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## Human Security and Development in Myanmar : Issues and Implications

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# Human Security and Development in Myanmar<sup>1</sup>: Issues and Implications

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## Abstract

The nexus between human security and development as a workable approach towards inclusive development is gaining prominence. In present-day Myanmar, which is currently undergoing transition and reform, human security needs and challenges are acute, particularly in striving for inclusive and equitable social and economic development in tandem with political stability and national reconciliation. Trust among the different interest groups is a crucial element for moving forward with human security issues. There is a role for inclusive and participatory practices to be instituted in Myanmar's pursuit of human security in the national development plans. The human security and development approach to assistance programs in Myanmar is thus worth consideration. ASEAN and development partners can leverage on ASEAN's constructive engagement mechanisms in pursuing this approach in Myanmar.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses "Myanmar" as the country's name, which is consistent with the UN-recognized usage. However, the former name "Burma" is used in narrating developments before the name change was effected in 1989.

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## 1. The Context for Human Security and Development

The nexus between human security and development was highlighted prominently in the seminal *Human Development Report 1994* released by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which shifted the focus from state security to more concrete deliverables for the security of individuals within a nation-state. The *Human Development Report* thus brought forward the vision of Dr. Mahbub Ul-Haq and his human development paradigm of enlarging people's choices by proposing "a new concept of human security" that acknowledges "people's security," encompassing job security, income security, environmental security, and security from crime, conflict, repression, and social disintegration.<sup>3</sup> The report also made the argument for human security as an "upstream" intervention that requires long-term development support.<sup>4</sup>

*Human Security Now*, the 2003 report of the independent Commission on Human Security, further elaborated the concept of people-centred human security. The report states from the outset that "Human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people's vital freedoms. It requires both shielding people from acute threats and empowering people to take charge of their own lives. Needed are integrated policies that focus on people's survival, livelihood, and dignity during downturns as well as in prosperity."<sup>5</sup> This new paradigm of security brought together the "human elements of security, of rights, of development."<sup>6</sup> Building on this, UN General Assembly Resolution 66/290 on September 10, 2012, established a common understanding of human security, essentially ensuring freedom from fear, freedom from want, and a life with dignity for individuals. The successful pursuit of human security will thus result in an absence of threats to individuals and communities for their survival (personal security), their livelihoods (access to food, education, health, and income opportunities), and their dignity (political, civil, social, and cultural rights).

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Commission on Human Security, *Human Security Now* (New York: Commission on Human Security, 2003). The excerpt is from the Foreword of the report presented jointly by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4

Following this comprehensive enunciation of human security, Howe and Jang have examined the relationship between human security and development, and their mutually reinforcing nature. They posit that conflict retards development and underdevelopment can lead to conflict.<sup>7</sup> This description certainly seems to resonate with the experience of Southeast Asian countries. Human security policy and practices in many developing countries in Southeast Asia lean more towards developmental aspects, whether on the part of the government responsible for ensuring the human security of its populace or on the part of the development partner or donor which prioritises human security as an overseas development tool. The underlying notes of conflict and instability from which human security concerns arise, or to which lack of human security could lead, also lend a sense of urgency for governments to consider human security priorities in their development agendas. This has proved true for Myanmar, even as the transition from state security to human security continues to be in a state of flux in the country.

Using the broad conceptual approach of human security from a continuum that began with the *Human Development Report 1994*, was explained further by the 2003 report of the Commission on Human Security, and culminated in an agreed understanding in the 2012 UN General Assembly resolution 66/290, this paper assesses the current attitudes towards, and practices (where relevant) of, human security in the present day reform-oriented Myanmar, bearing in mind the emphasis placed on state security by the past military regimes. It looks at perceptions and practices on six issues: a) environment and climate change; b) migration; c) urbanization; d) peacebuilding; e) poverty reduction; and f) health and education. The assessment seeks to ascertain whether the development approach to human security will find greater traction in Myanmar, as the current situation – though far from ideal – now provides more opportunities than in the past for pursuing a policy-coherent approach to human security issues. By examining these issues, the paper also argues that the Japanese “maximalist” approach to human security, which emphasises a comprehensive view of all threats to

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<sup>7</sup> Brendan M. Howe and Suyoun Jang, “Human Security and Development: Divergent Approaches to Burma/Myanmar,” *Pacific Focus* 28, no. 1 (April 2013): 120-143.

human survival, life, and dignity,<sup>8</sup> will work better in Myanmar through development cooperation activities that help to build a culture of trust among the different interest groups. The main assertion of this paper is that while an emerging rationale for pursuing human security in the context of development can be seen in the pronouncements made by Myanmar's leadership, it still remains to be seen whether current human security – and the more immediate humanitarian needs – following the clashes in Rakhine State and the ethnic armed conflict issues will be addressed in the same spirit, and whether regional cooperation mechanisms (under ASEAN) can play a role in addressing human security priorities in the country.

The paper is based mainly on documentary research, with additional insights gained from focused conversations and interactions with Myanmar experts, practitioners, and resource persons in the six issue areas mentioned above.

