SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION IN KAREN STATE

JUNE 2016

Acknowledgments

SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION IN KAREN STATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities in Karen State are witnessing significant albeit uneven political and social change. The 2012 ceasefire between the Government of Myanmar and the Karen National Union (KNU) has resulted in a more stable situation for communities who had endured over sixty years of armed conflict, displacement and impoverishment. Although the peace process is still in its infancy, the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and increased dialogue between the government and ethnic armed groups do offer some hope of a durable resolution to the long-lasting conflicts in Myanmar and of genuine improvements to the lives of ethnic minority communities. Looking towards the future, further changes and developments can be anticipated with the formation of a civilian government, the continuation of peace negotiations, and increasing discussions around refugee return.

Discussions around education reform and the recognition of ethnic education systems are now central to political dialogue between the Myanmar government and ethnic nationalist groups, as well as being key to the durable improvement of services in ethnic minority areas. Although political discussions between the government and ethnic armed groups have been progressing slowly, and the provision of education has not yet been addressed in detail during the nationwide ceasefire negotiations, the situation for communities on the ground in Karen State is often changing rapidly. Since the 2012 ceasefire, the government has built hundreds of new schools and assigned thousands of teachers to previously inaccessible areas. Many community schools in Karen State have now also been officially registered as government schools.

Education systems in Karen State have been shaped by decades of conflict, competing administrative structures, and the struggle for self-determination of ethnic nationalist groups. In a context in which they received little to no outside assistance, communities rallied to manage and support their schools, thereby playing a key role in ensuring that children had access to education. The Karen Education Department (KED) — which was created at the time of the KNU's formation in 1947 to oversee education in Karen communities — historically organized the curriculum for many of these community schools, allowing Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) education for Sgaw Karen

students. The KED now continues to support education in more than 1,500 schools. A growing proportion of these schools are 'mixed' schools, comprising both community and government teachers. At the local level, the current rolling out of state education systems is often perceived as one of the main threats to these ethnic and community education systems.

In line with Myanmar's Framework for Economic and Social Reform, and as the government works towards the Sustainable Development Goals as well as fulfilling its commitment to inclusive and equitable quality education as outlined in the Incheon Declaration, a focus on community engagement and its role in promoting equitable access is timely. In Myanmar's evolving political context, an in-depth analysis of community engagement in education is also essential, in order to better inform local and international efforts to support community ownership and to address needs and obstacles hindering quality and access to education. As stakeholders look towards improving education services for Karen communities, it is crucial to assess existing systems for school-based management, as well as communities' hopes and preferences for the education of their children. Rolling out programming in ways that are not conflict sensitive and that do not involve key community actors can exacerbate tensions, impacting negatively on the peace process. Conversely, constructive engagement can impact positively on peace building, as well as further strengthening community mechanisms for school-based management. Effective school-based management also has additional benefits for promoting social harmony through outreach and support services to those in greatest need.

Drawing on information obtained through in-depth research with local actors in different areas of Karen State, this report describes community engagement in education, as well as factors restricting and enabling local engagement and decision-making. In Karen State's Mutraw District, research was conducted in areas that have historically been to a large extent under KNU administration and in areas where there are both state and KNU actors. In Dooplaya District, research was conducted in mixed administration areas that comprise multiple political and armed actors, including state actors,

the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, the Border Guard Force, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, and the KNU. Focusing on these different socio-political contexts highlights ways in which socio-political factors can impact on patterns of community engagement in education, as well as on local agency for school-based management and education decision-making.

The School Committees as mechanisms for community management of local schools

The School Committees have become crucial mechanisms for the local management of community schools and play a key role in coordinating different aspects of community engagement in education. The School Committees are locally grown mechanisms for school-based management. They function as systems to involve community members in problem-solving and decision-making at the local level.

The School Committees are made up of community leaders and members. They are generally seen as representative of the parents and community members, and as having the authority and legitimacy to make decisions, to mobilize community support, and to solve problems for the school. The School Committees in different areas work with teachers, community members, and leaders to manage and support their schools. However, they can also reflect and reproduce existing socio-political hierarchies. School Committee members are generally senior members of the community; they are also typically male. Additionally, there are differences in how the School Committees work with the students' parents. In smaller village schools, there is generally more parent involvement in the School Committees and in school decision-making than there is in larger and secondary schools. The School Committees can therefore be strengthened in the future to ensure that they are representative and inclusive of all parents and of more marginalized community members.

The School Committees play an essential role in mobilizing and managing community contributions to the schools. They generally set the levels of the contributions that families need to make to the schools; they then collect these contributions before giving them to the teachers or using them to cover school costs and needs. The School Committees are also crucial in promoting access to education at the community level. They encourage community members to send their children to school, and they often play a key role in identifying and seeking out school-aged children who are not in school. By mobilizing

community support mechanisms and promoting access to education in these ways, the School Committees have ensured that local schools can provide a basic level of education for populations who would otherwise not have access. Additionally, the School Committees have enabled students in ethnic minority areas to access education in their ethnic mother tongue, thereby promoting quality in access to education.

The School Committees also act as 'safety nets' and support mechanisms for families who face difficulties contributing to the schools. When a family cannot contribute to the school, the School Committee acts as a decision-making body, waiving or adjusting their contribution, or finding alternative sources of support for this family. Additionally, some School Committees function as support mechanisms beyond the school — for example, providing financial assistance if a student is sick and requires healthcare but the family cannot pay. The School Committees therefore act as locally grown community support mechanisms, providing 'safety nets' for students and their families, as well as mitigating some of the barriers to accessing education that are faced by more vulnerable families.

At the same time, the School Committees function as a key link between the communities, schools, and KED. They report information to the KED about the situation of, needs in, and problems faced by the communities and the schools. By operating as this link between the schools and the KED, the School Committees are integral to the KED's school monitoring systems. The School Committees also disseminate information and materials from the KED to the schools, enabling communities and their schools to obtain essential resources that help ensure local access to education. In the future, this link can be utilized in a variety of ways to support quality education, information sharing, and teacher support.

The School Committees also have other roles and responsibilities, including: managing and maintaining school buildings and infrastructure; ensuring the security of the students, teachers, and schools; ensuring and monitoring teaching and learning in the schools; developing school plans; and solving problems in the schools. However, and although the KED's policy states that the School Committees are responsible for monitoring teachers in the schools, they often lack the capacity to fulfill such technical roles. Moreover, because of capacity and power limitations, the problem-solving abilities of the School Committees are often limited to more practical issues to do with the maintenance and daily running of the schools, rather than longer-term planning and strategizing.

The School Committees therefore already function as mechanisms for the local management of community schools. There is definitely room for improvement in the ways that these mechanisms function and in providing School Committee members with the capacity to play a greater role in school-based management. Yet this study found that instead of capitalizing on these valuable resources, current national-level programming is being rolled out in ways that tend to exclude and undermine the School Committees. The School Committees have generally not been consulted or involved in plans to build new schools, to send government teachers to their areas, or to register former community schools. Undermining and weakening these locally grown systems can lead to the loss of essential community-level mechanisms for school-based management, without there yet being alternative systems in place — or plans to develop systems — that are considered by local communities as legitimate and as having the authority to manage and make decisions for their schools.

At the local level, tensions have often escalated — particularly in cases where government teachers have adopted seniority over community teachers and School Committee members who had already been working in the schools for many years. This is resulting in situations where competing management systems are undermining community mechanisms for school-based management and decision-making. Many School Committee members feel that they have no voice and that they are powerless in relation to education plans which are being rolled out in their areas. The lack of clarity in policies and implementation is therefore leading to unnecessary and unproductive conflicts at the school and community level. Failing to work with these key community mechanisms risks further exacerbating tensions and can be detrimental to peace building at the local level. Through processes of constructive engagement, these negative outcomes can easily be avoided.

The School Committees have the potential to act as key mechanisms in strengthening education services for ethnic minority communities. Looking towards the future of education in Karen State, it is essential to capitalize on and develop these valuable community-level mechanisms. In particular, the School Committees should be strengthened to ensure that they act as participatory and inclusive systems for school-based management, and to enhance their role in promoting education quality and access at the local level. Current resource and capacity limitations faced by the School Committees also need to be addressed. Finally, it is essential to engage constructively with these local-level mechanisms in order to support education systems and programs that contribute positively to peace building efforts.

Community engagement in education in Karen State

In a context in which community schools were historically not recognized and received little to no outside support, communities in Karen State have rallied to provide the material and financial contributions necessary for their schools to function. Community members' contributions to their schools can include: school fees; in-kind and financial contributions to teachers' livelihoods; and in-kind, manpower, and financial contributions to school building and maintenance. Community members typically cover a large proportion of teachers' livelihoods needs through in-kind or financial contributions. Community in-kind, manpower or financial contributions also generally cover most if not all of the school building and maintenance needs. These contributions are commonly linked with strong systems of solidarity and community ownership of local schools. Yet this has also placed additional strain on communities who are already impacted by decades of conflict and impoverishment.

Community members in Karen State are typically not strongly engaged in the pedagogical dimensions of their children's education. Teachers are commonly seen as solely responsible for the students' education, with parents' responsibilities being limited to sending their children to school and providing material support for the teachers and the school. Low levels of community involvement in the pedagogical dimensions of education are linked with high levels of illiteracy in historically unstable and remote communities. However, relatively weak school-community communication and outreach systems also reinforce a situation where community members are not strongly engaged in their children's teaching and learning.

Community members often attribute a high value to their children's education. Yet while education can be perceived as a 'way out' of the poverty and insecurity that they have experienced during their lifetimes, many parents also see no real value to their children staying in school, since further education and employment opportunities for those who do finish school are limited — and, as a Karen saying goes, "even if you can read and write, you still eat rice." Nevertheless, community members speak often of the importance of their children being taught in their mother tongue. They value their community education systems as a way to safeguard their ethnic language, culture, and identity. Community schools are then seen as making

significant contributions to local community development and to the preservation of Karen culture and identity.

The current rolling out of state education systems into communities in previously contested areas of Karen State is commonly perceived as undermining community education systems and as threatening Karen language, culture, and identity. Yet state education systems are also seen as providing students with much-needed proficiency in Myanmar language and with increased opportunities for employment and higher education. Additionally, state education systems are often perceived as relieving some of the strain that communities face in supporting their schools. Community members' preferences for different education systems are then shaped by the values that they attribute to different education regimes, as well as by difficulties currently confronting community education systems — particularly the lack of official recognition for these systems and the burden that communities face in supporting their schools.

Communities visited by the research team in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District provide contrasting examples of how socio-political factors can impact on community engagement in education. Overall, the socio-political context in Mutraw District — where communities visited by the research team live in more remote areas and/or had historically been to a greater extent under the administration of a single authority, and where populations are relatively unified — can be seen to have contributed to more robust community support mechanisms, greater community engagement in education, and more developed community mechanisms for school-based management. School Committees in Mutraw District have also benefitted from sustained efforts by the KED to strengthen local mechanisms for school-based management, with the KED able to access and work with communities in these areas.

Conversely, the socio-political context in Dooplaya District — where communities visited by the research team live in mixed administration areas, grapple to meet the demands of competing authorities, and are overall more diverse and less unified — can be seen to have contributed to less developed community support mechanisms, weaker community engagement in education, and more fragile community mechanisms for school-based management. Due to the political and conflict situation, the KED has also had less access to communities in Dooplaya District's mixed administration areas, and has been less able to work with and to strengthen the School Committees.

Additionally, there are a number of common challenges or barriers across different socio-political contexts, which have significant negative impacts on community education systems and engagement in these systems. The lack of official recognition for community education systems creates major obstacles to students accessing education and employment opportunities in Myanmar. This in turn impacts negatively on community engagement in education. Ongoing political uncertainties, poverty, and livelihoods difficulties, lack of education and employment opportunities, and high rates of parent illiteracy also impede community engagement in education. Moreover, community teachers face a number of difficulties. These teachers struggle to provide quality education and to strengthen school-community linkages in a situation where they are commonly seen as solely responsible for the students' education, yet where they lack resources and capacity. Community teachers are extremely valuable resources, particularly in a context where trained teachers are lacking. They are also mother tongue teachers and therefore play a key role in ensuring quality in access to education. As such, these community teachers need to be recognized and their roles strengthened in the development of inclusive and equitable quality education for Myanmar's diverse populations.

Looking towards the future, factors currently restricting community engagement in education need to be considered in order to minimize barriers to engagement and to strengthen school-community linkages. Ultimately, efforts to improve education quality and access for communities in Karen State should take into account the values that local actors attribute to different education regimes, as well as limitations and challenges that impede community education systems and engagement in these systems.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms and glossary

ATT	Area Teacher Trainer
BGF	Border Guard Force
BMWEC	Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee
CBO	Community-Based Organization
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist/Benevolent Army
KED	Karen Education Department
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
KNU/KNLA PC	KNU/KNLA Peace Council
KSEAG	Karen State Education Assistance Group
KTTC	Karen Teacher Training College
KTWG	Karen Teacher Working Group
MoE	Ministry of Education
MTB	Mother Tongue-Based
MTB-MLE	Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education
MTT	Mobile Teacher Training
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NGO	Non-Government Organization
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
SC	School Committee
SCI	Save the Children International
Tatmadaw	Myanmar Armed Forces
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
QLE	Quality Learning Environment

Note on territorial designations and currencies

This report uses territorial designations employed by the Karen Education Department (KED) to allow comparison with the KED's publications and information. The author recognizes that these differ from the territorial designations of the Myanmar government. For the purpose of this report, Karen State refers to the KNU-identified territory that includes areas within the government-defined boundaries of Kayin State and adjacent areas of Mon State and Bago Division. Research was conducted in areas of KNU-defined Mutraw District, corresponding roughly to the area of northern Karen State called Papun Township on government maps, and in areas of KNU-defined Dooplaya District, corresponding roughly to the southernmost part of Karen State, incorporating all or part of government-delineated Myawaddy, Kawkareik, and Kyainseikkyi Townships.

Figures quoted in this report are given in the original currency (Myanmar Kyat or Thai Baht) with their approximate equivalent in US Dollars, calculated based on the exchange rate as of 21 March 2016 (1 USD = 1,212.28 Kyat and 1 USD = 34.91 Thai Baht).

1. INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION IN KAREN STATE

Communities in Karen State are witnessing significant albeit uneven political and social change. The 2012 ceasefire between the Government of Myanmar and the Karen National Union (KNU) has resulted in a more stable situation for communities who had experienced over sixty years of armed conflict, displacement and impoverishment. Although the peace process is still in its infancy, the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and increased dialogue between the government and ethnic armed groups offer some hope of a durable resolution to the long-lasting conflicts in Myanmar and of genuine improvements to the lives of ethnic minority communities. Looking towards the future, further changes and developments can be anticipated with the formation of a civilian government, the continuation of peace negotiations, and increasing discussions around refugee return.

In this changing political context, it is essential to look in depth at existing systems for the provision of education in historically disputed areas. In Karen State, community education systems have developed to support schools in remote and unstable areas. Historically, these community schools were not officially recognized and received little to no support from the government or outside agencies. Local communities rallied to manage and support their schools, and have played a key role in assuring that children have access to education. The School Committees have developed as local management systems for community schools, ensuring that these schools can provide a basic level of education for populations who would otherwise not have access, as well as enabling students to access education in their ethnic mother tongue. These School Committees have also become key community support mechanisms and 'safety nets' for vulnerable students and families. The Karen Education Department (KED) — which was created by the KNU to oversee education in Karen State — historically organized the curriculum for many of these community schools, allowing Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) education for Sgaw Karen students. Community teachers have also received training and support from a network of Karen education groups. Although they are still not officially recognized, these Karen education systems continue to support education for over 150,000 students in community schools.

Discussions around education reform and the recognition of ethnic education systems are now central to political dialogue between the government and ethnic nationalist organizations, as well as being key to the durable improvement of services in ethnic minority areas. Although political discussions between the government and ethnic armed groups have been progressing slowly, and the provision of education has not yet been addressed in detail during the nationwide ceasefire negotiations, the situation for communities on the ground in Karen State is often changing rapidly. Since the 2012 ceasefire, the government has built hundreds of new schools and assigned thousands of teachers to previously inaccessible areas. Many community schools in Karen State have now also been registered as government schools. At the local level, the rolling out of state education systems is commonly perceived as one of the main threats to community education systems. This can also exacerbate tensions and potential sources of conflict.

In line with Myanmar's Framework for Economic and Social Reform, and as the government works towards the Sustainable Development Goals as well as fulfilling its commitment to inclusive and quality education as outlined in the Incheon Declaration, a focus on community engagement and its role in promoting equitable access is timely. In Myanmar's evolving political context, an in-depth analysis of community engagement in education is also essential in order to better inform local and international efforts to support community ownership and to address needs and obstacles hindering quality and access. As stakeholders look towards improving education services in Karen communities, it is crucial to look at existing systems for school-based management, as well as communities' hopes and preferences for their children's education. Rolling out programming in ways that are not conflict sensitive and that do not involve key community actors can exacerbate tensions, in turn impacting negatively on the peace process. Conversely, processes of constructive engagement can impact positively on peace building, as well as further strengthening community mechanisms for school-based management. Effective school-based management also has additional benefits for promoting social harmony through outreach and support services to those in greatest need.

Drawing on information obtained through in-depth research with local actors in different areas of Karen State, this report describes community engagement in education, as well as factors restricting and enabling local engagement and decision-making. In Mutraw District, research was conducted in areas that have historically been to a large extent under the administration of the KNU and in areas where there are both state and KNU actors. In Dooplaya District, research was conducted in mixed administration areas that comprise multiple political and armed actors, including state actors, the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army, the Border Guard Force, the KNU/KNLA Peace Council, and the KNU. Focusing on these different socio-political contexts highlights ways in which socio-political factors can impact on patterns of community engagement in education, as well as on local agency for school-based management and education decision-making.

'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

2. BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

Education systems in Karen State have been shaped by decades of conflict, competing administrative structures, and the struggle for self-determination of ethnic nationalist groups. As the country moves towards a democratic system of government, and as peace negotiations progress slowly at the national level, communities on the ground are facing a changing education landscape. In the current context of discussions around education reform, the ways in which these communities engage with existing education systems and their responses to different education regimes and programs need to be taken into account in order to safeguard effective school-based management, to work towards inclusive and equitable quality education, and to ensure that education contributes positively to peace building.

2.1 Education systems in Karen State

a. Political and historical context

The Karen conflict has been described as the world's longest civil war. The Karen National Union (KNU) and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), launched its struggle for independence in 1949.[1] Over half a century of conflict and government counter-insurgency operations in areas populated by Karen communities have had severe humanitarian impacts on civilian populations. As well as being subjected to violence, human rights abuses, and displacement, communities in disputed areas had little to no access to official health and education services, and their livelihoods were constantly threatened.

