



South-East Consultations Meeting
Kandawgyi Palace Hotel
18 September 2013

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened and chaired by Hans ten Feld, UNHCR Representative, at 14.45. He highlighted that at a South-East coordination meeting in July, it was agreed that meetings on the SE (either operational or thematic) would be held more regularly, and to that end, today's Consultations were preceded by an operational meeting on Kayin State.

MPSI Briefing: Lessons Learned from Pilot Projects

- The Myanmar Peace Support Initiative gave an overview of their projects in Myanmar, summarizing highlights and challenges.
- Norway was invited by the Government of Myanmar in March 2012 to support consultations between the Government, Non-State Actor Groups (NSAGs) and communities, out of which the MPSI was created. To date, there have been 15 substantive projects throughout Myanmar and all projects aim to support the peace process. Specifically, their role is to help build trust and confidence between the parties and to test the cease fire and the undertakings contained therein.
- Some of the achievements include bringing the Government and NSAGs together thereby opening discussion channels between them; offering political guidance under the auspices of the ceasefire, and securing funding for the projects from several donors including the Norwegian, Finnish and Danish Ministries of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands.
- Some of the challenges faced by MPSI in discharging their responsibilities include dealing with a confidence deficit amongst NSAGs and local communities in respect of the political process. There is also an unrealistic expectation on the part of the Government and donors in particular; who believe that by simply having a project in a certain area should enable a faster scaling up of assistance (in those areas).
- Lessons learned include the recognition that innovative ways to strengthen the role of women in the peace process is important as well as the need to fully understand the context (of the peace process) throughout the program cycle. Understanding the wider political context is a fundamental aspect of the process. Assistance is often perceived in political terms and can either therefore be divisive, or bring people together. MPSI further reiterated that in development work, it is important to recognize that local communities are often better placed to develop appropriate responses to socio-economic needs of their own community, and it is often only when their needs cannot be met internally, will they then take the initiative to seek assistance from outside.

- In the coming month two papers will be finalized, one of which highlights principles for donors and the international community working in conflict affected areas and the other concentrating on operational lessons learned.

An MPSI Perspective on the Peace Process:

- In 2012, ceasefires were agreed and signed by the most important ethnic armed groups, but little was put into operation. The May 2013 agreement between the KIO and Government was not a ceasefire, but merely an “agreement to talk”. Notwithstanding, fighting initially halted for the most part. Even though fighting has erupted again, the agreement to continue talks still stands.
- Over the course of the year, the ethnic armed groups envisaged political dialogue that would result in a framework that takes into consideration aspirations related to federalism and autonomy in ethnic areas. The UNFC has positioned itself as the main interlocutor between the Government and NSAGs in this regard.
- Currently, ethnic armed groups are not satisfied with the level of progress of talks with the Government. Moreover, ethnic communities are also unhappy with the lack of meaningful dialogue with the Government and have no confidence in them. The general perception is that the Government is trying to demonstrate transition to the international community general public and, but the process at the negotiation table is failing.
- Three months ago, a combination of factors (including lack of confidence in the Government due to a perceived non-committal stance) ; compounded by internal power struggles within the Government and the imminent issues associated with the ASEAN Chairmanship and 2015 election, led to the stalling of the peace process.
- As a result, RCSC and the KNU led a willing and non-confrontational approach to resume talks. They were confident that their efforts were well received at the highest level of Government and the Military. They have attempted to re-conceptualize the political discourse by drafting a national ceasefire accord for inclusion in future discussions.
- This is the most recent development on the peace process, but there is not yet any consensus between the Government and NSAGs on the framework for political dialogue. However, fighting has stopped in some places, mostly in the Southeast, but not everywhere. Notwithstanding, given the developments over the last 12 months, the situation can no longer be classified as a humanitarian emergency.
- Finally, MPSI highlighted that while communities generally welcome the cease fire and feel the burden of the conflict lifting they were always resilient and are generally self-sufficient. Therefore, when we talk about issues of “access” from a humanitarian angle, one really must think about what is meant. Are the communities themselves asking to be accessed? Or do they in fact consider humanitarian access an intrusion? Communities may see access differently, as an “invading force”, extending the reach of the Government to areas which they had not managed to reach by military contest. Likewise, when one talks about “coordination”, one must be prudent because this term often results in the Government’s insistence on ‘leading’ , which can mean - in this context, the Government taking control of areas they were never in control of before.