## **2. Perceptions and Practice of Human Security in Myanmar**

Dr. Maung Zarni has pithily noted that Burmese modern history has been conflict-soaked from 1947 to the present.<sup>9</sup> These conflicts are along multiple lines: class and ideology; civil society and the military; and the ethnic groups. Conflicts from pre-colonial and colonial eras gave rise to a new set of conflicts upon Burma's independence in 1948. This unbroken line of conflicts in the country, leading to broken trust across the different interest/stakeholder groups, has coloured perceptions of human security and responses to human security needs, especially by the ruling elites at any given point in time in the country. Tin Maung Maung Than contextualizes this in analysing the human security dimension in "Myanmar's overwhelmingly state-centred national security perspective".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Keizo Obuchi, "Toward the Creation of a Bright Future for Asia," (policy speech at the Lecture Program hosted by the Institute for International Relations Lecture Program, Hanoi, December 16, 1998), accessed December 30, 2014, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-pacific/asean/pmv9812/policyspeech.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Dr. Maung Zarni, "Burma/Myanmar: Its Conflicts, Western Advocacy, and Country Impact," *Reinventing Peace* (a blog of the World Peace Foundation, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University), March 25, 2013, accessed January 1, 2015, <http://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/2013/03/25/burmamyanmar-its-conflicts-western-advocacy-and-country-impact/>

<sup>10</sup> Tin Maung Maung Than, "Human Security Challenges in Myanmar," in *Myanmar: State, Society and Ethnicity*, ed. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Singapore: ISEAS, 2007), 176.

The historical roots of human security perceptions in colonial Burma seem to illustrate this point. The earliest expression of an organised movement to ensure human security in pre-independence Burma (even before the concept was coined) was the motivation of Western-educated young men, using Western organizational and institutional forms to protect the people from what they saw as “encroachment” of Christian missions and other “Westernising” influences, and also against the economic exploitation of Burma’s natural resources. The early social movements in Burma in the 1900s aimed at bettering the lives of the Burmese and were mainly rooted in Buddhist civic action. The humanitarian or social actions undertaken by these organised movements and civil society associations to protect “national interests” and the security of the local (Burmese) communities politicised issues of concern and promote nationalism, whether intentionally or not. These nationalist-oriented movements had political motivations as well as an aspiration to counter the situation of the (Burmese) people negatively affected by government policies of the time.

On the other hand, Burma/Myanmar’s history of the authorities’ response to human security concerns have had mainly political underpinnings, and spontaneous action was strictly regulated by the colonial, and later the military, regimes. The focus has been more on civic and humanitarian action, mobilising state-organised youth and social welfare organizations, rather than on proactive policies that address human security and developmental needs.

In post-independent Burma in the 1950s, the social and business associations, which addressed human security situations as a continuation of the pre-independence movements, were encouraged to come under the umbrella of the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL). Many social organizations were thus affiliated to, and operated through, the AFPFL machinery. Although political societies existed, their roles and aspirations were rather ambiguous. Civil and political rights advocacy took a backseat to the growing concerns over the emerging insurgencies that took place almost immediately after independence. The insurgency situation led to the overwhelming emphasis, through the decades up to the present day, on national (state) security and protecting the state from any enemy or threat. This later became conflated with regime security, particularly after 1962.

After Ne Win took over powers of the head of state in 1962, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) created institutions for social movement and action while restricting political and

economic organizations. The over-arching attitude was to strive for self-protection and sufficiency. Local people's militia-type structures were organised to "prepare" the populace against the threat of insurgencies. Social organizations, such as the Lanzin Youth and the Peasants' and Workers' Unions, were formed under the aegis of the BSPP ideology and their actions were heavily influenced by it. Yet, local social welfare and religious organizations continued to function quite freely, creating favourable conditions for the norms that encourage and promote social collective action,<sup>11</sup> and thus keeping alive the communal spirit of protecting human security needs collectively.

When the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) took control in 1988 after a bloody repression of pro-democracy movements, it initially held hostile attitudes towards civil society organizations and, naturally, spontaneous collective action or movements of any sort. Regardless of these restrictions, many civil society organizations continued to exist, including native place and ethnic organizations, religious organizations, alumni associations, and local business associations in both formal and informal structures. They continued to provide social networks through which humanitarian needs were communicated and addressed, mainly for localized events and needs. This was in part due to the heavy restrictions placed by the military government on assembly and gatherings. Throughout the mid- to late-1990s, however, the current military government became gradually more tolerant of civil society organizations that focused mainly on social, health, and later, environmental issues (notwithstanding the political nature of the problems the organizations addressed). This helps to explain why many civil society organizations in Myanmar today have a focus on these topics. The civil society organizations thus provide a ready base for human security responses in inclusive social development and in areas or sectors where public or government capacity to respond is low and/or slow.

The importance of human security in several of its dimensions was driven home to the military regime when the 2008 Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar's delta area - the country's rice-bowl. The government in Naypyitaw, particularly the then Prime Minister Thein Sein, realized the importance of constructive partnerships in opening up the country and in bridging development and

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<sup>11</sup> Kyaw Yin Hlaing, "Myanmar: State, Society, and Ethnicity," in *Associational Life in Myanmar*, ed. N. Ganesan and Kyaw Yin Hlaing (Singapore: ISEAS, 2007).



information gaps. Since 2008, Myanmar's political landscape has undergone an important change. The military-led State Peace and Development Council ceded power to a "civilianized" government elected into power in November 2010. The 2010 elections were largely decried as a "sham," as the main opposition party - the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi - did not participate in the election. Aung San Suu Kyi herself was still under house arrest. This was lifted on November 13, 2010, five days after the elections. The reformist government led by Thein Sein, now the President of Myanmar, has initiated wide-ranging political and economic reforms since taking office on March 30, 2011. The reform process has paved the way for the opposition to rejoin the political process. Myanmar is now gearing up for the next round of general elections in 2015, which are widely anticipated as the litmus test for the country's democratization process.

