they don’t have the right to sell it as the land are theirs.”

Former head of village, Zaelant

RUMORS

Tensions between the two communities have been exacerbated by rumors. The LP team heard from respondents that the Palaung religious leader had prohibited Palaung people from joining Shan social events and festivals, on penalty of a 5,000 kyat fine. Moreover, the LP team heard that Palaung people were prohibited from buying Shan products. However these are just rumors and no such prohibitions actually exist.

Nevertheless, these rumors had unintentional consequences. For instance, due to livelihood difficulties, several respondents have been angered by the fact that Shan people still go to Palaung festivals to sell food, even though the Palaung people no longer participate in Shan festivals or events. The rumors were spread throughout the community and people of both ethnicities have started believing them.

While the relationship between Palaung and Shan communities in most townships soured as a result of the armed conflict between the RCSS and TNLA, in Zaelant the conflict is mostly a result of the territorial struggle between the Palaung and Shan communities in the village.

“We lived close to each other, and did things together. But after all these incidents, it is very difficult to even greet. What if they don’t want to greet us? We don’t greet each other anymore. It’s difficult because it is not like we have never known each other. Seeing each other knowing very well that we used to be close, it doesn’t feel good. We are like complete strangers now.”

Nevertheless, like in the other villages, the armed struggle between the RCSS and TNLA served to further strain the relationships between the two communities. Unfortunately, the conflict has also been further exacerbated by unintentional acts. For instance, while the Palaung people used to pass through Zaelant to get to Muse, they have now created a new road in order to not pass Zaelant. This has led to feelings of discomfort among the Shan.

4.2.3 Interdependence between Shan and Palaung communities in Kyaukme

Kyaukme is situated on the Mandalay-Lashio National highway. It is known for its tealeaf products. Tea plantations positioned along the sloped elevated land in Kyaukme townships are inhabited by Shan and Palaung communities. Palaung groups occupy the elevated hill regions where they practice shifting cultivation, while the Shan stay near the valley in order to practice irrigated farming. In Kyaukme there is a saying that, “*Tai [Shan] and Loi [Ta’ang] are relatives*”, because these two ethnic communities live in close proximity and have good socio-economic, traditional, religious, and cultural relations.

Kyaukme is a military strategic region. Consequently, various armed groups including the SSPP, RCSS, TNLA, and Tatmadaw have their bases here. Even the KIA, an ally of TNLA, is active in Kyaukme. The frequent armed clashes between the various groups cause massive suffering for civilians in the region, and many villagers have had to flee their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. Different kinds of human rights violations have been committed by the armed groups, including extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, forced displacement, forced recruitment, forced labor, forced taxation, and placing of landmines. The ongoing violent conflict has resulted in over seven thousand IDPs. For instance, Taw San, a Shan village used to have over six hundred households, and is now left with only sixty. Nyaung Mong, a Palaung village, was motor shelled by Tatmadaw, and its villagers had to seek refuge in nearby stable villages. Most of their houses were burnt down and as a result, and because of ongoing fighting and security issues, numerous households are unable to return to their homes.

A. ECONOMIC FINDINGS

Similar to Nam Kham, the economic interrelations between Palaung and Shan people in Kyaukme can be divided into trade and human capital sharing.

TRADE

People from Kyaukme Township trade in Kyaukme. Therefore, almost all villages in the region, whether Shan or Palaung, have relations with Kyaukme. In the past, most people traded only with nearby villages due transportation difficulties in the region. For instance, historically, almost all LP target villages, such as Pa Leng, Kong Sa Lang, Mang Kone, and Om Ngarm, traded mainly with each other, rather than with Kyaukme. However, since transportation routes have improved, trade between the smaller villages has become less frequent, while more trade has been carried out in and with Kyaukme. 66% of the respondents commented that the Palaung and Shan depend on each other economically. 34% of the respondents stated that such interdependence did not exist because of geographic distance between the Shan and Palaung villages.

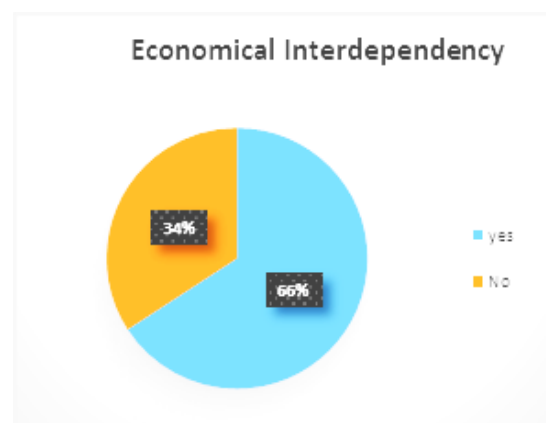


Figure 15 - Economic Interdependence Kyaukme

“Before we went to the Mong Kong five-day-market and Mong Ngawe market for shopping. These days we have a better road and we can go directly to Kyaukme Market”

63-year old Palaung woman, Pang Ka Bin

HUMAN CAPITAL SHARING

Almost all of the target villages cultivate tea for their main source of income. Most Shan villages farm rice, however some also cultivate tea. Labor exchange between Shan and Palaung, tea plantations is common throughout Kyaukme Township.

“When it is time for picking tea, the Shan people from Mong Mit came to pick our tea leaves.”

Elderly Palaung woman, Pang Ka Bin

B. SOCIAL WELFARE FINDINGS

Similar to Nam Kham, people in Kyaukme commented that the Shan and Palaung people have good social relations and participate in each other's events like meetings, funerals, and weddings. The LP team found that this was also due to the close proximity of Shan and Palaung villages.

Moreover, intermarriage between Palaung and Shan is common in Kyaukme Township. Because of such intermarriage, Palaung and Shan families have close ties.

Children of mixed parents, pick different identities from their parents.

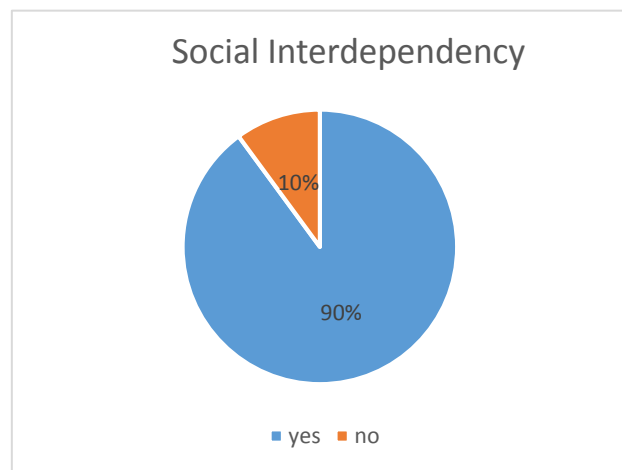


Figure 16 - Social Interdependence Kyaukme

“If there is funeral, the villagers should support the family of the deceased, and we are willing to do so.”

