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A Preliminary Assessment of Decentralization in Education

Experiences in Mon State and Yangon Region

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Preface

The Myanmar Development Resource Institute's Centre for Economic and Social Development (MDRI-CESD) and The Asia Foundation are pleased to present this first volume of the Subnational Governance in Myanmar Discussion Paper Series. The pace of change in Myanmar is rapid and constantly evolving, and decentralization and local governance are issues of critical importance to the country's long term development and are priorities in the government's reform agenda. As such, there is a real need for timely research and analysis on key reform areas related to decentralization and local governance. As an extended collaboration between the Foundation and MDR-CESD, this series of discussion papers aims to provide Myanmar policy-makers at national and local levels, civil society organizations, the business community, development partners, and other interested stakeholders with research findings on subnational governance issues that directly inform policy and reform processes.

As the first volume in an ongoing series, the education sector is particularly apt as a research topic considering its importance to the broader transition that Myanmar is undergoing. The research, presented in this discussion paper by Patrick McCormick and Brooke Zobrist, serves as a useful medium for looking at how a large national ministry, namely the Ministry of Education, is responding to the government's push towards decentralization. Intended to reach a general readership, the paper provides the relevant history, policy structures and overarching reform context affecting the education sector. Using data collected through field work carried out in Mon State and Yangon Region, the authors illustrate and analyze important trends shaping the wider education sector and the intersection between national policies and changes in local governance. The paper concludes with key policy considerations by the authors.

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A Preliminary Assessment of Decentralization in Education: Experiences in Mon State and Yangon Region

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ONE: Introduction

This discussion paper examines decentralization within the formal education system in Myanmar in Yangon Region and Mon State. The aspects of decentralization considered include arrangements between the central government and the states for the management of education, including budgets, human resources, curriculum, policy frameworks, and overall decision-making authority.[2] It reviews some of the non-state actors involved in the provision of education, especially as their involvement throws into relief some of the challenges that the formal education system faces. It concludes with a consideration of the challenges and prospects that further efforts towards decentralization may face, while also highlighting some of the risks to the education system that could arise as outside funding increases.

There has been widespread interest in the reforms that the current administration announced after its installation in March 2011. However, while many reforms have been announced, and many are under discussion, the degree of implementation has varied. The Myanmar government has identified decentralization as a goal in the state-sponsored provision of basic education. As the second-largest ministry in the government of Myanmar, after the Ministry of Defence, decentralization in the Ministry of Education provides useful insight into the course of changes in overall governance.

The findings of this report are based on a literature review and twelve interviews carried out with members of the Ministry of Education, including officials and school principals, as well as interviews with leaders from the Mon National Education Committee—an "ethnic" education department active largely in ceasefire areas of Lower Myanmar.[3] There was regional variation

[1] Zobrist has been working in education related to Burma/Myanmar for the past twelve years, many of which were spent on the Thai-Burma border, and has been living in-country full time for the past four years, working as a research and education consultant. McCormick has worked as a researcher and consultant on matters of education, civil society, and livelihoods for the past six years, and has lived in-country for the past eight.

[2] There are fourteen states and regions in Myanmar. In Myanmar English usage, the term "states" refers to areas inhabited by the so-called "ethnic minorities" (Kachin, Mon, Chin, Shan, Kayin, Kayah, and Rakhine states). Areas where the Bamar majority dominates are called "regions" (Yangon, Tanintharyi, Magwe, Ayeyarwady, Mandalay, Sagaing, and Bago regions). In addition, there are six self-administrated areas and several ceasefire areas, which are associated with the central administration in various ways. In this paper the term "state-level" encompasses both states and regions.

[3] In Mon State, the authors interviewed high-level officials in the state, district, and township offices, and four school principals. In Yangon Region, the authors interviewed similar officials and two school principals. All interviews were conducted in the Myanmar language following a semi-structured format designed to draw out explanations of the procedures and protocols of the Ministry of Education. Discussions of possible scenarios

in the openness of interviewees to meet with the researchers. This suggests that despite what the Minister of Education has said about no one needing "permission" to speak with outsiders about ministry affairs, old habits are dying hard and that people lower down in the system were reluctant to act without "permission." This reality also suggests that directives issued from the center are not necessarily followed at the subnational level.

Yangon Region and Mon State were chosen for this study in order to provide points for comparison. Mon State has a long history of armed conflict and has contained many so-called "brown" areas, under partial government control, and "black" areas that were not under the control of the central government. Mon State is relatively prosperous and also has high levels of emigration to neighboring Thailand. A number of international organizations, such as UNICEF and the Myanmar Peace Support Initiative (MPSI), have funded education-related programs in the state. Yangon Region is fully under central government control and is home to the country's largest city and former capital. Internal migration in recent decades has contributed to the great socio-economic diversity of Yangon Region.

This study indicates that there has been little decentralization within the Ministry of Education. There has been limited, unclear "deconcentration," resulting in a certain amount of responsibility shifting to lower levels of administration, but people at these lower levels do not have decision-making authority commensurate with, or related to, their responsibilities. Government policies concerning education and decentralization have not been clearly defined. Instead, the institutional and organizational culture in the Ministry of Education continues to be top-down. Interviewees demonstrated this through their tendency to speak of "decentralization" as something abstract that happened outside of the individual and themselves. A lack of autonomy at lower levels of administration may prevent the Ministry of Education from being able to address and implement politicized aspects of education provision, including the provision of services in ceasefire areas, in languages other than Myanmar, and more widely, in being responsive and accountable to local populations. The accommodation between the Mon National Education Committee and the central government may be one example of a solution of how the central government can deal with these concerns.

helped the authors gain an understanding of how the interviewees dealt with specific situations and were particularly useful to gauge their understanding of decentralization and its scope. Each interview lasted between thirty and eighty minutes.

TWO: Background to Decentralization of Education

2.1 Governance in Myanmar

Since the elections of November 7th 2010, and the subsequent change-over to a new government in 2011, President Thein Sein has announced plans to change the structure and practices of governance at all levels.[4] The national houses of the *Hluttaw* (Parliament) have been convening regularly and, for the first time in decades, substantive parliamentary debate is part of the political process, and much new legislation has been proposed and passed, although the relevant actors have faced some challenges to achieving full implementation. Similarly, provision has been made for the state- and region-level *hluttaws* to have a greater role in governance. As discussed below, funding appears to have been set aside for state-level *hluttaws*, but they do not yet play a strong, tangible role in subnational governance.[5]

Whatever the strengths or weaknesses of the various forms of government in the country before the first military coup in 1962, it is clear that governance in the decades since the 1960s has been characterized by top-down power and decision-making, which has done little to foster accountability, responsiveness, or flexibility. During this time, top-level decision-makers and power-holders have made pronouncements, often based on official ideology or specific short-term agendas. Officials at lower levels then had to carry out these orders from above, even if they did not have the ability to do so. It was often the case that proper funding was not provided. Under previous regimes, it was common practice for the central government to set targets in various sectors. Local officials were then expected to report back on the results of these targets, however challenging or even impossible they were to achieve, which put local officials in a difficult position.

