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DOI
10.1007/978-3-319-93812-7_12

Publication date
2019

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Sustainable Peacebuilding and Social Justice in Times of Transition

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Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Maber, E. J. T., Lopes Cardozo, M., & Higgins, S. (2019). Drawing Conclusions: The Role of Education in Moving Towards Sustainable Peace in Myanmar. In M. T. A. Lopes Cardozo, & E. J. T. Maber (Eds.), *Sustainable Peacebuilding and Social Justice in Times of Transition: Findings on the Role of Education in Myanmar* (pp. 251-261). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93812-7_12

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Chapter 12
Drawing Conclusions: The Role of Education in Moving Towards Sustainable Peace in Myanmar

Elizabeth J. T. Maber, Mieke Lopes Cardozo, and Sean Higgins

Introduction

Given the persistence of conflicts in multiple regions of the country, the increase in violence in Rakhine State, the continuing accounts of atrocities and human rights abuses, and the hundreds of thousands who remain displaced both within and across Myanmar's borders, it may seem somewhat optimistic to speak of achieving sustainable peace in the country at present. However, the intention of this work has been to indicate the potential role for education to support efforts to move towards peace and the pitfalls that exist that may undermine peacebuilding efforts. The research presented in this collection has focused on areas of the country – Mon State and the broader Yangon area – that may be considered closer to a post-conflict context, precisely in order to examine the opportunities and the challenges that education initiatives encounter in the aftermath of conflicts and as political transitions are negotiated.

This concluding chapter aims to draw together reflections on the findings of the chapters and indicate potential ways to move forward. Towards the end of our period of data collection for the research in January 2016 members of the Amsterdam and Myanmar-based team facilitated a series of workshops in both Yangon and Mawlamyine. The intention of these workshops was to share initial findings of the research and to work collaboratively with research participants and other key stakeholders to develop some suggestions for ways forward. The results of these discussions are presented here in relation to the three main thematic areas of the research: (1) integrating education reforms and peacebuilding at the level of policy formation

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© Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2019

M. T. A. Lopes Cardozo, E. J. T. Maber (eds.), *Sustainable Peacebuilding and Social Justice in Times of Transition*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93812-7_12

and implementation; (2) supporting teachers to foster teaching and learning environments conducive to building peace; and (3) supporting the socio-cultural, political and economic agency of youth in peacebuilding. While these reflections emerged from a time of political uncertainty about the process of transition in the wake of the NLD's election victory, they continue to hold resonance as peace processes and education reform processes have gradually advanced, yet remain unresolved.

The chapter then reflects on the application of the '4R' framework that has supported the analysis across the chapters. The potential opportunities to address root causes of inequalities and social injustices in education are summarised in relation Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Reconciliation, emphasising the interconnections between these dimensions and the importance of complimentary efforts to ensure greater equality and ultimately contribute to a more sustainable peace. A strength of the findings of all chapters is their emergence from research partnerships developed between "northern" and Myanmar researchers at each stage of the research process, from joint decision making on data collection through to analysis, writing and dissemination. This edited collection therefore has greatly benefitted from the scholarly collaboration and distinctive form of knowledge production resulting from the participation of all the contributors to the research. Constrained by a historically restrictive environment for research, such collaborations have been difficult until quite recently, and it is hoped that opportunities will continue to expand to promote increased scholarly partnerships.

Consolidating Findings and Ways Forward

In Yangon two workshops were held: the first was conducted in the UNICEF country office with 27 participants and representatives from civil society organisations, education practitioners, policymakers and activist groups, national and international NGOs, UN agencies and other international agencies. The second was held with 13 youth respondents who participated in the case studies included in the research and programme facilitators working with these initiatives. In Mawlamyine, 2 workshops were held, 1 with 30 teachers and township education officers from across Mon State, and the second with 16 youth respondents and programme facilitators that participated in the Mon-based case studies.