50-year old Shan man, Taw Sang

“My wife is a Ta'ang and her relatives live in a village on the mountain. When we need anything we can go to this Ta'ang village for support.”

35-year old Shan man, Taw Sang

C. RELIGIOUS FINDINGS

All of the respondents from Kyaukme Township, whether Palaung or Shan, are Buddhists. In mixed villages, Shan and Palaung villagers use the same monasteries. In non-mixed villages,

they go to their own monasteries. However, during big religious festivals, like Poi Lurn Si, the Palaung and Shan people celebrate together.

“We used to celebrate Poi Lurn Si together at Mong Ngaw monastery.”

32 year-old woman, Mong Ngaw

“Ta`ang and Shan people should cooperate in social and religious activities. If there is Shan New Year festival, Shan people invite us to join. We usually participate and we should continue this custom of interrelation.”

We usually participate and we should continue this custom of interrelation.”

63 year-old Palaung man, Kyaukme

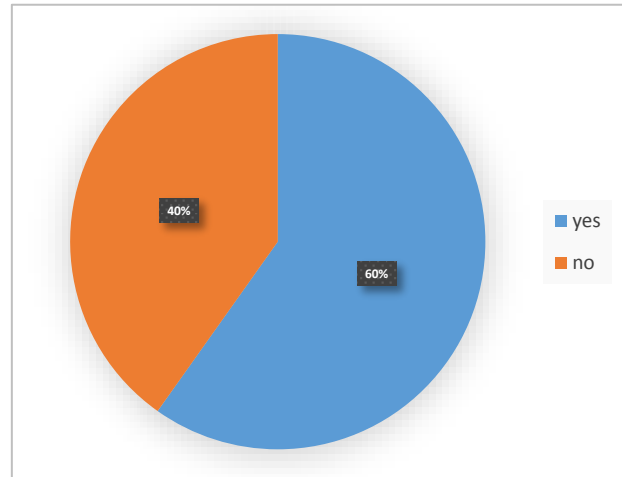


Figure 17 - Religious Interdependence Kyaukme

The religious interrelation between Palaung and Shan in Kyaukme Township is so close that the Palaung and Shan monks are each other's disciples.

“I used to be the disciple of Mong Kong abbot”

Pa Leng Palaung abbot

D. ADMINISTRATIVE FINDINGS

As most of the Palaung and Shan villages are situated in close proximity to each other, they often have to communicate at village track administration level. For instance, Nam Dway, a Palaung village head, cooperated with the village head of Mong Ngaw, a Shan village, in deciding how to deal with the ongoing conflict between different armed groups, including Tatmadaw. Compared to Nam Kham Township, the administrators of Kyaukme townships cooperate more closely, due to the frequent armed clashes in the region, the political situation, and the close proximity of Shan and Palaung villages.

“We need to cooperate with Loi village head man. Being a village head when two or three armed groups are present is difficult. Thus, we need to work together as a team.”

Shan former head man, Mong Ngaw

E. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTBREAK OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN KYAUKME

The recent armed clashes between the armed groups have caused chaos in the villages of Kyaukme Township, and have caused fear and insecurity among the people, especially since civilians have been captured and killed by the armed groups. In Kyaukme, when villagers refer to the conflict they mean the armed conflict between the RCSS and TNLA, not the ethno-conflict between the Shan and Palaung. Thus, when respondents stated that relationships have changed because of tension between the Shan and Palaung, they were in fact referring to security issues and risks of landmines.

FORCED RECRUITMENT

Numerous respondents have commented that, before the fighting between the TNLA and RCSS broke out, relationships between the Palaung and Shan people were good and they would go to each other's social events. However, the fighting has strained the relationships between communities, because of villagers' inevitable and often involuntary involvement with either the RCSS or TNLA.

"After Palaung self-autonomic region was announced, the TNLA took control of some parts of Kyaukme Township. After that incident, the Palaung villagers who live near our village in Kyaukme did not visit us anymore despite being used to do so. They are worried that we might ask about their connection to the TNLA. Since then, doubts arose and the relationship we had with Palaung people was broken."

Middle-aged man, Mong Ngaw

"24 men of Shan and Palaung were captured on 10 December 2016 because the villagers refused to join the army or pay fines for the recruitment. However, the TNLA stated that they captured only 21 people. The TNLA released six people at a time, twice. The number of people they have released are twelve and the rest are still missing and we don't know if they are dead or alive. One villager from Nam Ngue was also captured"

Sai Tun Win, SNLD State Member of Parliament, Kyaukme

"I don't know what to do anymore. We are told to send five men from each village in our region. We had to go to them and asked for consideration and kindness. So they reduced the number to three people. I don't know what to do. If we send our men to join them (TNLA), they will become TNLA soldiers and will fight with the Shan army which is (RCSS). If I don't send the men, our village will be in trouble. If we do send our men then, we feel like we are betraying our people. I really don't know what to do. If I don't send the men, I am sure I will be like Long Htun Yein (SNLD), who was captured after he refused to send people to TNLA. We still don't know if he is alive or dead. If we don't send people to them we have to pay them at least three million as a fine. We are just farmers and how could we have that amount of money. I am confused and don't know what to do. It will be good if I got a letter from either RCSS or SSPP saying that we shouldn't give out our people. If I have that letter, we will stay stubborn and will not send any men to the TNLA. It would be good if they send us a letter of statement saying we shouldn't send or men. Right now, I don't know what to do. The deadline is getting nearer and nearer."

Village headman, Kyaukme Township

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

The extrajudicial killings of civilians by EAOs have created distrust and tension in the Palaung and Shan communities.

"We found the seven dead bodies in Ka Law Wong's cemetery. Seeing the bodies, we confirmed that they were villagers from Mang Kone. Mang Kone is a mixed village of Shan and Palaung. Of the seven captured by the TNLA, six were Shan and one was Palaung. They were killed in the Shan village Ka Law Wong. This act surely created ethnic distrust between Palaung and Shan."