Questions

- In reference to the point raised about “access” and “coordination”, it was asked how best to strike the balance between the role of humanitarian agencies and mandate to access those in need, while respecting the principle of “do no harm” and making a positive contribution to development. The response was to consult with communities as much as possible, and to try and identify those most in need, resorting to Government last. There was also considerable emphasis put on the need to tune in to the peace process and understand the complexities therein to inform one’s decision of where services are required.
- There was also a question on how to consult with NSAGs, in a way which does not lead to them becoming “gatekeepers” for their communities. In response, MPSI indicated that NSAGs are sensitive to this issue and do not want to be perceived as hindering humanitarian assistance. They are aware of the needs within their own communities.

Socio-Economic Analysis of Kayah State (SEA)

- The second presentation was on the Socio-Economic Analysis of Kayah State (SEA). The study was commissioned by the EU and undertaken by a consortium of agencies including Mercy Corps, ACF, AVSI, CARE and Metta Development Foundation. The purpose of the study was to provide broad insight into the issues facing the people of Kayah State, particularly for those agencies (Government and Non-Government), who may wish to launch projects there.
- The multi-sector study was undertaken between March – August 2013 and evaluated data from seven townships in Kayah State. The methodology included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, and data was retrieved at village level, as opposed to household, using enumerators from Kayah State.
- A total of 111 villages were surveyed on eight sectors and, *sic*, cross cutting issues. Sectors included health, education, livelihoods, finance, environment and land, water and sanitation; and six cross cutting issues including functioning of institutions, economic drivers, community needs, security concerns, returnees, etc.
- Several challenges were highlighted during the data collection process, including access to villages. In fact, mobility surfaced as a significant hurdle in the daily lives of people in Kayah State, with more remote villages being 4-5 days walking distance from a town.
- The nature of the report did not provide for specific recommendations, but some overarching messages included:
 - Ceasefire is not peace, but is a bridge to peace;
 - With all the developments occurring in Myanmar, data seems to indicate that the Government, CBOs have a tendency to look backward (“where we have come from”), instead of looking forward (“where are we going”);
 - Natural resources are an important issue in Kayah State, as is food security and together, these issues will be important for the future of the State;

- Mobility issues associated with limited roads and a difficult terrain are a fundamental issue;
- Border trade with Thailand, particularly on the Mese area can and will change the dynamics of the State, specifically the economic landscape;
- Some general findings of the study include:
 - Transportation is an issue with around 41% of the population generally travelling by foot, and location matters greatly: in places like Shadaw Township, 81% of the respondents travelled primarily by foot and more than 72% of the respondents were living near Shadaw were more than 2 hours walk away from the town.
 - Interviews at township level revealed staffing in the healthcare sector was an issue, evidenced by many vacant positions. Mobility also greatly affected access to health care facilities, particularly in places where roads were impassable in the rainy season.
 - Regarding education, a large portion of the respondents reported that their children “were not interested” in school; while many reported they could not afford the fees. A significant number also reported children were needed to help with chores in the home. Poor quality education, farming practices that required more labour and distance were all factors related to low school attendance. Illness, handicap, absent teachers actually featured insignificantly in this regard.
 - Some questions intended to obtain qualitative data included questions like “Do you find it easier or harder to make a living as compared to two years ago”? Responses varied from village to village. Respondents talked a lot about freedom of movement, security and farming equipment. 65% of the respondents cited issues with poor access to land during in rainy, together with distance, and safety as being key issues they face for survival.
 - An interesting observation was that people appeared to have access to credit, being able to borrowing money from friends and family for food and health care. Food insecurity featured significantly across the state, with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents saying they sometimes skip meals and sell their items for food.
 - Most people still use traditional methods of farming, such as draught animals, as opposed to machinery. This is due in part lack of access to fuel and electricity, as, much of Kayah State is not on the grid. 57 % of the respondents reported not having any access to electricity at all. Some communities were, however, organized and benefiting from solar and hydropower. The Government plan to install a power plant 2014.
 - Most vulnerable groups identified were landmine victims, female headed households and elderly persons across all villages interviewed. It was observed that most villages had youth and women’s groups, but that they appeared to mobilize for specific activities, and did not generally play a main role in the development of the community. There is an increasing number of CBOs, FBOs, NGOs, INGOs, border groups, cease fire groups, etc. There are many people assisting, but there are