Starting from a low base, one can argue that the only direction for Myanmar to go is upwards. Successfully securing a progressive and prosperous future for the people requires an ability to formulate and implement an integrated development policy that is appropriate for the specific circumstances of the country, including progressing reforms at a pace that the Myanmar people can absorb and adapt to. Human security considerations need to form the core of such a policy.

### 3. Key Human Security Concerns in Myanmar

Myanmar's policy planners seem to have recognized this imperative. The Ministry for National Development and Economic Planning launched a Framework on Economic and Social Reforms (FESR) in January 2013 at a development cooperation forum attended by donors and development partners. The framework outlines Myanmar's policy priorities for 2012-15, stating its intent to be a "reform bridge" that links ongoing reform programs to the country's 20-year National Comprehensive Development Plan. In the context of the FESR and ongoing reforms, ensuring human security for the population should no longer be a matter of debate or choice for Myanmar's policy makers.

The following six areas provide a useful framework for analysis of human security issues and implications in Myanmar, as the country continues its quest to be an active player in regional efforts for people-centred development. Indeed, it is now an opportune time for the Myanmar government to engender people-centred programmes and projects in its reform measures. During Myanmar's ASEAN chairmanship tenure in 2014, President Thein Sein was the first among ASEAN heads of state/government to use the term "people participation" with reference to regional integration priorities.<sup>12</sup> This provides a good basis for policy coherence in implementing current national priority plans such as the FESR. It should also take into consideration the global objectives for the post-2015 Development Agenda, which calls for a "truly integrated people-centred approach" in pursuing inclusive social development; inclusive economic development; environmental sustainability; and peace and security.<sup>13</sup>

At present, policies or programs in each of the six areas do not yet take an integrated approach to human security needs and are largely pursued along separate tracks. The exception seems to be in the emerging approach taken towards environment and climate change.

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<sup>12</sup> In his keynote speech to the 2014 ASEAN Business and Investment Summit at Naypyitaw, Myanmar on November 11, 2014, President Thein Sein stressed that "ASEAN, a people-centred and people-oriented organization, must highlight the importance of people's participation in the business environment, along with inclusiveness and transparency." Full text of the President's speech at the website of the President's Office: <http://www.president-office.gov.mm/en/?q=briefing-room/news/2014/11/12/id-4395>.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, *Human Security Unit Strategic Plan 2014-2017* (New York: United Nations, 2014), 17.

### *Environment and climate change<sup>14</sup>*

Environmental concerns are emerging as an area where there is a nascent intersectoral approach linking environmental and human rights. Central (or Union) level senior officials in government have openly recognized the nexus of human rights, environment and climate change, and the need for policy cohesion among the different sectoral ministries. The commitment of Myanmar - in this new era of opening up - to address green growth and sustainable development, is a noteworthy experience to build upon. The lead taken by Myanmar during its tenure of the ASEAN chairmanship in adopting an East Asia Summit Declaration on Climate Change (as an input to the international climate change discussions led by the United Nations [UN]), and the announcement that Myanmar would host the ASEAN Institute on Green Economy bodes well for Myanmar's emergence as a future "champion" for this topic in ASEAN. However, the current state of ASEAN's work related to environment and climate change shows that cross-sectoral coordination is still weak, whether at regional or national level. This implies that national efforts (and national interest) are still the main drivers for regional or global action. Yet, in this area, human security concerns are coming to the fore, with increasing calls for environmental governance in different ASEAN countries to discuss the legislative and judicial frameworks for access rights and public participation in environmental decision-making. There is also a nascent environmental justice movement in ASEAN countries, with transboundary relevance, which bears monitoring. With major infrastructure projects now taking place for closer connectivity among the ASEAN countries, especially in the Mekong region and the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), issues of how to address/ensure procedural rights across borders, for displaced or relocated local communities, are related to environmental and community security. This is being played out at the local level in Myanmar by way of the community protests against the Dawei deep sea port project in southern Myanmar.

Human security concerns are also embedded in compliance requirements for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI),<sup>15</sup> to which Myanmar became a candidate country in July

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<sup>14</sup> The discussions under this heading are based on the author's participation at a workshop on "Human Rights, Environment, Climate Change" organized in Yangon on September 13-15, 2014, by the government of Myanmar in its capacity as the 2014 chair of the ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights.