Sai Tun Win, SNLD State Member of Parliament, Kyaukme

Other respondents described an event where ten people were captured in Mong Kong, of which three were sent back home, and seven killed. According to Sai Tun Win, SNLD State Member of Parliament, and Colonel Sai Hsu of the SSPP/SSA, the killings were committed by the TNLA. However, the TNLA denied these killings in the media.

The questions of which EAO has killed more civilians and which ethnic group is most heavily targeted are highly controversial. Nevertheless, the fact remains that villagers are victimized in the ongoing conflict. And, whether intentional or unintentional, Shan villagers were more often victims of killings by the EAOs than Palaung villagers. This has led to enhanced suspicion and tension between Shan and Palaung civilians.

CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY

Acts of confiscation by armed groups have also created suspicion and hatred among villagers. Often such confiscation is blamed on the other ethnic group, rather than the responsible EAO.

“RCSS raided a shop in Nam Dway village and 1.8 million was taken. In the following months, the TNLA collected tax from us, 1 million per tea factory. Maybe this is revenge from the Palaung because of the incident in Nam Dway by the RCSS.”

A Shan villager from Mong Ngaw

LAND MINES

Landmines have caused major security issues in Kyaukme. When troops from various EAOs enter villages they lay landmines to secure the area. Although they often dig up the landmines when leaving the area, villagers are unsure when it is safe for them to travel.

“We cannot go to the farm, we are afraid of landmines. Our crops are ready to be harvested but we cannot go to the farm.”

Elderly man, Pa Lang

“Because of the conflict, workers from other places are afraid to come to pick tea leaves. The tea leaves picking season is over, we had no labor to pick them up. So, we have no income as it should be.”

Villager, Kong Sa Lang

4.2.4 Interdependence between Shan and Palaung Communities in Namtu

Namtu has a similar background to Kyaukme, with many armed clashes between the RCSS, SSPP, TNLA, and Tatmadaw. Fighting between these groups remains intense. This has resulted in widespread abuse of human rights of Namtu villagers, including extrajudicial killings, abduction, forced recruitment, forced labor, deprivation of liberty, and killings by landmines. Due to the ongoing armed violence, the number of IDP camps have grown rapidly, from one in 2015 to six now. The LP team visited all camps and spoke to victims there.

A. ECONOMIC FINDINGS

Of respondents interviewed in Namtu, 73% stated that the Shan and the Palaung are economically interdependent. This interdependency is based mostly on trading of farm products, like tea leaves, and household purchases made by and from Palaung and Shan villagers. In most cases, examples were given of trade in local markets or sharing of labor forces.

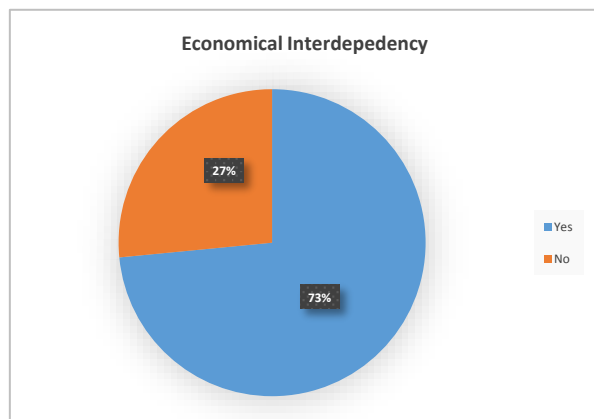


Figure 18 - Economic Interdependence Namtu

Some respondents stated that no economic interdependence exists, because they send their harvested crops, like corn, to other towns and sell them to local Chinese merchants there.

B. SOCIAL WELFARE FINDINGS

Although 27% of the respondents stated that no economic bonds exist between the Shan and Palaung, very different figures were given for social interdependence. In fact, 96% of respondents stated a perceived social interdependence between the Shan and Palaung communities in Namtu.

“Ta`ang and Shan are socially interdependent on each other”.

Abbot, Nar Hsai

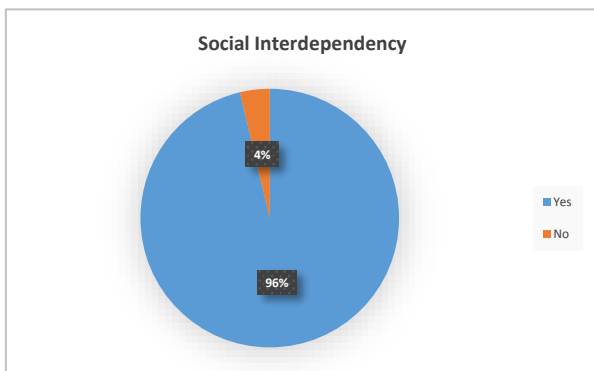


Figure 19 - Social Interdependence Namtu

Respondents repeatedly stated that on occasions such as weddings, funerals, marriages, and meetings, the Shan and Palaung would all participate and help each other.

C. RELIGIOUS FINDINGS

Palaung and Shan villagers in Namtu Township usually have their own respective monasteries. This is often due to the fact that the ethnic groups use their own language in their monasteries.

On special occasions, like religious festivals, Palaung and Shan monasteries are visited by both Shan and Palaung people, without regard to ethnicity. Festivals are usually open to all nearby communities. As such, when one ethnic community hosts a festival, they will invite groups from nearby villages, including those of different ethnic heritage, to participate.

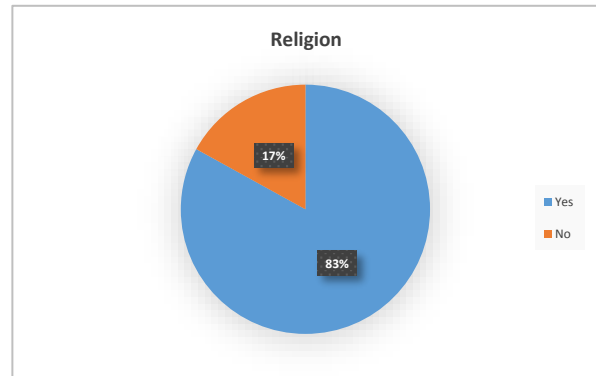


Figure 20 - Religious Interdependence Namtu

“Both Ta`ang and Shan built the monastery and participated in the religious activities together.”

Abbot, Nar Hsai

“Because we respect each other’s custom and traditions, we could keep good relationships between us.”