The aim of each workshop was twofold. One was to validate the findings from the draft country report, and in particular how viewpoints and programmes were represented. The second was to co-construct ideas on ways forward from these findings, if the goal is to achieve a sustainable peace for the country. To do this, youth and teachers were asked to visually represent (in small groups) the types of changes that needed to happen at a number of different scales/levels, and who would be responsible for these changes – starting from the individual (self) and moving outwards to the international. With the policymakers' workshop hosted by the UNICEF country office in Yangon, similar questions were asked but responses were individually written on a feedback form. From this, discussions were held where

participants were asked to identify where education in particular might figure as part of transformation processes. Both the activities and the subsequent discussions helped to shape the ideas noted below.

It is important to note that in these workshops and within the discussions presented here the research team has steered away from using the term "recommendations". What is provided below are ideas on how an agenda for building a sustainable peace within and through education could be better realised. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive, and should be taken as areas for consideration rather than prescribed steps for change.

Considering the Role of Education in and Within Peacebuilding Processes

It is acknowledged that education reform since 2011 has taken place in a highly politicised arena driven by various and competing interests. Nonetheless, this resulted in peacebuilding principles being notably absent from key reforms, such as the CESR, the National Education Law (2014), and the NESP which was in draft form at the time. Following the 2015 parliamentary elections, new opportunities have emerged to make inclusion, conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding central pillars for further reform. However, there remain uncertainties about the prospects of capitalising on this opportunity, as significant political constraints remain (as detailed in Chaps. 4 and 5). There has been a stark divide between the national peace process and the process of education reform, and this appears to be continuing despite a more recent renewal of peacebuilding rhetoric (addressed in Chap. 3). This leads to a lack of understanding, particularly amongst those involved in the education sector, of the important grievances held by a wide range of non-state actors on matters of recognition and representation within and through education. The result has been a focus on redistribution as a primary broker for building a peace dividend as part of reform. As ways forward:

(a) Educational actors need to better understand the key grievances of the multitude of non-state actors and civil society to formulate appropriate policy responses.
(b) On the side of the (inter-)national peacebuilding community, there needs to be greater acknowledgement of the foundational importance of equitable social service delivery, in arenas such as education and health, that is both quantitatively and qualitatively supporting the construction of a sustainable peace.
(c) For both the international community and the national government, there is a need to move education reform beyond the modernisation – and economically focused – paradigm, and to situate it with a process of building a citizenry that is inclusive and reconciliatory (in the long-run).

To date, despite claims that educational policymaking processes have been made more transparent and representative of a variety of viewpoints, there remains a

strong sense that such consultation is tokenistic in nature and exclusionary. Many continue to feel alienated and/or ignored in their claims for change, and resulting in widespread protests, as was evidenced following passage of the National Education Law in 2014. Venues for more effective engagement and participation in processes of education reform need to be considered, to avoid the creation of new grievances, as was highlighted in Chap. 5.

As also discussed further below, the gendered experiences and outcomes of schooling for boys and girls must be better considered at all levels of education reform and implementation. Quantitative data on gender parity and participation rates continues to mask significant inequities when it comes to how boys and girls are treated and valued in the classroom and their communities. Current education practices do not prepare girls to take on positions of leadership or to challenge traditional gender roles and inequalities. While women's participation in politics and policymaking, and representation in parliament and within the Ministries, has increased with the 2015 election, it continues to be low at roughly 10%[1] (Macgregor 2015) and remains a priority for women's rights activists and civil society leaders to ensure gender inequalities are addressed within reform initiatives. To ensure the adequate representation and recognition of women's voices in administrative and policy-making roles in education, avenues for the promotion of women into key decision-making roles in the education sector need to be strengthened. Likewise, more could be done to uptake principles of positive masculinity and address the myriad forms of gender violence that persist in the country.

Finally, ongoing developments in the policy for language of instruction in classrooms are crucial. Language is seen as central to the identity of various ethnic groups within the country, and the inability for children to learn and use their mother tongues in schooling has been a long-standing grievance of these groups. In early 2016 reforms had only moved as far as supporting an additive model of language policy (i.e. teaching of ethnic language as an additional subject) which may do little to better support children's learning and acknowledge past grievances. Ultimately it is critical that children across the country are able to enter into school and gain literacy in their mother tongue first.

