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Chapter 5
Education and Policy Challenges of a Situation in Flux

Ritesh Shah, Khin Mar Aung, and Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo

Introduction

Concerns about the country's education system, set against the backdrop of Myanmar's current process of economic and political change, have spurred what many argue is the most significant reform package in education to date. Initiated in 2011, and followed by a comprehensive review of the entire education sector in the following 3 years, a new national Education Law was passed initially in 2014, and subsequently amended in 2015. This was followed in 2016 by the passage of a new 5-year education strategic plan which presents a costed approach for achieving the significant ambitions of the reform package in cooperation with the country's development partners. In the latter parts of this process, the NLD assumed control of the civil government, but maintained and supported the momentum which had occurred under their predecessor government. Some small changes, particularly in terms of implementation were made. This was particularly true on matters of language of instruction. Some of the key shifts are discussed in subsequent sections.

Important about this strategy is that it takes a long-term, developmental view to reforming Myanmar's education sector. It does not mention or acknowledge the ongoing conflict occurring in parts of the country. It also fails to recognise ongoing tension in Rakhine State which at the time this chapter was drafted, had led to a large-scale humanitarian crisis as hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled

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into Bangladesh to escape state-sponsored violence against them. The reason for the absence of such discussions in the reform texts is discussed in more detail later on in the chapter.

The major part of the chapter traces the evolution of the reform process in terms of its justificatory narrative, and the ways in which the reforms acknowledge and redress grievances of the past. A key argument made throughout this chapter is that on the surface (and using different yet connected terminology) claims are made to notions of redistribution, representation and recognition—particularly towards recognised ethnic minority groups—yet the substance of the reforms is largely one which some might argue is devoid of actual recognition of the country's history and conflict-affected context. Reasons why this might be the case and the competing actors involved are explored, and we identify the various interests involved in shaping these reforms.

It is important to note that the bulk of data collection and analysis that occurred in the writing of this chapter occurred in 2015, prior to the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) being finalised and adopted by the new government. Several references are made to the draft NESP which was completed in early 2015. Interestingly, what was observed when comparing the draft to the final version of the NESP from 2016 was an even further elimination of references to conflict, peacebuilding and social cohesion. For that reason, in parts reference is made to the draft, rather than final version—because these quoted texts no longer exist in the final version. The deletion of this material says something in itself about the idea of "peacebuilding being everywhere and nowhere"; a concept that is explored more explicitly later on in the chapter. Drawing on a combination of the draft and final NESP also provides a foundation for discussing the policy making process in more depth.

Impetus and Drivers of Current Education Reform in Myanmar

In his inaugural speech on 30 March 2011, former President U Thein Sein committed the government to a wholescale reform of the education sector as part of a broader package of reforms that aimed to herald the country's transition to a liberal democratic state. The Framework for Economic and Social Reform (November 2012) subsequently set out a policy framework for reforms to the education system that would consider issues of access, quality and management within all levels of the sector. In February 2012, the Ministry of Education (MoE) agreed to undertake a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) as a response to this agenda.[1] It was argued in the Terms of Reference for the review that it was,

[1] With impetus for the review coming from the President's office rather than the Ministry itself, overlaps in perceived responsibilities and tensions in agendas and motivations have been a feature of the reform process since its instigation.

> …required in order to ensure that there is a full and comprehensive understanding of the current status of education in Myanmar, regarding access and quality across the sub-sectors; as well as current strengths and gaps in policy, capacity, management systems, financing and partnership. This will support the implementation of priority reforms and the assessment of realistic policy options to form the basis of a costed, strategic education sector plan. These, in turn, have the potential to address the challenges and greatly accelerate progress towards realisation of Myanmar's education and socio-economic goals. (MoE 2012, 2)

The primary rationale for this reform has been and continues to be driven by an imperative to 'modernise' an education system that is perceived to be antiquated and irrelevant to Myanmar's current position in the regional and international global political economy. Specifically, Myanmar's 'democratisation' as well as accession into ASEAN have led to a desire to construct citizens and a state that are perceived to be able to participate in this new political economy. Education is perceived as a key vehicle for doing so. According to one international interviewee:

> The generals realised they were going to join the outside world, and that they were part of an education system that wasn't preparing anybody for it…and therefore they saw [reform] as key for becoming like their ASEAN partners. (int. 10)