Elderly man, Nar Hsai

D. ADMINISTRATIVE FINDINGS

In Namtu Township, the Shan and Palaung communities usually live in separate non-mixed villages, except for Nar Hsai, Marn Tzarm, and Marn Loung, which are mixed. Like mixed villages in other townships, the Palaung and Shan each have their own head man, within the same village. The village administrations of the two ethnicities are perceived to work well together. In fact, the secretary of Marn Tzarm is of Palaung ethnicity, and villagers of both Shan and Palaung heritage commented that he is a good person. Indeed, all respondents affirmed that they had never experienced administrative problems in their villages, whether mixed or not.

E. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTBREAK OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN NAMTU

LP teams heard many stories about the negative effects of the armed conflict between the RCSS and TNLA on the relationships between Palaung and Shan villagers. In fact, respondents stated that a communal conflict now exists between the Palaung and Shan. Moreover, it was often repeated that civilians were forgotten victims since the focus was always on the armed conflict. Respondents expressed their distrust in the government, EAOs, and Tatmadaw. They further described problems they experienced in the delivery of goods, transportation, and security concerns due to the ongoing fighting between the RCSS, TNLA, and Tatmadaw. Many respondents pointed out that they were unable to live and carry out their livelihoods peacefully.

CAPTURE AND ABUSE OF CIVILIANS

Respondents described the capture and abuse of civilians as a factor contributing to the communal conflict in Namtu. For instance, two men from Marn Nar, Namtu were captured by the TNLA on accusation of being RCSS-soldiers, while they were on their way to check on their cows and buffalos. The men were beaten and repeatedly asked whether they were RCSS-soldiers. The LP team spoke to these men and learned that they were released after a Kachin villager from Marn Nar saw them and guaranteed the TNLA that the men were indeed villagers from Marn Nar. One of the men was beaten so severely that he is no longer able to speak well.

“They asked us if we were RCSS soldiers. They don’t speak Shan. They speak Palaung and Burmese sometimes. One of the soldiers told me to answer if I am or I am not. If I am about to answer, another soldier beat me and said “why are you speaking?” This vicious circle goes on for a while. After a beating one soldier told me to get up. While I was getting up, another soldier knocked me down with the back of his gun, asking why I was getting up. Luckily, a Kachin from our village saw us and confirmed that we were villagers. After that we were released.”

Victims from Marn Nar

Moreover, due to the widespread threat of capture and abuse by the TNLA, less people are willing to take up leadership roles in the community.

“No one would like to be a leader or even states opinions about the recent arm clashes because of the threat that community leaders will be the one to be captured first.”

Anonymous advisory board member in the village

EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

The extrajudicial killings of civilians is one of the main causes of tension between Palaung and Shan communities, and have led to distrust and blame.¹⁵

“I am not sure if he is dead or alive but I heard that Palaung (TNLA) killed him. I still could meet him two days after they took him with them. But later they didn’t allow me to meet him saying that they laid mines on the way. It has been over nine months since they took my husband. I took my four kids and came here (to Li Saw Camp in Namtu) because it is not safe. I didn’t have a chance to bring anything with me; just my kids.”

Wife of Palaung victim, Li Saw Camp, Namtu

“Three Palaung villagers from our village were captured; Hla Aung, Nyi Mai and Nai Marn. Ai Toe, a Palaung, from Maung Yok was also captured. Ai Toe might be alive. The TNLA asked for grain but our village chief could not find it for them because it is very difficult to get rice here. That’s why Hla Aung and my brother, Nyi Mai arranged grain and went to Nong Arng to deliver rice to TNLA. Then, they asked them to find some meats. So, the two of them requested a pig from a one-sided blind old man in our village. They took the pig to deliver to them again. After sending the pig and on their way back I guess, the two were captured. I went to Nong Arng but I wasn’t allow to speak one word with them. I even followed them to Loi Khang, but I wasn’t allowed to speak one word too. I was the one who

¹⁵ Note how the people refer TNLA as Palaung in the quotes.

went to look for my brother. I was so afraid. He has been a soldier of SSPP since he was 15 years old. We can't do anything.”¹⁶

Hla Aung's sister and mother, Namtu Township

LAND MINES AND PORTERS

The EAOs use land mines and porters in order to carry out their military operations. This has led to fear within the communities, because some villagers have been killed or injured by the landmines. This has again contributed to the distrust between Palaung and Shan villagers.

“An old man, Long Wi stepped on land mines in the Pang Long village. His right leg was torn apart from his body. He was sent to Lashio Military Hospital. Eight blood bags were used to cure him.”

Witness from Pang Long Village, Namtu

“Two men on a motorbike crossed over the landmines that had planted at the entrance of Nam Ngu village, Namtu Township and died during the incident.”

Villager in Namtu Camp, Namtu

“Eight Shan potters to the RCSS stepped on land mines. One died and three are severely injured. Four are not badly injured.”

Villager from Namtu

“We had to follow the steps of cows and buffalos for safety.”

Villagers from Marn Mai and Marn Nar

CONFISCATION OF PROPERTY

Armed groups have repeatedly confiscated or destroyed villagers' property. This has led to grievances within and especially between Palaung and Shan communities.

“We wanted to go back to our village, Marn Mai. So, we went back to check on our houses and farms. Our roofs were taken, rice farms were destroyed, rice from our rice barns were taken, the fences for corn farms were destroyed to allow the cows to eat all our corns, even our worn out clothes were taken. Our pigs, chicken, cows, and buffalo? Nothing is left for us. They take the useful things for them and destroyed useless things. Even if we go back, we have to start from zero which is very difficult. We had lost about three million kyats”

Shan victim, Marn Mai, Namtu Camp

“They took all of my rice from my rice mill. Then they destroyed the mill. The only thing that was left is the alcohol factory.”

Victim from Marn Mai, Namtu camp

“They took everything and even our old clothes. We gave everything they asked for and if we look at the way they treat us, we feel hurt”

Palaung victim, Li Saw IDP camp

¹⁶ At the time of Hla Aung's capture, the SSPP and TNLA were alliances.

“RCSS and TNLA stayed on each side of our village and fought against each other. So, my two kids and my husband, Tun Aung ran away from village. We couldn’t go to Namtu because there were battles along the road. So we lived in the jungle. There was no rice. So we had to eat leaves and raw bananas. We stayed there for fifteen days. After that we got to Namtu camp. We lost everything”

Shan victim, Marn Nar

IDP CAMPS

The LP team found that the number of Shan IDPs in the Namtu camps is far larger than the number of Palaung IDPs. This fact further provokes tension between Palaung and Shan communities in Namtu Township. Indeed, expressed grievances were relative to the suffering experienced. If one group was victimized more, it also had more grievances towards the group that has suffered less.