2014, the first ASEAN member to do so. The EITI is a voluntary initiative that ensures greater accountability and transparency in reporting revenues from extractive industries. Myanmar's preparations to be part of the EITI can provide a window to address corruption issues in the country, as well as to see whether local communities and the public in general benefit from the funds gained from extractive industries. A sad lesson in the midst of Myanmar's EITI compliance preparations can be found in the harsh security-related responses to community protests over the Letpadaungtaung Copper Mine project, a joint venture between Myanmar and Chinese companies.<sup>16</sup> The protests started in 2012 over land compensation and relocation disagreements, escalating into a crackdown by security forces that severely injured several protesters, including monks. The tensions continued to simmer even after an investigation commission headed by Aung San Suu Kyi reported its findings and recommended greater compensation, environmentally sustainable practices and greater corporate social responsibility amongst other things. The recommendations did not include the halting of mine operations.<sup>17</sup> Protests returned with the resumption of the mine's operations in 2014.<sup>18</sup> The protests in December 2014 resulted in the death of a villager.<sup>19</sup>

### *Urbanization*

Myanmar's urban population is roughly one-third of the country's total population.<sup>20</sup> United Nations statistical data estimates urban population growth at 2.5 percent, and rural population growth is -0.1

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<sup>15</sup> To be EITI compliant, candidate countries are required to have in place a functioning multi-stakeholder group that includes civil society participation, among other key requirements. See Human Rights Watch, "Decisive Moment for Global Transparency Effort," March 9, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> The joint venture partners are the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings (UMEHL), a state-owned enterprise with military backing, and Wan Bao Mining, a subsidiary of a Chinese state-owned arms firm. Charltons, a boutique corporate finance law firm, provides the project background on its website at: <http://www.charltonslaw.com/newsletters/myanmar-law/en/2013/3/Letpadaung-Investigation-Commission-Issues-Final-Report.html>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Protestors state their concerns over environmental damage and lack of full compensation. In 2014, three workers were kidnapped by opponents of the mine. "Kidnapped: A Chinese Miner Tries to Be Nice," *The Economist*, May 24, 2014, accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21602719-chinese-miner-tries-be-nice-kidnapped>.

<sup>19</sup> Aye Aye Mar, "Violent Standoff Continues at Myanmar Mine Protest," *VOA News Online*, December 23, 2014, accessed January 5, 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/violent-standoff-continues-at-myanmar-mine-protest/2570915.html>.

<sup>20</sup> In 2013, the percentage of urban population was 33.8, according to United Nations estimates.

percent.<sup>21</sup> Rural-urban migration has become one of the contributing factors to Myanmar's urbanization challenges. Migrants have the intention to return to their place of origin, but in reality only few actually return. If they support relatives in their place of origin or intend to spend their savings there, their disposable urban income is often very low, forcing many to share a rental room or live in an informal settlement. Over the years, they become part of the urban population but their lack of income and of access to basic infrastructure services, such as clean water and sanitation, and to power and decision-making processes, render them vulnerable to the changes and renewals taking place in urban areas such as in Yangon and other parts of the country. The country's commercial hub, Yangon, is confronted with the challenge of upgrading its infrastructure and facilities to meet the requirements of ASEAN connectivity, while at the same time dealing with the lack of space, land, and basic social services to accommodate all urban residents adequately. The continued existence of slums or squatter settlements is a result of inadequate housing. Thus, there is no security of tenure for a large portion of the urban population. In many cases they face the continuing threat of eviction as the government, which technically owns all land in the country, seeks new venues for major development projects, such as the special and/or industrial zones around major urban agglomerations.

Daw Mae Ohn Nyunt We, a candidate who stood for the West Yangon seat in the municipal elections in Yangon, held on December 27, 2014 (the first municipal elections held since independence),<sup>22</sup> publicly shared her frustration with the lack of attention paid to the plight of such urban insecurity in Yangon's Kyimyindine township. She recounts that the residents in parts of the township are literally living in the garbage as there is no regular garbage collection service. The residents also have serious water shortage problems in the dry season. Currently, the Yangon City Development Council (YCDC) provides one *sampan*-load<sup>23</sup> of drinking water during the very dry season to these residents. The water is meant to be shared among some 2000 residents in three wards in the township. This is an insufficient supply for such numbers. Self-help efforts at digging ponds are

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<sup>21</sup> Data available at the United Nations Statistics Division UNData website, accessed October 15, 2014, <https://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=MYANMAR>.

<sup>22</sup> However, Daw Mae Ohn did not get elected.

<sup>23</sup> A *sampan* is a small wooden boat used by coastal communities in Asia.

to no avail as the area is vulnerable to salt water seepage. There are no public funds allocated to facilitate digging, fencing, and desalination of the pond-water.<sup>24</sup>

### *Migration*

Myanmar has become the country with the highest numbers of migration in the GMS or Greater Mekong Sub-region.<sup>25</sup> This is mainly a result of people fleeing conflict in the border areas between the armed forces and insurgent groups, as well as semi- and unskilled workers seeking what they perceive as an attractive income in the labour-scarce higher-income ASEAN economies.

Inter-communal tensions between Rakhines and Rohingyas in 2012 led to some 140,000 people displaced in Rakhine State - most of them without citizenship and living in fragile protection environments. The government has started a phased project to grant citizenship to the Rohingyas (starting with 209 in September 2014) but there is current controversy over the “verification process” to reflect the Bangladeshi origin of the Rohingyas. Hostilities in Kachin State caused some 100,000 people to be displaced. Ceasefire negotiations between the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) and the Myanmar government are still ongoing. International and local humanitarian organizations have direct access to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the government-controlled areas. Local organizations have helped in providing humanitarian assistance to IDPs in other areas. The Governments of Myanmar and Thailand are discussing the situation of displaced persons along the Thai-Myanmar border, most of whom are in refugee camps or undocumented workers in Thailand. On June 30, 2014, the Ministries of Labour of both countries launched a process to issue temporary registration cards for Myanmar workers in Thailand. This in turn had the effect of thousands more entering Thailand in the hope of qualifying for registration and potentially legal work permits in the future.