Over the years, communities in Karen State have had to grapple with an ever more complex patchwork of armed state and non-state actors, as the Karen resistance movement splintered and a number of groups negotiated ceasefires whilst the KNLA continued armed conflict despite shrinking territorial control (Callahan 2007; South 2011). In 1994, the KNU and KNLA were severely weakened when a faction broke away and formed the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), ostensibly in reaction to discrimination by the Christian leadership against the Buddhist rank and file of the insurgency (South 2011). Shortly afterwards, the DKBA signed a ceasefire with the government and was instrumental in the 1995 fall of Manerplaw, former KNU headquarters in Karen State. After the fall of Manerplaw and scaled-up Tatmadaw offensives in Karen State in the second half of the 1990s, the KNU/KNLA and pro-democracy forces were forced to retreat ever further east towards the Thai border (Fong 2008). Within a few years of its formation, the DKBA overtook the KNLA as the most powerful Karen armed group in both military and economic terms (South 2011). In 2007, another group splintered from the KNLA and formed the KNU/KNLA Peace Council (KNU/KNLA PC). The KNU/KNLA PC signed a ceasefire with the government, which has lasted ever since.

In the lead up to Myanmar's 2010 elections, the government called for all ceasefire groups to either lay down their arms or become part of a centrally controlled Border Guard Force (BGF). A breakaway faction of the DKBA refused to join the Border Guard Force, leading to renewed fighting in areas of Karen State bordering Thailand.[2] A new ceasefire was then agreed in 2011. Yet as outbreaks of fighting in 2015 demonstrated, the situation remained unstable (Lenkova 2015). Meanwhile, the KNU/KNLA PC never accepted the BGF scheme.

As a result of the splintering of ethnic armed groups and of the evolving conflict situation, communities in contested areas of Karen State were increasingly subjected to competing political and military authorities. The literature on Myanmar's borderlands has traditionally referred to government-controlled, resistance group-controlled, and ceasefire group-controlled areas. Yet the situation on the ground tends to be much less clear-cut. By the 2000s, many parts of the borderlands were more accurately described as 'mixed administration areas' — that is, areas that were not fully under the control of one party to the conflict, and where villagers had to negotiate and

---

[1] The KNU's aim was initially secession. However, from 1976 onwards, the KNU called for a federal system rather than an independent Karen State (South 2011).
[2] In 2010, when this faction of the DKBA refused to become part of the Border Guard Force and broke away from the organization, it was renamed the Democratic Karen Benevolent Army Brigade 5 (DKBA 5). It is generally now known simply as the DKBA.

were frequently exposed to exploitation by multiple and often-conflicting political and armed actors (South 2011).

After coming to power in 2011, President Thein Sein's government initiated peace negotiations with ethnic armed groups. In 2012, the government and the KNU signed a ceasefire agreement. Then, in October 2015, after four years of negotiations, the government and eight ethnic armed groups signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). Although significant challenges remain, groups including the KNU have committed to political dialogue. Meanwhile, international aid organizations have gained access to historically disputed regions, and the government has started rolling out infrastructure and development projects in previously inaccessible ethnic minority areas (Lenkova 2015; TBC 2013).

b. Education systems and competing legitimacies

The current state of education in Myanmar is particularly complex. Education services are provided by a range of actors, including the government, education departments of ethnic nationalist goups, religious groups, NGOs and CBOs, and local communities. Education has also long been tied up with the aspirations of ethnic nationalist groups, whose political and armed struggle was at the same time a struggle to resist what were historically seen as attempts at forced assimilation and 'Burmanization' (Pederson 2008; Fong 2008; South and Lall 2015).

Historically, areas controlled or partly controlled by the KNU saw the development of extensive para-state governance systems, with a range of specialized departments created under the political leadership of the KNU (Fong 2008). The Karen Education Department (KED) was created at the time of the KNU's formation in 1947 to oversee education in Karen communities, and to preserve Karen language and culture.[3] Over the past decades, the KED has supported education services in different areas of Karen State and in refugee camps on the Thai side of the border. The KED has developed an education system that differs from the government system notably through its promotion of Karen (mostly Sgaw) language and culture (Lenkova 2015; South and Lall 2014). Education systems developed under the administrative structures of ethnic nationalist

groups like the KNU have also been described as forms of 'federalism from below' — as "concrete examples of local communities and stakeholders struggling for self-determination, developing the building blocks of what a future federal [Myanmar] might look like, working from the bottom up."[4]

In contrast, Myanmar state education systems are highly centralized (Zobrist and McCormick 2013). The 2014 National Education Law theoretically allows for some regional variation in curriculum development and for the use of an ethnic language alongside Myanmar as a language of instruction at the basic education level.[5] Recent developments have seen the beginnings of introducing ethnic languages into government schools, but as a second language and not as a central medium of instruction (South and Lall 2016). In some areas, such as parts of Mon State, ethnic languages are reportedly increasingly taught in government schools — including, in some areas, during the regular school day (ibid.). However, there have not yet been any significant developments in teaching subjects *in* ethnic languages within government schools (ibid.). Meanwhile, education provision has not yet been comprehensively addressed as part of the peace negotiations, and the NCA contains only minor provisions relating to education. The NCA notably recognizes the role that ethnic armed groups have played in the provision of services such as education, and it states that during the interim period the government and ethnic armed groups should carry out their responsibilities in consultation with one another. Yet critics have argued that this is not the same as recognizing the authority and legitimacy of ethnic education departments like the KED. Meanwhile, the official recognition of their education systems remains one of the key demands of the ethnic nationalist groups.

Issues of legitimacy are key to understanding current education systems in Myanmar as well as how education can feed into the dynamics of conflict or peace building. As highlighted in previous research, local communities often perceive the health and education departments operating under the administration of ethnic nationalist groups as more legitimate than government service providers (Décobert 2016; Jolliffe 2014). Issues of legitimacy are in turn integral to how communities engage with education systems in their areas, and to local agency and decision-making.

[3] The KED was initially called the Karen Education and Culture Department. When it was restructured in 2000, it was renamed the Karen Education Department in English, although its Karen name has remained unchanged.
[4] http://www.dvb.no/analysis/ethnic-education-political-transition-and-the-peace-process-in-burma-myanmar/58229 — last accessed 21 March 2015.
[5] National Education Law, 2014, Section 39 (g) and Section 43 (b).

c. Current education systems in Karen State

The wide variety of school types in Karen State is a product of decades of civil war, as well as parallel education systems linked with competing political and administrative structures. As described in a recent study of education in Karen State, education services are provided by the government, ethnic nationalist groups, faith-based organizations, and community-based schools with or without links to the government or ethnic nationalist groups (Lenkova 2015).

In Karen State, the KED supports education in a variety of formats, ranging from schools that are fully administered by the KED, through so-called 'mixed' schools, to sometimes supporting Karen language classes in government schools — with the latter made possible through informal arrangements. The KED has developed its own curriculum, which uses Sgaw Karen as the main language of instruction; the curriculum teaches Myanmar language as a subject, rather than using it as a medium of instruction; it also includes a history subject that differs

significantly in content from history as taught in the Myanmar Ministry of Education (MoE) curriculum.

The KED currently provides support to over 1,500 schools in Karen State. However, only roughly 20% of these schools teach only the KED curriculum, with the others either teaching the Myanmar MoE curriculum or a mix of the MoE and the KED curricula. In the current political context, the number of 'mixed' and government schools in Karen State is also increasing, as a result of growing numbers of government teachers in Karen community schools as well as growing numbers of community schools being officially registered by the government.

Recent research has highlighted that the rolling out of state education systems into historically disputed areas of Karen State is not being done in ways that are conflict sensitive (Lenkova 2015). Stakeholders are also concerned that international donors and aid agencies are supporting the expansion of government administrative structures into ethnic minority areas without taking into account existing systems and services or the impacts on peace and conflict dynamics (South and Lall 2016). As further detailed in this report, the rolling out of national-level

Students in a 'mixed' school, Dooplaya District

education programming into previously disputed areas of Karen State is perceived as one of the main threats to community education systems and has not involved consultation with local actors or existing community-level mechanisms for school-based management.

2.2 Defining community engagement in education

a. The importance of community engagement in education

Community engagement in education is internationally recognized as essential for education quality and access. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) describes community involvement and ownership as key to the effectiveness and sustainability of education systems in and beyond emergency situations (INEE 2010). Save the Children's Quality Learning Environment (QLE) framework emphasizes the importance of parent and community engagement in contributing to a quality child-centered teaching and learning environment (SCI 2013). UNICEF also emphasizes the importance of school-community links in developing child-friendly schools (UNICEF 2009). Child-friendly schools are described as intensely linked with and accountable to their communities.

Additionally, school-community links are integral to a rights-based approach to education; these links enable the community's involvement in supporting local education systems and they ensure the school's accountability to the local community (UNICEF 2009). Finally, strong school-community links support community development, which is especially important in post-conflict and impoverished contexts (UNICEF 2009).

International literature and guidelines also emphasize the interconnectedness of education, identity, and peace building. Education is closely linked with notions of identity, and education systems and programs can contribute positively or negatively to peace building in countries that have experienced long-standing conflict (INEE 2010; World Bank 2005). Languages of instruction, the political and cultural relevance of the curriculum, teacher recruitment, placement, and remuneration strategies, as well as teaching and learning methodologies, can all play a role in how education systems contribute to peace building (INEE 2013; Lenkova 2015). Education systems can feed into conflict dynamics particularly when they reproduce the values and hierarchies of a dominant group (World Bank 2005). Conversely, conflict sensitive education can promote peace, with community acceptance of education systems and programs being key to ensuring their conflict sensitivity (INEE 2013).

Classrooms, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

b. International guidelines and standards

International guidelines generally identify three main dimensions of community engagement in education: economic and material; pedagogical; and developmental and socio-political. For example, UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools Manual describes three key dimensions to school-community links: economic dimensions relate to school financing and other material aspects of a school's functioning; pedagogical dimensions relate to teaching and learning in and beyond the school; and developmental and socio-political dimensions relate to issues such as nation- or community-building, reaching development or economic goals, or socio-political identity (UNICEF 2009).

International agencies have developed specific standards and indicators relating to community engagement in education. The INEE identifies community participation as one of the foundational standards for education quality and access, and its Minimum Standards for Education include two standards relating specifically to community participation (INEE 2010). Standard 1 states that "Community members participate actively, transparently, and without discrimination in analysis, planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of education responses"; and Standard 2 states that "Community resources are identified, mobilized and used to implement age-appropriate learning opportunities". The INEE also describes community participation as ranging from symbolic to full participation, with full participation defined as "the active contribution of time and direct involvement in decision-making, planning and implementation of education activities" (INEE 2010: 20). Although full and inclusive participation is often difficult to achieve in emergency and recovery situations, the INEE emphasizes that it is important to work towards this, since symbolic participation alone is not effective in providing quality and lasting education responses.

Save the Children's QLE framework also emphasizes the importance of parent and community engagement in contributing to a quality child-centered teaching and learning environment. Guiding Principle 4 of the QLE framework states that: "Parents and local community members are actively involved in planning, decision-making and action to improve education" (SCI 2013). The QLE Monitoring Form for Basic Education Programs includes specific indicators relating to Principle 4 on parent and community engagement. In brief, these indicators assess the strength of parent and community involvement based on: the existence and performance of a group such as a Parent-Teacher Association or School Management Committee, which includes representatives and a cross-section of the community (for example, by age, employment, gender, or disability); the level of teacher and parent collaboration on key issues affecting learners, such as sickness, absenteeism, performance, or discipline; and the provision of training and capacity building for parents and community members to support learner development and education (SCI 2013).

Drawing on these diverse frameworks and resources, this research has assessed material and economic dimensions, pedagogical dimensions, and socio-political dimensions of community engagement in education in different areas of Karen State. It has sought out groups and structures at the community level that act as mechanisms to involve parents and other community members in school management and decision-making; and it has endeavored to evaluate the representativeness and inclusiveness of these groups as well as their roles in relation to community engagement in education. It has examined current communication and collaboration between teachers and parents, and whether and how community members are provided with information or capacity building on how to support their children's education. Finally, it has explored community reactions to and attitudes towards an evolving education landscape, and it has analyzed current changes within a wider framework of conflict sensitivity and peace building.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research sites

Research was conducted between December 2015 and February 2016 in different socio-political contexts within two districts of Karen State: Mutraw District and Dooplaya District. In Mutraw District, research was conducted in areas that have historically been largely under KNU control, as well as areas where there are both state and KNU actors. In Dooplaya District, research was conducted in mixed administration areas that comprise multiple political and armed actors, including the state, DKBA, BGF, KNU/KNLA PC, and KNU. As described in **Section 6.4**, focusing on these different socio-political contexts highlights ways in which socio-political factors can impact on patterns of community engagement in education and on local agency for school-based management and education decision-making.

a. Mutraw District

KNU-defined Mutraw District (also known as Papun District) corresponds roughly to the area of northern Karen State called Papun Township on government maps.[6] Mutraw District is divided by the KNU into three townships, which do not appear on government maps: Lu Thaw Township, Dweh Loh Township, and Bu Tho Township. The schools visited as part of this research are within Lu Thaw Township.

Mutraw District's Lu Thaw Township comprises relatively sizeable areas that have historically been largely under KNU control. Areas around Day Bu Noh village have developed as a KNU administrative center, and Day Bu Noh has become a hub for service providers working under the administration of the KNU. Government troops have also historically been active in Lu Thaw Township, and there was heavy fighting in some areas especially during scaled-up Tatmadaw offensives in 1997 and 2006, as well as in 2009-2010.[7] Government troops now remain present in some areas of Lu Thaw Township, with camps located along the two main roads. Villagers

in the mountainous regions of northern Mutraw District and in much of Lu Thaw Township practice hill field paddy cultivation. However, agricultural production has been severely hampered for many years as a result of conflict, displacement, and human rights violations.

In Mutraw District, in-depth research was conducted in five schools in four different areas: two schools in Day Bo Noh village and one school in Htee Poe Hta village, which are both under KNU administration; and two schools in the villages of Day Baw Khaw and Htaw Lwee Jaw, both of which are in areas where there are KNU and state actors. Descriptions of these schools are included in **Section 4.2** below.

b. Dooplaya District

KNU-defined Dooplaya District corresponds roughly to the southernmost part of Karen State, incorporating all or part of government-delineated Myawaddy, Kawkareik, and Kyainseikkyi Townships.[8] It comprises four KNU-defined townships: Kawkareik Township, Waw Raw Township, Noh T'Gaw Township, and Kru Tu Township. The schools visited as part of this research are within Kawkareik Township.

Dooplaya District now features the heavy presence of mixed political and armed actors, including the state, DKBA, BGF, KNU, and KNU/KNLA PC. These areas were the site of heavy fighting during the first half of the 1990s. Many civilians were displaced in these areas after the split of the DKBA from the KNLA in 1994 and the fall of Manerplaw, former headquarters of the KNU, in early 1995.[9] Fighting in these areas continued during the second half of the 1990s, with scaled up Tatmadaw offensives. In the early 2000s, the situation in some areas became more stable, as a result of local agreements between the DKBA and KNLA. However these areas continued to be heavily militarized, and local communities were subjected to abuses by an increasingly complex patchwork of armed actors. More recently, these

---

[6] http://khrg.org/reports/location/41 — last accessed 21 March 2016.
[7] http://khrg.org/reports/location/41 — last accessed 21 March 2016.
[8] http://khrg.org/reports/location/43 — last accessed 21 March 2016.
[9] As described in Section 2.1, in 1994 a faction of the KNLA split away and formed the DBKA. The DKBA signed a ceasefire with the government, and was instrumental in orchestrating the fall of Manerplaw in 1995. The fall of Manerplaw marked a severe blow to the KNU and KNLA, and scaled-up Tatmadaw offensives in the second half of the 1990s forced the KNU and KNLA to retreat ever further east, towards the Thai border.

areas were the site of renewed fighting in 2010-2011 between government forces and a faction of the DKBA that refused to become part of the centrally controlled Border Guard Force. Renewed fighting was accompanied by increased militarization of the area, with Tatmadaw camps increasing in numbers since 2011.[10]

Armed actors now coexist in these previously contested areas. The government is currently developing parts of Kawkareik Township to accommodate two new sub-township administrative centers, as well as building roads, schools, and houses — with the latter alledgedly inteded to accommodate displaced persons who may return to the area. Many villagers in Kawkareik Township work as daily wage laborers in the corn plantations that export produce across the border into Thailand. Villagers also continually struggle to meet the taxation demands of the different authorities and armed actors.

In Dooplaya District, in-depth research was conducted within four schools in four different villages: Thay Baw Boe village, Ti Ther Leh village, Oo Kray Tha village, and Wah Mi Hta village. All these villages are in mixed administration areas. Descriptions of these schools are included in **Section 4.2** below.

3.2 Qualitative approach and sources

Qualitative methods were used to collect information relating to community engagement in education. Schools visited as part of this research project were selected in collaboration with World Education and the KED. Efforts were made to collect information in different types of schools, with variables including:

- School in different socio-political contexts (KNU administered or mixed administration)
- Schools teaching only in Karen language or in Myanmar as well as Karen language
- Schools using only the KED curriculum, mixed MoE and KED curricula, or only the MoE curriculum
- Schools with only community teachers or with mixed government and community teachers
- Primary or secondary schools

The research project included 130 participants in 36 focus group discussions or semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including district- and township-level political and military leaders,

as well as District and Township Education Officers of the KED. Interviews were also conducted with head teachers and School Committee members. Focus group discussions were conducted with separate groups of teachers, School Committee members, and parents or other family members.[11]

Due to the nature of the research and practicalities of access, a number of limitations need to be highlighted. Firstly, research sites and schools were selected in partnership with the KED and taking into consideration accessibility and other limitations. This could result in some degree of bias. However, the research team with the assistance of World Education endeavored to visit different types of schools, with varying levels of KED involvement, as well as schools in different socio-political contexts. The research design also enabled the triangulation of information from different types of participants, including key informants, School Committee members, teachers, and parents.

Another potential limitation stems from the recruitment of research participants. Participants were largely recruited through the local networks and connections of KED staff assisting the research team on the ground. Additionally, it can be expected that there was a certain degree of self-selection, particularly for groups of parents participating in focus group discussions. This could result in the inclusion of participants who were more inclined to speak positively about the KED and/or who were a priori more supportive of or engaged in education than others in the community. To some extent, this was mitigated by comparing information from different sources and by asking community members to speak about the diverse possible opinions and attitudes of those in their communities.

Finally, a key limitation of this research is that, due to practical and time constraints, the research team was only able to reach a relatively small number of schools in each district. However, the intention of this research was not to provide an exhaustive picture of education systems in Karen State, but instead to conduct in-depth research within different types of schools and to collect and compare detailed information from diverse actors in these different types of schools. Finally, interviews with key informants, as well as more informal discussions with KED staff and other key stakeholders in education in Karen State, enabled the contextualization of information gathered in these specific schools, as well as the comparison of this information to more general patterns and information.