The language of modernisation is inherent in the Ministry of Education's vision and motto which are to ensure that the country's education system, "promotes a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age" and that it helps to build "a modern developed nation through education", respectively (MoE 2012, 1). This is also reflected in the rationale for the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) and ensuing development of the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP). The CESR, for example specifies that through this review and the development of a new education sector plan, opportunity will be afforded to "greatly accelerate progress towards realisation of Myanmar's education and socio-economic goals" (MoE 2012, 1). According to a separate ADB report:

> The education reform strategy and development plan sits within a national development process that is focused on poverty alleviation, rural development and decentralization. (2013, 6)

Related to this, the draft National Education Strategic Plan's chapter on access, quality and inclusion stresses the importance of improving inclusive access to quality education provision from a human capital and economic development paradigm. Specifically, the chapter, citing research from the World Bank, argues that improving access will: "…have a high impact on poverty reduction although its impact will not be realized in the short-term" (3).

In sum, the key driver for reforms at present is focussed on improving educational service delivery to ensure that the education system promotes, rather than hinders, broader macro-economic reform processes. As described by one individual involved in the CESR process, the consolidation and focus on improving service delivery, rather than considering the function of education in promoting peacebuilding or even a peace dividend was because it was a politically 'neutral' focus that all sides could agree on. This person believed that, "*improving teaching and learning in schools/getting textbooks to students and better management of schools… they*

are exactly the same [in terms of competing interests from different stakeholders around reform]… they are not going to deviate too much…in terms of a setting of the policy agenda" (int. 8). Another international consultant believed that while inherent in the drive to improve access and quality of the education system is the ability to broker a peace dividend between citizens and the state, the lack of visible manifestation of such language meant that peacebuilding was, "*everywhere and then it's like nowhere*," in the current process unfolding (int. 79). The consequences of this *implicit peacebuilding rationale* are further explored in both this chapter as well as those on teachers and youth.

Contestations and Challenges in the Lead Up to the New Education Strategic Plan

Competing or Aligned Agendas?

One of the key principles stressed when the CESR first began was a desire to ensure a level of coherence and coordination within and between CESR activities and other policy reforms and initiatives in the sector. The Terms of Reference specified that, "Over the time period of the CESR, it is anticipated that there will be many other inter-related processes taking place…the CESR will synergise with and tap into these wider processes as far as possible" (MoE 2012). In addition, given the multiple actors and sub-sector studies that would be carried out as parts of each phase of the CESR, there was a promise that strong coordination would ensure that a clear and consistent purpose was shared across these activities.

Yet, with 72 consultants (national and international) and 19 different sub-sector studies carried out in Phase 1 alone, coordination has proven to be a particularly difficult challenge despite the intentions highlighted above. It was noted by one international donor staff that the significant number of individuals and agencies involved required, "*a [full-time] coordinator…drawing up an Excel spreadsheet of consultants that were coming in and were going out…[it was] an absolutely huge logistical challenge*" (int. 79). A consultant working within the early stages of the reform process also felt that the entire process has been,

> …very haphazard and poorly organized… with no clear conceptual framework…well they had a rapid assessment which set the stage but I didn't get the sense from that that there was a lot of strategy and thinking around … [it] should have led to a clear road map and agenda but they went into phase 2 which involved a much larger number of studies that were even more disparate in nature. (int. 8)

This lack of coherence and a clear conceptual framework also meant that when it came to prioritising activities within and between the various sub-sectors, vested interests came in the way of coherence. The same respondent noted that:

> we have got some subsectors [which are] heavily influenced by lots of donors involved and its quite messy because they have contrasting opinions and things and pull government colleagues in different directions. (int. 8)

A similar tension has also existed between the CESR process and other policy initiatives in the education sector. Driving much of this tension has been a desire amongst those in government to make some quick visible changes to the education sector—referred to as the "quick wins", and the CESR's desire to support a process of systemic, sustainable reform. One interviewee felt that,

> there was this tension between the long-term sustainable sector planning and the strategic process, based on evidence and [the desire of politicians for] we want something now. (int. 79)

The CESR process aimed to develop a strong evidence-base and use such evidence to drive policy decision-making. The use of data, and particularly the employment of evidence-based decision-making was driven by a belief, particularly amongst the international community, that doing so would result in greater transparency, and force issues to be decided on the basis of data, rather than political agendas. While theoretically, this rationalist and technical approach may have allowed decisions about the (re)distribution of resources to be more equitable, those involved in the process believed that this approach may have been "politically naïve", particularly, *"…to think that in this currently highly charged environment politicians can wait two years...there was a need to show some concrete results intermediate along the way*" (int. 79).