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<sup>24</sup> This information is from an email interview with Daw Mae Ohn Nyunt We.

<sup>25</sup> According to the International Organization on Migration (IOM). See overview for Myanmar at the country page on the IOM website, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/where-we-work/asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar.html>.

Government responses to migration thus far lack policy coherence. For example, the migrant worker issue is dealt with mainly by the Ministry of Labour, which has no jurisdiction over IDPs, and which provides peripheral inputs to the negotiations on liberalization of skilled professionals. The resettlement of IDPs comes under the mandate of the Ministry for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, yet the political nature of the situation has occasioned multi-faceted interventions by different government-related organizations, such as the Myanmar Peace Centre and the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission. International humanitarian organizations and related UN agencies seem to be taking on most of the work in assisting the Myanmar government. There is much potential for building local civil society capacity to take on the bridge-building role in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, and to strengthen nascent capacities among civil society groups that are participating in national, bilateral, and regional discussions on cross-border migrant labor issues.

### *Peacebuilding*<sup>26</sup>

The decades-long national reconciliation process in Myanmar had a “breakthrough” in August 2011 when President Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi publicly shared their joint commitment to work together in bringing about positive change for Myanmar. Landmark by-elections on April 1, 2012, saw the NLD win a majority of the seats being contested. The inclusion of all political forces is cited by analysts as one of the main accomplishments of Myanmar’s political reforms, as are the agreements reached with ethnic armed insurgent groups towards a nation-wide ceasefire agreement. Challenges remain, however, in building trust among the different (minority) interest groups. There are sixteen armed groups negotiating their different interests with the government, each with different sets of concerns over their security and survival beyond the ceasefire settlements. Resettlement, rehabilitation and reintegration for citizens affected by the ethnic conflict, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) for armed groups to re-join the political process all require substantial capacity-building and assistance from partners.

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<sup>26</sup> Insights on peacebuilding efforts in Myanmar are gained from several conversations with Dr. Kyaw Yin Hlaing of the Myanmar Peace Centre.

At present, the government remains committed to the peace process towards a speedy conclusion of the projected ceasefire accord by February 12, 2015, Myanmar's Union Day.<sup>27</sup> Civil society organizations (CSOs) and international non-governmental organizations (I-NGOs) have taken part in facilitating meetings and discussions with the ethnic groups. Their assistance will also be important in the resettlement and reintegration of IDPs. The Myanmar Peace Centre, established under the aegis of the International Peace Donor Support Group in June 2012, continues to coordinate the process and serve as a one-stop center for development needs and poverty reduction in the ethnic areas. Myanmar has placed poverty reduction prominently on the national agenda for the first time in decades (poverty was hitherto hidden under the rubric of "border area development"), as part of the reform efforts.

#### *Poverty reduction*<sup>28</sup>

The First Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA-I), conducted nation-wide in Myanmar in 2004-05, defined poverty incidence as the "proportion of population of households with insufficient consumption expenditure to cover their food and non-food needs." IHLCA-II followed in 2009-10. The IHLCA-I showed poverty incidence to be at 32.1 percent at the Union or national level. Then IHLCA-II found poverty incidence to have fallen to 25.6 percent, showing an improvement of 6.5 percentage points. However, there are disparities between rural and urban areas. IHLCA-I showed a rural poverty rate of 35.8 percent compared to 21.5 in urban areas. IHLCA-II showed an improvement, but with rural poverty incidence (29.2 percent) almost doubling the urban rate (15.7 percent). Nevertheless, the overall reduction in national poverty incidence encouraged the Thein Sein administration to set an ambitious target of further reducing the poverty incidence to 16 percent by 2015, to meet Millennium Development Goal 1A of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by halving "between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day." But in

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<sup>27</sup> Nyein Nyein, "President Meets with Ethnic Armed Groups, Hopes for Quick Ceasefire Accord," *The Irrawaddy*, January 5, 2015. The previous dates set for the nationwide ceasefire accord were by end-September 2014 and then later November 2014.

<sup>28</sup> The priorities for poverty reduction are from insights shared by Dr. U Myint, chief economic advisor to the Myanmar President. In November 2014, Dr. Myint was put in charge of overhauling Myanmar's archaic statistics system to ensure accurate forecasting and planning.



Myanmar's surveys through the years, there has been no estimate of the proportion of people living on less than US\$1.25 (or US\$2) per day.

The preliminary results from the 2014 census carried out in Myanmar placed the country's total population at about 52 million. This implies that many people in Myanmar, especially in the rural areas, are existing just above the poverty line. Any disturbance, natural or man-made disaster, a rise in inflation, or the sickness of a family member can send households over the edge. Additionally, there are the attendant issues of a lack of proper social protection, social safety net, and social insurance. Low public spending on healthcare also means that when a family member falls sick, the family has to either sell off assets or borrow money at an exorbitant interest rate, thus incurring a vicious debt cycle from which it is very difficult to exit.

