

# *I want to be a drop of water that creates an ocean*

## **Youth, Education, and Peacebuilding in Myanmar**

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**54 million people | 119 languages | 135 ethnicities | 55% < 30 years old | 7 million Karen**

### **Background**

As Myanmar transitions to a democracy and continues its national peace process, it is critical to recognize the importance of sustainable peacebuilding. Establishing lasting peace is not merely a question of instituting elections or signing ceasefire agreements.

It is further a question of protecting human rights and the rights of ethnic groups whose rights have been violated in the Myanmar education system since 1962. In part, this requires developing a new generation of youth who view themselves as national citizens in addition to citizens of minority ethnic groups, and who recognize the multicultural and multilingual identity of the nation. This study considers the involvement of youth in Myanmar's peacebuilding, with a specific focus on the Karen group and the Myanmar (national) and Karen (ethnic) education systems.

### **Key Concepts & Literature**

- Johan Galtung: Cultural Violence; Positive Peace
- Jean Paul Lederach: Conflict as social construction
- Ashley South and Marie Lall: Ethnic multilingual education and its impact on the peace process
- Sean Higgins, Elizabeth Maber, Mieke Lopes Cardozo, Ritesh Shah: The Role of Education and Peacebuilding: Myanmar

### **Research Questions**

- How do youth understand peace for themselves and their nation? (How have their educational experiences contributed to this?)
- How do youth think education can be used to create peace? (Could multilingual and multicultural education create this space?)

### **Methodology**

- Qualitative & case study design
- Three participatory based peacebuilding workshops\* for 100+ youth in Hpa'An
- Three semi-structured focus groups in Hpa'An and Yangon: (2) Karen youth; (1) Karen elders
- Seven semi-structured interviews in Hpa'An & Yangon

### **Findings**

- Youth desire to be active participants in Myanmar's peace process
- Dissatisfaction with Myanmar education system/educational experiences
- Integration of Karen culture, history, & language: benefits and challenges
- Decentralization of education system

### **Recommendations**

- Myanmar national education system revision to include other perspectives of histories, languages, cultures
- Opportunities for youth involvement
- Recognition of Karen ethnic education system
- National curricula representing ethnic groups



### **\*Peacebuilding Workshop Outline**

- What is peace?
- Group skits: Actions that represent peace
- How can we create peace in Myanmar?
- How can we use education to create peace?
- "Strong Arm Exercise"