Despite the fact that a large percentage of government staff appear to take pride in their work and have the interests of the nation at heart (however they understand national interest), governance is not efficient, and the degree of openness and flexibility varies widely from one ministry to another. Personal relationships are central to how power is exercised, so that ties of patronage between superiors and inferiors are far more important than official procedures. In everyday language, this dynamic means that underlings take no action unless their immediate supervisor approves or directs it.[6] While many individuals at all levels of the administration want to change the process of governance, long-standing hierarchical patterns in decision-making, giving approval, and holding on to authority (that is, not allowing delegation) all continue and indicate that deep changes in governance will take a long time.

[4] U Thein Sein gave a speech on August 9th 2013 in which he announced five key public administration reforms designed to clarify relationships between state and region departments and the state and regional *hluttaws.*
[5] Hamish Nixon et al, *State and Region Governments in Myanmar* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation and Myanmar Development Research Institute-CESD, 2013).
[6] For a succinct description, see David Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

At the same time that the nationally-directed reform process is underway, and the central government has said that it will assign more roles and responsibilities to the state-level *hluttaws*, there has been an increase in international and domestic pressure for government bodies to operate transparently, and respond to the needs of the diverse peoples of the country. It is important to note, however, that despite the internationally-recognized borders of the country, the central government is not necessarily sovereign throughout the country. Large areas of "border" territory are not under *de facto* government control, and these areas are poorly reached by government services. An aspect of the ceasefires that has been negotiated, or is currently under negotiation, is bringing these border areas under greater central government control, or at least greater association with the government system.[7]

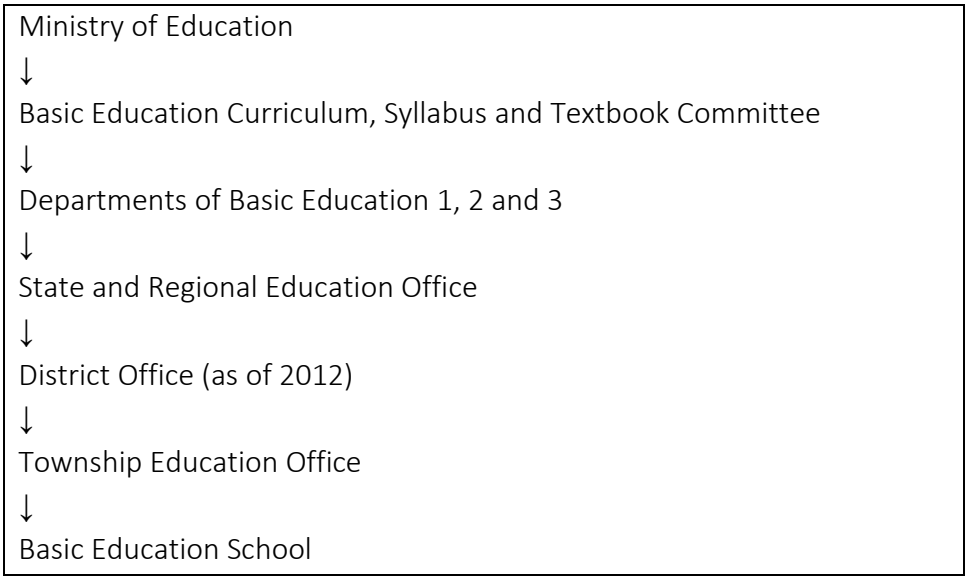
2.2 Governance in education

The largest education provider in the country is the government, which oversees education primarily through the Ministry of Education, but also with the involvement of other ministries or departments, each with more specialized purviews. These include the Ministry of Border Affairs (formerly the "Ministry of Border Area Development"), the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which supervises monastic schools, and the Ministry of Trade, which licenses private schools. Within the Ministry of Education, planning, budgeting, and decision-making are highly centralized. The administrative divisions relevant to primary and secondary education under the Ministry of Education are three Departments of Basic Education that administer one of three parts of the country.[8] Each of the seven states and seven regions has a state or region education office. Under each state or region education office are several newly-created *khayaing,* or District Education Offices, below which are Township Education Offices, one for each of the 325 townships of the country. Additional administrative units include six self-administered zones for several ethnic minority groups, as mandated in the 2008 Constitution. These have authority over, and responsibility for, providing education in their zones.

[7] For further reading on earlier rounds of ceasefire negotiations, please see: Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2004). For an extensive description of contemporary negotiations see International Crisis Group, *Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative* (Asia Report N°214, 30 November 2011), http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/burma-myanmar/214%20Myanmar%20-%20A%20New%20Peace%20Initiative.pdf.

[8] According to the Basic Education Law of 1973, Departments of Basic Education are charged with the operations of schools and defined by geographic coverage. Department 1 administers "Upper Myanmar," Department 2 administers "Lower Myanmar," and Department 3 administers all the schools in Yangon City.

Figure 1: Simplified administrative structure - Ministry of Education[9]



During the past several decades, the levels with the most administrative responsibility have been the three Departments of Basic Education and the Township Education Offices. According to the interviewees, the District Education Offices were only created in September 2012, and while in theory their roles and functions have been mandated, in practice they are still being established, with many of their functions that they are meant to take on still being the responsibility of the Township Education Offices. As in other government ministries, administration and implementation tends to flow from the Ministry of Education down to the townships, with little communication flowing up from lower levels.

The current law guiding Basic Education was enacted in 1964 and has been amended several times, most recently in 1989. The law outlines four key objectives in the promotion of education. In brief, these are: promoting "good moral character"; ensuring that students are "well-equipped with basic education"; giving "precedence to the teaching of science" and delivering vocational training programs, with a "strong foundation" for continuing to tertiary education.[10]

The government has outlined a series of national plans on education loosely built on the Basic Education Law, but these are not specific and promote widely disparate priorities.[11] The current administration is governed by the Thirty-Year National Action Plan on Education which

[9] This diagram shows only the most salient levels of administration. Ministry of Education Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar), *Administrative Structure of Basic Education Sector,* http://www.myanmar-education.edu.mm/dhel/education-system-in-myanmar/education-structure/.

[10] Ministry of Education Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar), *Education System in Myanmar: Self-Evaluation and Future Plans,* http://www.myanmar-education.edu.mm/dhel/education-system-in-myanmar/evaluation-of-current-implementation-situation/.

[11] For example, see the "Ten Points Education Policy" which U Thein Sein unveiled in March 2011 at the first session of the *hluttaw.* This and other plans state that education should be free and compulsory, although the emphasis of individual plans is often quite different: some concern improving teachers' skills, others focus on non-formal education and developing life-skills.

began in 2001. At the Direct Policy Options Conference, which the government held in February 2012, the Minister of Education, Dr. Mya Aye, reiterated that the government would continue the 2001–2030 plan, which had been developed under the previous regime, but was committed to reviewing the sector.[12] The Thirty-Year Plan ensures universal education in successive timed phases, ending in 2030-2031. However, the ten broad program areas in the plan lack work plans. For example, one program area is "Emergence of an Education System for Modernization and Development",[13] but the plan makes no mention of devolution, decentralization, or increasing sub-national decision-making authority.