The government's poverty reduction efforts seem to have stalled. In several public statements, including his monthly radio messages, the President has reiterated the importance of economic development in the border areas to assist poverty alleviation. There are, however, few concrete projects, although there is a significant push by Japan to ramp up assistance to Myanmar through several channels, including rural poverty reduction and improving HIV/AIDS care. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) recently announced that its Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction would fund a US\$12 million program for rural poverty reduction in the Ayeyawaddy Delta, Tanintharyi Division and Shan State where poverty rates are double that of urban poverty rates; another US\$10 million will go to financing programs for better access and quality to health and HIV/AIDS services.<sup>29</sup>

A progressive measure that has been implemented without much fanfare is the establishment of a poverty reduction fund as part of the decentralization process undertaken under the rubric of the government's Framework for Economic and Social Reforms (FESR), which was launched in 2013. An assessment of state and regional governments in Myanmar, carried out by the Myanmar Development Resource Institute (MDRI) Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD) in partnership with the Asia Foundation hailed this development as a major innovation in the sub-national fiscal system. First introduced in 2011 as a lump sum development grant called the Poverty

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<sup>29</sup> Kyaw Hsu Mon, "\$22 Mln in ADB Programs to Reduce Poverty, Improve HIV/AIDS Care," *The Irrawaddy*, February 14, 2014, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/22mln-adb-programs-reduce-poverty-improve-hiv-aids-care.html>.

Reduction Fund, the initiative stands out as “the only fully devolved resource transfer from the union to state and region level,” allocating (in FY2012-13) about one billion kyat (roughly US\$1 million) to each state or region, with Chin State – due to its extreme remoteness and lack of facilities – receiving triple.<sup>30</sup>

### *Health and education*<sup>31</sup>

In June 2014, the Myanmar President appointed advisors for health and education.<sup>32</sup> These are two important areas which facilitate the empowerment and development of people and their capacity to participate in, and contribute to, development processes in the country. Even with the wide-ranging reforms that the Thein Sein administration has instituted, Myanmar’s public spending on health and education ranks lower than other ASEAN countries, according to a study carried out in early 2014 by Action Aid Myanmar.<sup>33</sup> For the 2014-15 budget year, the defense spending (at 12 percent of total allocation) was more than the combined allocations for education (6 percent) and health (3 percent).<sup>34</sup>

Health and nutrition security is paramount for young children (especially those under five years of age) and their mothers in Myanmar. Myanmar’s infant, child, and maternal mortality rates are still high. There are twin challenges of lowering the infant and maternal mortality rates, as well as reducing malnutrition in children, particularly those living in rural and remote border/ethnic populations. One in three children under five years of age face stunted growth and development in Myanmar. Stunted growth and development is associated with poor educational performance,

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<sup>30</sup> Hamish Nixon et al., *State and Region Governments in Myanmar* (Yangon: MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> The priority needs listed for health and education security in Myanmar are insights gained from Dr. Yin Yin Nwe, former UNICEF Country Director for China, and currently advisor to the Myanmar President on education.

<sup>32</sup> President Thein Sein appointed Dr. Yin Yin Nwe as one of two education advisors on June 17, 2014. Advisory groups on health and on religion were also established, adding to the existing National Economic and Social Advisory Commission. See: Kyaw Hsu Mon, “Burmese President Appoints New Advisors,” *The Irrawaddy*, June 29, 2014, accessed January 6, 2015, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/burmese-president-appoints-new-advisors.html>.

<sup>33</sup> For the 2013-14 fiscal year, 11.8 percent of the budget was allocated for education and 6.5 percent for healthcare. See “Myanmar Spends the Least for Education among ASEAN Countries: AAM,” *Eleven Daily*, March 23, 2014, accessed Month Day, Year, [http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5505:myanmar-spends-the-least-for-education-among-asean-countries-aam&catid=44:national&Itemid=384](http://www.elevenmyanmar.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5505:myanmar-spends-the-least-for-education-among-asean-countries-aam&catid=44:national&Itemid=384).

<sup>34</sup> Ei Ei Toe Lwin, “Military Spending Still Dwarfs Education and Health,” *Myanmar Times*, March 30, 2014, accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/10000-military-spending-still-dwarfs-education-and-health.html>.

heightened risk of non-communicable diseases as adults, and negative consequences for the country's human capital and economic productivity. Strategies for promotive and preventive public health are thus important in ensuring health security, as many of the causes of death amongst women and children are either preventable or treatable. Increasing the number of auxiliary health workers and midwives in villages, and free health care for children under five are proven public health solutions that have shown results and need to continue. It will also be important to improve/raise the health facility-to-population ratio according to WHO standards.

As regards education, there are access, quality, and governance issues affecting primary, secondary, and tertiary education. To address these challenges, a new education law was enacted on September 30, 2014, outlining a decentralized structure and a wider space for private or alternative education. Education reforms at the primary and secondary levels will need to break the current vicious cycle of (overloaded) curriculum, predominance of private tuition, and poor quality of the teaching-learning process. The ongoing ceasefire negotiations are expected to have a positive impact on the teaching of local languages and culture in ethnic areas. With regard to tertiary education reform, the major challenge for all levels of education will be to ensure that education outcomes are able to fulfil job market requirements as Myanmar opens up. Even as the new education law was promulgated, young people took to the streets to voice their anger at the job-skills mismatch and the low quality of tertiary education.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Paul Mooney, "Myanmar Students Protest against Education Law for Third Day," *Reuters*, November 16, 2014, accessed December 30, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/16/us-myanmar-protest-idUSKCN0J00MD20141116>.