Namtu Camp

The LP team first visited Namtu Camp on November 22nd 2016. There were 195 IDPs living in Namtu Camp at the time, hailing from Marn Mai, Marn Nar, Zae Pain, Marn Sar, and Marn Pha. According to the respondents in Namtu camp, the IDPs left their villages due to ongoing fighting in their regions. Only two people in Namtu camp are Palaung. The IDPs in Namtu are supported by people from Namtu Township, and with international aid. The LP team had a chance to speak to several IDPs, including the two villagers who had been captured by the TNLA and subsequently released. The LP visited Namtu Camp again on January 6th 2017. By that date, the number of IDPs had increased to 667. New IDPs hailed from Mong Nay, Mong Yoke, Nam Hai, Maw Teik, Nong Sang, Kong Mu, Marn Kong, Nar Lue, Ho Nar and were mostly Shan. Most respondents stated that relationships between Palaung and Shan people were not the issue, but that the armed conflict had caused them to lose their property.

Li Saw Camp

On January 16th, 2017 the LP team visited Li Saw Camp to meet the families of victims that were captured and killed by the TNLA. Li Saw Camp houses 294 IDPs, from Marn Kaw, Loi Kang, Nong Ang, Nam Hai, and Aon Swe villages. The majority of IDPs are of Li Saw ethnicities, others are Shan and Palaung. There are two Palaung households in the camp. Various organizations provide the camp with aid. According to the IDPs, they were forced to move to Li Saw Camp due to fighting in or near their villages, and security issues relating to civilians being captured by armed groups. The fighting described by IDPs was between the RCSS and TNLA. However, after the RCSS retreated, Tatmadaw came to the region, and fighting broke out between them and the TNLA. People that have gone back to their villages to check on their belongings, and to find out whether the situation had stabilized, reported that their property has been destroyed or confiscated. IDPs did not mention grievances towards other ethnic groups in the camp. Instead, they blame the EAOs and Tatmadaw for their situation.

Potepayone Camp

The LP team visited Potepayone Camp on January 16th, 2017 to meet IDPs who had fled their homes due to the armed conflict. There were about 39 individuals in the camp, most of whom were Palaung that had fled from Marn Saw and Ho Nar villages. There were only five Shan IDPs in the camp. IDPs explained that they had come to Potepayone Camp because of continued and worsening fighting between the RCSS and TNLA. They had first fled to Nam Hai village, where they hoped to be able to return to their homes soon. However, because the situation did not stabilize and the fighting intensified, these villagers were forced to go to Potepayone Camp. Villagers in the camp described how Ai Nai, a teenager, was captured by the RCSS eight months ago. Respondents did not know whether Ai Nai was still alive. All respondents expressed the wish to return to their homes soon.

Although the Palaung and Shan people have always lived together peacefully in Namtu, the LP team found that tension between the Palaung and Shan villagers is worsening. Respondents were cautious to tell their stories, because they want to avoid confrontation. Consequently, respondents were evasive in answering questions relating to the ethno-conflict or security concerns, such as questions about human rights violations by EAOs. The data collected by the LP team therefore slightly contradicts their stories.

LP team members found that because of the suffering experienced by villagers from both ethnicities, the two groups have started blaming each other for their troubles. Such blame was even expressed in the IDP-camps. Palaung and Shan people in the camps of Tar Day, Marn Tzarm, and Hsipaw blamed each other by saying: *“it is because of you that we are suffering.”* In Tar Day and Hsipaw, such blameful statements caused Palaung IDPs to leave their camps and move to Na Taung Ngar Yar Monastery in Hsipaw. Although Shan and Palaung are equally victims of the armed conflict, they seem to have lost sympathy for each other. This has been exacerbated by the fact that Palaung and Shan communities have chosen sides in the conflict, and even helped their respective armed groups.

4.2.5 Interdependence between Shan and Palaung Communities in Mong Hsu

Mong Hsu was chosen as a research site, even though no conflict has taken place between the TNLA and RCSS there. Armed violence has only occurred between the SSPP and Tatmadaw. Consequently, the relationships between the Palaung and Shan communities remain unaltered.



Figure 21 - Shan and Palaung IDPs in Mong Hsu receive aid from local donors (Data Collector from Mong Hsu)



Figure 22 - Hai Pa IDP Camp, Mong Hsu Township (Data Collector from Mong Hsu)

Compared to other targeted townships, the interdependence between Shan and Palaung communities in Mong Hsu Township remains visible.

Approximately one hundred and fifty years ago, a group of Palaung moved to Mong Hsu from Mong Lurn, in order to find a place where they could practice shifting cultivation. Ever since, they have moved around the region and formed villages in the mountains and elsewhere, together with the Shan. In 2010, when the fighting broke out between the SSPP/SSA and Tatmadaw, many Palaung villagers living in the mountains sought refuge at Hai Pa and Warn Saw, two Shan villages. The Palaung IDPs commented that local Shan people and Palaung and Shan communities from other regions actively helped them. For instance, Shan people from Hai Pa, gave Palaung people permanent ownership over land for housing. The newly formed Palaung village is called Wan Mai Hai Pa.

One hundred and fifty years of living in close proximity has led to interdependence and even adoption of cross-cultural traditions. Shan and Palaung people trade together at local markets, share traditions and religious activities, and look after each other in difficult times. Politics and ideologies have no place in their relationships. Consequently, Mong Hsu was included as a research site for the LP, as a yardstick to compare the other target areas of to, and as an example



Figure 23 - Hai Pa IDP Camp, Mong Hsu Township (Data Collector from Mong Hsu) of Shan/Palaung relationships in the past.

A. ECONOMIC FINDINGS

One hundred percent of respondents stated that Shan and Palaung communities in Mong Hsu are economically interdependent. Palaung villagers form the main labor force for the Shan. Almost all Palaung practice shifting cultivation, which is not labor intensive. Palaung ‘spare’ laborers have become the labor force for Shan farmers. The Shan are mostly involved in corn production, irrigated paddy farming, and trade.