---

[10] http://khrg.org/reports/location/43 — last accessed 21 March 2016.
[11] In some cases, grandparents of students in the community schools also participated in focus group discussions, sometimes accompanying their children and sometimes substituting for parents who were busy working.

4. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN KAREN STATE

4.1 Definitions and types of schools supported by the KED

The KED currently provides support to over 1,500 schools in Karen State. 285 schools use only the KED curriculum; 553 schools use mixed KED and Myanmar MoE curricula; and 666 use only the Myanmar MoE curriculum.

'KED administered' schools are defined as schools that are managed by the KED, with the KED organizing the policy, curriculum, and teacher training. They are not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. They are linked into the KED's management structure, and receive support for school materials from the KED and for teachers' stipends from the Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG). Teachers in these schools are referred to as community teachers and are mostly recruited from local Karen communities. The main mechanisms for training these community teachers include the KED's Area Teacher Trainer (ATT) program, which provides subject training, and the Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG) Mobile Teacher Training (MTT) program, which provides methodology training.

Government schools are administered by the Myanmar MoE. They teach the official Myanmar MoE curriculum and are funded by the MoE. Their teachers have received official accreditation and are appointed to different areas by the MoE at central levels. The KED supports school materials in some government schools.

Many former community schools in Karen State have now been registered by the MoE, becoming de facto government schools. However, in reality many of these newly registered schools continue to have a mix of community and government teachers and are therefore referred to as 'mixed' schools. Government registration has meant that these schools follow the official MoE curriculum and has raised complications at the school level for the use of the KED curriculum, as well as the use of Karen language as the main medium of instruction. As described in detail below, communities often perceive the registration of former community schools as a deliberate attempt to undermine their community education systems, as well as their ethnic language and identity.

'Mixed' schools are typically defined as schools that comprise both community teachers and Myanmar government teachers, and/or that teach a mix of the KED curriculum and the Myanmar MoE curriculum. These schools are generally also funded through mixed mechanisms, with community teachers receiving support from Karen education groups and government teachers receiving support from the state education system. In the explanations of many stakeholders, 'mixed' schools (as well as the increasing numbers of government schools) are a result of state education systems being rolled out into areas where there were previously only Karen community education systems:

"The mixed schools mean our community teachers teach in these schools and the government also sent their teachers to teach in these schools. It means the same schools have Myanmar teachers and community teachers." (Key informant, Mutraw District)

'Mixed' schools are then commonly assumed to have originally been Karen community schools, in which community teachers and the KED curriculum pre-dated the arrival of Myanmar government teachers and the MoE curriculum. Yet while many 'mixed' schools do fit this pattern, others demonstrate that the history and functioning of community schools in Karen State can be more complex. Some 'mixed' schools that the research team visited had started out as Karen community schools that were not officially recognized but that taught the Myanmar MoE curriculum; they then began teaching the KED curriculum when they came to be linked into the KED's management systems as a result of the increasing accessibility in recent years of previously unstable areas. Schools that the research team visited in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District therefore illustrate the complexity of community education systems, with definitions of 'KED administered', 'mixed', and government schools sometimes becoming more blurred on the ground.

Students' drawings, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

4.2 Descriptions of schools in the research sites

Table 1 outlines the different types of schools that the research team visited in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District. Different types of schools are distinguished according to their administration, types of teachers, curricula, and funding mechanisms. It should be noted that the descriptions below are intended as a 'snapshot' of these schools when research was being conducted — between December 2015 and February 2016 — and that the situation of some schools was changing rapidly even during this period.

a. Schools in Mutraw District

The KED works in 293 schools in Mutraw District. 243 are primary schools and 50 are secondary schools. 129 schools use only the KED curriculum, 130 use mixed curricula, and 34 use only the Myanmar MoE curriculum. In the schools using the KED curriculum or mixed curricula, the KED provides the curriculum, training for community

teachers, and school materials; community teachers also receive stipends from KSEAG. In the schools using only the MoE curriculum, the KED supports training for community teachers, as well as school materials; community teachers also receive stipends from KSEAG.

The research team visited one primary-level 'KED administered' school and one primary- and secondary-level 'KED administered' school in Day Bu Noh village — which has become a hub for service providers operating under the administration of the KNU. The team also visited one more remote secondary-level 'KED administered' school, as well as two primary-level 'mixed' schools in villages closer to Papun town. These two 'mixed' schools differed from what local actors commonly defined as a 'mixed' school: there were only community teachers in these schools, yet these teachers had initially taught only the MoE curriculum. After the 2012 ceasefire, when KED staff had more access to these previously unstable areas, these two schools came to be linked into the KED's management systems and then starting using the KED curriculum to teach Karen language.

- **Ti Swe Ni School ('KED administered' primary school, Day Bu Noh village)**

Tin Swe Ni School is the largest primary school in Day Bu Noh village. It is not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. The school teaches students from Kindergarten to Fourth Standard. There are a total of 63 students, all of whom come from Day Bu Noh area. Five teachers currently work in the school. The teachers are all described as community teachers and received training from the KED's ATT program and from the KTWG's MTT program. The teachers receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) per year from KSEAG. The KED supports school materials, including textbooks, stationary, and sports materials. Students' parents also pay school fees: 60 Thai Baht (approximately 2 USD) per year for students in lower grades; and 100 Thai Baht (approximately 3 USD) per year for students in higher grades. The School Committee uses these school fees to pay for building expenses and other school running costs. The students' parents also contribute rice for the teachers' livelihoods, as well as making in-kind and manpower contributions to school building and maintenance.

- **Day Bu Noh School ('KED administered' primary and secondary school, Day Bu Noh village)**

Day Bu Noh School teaches students from Kindergarten to Tenth Standard. It is not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. There are 856 students. 35 students stay in dormitories, having come from more remote areas to continue secondary-level studies in the school. There are 30 teachers working in the school. All the teachers are described as community teachers and most come from nearby villages, although some teachers with whom the research team spoke came from as far away as the Irrawaddy Delta. The teachers received training through various mechanisms, including the ATT program, the MTT program, as well as the KTWG's Karen Teacher Training College (KTTC). The teachers receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) per year from KSEAG. The KED supports school materials, including textbooks, stationary, and sports materials. Students pay an admission fee of 5 Thai Baht (approximately 0.15 USD) per year. The School Committee uses these fees to pay for building expenses and other school running costs. Students' parents provide rice, fish paste, oil, and candles for the teachers' livelihoods, as well as manpower and in-kind contributions for school building and maintenance.

- **New Generation School ('KED administered' secondary school, Htee Poe Hta village)**

New Generation School teaches students from Eighth to Tenth Standard, as well as first and second year of post-Ten. Local actors explained that this school had been established to form the new generation of leaders in their district. It is not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. There are currently 154 students in the school. Local actors described New Generation School as quite different from most 'KED administered' schools. For one, the students all stay in dormitories and many have come from remote areas to continue secondary-level studies at the school. The school is also relatively isolated, resulting in it not being very involved with the local community. Although they are described as community teachers and were trained through Karen teacher training systems, the nine teachers at the school come from sometimes more distant areas and also live in dormitories at the school. Additionally, the school is funded by the American Jewish World Service, an international NGO, which supports students' food, transportation, and medical supplies. Teachers also receive a stipend of 7,000 Thai Baht (approximately 200 USD) per year from the NGO. The KED supports textbooks and school materials. Each student also pays a fee of 500 Thai Baht (approximately 14 USD) per year; and unlike other schools in Mutraw District, parents do not provide rice or other in-kind contributions to the teachers' livelihoods. However, staff at New Generation School reported that funding from the international NGO has recently been cut, and that they are facing difficulties in securing funding for the future.

- **Htaw Lwee Jaw School ('Mixed' primary school, Htaw Lwee Jaw village)**

Htaw Lwee Jaw School teaches students from Kindergarten to Fourth Standard. It is not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. There are two community teachers, who teach mixed classes of 50 students from the village. Both teachers are from the village and received training through the KED's ATT program. They receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) per year from KSEAG. Textbooks and school materials are provided by the KED. Parents and other community members make in-kind contributions of rice and other produce to support the teachers' livelihoods, as well as providing manpower and material support to the school. The school does not currently have its own building. Classes are held in an open and exposed space below the church, and community members described

wanting to build a school but not having the resources to do so. The school initially taught only the Myanmar MoE curriculum, which local actors explained as being due to the proximity of the village to the government-controlled town of Papun. About three years ago, the School Committee and teachers decided to start using the KED curriculum to teach Karen reading and writing, after being visited by KED staff who offered to support the school. The community members also wanted their children to learn to read and write in their ethnic language. The Myanmar MoE curriculum is now the main curriculum that is used to teach the students, with the KED curriculum being used to teach Karen reading and writing. According to local actors, approximately half the students who go on to continue their studies after Fourth Standard do so in 'KED administered' schools, such as Day Bo Noh School; the other half go to government schools in Papun. Yet these students still face significant barriers in transferring into the state education system. Additionally, local actors explained that the government had recently offered to build a new school for the village, but that the School Committee and other community members had rejected the proposal.

'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

- **Day Baw Khaw School ('Mixed' primary school, Day Baw Khaw village)**

Day Baw Khaw School teaches students from Kindergarten to Fourth Standard. It is not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. There are three teachers, who teach mixed classes of 116 students in a small building within the church compound. One of the teachers is from the village and received teacher training through the KED's ATT program. The two other teachers were trained by a mission group from the Irrawaddy Delta and are funded by this mission group, receiving 300,000 Kyat (approximately 247 USD) each per year. All three teachers also receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) each per year from KSEAG. The KED provides school materials and textbooks. Parents and other community members make in-kind contributions of rice and other produce to support the teachers' livelihoods, as well as providing manpower and material support to the school. The school initially taught only the Myanmar MoE curriculum, which the villagers also explained as being due to the fact that their village is relatively close to Papun town. The teachers began using

the KED curriculum about three years ago, after the School Committee and villagers held a meeting and decided that the school should teach the students to read and write in their mother tongue. The Myanmar MoE curriculum is now the main curriculum that is used to teach the students, with the KED curriculum being used to teach Karen reading and writing. According to local actors, approximately half the students who go on to continue their studies after Fourth Standard do so in 'KED administered' schools; the other half go to government schools in Papun town. Yet students also continue to face significant barriers in entering into the state education system.

b. Schools in Dooplaya District

The KED works in 495 schools in Dooplaya District. 343 are primary schools and 152 are secondary schools. 58 schools use only the KED curriculum; 110 schools use mixed curricula; 327 schools use only the Myanmar MoE curriculum. In the schools using the KED curriculum or mixed curricula, the KED provides the curriculum, training for community teachers, and school materials; community teachers also receive stipends from KSEAG. In the schools using only the Myanmar MoE curriculum, the KED supports training for community teachers, as well as school materials; community teachers also receive stipends from KSEAG.

The research team visited four different types of schools in Dooplaya District's Kawkareik Township, including one primary- and secondary-level 'KED administered' school in Thay Baw Boe, and three 'mixed' schools in Ti Ther Leh, Wah Mi Hta, and Oo Kray Hta villages. These three schools illustrate how different 'mixed' schools can look on the ground: Ti Ther Leh Primary and Middle School has only community teachers but uses a mix of the KED and the Myanmar MoE curricula; Oo Kray Hta Primary School has mixed government and community teachers but now uses only the MoE curriculum; and Wah Mi Hta Primary School has mixed government and community teachers and uses the MoE curriculum as the main curriculum, with the KED curriculum used to teach Karen reading and writing after official school hours. Additionally, most of the community teachers in all four schools in fact come from different areas to where they currently work. Local actors explained this as being due to a lack of qualified teachers in their areas.

- **Thay Baw Boe School ('KED administered' primary and secondary school, Thay Baw Boe village)**

Thay Baw Boe School teaches students from Kindergarten to Ninth Standard. The school is currently not officially recognized or registered by the Myanmar government, but local actors said they had heard that the government is planning to register the school. There are 282 students at the school. 28 of these students stay in dormitories, having come from more remote areas to attend school in Thay Baw Boe village. There are 16 teachers working at the school. Most teachers are from different areas in Dooplaya District. The teachers received training through various systems, including the KED's ATT program, the KTWG's Karen Teacher Training College (KTTC), and the English Immersion Program (EIP). The school teaches only the KED curriculum. The community teachers receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) each per year from KSEAG. The KED provides textbooks and school materials, as well as teachers' uniforms. Students pay a yearly admission fee of 100 Thai Baht (approximately 3 USD). The teachers are also supposed to receive an additional 500 Thai Baht (approximately 14 USD) each per month from the local community, but they explained that they only receive this support some months and not others because of difficulties that the community members face in supporting them.

- **Ti Ther Leh School ('Mixed' primary and middle school, Ti Ther Leh village)**

Ti Ther Leh School teaches students from Nursery to Eighth Standard. The school is currently not officially recognized or registered, but local actors said they have heard that the government is planning to register the school. There are 258 students in the school. 80 of the students stay in dormitories. The students all come from six different nearby villages; there is also a small number of students who were previously living in Umphiem refugee camp, on the Thai side of the border. All 13 community teachers come from a mission group in the Irrawaddy Delta. The teachers received training through various mechanisms, including the KED's ATT program and the Teacher Preparation Center in Mae Sot, Thailand. The new school building was funded by individuals and religious groups, as well as community contributions. Teachers receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) from KSEAG, and the KED supports textbooks, stationary, and sports materials. Community members contribute an

additional 200 Thai Baht (approximately 6 USD) per month for each teacher, as well as rice. The village tract leader also provides 3,000 Thai Baht (approximately 86 USD) per year for each teacher when they return to their own villages. Students' parents pay a yearly admission fee of 20 Thai Baht (approximately 0.60 USD) for primary school students, and 30 Thai Baht (approximately 0.90 USD) for middle school students, as well as buying copies of the Myanmar MoE textbooks. The school uses the MoE curriculum to teach Myanmar language, English, math, and science, and the KED curriculum to teach Karen language, as well as history and geography.

- **Oo Kray Hta School ('Mixed' primary school, Oo Kray Hta village)**

Oo Kray Hta School teaches students from Kindergarten to Fourth Standard. The school is currently not officially registered or recognized by the Myanmar government. There are 93 students in the school. Three of the four teachers are community teachers. All three were trained through the KED's ATT program and come from a different district in Karen State. A government teacher has been working in the school for the past year, and was appointed by the MoE as head teacher in the school. The school is currently funded through mixed mechanisms. The community teachers receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) each per year from KSEAG, as well as an additional 2,000 Thai Baht (approximately 57 USD) per month from the community, which they share amongst themselves. The village leader also provides 15,000 Thai Baht (approximately 430 USD) per year for each teacher when they return to their own villages. Villagers contribute rice and local produce for the community teachers. The KED provides school materials as well as uniforms for the community teachers. The government head teacher receives 226,000 Kyat (approximately 186 USD) per month from the state education system. The state education system has provided a school grant of 800,000 Kyat (approximately 660 USD) per year, which is managed by the government head teacher. The MoE also supports materials such as textbooks, notebooks, and student uniforms, as well as having recently funded the construction of two latrines. The school now only teaches the Myanmar MoE curriculum. Karen language was previously taught in the school, when there were different teachers; it is now no longer taught. The community teachers explained that although they receive support from the KED, they cannot use the KED curriculum (which is in Sgaw Karen) because they are Pwo Karen and they are unable to read and write Sgaw Karen.

'Mixed' school, Dooplaya District

- **Wah Mi Hta School ('Mixed' primary school, Wah Mi Hta village)**

Wah Mi Hta School teaches students from Nursery to Fourth Standard. The school was officially registered by the Myanmar government in 2015 and now qualifies as a government school. However, local actors continue to refer to it as a 'mixed' school due to there being mixed teachers, curricula, and school funding mechanisms. There are 89 students in the school. Three of the six teachers are community teachers; two of these teachers come from a different district in Karen State, and the third comes from Yangon. All three received training from the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC). The other three teachers are government teachers. The first government teacher arrived in 2012; the second (who was appointed as head teacher by the MoE) arrived in the middle of the 2015 school year; and the third arrived at the beginning of 2016. The school is currently funded through mixed mechanisms. Community teachers each receive a stipend of 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) per year from KSEAG, and an additional 500 Thai Baht (approximately 14 USD) per month from the community. They also collect a yearly admission fee of 100 Thai Baht (approximately 3 USD) per student (or 200 Baht per family if the family has more than two children at the school). The KED provides textbooks, as well as school materials, sports equipment, and uniforms for the community teachers. Government teachers at the school receive between 200,000 and 230,000 Kyat (between 165 and 190 USD) per month from the state education system. Additionally, the state education system has provided a school grant of 800,000 Kyat (approximately 660 USD) per year, which is managed by the government head teacher. The MoE also supports materials such as textbooks, notebooks, student uniforms, and solar panels. In 2012, the government also built a new concrete school building. The school uses the Myanmar MoE curriculum as its main curriculum; the community teachers use the KED curriculum to teach Karen reading and writing. However, since the school was registered, Karen language classes are no longer included in the official timetable and grades from these classes are not included in the students' overall grades.