#### 4. Opportunities and Challenges of Constructive Engagement

The SLORC's assumption of state power in 1988, brutally suppressing the popular uprisings that swept across the country's urban centers, was widely condemned. This, and the SLORC's targeted antagonism against Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD (which symbolized the forces for democracy) led to the imposition of sanctions and other punitive measures against the military junta. However, Asian governments, particularly the ASEAN governments, did not join the sanctions regime and instead advocated constructive engagement as the approach to bringing about change in Myanmar. Only Japan applied limited sanctions while continuing to be a major source of foreign aid to the country.<sup>36</sup>

This illustrates the dissimilarities in the Canadian and Japanese approaches to human security. Howe and Jang explain that Canada's human security perspective is associated with conflict- and violence-related threats to individuals, and allows for "vigorous action" including coercive measures such as sanctions and military force in pursuing the human security agenda. Japan's human security perspective, on the other hand, is rooted in the "heart to heart" Fukuda doctrine, which is essentially anti-military and pro-economic in practice. Learning from the bitter experience of World War II, Japan's human security concept embraces both freedom from fear and freedom from want. This was later expanded to include freedom to live in dignity, building on the "comprehensive security" policy of the 1980s that was inclusive and emphasized multilateralism. This became a key foreign policy perspective for Japan in the 1990s under Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi and a main objective of Japanese overseas development assistance (ODA), highlighting the notion of a strategic link between development, human security, and Japan's foreign policy.<sup>37</sup> Japan's ODA policy, and subsequent refinements to it, also reinforces this notion by emphasising that human security is one of the "basic policies" of ODA and the first "priority issue." ODA implementation thus requires assistance programs that put people "at the center of concerns." The revision of Japan's ODA Charter in 2003

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<sup>36</sup> Dr. Maung Zarni, "An Integrated Approach to National and Human Security Issues in Myanmar or Burma," (paper presented at the International Conference on Civil Society, Religion and Global Governance, Canberra, September 2005), accessed January 1, 2015, <http://www.freeburmacoalition.org/integratedsecurityapproach.htm>.

<sup>37</sup> Howe and Jang, "Human Security and Development: Divergent Approaches to Burma/Myanmar."

saw an increased focus on programs that address basic human needs, including basic social services and emergency aid.<sup>38</sup>

Japan's human security approach finds greater traction among the policy elite in Myanmar<sup>39</sup> who subscribe to the seven components of human security in the *Human Development Report 1994*.<sup>40</sup> These considerations have influenced various plans and programs of the current Myanmar administration, including the President's aspirations for poverty reduction as a means towards development, peace, and (comprehensive) security, especially in conflict-prone or tension-ridden areas.

The response to human security and the humanitarian need arising in the wake of the devastating 2008 Cyclone Nargis provides a good example of the constructive approach to tackling human security concerns through development assistance.

Today Nargis is mostly remembered for the confusion over Myanmar's stance on accepting aid. Less remembered is the tripartite mechanism among the Government of Myanmar, the UN, and ASEAN to coordinate relief and recovery assistance. The military governments' initial ambivalence towards offers of assistance grabbed worldwide attention. France's suggestion to invoke the UN responsibility to protect and deliver aid without waiting for approval prompted a statement from Myanmar's foreign ministry on May 8, 2008, making it clear that the country "was not yet ready" to receive search and rescue, and media teams. Amidst the confusion, aid flights, including those from the United States, continued to arrive in Yangon. At the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' special meeting on May 19, 2008, Myanmar agreed to accept aid through ASEAN's coordination at that meeting. The ASEAN and UN Secretaries-General sought to prevail on the military leadership to allow foreign aid workers into the country. On May 23, 2008, Myanmar's reclusive Senior General agreed to allow all aid and relief workers into the country "regardless of nationality." Two days later, the ASEAN-UN

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>39</sup> Personal interviews with former foreign and deputy foreign ministers of Myanmar.

<sup>40</sup> The seven components are: i) economic security which requires an assured basic income; ii) food security which means all people have both physical and economic access to basic food; iii) health security which means freedom from diseases and infection; iv) environmental security, such as freedom from dangers as environmental pollution; v) personal security which is physical safety; vi) community security which ensures survival of traditional cultures and ethnic groups; and vii) political security which means protection of basic human rights and freedoms. See United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 1994*, 24–33.

International Pledging Conference was held in Yangon and ASEAN Foreign Ministers established the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force. The Task Force's mission to coordinate relief and recovery efforts in Myanmar was carried out by a Tripartite Core Group (TCG), comprising representatives from ASEAN, the Government of Myanmar, and the UN. This opened the opportunity for non-government actors, both local and international, to assist in the recovery of Nargis-stricken areas. Humanitarian aid workers were allowed to operate in the delta area. The circumstances surrounding the response to Nargis thus led to unprecedented mechanisms of working together and also brought into focus ASEAN's efforts to address issues that require special engagement with its members, including human security issues.