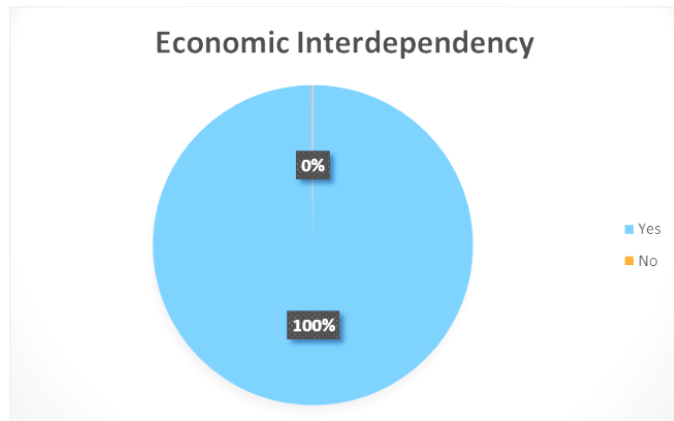


Figure 24 - Economic Interdependence Mong Hsu

Palaung people usually bring vegetables and forest products to sell to Shan communities, which they exchange for rice or money.

“75% of the labor force are from Loi”

42-year old man, Mong Ark, Warn Saw

“We pay the same daily wages for labors. The Shan get 3000 Kyats per day and so do the Palaung.”

Elderly man, Wan Sak

B. SOCIAL WELFARE AND RELIGIOUS FINDINGS

Most (90%) of the respondents also agreed that the communities are socially interdependent. In situations of emergency, the Palaung and Shan depend on each other, in terms of borrowing and lending money from and to each other. They also participate in each other’s social events and go to each other’s festivals, per invitation. However, compared to Kyaukme Township, intermarriage between Palaung and Shan in Mong Hsu Township

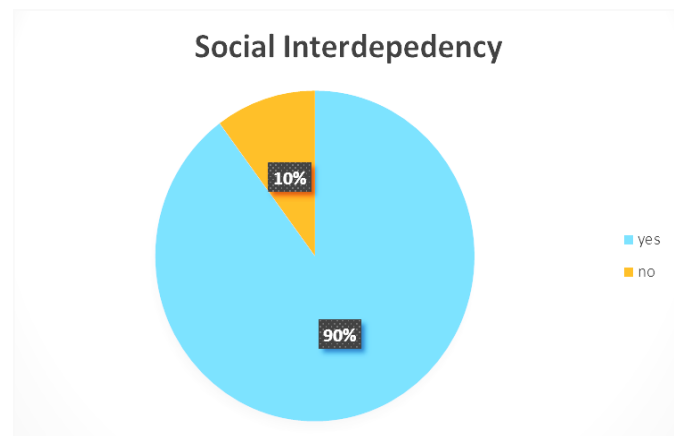


Figure 25 - Social Interdependence Mong Hsu

is rare. In fact, respondents saw their ethnic identities as a boundary keeping them from marrying someone with a different ethnicity. Nevertheless, social interrelations between Palaung and Shan was perceived to be much stronger in Mong Hsu than in any other township. This is because the TNLA and RCSS are not fighting here, and because no ethno-conflict exists between the Palaung and Shan.

“The Shan people always call me ‘Aye Palaung’ and I gladly accept how they call me, because it is a true fact that I am ‘Aye Palaung’. I have no hard feelings. As we are sharing and living together, we, Palaung have to learn Shan language for our advantage. For example, although I am a Palaung, I am a Shan language teacher.”

25-year old Palaung woman, Wan Mai Hai Pa

“We go to help at the funeral and weddings in Hai Pa per invitation.”

18-year old man, Hai Pa Wam Mai

“If Palaung people are sick they come to get advanced pay and when they recover they return the loan as laborers”

45-year old man, Wan Saw

C. ADMINISTRATIVE FINDINGS

All of the Palaung villages are under the control of the SSPP/SSA. Similar to villages in other townships, the Shan and Palaung villagers in Mong Hsu have their own respective village heads. No fighting has taken place between Shan and Palaung villagers. If such conflict does break out, the head villagers from both ethnic groups are responsible.

“The Shan and Wa people used to fight over land. When I have authority over Wan Saw I talked to them and offered them land. Since then, the relationships between Wa and Shan got better. Through my experience, I learned that resource sharing is a vital factors to keep the communities together. I do the same with the Palaung as well and the Shan people are happy with that too.”

Former village head, Wan Saw

E. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE OUTBREAK OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT IN MONG HSU

Most Palaung people in Mong Hsu are unaware of the ethno-conflict between Palaung and Shan communities in Nam Kham, Namtu, Zaelant, and Kyaukme townships. Only few people have heard about the conflict through the media. Due to poor communication channels, the region is also out of reach of social media. Consequently, the ethno-conflict has not spread to Mong Hsu. Despite the ongoing conflict in northern Shan State

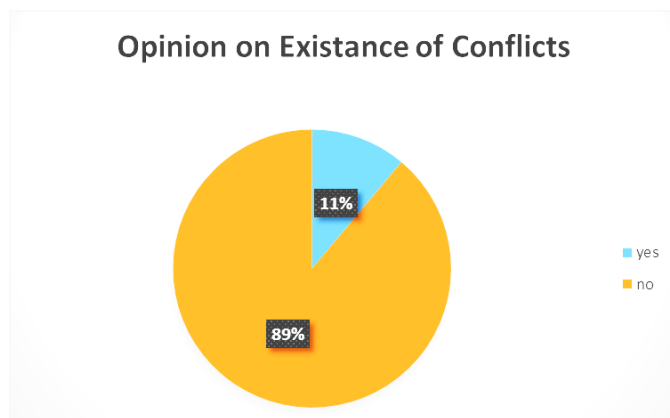


Figure 26 - Opinions on Existence Conflict Mong Hsu

between the TNLA and RCSS, Palaung IDPs in Mong Hsu have received a great deal of help from Shan communities. In fact, while most Shan IDPs have returned to their homes, Palaung IDPs remain in Wan Mai Hai Pa, due to ongoing instability in their former regions. The Palaung IDPs continue to get support and aid from local Shan communities, and from other regions.

In conclusion, the ethno-conflict and armed conflict in northern Shan State has had no influence on the people of Mong Hsu, and no ethno-conflict between the Palaung and Shan has taken

April 2017

place there. In fact, the respondents in Mong Hsu commented that there have never been problems between Palaung and Shan communities in their township.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the research paper summarized in the following statements.