Priorities and standards in education are also legislated by the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Despite the fact that the Constitution is contentious, it has become widely accepted by the international and domestic community, and is a critical document for guiding policy formulation. In Section 28, the Constitution states, "the Union shall provide free, compulsory primary education system." It further states that citizens have the "right to education" and "the right to conduct scientific research, work with creativity," and "the right to develop the arts." As discussed in greater detail below, the Framework for Economic and Social Reform (FESR), a key policy document of the Thein Sein government, also guides priorities in the education sector.

As part of a larger project of decentralization and devolution of power and responsibility to the state level, the new constitution has reinvigorated state-level governance, including parliaments and state-level ministers. In education, there is a state-level minister with joint responsibilities for education and social welfare who is appointed by the president and approved by the national *hluttaw*. While legislation grants budget and decision-making powers to the state parliaments, it is not yet clear what these powers will be. It is difficult to assess the actual roles and responsibilities that state parliaments will exercise in relation to education.[14] Unfortunately however, in carrying out the research for this paper, it was not possible for the authors to interview anyone from either the Mon State or the Yangon Region *hluttaws*.

The Constitution divides legislative responsibilities related to the state into two "Schedules."[15] Regional *hluttaws* have no ability to enact legislation over areas that fall under Schedule I (including health, security, and education, among others), whereas they are able to do so over areas falling under Schedule II (including state-level budgets, and state-level development). Crucially, the education sector falls under Schedule I, meaning that the state and regional

[12] Mya Aye, presentation at the Conference on Direct Policy Options with Special Reference to Education and Health in Myanmar (Naypyidaw: 13-16 February 2012).
[13] Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, "Education for All: Access to and Quality of Education in Myanmar," in *Conference on Development Policy Options* (Naypyidaw: 13-16 February 2012).
[14] Nixon et al*, State and Region Governments in Myanmar.*
[15] Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Information, *Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar* (2008).

hluttaws cannot enact any legislation in that sector. Nor is there formal provision for the state governments to have a role in education, or practical means for them to do so.

2.3 The history of the education sector

A quick review of the history of education under the British and since Myanmar's independence provides useful context for understanding the state of education today. Under the British, who established their presence starting in 1824 before completely taking over the country in 1885, education was managed by the state. Prior to that, education was provided through monastic institutions, and was largely for males. Moreover, starting with the British, a greater number of children, both boys and girls, began to attend the 7,000 basic education schools, where instruction was in Burmese.[16] Other government schools used English as the medium of instruction, as this was useful for employment in government service, and so these schools were well-funded.

Under colonial rule, educational institutions, and especially colleges and universities, became centers of social and political activism. By the 1920s, university students had begun striking against the University Act Bill which established English as the medium of instruction, and set fees that were too high for most Burmese.[17] There is a widespread perception that student activism, which continued over the decades before independence, led to the Ministry of Education becoming highly centralized, with greater concentration of authority and less flexibility than other ministries. The ministry, which was charged with controlling a fractious part of the population, no doubt came under pressure to bring students "to heel."

After independence in 1948, the Burmese administration launched the "Simla Scheme," a policy that brought various types of schools under a single system, with the full support of the government. Education was made free, with the entry age set at six years. Many of the decisions made under the Simla Scheme have influenced the shape of contemporary basic education. When General Ne Win took over the country in 1962 through a military coup, a new University Act decreased the size of Rangoon and Mandalay Universities by having them focus on specialized courses. Since then, a student's choice of study has been determined by their high school matriculation examination results, with Myanmar Language and Literature being the lowest-ranking course of study.[18] Over the decades, policies have sought at times to restrict the student intake for certain courses of study, such as medicine, to only those for whom both parents were Myanmar citizens. For example, people of Chinese origin were considered over-represented, and therefore their numbers were restricted. Furthermore, in 1965, as part of a

[16] Thein Lwin, *Education in Burma 1945-2000* (Second ed., 2000), http://burmalibrary.org/docs/Education_in_Burma_(1945-2000).htm.
[17] There is again a move afoot to make English the medium of instruction in universities.
[18] For readers unfamiliar with this system, a "matriculation examination" is administered at the end of the eleventh year of schooling, and serves as a university entrance examination.

larger campaign of nationalization, General Ne Win nationalized all schools, including mission schools and schools operated by the Chinese and Indian communities.[19]

2.4 Contemporary provision of education

According to the recent Human Development Index, the mean for years of schooling in Myanmar is only 3.9.[20] Overall, the education system is characterized by poor quality, outdated pedagogy and insufficient geographic coverage, with rural and border areas being poorly served.[21] Roughly half of Myanmar's children do not complete primary school. The recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, a household based-survey, puts the net intake ratio (NIR) at 74.4%, and the Net Primary Completion Rate at 54.2%.[22]

In addition to the government system, there are various community-based schools, monastic schools, and in areas with non-state armed groups, ethnic education departments, such as those areas in Mon State that are under the control of the New Mon State Party. Throughout the country, although education is free in theory, the costs of attending school have proven a burden for many families. In addition to paying for school uniforms, books, and stationery, parents are often pressured to pay unexpected "fees" to school administrators for bench sitting, school ceremonies, and purchase of necessary school equipment. Additionally, parents are expected to send their children to "tuition," after-school tutoring, usually run by the local school teacher, during which class lessons are reviewed.[23] In many cases, local teachers depend on "tuition" as a primary source of income and students that do not attend "tuition" risk failing grade-level examinations. Even where government schools are available, the fees are such that many families send their children to monastic schools that operate with donor support and do not ask families to pay for the basic costs of schooling.

The curriculum used in the monastic system is the same as in government schools, but the monastic system falls under the purview of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as described above. Mon National Schools also follow the government curriculum, with the addition of Mon history and language components. The teachers in these non-government schools are not

[19] Thein Lwin, *Education in Burma 1945-2000*.
[20] United Nations Development Program, "Myanmar: HDI Values and Rank Changes" in *2013 Human Development Report* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2013).
[21] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Presentation on the Concluding Observations on the Third and Fourth National Report on the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child" in *Third and fourth national report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2011).
[22] Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Health, and UNICEF, *Myanmar: Monitoring the Situation of Women and Children, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009-2010* (Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar: Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and Ministry of Health, 2011). The data in this survey were collected from a representative sample of the population, and therefore may be more reliable than data collected on the basis of problematic measures and projections of population figures, such as the census.
[23] Brooke Zobrist, *Mapping Teaching-Learning and Operational Experiences in Fifty Monastery Schools Across Myanmar, Pyoe Pin Programme* (2010).

government-certified. It is not clear to what extent other so-called "national education" departments of non-state armed groups follow the government curriculum, although in at least some of the Kayin schools (not all of which are in Kayin State), teaching is only in a Kayin language (of which there are several) and English. There are also a growing number of wealthy families who send their children to private schools, particularly in urban areas.