Supporting the Role of Teachers, and Teaching/Learning to Foster Peacebuilding

The fragmented, piecemeal nature of teacher training provision (pre and in-service) to date has the potential to cause or exacerbate inequalities in terms of qualifications of those entering into the various sectors, career prospects, and the pedagogical

[1] This figure takes into account the 25% of parliamentary seats reserved for Military appointees, amongst which there are two female appointees. The number of women rises to 14.5% of MPs elected to the Union Parliament, and 12.5% of MPs elected to State and Regional Parliaments when excluding the non-elected Military appointees (Ninh 2016).

knowledge they are equipped with during their careers. From a peacebuilding perspective, particularly in regards to redistribution and recognition, teacher education could benefit from greater coherence and logic, with particular attention to the constraints within which teachers work.

Opportunities to bring teachers together across the various sectors could be increased. As outlined in Chap. 7, programmes like SITE and Head Teacher Training in Mon State have opened spaces for dialogue between educators working in the state, ethnic and monastic systems, and increased understanding of the shared challenges and dilemmas teachers within both systems face. However, such encounters need to be carefully managed, as they will bring to bear ongoing inequities which exist within the current system. As revealed in Chaps. 7 and 8, teachers are acutely aware of the inequalities that exist in terms of the resourcing and distribution of learning materials (such as textbooks or school uniforms). This forms a significant grievance. Positive steps, such as the training of township education officers and head teachers in Mon State, are working to raise awareness of this issue, and potentially serve to rectify the situation. This is dependent on state resources being made freely available to township education officers to redirect to schools and sectors that have been previously neglected. It is critical from a peacebuilding standpoint therefore, that promises of change are followed by meaningful action.

Similarly, the recent decision to increase salaries of state teachers has the potential to improve the status and self-worth of the teaching profession. There are, however, some important unintended negative consequences which could create new grievances. For one, it appears to be creating a greater divide in the status of state versus non-state educators. Additionally, it may also drain non-state schools of their most qualified and/or experienced teachers, as teachers are attracted towards the state sector. It is suggested that policies that aim to redistribute resources related to teaching and learning (such as the so called 'Quick Wins' discussed in Chap. 5) better consider consequences in terms of equity within and across the various education sectors.

There is also perhaps a danger that in the urge to draw on so-called international best practice from OECD countries in the content of teacher trainings and teacher education reform, the valuable, contextual knowledge and practical wisdom of current teachers working in diverse communities within the country may be side-lined. Given the distinctive challenges faced by the country's teachers, the development of teacher education curricula, while drawing on cross-national insights, should also build directly on local teacher knowledge, experience and examples of good practice. Crucially, teachers' agency should be respected and honoured in the new curriculum that is devised. Examples emerged in the research, as explored in Chap. 6, of how teachers are presently mediating content they perceive as divisive and exclusionary. Ideally, curriculum reform should provide teachers with a greater sense of autonomy to contextualise content to reflect their students' backgrounds and needs. Simultaneously, the reform process should provide sufficient guidance and support through resources and training, to effectively incorporate principles of peacebuilding – namely reducing inequality, accepting diversity, meaningful participation and building trust/cooperation (i.e. the 4Rs) – across all areas of the curriculum, rather

than as a separate content area. It will also necessitate reform of the examination-based assessment system, and the consolidation of an overcrowded curriculum.

Significant issues remain in how teachers are deployed and managed within the state system and at the school level. This leads to concerns in terms of the distribution of qualified and appropriate personnel, and recognition and representation of community demographics and demands. Specific to initial deployment, greater consideration must be given to the needs of particular communities, as well as the qualifications, experience, background, and obligations (such as family) of individual teachers. Schools and townships across the country should maintain a standard *teacher:student* ratio that needs to be regularly monitored, with processes of deployment/redeployment responding to changes in enrolment numbers. This needs to be done in a transparent fashion. Likewise, important consideration must be given to the ability of teachers to instruct in the mother tongue(s) represented in the school.