1. The collected data reflects the existing interdependent life style of Shan and Palaung communities.
2. Palaung and Shan villagers are heavily affected by the armed conflict, in terms of human rights violations and forced displacement.
3. Villagers are aware of the ongoing conflict and therefore wary and cautious when answering questions.
4. The conflict between the RCSS, TNLA, and even Tatmadaw, has led to hatred between ethnic groups, specifically between the Shan and Palaung.
5. The use of social media has strongly impacted the ethno-conflict.
6. The majority of documented victims are Shan.
7. Local communities and IDPs consider the government and Daw Aung San Su Kyi to be neglectful on the issues.
8. The fact that TNLA is mostly referred to as ‘the Palaung’ and the RCSS as ‘the Shan’ has caused more tension and misunderstanding between the Palaung and Shan people.
9. The armed groups that operate in the affected areas do not respect civilians’ human rights.
10. Less people willing to step up and become community leaders because of the security risks that leaders in the villages face.

There is a high level of interdependence and interrelation between the Shan and Palaung in terms of proximity of location and socio-economic relations. Economically, the LP report found trade relations and exchange and complementing of labor between the two groups. Socially, groups also have many interrelations, visible especially through shared traditions and festivals. The Shan and Palaung further share the same religion and related rituals and festivals, and sometimes even monasteries. In terms of administration, there is often collaboration between Palaung and Shan village heads, when dealing with issues at village track level, including conflict prevention.

Some respondents expressed their belief that there are no relationships or interdependence between the Shan and Palaung. They based this on the proximity or lack thereof between their villages and that of the other ethnic group, on security issues, and on communication channels between Shan and Palaung that have been cut off.

Almost all respondents stated that the relationship between the Shan and Palaung has not changed. However, when the LP team asked further questions about their daily lives and activities, some concerns were addressed by both Shan and Palaung respondents. Indeed, throughout the interviews it became clear that there have in fact been changes in the interrelations and interdependence between the Shan and Palaung. For example, the security issues have left them fearful to travel, and visit other villages (of other ethnicities). In addition, the ongoing conflict between Tatmadaw, RCSS, and TNLA has affected people’s ability to see

to their livelihoods. Villagers cannot farm, and are afraid of stepping on landmines. Moreover, villagers are afraid to leave their villages to trade, because they fear human rights violations such as capture, forced recruitment, torture, and killings by the EAOs. This, together with the forced labor and taxation, has angered civilians and created mistrust and tension between Shan and Palaung communities. In fact, it seems that the hatred between the TNLA and RCSS has spread to the ethnic groups, since villagers often blame each other, rather than the respective EAO. Indeed, the LP team found that, when answering questions, both Shan and Palaung respondents referred to the TNLA as ‘the Palaung’ and the RCSS as ‘the Shan’. In practice, this has led to further misunderstandings between civilians.

The LP team found that the EAOs have shown almost complete disregard for the human rights of civilians in the conflict areas. Various violations were discussed, such as extrajudicial killings, forced recruitment, forced labor, confiscation of property, and forced taxation.

The LP team further observed that respondents were reluctant to cooperate and answer questionnaires openly. Villagers did not express their feelings and opinions, but mostly tried to present the facts. The LP team regarded this as a constructive attempt by villagers to solve the ethno-conflict. Whenever respondents were asked directly about the problems of and conflicts between the Shan and Palaung, they answered that “there is nothing”. However, by the end of conversations, concerns became visible, as well as respondents willingness to solve the issues.

The use of social media, especially Facebook, has greatly impacted the ongoing conflict. Facebook’s news feed is not a reliable news source, and yet people in Myanmar treat it as equal to news from news agencies. This is how rumors have started and spread. Respondents from Nam Kham, Zaelant, Kyaukme, and Namtu expressed their beliefs that a third party might be behind the spreading of rumors on social media.

Despite the ongoing armed clashes and heightening tension between Shan and Palaung communities, the government has failed to address, and in fact ignored, the issues. Even in cases like Zaelant, where the conflict was initially caused by Tatmadaw’s Four Cuts Strategy, no follow up responsibility was taken by the government. In Zaelant, Palaung IDPs are still living in the village, where they were only meant to stay for three years, two decades later. The fact that – as a result – they have now requested village track status initiated the ethno-conflict in Zaelant. Yet, the government fails to address the situation.

Recommendations to the stakeholders

To the Government and Tatmadaw

1. The ethnic conflict should be addressed through political dialogue.

Violence is not the way to solve ethnic conflict. The ongoing violent has led to many civilian victims. The advantage of political dialogue is that demands from both sides can be heard and compromises can be made. By addressing the conflict through political dialogue, negative impacts of the conflict can be avoided.

2. Recognition of ethnic rights in order to come to non-violent conflict resolution.

Recognizing ethnic rights gives space for ethnic minorities to promote their culture, languages, and identities. This is what ethnic people demand, and failure to do so is the root cause of conflict in Myanmar. By recognizing ethnic rights, the problems can be solved.

3. Hear victims, and give them a voice in the political dialogue.

Victims have been directly affected by the ongoing conflict. Their losses should be compensated and restored, and their suggestions should be heard. The majority of the population has been affected by conflict, and they should therefore be given a voice.

4. Open up space to hear victims' demands.

The tension between Shan and Palaung communities are caused by the armed clashes between EAOs. The resulting destruction has impacted society dramatically. Victims dare not speak out about the losses and difficulties caused by the EAOs and Tatmadaw. The government and Tatmadaw should provide a safe space in which victims' troubles and demands can be heard.

5. Civilians should be able to participate in the peace dialogue.

Civilian participation is not included in Myanmar's peace process. Without inclusion of civilian and victim's voices, peace deals cannot last.

6. Punish those who spread rumors and hate speech.

Rumors and hate speech are some of the main causes of tension between Shan and Palaung communities. The government should take responsibility on the issue.

7. The government and Tatmadaw should no longer stay silent about the Shan/Palaung ethno-conflict.

Ever since fighting broke out in 2015, the government and Tatmadaw have kept silent about the matter and have taken no responsibility in solving the ethno-conflict or armed conflict. Because of the ongoing armed conflict in northern Shan State, some EAOs are not allowed to participate in the Political Dialogue. This is seen by civilians as an act of revenge by the government and Tatmadaw. Instead, the government and Tatmadaw should allow and encourage all EAOs to sign the NCA, based on recognition of their ethnic rights. Moreover, Tatmadaw should avoid giving the impression that they are strategically benefiting from the conflict between TNLA and RCSS.