There was a sense that the multiple actors, actions and interests involved in the reform led to situation by 2015–2016, where the desire for rapid, visible change precluded the initial aim of CESR—which was to provide a comprehensive, coherent view. As one individual working on the sidelines of the reform processes at that time noted,

> …It feels a little overwhelming in terms of the amount of change which is underway and the depth of that change that is being undertaken…so although the broad Education Law has been passed now all of the bylaws, rules, regulations, subsections…they're all called different things… they're being written like mad….with all this frenzy...I think the speed and pressure for reform is compromising the ability to get really good work done. (int. 4)

This sentiment was reiterated by another respondent who felt that the intense drive to produce new policies was frustrating efforts to ensure coherence between the different pieces of action occurring:

> This is something we keep telling [the Ministry]…make sure that your subsector laws match with the Education Law …but also match between themselves… make sure that they match with your [long term goals]…and make sure the NESP is aligned to them… that's why the NESP is also a bit late compared to what was foreseen …and now the Education Law will be reviewed…which means that the bylaws will be delayed. (int. 6)

Thus, the expectation of producing some visible change, balanced against the desire to ensure coherence, "…*was an uneasy compromise*" where "*this interface between technical and political processes, this interdependence and how the one influences the other*" has manifested itself in clear tensions (int. 79). UNICEF and other international actors whom are supporting CESR maintain a belief that the reform process has the potential to lead to an educational system that is more equitable for all. The challenge, however, has been to maintain a coherence and commitment to this

vision through the multiple actors and individuals involved in the process, and across the various stages and activities which are occurring within this set of macro reforms.

Both the influx of international consultants as well as policy priorities—such as the provision of school grants, school based management, the introduction of competency based frameworks for teachers and other educational professionals, and investment in child-centred pedagogies—all testify to the formative role of international policy borrowing in shaping Myanmar's educational reform process. However, the comments discussed above highlight the lack of coherence that resulted from the involvement of so many actors, leading to representatives from the Ministry of Education feeling overwhelmed by the proliferation of global educational agendas and technical advice. From a sustainable peacebuilding perspective, these are warning signs for a potential lack of context responsiveness, which might exacerbate rather than address grievance and inequality. These findings in Myanmar mirror the critiques presented by other scholars on international policy borrowing in the broader field of education (see also Verger et al. 2012).

Participation and Voice in the Reform Process

The CESR Terms of Reference also stressed that a guiding principle of the reform process should be that it would be "an inclusive, participatory process". This would involve various departments/Ministries of government as well as a wide range of educational stakeholders, including representatives of different ethnic groups and the monastic sector. It was envisaged that this process would engage with key constituencies including parents, students, communities, teachers, head teachers, and education officers at the State/Regional and township levels. Moreover, CBOs, academics and development partners in shaping and refining the reform agenda. The CESR Phase One report (MoE 2013, 19) argues that the findings and recommendations present "diverse opinions" based on comments received from a range of educational stakeholders. Yet it became evident in speaking to those observing and witnessing processes of consultation and participation that such efforts were both insufficiently participatory or representative.

One significant reason given for this was a lack of understanding, willingness or ability to participate. One international respondent believed that there was an unwillingness to participate from the opposition groups themselves:

> …it is important to recognize that [the government] did invite all these different people to come and talk to them […] but politically they just… I got a sense that they just didn't want to engage. (int. 8)

This respondent went onto an example to illustrate this point: "…*The ministers have invited the students to a number of meetings...recently…and they haven't been willing to attend"* (int. 8). Yet, from the perspective of those in the opposition there was a willingness to participate, it was rather government officials who were unwilling

or unable to enter into a meaningful dialogue with them. The National Network for Education Reform (NNER) is the major civil society group for education, set up in 2012 specifically to bring together actors and activists across education sectors. The NNER, has close associations with political opposition and ethnic groups through the multiple positions of the networks' leadership and members.[2] There was therefore perceived to be political conflicts of interest for the government to engage with NNER too closely (ints. 79 and 22). Likewise, the cumbersome bureaucracy involved in facilitating such politically charged meetings was identified as obstructing discussions and potentially provoking recriminations (int. 4). The highly oppositional and political dynamics that existed between NNER and the government was therefore perceived to preclude effective dialogue. One observer further described how, "*Distrust was so embedded for so many years, there wasn't a sort of safe space to have a dialogue…*" (int. 79). This then led to a sense of a one-sided type of communication, where while NNER was expected to participate in the government reform process, reciprocity in terms of engaging with NNER's separate reform platform was not equally considered by the government. An individual working within the reform processes expressed this as follows:

> I think neither side is able to trust each other too much so we had … we facilitated sessions where the CESR shared their review findings and then we had another one where the NNER shared their findings of their country-wide consultation, but you couldn't get the two in the same room. The NNER came to the government one but the government for all sorts of different reasons weren't able to come to the NNER one. (int. 4)

In another instance, around the drafting of the new Education Law, questions of whether or how NNER should be invited ultimately led to them being excluded from the consultation process, which in turn fuelled a stronger grievance on the part of NNER.

> They organized a high-level consultation on the outputs [of the law reform process] in March last year. The president was going to be there, the Minister of Education, States, regions...and then there was a lot of unclarity about the NNER about if they were or were not invited. And our understanding is that they were invited, but [with a limited number of representatives allowed]. I don't think the limits on [the] number of attendees was ever specified, so when they arrived for the meeting with a large contingent, [the government] stopped them. In the end NNER wasn't at the meeting, that was the result. So they called a press conference the day of the meeting. Saying [NNER] reached out to them but [the government] didn't reach out to us. Because meanwhile the NNER was doing their own national consultation around policy documents they produced. (int. 4)

Moreover, when consultation did occur, there was a strong sense that it was limited in both breadth and depth. Often consultation was described as more a case of 'telling' various stakeholders what the findings were, and not opening conclusions reached in the various stages to contestation or debate. As one consultant described:

[2] The blurred boundaries of the roles of leading NNER figures came to a fore in early 2015 during the student protests as the NLD sought to distance themselves from the political position of the NNER, removing a key leader from the party executive committee (Mratt Kyaw Thu 2015).

> The government did go to the states and regions, and it put forward the parts of [CESR findings]…but the way they did it, they basically went in and said 'this is what's going to happen, does anybody object?' No, good, right we consulted. (int. 10)

The same individual recalled another meeting where civil society was invited to attend and provide input to the government on the draft Education Law:

> A member of [civil society] was talking about something, and this was a consultation meeting… and the minister said well that's already been decided so there was no point of going over that. So consultation is very much giving information. It's a powerpoint up on the wall and saying this is what we're going to do. The word consultation is used very easy…because you say we are going to involve everybody…but they're not actually doing anything. (int. 10)

Another respondent similarly described how there was a strong perception that the Ministry was:

> …go[ing] too far ahead [so consultation] will be seen as confirmation rather than input…. people feel that its already cooked, and are not really wanting…input…they just want us to tick the box. (int. 79)

The reach of such consultations was also limited. The same consultant involved in the planning of these meetings described how:

> …originally they wanted to have consultations in every state, but in terms of capacity and trying to get dates...they ended up doing it regionally. I think it was doing the right thing, but not enough of it…[often in these meetings] it was not so clear who was [invited] and who was not, [and so] it was probably more government people than civil society people represented. (int. 79)

Finally, the government legitimated the passage of the Education Law in 2014 as a reflection of a diverse range of viewpoints and interests—in essence a product of the consultation process itself. They argued that protests led by groups such as the All Burma Federation of Student Unions (ABFSU) following the law's initial passage were misinformed and based on false pretensions. As Metro (2014) identifies, "advocates of the law counter that it already includes much of what the students' desire". Yet, the claims of the protesters "suggests that ministry officials have not yet succeeded in informing stakeholders about their larger efforts at reform, in building consensus around them or in creating trust regarding their aims" (Ibid.).

While UNICEF and QBEP partners, for their part, pushed for the consultation process to seek the view of all stakeholders irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, and to include, rather than exclude important non-state actors, it would appear that in actual practice, a fairly limited consultative approach was employed. One observer noted that UNICEF's expectations may have been unrealistic, particularly in a context where "*it is not something this country has been exposed to for the past 50 years*" (int. 51). His perspective was that expecting an inclusive and participatory consultation process to do just that, because it was part of a "*two or five year project cycle*", would inevitably disappoint. The danger was that in a setting with conflicts still ongoing and peace agreements with different groups still very tentative, any promises that were perceived to be unmet could, "*undermine [the peace process]*" (int. 51). Additionally, during the times of the run

up to the elections of 8 November 2015, there was both, tension and uncertainty in the political environment more broadly which affected trust and confidence in reform processes specifically. Likewise, the protests that have occurred around the Education Law are concerning and revealing of such grievances, as they are the direct expressions of a felt lack of *representation*.