Students fetching water for their dormitories, 'mixed' school, Dooplaya District

Table 1: Types of schools visited in Karen State

Administration	Teachers	Curriculum	Funding and support	Name of school and area
'KED administered' school: • KED curriculum • KED administration	Community teachers	KED	KSEAG (teachers' stipends) + KED (school materials)	Ti Swe Ni School (Mutraw District) Day Bu Noh School (Mutraw District) Thay Baw Boe School (Dooplaya District)
	Community teachers	KED	Mixed: • NGO (teachers' stipends and school running costs) • KED (school materials)	New Generation School (Mutraw District)
'Mixed' school – Type 1: • Mixed curricula • KED administration	Community teachers	Mixed: • Main: Myanmar MoE • KED for Karen language	KSEAG (teachers' stipends) + KED (school materials)	Htaw Lwee Jaw School (Mutraw District)
	'Missionary' teachers	Mixed: • Myanmar MoE for Myanmar language, math, science, and English • KED for Karen language, history, and geography	KSEAG (teachers' stipends) + KED (school materials)	Ti Ther Leh School (Dooplaya District)
	Mixed community and 'missionary' teachers	Mixed: • Main: Myanmar MoE • KED for Karen language	Mixed: • KSEAG (teachers' stipends) + KED (school materials) • Mission (teachers' stipends)	Day Baw Khaw School (Mutraw District)
'Mixed' school – Type 2: • Mixed curricula • Mixed (KED + Myanmar MoE) administration	Mixed community and government teachers	Mixed: • Main: Myanmar MoE • KED for Karen language	Mixed: • KSEAG (teachers' stipends) + KED (school materials) • Myanmar MoE (teachers' salaries, school materials, and school grant)	Wah Mi Hta School (Dooplaya District)
'Mixed' school – Type 3: • Myanmar MoE curriculum • Mixed (KED + Myanmar MoE) administration	Mixed community and government teachers	Myanmar MoE	Mixed: • KSEAG (teachers' stipends) + KED (school materials) • Myanmar MoE (teachers' salaries, school materials, and school grant)	Oo Kray Hta School (Dooplaya District)

Table 2: Research findings summary by district[12]

	Mutraw District	Dooplaya District
School Committees (SCs)	SCs are typically more developed and are seen as the main actors responsible for managing and making decisions for the school	SCs are generally less developed and much of the school management and decision-making remains the responsibility of the head teacher; SCs contribute to school management by playing more of a supportive role
SC policy framework	• SC members are often unaware of the KED's policy on SCs	• SC members are mostly unaware of the KED's policy on SCs
SC structure and members	• More clearly defined structures and functioning, as well as more specific positions and roles for the different SC members • SC members are generally senior community members; most SC members are male • SCs of larger secondary schools and of schools in KNU administrative centers include higher numbers of leaders and representatives from the KNU's different departments	• Less clearly defined structures and functioning, and less specific roles and responsibilities for the different members • SC members are generally senior community members; most SC members are male
SCs as mechanisms to involve communities in school management	• SCs are generally held responsible for more high-level school management and decision-making, with the day-to-day running of the school being the head teacher's responsibility • In smaller village schools, there is generally more involvement of parents in the SCs and in school decision-making than there is in larger and secondary schools • There is generally little student involvement in the SCs and in school decision-making	• Head teachers are generally held responsible for school management and decision-making, with the SCs playing more of a supportive role and mobilizing resources for the school • In smaller village schools, there is generally more involvement of parents in the SCs and in school decision-making than there is in larger and secondary schools • There is overall less parent involvement in school management and school decision-making than in Mutraw District • There is generally little student involvement in the SCs and in school decision-making
SC roles and responsibilities	• Mobilizing and managing contributions and funding for the schools • Providing 'safety nets' and mobilizing community support mechanisms for vulnerable families • School building and maintenance • Promoting access to education (in smaller village schools, SCs also actively identify and reach out to out-of-school children) • Maintaining school rules and regulations • Security of the students, teachers, and school (especially in secondary/larger schools) • Linking schools and communities into the KED's management systems (through formalized reporting systems) • Ensuring and monitoring teaching and learning (although monitoring is generally minimal due to lack of capacity) • School problem-solving and planning (although often relates to more basic school maintenance and running than complex and longer-term problems and planning)	• Mobilizing and managing contributions and funding for the schools • Providing 'safety nets' and mobilizing community support mechanisms for vulnerable families • School building and maintenance • Promoting access to education (some schools) • Maintaining school rules and regulations (some schools) • Security of the students, teachers, and school (some schools) • Linking schools and communities into the KED's management systems (through informal linkages, not formalized reporting systems) • School problem-solving and planning (although generally relates to more basic school maintenance and running than complex and longer-term problems and planning)

[12] Note that this summary applies for the schools and communities visited by the research team in each district, and will not necessarily apply to schools and communities in different areas of these districts or of Karen State.

	Mutraw Districtc	Dooplaya District
School Committee achievements	• Strengthen local school management systems and decision-making • Enable greater collaboration with and support from community members, leading to practical improvements for the schools • Mobilize community support for the schools and enable the functioning of community schools • Promote access to education at the local level • Link schools and communities to the KED: report information to the KED about the situation and needs of, as well as problems in, the schools; and channel information and resources to the schools	• Strengthen local school management systems and decision-making (although overall not as strong as in Mutraw District) • Enable greater collaboration with and support from community members, leading to practical improvements for the schools • Mobilize community support for the schools and enable the functioning of community schools • Promote access to education at the local level • Link schools and communities to the KED: report information to the KED about the situation and needs of, as well as problems in, the schools (although reporting is not formalized and not systematic); and channel information and resources to the schools
School Committee limitations	• Lack of funding and resources to manage and improve the schools • Lack of capacity for more technical roles – especially relating to ensuring and monitoring teaching and learning • Can reflect and reproduce existing socio-political hierarchies, and may not always be representative of all parents or of more marginalized community members • Lack of involvement in and power in relation to the rolling out of national-level education programming in their areas	• Overall not as strong as mechanisms for school-based management and for involving communities in school management and decision-making • Lack of funding and resources to manage and improve the schools • Lack of capacity for more technical roles – especially relating to ensuring and monitoring teaching and learning • Can reflect and reproduce existing socio-political hierarchies, and may not always be representative of all parents or of more marginalized community members • Lack of involvement in and power in relation to the rolling out of national-level education programming in their areas
Community engagement in education		
Economic and material dimensions	• School fees (some schools) • Contributions to teachers' livelihoods needs (in kind: rice and very often other produce like fish paste, vegetables, oil, etc.) • School building and maintenance (in-kind, financial, and manpower) • Community contributions are generally associated with a strong sense of community ownership, social solidarity, and responsibility	• School fees • Contributions to teachers' livelihoods needs (financial; also often in kind: rice, charcoal, fresh produce, etc.) • School building and maintenance (financial, in-kind, and manpower) • Community contributions are often associated with a sense of community ownership, social solidarity, and responsibility, but there are more mixed attitudes towards these contributions. Some community members describe preferring their schools to be officially registered so that they do not need to make contributions
Pedagogical dimensions	• Communities play an important role in promoting access to education • Teachers are generally seen as solely responsible for teaching and learning • Little involvement of parents in their children's education • Often weak communication systems between schools and parents • Generally little done to promote the involvement of community members in their children's education	• Communities often play an important role in promoting access to education • Teachers are generally seen as solely responsible for teaching and learning • Little involvement by parents in their children's education • Often weak communication systems between schools and parents • Generally little done to promote the involvement of community members in their children's education

	Mutraw District	Dooplaya District
Developmental and socio-political dimensions	• Community members often attribute a high value to their children's education • Parents often see no real value to their children staying in school, since further education and employment opportunities for those who do finish school are limited • Community members value their children being taught in their ethnic mother tongue • Community schools are commonly seen as making significant contributions to local community development, as well as to the preservation of Karen language, culture, and identity • Especially in villages closer to towns, state education systems are sometimes seen as providing greater opportunities for Myanmar language learning, recognized qualifications, and education and employment	• Community members often attribute a high value to their children's education • Many parents see no real value to their children staying in school, since further education and employment opportunities for those who do finish school are limited • Community members value their children being taught in their ethnic mother tongue • Community schools are commonly seen as making significant contributions to local community development, as well as to the preservation of Karen language, culture, and identity • State education systems are commonly seen as providing greater opportunities for Myanmar language learning, recognized qualifications, and further education and employment
Socio-political dynamics that can act as enabling or disabling factors for community engagement in education	• Communities live in more remote areas and/or areas that have been to a larger extent under KNU control and sole administration • Communities are less exposed to the demands of a mix of competing political and armed actors • Communities are more homogeneous and unified, with there being a stronger sense of community and solidarity • There has been greater access by the KED to local schools and SCs, and the KED has been able to work with and to strengthen the SCs	• Communities live in mixed administration areas • Communities are exposed to the demands of a mix of competing political and armed actors • Communities are more heterogeneous and less unified, with there being a weaker sense of community and solidarity • There has been less access by the KED to local schools and SCs, and the KED has been less able to work with and strengthen the SCs
Common barriers to and restricting factors for community engagement in education across different socio-political contexts	• Conflict, instability, and ongoing uncertainties • Lack of official recognition for community education systems • Rolling out of state education programs and systems which do not take into account local systems or community preferences for their children's education • Livelihoods difficulties, poverty, and lack of opportunities • Difficulties faced by teachers (low stipends and livelihoods difficulties, lack of resources, and lack of capacity)	• Conflict, instability, and ongoing uncertainties • Lack of official recognition for community education systems • Rolling out of state education programs and systems which do not take into account local systems or community preferences for their children's education • Livelihoods difficulties, poverty, and lack of opportunities • Difficulties faced by teachers (low stipends and livelihoods difficulties, lack of resources, and lack of capacity)
Support for and factors enabling community engagement in education within different socio-political contexts	• Programs supporting teachers' stipends and school running costs • Parent involvement training sessions and other community outreach programs • Capacity building for teachers and School Committees	• Programs supporting teachers' stipends and school running costs • Parent involvement training sessions and other community outreach programs • Capacity building for teachers and School Committees

5. THE SCHOOL COMMITTEES AS MECHANISMS FOR SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT

The School Committees have become essential mechanisms for the local management of Karen community schools and play a key role in coordinating different aspects of community engagement in education. In a context where community schools were not officially recognized and received little to no outside support, the School Committees have ensured that these schools can stay open and can provide a basic level of education for populations who would otherwise not have access. At the same time, the School Committees have developed into key community support mechanisms and 'safety nets' for vulnerable students and families. Although they can look quite different from one school to another, the School Committees are also central to decision-making at the community level, and link community schools in different areas into the KED's management and monitoring systems. Assessing the current functioning of the School Committees, as well as their strengths and weaknesses, in turn enables the identification of ways in which these valuable community-level structures can be strengthened to further promote effective school-based management and community engagement in education.

5.1 What are the School Committees?

The School Committees are locally grown mechanisms for school-based management and function as systems to involve community members in problem-solving and decision-making at the local level.

"We held a meeting, many people had different views and the whole village was included and then we decided and formed the School Committee. … We formed this School Committee because we saw that the students needed to go to school. And also in order to support the school, we needed to form the School Committee." (School Committee member, Mutraw District)

The KED's policy is that every school should have an active School Committee. Over the past decades, the

KED has therefore worked to develop and strengthen these local governing bodies. At the community level, there is generally a strong sense of local ownership and the School Committees are seen as essential mechanisms for communities to manage and support their schools. However, there are differences in the levels of development of the School Committees and in their actual roles in school management and decision-making. The School Committees in Mutraw District are typically more developed and are seen as the main actors responsible for managing the schools. In contrast, in Dooplaya District, the School Committees are generally less developed, much of the school management remains the responsibility of the head teachers, and the School Committees play more of a supportive role. Nevertheless, in both districts, the School Committees function as mechanisms for decision-making and problem-solving at the local level.

5.2 School Committee policy framework

The KED's policy framework provides some information on the roles and responsibilities of the School Committees. However, this policy could be strengthened and rolled out to provide a clearer framework for ensuring that the School Committees are representative and inclusive mechanisms for school-based management.

The KED's policy describes the structure as well as the roles and responsibilities of the School Committees. These include: promoting access to education; monitoring teachers; transmitting information from the KED to the school; solving problems within the school; managing and maintaining school infrastructure and buildings; and reporting information to the KED about the situation of the school. Yet while the KED's policy provides a basic framework for the School Committees, it does not provide any clear guidelines to ensure that the School Committees are representative and inclusive mechanisms for involving community members in school management and decision-making. The policy states that the School

Students' dormitories, 'mixed' school, Dooplaya District

Committees are "representative of the parents", but there is no information on who should actually be part of the School Committees and how parents should be involved in the School Committees and in their decision-making. Similarly, there is no information on how teachers and students should be involved in the School Committees and in decision-making for the school.

Many School Committee members are currently not familiar with the KED's policy and are unaware of the roles and responsibilities that they are expected to fulfill. As described below, School Committees in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District do fulfill at least some of the roles and responsibilities outlined in the KED's policy. However, the actual roles and responsibilities of the School Committees can vary. The School Committees in Mutraw District often adopt more sophisticated roles and responsibilities than do the School Committees in Dooplaya District. Local actors in both districts also recognize that the School Committees are more able to fulfill some roles than others, and that they generally lack the capacity to fulfill more technical roles such as monitoring teachers within the schools.

5.3 School Committee structure and members

The School Committees are made up of community leaders and members. They are generally seen as representative of the parents and community members, and as having the authority and legitimacy to make decisions, to mobilize community support, and to solve problems for the schools. However, they often reflect and reproduce existing socio-political hierarchies. School Committee members are often senior community members or leaders; they are also typically male. The School Committees should therefore be strengthened in the future to ensure that they are representative and inclusive community-level mechanisms for school-based management.

The structure and membership of the School Committees can vary depending on the area, the type of school, and its position in relation to the community it serves. In general, the School Committees in Mutraw District have more clearly defined structures and functioning, as well as more specific positions and roles for their different members. In contrast, the School Committees in Dooplaya

District generally have less clearly defined structures and functioning, and less specific roles and responsibilities for their members. These differences are interconnected with the levels of development of the School Committees — with the School Committees in Mutraw District generally being more developed than those in Dooplaya District. As described in **Section 6.4** below, this could in turn be read as at least partly related to socio-political dynamics in these different areas and to the levels of access that the KED has had in these areas.

In general, the School Committees of smaller primary schools that are located within the village they serve tend to have fewer members than the School Committees of larger schools and/or secondary schools that serve a wider population. Local actors explained that this is linked to the need for increased coordination and management support for larger schools and secondary schools. For example, the School Committees of the primary schools visited in Mutraw District comprise between five and eleven members, while the School Committees of both secondary schools comprise fifteen members. In Mutraw District, the School Committee members typically include at least a Chairman, a Secretary, and a Treasurer and/or Record Keeper; the School Committees of larger secondary schools and of schools located within KNU administrative centers can also include specific positions for members who are responsible for school infrastructure, health, security, or transportation. In contrast, the School Committees in Dooplaya District generally comprise a Committee head, but are otherwise made up of members with no specific positions or roles.

Overall, the School Committees of smaller primary schools and of schools in more remote villages tend to be more closely linked to the local community, in the sense that their members are all leaders and members in the community. School Committee members are typically senior members of the community, including people such as the village head or elders, village section leaders, and more literate or respected community members. Most members of these School Committees are also parents of children attending the school. In contrast, the School Committees of larger schools and secondary schools — and/or of schools in KNU administrative centers — generally also include more high-level leaders, such as township and district authorities or leaders from the KNU's different departments. These School Committees are typically less closely linked to the local community and function less as a mechanism for involving community members in school management and decision-making.

Local actors typically described the School Committee members as being selected by and representative of the parents and other community members. However, in many cases the School Committee members are chosen by the village leaders or other local authorities. As a School Committee member in a secondary school in Dooplaya District explained, "The village head and some of the leaders formed the School Committee." Most School Committee members are also male, as well as being leaders or senior community members. Having leaders and senior community members as School Committee members provides the School Committees with the authority to support the teachers, to mobilize community contributions, and to solve problems in the schools. As a key informant in Dooplaya District explained, "Because the School Committee power is higher than the teachers, so when the teachers need something or when the teachers have a problem, the School Committee has to solve the problem for the teachers." However, and although the School Committees do function as local-level mechanisms for school management and decision-making, there is therefore also a sense in which they reflect and reproduce existing socio-political hierarchies, and they may not be representative of all parents or of more marginalized community members.

5.4 The School Committees as mechanisms for community involvement in school management

The School Committees in different areas work with teachers, community members, and leaders to manage and support their schools. Working relationships with teachers are shaped by the levels of development of the School Committees, as well as local socio-political dynamics. In smaller village schools, there is generally more parent involvement in the School Committees and in school decision-making than there is in larger and secondary schools. Overall, there is little student involvement in the School Committees and in school management and decision-making.

Differences in the ways the School Committees function as management and decision-making bodies also shape how they work with teachers, parents, and other community members. In Mutraw District, the School Committees are generally held responsible for more high-level school management and decision-making, with the day-to-day running of the school being the responsibility of the head teacher. Teachers are typically not part of the School Committees but work closely with School Committee members to manage, improve, and solve

Hygiene messages promoted by local schools and School Committees, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

problems in the school. School Committee members and teachers generally have regular meetings, during which the teachers report needs and problems in the school to the School Committee members, and the teachers and School Committee members then make decisions together about the management of the school as well as future plans and activities:

"So the head of the Committee and some Committee [members], they make the decisions for the school, how to do and what to do. … Normally we have the [School Committee] meeting at the start of the school [year]; and the other time, at the middle of the school year; and we also have the last meeting at the end of March. So we have the meeting three times [each year]. At that time, we have some discussions and we make decisions for the school." (Head teacher, Mutraw District)

In Dooplaya District, head teachers are held responsible for much of the school management and decision-making, with the School Committees playing more of a supportive role and mobilizing resources for the schools. Local actors often described the School Committees and teachers having a close working relationship. Yet this relationship could also sometimes be more fraught, with difficulties and tensions arising particularly when the community teachers are not in fact from the local community but from

different areas in and beyond Karen State. For example, the School Committee of one school in Dooplaya District holds meetings once or twice a month with the village leader to discuss any issues in the school; however, the teachers described not being involved in these meetings and explained that the School Committee makes decisions without including them. One teacher also claimed that the School Committee hadn't listened to their needs, "because we are the guests, not the villagers." As described further in **Section 6.4**, working relationships between the teachers and the School Committees can then also be impacted by local-level socio-political dynamics.

The extent to which the School Committees represent the parents and involve parents and community members in decision-making can differ according to the type of school and its position in relation to the community it serves. There are three main mechanisms for the involvement of parents and other community members in the School Committees and in school decision-making: the selection of School Committee members by parents and other community members; the participation of parents and community members as members of the School Committees; and their participation in School Committee meetings.

In larger schools and/or secondary schools that serve a wider population, School Committee meetings are

typically organized two to three times a year. The School Committee members then invite the parents to discuss and make decisions about issues such as the recruitment of teachers or any activities, plans, or problems in the school. In primary and/or smaller village schools, School Committee meetings are generally more informal and less systematic. For smaller village schools, where the community is often more closely involved in the school and in the School Committee, school management issues might also be discussed during the regular village meetings, instead of there being separate School Committee meetings. These village meetings bring together the village leaders, School Committee members, teachers, and parents, who then make decisions together for the school.
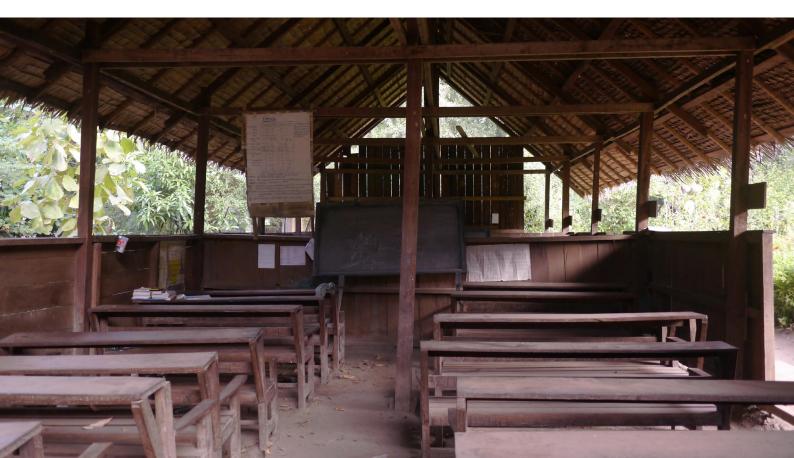
In general, the School Committees of smaller village schools also tend to be more closely linked to the local community and function to a greater extent as mechanisms for involving community members in school management and decision-making. As a parent of a primary school student in Mutraw District explained:

"When the School Committee makes a decision, they call the meeting and invite the parents. So the parents agree together, and then they make the decision."