8. The government should take a mediation role in solving the ethno-conflict.

The government has a responsibility to build a peaceful society. Therefore, the tension between Shan and Palaung communities should be mediated by the government.

9. The government should provide humanitarian aid and temporary shelter to IDPs.

The government does not sufficiently support IDPs, who survive mostly through local donors and aid. Local funding barely covers IDPs' needs. The government should provide aid and assistance to the victims and affected communities.

10. The government should allow international aid, in order to help with the economical, physical and mental effects of the armed conflict.

The effects of the ongoing armed conflict are brutal for IDPs. Their property has been destroyed and they have been victims of violent acts. IDPs must rebuild their lives from scratch, and need economical, physical, and mental help. Local help is insufficient. Assistance should be provided by the government, and the government should allow international humanitarian aid to reach IDPs and affected families.

11. The government is responsible to the citizens and the nation, and as such it has to make a real effort to end the armed conflict.

The government should sincerely approach different EAOs with genuine commitment to end the armed conflict, in order to bring peace.

To the Restoration Council of Shan State, Shan State Army

12. Build effective peace and sign a ceasefire with the TNLA.

Building peace with the TNLA will ease the ethnic tension in the community. Without effective peace, development and stability in the region cannot be pursued.

13. Avoid acts that are harmful to the relationship between Shan and Palaung.

The media has sometimes, through RCSS influence, released news that have provoked tensions among ethnic groups. The RCSS should instead create policies that will strengthen the unity of ethnic groups in Shan State.

14. Recognize human rights.

Respecting human rights is a constructive way of approaching or preventing conflict. Human rights violations cause anger and hatred. If victims are of different ethnicity than perpetrators, harmful stereotypes can easily be created. Moreover, victims are sometimes unable to differentiate between armed organizations and ethnic groups. Human rights must therefore be recognized and protected by all EAOs.

15. Cooperate with the SSPP on national and political issues.

The cooperation of Shan State Army-North and Shan State Army-South could benefit all people in Shan State. Moreover, the SSPP have had a long history of good relations with Palaung armed groups, including the TNLA. Therefore, the SSPP can help as mediator in solving the conflict.

16. Avoid spreading the idea that Tatmadaw is using the conflict in order to build its army

The LP team found that rumors and hate speech that were spread were, in some instances, closely linked to army building. When Shan communities feel threatened by the Palaung communities, they assume the Palaung are working with Tatmadaw. Similarly, the Palaung assume that the Shan work with Tatmadaw when they feel threatened. This is due to groups spreading the idea that when communities feel threatened by neighboring ethnic groups, they are more willing to join the military.

17. Avoid using the conflict as a tool for army expansion.

The LP team found that the army is using hate speech as propaganda to expand its forces. When Shan communities feel threatened by the Palaung communities, the Shan are more likely to join the army.

To the Ta`ang Nationality Liberation Army

18. Build effective peace and sign a ceasefire with the RCSS.

Building peace with the RCSS will ease the ethnic tension in the community. Without effective peace, development and stability in the region cannot be pursued.

19. Avoid acts that will harm the relationship between Shan and Palaung.

The killings, torture, and other human rights violations are one of the major causes of tension between the Shan and Palaung. By camping and fighting in the villages, villagers' security and livelihoods are affected. It also prevents IDPs from returning to their homes.

20. Avoid acts based on revenge.

The fact that over 90 Shan civilians were captured by the TNLA makes Shan villagers assumed that TNLA is taking revenge on the civilians. Therefore, it created hatred and distrust.

21. Recognize human rights.

Respecting human rights is a constructive way of approaching or preventing conflict. Human rights violations cause angers, and hatred. If victims are of different ethnicity as perpetrators, harmful stereotypes can easily be created. Moreover, victims are sometimes unable to differentiate between armed organizations and ethnic groups. Human rights must therefore be recognized and protected by all EAOs.

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23. Avoid using the conflict as a tool for army expansion.

The LP team found that the army is using hate speech propaganda to expand its forces. When Palaung communities feel threatened by the Shan communities, the Palaung are more likely to join the army.

To the Shan State Progressive Party

24. Protection of civilians must be the first priority. Cooperate with RCSS to address national and political issues.

Protection of civilians and keeping good relations with good alliances are both very important. However, because civilians are vulnerable due to the effects of the armed conflict, the protection of civilians must be prioritized. The SSPP must cooperate with RCSS to benefit all Shan people, and other ethnicities in the political arena.

25. Be a mediator between TNLA and RCSS, to solve the armed and communal conflict.

The SSPP has a good relationship with the TNLA, as well as the RCSS. Thus, the SSPP must take a mediation role in the TNLA/RCSS conflict, and in the ongoing communal conflict.

26. Listen to local voices and protect villagers.

The current tension between Shan and Palaung communities was caused by the armed clashes. The resulting destruction has dramatically impacted society. Victims dare not speak out about their grievances and difficulties, which were caused by the EAOs. The SSPP should provide a space in which victims can freely share their troubles and demands.

To Shan and Palaung communities

27. Avoid acts and words that will harm the relationship between Shan and Palaung.

Harmful language and exaggeration should be avoided. Hate speech and rumors are some of the main causes of tension and should not be listened to. News should be analyzed and confirmed before it is spread.

28. Military and civilian affairs should not be mixed.

Civilians are forced to support EAOs. That does not mean that they are part of them. EAOs often change their strategies and force support from different groups. Such forced support should not be seen as actual support. The Shan/Palaung relationship must not end because of the armed conflict.

29. Peaceful coexistence between Shan and Palaung should be maintained.

Communities should be able to live peacefully. Without peace, Shan and Palaung cannot survive. Their long history of interrelation and coexistence has led to economic, social, cultural, traditional, and administrative interdependence.

30. Communities must recognize each other's rights.

By recognizing each other's rights the ethno-conflict can be stopped and space can be created to accommodate peace. Recognizing each other's rights will minimize the conflict and enhance coexistence between Shan and Palaung communities.

31. Shan and Palaung communities should cooperate in combating the armed conflict and building good relationships.

The Palaung and Shan should work together to address the communal conflict. There should be interethnic administrative networks, local organizations, farmer organization to deal with issues in the Shan/Palaung communities. Such local institutions, dealing with specific local issues, can prevent conflict and create synergy through cooperation.

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Fear makes strangers of neighbors...

Distrust makes strangers of friends...

Rumor makes strangers of partners...