At present, the education system provides eleven years of schooling. There are five years of primary, four years of middle school, and two years of high school. The system is designed for students to enter First Standard at five years of age and graduate from high school at age sixteen or seventeen. Teachers in government schools are hired and paid by the central government. Teachers have to complete a series of pre-service programs at one of the country's twenty Teacher's Colleges. However, because the ministry is committed to increasing the total number of teachers, over the 2013-2014 academic year, 10,000 Assistant Junior Teachers are being recruited. These Assistant Junior Teachers will not attend the two years of preparation courses normally required to qualify teachers in state schools. The table below gives a sense of the size of the Ministry of Education.

Figure 2: National school statistics, 2011-2012[24]

Government Schools	
Primary	28,968
Post-Primary[25]	6,761
Middle	3,163
High	2,395
Total Schools	41,287
Teachers	
Primary School Teachers	184,170
Junior Teachers	67,398
Senior Teachers	26,612
Total Teachers	276,180
Students	
Primary	5,195,952
Middle	2,332,249
High	672,394
Total Students	8,200,595

[24] Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2012, p 5.

[25] In recent years, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Progress in Border Areas and National Races and Development Affairs have added middle school levels to primary schools as a strategy to extend children's overall school attendance rates.

The curriculum for all schools, whether government, monastic or private, is set by the Ministry of Education and must use the textbooks prepared by the ministry. There are five main subject areas taught at the primary level: Myanmar Language, Mathematics, English, Science, and General Studies. The latter includes life skills, social sciences, and civic education. Lessons are officially taught in the Myanmar language, and rote learning and group chanting are widespread.

When viewed against the benchmarks of *Education For All* (EFA),[26] to which Myanmar became signatory in 2001, the government system does not yet address the core needs of students or society: enrolment levels are low overall; transition rates from primary to middle school are low, with only a quarter making the transition (and dramatic regional variation); and of the students who do continue through the final year of high school, only 50% pass the matriculation exam.

2.5 Spending in the education sector

There is a widespread perception that the quality of education has declined in recent decades. Although funding has generally been exceedingly minimal for several decades, government financing for education has risen in recent years. In the 2000s, spending as a proportion of GDP fell from 0.4% in 2002-2003 to 0.1% in 2007-2008, before again rising significantly to 0.7% by the end of the decade.[27] Since then, when calculated as a proportion of the total budget, spending has been quite low. According to *Education for All* and the Education Sector Development Plans under the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) Framework which the Myanmar government released in 2004, the recommended level of spending on education should be 6% of GDP. In 2006, Myanmar's spending rate for education was five times lower than the regional average of 3.6%.[28]

For the 2010-2011 academic year, however, the Department of Educational Training and Planning reported a total expenditure, including capital costs, of approximately $231 million.[29] Based on the Department's figure of eight million enrolled students, annual spending per student from the first to final year of high school is roughly $30.[30] [31] In February 2012, the Minister of Finance reported that total expenditure on basic education for the 2012-2013

[26] Not to be confused with the above-mentioned Myanmar Government plan, "Education for All," which was developed by UNESCO, and was adopted by 164 countries in 2000 at Dakar, Senegal. It is comprised of six goals, including "Goal 2: Free and Compulsory Primary Education for All." Along with the Millennium Development Goals, the EFA is a key framework for economic development and poverty reduction through improving education.

[27] Statistics from the Annual Myanmar Laws, published by the Attorney General's Office.

[28] EFA Global Monitoring Report team UNESCO, *Reaching the Marginalized; EFA Global Monitoring Report* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

[29] This is calculated at the exchange rate of the time, which was approximately $1 = 1,000K (2,318,838 Kyats).

[30] Department of Education Planning and Training (January 2011), "Brief Presentation on Basic Education," presented at the Educational Thematic Working Group Meeting, Yangon.

[31] "Standard" is the Myanmar English term equivalent to "grade" in the US and Canadian systems and "year" in the British system.

academic years increased to approximately $757 million, which is 4.9% of the total government budget,[32] while about a year later, Parliament announced a further increase to approximately $1 billion, or 5.8% of the national budget.[33] This figure raises government spending to roughly $94 per student, but given problems with the accuracy of government data in Myanmar, this figure may not be accurate.[34] Salary costs comprise around 80% of the education budget (compared to 70-90% in most developing countries)[35] and capital costs are about 5% of the budget, leaving little for school supplies and maintenance. A further caution is that the education sector has begun to attract more foreign aid, so that as the amount spent on education increases, it will become more difficult to untangle state spending on education from the spending by international agencies.

THREE: Decentralization in Myanmar's Education Sector

3.1 Models and debates

Decentralization—understood as some form of devolution of power, responsibility, and decision-making—has become popular across the world since the 1980s. Governments often embrace decentralization as a strategy to achieve various goals of national reform. In the midst of a reform or transitional process, powerful outside development agencies may recommend or require that recipient countries implement some form of decentralization as a condition to receiving their aid. Stated and unstated goals of decentralization include economic development, increased management efficiency, increasing democratization, and generally improving the quality of education or other services.

The process of decentralization can be applied to nearly any sector, and in some sectors, has the potential to reduce ethnic conflict.[36] Decentralization institutionalizes forms of sub-national governance. In the case of education, this process usually includes policy development, the creation or revision of curricula, student evaluation, rationalizing the allocation of funds, budgeting, generating revenue, and the management of resources. Decentralization does not occur simply through the passage of laws or by fiat.

Organizations such as the World Bank have presented findings from research conducted elsewhere and given recommendations about the process of administrative reform, of which

[32] U Hla Tun, Minister of Finance and Revenue (January 2012).
[33] Ministry of Education, quoted in "Back to School Insert," *The Myanmar Times*. May 2013.
[34] The quality of data in Myanmar is generally quite poor. Moreover, data are often aggregated, making it difficult to assess gaps and variation.
[35] E.M. King, *The Global Economic Crisis, Education, and Development Partnerships*, Keynote Presentation at the HDN-WBI Course on Innovations in Partnerships, 2009, Washington, DC, http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/252243/Keynote%20presentation%2C%20Elizabeth%20King.pdf
[36] Political decentralization may help to curtail such conflict, but is not always successful. Ethnic conflict has been at the heart of the civil war that has been constant since independence, and which in turn has had a deep impact on education, especially in areas that have been controlled by non-state actors. See Dawn Brancati, *Decentralization: Fueling the Fire or Dampening the Flames of Ethnic Conflict and Secessionism* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Institute for Quantitative Political Science, 2005).

decentralization is a central feature.[37] In a 2006 study, for example, the World Bank set improved learning outcomes as the central objective of education reform, and advised that improving the management of the education sector is one way to bring about this reform.[38] Central to this process is improving the ability to make education-related decisions and conduct analytically critical evaluations of the system. To improve learning, the World Bank recommends that a nation address a complex set of needs that go beyond simple administrative and funding capacity. This would include language policy (including the question of mother-tongue education), pedagogy, parent involvement, curriculum and curriculum reform, and education philosophy, which could include articulating what kind of student, citizen, or person the education system aims to nurture.