In contrast, the School Committees of larger schools and/or of secondary schools that serve a wider population generally function to a lesser extent as mechanisms for involving parents and other community members in school management and decision-making. One of the reasons for this is that the parents are often further away, with their children staying in boarding houses at the school. As a secondary school teacher in Mutraw District explained: "I don't think they have those kinds of talks, because most parents are in the mountainous areas and they only rely on farming, and they rely on the management of the School Committee and the leaders." Yet there is also a lack of mechanisms to promote the involvement of such parents in the School Committees and in discussions and decision-making for the schools.

There appears to be overall less involvement of parents and other community members in school management and decision-making in Dooplaya District than there is in Mutraw District. Community members' involvement in the schools in Dooplaya District was often described as being limited to sending their children to school and making contributions to the school. Although there are generally fairly regular meetings bringing together parents, School Committee members, and teachers, these meetings are more often when the School Committee members and teachers inform the parents of decisions that have been made — rather than involving them in decision-making. This could be linked to the strength of the School Committees, with the School Committees in Dooplaya District being typically less developed as mechanisms for school-based management than those in Mutraw District. Moreover, this could also be linked to the socio-political context in Dooplaya District, where community members

Classroom, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

are grappling not only with strains to their livelihoods but also with competing authorities and more complex community dynamics. These socio-political factors and ways in which they can impact on community engagement in education are discussed in **Section 6.4**.

In general, there is little student involvement in the School Committees or in school management and decision-making, although this does vary depending on the level of the students. Primary school students are generally considered too young to be included in school decision-making. Student representatives or 'monitors' in primary schools play more of a role in disciplining or organizing other students than in representing their needs in discussions with teachers or the School Committees. In the words of a primary school teacher in Mutraw District, "I think they don't include the students [in decision-making] because they are very small." Secondary school students are sometimes given more of a voice in decision-making, with their student representatives or 'monitors' being invited to teacher and School Committee meetings, and asked to provide input to discussions and decision-making about activities in and improvements for the school. However, the involvement of even older students is not consistent. Many local actors simply consider that — as the head teacher of a secondary school in Mutraw District put it — "It is not the level of the students to decide."

5.5 Roles and responsibilities of the School Committees

The School Committees enable the functioning of community schools by mobilizing community contributions and promoting local access to education. They act as essential community support mechanisms and 'safety nets', playing a vital role in assisting students and families within and beyond the school. They also play a key function in linking communities and schools to the KED, and in enabling the two-way flow of information and resources.

Roles and responsibilities of the School Committees range from more 'basic' roles, such as mobilizing community support for the schools or maintaining school buildings and infrastructure, to more 'sophisticated' roles, such as monitoring teaching and learning or solving problems in the schools. In general terms, the School Committees in Mutraw District are often able to fulfill a greater range of roles and responsibilities, and to implement more 'sophisticated' roles and responsibilities, than the School Committees in Dooplaya District. However, in both districts, the School Committees are more able to

fulfill some roles than others, and they generally lack the capacity to fulfill more technical roles such as monitoring the teachers and the schools.

- **Mobilizing and managing contributions and funding for the schools**
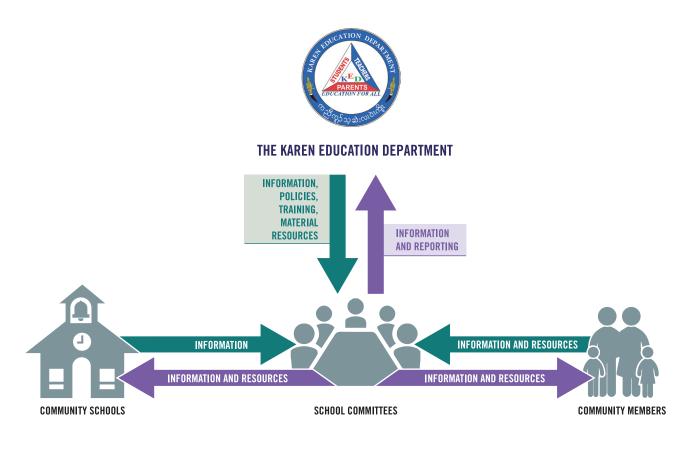
The School Committees mobilize and manage community contributions to the schools, thereby enabling community schools to function and ensuring basic education for communities who would otherwise not have access. They set the levels of any school fees, as well as the amounts of money, rice or other contributions that community members provide to support the teachers and the schools; they then collect these contributions from the community members before giving them to the teachers or using them to cover school costs and needs:

"For the teachers' food, each student has to give 3000 Kyat [approximately 2.50 USD] and one tin [approximately 15 kg] of rice for one year. … They give to us, and we have a person who is responsible to record and make a list. … We ask the [School Committee] Treasurer to collect this. … With this money, we buy the teachers' food, like oil and tea and other things." (School Committee member, Mutraw District)

In Mutraw District, where the School Committees often play a greater role in school management, School Committee members also mobilize and manage any outside funding or other contributions from organizations that support teachers' stipends, school materials, school building and construction, and other aspects essential to the running of the school. They then use these contributions to manage and improve their schools.

- **Providing 'safety nets' and mobilizing community support mechanisms for vulnerable families**

The School Committees provide 'safety nets' and mobilize community support mechanisms for families who face problems contributing to their local schools. Local actors in different areas commonly described there being some families who face more difficulties than others in contributing to the schools, due to livelihoods insecurities, family problems, or other issues. In Dooplaya District, the School Committees often set different 'levels' for community members' contributions; they then ask families to make contributions based on what they can afford. The School Committees in Dooplaya District also waive contributions or school fees for families who cannot afford them. In Mutraw District, the School Committees act as decision-making bodies,

THE KAREN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

INFORMATION, POLICIES, TRAINING, MATERIAL RESOURCES

INFORMATION AND REPORTING

INFORMATION

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

SCHOOL COMMITTEES

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The School Committees enable the flow of information and resources between local communities and their schools, and between the KED and community schools.

waiving or delaying some families' contributions, or finding alternative sources of support for more vulnerable families. Some School Committees in Mutraw District also provide assistance to students' families if, for example, a student is very sick and requires healthcare but the family cannot pay. The School Committees therefore act as locally grown community support mechanisms, providing 'safety nets' for students and their families, and mitigating some of the barriers to accessing education that are faced by more vulnerable families:

"Some parents completely depend on farming, so sometimes the weather changes and they have a very bad impact. And some parents are single parents and they cannot support their children. So the School Committee helps them pay to the rice and the things they need so the children can go to school" (Teacher, Mutraw District)

• School building and maintenance

The School Committees play a key role in school building and maintenance, including: monitoring the needs of the schools; managing constructions and repairs; and mobilizing and managing the resources that are used to build and maintain the schools. This generally entails organizing support from community members, who

provide in-kind, monetary, and manpower contributions to the construction and maintenance of their schools. As a teacher in Mutraw District explained, "For example, if we have to build the school, with only the School Committee we cannot do. So they ask the community to come."

• Promoting access and 'quality in access' to education

The School Committees also play a vital role in promoting access to education at the community level. The School Committees in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District encourage community members to send their children to school, and often actively identify and seek out children who are not in school. For example, during community or School Committee meetings, the School Committee members often speak to community members about the importance of education and inform them that it is their duty to send their children to school. Particularly in smaller and more closely-knit communities, School Committee members also seek out the parents when there are children in the community who do not go to school or who drop out of school. The School Committee members might then visit the parents in their homes, ask them about any difficulties they are facing, and encourage them to send their children to school:

"Also the School Committee, if they see the children who are not going to school, then they contact the parents and they say: it is the age for the children to go to school and you should send your children to school." (Teacher, Mutraw District)

Additionally, the School Committees play an important role in promoting quality in access to education. By enabling community schools to function and by promoting access to these schools, School Committees in different areas are also enabling students to access Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). Supporting MTB-MLE particularly at primary levels in turn provides students with a greater ability to enroll and succeed at school; it enables students to effectively develop foundational literacy building blocks; and it better equips students to learn Myanmar language and, later, to become active citizens in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country (Benson and Kosonen 2013).

• **Maintaining school rules and regulations**

The School Committees maintain school rules and regulations, and often act as disciplinary 'last resort' mechanisms. In Mutraw District, the School Committees are seen as playing an essential role in ensuring discipline within and the smooth functioning of the schools. Teachers in Mutraw District often use the School Committees as disciplinary 'last resort' mechanisms, referring students to the School Committee if they cannot solve problems with their behavior. The School Committee will then contact the parents; if the problem cannot be resolved, the School Committee makes the decision to expel the student. Similarly, in Dooplaya District, although there is overall less involvement by the School Committees in school management, the School Committees are also often used as disciplinary mechanisms — for example intervening with the parents in the case of absenteeism or problems with the behavior of a student. In both districts, local actors also described the School Committees similarly intervening if there are problems with the behavior or performance of a teacher.

Case Study 1:
School Committee planning and problem-solving (Dooplaya District)

In one school in Dooplaya District, the School Committee members told the research team that they had recently applied for their school to be registered by the government. Many other schools in the area had recently been registered, they explained. The School Committee members and villagers said that they prefer to keep their community school, but they cannot afford to build a bigger school building. Classes are currently held in a small one-room wooden building, which does not have enough space or equipment for all the students. The teachers have to teach groups of students in shifts, and they described feeling overworked and unable to provide the attention and quality teaching that the students require. Students often drop out, and many students stay in the same grade for more than a year.

The decision to apply for government registration was made by the School Committee in consultation with the village head, community members, and teachers. Their hope is that if their school is registered, the government will provide the village with funding to build a bigger school. The School Committee and village head have also developed what they described as a 'back-up plan': if the government registers their school but they are no longer allowed to teach Karen language and history, they plan to use a community learning center within the village to teach these subjects. This community learning center was recently built by an international NGO and is currently used to teach Karen literacy for children both in and out of school. Despite having this 'back-up plan', School Committee members described feeling powerless in relation to the rolling out of state education systems in their area:

"But for our part, if someone is coming from outside and just changes all the things that we already started to do from the beginning, we don't accept that. But that decision is made at the higher level. … Actually what we want is our own community school but we cannot stop them [i.e. the government]." (School Committee member, Dooplaya District)

- **Security of the students, teachers, and school**

Some School Committees also play a role in ensuring the security of the students, teachers, and school. In primary schools located within smaller, more isolated villages, the School Committees might for example provide warnings to the students and teachers in case of flooding or other dangers, or make sure that students who are at the school for 'night study' get home safely. In light of recent flooding in Myanmar's border areas, the role of the School Committees in providing information to students and teachers about natural disasters and other risks is significant and can potentially be built upon in the future. Additionally, in secondary schools with boarders and students who come from further away, the School Committees often play a greater role in ensuring security — for example, communicating with armed actors to assess the security situation, providing information to the students and teachers so that they can travel safely to and from the school, and ensuring the security of school infrastructure and materials.

- **Linking schools and communities to the KED's management and monitoring systems**

The School Committees link the schools and the communities to the KED's management systems. In Mutraw District — where the School Committees are more developed and the KED has been able to work to a greater extent with the School Committees — these links are generally stronger. The School Committees disseminate information and resources from the KED to the schools; and they regularly provide reports to the KED, which include information about the situation of, needs in, and problems faced by the schools. Additionally, by operating as this link between the schools and the KED, the School Committees in Mutraw District are integral to the KED's school monitoring systems:

"The [School] Committees are the groups who are working closely with the teachers and the parents. When our staff go to the schools, they talk with the teachers and the Committee members. So the School Committee reports are included by our staff. Also our Township Officer's report includes the School Committee's ideas and [information about] needs in the school." (Key informant, Mutraw District)

In Dooplaya District, the School Committees also provide a key link between the schools and the KED, although this link is less formalized and systematic. The School Committees provide information to the KED about the situation of and needs in their schools, yet this is informal and more irregular, not through systematic reports. They also communicate any problems in the schools and assist with the distribution of materials and other resources to the schools.

- **Ensuring and monitoring teaching and learning**

The School Committees also play a role in ensuring and monitoring teaching and learning in the schools, although this role varies depending on the level of development and the strength of the School Committees. More developed School Committees play a greater role in teaching and learning in the schools through their involvement in: recruiting teachers; supporting the teachers' work (for example, by organizing travel to training sessions or by communicating needs for training and capacity building to the KED or partner organizations); and sometimes contributing to discussions and decisions about what is taught in the schools. For example, in the two 'mixed' schools that the research team visited in Mutraw District, the community teachers had originally used only the Myanmar MoE curriculum; the School Committees had then coordinated discussions at the community level, which led to the decision to use the KED curriculum to teach Karen reading and writing.

The KED's policy states that "the School Committee has to monitor the teachers once a week." Yet local actors in both districts described limitations in the skills and capacities of the School Committee members, which act as barriers to the School Committees fulfilling this role. The School Committees' monitoring of the schools and of the teachers is typically minimal to non-existent. Instead, teachers and especially head teachers were typically described as being responsible for monitoring their schools and for ensuring the quality of teaching and learning. In some schools, School Committee members do sometimes check attendance records or go to observe classes. However, this monitoring is generally very irregular and basic. For example, when asked how they monitor the teachers, the School Committee members of a primary school in Mutraw District described occasionally checking whether the teachers' handwriting is messy or whether there are mistakes in the students' notebooks. More generally, the School Committees were described as lacking the skills and capacity to play a greater role in school monitoring and in ensuring quality teaching and learning:

"Our Committee members have problems because we don't have education, we don't have much experience. So we cannot reach the high quality when we are working." (School Committee member, Mutraw District)

• **School problem-solving and planning**

The School Committees make decisions about and organize activities in the schools. They provide a 'safety net' if families face difficulties contributing to their schools, finding ways to solve the problem so that teachers still receive support and parents are still be able to send their children to school. They solve other problems, such as problems with a student's behavior or with school buildings and supplies. Yet they also recognize that there are problems that they currently cannot solve, including problems to do with education quality and access. Other problems that the School Committees face difficulties

solving are related to the evolving political situation on the ground.

In previously unstable areas that are witnessing the rolling out of state education system, the School Committees are often at the forefront of dealing with problems that can result from competing school management systems. At the village level, School Committee members and village leaders generally lead discussions and decisions about whether or not to accept government teachers in their schools, and whether or not to register their schools. However, as illustrated in Case Study 1, School Committee members often described not understanding and not being

Case Study 2:
Competing school management systems (Dooplaya District)

One school in Dooplaya District now has two head teachers — a community head teacher and a government head teacher. Tensions and conflict have emerged as a result of competing school management systems. When the research team went to this school, the government head teacher explained that, since the MoE had appointed them as head teacher, they were responsible for school management and decision-making. Yet they also acknowledged challenges due to the existence of parallel administrative structures:

"Being in this area is very challenging because we have to deal with many different powers and departments. For the government, we have our own government [education] department and plan and they [the KED] also have their own department and plan."

The day before the research team went to this school, the School Committee members had announced that they would stop working for the school, as a result of what they described as the government head teacher making decisions without engaging them or others in the community. The explanations of the community teachers similarly highlighted potential difficulties caused by competing school management systems and by an apparent lack of consultation between government teachers and the School Committee:

"Actually if the government teachers have to do something, they have to inform the School Committee. But they don't usually inform them. … And for us, if we do anything we discuss with the School Committee, it is not done with the head teacher. … The government teachers also don't inform the School Committee whenever they go to and from [the school]. But for us, we inform the School Committee. Whatever we do and wherever we go, we inform the School Committee."

When the research team met the community teachers, they explained that they were also planning to leave if the government sent more teachers to their school. As one community teacher explained: "If they take all the power, then we think that we are going to leave because even though we are here, we will have no power and it would be meaningless to be here."

Competing management systems and a lack of clarity in policy and implementation as state education systems are rolled out at the local level are therefore leading to unnecessary and unproductive conflicts at the school and community level. Reflecting on this case, a key informant in Dooplaya District explained:

"For example, today the school that we went to, it is administered by the government, so those kinds of situations make the School Committee members give up and leave. … [Because] There is less discussion with the community leaders and the villagers. They [i.e. the government teachers] just want to do by themselves. … The difference is that in the pure KED schools, there is no conflict like that."

involved in the government's education plans, and feeling powerless in the face of a changing education landscape.

More developed School Committees and School Committees in KNU administrative centers — where members of the School Committees are also often local authorities and/or representatives from the KNU's different departments — do play a larger role in developing school plans and in managing the improvement of education systems in their communities. Yet because of capacity and power limitations, the problem-solving abilities of those on the ground are very often limited to more practical issues to do with the maintenance and daily running of the school, rather than longer-term term planning and strategizing. School Committee members therefore often described not really being able to plan for the future of education in their communities, and instead relying in their leaders for instructions and future plans:

"Now we cannot see any way to get through, and also nobody is coming to tell us, to show the way, what to do to improve for the future. … We believe we have to ask the advice from the KED and the local leaders and the people who administer us. If they suggest to us, so we can do it to improve." (School Committee member, Mutraw District)

5.6 Achievements and limitations of the School Committees

The School Committees play an important role in school-based management and in ensuring access to education, as well as quality in access, at the community level. Their role in linking local schools and communities to the KED's management systems can be utilized in various ways to support education quality and access. However, the School Committees currently face resource and capacity limitations that need to be addressed in moving forwards. The School Committees can also be strengthened to ensure that they are representative and inclusive mechanisms for school-based management. Yet instead of capitalizing on these valuable local-level mechanisms, current programming at the national level is being rolled out in ways that tend to exclude and undermine the School Committees. This is resulting in situations where the School Committees can no longer function and is exacerbating tensions at the local level. It is then essential to recognize and to involve these local mechanisms for school-based management in education planning and decision-making for their communities.

Overall, local actors described the School Committees as enabling community schools to function and as strengthening local school management systems. One of the key successes of the School Committees is that problems in the schools are then largely solved locally, with the involvement of the community members. The School Committees are therefore essential mechanisms for school-based management. As a key informant in Mutraw District put it: "Because they take responsibility in their own school, so every school can solve the problems in their school if something happens. The problems don't reach to the township or district level."

The School Committees also enable greater collaboration with and support from community members, in turn leading to practical improvements for the schools. Through their roles in mobilizing community support for the schools and encouraging community members to send their children to school, the School Committees enable the functioning of community schools and promote access to education at the community level. Additionally, by providing a link between the schools and the KED's management systems, the School Committees play an essential role in channeling information and resources to community schools, and in reporting information to the KED about the situation and needs of the schools. Looking towards the future, this link can be utilized in a variety of ways to support quality education, information sharing, and teacher support. Moreover, the School Committees provide an important resource as drivers of MTB-MLE. They can therefore be drawn upon as mechanisms to strengthen quality in access to education, so that children in ethnic minority communities can obtain the same life opportunities as those in areas where state systems deliver education services.