Continuity or Change? The National Education Law

The National Education Law passed in 2014 was supposed to provide a foundation upon which key legal framework issues identified in Phases One and Two of the CESR could be rectified, as a prelude to the implementation of the new NESP. As it turned out, however, the Education Law turned into a political issue and grievance in itself, largely because of a perception from large segments of society that the law does not go far enough to challenge or change the status quo. Stakeholders such as students, teachers' unions and civil society organisations, who had campaigned to be included in decision making, have felt ultimately side-lined, as those with direct involvement in policy formation remained confined to a small circle of officials. After the passing of the National Education Law in September 2014, students and members of the NNER publicised their dissatisfaction through seminars, public events and protests. In March 2015, student demonstrations reached a height as protesting students seeking amendments to the law met a brutal police response that resulted in dozens of arrests. It was a graphic reminder of the consequences of this fundamental mistrust that pervades across generations, political affiliations and ethnic identities (amongst others). Table 5.1 provides a summary of some of the languages embedded in the emerging legislation and policy documentation of both the government and NNER—using the 4Rs framework—and compares them.

On one hand, what is evident are some clear similarities in key principles of what the government is proposing and what NNER was asking for, particularly in terms of broadening educational access, offering up greater autonomy to schools and universities, and creating greater mechanisms for the recognition of ethnic groups other than the Bamar. Both NNER and the government agree on the need to ensure that school-aged children have free, unfettered access to an education that is non-prejudicial and exclusionary. Where they differ is on how far this access should extend, with NNER arguing that it should extend to youth and individuals of any age. Similarly, NNER and the government agree on the need to better preserve and support languages and cultures other than the Bamar majority. For the government, however, this is focussed on the preservation, maintenance and strengthening of the languages and cultures of 'national races' while for NNER the focus is on ethnic group language and cultural preservation and maintenance—an important distinction in the context of Myanmar. Thus, in several areas, while the government has made some moves towards NNER's policy agenda, there is a sense it hasn't gone far enough. One individual, working on the inside of the reform process for the government, reflected on this challenge identifying that:

Table 5.1 A comparison between the National Education Law and NNER's Education Policy using the 4Rs framework

Topic	National Education Law (2014)	NNER Educational Policy submitted to parliament
Redistribution	Every school-aged child has the right to education that enables them to develop their full potential while respecting the environment and the rights and values of others	School-aged children and youth (of any age) must have equal opportunities to pursue education
		The compulsory years of education will be mandated and enforced by law and will be free for all students
	Once free, compulsory education has been successfully implemented at the primary level it must be extended step by step (to higher grades)	There must be no discrimination against students on the basis of their birthplace, the region where they live, their ethnicity, culture, religion, social background, poverty, wealth, gender, or physical disability
		All citizens have the right to lifelong education
		All high schools operated with funds from the federal budget must be free
		Both university education and vocational education will be valued equally
		Regional departments of education will take responsibility for sending mobile teachers to students who live in regions far from schools
Recognition	Education must value, maintain, and improve the languages, literature, culture, and traditions of the national races	Education must be free from the influence of religious groups or political parties. It will value human dignity and freedom of religion
	Monastery schools and schools operated by religious organizations must use only the Ministry of Education's basic education curriculum, syllabus and textbooks in accordance with the standard national education curriculum	Educational policy must give priority to the preservation of the environment and the maintenance of the ethnic languages and cultures which will contribute to long-term, sustainable development
	The national language, Myanmar, will be the language of instruction for basic education. If necessary, things can be explained orally in children's mother tongue	Emphasis will be given [in Early Childhood Education] to the development of the children's mother tongue. The basic education curriculum will be written by experts based on the national education policy. Each region has the right to freely develop this curriculum further based on the curriculum guidelines approved by parliament
		In each region, at the primary levels, the ethnic language agreed on by majority decision will be used as the school language. In multi-language areas, the school language will be decided by the school administrative body of each school
		In middle schools in ethnic areas, where Burmese is not the mother tongue, Burmese and the ethnic language will be used in a bilingual way. English will be taught as a subject