There is some debate about the purpose of decentralization, and what the best outcomes of it can be. Politically, decentralization in whatever the sector is seen not only as a way to make administration and governance more responsive to the population, more effective, and more accountable for its actions, but also as a way to save money. There are cases where decentralization has been used as an excuse to under- or de-fund the education sector, with the central government "encouraging" lower levels of administration to find funds on their own. In Pakistan, for example, the national-level Ministry of Education was simply closed, with each of the provinces being given responsibility for education. Furthermore, it should be noted that not all forms of centralization are necessarily bad or necessarily connote inefficiency. In many Anglo-American countries, such as the United States which have historically allowed a high degree of local autonomy in education, there are some moves towards greater centralization and standardization. In their examples from Thailand, Mounier and Phasina show that a centralized educational system can be successful in increasing enrollment and retention rates, although not necessarily in improving the quality—difficult to define in any case—of education, especially in rural areas.[39]

The actual type of decentralization – the philosophy, implementation, and outcome – reflect the situation in which the process is undertaken. Overall, there are three major forms of decentralization. *Deconcentration* is the redistribution of decision-making authority and financial and management responsibilities to different levels of the central government.[40] This form of decentralization is the least radical and is the kind most often found in unitary states. As such, deconcentration merely shifts responsibilities from central government officials to those working in regions, provinces, or districts. *Delegation* is a more extensive form of decentralization through which central governments transfer responsibility for decision-

[37] See for example, The World Bank, *Accountability, Governance, and Quality of Decentralized Education in Africa* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2009).
[38] The World Bank, *From Schooling Access to Learning Outcomes: An Unfinished Agenda – an Evaluation of World Bank Support to Primary Education* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2006).
[39] Alan Mounier and Phasina Tangchuang eds., *Education and Knowledge in Thailand: The Quality Controversy* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2010).
[40] These definitions are based on those presented in Jennie Litvack and Jessica Seddon, eds., *Decentralization Briefing Notes* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000), 2.

making and the administration of public functions to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by the central government, but ultimately accountable to it. These organizations include public enterprises and corporations, which usually have significant decision-making authority. In the case of education, this would include private educational institutions. *Devolution* is the transfer of decision-making authority, control over finance, and management to local governments. Devolution usually transfers responsibilities for services to municipalities or other subnational-levels of government that will elect officials and raise revenues.

In the short term at least, deconcentration is the form that decentralization will primarily take in education service provision under the Ministry of Education, given that it falls under Schedule I (sectors in which sub-regional governments have no authority to enact legislation). Currently, private schools and monastic schools operate outside of the purview of the Ministry of Education, and so represent an unexpected example of delegation of administrative, decision-making and budgeting authority.

The Myanmar government has stated that decentralization is a key strategy in educational reform, according to the Framework for Economic and Social Reform (FESR), a national planning document discussed below, which was released in December 2012. Among other things, this document covers basic education for the next five to ten years, and also includes the provision of free textbooks and stipends for poor and exceptional students. This document reveals the intention of the government to work towards some form of sub-national devolution, although how this will be accomplished, the timeframe, and other specifics are not yet clear. In the absence of a comprehensive education policy, decision-making has been governed by what are called "national action plans." The process of decentralization in the Ministry of Education is taking place within the context of a ministry that has been, and continues to be, highly centralized. Currently, the ministry tends to use lower levels of administration to execute tasks such as data collection and collation, holding student examinations, and distributing educational materials. However, lower levels of administrators do not have decision-making authority.

3.2 Decentralization in the context of Myanmar's education reform

As mentioned above, part of the larger context for decentralization in education in Myanmar is the FESR, released in December 2012. This document lists the policy priorities of the Thein Sein government across several sectors, including the economy, environmental sustainability, poverty alleviation, and health and education reform. The FESR provides short-term recommendations as a bridge to the Comprehensive Development Plan, a twenty-year plan which the government is currently drafting. The FESR does not, however, offer a comprehensive vision of reform in the education sector, or a clear articulation of the expected outcomes of the reform process. Rather, it focuses on "quick wins," of which there are nine. One of the "quick wins" of the FESR is changing the funding structure of basic education, as

well as undertaking a Comprehensive Education Sector Review. The FESR addresses the potential for cash to be transferred to lower levels: for school grants, and student stipends, or "conditional cash transfers," which are discussed in detail below.

> *While [the Government of Myanmar] strengthens regulatory policies to streamline various private and community-run educational programs, it is also moving ahead with the decentralization of education management in line with the requirements of the Constitution by integrating locally-designed teaching curriculum as well as non-formal programs in basic education system. This reform policy and strategy will focus on the need to expand the system of basic education from eleven to twelve years, on child-centred teaching methodologies, upgrading teacher training and other curriculum reforms necessary to enhance the quality of basic education, on teacher remuneration and broader issues of education financing, on establishing a rigorous system for education quality assessment and performance, and on further reforms in the management of basic education including the importance of active engagement in the process by the parents themselves. In addition, [the Government of Myanmar] will also pay attention to other supportive measures that can address high drop-out rates and out-of pocket cost burdens on the families.*
>
> -*Framework for Economic and Social Reform*, December 2012, p 28-29.

It is important to note, however, that the FESR and the Thirty-Year National Action Plan on Education are not in harmony. The latter was created under the previous regime and does not address decentralization or devolution, nor the shifting of any administrative or decision-making power to lower levels. However, both of these government plans provide a standard against which to understand the experiences of, and opinions expressed by, officials from the Ministry of Education that were interviewed.

As discussed in greater detail in the section on findings below, decentralization in the education sector is a form a limited deconcentration, as some responsibilities have moved from higher to lower levels. When asked how they understood the term "decentralization" (in Myanmar, the English-language term is used), interviewees answered along the lines of, "The center used to control everything, but now they won't." Most of the discussion had to do with deconcentration—the creation of new levels of administration and providing lower levels of administration with a discretionary budget. Throughout all government administration, perhaps a reflection of the bureaucratic culture, there is limited delegation. Rather, people in positions of power tend to retain their privilege. A move towards greater delegation and deconcentration will happen within that context. Some of the ethnic education systems follow the government curriculum, but the extent to which they are recognized by the central government and the process of recognizing them and providing oversight, is fraught.

Privatization is one element that is commonly part of decentralization, and can be included under the rubric of delegation as decision-making authority and responsibility are fully handled at the level of the school or private company as, for example, in the case of some private schools. A recent change of law has facilitated the registration of private schools, whose number has increased. There are currently sixty-two private schools providing basic education nationwide.[41] Looking elsewhere in the region for possible outcomes of this development, India provides an example of decentralization of education that has resulted in the rapid growth of fee-charging private schools. In India, the growth of private education has great inequity of access and differences in quality.[42] Many of these schools in Myanmar, although legally required to teach the government curriculum, also provide intensive English language instruction as English skills help in gaining entry to higher education and potential jobs abroad. While there is some delegation in the form of allowing private schools and the tacit acceptance of non-state groups providing education through ceasefire agreements. Some scholars researching on other countries have suggested that devolution, rather than delegation, has a better chance for long-term success because it provides for a greater level of continuity during the process of change.[43]