However, while the School Committees currently play an essential role in school-based management and in coordinating different aspects of community engagement in education, they also face significant limitations. These limitations are often linked with practical difficulties, as well as issues of capacity and power. For one, School Committee members commonly face limitations in their ability to dedicate time and resources to working for their schools. Additionally, the School Committees in Dooplaya District and in Mutraw District are limited by a lack of funding and resources to manage and improve their schools. Their role in providing a 'safety net' for community members who face difficulties contributing to their schools places additional strain on the School Committees, and members often described struggling to find the means to support the teachers and the running of the schools.

Importantly, the School Committees also very often lack the knowledge and skills to fulfill their more technical roles and responsibilities, such as monitoring teaching and learning in the schools. As a School Committee member in a secondary school in Dooplaya District explained, "Our School Committee members, some of them didn't go to school and some of them never have had experience with school, so that is kind of a weakness for us." And as another School Committee member in a primary school in Dooplaya District put it, "We only live in the village, we don't know anything about the other things, we only know how to collect the food [for the teachers]." As a result of these limitations, key informants often described the School Committees as lacking the leadership capacity to fulfill all of their roles and responsibilities as defined in the KED's policy:
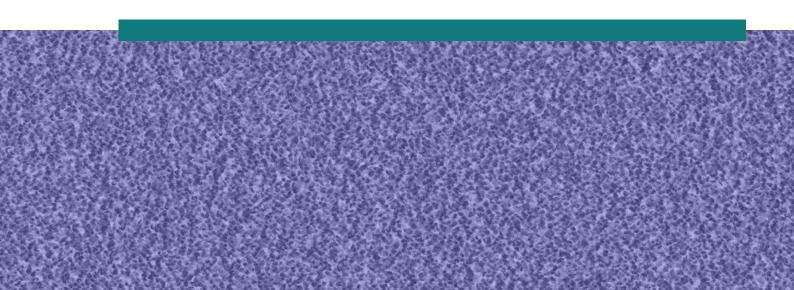
"I think they have already achieved about 50% of their roles and responsibilities. … I think the one that they cannot fulfill is the leadership. … The biggest challenge is the School Committee members need more knowledge and skills." (Key informant, Mutraw District)

The School Committees also commonly reflect and reproduce existing socio-political hierarchies. They may therefore not be representative of all parents or of more marginalized community members. In strengthening the School Committees as mechanisms for school-based management, it is then also essential to develop and implement systematic guidelines and procedures to ensure that they are fully representative and inclusive of different community members.

The School Committees have the potential to act as key mechanisms in further strengthening school-based management and in addressing needs and obstacles that currently hinder quality and access to education in Karen State. However, instead of capitalizing on these valuable local mechanisms, current programming at the national level is being rolled out in ways that tend to exclude and undermine the School Committees. Particularly in mixed administration areas, the School Committees are often described as facing significant challenges in dealing with the rolling out of state education systems. Although they are essential actors in education within their areas, the School Committees have generally not been consulted or involved in plans to build new schools, to send government teachers to their areas, or to register community schools.

At the local level, tensions have often escalated — particularly in cases where government teachers adopt seniority over and do not engage with community teachers and School Committee members who have been working in the schools for many years. This is resulting in situations where the School Committees can no longer function as mechanisms for school-based management and where an invaluable resource is being lost. In this evolving education landscape, many School Committee members feel that they have no voice and no part in the government's education plans. They express a sense of powerlessness in relation to evolutions that are having profound impacts on their communities. It is therefore essential to recognize and to involve these local mechanisms for school-based management in education planning and decision-making for their communities.

Overall, the strength of a particular School Committee is also intimately linked with its ability to mobilize community engagement in the local school, and with levels of community ownership of and involvement in the school. As described in the following sections, community engagement in education can be impacted by socio-political dynamics and other factors. These can restrict or enable community engagement, as well as affecting the ability of the School Committee to act as a local school management and decision-making body.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION IN KAREN STATE

Communities in Karen State have played an essential role in ensuring the survival of their local education systems. Community members generally see it as their duty to provide the material and financial support needed for their community schools to function. Compared with this economic and material engagement of communities in local schools, pedagogical dimensions of community engagement in education are overall weaker. In general, community members are not strongly engaged in the teaching and learning aspects of their children's education. However, community members often attribute a high value to their children's education and to community education systems that are seen as essential to the preservation of their ethnic language, culture, and identity. Yet community ownership of and involvement in local education systems is demonstrably stronger in some contexts than in others, and socio-political as well as economic factors can have significant impacts on community engagement in education.

6.1 Economic and material dimensions of community engagement in education

Communities in Karen State play a vital role in ensuring that children have access to education. Parents and other community members make significant material and financial contributions to their schools, enabling these schools to function. These contributions are linked with strong systems of communal solidarity and responsibility; yet they also place additional strain on already impoverished communities.

Parents and other community members in Karen State contribute to their local schools in a number of ways. These contributions can include: school fees; in-kind and monetary contributions to teachers' livelihoods; in-kind, manpower, and financial contributions to school building and maintenance; and in-kind and financial contributions to specific activities in the school, such as opening and closing ceremonies. Of these community contributions, the most significant in the eyes of many local actors are the contributions to teachers' livelihoods.

• **Contributions to teachers' livelihoods**

Community teachers working in 'KED administered' and 'mixed' schools in Karen State currently receive 7,500 Thai Baht (approximately 215 USD) per year from the Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG). Community contributions to the teachers' livelihoods complement these stipends. These contributions are linked to long-standing community support mechanisms that have historically enabled communities to sustain the provision of basic services in their areas. In the schools visited by the research team in Mutraw District, community members therefore cover a large proportion of the teachers' livelihoods needs through in kind contributions. Students' parents — and very often other community members as well — provide set amounts of rice for the teachers each year, as well as giving them other supplies and food items such as candles, oil, salt, or fish paste:

"They also contribute to the teachers – for one year, they give ten tins [about 150 kg] of rice. … We also get from the community people about three kilos of fish paste and two tins of oil and two packets of candles. This is for one year. … The parents give this. The School Committee organizes." (Teacher, Mutraw District)

In the schools visited by the research team in Dooplaya District, community contributions also cover a large proportion of the teachers' livelihoods needs and complement the stipends that the teachers currently receive from KSEAG. In Dooplaya District, all households in the community — including those without children in the school — are asked to make financial contributions to the teachers' livelihoods. In the areas visited by the research team, each family contributes between 200 and 600 Thai Baht (between 6 USD and 17 USD) per year. School Committee members and teachers explained that these contributions are organized so that the teachers receive a set amount of money per month on top of the KSEAG stipend. In the schools visited by the research team, the teachers therefore receive between 200 and 500 Thai Baht (between 6 USD and 14.50 USD) per month from the community, complementing the 625 Thai Baht per month (18 USD per month) from KSEAG. Community members also often contribute rice and other produce and

supplies, such as vegetables or charcoal. Additionally, and since teachers in these areas typically come from different villages to the ones in which they teach, the village leader or village tract leader provides additional funding for their travel and expenses when they return to their own villages at the end of the school year, with this money coming from taxes collected from the villagers.

- **Drivers and perceptions of community contributions to the schools**

Community contributions are essential to the functioning of community schools. Community members generally see it as their duty to support their local teachers and schools. As one parent in Mutraw District put it, "Because [the teachers] help us by teaching our children, so we help them with a little bit of food." In both Mutraw District and Dooplaya District, these contributions are often linked with a strong sense of community ownership of the school, as well as a strong sense of communal solidarity and responsibility. A parent in Mutraw District explained: "Because we stay together as a group, we have to help each other. If only a few people did this, we couldn't access [education]." In the eyes of local actors, this is also one of the key distinctions between community schools and government schools. As a School Committee member in Dooplaya District described:

"We and all of the villagers discussed and we decided together to support the teachers' food because they come to teach our children, so we help them for the food. They can't teach our children for free. They can't bring their food from their homes. So all the villagers, we have to support them. This school is not a government school and we struggle by ourselves and we hire the teachers. We give the teachers the salary and the food."

However, in Dooplaya District's mixed administration areas — where communities are witnessing the rolling out of state education systems — community members sometimes also have more mixed attitudes towards the contributions that they need to make to community schools. As further detailed in **Section 6.4** below, some community members in these areas described preferring their schools to be registered by the government, so that they will no longer have to make the contributions that are needed for community schools to function. As a parent in Dooplaya District put it, "we don't need to contribute anything to the government school." As described below, these attitudes are linked with difficulties that community members face in contributing to their schools, due to livelihoods insecurities and the taxation demands of multiple authorities and armed actors. However, it should

also be noted that there is as of yet no long-term strategy to relieve community members of the contributions that they need to make so that community schools can function — and, as illustrated below, although registering community schools as government schools can enable access to increased funding and can relieve some of the burden on local communities, this can also increase tensions if it undermines local school management mechanisms and if national-level education systems are rolled out without the involvement of key actors at the community level.

6.2 Pedagogical dimensions of community engagement in education

Compared with the material and financial aspects of community engagement in education, there is overall less engagement by communities in the more pedagogical dimensions of education. At the local level, communities often play an important role in promoting access to education. Yet teachers are generally seen as solely responsible for teaching and learning, with little involvement by parents in their children's education. This is linked with low levels of adult literacy within historically unstable and remote communities in Karen State. However, this pattern is also reinforced by there often being only relatively weak communication systems between schools and parents, and by little being done to promote the involvement of community members in their children's education.

- **Promoting access to education**

At the local level, community members play an important role in promoting access to at least basic education. Local actors in different areas described community leaders, teachers, and villagers promoting access to education by encouraging children in the community to go to school. Community leaders, teachers, and School Committee members were also described as playing an important role in promoting access to education by identifying and reaching out to out-of-school children and their parents. For example, the village leader and School Committee members might call a community meeting, during which they inform the parents that it is their duty to send their children to school. Teachers and School Committee members also often visit families whose children are not in school; they then ask the parents about any difficulties they face and they encourage them to send their children to school. As a secondary school teacher in Mutraw District explained:

"For those kinds of children, if they don't go to school, the community members see them and they inform us. So then in the evening we go to speak with the parents."

This local-level promotion of access to education is generally done on an informal, case-by-case basis, by drawing on existing community networks and hierarchies. Additionally, community support systems described above mitigate some of the barriers that more vulnerable families face in sending their children to school and can therefore be seen to promote access to education at the community level.

- **Involvement in teaching and learning**

Parents' roles in their children's education are very often understood as being limited to sending their children to school and to providing material support for the school. As a parent in Dooplaya District put it, "The only thing I do is I take my child to school. I give the money and then finished." Teachers are generally seen as solely responsible for the students' teaching and learning. As another parent in Mutraw District stated: "I take them to school and I just ask my children to go to school because I don't understand, so I leave it in the teacher's hands to educate my children."

There is generally more parent involvement when students are in lower grades. Some parents of secondary school students did describe speaking regularly with

their children about what they are learning in class or helping their children with their homework; yet such parents are typically more educated and much fewer in number. Many parents instead described feeling that they are not at all able to be involved in their children's education. In the eyes of local actors, the most significant barrier to parent involvement is lack of education, which impacts increasingly on parents' ability to engage with their children's studies the more their children advance at school. As one parent of a secondary school student in Mutraw District explained: "I don't know [what they are learning], I don't understand. I can't read, so I don't want to look at the books."

Parents therefore very often described being unable to speak with their children about their studies or to help their children when they have difficulties at school. They also described feeling powerless and depressed when their children are not making progress at school:

"We know [about their problems] but we can't help them. Some of them cannot keep up with their friends but we don't know how to help. ... Because we are illiterate. No other reason. I just wish that my children will be educated. We also have many different kinds of problems, like we are not educated, we don't have enough food, we have financial problems. There are many obstacles, like I have mentioned. But when my children cannot get educated I get depressed." (Parent, Mutraw District)

School library, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

Students' dormitories, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

- **School-community communication and outreach**

Some schools have better systems than others for communicating with and engaging parents and other community members. However, in general, existing school communication and outreach systems tend to reinforce a situation where community members are not strongly engaged in the teaching and learning aspects of their children's education.

In many schools, the only form of organized communication between teachers and parents is the provision of grades after exams, typically with little to nothing in terms of explanation about a student's progress or difficulties. Local actors also described challenges faced by illiterate parents when they cannot understand the information that is given to them:

"They have exams every month. After the exams, they give the students' report card or I don't know how to call it. So the children bring it to show the parents. Some of the parents who can read will know about their child passing or failing, but those who can't read don't understand." *(Parent, Dooplaya District)*

There are often no regular meetings between parents and teachers, apart from the school's opening and closing ceremonies; and when there are meetings, these typically bring together all the parents as a group and therefore do not provide an opportunity for discussion between individual parents and a student's teachers. In smaller village schools, teachers and parents often interact irregularly on an informal basis, and might discuss a student's progress during these informal interactions. Yet more generally, there is very little in terms of communication mechanisms for teachers and parents to discuss a student's progress at school, and there is little outreach by the schools to promote the involvement of parents in their children's education.

Outreach by the schools is typically limited to informing the parents that it is their duty to send their children to school and to encourage their children to study. Some teachers and School Committee members described asking parents to help their children with their studies, or to develop schedules and study plans for their children to follow; but they also explained that this is done on an informal and irregular basis, and that it is limited by the parents' illiteracy and time constraints. More often, teachers and School Committee members described telling parents to take their children to study with the teachers or with others in the community who can read and write, and asking the parents only to discipline and encourage their children.

Most teachers in the schools visited by the research team described having received no specific training or information about how to involve parents in their children's education, or how to work with parents and the wider community. It is worth noting that teachers in schools that have stronger communication systems with parents and that make more effort to engage parents in their children's education also commonly described having received more specific training about how to work with parents and community members.

- **The school in the community: school and community activities and events**

The extent to which schools involve community members in school activities and participate in community life also varies. Some schools, especially secondary schools, invite parents and other community members to events where they showcase what the students have been learning. More generally, events at the schools and the schools' involvement in community activities are centered around religious and other community festivals. There is a lot of variation between schools, with some schools inviting parents and community members to events and activities, as well as participating in community events, and others having no events with community members apart from the school's annual opening and closing ceremonies. It would appear that events in the school and the school's participation in community events are very much dependent on efforts made by individual teachers.

6.3 Developmental and socio-political dimensions of community engagement in education

Community members often attribute a high value to their children's education. Yet while education can be seen as a 'way out' of the poverty and insecurity that they have experienced during their lifetimes, many parents also see no real value to their children staying in school, since further education and work opportunities for those who do finish school are limited and — as a Karen saying goes — "even if you can read and write, you still eat rice." Nevertheless, community members speak often of the importance of their children being taught in their mother tongue, and value their community education systems as a way to preserve their ethnic language, culture, and identity. In contrast, state education systems are seen as providing greater opportunities for Myanmar

language learning, recognized qualifications, and further education and employment.

- **The value of education**

Community members often attribute a high value to their children's education. Parents in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District commonly described hoping that their children will finish school and will then be able to work for their communities or get jobs that will help them to support their families. Parents often contrasted their own lack of education to their hopes for their children's future — a future that might be better than the existence they have known:

"We think like that also because for us we didn't have education, we didn't have those kinds of chances, so for our children we really hope for them. … We don't have education and we want them to have education until the end of school level. So it will better for their lives, not like us." (Parent, Mutraw District)

Yet many local actors also spoke of people in their communities who attribute a lesser value to education or who do not support their children staying in school, with this often being linked to livelihoods difficulties. Local actors in Mutraw District frequently described parents not wanting their children to continue their studies beyond the first few years, and instead preferring them to work in the fields or to take care of their younger siblings. Similarly, in Dooplaya District, many teachers and School Committee members described parents not supporting their children's education. As a teacher in Dooplaya District explained, "If they go to school, their parents won't get money." Many local actors in both districts also cited a common Karen saying that, "even if you can read and write, you still eat rice." This evokes the lack of opportunities for further education and employment that is faced by children who do finish school. Indeed, as described below, a key challenge for community education systems and engagement in these systems is this lack of opportunities, which commonly leads community members to perceive that there is no real point to children staying in school.

- **Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) education and preferences for different education regimes**

In Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District, community members attribute a high value to their children being taught in their ethnic mother tongue. Community members often described preferring to send their children to community schools, since students in these schools can be

taught in Karen. As the grandfather of a secondary school student in Mutraw District explained, "The reason why we choose the community school here is they provide Karen language. The government schools don't give the Karen language, so this is the first priority." In the explanations of community members, Karen community schools play a key role in preserving their Karen language, culture, and identity. As one parent in Dooplaya District put it, "We are Karen, we have to know about our tribe and our nation." Some parents also linked their preferences for Karen community schools to their fear of and lack of trust in the government. As a parent in Mutraw District explained, "If we go to our school, we don't need to feel insecure or afraid of the enemy, the Myanmar government." Another parent, when asked why they preferred their community school, stated: "Because they [i.e. the government] dominate us and we always had to flee from them."

In contrast, state education systems are commonly seen as providing greater opportunities in terms of Myanmar language learning, recognized qualifications, and further education and employment. Many local actors, especially in mixed administration areas, emphasized the importance of children becoming more proficient in the country's official language — with 'KED administered' schools often described as being weak in Myanmar language. In villages that are closer to government-controlled towns, some parents also described preferring to send their children to attend government secondary schools, simply because these are closer than 'KED-administered' secondary schools. Additionally, and particularly in mixed administration areas, the state education system was often described as enabling access to greater opportunities for further education and employment. Indeed, since community education systems are not officially recognized, children who are educated through these systems face barriers in accessing further education or employment in Myanmar. In Dooplaya District's mixed administration areas, community members also frequently described preferring state education systems, since these systems do not require community contributions to function. As described further below, preferences for different education regimes are then linked to the difficulties currently confronting community education systems and that act as barriers to community engagement in education — in particular, the lack of official recognition for community education systems, as well as challenges that communities face in supporting their schools due to livelihoods difficulties and the demands of multiple authorities and armed actors.

- **Schools' contributions to community development and identity**

Community members commonly associate the value of education with the contributions that more educated people make to their communities. Community schools are therefore seen as making significant contributions to the development of local communities, through students who are educated and who then work in their communities as leaders, teachers, or medics. As one parent in Dooplaya District described: "The school helps the young people for the future. If they are educated, they can help their village to develop and they will become the leaders." Community schools are also commonly seen as key to the preservation of Karen language, culture, and identity. This also explains community members' sense of ownership of community schools, as well as their fears in relation to the rolling out of government schools and the increasing numbers of government teachers in their areas. As discussed below, these changes are very often perceived as threatening Karen language, culture, and identity.