As the research collected here indicates, there are attempts to centralise aspects of teacher management, particularly on matters such as the competency frameworks and qualification standards. At the same time, there are concerns that bridging the parallel systems and offering greater standardisation may not acknowledge the particular needs, challenges and expected roles of teachers vis a vis their communities. In the validation workshop in Mon State, teachers identified that aspects such as teacher accountability might be better managed within the profession itself, and ideally at the level of the school or township. At the school level itself, school leaders and township education officers should (be made able to) ensure that teachers' time and skill levels are being efficiently and effectively utilised across all grades.

Finally, appropriate school facilities, specifically adequate and clean toilets/running water, child-appropriate learning spaces, sports/recreation areas, should be made available to all students and teachers in Myanmar, even more for those outside the state system. There are currently significant challenges in terms of making schooling accessible to all, which exacerbates inequalities from a redistribution standpoint and fails to recognise the needs of students and teachers to feel safe in their learning environments. The school mapping exercise undertaken by the government in coordination with its development partners is a positive first step, particularly if it is able to cover the entire country and maps schools within and across the various sectors. This will need to be followed by the appropriation of adequate resourcing to areas of greatest need, irrespective of sector or locale.

Supporting the Socio-cultural, Political and Economic Agency of Youth in Peacebuilding

Policy and practice must move beyond considering youth as a singular entity, and better acknowledge the distinctive, contrasting priorities of various youth constituencies whose lived realities are rooted in families and communities. In responding to diverse needs and demands, care should be taken to carefully examine if and how

some constituencies might be privileged, or how some peacebuilding agency dimensions (e.g. enhancing economic or civic participation) might be prioritised over others, despite the desire of some youth for the strengthening of socio-cultural agency, or inter-cultural cohesion.

Similarly, there is a strong desire and need for increased physical and virtual spaces available for youth to learn and connect both formally and informally. Such spaces can provide opportunities for young people to come together, build bridges and foster mutual understanding. However, the creation of these spaces – such as youth centres, libraries, community meeting places, and online forums – can be problematic and should be sensitive to the dangers of over-privileging one group over another. Merely increasing access or redistributing access to such spaces may not serve (i.e. represent) the needs of all youth actors. Consideration should be given to who is perceived to be directing and/or funding such initiatives, which voices are dominant and which youth may feel excluded.

There is a need for greater representation of diverse youth voices in political processes at multiple scales and this is accompanied by a need for greater policy development for youth related issues. At the national political level, youth have a history of and continued desire to engage in political activity – which has often been marginalized or violently obstructed. Moving forward, youth expressed a need for policy-makers to recognize and act upon their demands and grievances in non-violent, democratic and meaningful ways, an observation that was similarly reflected in a report by Paung Sie Facility (2017). The developments of the NLD government in formulating a National Youth Policy and inviting youth representatives to participate in renewed peacebuilding dialogues are positive steps to engage young people in addressing the issues that concern them (Phyo 2016; PSF 2017). Youth participation in these consultation processes have also further underlined the prioritisation of education amongst young people's concerns (Phyo 2016). The historic absence of inclusion of youth within reform processes, however, remains a concern for the enactment of education reforms such as the NESP. Additionally, it remains critical that such efforts are representative of diverse youth voices and that consultation processes are followed up with actions that address the concerns raised (Min 2016). At the community-level, youth engagement in community decision-making mechanisms, and within the diverse spaces and contexts they occupy in community structures, must be enhanced if their potential agency is to be fully realised. Likewise, the findings presented in Chaps. 9, 10 and 11 illustrate how (formal and non-formal) education can contribute to youth political empowerment by equipping them with knowledge and understanding of political processes. However, existing social norms and intergenerational hierarchies can limit the extent to which youth participation is able to move beyond a tokenistic role. There is a need to provide youth with the adequate tools to participate, and create open, meaningful, and effective avenues for their perspectives to be heard and authentically considered at the national as well as community levels.