3.3 Decentralization research findings: Overview

The following is a list of the main features of decentralization in education, as revealed in the course of this research. Each point is presented according to theme: *administrative*, which focuses on distributing managerial responsibilities among different levels of government or administration*; fiscal*, or how expenditure responsibilities are assigned and corresponding resources provided; and *political*, which involves the transfer of decision-making and accountability to lower levels of administration.[44]

Administrative

- In terms of administration, a new district *(khayaing)* level was created in 2012. Some decision-making power has been moved up to the district from the township level, although as of this writing, this is more theoretical than actual. This move will shift some responsibilities up one level, and others down from higher levels. Data aggregation will be moved up to the district from the township, while the authority to move teachers from school to school within a district moves down to the district level from the state or region. These changes represent deconcentration: a decision at the Union-level to build up more administrative capacity at a lower level in the administrative structure.[45]

[41] *Union Daily*, 18 June 2013.
[42] Gretchen Cheney *et al*, *A Profile of the Indian Education System: Prepared for New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce*" (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2005).
[43] Mark E. Hanson, *Education Decentralization: Issues and Challenges* (1997), 5.
[44] These definitions are a modification of those of Nixon *et al*. (2013), 4.
[45] Interviews with multiple education officials in Mon State.

- There have been some small changes in terms of appointments. According to the interviewees, in 2013, for the first time in recent memory, region and state-level ministry officials were allowed to appoint one type of teacher: Junior Assistant Teachers, of which there will be 10,000 new appointments in an effort to expand the primary education system. All other teachers continued to be appointed at the Union Level, as is all education-sector leadership.

- Curriculum and assessment were still under central control of the Ministry of Education.

- For decisions related to infrastructure, school repairs and maintenance, the authority remained mixed. Some decisions were made at the Township, others at Departments of Basic Education. Township officers must seek approval from the Departments of Basic Education, apparently skipping the state and region level. More investigation is necessary, especially since these decisions involve potentially lucrative building contracts.

Fiscal

- According to interviewees, budget decisions continued to be made at the Union-level, with no authority delegated to lower levels. A limited, small exception was that starting in 2012, school principals have been given a limited discretionary budget, under which expenses have already been narrowly allocated by type of expense. Principals had no authority to diverge from the pre-set plan and must report up to the Township Education Officer.

- Policies on raising revenue at lower levels were unclear. No entity below the Union-level could approach international donors. In practice, however, the School Welfare Committees or Parent-Teacher Associations of individual schools could raise revenues, as was the case, for example, for emergency repairs through School Welfare Committees or Parent-Teacher Associations. The principal must seek approval from either Township or District Officers. Because local levels had no authority over curriculum or special programs, they could not raise funds for such uses.

- According to interviewees, a program started in 2012 required schools to choose needy students to receive scholarships from the Ministry of Education. The schools must form a committee to evaluate and select the students, typically very low in number, such as four students per school. The schools could not ask for more funding for more students, nor could they move budget allocations from elsewhere to help those students.

Political

- As of the writing of this report in September 2013, regional and state-level *hluttaws* had no authority over education. There appeared to be no formal connection between the Ministry of Education and the regional *hluttaws* and their members. In any case, education falls under Schedule I of the constitution and therefore it is not clear how these *hluttaws* could become involved in education. Several Ministry of Education officials interviewed for this study appeared to view the state legislatures as irrelevant to their work. As one official put it, "They do their own things."

- Below the level of the Union *Hluttaw*, no elected officials play a role in education. All other officials were appointed. Similarly, the authority to appoint teachers and principals lay with the Union Department of Basic Education. No lower-level organizations or committees have authority to make these appointments.

- A few "national education" systems associated with non-state ethnic groups who had reached cease-fire agreements with the central government had created what appear to be viable ethnic education systems, such as the Mon National Schools, which developed out of the New Mon State Party. These systems, however, are not legal and represent an ad-hoc form of accommodation in what could be considered a form of "decentralization through devolution."

3.4 Processes of decentralization in the education sector

The main finding of this research is that as of this writing, there are very limited signs of decentralization happening in the education sector. Much of what the authors observed in their research, and what interviewees described as "decentralization," may be better understood as providing social welfare services, which have been decided at a central level of the Ministry of Education. The provision of these services represent a form of deconcentration, meaning that people at the lower levels have more work and responsibilities, but which give them no greater authority—only more work. Examples are the recently-instituted programs that provide all students with 1,000 Kyat (roughly $1) for enrolling in school, and scholarships for poor students. Another example is the ministry providing a small, "discretionary" budget to be managed by a school's principal. However, as discussed above, this budget is very small and spending categories are pre-determined. The authors examined a budget of one school principal, which showed spending categories such as "ceremonies." The amounts to be spent in each category were pre-determined. Rather than decentralization, another interpretation of these new programs is simply an extension of central control—a further institutionalization of government authority.

Any recent shifts in the administrative habits of governance in education in Myanmar are, in any case, minimal, and must be understood in the context of administrative practices in the Ministry of Education as a whole. Many practices and institutional arrangements within the

ministry are unclear. Authority to implement work tends to flow down from the Ministry of Education to the townships, with little information and feedback flowing back up. Several interviewees did state, however, that they were able to provide suggestions to, and make requests of, higher administrative levels. One state-level official, when asked whether he had any influence over decisions made above him, replied, "They [i.e. higher levels of authority] listen to what I say. Not exactly, but they listen." In this interview and elsewhere, it was not possible to elicit any concrete examples of when suggestions from state, region, or lower-level officials had had an influence on planning or operations.

Administrative practices also appeared to vary between Yangon Region and Mon State. Individuals interviewed for the study seemed to understand their authority and power differently. A school principal in Yangon Region, for example, said that she could approve a special program for her high school but, as a matter of courtesy, she should inform higher-level officials about her plan. She already had one such program in place: students from an international school in Yangon had come to play with the children at her high school. In contrast, a principal in Mon State said that she wanted to start a sports program but was not authorized to do so. These variations in local authority may reflect differences in administrative culture, personal connections, or power relations.

As indicated above, the Ministry of Education has instituted a new level in their administrative structure: district-level administrations, or *khayaing,* have been set up across the country. This new level of administration was explained as bringing the ministry in line with all other ministries; however interviews with newly-appointed District Officers indicated that district offices only aggregate education-related statistical data. Such a role calls into question the extent to which this new level of administration represents a deconcentration of power, rather than simply a greater extension of ministry authority.

The duties and responsibilities of District Officers were not clear either. The office in Yangon Region seemed to be functioning to a greater degree than in Mon State: the latter had only a temporary office, despite having a full staff. The District Officers in both Yangon Region and Mon State had no authority over education budgeting or planning. Their only power was to move teachers within the district.

Another area of apparent change was student stipends and cash transfers. At the central level the government has implemented two projects to increase the number of students who go to school at the primary or elementary level across the country.[46] The first program gave all parents 1,000 Kyats per child when they enroll their child in school. The second program provided a modest stipend to poor children for them to be able to attend school. While the goals of these programs are admirable, some respondents criticized them. Distributing 1,000 Kyats, for example, created new work and responsibilities for school principals and teachers, but gave them no decision-making authority. Some also argued that 1,000 Kyats (the

[46] Interviews with school principals and officials in Mon State and Yangon Region.

equivalent of about $1) is not a significant incentive for parents. In fact, some school principals reported that some parents found that picking up the money was not worth their time or transportation costs. One high-ranking official, quoted a Myanmar proverb to describe the program as "like throwing sesame seeds at an elephant."