6.4 Barriers to and support for community engagement in education

Communities in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District provide contrasting examples of how socio-political factors can impact on community engagement in education. Overall, the socio-political context in Mutraw District — where communities visited by the research team live in more remote areas and/or were historically largely under the administration of a single authority, and where there is typically a strong sense of community and unity — can be seen to have contributed to robust community support mechanisms, greater community engagement in education, and more developed community mechanisms for school-based management. School Committees in Mutraw District have also benefitted from sustained efforts by the KED to strengthen local mechanisms for school-based management, with the KED able to access and work with communities in these areas. Conversely, the socio-political context in Dooplaya District — where communities visited by the research team live in mixed administration areas, grapple to meet the demands of competing authorities, and are overall more diverse with there being less of a sense of community and unity — can be seen to have contributed to less developed community support mechanisms,

weaker community engagement in education, and more fragile community mechanisms for school-based management. Due to the political and conflict situation, the KED has also been less able to access Dooplaya District's mixed administration areas and to work with and strengthen the School Committees.

In communities visited by the research team in Mutraw District, there is overall greater community engagement in education and the School Committees are more developed as systems for school-based management. Local actors in Mutraw District often drew attention to a strong sense of community involvement in and ownership of their schools. Even if some aspects of community engagement are not as strong as others, communities in Mutraw District have well-developed systems for managing their schools, as well as having robust community support mechanisms and systems of solidarity. This could be linked to a number of factors, which are related to wider socio-political dynamics.

Communities visited by the research team in Mutraw District live in areas that are relatively remote and/or were historically largely under KNU control and administration. Even if state actors are present in some of these areas, they historically had little control over more remote communities. Community members generally perceive the KNU and its departments as legitimate socio-political authorities. They have had little to no experience in negotiating with state actors, and they perceive government expansion into their areas as a threat and as leading to the loss of their autonomy. Communities visited in these areas are also relatively homogeneous in terms of their members' ethnicity, language, and geographic origin, and there is an overall greater sense of solidarity and unity. This could be seen to feed into stronger community support systems and more robust community mechanisms for school-based management. In most of these areas, there was also historically greater access by service providers operating under the administration of the KNU. This has enabled the KED to work with the local schools and School Committees — rolling out their policy on School Committees, strengthening the School Committees as mechanisms for school-based management, and creating stronger linkages with the School Committees.

Case Study 3:
The importance of Mother Tongue-Based education (Mutraw District)

One 'mixed' school in Mutraw District is in a village that is not far from Papun town. Yet this school was never officially registered. The teachers had previously used only the Myanmar MoE curriculum, which they explained as being linked to the village's proximity to the government-controlled town. They started using the KED curriculum about three years ago. They now use the MoE curriculum as the main curriculum, and the KED curriculum to teach Karen reading and writing. The decision to start using the KED curriculum was made by the community members, teachers, and School Committee, which illustrates the engagement of community members in choices about their children's education. The community members and teachers wanted students to be able to read and write in their mother tongue. They also explained that teaching Karen is essential in order to preserve their ethnic language and identity:

"Because we are Karen and the children also didn't know their language enough, they could not read and write Karen language. So some of the leaders came to encourage us to teach Karen language. And if we don't teach Karen language, our ethnicity will be lost because we cannot read and write Karen." (Teacher, Mutraw District)

This school also illustrates difficulties for students and teachers, when the main language of instruction is not the students' mother tongue. Teachers in the school explained that they use the MoE curriculum to teach most subjects; but because the students often have difficulty understanding Myanmar language, they have to explain to them in Karen:

"If we teach Myanmar subject, we show them or we read in Myanmar language, but we explain in Karen language." (Teacher, Mutraw District)

In contrast, in communities visited by the research team in Dooplaya District, there is overall less community engagement in education and the School Committees as community systems for school-based management are less developed than they are in Mutraw District. This could also be linked to a number of factors that are related to socio-political dynamics in these areas.

Local actors in Dooplaya District often described communities' involvement in education as weak, which some explained as being linked to a lack of unity at different levels. Communities in these areas have been dealing with mixed and competing political and armed actors for over two decades. At the village level, there are often competing administrative structures — with, for example, there frequently being a 'DKBA village head' and a 'KNLA village head'. In this context, the KNU and its departments have much less administrative reach and are not necessarily seen by local populations as legitimate and representative authorities. Instead, the KNU is often perceived as one armed actor among the many that are making demands of local populations. Indeed, communities in these areas have been struggling for the past decades to meet the taxation demands of an increasingly complex patchwork of competing political and armed groups — as well as being required to make contributions to their schools, to any local development projects, and to religious groups. As a parent in Dooplaya District explained:

"In this village, we have a lot of problems. Even though we don't have enough food from farming, we have to give the tax, so we have to find the way to give the tax. We give to all of them — the KNU, the DKBA, the government, and the BGF. We give to all of them because they ask. We really have difficulty because we don't have enough food and we have to give."

These pressures contribute to weaker support systems for local schools, as well as community members' more mixed and sometimes negative attitudes towards the contributions they have to make to their community

Classroom, 'KED administered' school, Mutraw District

schools. So as another parent in Dooplaya District described: "Sometimes we don't have any money but people ask us to give money [for the school]. We are all tired of the people collecting money." At the same time, community members' attitudes towards the rolling out of state education systems into their areas are also more mixed than they are in Mutraw District — with community members often seeing this as potentially lightening the burden that they face in supporting basic services and in dealing with competing authorities.

Communities visited by the research team in Dooplaya District are also more heterogeneous and include populations from diverse ethnic and linguistic groups who migrated to these areas over the past two decades, due to evolving conflict dynamics and opportunities for paid employment in the corn plantations. As one key informant explained, "most of the people are not native from here, they are from other places that have problems and they came to live here. At the same time, they are weak in participating and in working together in education." Differences and potential difficulties were often highlighted during group discussions with parents and teachers in Dooplaya District. In parent group discussions, the research team frequently ended up managing discussions in multiple languages and translating between parents who spoke Pwo Karen, Sgaw Karen, and Myanmar language, and who sometimes did not understand each other. Additionally, most community teachers in the schools visited in Dooplaya District do not actually come from the communities in which they currently work, but from different areas in and beyond Karen State. Local actors described this as being due to a lack of qualified teachers in their areas. Yet teachers in these schools sometimes described disputes with School Committee members, whom they see as having different interests to their own and as not listening to their needs because, as one teacher put it, "we are the guests, not the villagers." Teachers also commonly described having difficulties working with parents and other community members. As one teacher explained: "To be honest, it is not our own village, so it is a bit difficult to organize."

At all levels, communities in mixed administration areas of Dooplaya District are therefore dealing with potentially more divisions and less unity. Given community members' difficulties with their livelihoods, the additional challenges and complexities of dealing with competing authorities and diverse populations can impact significantly on community education systems and engagement in these systems. Additionally, service providers operating under the administration of the KNU were historically unable to access many of these areas. Teaching in Karen or using the KED curriculum were in previous years viewed as signifying that the school and community were aligned with the KNU, and local actors described the Tatmadaw burning down such schools in the past. Teachers therefore explained that they had previously taught the MoE curriculum and had avoided contact with the KED in order to protect themselves and their schools. Due to these dynamics and to the overall security situation in these areas, KED staff members were not able to work as closely with the schools and the School Committees as they did in Mutraw District. Access by the KED to these areas has increased in recent years, but KED staff on the ground are also dealing with competing administrative systems, and they have not yet been able to provide the School Committees with the same level of support as has been provided to the School Committees in Mutraw District.

a. Barriers to and factors restricting community engagement in education

Socio-political dynamics in different contexts can act as barriers or restricting factors that impact negatively on community engagement in education. Additionally, there are a number of factors that impede community engagement in education across different socio-political contexts. These include: instability and ongoing political uncertainties for communities in Karen State; the lack of recognition for community education systems; the rolling out of national-level education programs and systems that do not take into account local systems or community preferences for their children's education; livelihoods difficulties, poverty, and lack of opportunities; and difficulties faced by community teachers.

• Instability and ongoing political uncertainties

Conflict, instability, and ongoing political uncertainties have significant impacts on community engagement in education. Decreased fighting and instability in Karen State since the 2012 ceasefire has led to some improvements for community schools and engagement in education. Community members described being increasingly able to send their children to school and to unite and organize themselves — for example, creating or strengthening School Committees and participating more in school activities. As one parent in Mutraw District described, "Now because the situation is getting better, the parents and teachers and School Committee can be more united, so we can start step by step and we can work more and

more." However, ongoing political uncertainties continue to negatively affect community education systems and engagement in these systems. Community members in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District described the ceasefire as only having stopped the fighting, with ongoing political problems not yet having been resolved. There is a common lack of trust in the National Ceasefire Agreement and in the government's intentions. In mixed administration areas, this lack of trust is often amplified, with local actors describing some improvements for their communities yet often seeing the government's efforts to extend its administrative areas and to develop their communities as attempts at domination. As a result of these ongoing tensions and uncertainties, local actors often emphasized difficulties in planning for the future of community education systems:

"Even if we want to build a building like a school building, we can't build smoothly. Because now we see that even though they talk about peace, in some states like Kachin or Shan State the fighting has been going on. So the leaders cannot build trust a lot. So we are not really sure what kind of improvements we need to do with the school." (Teacher, Mutraw District)

- **Lack of official recognition for community education systems**

The lack of official recognition for community education systems creates a number of challenges for local schools and students, and impacts negatively on community engagement in education. Students who finish their education in Karen community schools face difficulties in accessing higher education or employment in Myanmar, due to the lack of official recognition for their education and qualifications. Most community schools are primary schools and provide education only until Fourth Standard; students wishing to continue their studies and to obtain recognized qualifications then need to transfer into government schools. However, there continue to be significant barriers to such students entering the state education system. Local actors described the highest school drop out rates occurring precisely after Fourth Standard, when students wishing to obtain recognized qualifications need to transition into government schools. Although there has been much discussion at national and regional levels around the provision of Transfer Certificates to allow students from community schools to transition into government schools — and actors in different areas have been requesting these Transfer Certificates — in reality these systems still require negotiation between the KED and government at central levels. As a result of the lack of clarity in policy and implementation of mechanisms such as the Transfer Certificates, Karen township and

district-level education authorities described being unable to assist students to enter into the state education system:

"If the mixed school is organized by the Myanmar [government] headmaster, [the students] can go [to the government school] if they pass Fourth Standard. But if they ask for the Transfer Certificate from us, it is difficult because we cannot provide it. … We cannot do the Transfer Certificate by ourselves in our area. It depends on the central. If the KED central and the government allow us, then we can do." (Key informant, Dooplaya District)

Opportunities for students who have attended community schools are then limited by this ongoing lack of official recognition. This tends to reinforce local perceptions that "even if you can read and write, you still eat rice." This in turn impacts negatively on community members' support for and engagement in education.

- **Rolling our of national-level education systems and programs**

One of the key concerns described by local actors in both Mutraw District and Dooplaya District is the expansion of state education systems, with programs and resources being rolled out from central levels without taking into consideration existing systems or community members' preferences for the education of their children.

Difficulties commonly arise when government teachers adopt seniority over community teachers and School Committee members who have been working in community schools for many years. This often results in a situation where there are two head teachers — a community head teacher and a government head teacher — and where tensions are created by competing school management systems. As illustrated in Case Study 2 above, this is also resulting in situations where the School Committees can no longer function as mechanisms for school management and decision-making, and where an invaluable community-level resource is being lost. Unnecessary and unproductive conflicts at the school and community level risk further exacerbating tensions and can be extremely detrimental to local peace building.

Local actors frequently described government teachers undermining community teachers, since government teachers have officially recognized qualifications, whereas community teachers generally have relatively little training as well as no official accreditation. Additionally, many local actors in both areas described government teachers preventing community teachers from teaching in Karen language and from using the KED curriculum. As a result, community members commonly fear that their

schools will no longer be able to teach in the students' mother tongue and are concerned that they will lose their Karen language and identity. Many community members in fact perceive the rolling out of state education systems in their areas as a deliberate attempt to undermine their Karen language, culture, and identity. Echoing the feelings of many local actors with whom the research team met, one key informant in Dooplaya District explained: "This is kind of the fighting operation, using development and using the education system in order to influence us and in order to dominate us."

Another concern identified by many local actors is that government teachers receive a much higher salary than the stipends and support received by community teachers. Actors in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya

District described this as leading to competition between government and community teachers, and as undermining community support systems — since these systems cannot provide equivalent salaries for the community teachers:

"The Myanmar government uses another thing, like they give more salary for their teachers. And for our community teachers, we aren't able to give like that. So our teachers get depressed. So they don't want to teach anymore in the school and they leave to find new jobs in the town. We encourage them: "You are working for your community people, you have to be patient in working for your community." But we cannot encourage them because they want higher salary like the Myanmar [government] teachers." (Parent, Mutraw District)

Case Study 4:
Lack of recognition for community education systems (Mutraw District)

One of the 'mixed' schools in Mutraw District now uses the Myanmar MoE curriculum as the main curriculum and the KED curriculum to teach Karen reading and writing. The village is closer to the town of Papun than it is to Day Bu Noh village, where there is a 'KED administered' secondary school. Teachers in this 'mixed' school described benefits in teaching the MoE curriculum, since this enables students to become more proficient in Myanmar language, as well as theoretically allowing them to integrate government schools more easily. A number of parents in the village also described preferring to send their children to secondary school in Papun once they have finished Fourth Standard in the village, since the town is closer. Some parents also described preferring the government system for the opportunities it can offer their children in terms of further education and employment in Myanmar. However, there are barriers to students integrating government schools. Even though the MoE curriculum is the main curriculum used in this community school, the school is not officially recognized. For the students to transfer into a government school in Papun, they need to pass the government board exam, which they cannot do in their community school:

"Because they say that every Fourth Standard student has to enter the board exam and if you don't enter the board exam they won't accept you. … Because this school is the community school, so after finishing Fourth Standard, they can continue only in KED school and cannot go to the Myanmar [government] school." (School Committee member, Mutraw District)

Although there has been much discussion about the provision of Transfer Certificates to allow students from community schools to transition into government schools, these systems are not yet being implemented in schools like this one. Students in this 'mixed' school are therefore not being given Transfer Certificates to enter into the state education system. Instead, the School Committee is advising parents to either send their children to a 'KED administered' secondary school in Day Bu Noh after they finish Fourth Standard — but this is much further than Papun town and, due to the current lack of recognition for 'KED administered' schools, this does not enable the students to obtain recognized qualifications. Or they are telling them to send their children to government schools in Papun before the end of Third Standard, so that the students can then sit the board exam in a government school. Yet this means that parents need to send their children to attend boarding school in the town at a younger age, which also creates an additional burden for parents who struggle to afford the costs of boarding houses in town.

Local actors in both districts also described practical difficulties caused by the increase of government teachers in their areas. For example, many people described difficulties when government teachers are sent to teach in community schools but then frequently leave for meetings or trainings in other areas, causing disruptions to the students' education as well as further barriers to building school-community linkages. Additionally, although state education systems are often perceived as less of a strain on community resources, some local actors described community members being obliged to give money or in-kind contributions to government teachers — and this despite the fact that these teachers receive salaries and other financial support from the state education system.

However, some local actors do see benefits to the increasing numbers of government teachers in community schools and to government registration of their schools. As detailed above, particularly in Dooplaya District's mixed administration areas, community members often described preferring their children to study in schools that are registered by the government, since community members are (at least theoretically) not required to make material and financial contributions to government schools. Additionally, parents in both areas described government schools as enabling their children to access greater opportunities for further education and employment in Myanmar. Attitudes towards the rolling out of state education systems are then again shaped by the challenges that communities face in supporting their local schools and by the ongoing lack of official recognition for community education systems.

- **Poverty, livelihoods difficulties, and lack of opportunities**

Poverty and livelihoods difficulties have significant impacts on community engagement in education. They act as a barrier to accessing education; they make it difficult for community members to contribute to and support their local schools; and they affect parents' abilities to dedicate the time and resources necessary to be more involved in their children's education. Additionally, with since central funding still not fully reaching more remote and underserved areas, community members who are already struggling to feed their families have to contribute not only to their schools but also to other community development projects. Many local actors therefore described a need for livelihoods support, including livelihoods training and vocational training, since this could enable community members to sustain themselves more easily and then to become more involved in their schools and in their children's education:

"If there are some people who can help us with the livelihoods, we can also support our children more in the future. … Because with our livelihoods, if we get more income, it will be easier for our family, so we can support our children to go to school more and support the school more. … As we are already older people, we are illiterate, so we might need work skills, about agriculture or something like that." (Parent, Dooplaya District)

In Mutraw District, and even more so in Dooplaya District, local actors often described a lack of parental support

Students coming out of school, 'mixed school', Mutraw District.

for education. In the explanations of local actors, lack of parental support for education is commonly linked to the parents' lack of education, as well as difficulties such as poverty and livelihoods insecurities. Additionally, lack of opportunities again plays into this, since without opportunities for children who go to school, it becomes difficult to see how community members could attribute greater importance and resources to educating their children. Despite some small improvements in the development of their communities and in opportunities for their children, many parents and community members still quoted the Karen saying that, "even if you can read and write, you still eat rice." Many local actors therefore described a need for increased higher education options, as well as increased vocational training and employment opportunities for children who finish school. Some also described a need for targeted support and guidance to assist students in accesing higher education and work opportunities in Myanmar.

- **Difficulties faced by community teachers**

Difficulties faced by community teachers also impact negatively on community education systems and engagement in these systems. Community teachers face significant challenges in sustaining themselves and their families with the stipends and support they currently receive. This leads to high teacher turnover as well as difficulties in recruiting teachers for community schools. As one secondary school teacher in Mutraw District explained: "A lot of teachers drop out. … The reason is the livelihood, because the salary is not enough to live."

Difficulties faced by community teachers are often highlighted in 'mixed' schools. Teachers in one 'mixed' school in Dooplaya District described having to take days off from teaching in order to grow crops, since their stipends are insufficient for them to support their families. They described this as creating further tensions with the government teachers, who have allegedly criticized them for taking time away from the school:

"I want to explain the problem with the KED teachers. They only get about 500 Baht [approximately 14 USD] for each month and this is not enough for the whole family. So sometimes we are absent one day in a week. So the government teachers argue about this. And actually they should allow us, because if we compare the salary, it is very different. What we get for one year, [the government teachers] get for one month. We KED teachers want to give all the time to the students but we have problems with our livelihoods." (Teacher, Dooplaya District)

Additionally, community teachers frequently described feeling that they are overworked, particularly since they commonly have to teach multiple classes at the same time and without the resources that they need. For example, teachers in a primary school in Dooplaya District described difficulties they currently face in having to teach over ninety students in five different grades within a small one-room building that has insufficient space and materials for the students. One of the teachers told the research team: "I am sick to death. I want to run away. I cannot sit down. I have to teach one group there and another group there, and I cannot take a rest."

Adding to these difficulties is the fact that teachers are generally seen as solely responsible for the students' education. Since parents are very often illiterate and cannot help their children with their studies or homework, teachers also organize 'night study' for the students after school hours. Communication systems between schools and families mostly depend on individual teachers reaching out to the students' parents — something for which teachers often explained that they do not have enough time. Additionally, local actors described teachers feeling pressured or depressed when they are blamed for students not doing well at school. As a result of these different constraints and pressures, teachers face numerous challenges in doing their work and in building relationships with community members. These difficulties in turn impact negatively on the functioning of community schools, as well as on the links between the schools and the communities.