In the reform of the formal education systems, attention needs to be paid to the need to ensure relevance of both content and learning experiences. Youth respondents expressed a strong desire for a system that equips them for broad engagement with life

and work, would include critical thinking skills, civic, political and media literacy, and that was responsive to their daily realities and challenges. There was also a desire for conflict resolution skills to be integrated into educational provision. The need for education to provide youth with skills for work, linked to labour market opportunities was also emphasised. Ethnic minority youth expressed a strong concern for the need to have their cultural and linguistic identities recognised and protected. Language of instruction and the teaching of history were key aspects of the curriculum in which this could be taken up. Additionally, the impact of gender, sexual orientation and sexual health and reproductive rights require greater consideration within and throughout education experiences and interventions. Education systems are not equipping girls and other marginalised groups of youth with leadership and critical thinking skills to address and interrogate social and cultural hierarchies and prejudices. This undermines their participation in the peace processes and political leadership. The system also currently fails to equip boys with critical thinking to enable them to question patriarchal norms that may condition their behaviour.

There is a need for a greater variety of flexible and continued learning opportunities responding to the diverse needs of different youth constituencies. Recognising the different positions, experiences and educational trajectories of youth, there should be greater opportunities for non-formal vocational education, continuing opportunities to reskill, and routes back into (formal) learning for those with interrupted learning trajectories. Such diverse provision would also require state support for systematic recognition and accreditation. Particular strengths exist in non-formal educational initiatives for youth which could be built upon by both the formal and non-formal system. These strengths include their recognition of pre-existing youth agency and experiences, and their ability to attend and respond to their diverse contexts and challenges. Nevertheless, non-formal education initiatives are not a panacea or alternative to reforms of formal schooling, considering its more inclusive reach amongst a wider, and more diverse range of youth consistencies in the future.

Reflecting on Applying the 4Rs in Myanmar

As various stakeholders and research participants were familiarised with the 4Rs framework in Myanmar, it became apparent that many saw it as a useful heuristic tool for conceptualising the various domains by which peacebuilding could be viewed. Applied to education specifically, many could make clear links to issues of redistribution, representation, recognition and reconciliation and ways that the sector had or could respond to these imperatives. Building on Fig. 2.2 that visualised the various connected relations between the 4Rs in a pyramid shape (Chap. 2), we now provide some concrete reflections on the ways in which choosing to prioritise one R over another could lead to unintentional consequences and unforeseen trade-offs.

As an example, the Quick Wins programme has stressed the redistributive side of peacebuilding, and in particular sought to secure peace dividends by expanding service delivery. Yet, in doing so, and deploying new teachers to some of the more

conflict-affected and remote areas of the country, it may signal a lack of recognition of the historical grievances held by ethnic groups regarding issues such as the inclusion of cultural identity in schooling. Such a policy also lacks in representation by failing to ensure that the teachers deployed reflect the background and aspirations of the communities they serve, and instead, places the teachers themselves in vulnerable positions.

Likewise, the desire for rapid visible changes (driven by a focus on supporting redistribution through more effective and equitable education service delivery) sits uneasily with desires to make current reforms representative of diverse stakeholders' viewpoints and aspirations for education. The pace of reform, particularly during the Thein Sein presidency, resulted in consultation processes being judged by many as symbolic rather than substantive, and created a public perception that not all viewpoints are equally valued. Many groups continue to feel "unrecognised" in the new reforms, despite their promise of representing a broader range of the country than before, which (unintentionally) carries the danger of undermining rather than supporting processes of trust-building and reconciling past and present grievances.

Myanmar has been following a liberal peacebuilding thesis, one which presupposes that by redistributing opportunity (i.e. improving educational access), faith in the state can be restored. This assumes that it is matters of redistribution which matter most to the country's citizenry. What was heard from stakeholders we engaged with, however, was that issues of representation and recognition were equally if not more important to them as needing immediate addressing. In particular, concerns about the irrelevance of the current education system to the needs of its stakeholders, the lack of responsiveness of the state to constituency demands, and the lack of perceived control over key decisions in education, were voiced quite vocally in the various workshops held in January. Without acknowledging this, processes of meaningful reconciliation remain absent from the peace being built in the country.

In sum, a clear dialogue needs to occur between the various 4R's dimensions for them to effectively inform the design and implementation of approaches towards supporting and sustaining peace in the country at present. Attention must be paid to where matters of representation, recognition, redistribution and reconciliation can be worked on concurrently in all four moments of education (Robertson and Dale 2015 – as introduced in Chap. 2), and in relation to the broader cultural political economy context, rather than isolating or focusing on one R only – or the education sector as an isolated arena. The table below (Table 12.1) therefore presents further opportunities for changes within the education system to reduce inequalities, understanding that actions are complimentary, and if taken independently may fail to adequately address injustices.