However, attempts at brokering similar responses to human security and recovery needs in Myanmar's Rakhine State over the Rohingya issue have not met with similar breakthroughs. It is difficult to recapture the spirit of impartial collaboration and partnership during the time of Nargis and apply it to situations of human insecurity such as those that occurred in the wake of the June 2012 clashes between the Rohingya and Rakhine residents in Rakhine State leading to religion-based violence in central parts of Myanmar, as well as to the situation of displaced persons in the aftermath of clashes between the Myanmar armed forces and ethnic armed groups. In response to the concern expressed by the international community over the situation in Rakhine State, and the ethno-nationalist tensions today, Myanmar has reverted to sovereignty over intervention. Human security issues in ASEAN member states are usually not part of the formal regional agenda for discussion, although it is still possible to raise the topic(s) in the corridors or bilaterally among member states.

## **Conclusion: Future Human Security Approaches for Myanmar**

The key requirement for the success of human security policies or projects in Myanmar is to have greater inclusion and participation in their formulation and implementation. This is where civil society organizations can help fill capacity gaps and complement government initiatives.

Myanmar today enjoys a more open atmosphere as the wide-ranging reforms that started in March 2011 created more space for civil society to operate and function. Building on these gains, civil society organizations present in all regions of the country have a wider scope for their work. Throughout the country, civil society organizations are present in almost every township, including the presence of smaller community-based organizations, especially faith-based organizations. The largest concentration still remains the Ayeyawaddy and Yangon Divisions, where the post-Nargis responses are being implemented. There are Christian organizations in Chin, Kachin, and Shan States where peace negotiations and ceasefire agreements have enabled their existence and operations, although armed conflict still continued in Kachin State until the recent breakthrough in the government's ceasefire talks with the armed groups. Only a few are in Kayah and Kayin States, and Tanintharyi Division, as well as in Northern Rakhine State where Rohingya communities are still facing difficulties following the violent communal clashes in June 2012.

Some suggestions have been put forward on applying the tripartite consultation model that worked successfully during Nargis, to the Rakhine communal clashes. Although Myanmar's reformist government admits the humanitarian dimensions of the situation, it has maintained that the Rohingya situation is Myanmar's internal affair and has rejected several proposals to set up tripartite talks based on the Nargis modus operandi to "prevent the violence having a broader regional impact."<sup>41</sup> Dr. Surin, who is a Thai Muslim, took the lead in exhorting stakeholders and commentators alike not to put a religious slant on the issue. Yet, the Rakhine situation is still interpreted by many as conflict between Buddhists and Muslims. The complexities of the situation have been compounded by decades of manipulation by dictator regimes. The Thein Sein administration thus faces one of its biggest challenges with the Rakhine situation, which unfortunately will not see a constructive resolution

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<sup>41</sup> The proposal was made by then ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan in 2012.

through democratic institutions. The many layers to this issue, i.e., national identity and citizenship; corruption and the lack of proper rule of law; and, perhaps most importantly, poverty alleviation and access to basic social services, all present formidable human security challenges that confront and, to some extent, threaten Myanmar's nascent transition to change. At the core of these issues are the people.

In addressing the issue of broken trust (and continuing feelings of insecurity) among the different communities, civil society has a potential role to help bridge the tensions. Civil society (especially inter-faith groups) in Myanmar has taken some initial steps towards this difficult role. In addition to government relief efforts, some civil society groups and individuals have offered relief assistance to people displaced by the conflict in Rakhine. The role of political parties in Rakhine State and legislators of these parties in the regional and central-level parliaments is also crucial in framing the issue and perceptions of the human security needs arising from it. However, it will probably take decades to undo negative perceptions<sup>42</sup> and re-establish a modicum of trust.

Disasters and conflicts thus underscore an urgent need for "bridge-builders" for human security and for building capacities of such individuals and organizations. The situation in Myanmar illustrates that trust is essential for formulating integrated responses to human security needs. Further research should continue to explore whether Myanmar's fellow ASEAN members and ASEAN's Dialogue Partners who have bilateral country programs in Myanmar can leverage the regional cooperation mechanisms and utilize the approach of development diplomacy to provide bridges to this end.

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<sup>42</sup> Tin Maung Maung Than and Moe Thuzar, "Myanmar's Rohingya Dilemma," *ISEAS Perspective* (July 9, 2012): 1-7.



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## Abstract (in Japanese)

### 要約

包摂的な開発に向けた実際的アプローチとして、人間の安全保障と開発の結合（nexus）が注目を集めつつある。移行・改革の真っ只中にある今日のミャンマーでは、政治的安定および国民和解とならび、特に包摂的で公正な社会経済開発を達成しようとする努力において、人間の安全保障のニーズおよび課題が重大なものとなっている。人間の安全保障の問題を進めるためには、異なる利益集団間の信頼関係が極めて重要な要素である。ミャンマーの国家開発計画において人間の安全保障を追求していくにあたっては、包摂的で参加型の実践を組み込むことが必要である。このため、ミャンマーで実施される援助プログラムにおいて、人間の安全保障と開発を結合させたアプローチを採用することは検討に値する。同アプローチの追求に際し、ASEAN および開発パートナーは、ASEAN による建設的関与（constructive engagement）のメカニズムを活用することが可能であろう。