The student stipends created more work and responsibility for low-level administrators without carrying any discretionary powers or responsibilities. Township Education Officers were required to form a committee to create the criteria for selection. The committee, in turn, selected the students based on the criteria that they have agreed to. In Mon State, following the centrally-determined procedure, there was money for only four students. The Township Education Officer told us that they were required to use this money only for these four students. She could not, for example, divide up the money in order to help more students, nor could she apply the money in other ways, such as organizing transportation to allow students living far away to come to school. Additionally, this committee did not have the permission to raise outside funds to expand their ability to help more students. Many respondents said that they would like to have the authority to seek funds from local donors to undertake special programs, trainings, and to help more poor students.

A final area of change is the hiring of teachers. As noted above, the government has a plan to hire 10,000 new Assistant Junior Teachers, which appears to be the responsibility of the state and region-level officers, although this was not explicitly stated. These teachers will not have gone through the government-mandated training and certification programs that all other teachers have. One way to interpret this deconcentration of authority is that the lower levels of administration are not being given the authority to hire more qualified teachers. The state officers do not have the authority to train them, which will be undertaken by the central government in conjunction with UNICEF. It is not clear whether the state-level officers will be able to fire these teachers. The hiring and firing of all other teachers remains centralized and follows the established practices. The researchers had assumed that questions about hiring and firing of teachers might elicit responses from the school principals about a desire for greater control over this process. This was not the case. When asked about what they would do with a difficult teacher—someone who was not performing up to expectations—all the principals emphasized their close relationships with their teachers and described how they would encourage an erring individual to change. In the abstract case of a teacher having to be dismissed, the principal would submit a request to a higher level for further action.[47]

In the scholarship on decentralization, there appears to be an assumption that the people lower down will welcome greater increased decision-making authority. A benefit of decentralization, in this understanding, is that people lower down in administration have, and

[47] This process of firing is not necessarily lengthy. A recent report in the *Irrawaddy* describes how a teacher was fired after attending a commemoration of the events of August 8th, 1988. Lewi Weng, "Sacking of Naypyidaw School teacher Draws Condemnation," *Irrawaddy*. August 26 2013, http://www.irrawaddy.org/reform/sacking-of-naypyidaw-schoolteacher-draws-condemnation.html.

see the advantages of, taking on more responsibilities, having greater discretionary authority, and having greater autonomy. Before decentralization, they have responsibilities, but have limited authority over budgeting, decision-making, and ability to influence the policies made higher up. In the interviews, respondents spoke of decentralization in concrete, not abstract terms. No one spoke in terms of fundamentally re-evaluating their roles or administrative processes in the Ministry of Education. Rather, people spoke of wanting more discretionary power in relation to specific matters, while in others they were not eager to take on more authority. What they did and did not ask for reflected their understanding of their roles. In other words, it appeared that for many respondents, to ask for certain kinds of authority would go beyond what they thought of as possible, or desirable for, providing an education. Many seemed to see their role as providing social welfare services, such as helping poor students. One kind of authority that many saw as useful would be for township-level officials and principals to be able to seek outside funding. Interviewees also tended to focus on what, in time, could become possible at lower levels of administration, rather than on what changes they would like to occur at higher levels in the Ministry of Education.

A final point to consider is the education system of the non-state armed groups, and the example examined in this study was that of the Mons. As already discussed, there is not a single education system in Myanmar, and the Ministry of Education is not the sole provider of education. The Mon national education system illustrates some examples of delegating educational authority, as the educational systems of such non-state armed groups have reached an accommodation with the official, national system. The Mon National Education Committee (MNEC) developed out of the New Mon State Party, and is operating largely—though not solely—in areas formerly under the control of the New Mon State Army. The MNEC provides education in a variety of formats, from schools—often monastic schools—they operate wholly themselves, to teaching Mon language and history classes in government-run schools, made possible through informal arrangements. The wholly-operated schools and the Mon-specific programs, including Mon language and history instruction, are funded through non-government sources. Important features of the Mon national school system is that it allows for instruction in a mother tongue other than Myanmar, allows the teaching of a local language and local content, but at the same time, works as a bridge to the government system. Students who pass through the Mon national education system are then, in theory, allowed to transfer into the government system and take the government matriculation exams. Thus the system both satisfies demands for an “ethnic” education, while also promoting an integrated nation.

The MNEC and their system is not, strictly speaking, legal. Myanmar law does not allow any deviation from the standard curriculum, nor is instruction in a medium other than the Myanmar language allowed. The system exists as part of a ceasefire agreement, and the extent to which local government-run schools will accommodate and allow Mon-content programs is not standardized or systematized, but rather a matter of local, ad-hoc, informal arrangements. Nevertheless, to the extent that the Mon national education system is functioning, popular,

and has the support of local communities, it represents an opportunity for promoting greater levels of local autonomy and the devolution of decision-making authority to local communities, starting with ethnic minority groups. This system has already attained a high degree of autonomy, as for example in curriculum, fund-raising, and the hiring of teachers, yet it is not fully or legally recognized by the government system.

FOUR: Research Implications

The following section first considers the institutional culture of the Ministry of Education, with an eye to understanding how current policies and practices are affected by the processes of decentralization. The section below on challenges and prospects points out some of the potential problems that further efforts towards decentralization may face, in addition to the risks to the education system, should there be an increase in outside funding. Reform and political change always carry the risk of causing upheaval and a backlash against those changes. While the purpose of this paper has not been to make policy recommendations, the authors do propose that policies which promote equitable service delivery throughout the country, with adequate funding and guidance, will likely mitigate many of the risks discussed below.

4.1 The institutional culture of education provision in Myanmar

Given that the Myanmar government has not yet articulated the goals or desired outcomes of the educational system through, for example, a coherent national education policy or an education reform policy, this study's description of the institutional culture, or "ethos" of the education sector provides some insight into the shared beliefs, values, goals, and priorities of people working in the Ministry of Education.

Interviewees took their work and responsibilities seriously and were concerned with providing an education to as many children as possible. As alluded to above, government plans often include such vague terms as the following:

> Our Vision: "To create an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age."
>
> Our Motto: "Building a modern developed nation through education."[48]

Interviewees reflected such slogans, speaking of education as a way to advance and develop the nation and the people. There was a widespread concern with being able to provide education to children of poor families. Many spoke in abstract terms about improving or modernizing the nation, but gave little concrete indication of what that would mean in terms of the school system, curricula, or teaching practices. As one principal put it:

[48] Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2012), 1. Here as elsewhere, terms such as "modern" and "developed" are not defined.

> We're bringing up students so that they will try hard. However poor they are, they must be in school. They must try hard. They have to know that they are Myanmar nationals. They must not betray their country. They must love their country. That's how we are raising our students.