restrictions in terms of registration and capacity. The State Government is improving, and trying to enhance its delivery of services, but motivating staff is an endemic problem.

- In terms of economic drivers in the region, trade of goods on the Mese border is growing, as is extractive industries; and the Government is looking to enhance further its natural resources through its preferred path of offering semi-finished products as opposed to raw materials (e.g. furniture). For this to succeed, there must be a peace, investment, a skilled workforce and other necessities such as irrigation and water.
- On the topic of sustainability, there are opportunities for new approaches to take root, when working with institutions, but in difficult, remote areas, this approach will be expensive and should be factored in to any programming. The communities need water, communication, health, electricity, roads, education, etc, and there needs to be long term solutions in this regard.
- More in depth analysis is need in several areas, not undertaken by the study including shifting agriculture, risk aversion, value chain analysis, natural resource management, forest management, landownership rights, institutional analysis, farmers association, gender issues, cost benefit analysis of an improved of road system, rural electrification, human resource management (particularly related to service delivery), data management, access to information, investment for jobs.
- Natural Resource Management in particular should be studied to better understand how concessions are given for timber and mining in order to build trust communication. There should be a better understanding of forestry management practices are at community level.
- Qualitative and quantitative questions about land laws revealed that while people generally understand there were rules and regulations related to the tenure of land, they did not appear to understand these rules and laws may also apply to them. For instance, people were generally confident that they land they were occupying was “theirs”, because it was generational property.
- In terms of human resources, there needs to be a better analysis of the challenges the Government faces in terms of opportunities with partners. Also, in consideration of returnees, consideration that maybe not all want to come back and do farming, and there needs to be opportunities for these people.

Questions

- There was a question related to communication, and whether people seemed to want mobile communications, or people simply better communication with people outside Kayah. The answer was that people seem to really want to communicate and be connected with the outside world across the board.
- Another question related to the extent to which the study consulted with KNPP. It was confirmed that there were several meetings held with the KNPP, and that they were generally supportive and even shared recent documents on their June talks with the

Government. However, they were cautious and made sure to highlight that their work was political as opposed to that of those conducting the study, which was development related.

- The final question related to whether the EU envisaged that a similar study will be conducted elsewhere in the country, to which it was affirmed that there was such a possibility, but not if there was already a similar study already conducted, as they do not wish to duplicate efforts.
- The assessment will be made available to UNHCR for distribution once finalized in the coming weeks.

UNHCR Village Profiling Project

- UNHCR presented the findings from its ECHO funded village profiling project, conducted between 2008-2012, which had as its main purpose the collection of data to support interventions in areas with populations of concern to UNHCR.
- One thousand villages were profiled, compared to a commitment to profile 440 villages, but the results of the survey take into account data from 702 villages once duplicates were removed, owing to lack of GPS and p-Code use.
- The majority of profiles were in Tanintharyi Region and Kayin and Mon States. Data from Kayah State was so insignificant it was excluded because it would distort cross-state analysis.
- The exercise was affected by significant access constraints, especially in the initial phases but access has now expanded, including in the number of international staff in the field, who can provide technical supervision of data collection. UNHCR now has permanent staff in the Southeast.
- Some of the challenges with the project were inherent in the methodology itself, which required staff to memorize the rapid assessment questionnaire, because staff were not allowed to take it to the field.
- Data collection occurred in stable areas, including only 10-15 from non-government controlled areas, mostly along road networks. The profiling was conducted in official and unofficial villages at household level; however the amount and type of data retrieved was inhibited in as a result of respecting “do no harm” principles.
- The data retrieved was largely about the population and UNHCR’s persons of concern, however, a lack of technical oversight, and absence of international staff supervision impacted the information and analysis.
- The data informed us that many people left for livelihood or economic reasons, and few for safety. Moreover, some questions were not well defined, so “abroad” for instance, includes another state.
- The village profile exercise was now complete and would be replaced by more focused protection monitoring and return assessments.