These opportunities for avenues to address social justice within education structures indicate the deeply political nature of education provision. Likewise the analysis indicates the need to reconceptualise the relationship between education and the realm of the political, moving beyond a presentation of "politics" as confined to ministerial processes of reform or, within the classroom, to teaching subjects such as civics. Rather, the research has revealed the impact and infusion of politics across education settings, grounded in local realities that are varied and evolving, and

Table 12.1 Applying the 4Rs

Applying the 4Rs: potential opportunities to address root causes of inequalities and social injustices in education	
Redistribution (addressing inequalities)	Decentralised teacher deployment, responding to the needs of communities, schools, students and teachers
	Adequate salaries for all teachers, reducing disparity between schools
	Equitable distribution of resources in schools, such as teaching materials and facilities, including sanitation and hygiene facilities
	Access and resources for disabled students and staff in schools
	Equitable learning outcomes for students across and with the different schooling systems
	Equal opportunities for promotion within education structures, including for women, ethnic and religious minorities
Recognition (respecting difference)	Opportunities for learning in mother tongue and managed transition to national language
	Analytical skills and critical thinking rather than rote learning and memorisation
	Inclusive pedagogy and varied teaching approaches to accommodate diverse learning styles
	Equal entrance grade requirements for women and men in tertiary education
	Availability of sex education and information on healthy sexual practice, including recognition of sexual orientation and gender identity expressions
	Absence of gender, religious and cultural bias, including through practices in schools and acknowledging diversity within the curriculum – in particular reducing the glorification of male military violence and heroism in the curriculum
Representation (encouraging participation)	Removing barriers to meaningful participation by focusing on:
	Political representation of diverse women and men across levels of government and ministerial departments
	Participation of diverse women and men, including female and male teachers, in education policy formation and consultation processes
	Representative school-based management and avenues for involvement in decision-making processes, including for teachers, parents and students
Reconciliation (building trust and cooperation)	Promoting non-violent classroom management and addressing bullying and violence within schools, whether committed by students, teachers or administrative staff
	Building vertical and horizontal trust within the school community, including through teaching practices and curricula that promote discussion, inclusion and respect between identity-based groups
	Using history teaching as an opportunity to learn about the past, its relevance for the present and new imaginaries of the future, and to understand differing viewpoints
	Creating spaces for peer learning, amongst students and amongst teachers and administrators in different school settings
	Trust building in reform process that is gender sensitive and inclusive

suggests a more micro-level awareness of where politics is enacted and experienced. Of vital importance is confronting education's role in addressing prejudice and processes of othering across these levels of interaction. Historic and current conflicts have been deeply motivated by fear and hostility towards different identity-based groups, and counterbalancing such pervasive mistrust necessitates sustained efforts across the dimensions of inequalities.

The wide array of findings presented in the chapters of this edited volume paint a complex picture, not only with regards to how we could further explore the multiple dimensions of education's potential positive and negative contributions to peacebuilding processes at multiple levels, yet also in terms of the complexity of possible responses and approaches that are constructive, inclusive and geared towards a creative imagining of a more socially just future. We have steered away consciously from all too prescriptive "recommendations" as highlighted above, yet in doing so, we do hope that the level of detail and range of voices represented in this volume might contribute to continued informed debates about Myanmar's future. We see a crucial need to view education as an indispensable and holistic part and parcel of any peacebuilding intervention, be it at micro, meso or macro levels of discussion and action. Here lies a crucial role for continuous research being undertaken by and in collaboration with young female and male students, teachers and Myanmar researchers with a stake and needed expertise in the various education systems. Serious investments in such studies, to inform and shape policies and practice, is needed in order to ensure addressing and limiting the unintended negative consequences of unequal and exclusive educational processes, while rather enabling the potential of education for peacebuilding to support Myanmar towards a more socially just and peaceful future.

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