When asked about hopes for the future, responses tended towards concrete terms of hopes for filling specific gaps and needs and providing services, rather than articulations of a vision for their individual schools or area. When asked what decentralization could mean for his area, one District-level official replied that it could be a way to find money more easily for extracurricular activities. Another said that he would like control over school construction and the geographic distribution of teachers, but specifically stated that he saw no need for him to be able to make changes to curriculum, teaching, or learning outcomes.

Another aspect of the institutional culture is how individuals view themselves, their institution, and the practices of administration. Respondents did not discuss the possibility of developing policy themselves to achieve specific educational outcomes. As explained earlier, individuals in the Ministry of Education work in a hierarchical, top-down structure. This impacts how they view their ability to make decisions, the authority they have and do not have, what they can and cannot request, and the processes of accountability and responsiveness, both to higher and lower levels of administration. The system requires following precedents and guidelines; to do otherwise carries great risks. In this context, since teachers and administrators do not see themselves as responsible for defining or shaping education, but rather as implementers of the process, answering questions about whether decentralization is desirable, possible, or can be undertaken, fell outside of the scope of what most interviewees were concerned with. As one Education Officer put it, "Over time, decentralization will happen by itself," which indicates that the interviewee viewed the decentralization process as happening outside of the individual and individual efforts, but rather as an abstract concept.

This institutional culture reflects a wider societal discourse related to the importance of being educated, and the importance for children to become educated people. It is not clear, however, what "educated" means, and therefore, it is difficult to understand what the purpose of education is. There was an assumption that if education happened, then everything else would fall in place. In this context, this situation could be interpreted as meaning that the most important goal of education is simply to have students participate in the school system. It is enough for students to be participating in the system, but it is not the place of teachers and other administrators to define what that education is — its goals or desired outcomes.

Given the Ministry of Education's institutional culture, substantive decentralization seems unlikely to happen without individuals reassessing their roles and a more general reassessment of the practices of administration. At least one interviewee recognized this himself, saying, "We need to change ourselves and our habit of obeying and fulfilling the instructions of those above, who tell us what to do." In the current system, there is no accountability to a local constituency, including the students or their parents. The parent-teacher associations and school

management committees that have been set up in recent years do not represent local constituencies. Instead they carry out pre-determined tasks and are usually appointed, not elected. Institutional culture views students as recipients rather than as active participants in the education process. Decentralization, however defined, includes such democratizing features as accountability to, and consultation with, local communities. The example of stipends for poor students could be an opportunity to build these practices, not only within the various levels of the Ministry of Education itself, but between the Ministry officials and members the community.

4.2 Challenges and prospects

Below are several points of correspondence between the findings of this research, on-going and future interventions in education from inside and outside the country, and the potential impacts of these on the education system.

Currently there is a lack of education policy.

There are two different policy frameworks in operation: the Thirty-Year National Plan for Education and the Framework for Economic and Social Reform (FESR), each of which began under different regimes. The government-led Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), currently underway, may result in new policies and priorities. Begun in 2012, it is comprised of three phases: 1) rapid assessment, 2) in-depth analysis, and 3) development of a costed sector plan. The rapid assessment was completed in early 2013 and approved by President Thein Sein, but at the time of writing was not yet publicly available. The CESR effort is led by the Ministry of Education with significant involvement from development partners, notably UNICEF and UNESCO. The CESR's remit is to create a two- and five-year sector plan, rather than a long-term education policy.[49] Without a clearly-articulated policy and a legal framework to launch the reform process, it will be difficult to achieve reforms such as decentralization.

The assignment of education to Schedule I prevents decentralization as well as local responsiveness and accountability.

Education-related decisions are made centrally and executed by officials who are not elected, locally or otherwise. No official, therefore, is accountable to anyone except their superiors within the Ministry of Education. If officials do not represent local interests, the possibilities for devolution, not just deconcentration, may be more limited.

As a result of the restrictions of Schedule I status, even if it were possible over the next few years for state and region governments to become involved in education, it is not clear how the Ministry of Education would work with them. Planning and implementation are roles held

[49] For further description of the CESR, please see Ei Thae Thae Naing, "Education policy in planning stages," *Myanmar Times*, November 18, 2013. http://www.mmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/8816-education-policy-in-planning-stages.html.

by the Ministry of Education, and there are no points of ministry engagement with state- and region-level governments.

Decentralization may exacerbate inequities or shift burdens.

Deconcentrating educational responsibilities may be only a transfer of work and problems, rather than an opportunity to create more responsive systems. Moving the responsibility for funding to lower levels of administration would have a negative impact on poor, rural communities, including ethnic areas which do not have the same access to the same levels of funding as urban schools. Similarly, giving communities responsibility for maintaining school infrastructure would pose difficulties for poor communities. All the schools visited for this research were in well-maintained colonial-era buildings, whereas poorer communities may not even have a school building to begin with. In order to prevent inequities, interventions that promote decentralization must ensure that a good standard of education is provided everywhere. Proper funding, clear planning, and budget guidelines must be central to decentralization for it to succeed.

Non-state "National Schools" present opportunities and challenges for delegation.

Technically speaking, ethnic education systems are not legal. Instead, they operate through tacit agreements with the central government. In ethnic areas, it may serve the best interests of both communities and the government for the Ministry of Education to recognize and integrate such systems into the government system. Such a move would, however, raise further questions about autonomy and control. What would happen if, for example, Mon national teachers were recognized as government teachers, even though they have not undergone government training and certification? The history of poor relations and deep distrust between the central government, the various minority ethnic groups, and their non-state armies, will make negotiating satisfactory solutions difficult.

The Myanmar government has expressed willingness to allow the teaching of ethnic languages outside of school hours in government buildings, which many take as a positive sign of progress on the thorny question of ethnic education. The government may eventually also provide some technical support for creating ethnic-language curricula. If such programs are not handled carefully, with close consultation and collaboration with ethnic leaders, an opportunity for real devolution and creating greater autonomy will be lost. The ethnic education systems in Myanmar are unique not only in the region, but possibly globally—no other country in the region, for example, has accommodated such a highly-articulated non-state education system into its reform process and policy. Whereas India, for example, provides education in local mother tongues, this has been accomplished through government mandate.

Non-state education systems represent an opportunity to build trust in the on-going peace process.

Currently, as there is not yet any political devolution, no authority has been moved legally to lower levels of administration to create the kind of local autonomy that many non-state armed groups seek. If this sort of political power were to be devolved, it is possible that education would be one area that could help build trust in the on-going peace process. By demonstrating successes in local autonomy in education, the fear that such devolution will tear the country apart will recede.

Further research is crucial.

Further research should have a broader geographic and ethnic scope to facilitate greater understanding of ethnic education systems, not only in other ceasefire regions, but in the semi-autonomous regions of the Pa-O and Wa. As yet there is little information on the governing processes in all these regions with regard to education, and thus the extent to which these systems contribute to the advancement of democratic governance is not known. Also, whether these areas want to be, or can be, integrated into an over-arching, nation-wide system, is unknown as it is unknown whether there is any type of locally-responsive education system in ceasefire areas under non-state army control. As more of these non-state areas come into greater association with the central state, these questions will become ever more pressing.

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