Community teachers represent a valuable potential resource and should be recognized as such, particularly in a situation where trained teachers are lacking and where the state is seeking out ways to equip the education system with personnel, including in rural and ethnic minority areas. Additionally, community teachers are mother tongue teachers and therefore play an essential part in ensuring quality in access to education. They enable students to learn in their mother tongue, which plays a key role in effectively developing foundational literacy building blocks and in achieving learning outcomes. Furthermore, community teachers who engage across curricula and/or languages are already primed with the competencies required for a multi-lingual education system. Community teachers are therefore a very valuable resource in working towards inclusive and equitable quality education for Myanmar's diverse communities.

b. Support for and factors enabling community engagement in education

As highlighted above, increased livelihoods opportunities for community members and increased education and employment opportunities for students who finish school can impact positively on community engagement in education. With the lack of official recognition for community schools currently impacting negatively on community education systems and engagement in these systems, it can be expected that the recognition of community education systems and the development of mechanisms that enable students to transfer into the state education system will strengthen community engagement in education. Additionally, local actors in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District identified other factors that can strengthen community engagement in education. These include: programs supporting teachers' stipends and school running costs; parent involvement trainings and other community outreach programs; and capacity building for teachers and School Committees.

• Programs supporting teachers' stipends and school running costs

Programs supporting teachers' stipends and school running costs can significantly strengthen community schools and community engagement in education. Current support from the KED, KSEAG, and partner organizations for teachers' stipends, school materials, and other school needs were described as strengthening community engagement in education, since this lightens some of the load that community members have to bear. In the words of a parent in Mutraw District, "It helps us carry one bag out of three because they support books and some of the teachers' benefits, so we don't have to pay it all." In particular, increased support for teachers' livelihoods was described as reducing difficulties faced by the teachers and by the communities supporting them, as well as having longer-term impacts in terms of building school-community links.

Local actors also described a general need for increased funding to improve their schools and to enable greater participation of parents and other community members in different aspects of the schools. As a School Committee member in Mutraw District explained: "We think that if we have more funds for the school, then we can do more actions and parents also will participate more, and then also the school will be improved."

• Parent involvement training sessions and other community outreach programs

Current parent involvement training sessions and other community outreach programs play an important role in promoting community engagement in education. The KED and partner organizations such as the KTWG's Mobile Teacher Training teams currently implement community outreach programs, during which they run sessions to promote parent involvement in education. As part of these programs, parents are taught about children's rights, the importance of education, and their duties in supporting their children's education. Local actors described these programs as having already led to higher numbers of children being sent to school and more involvement by parents in community schools:

"We have seen differences between the time when [the parents] have not got any training and after they got training. After the training, they take their children to school more, and they participate more in the school." (Teacher, Mutraw District)

Additionally, local actors described a need for increased training and capacity building for parents in how to work with the schools and how to support their children's education. As a parent in Mutraw District described, "Because we don't have education, we need information like how we can support our children to go to school, how we can help them."

• Capacity building for teachers and School Committee members

Finally, capacity building for teachers and School Committee members can also further strengthen community engagement in education. Many local actors in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District expressed a desire to continue to manage their community schools but stated that they lack the capacity, skills, and support to do so. In general terms, local actors in both districts described a need for greater numbers of qualified teachers, as well as a need for capacity building for existing teachers — many of whom have attended only basic trainings and have received no specific instruction on how to work with parents and other community members. Additionally, many local actors described a need for training for School Committee members in how to manage their schools and how to better involve community members in school management and decision-making.

7. COMMUNITY EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN THE FUTURE

The recognition and accreditation of community education systems, as well as how to deal with the potential future return of refugees, are critical issues for community schools in Karen State. In looking towards the future, it is helpful to take into account community members' perceptions of and attitudes towards these issues.

7.1 Recognition and accreditation of community education systems

For local actors, the recognition of Karen community schools and education systems is essential. Yet there is a gap between the discussions and negotiations going on at central or district levels and the communities on the ground, who are not involved in — and often feel that it is not their place to be involved in — these discussions.

Local actors in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District very often evoked the need for official recognition of Karen community education systems. As a parent in Mutraw District described: "We have our own village and we are one of the nations, and so our school should be recognized." And as another parent in Dooplaya District explained: "For me, I think the education system should be the same. So even though my child finishes this school, there must be something that guarantees him to apply for the job, like government job opportunities."

Central- and district-level authorities within the KNU's administrative sructures generally framed the future of community education systems within a broader political vision, which seeks recognition for ethnic education as part of a federal political model:

"We need to build the real federal country so each ethnic group can accept it. Each ethnic group has their own right to teach their own curriculum in the policy of their own education system. And we are discussing about having the education system that is decentralized, and the different levels. ... And if that cannot be achieved, I think the political problem cannot be resolved." (Key informant, Mutraw District)

In contrast, those implementing community education programs on the ground often explained that they are not involved in — and that they do not feel it is their place to be involved in — discussions that will affect them in the future. As a secondary school teacher in Mutraw District put it: "For me, I cannot think. But it will be the leaders from above who are leading us, like the KED." And as a School Committee member in Mutraw District explained: "No one comes and talks to us about that, so in terms of discussions [about the recognition of community schools], I can't say anything about that."

There is therefore a significant gap between the leadership and those providing services on the ground. To some extent, this gap is linked with practical issues, such as a lack of information and capacity. However, it is also linked with a hierarchical system, in which those on the ground — even when they are in senior and leadership positions — see themselves as executing the decisions of those above. Again, the planning and problem-solving abilities of local actors are then often limited to practical issues to do with the maintenance and daily running of the schools, rather than longer-term term planning and strategizing.

7.2 Community education systems and refugee return

Local actors feel that they are not involved in discussions about the possible return and (re)integration of refugees in their areas. Local attitudes towards refugee return vary and are related to experiences that communities have had with people coming back from the refugee camps. In general, local actors consider that their communities should play an essential role in integrating refugees when they return to their areas. The School Committees are also seen as key mechanisms to assist the integration of refugee students into community education systems.
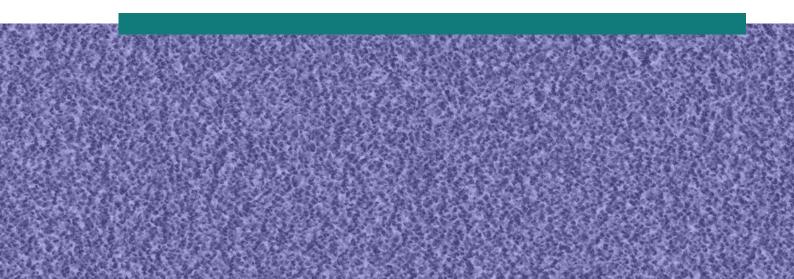
The return and (re)integration of families and children who have been living in refugee camps in Thailand is one of the major issues facing community systems in historically unstable areas of Karen State. District-level leaders in Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District

described ongoing discussions and the development of plans to accommodate the refugees. However, community members in both districts described not being involved in — and feeling that it is not their place to be involved in — discussions around refugee return. There is therefore again a gap between the leadership and the communities on the ground, who will be affected by plans and decisions in which they are not involved.

Local attitudes towards the return and integration of refugees vary and are related to the experiences that communities have had with people coming back from the refugee camps. In some areas of Mutraw District, community members described negative experiences in integrating students from the refugee camps. Teachers explained that they have had difficulties disciplining such students; and parents often portrayed these students as leading to increases in deviant behavior, such as the abuse of alcohol and drugs, as well as crime. In such areas, community members often speculated that increasing numbers of refugees returning to their areas would lead to pressure on their community's resources, negative influences on their own children, and social problems. In contrast, in other areas of Mutraw District, as well as in most communities visited in Dooplaya District, community members had more positive views of refugee families and children returning to live in their areas. Additionally, community members in both districts commonly described it as their community's responsibility to help integrate refugees from the camps — since they are, as many local actors put it, "the same people".

The School Committees were often identified as having a key role to play in integrating students from the camps into community schools. Some local actors — particularly district-level leaders and those with links into the KNU's different departments — have a clearer view of what role the School Committees can play in integrating students

from the camps. For example, some described it as the role of the School Committees to coordinate discussions between refugee families, families in their local area, and teachers in the camps and in their area, and to develop plans in conjunction with all relevant actors. However, beyond saying that the School Committees should have a role in integrating students from the camps, most local actors could not describe what this role should be, nor how the School Committees might be able to help integrate these children. Again, this highlights a disconnect between the planning and discussions going on at the leadership levels, and a lack of involvement and planning by those in the ground.

Overall, community members' concerns about the return and integration of refugees into their areas — and of refugee students into community schools — are linked to practical and logistical issues. In Mutraw District and in Dooplaya District, community members described livelihoods difficulties and potential problems caused by the lack of clear land rights as the biggest challenges that will need to be addressed in the context of refugee return. In order to integrate refugee students into local education systems, actors in both districts highlighted the need for more schools, teachers, and materials, and a more general need to develop and provide increased support to existing community education systems. As explained by a primary school teacher in Dooplaya District, community education systems already often lack the infrastructure and resources to accommodate existing students, let alone to accept increasing numbers of students from the refugee camps:

"This school is not big enough for more students from the refugee camps, because it is not even big enough for the existing students. … We have the building and it needs to be fixed, and if the students are more we will need more chairs and blackboards and school materials."

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The School Committees have become essential mechanisms for the local management of Karen community schools and play a key role in coordinating different aspects of community engagement in education. The School Committees have ensured that community schools can stay open and can provide a basic level of education for populations who would otherwise not have access. At the same time, the School Committees have developed into key community support mechanisms and 'safety nets' for vulnerable students and families. They are also central to decision-making at the community level, and they link community schools in different areas into the KED's management and monitoring systems.

The School Committees therefore have the potential to act as crucial mechanisms in further strengthening school-based management, and in addressing needs and obstacles hindering quality and access to education. Additionally, the School Committees provide an important resource as drivers of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). They can therefore be drawn upon as mechanisms to strengthen quality in access to education for children in ethnic minority communities. Looking towards the future of education in Karen State, it is essential to capitalize on and empower these valuable community-level systems. In particular, the School Committees should be strengthened to ensure that they act as participatory and inclusive systems for school-based management, and to enhance their role in promoting education quality and access at the local level. Constructive engagement with these existing community-level mechanisms also has vital benefits in terms of supporting education systems that contribute positively to peace building efforts.

In a context where community schools were historically not recognized and received little to no outside support, communities in Karen State have rallied to provide the financial and material resources neccesary for their schools to function. These contributions are linked with strong systems of solidarity and community ownership of local schools. Yet this has also placed additional strain on communities already impacted by decades of conflict and impoverishment. In general, parents and other community members in Karen State are not strongly engaged in the teaching and learning aspects of education. This is linked with high levels of illiteracy in historically unstable and remote communities in Karen State. However, relatively weak school-community communication and outreach systems also reinforce a situation where community members are not strongly engaged in the pedagogical aspects of their children's education. Nevertheless, community members often attribute a high value to their children's education and to community education systems that are seen as essential to preserving their ethnic language, culture, and identity. The rolling out of state education systems into previously contested areas of Karen State is also commonly seen as undermining community education systems, as well as Karen language, culture, and identity. Yet state education systems are at the same time seen as providing greater opportunities for employment and higher education, as well as relieving some of the strain that communities face in supporting their local schools.

Community members' preferences for different education systems are therefore shaped by the values that they attribute to different education regimes, as well as by difficulties currently confronting community education systems — particularly the lack of official recognition for community education systems and the burden that communities currently face in supporting these systems. Efforts to improve education quality and access for communities in Karen State then need to take into consideration the values that community members attribute to different education regimes. Additionally, factors restricting and enabling community engagement in education need to be taken into account in order to strengthen school-community linkages and to further enhance community engagement in education.

Recommendations to the Karen Education Department:

- Update the policy and guidelines for the School Committee roles, responsibilities, and procedures to:

  - Upgrade the roles and responsibilities of the School Committees, and ensure consistency in structure and function across the School Committees

  - Clarify and systematize the roles and responsibilities of the School Committees and of the teachers (and especially of the head teachers)

  - Ensure that the School Committees are inclusive of parents and especially of women and mothers

- Roll out capacity building for the School Committees through dedicated staff who can provide training on School Committee roles and responsibilities, as well as targeted training relevant to community education needs in both Mutraw District and Dooplaya District

- Develop consolidated messages and materials for School Committees and community leaders to use in communicating to community members about the importance of education and their roles in supporting their children's education

- Implement capacity building for teachers in how to work with parents and community members, how to involve illiterate parents in their children's education, and how to strengthen school-parent and school-community communication and outreach

- Strengthen and systematize existing outreach programs by the KED to provide parents with information on how to work with the schools, strengthen communication with schools, and support the education of their children

- Develop stronger monitoring systems to assess the numbers of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in the area, as well as the average age of students leaving the school system

- Include representatives from the School Committees and other relevant local actors in discussions about the recognition and accreditation of community education systems

- Work towards empowering the School Committees to support the integration of students in the context of refugee return

- Provide capacity building support to District and Township Officers to develop their roles as mid-way communication channels, with support for systems in facilitating stakeholder coordination and community messaging aligned with higher level policy dialogue, particularly in areas of mixed control

- Conduct community survey of the percentage of parents who want their children to have a recognized MTB education by the Government of Myanmar and/or to have the ability to transfer from a community school to a government school

- Prepare and roll out Transfer Certificates for all Fourth Standard students, including students in all 'KED administered' as well as non-recognized 'mixed' schools

- Work with the government to develop and roll out a monitoring mechanism for students attempting to enroll in state education systems

- Facilitate the development with relevant stakeholders in refugee education of a transition strategy for camp-based education system beneficiaries, to include outputs such as policies for returning teachers and students, information sharing workshops, and procedural guidelines for field leaders in Myanmar

Recommendations to the Government of Myanmar and the Myanmar Ministry of Education:

- Ensure conflict sensitivity in education provision by holding extensive consultations with communities, School Committees, and non-state actors and their education departments

- Allow all Fourth Standard students from community schools who are holding a Transfer Certificate from the KED to enter into Fifth Standard in government schools

- Create a clear policy on the enrollment of students from community and refugee education systems, to enable these students to access state education systems, and make it available to relevant stakeholders for planning purposes. Train all school directors and head teachers in this policy

- Work with community stakeholders to develop and roll out a monitoring mechanism for students attempting to enroll in state education systems in order to ensure compliance across the system

- Provide a pathway to accessing the Junior Teacher Training Program for community teachers or teachers in 'mixed' schools who currently teach the KED curriculum and who can then return to their schools and continue to teach the KED curriculum while being officially registered and remunerated by the state education system

- Endorse and expand non-formal education programs in Karen State in order for OOSC to be able to access education

- Develop and roll out clear policies and guidelines for MTB-MLE in government schools

- Develop clear guidelines for the official recognition of community schools, including standards for performance and monitoring. Provide a period of 2-3 years to meet standards and then conduct a review to make determinations. Cover a percentage of costs until the review is completed and if full recognition is possible then incorporate as a fully funded school

Recommendations to the international community:

- Continue to provide funding and capacity support to ethnic education systems during the interim period, including increased funding for community teachers' stipends as well as funding for the provision of teaching materials and for the improvement of community schools

- Recognize the role that non-state actors play in education, and ensure that programming is designed in line with current roles

- Support the design and monitor the implementation of coordination mechanisms between the government and ethnic education representatives on:

  - The inclusion of School Committees and other key actors at the local level in education planning and decision-making

  - The provision of Transfer Certificates for students entering government schools

  - The accreditation of community teachers

  - The inclusion of MTB-MLE learning in government schools

  - The involvement of representatives from ethnic education systems in curriculum revision and reform

- Support programs that further strengthen the capacity of School Committees to act as mechanisms for school-based management and that strengthen different dimensions of community engagement in education

- Support programs that increase parents' ability to engage in their children's education, including adult literacy programs through organizations such as the KED and local partner organizations

- Support livelihoods, vocational training, and income generation programs for communities in Karen State

- Provide support to the Myanmar MoE in order to develop, implement, and monitor policies for the enrollment of community and refugee students into government schools

- Conduct thorough assessment of school drop out rates as well as student transfer from community and refugee education systems into state education systems

- Support programs for students transitioning into state education systems, including language preparation and support programs before, during, and after transitioning

- Work with local-level actors to better understand and prepare for the integration of refugee students into community education systems

REFERENCES

Benson, C., & Kosonen, K. (Eds.) (2013). *Language Issues in Comparative Education: Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Non-Dominant Languages and Cultures.* Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Callahan, M. (2007) *Political Authority in Burma's Ethnic Minority States: Devolution, Occupation and Coexistence.* Washington D.C.: East-West Centre.

Décobert, A. (2016) *The Politics of Aid to Burma: A Humanitarian Struggle on the Thai-Burmese Border.* Oxon: Routledge.

Fong, J. (2008) *Revolution as Development: The Karen Self-Determination Struggle Against Ethnocracy (1949-2004).* Boca Raton, Florida: Universal Publishers.

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2010) *Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery.* INEE.

Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) (2013) *INEE Guidance Note on Conflict Sensitive Education.* INEE.

Jolliffe, K. (2014) *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions.* The Asia Foundation.

Lenkova, P. (2015) *Conflict Sensitivity in Education Provision in Karen State.* Thabyay Education Foundation.

Pederson, M. (2008) 'Burma's Ethnic Minorities: Charting their own path to peace' in *Critical Asian Studies* 40(1): 45-66.

Save the Children (SCI) (2013) *Quality Learning Environment Monitoring Form for Basic Education Programs.* SCI.

Smith, M. (2007) *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma.* Washington D.C.: East-West Centre.

South, A. (2011) *Burma's Longest War: Anatomy of the Karen Conflict.* Amsterdam: Transnational Institute/Burma Centre Netherlands.

South, A. and M. Lall (2014) 'Comparing Models of Non-State Ethnic Education in Myanmar: The Mon and Karen National Education Regimes' in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol 44(2): 298-321.

South, A. and M. Lall (2015) 'The Peace Process and Ethnic Education in Burma' in *Democratic Voice of Burma* http://www.dvb.no/analysis/ethnic-education-political-transition-and-the-peace-process-in-burma-myanmar/58229

South, A. and M. Lall (2015) *Schooling and Conflict: Ethnic Education and Mother Tongue-Based Teaching in Myanmar.* The Asia Foundation.

The Border Consortium (TBC) (2013) *Poverty, Displacement and Local Governance in Southeast Burma/Myanmar.* The Border Consortium.

United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2009) *Child Friendly Schools Manual.* UNICEF.

World Bank (2007) *Reshaping the Future: Education and Postconflict Reconstruction.* Washington DC.: World Bank.

Zobrist, B. and P. McCormick (2013) *A Preliminary Assessment of Decentralization in Education. Experiences in Mon State and Yangon Region.* The Asia Foundation. December 2013. Discussion Paper No. 1.