Questions

- There was a question regarding whether MIMU have data from the project and UNHCR confirmed the data is available, and also there will be products developed in this regard as well.
- There was a comment related to the joint profiling of IDPs and it was stated that from a development perspective, a similar exercise should be undertaken for persons not of concern to UNHCR. UNHCR responded however that, targeted interventions take the form of a community based approach, thereby considering the community as a whole.

Updates from UNHCR Myanmar

- A Letter of Understanding between the Government of Myanmar (NaTaLa) and UNHCR was signed on 7 June 2013. Although UNHCR continued projects over the last year, after the expiration of the previous LOU, the new agreement is already having a tangible impact.
- Salient differences include:
 - Formalization of geographic expansion to Chin, Kayah and Shan States and East Bago, in addition to Mon, Kayin and Tanintharyi;
 - Progressive and explicit terminology including internally displaced persons, refugees and protection; thereby signaling a shift in understanding of UNHCR's role and the roles of other actors working with uprooted people;
 - Expansion of other sectors, including CBO infrastructure and training linked to community consultation, aware raising, with NSAGs and local organizations on durable solutions, EVIs, capacity building, health education, shelter, health and sanitation;
 - Direct contact with affected communities, and flexible allocation of funds at township level.
- On returnee monitoring, UNHCR spent the earlier part of the year looking back on the previous village profiling exercise that occurred, in order to devise a returnee monitoring tool that could capture reliable data on spontaneous returns. This is necessary, because even though UNHCR is not actively planning or promoting voluntary repatriation, and even though refugee and IDP returns are not occurring on a large scale experience shows that increased spontaneous returns are important and need to be tracked.
- Assessment consists of a community level tool, so it is limited in what protection data is captured, but does capture essential issues including the voluntariness of the return, and land and documentation issues.
- UNHCR has conducted targeted return assessments in 51 villages across Tanintharyi, Mon and Kayah State already, and once approval is given, in Kayin. Overall, numbers are quite low: the total number of refugee returnees is 86 and IDP returnees 890 (836 of which were recorded in Shadaw Township).

- Because many returnees want to keep a low profile, UNHCR needs to find a way to share the data in a responsible way, while serving the needs of the returnees and respecting their wishes of anonymity. The purpose of this exercise is largely to identify trends. UNHCR is also developing a dashboard summarizing where we are in terms of returnees by State/Region.
- Across the border in Thailand, Information Management colleagues have developed a web portal for cross border information. It is essentially a tool to share information with refugees in the camps, allowing them to make informed decisions about possible return. The portal will also serve as a resource for other interested actors. The approach is not a stand-alone one, and is part of a broader information management project together with NGOs in Thailand and the camp leaders, under the auspices of the CCSDPT. That effort includes information centres in the temporary shelters that will link to the web portal.
- Camp profiling in Thailand by the Mae Fah Luang Foundation, on behalf of UNHCR is complete, and results are pending. The pilot was conducted in Mae La Temporary Shelter, with over 80% of the households participating. The data is being analyzed and will be disseminated in due course.

Other Updates

- Myanmar Peace Centre

Dr. Kyaw San Oo, Associate Director of MPC indicated the JPNA got the 'go ahead' from the Minister and they have started talking to task force members who will meet later this week to discuss how to move forward.

- MIMU

Invited participants to update and contribute to the Assessment Registry currently being formed by MIMU. The purpose of the Registry is to record all completed assessments in the last 2-3 years in a searchable format. MIMU encouraged each agency to fill out the form using the name of their organization, sector, methodology and location in order to share assessments.

- AOB

Next Consultation has been penciled in for 12 November 2013, immediately following an operations meeting.

The meeting was closed at 16.45 by Simon Russell, Senior Protection Coordinator.

UNHCR
September 2013