Representation	Every level of education must be up-to-date and include diverse perspectives and views while promoting good character and producing human resources which will benefit the building of the nation	[Primary and secondary] school will be administered by a School Administration Body made up of the principal, teacher representatives, parent representatives, and respected community leaders. The School Administration Body will be responsible for enrolling students, hiring teachers, writing curriculum [see point 9 below on "developing" curriculum], testing of the school's teaching, learning and student achievement, and financial management of the school
	Coordinating Committee for Higher Education will check and approve all budget requests for each of the universities related to it prior to submitting them to the central government	Each university has the right to set its own admission requirements
		The universities and colleges will be free from the direct control of any government ministry. They will receive permission to operate from the University Administrative Council, but will be autonomous
		The University or College Administrative Council will be made up of professors from various subjects, management and financial officers, representatives of the university or college teachers, representatives of the student's union, as well as nationally recognized experts and academics
		Each department in the university or college will write their own curriculum
		Universities and colleges have the right to freely pursue research and to freely publish their research findings
		Each university and college has the right to freely communicate with and pursue educational activities with other recognized universities inside or outside the country
		Students have the right to freely form groups such as a Students' Union, sports teams, and arts and culture clubs
		Teachers have the right to freely form a Teachers' Union
		Teachers and students who have reached the legal age have the right to join a political party of their choice. They must show mutual respect for other views and opinions
		The University Administrative Council must take into consideration students' evaluations of their teachers

(continued)

Table 5.1 (continued)

Topic	National Education Law (2014)	NNER Educational Policy submitted to parliament
Violence	Every school-aged child has the right to education that enables them to develop their full potential while respecting the environment and the rights and values of others	There must not be any failing of exams by students in the basic education schools
	Human dignity and freedom of religion will be respected in places of formal education	Students have the right to freely express their ideas and views. Rather than designating views as right or wrong, priority will be given to the reasonableness and logic of the idea
	Good learning environments will be created and maintained for the long-term	Universities and colleges must be places that promote learning and provide a secure learning environment
	There must be mutual respect between teachers and students, and teachers must teach without physically or mentally harming students	
Gender	No mention	No mention

> The government is saying well, we've put [provision for teacher and student association] in the law and people are going, yes, but there isn't a proper meaningful representation… [NNER is] say[ing] that alright, we see that you are making some moves but … your comprehension of representation isn't what we're looking for. (int. 4)

What has to be noted is that in 2015, after months of protests, the Education Law was amended. Several of the issues under discussion were taken up in the National Education Amendment Law of 2015.[3] With regard to the preservation and support to ethnic languages and cultures, the 2015 Amendment mentions the state and regional government now has the responsibility to develop the local curriculum. In addition, the Amendment states that at primary level it is now allowed to use the respective ethnic language and medium of instruction in some schools.

Who Should Control Education?

On matters of autonomy—at both the primary, secondary and tertiary levels—the government and NNER take starkly different positions on how much independence should be granted from the centre. For example, curriculum control is implied under the government's draft law to remain in the hands of the state, while NNER advocates for greater curriculum autonomy to local schools and communities. It can be argued there is some degree of decentralisation included in the 2015 Amendment, with the State and local government now having a say in the development of the 20% of the curriculum designated as 'local', which includes subject areas such as ICT, Income Generating Programmes (IGP), life skills or ethnic languages.

University administration under the 2014 government's law, particularly around important issues like budgeting, remains tightly under their control, while NNER advocates for universities to become self-regulating/governing entities. No provision is afforded in the 2014 National Education Law for the existence of student or teacher unions at the university level which is left to individual institutions to define in their own charters. This again is a significant historical and current grievance for NNER and ABFSU. Many of these issues are raised in a statement issued by NNER in August 2014 in response to the National Education Law being passed by the Parliament. Consequently, there is some attention paid in the Amendment of 2015 to these issues of university autonomy, as it states that universities should be free to find their own funding, and that the management of respective universities should be the responsibility of the university council.

Nevertheless, for those involved in NNER, there is a sense of grave disappointment that despite promises of significant change, there has been very little movement on the government's side. One group of academics claimed outright that, "*the people's voice' [was] ignored*" in the reform efforts (int. 100). A leader of the group attributed this to the fact that the reforms were driven by a small group of individu-

[3] This new law is made available for instance by the ILO (in Burmese only): http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=100492&p_country=MMR&p_count=100.

als who were in essence, vestiges of the military government of times past (int. 96). The group of reformers working with government were seen by many to be a "*narrow representation*" of the broader interest groups in education on the outside, namely, "…*Bamar, and people from the education community, so we're not necessarily having a group that is so aware of all of the issues of everyone else in the country*" (int. 79). Added to this is the recognition that, *"[the] Ministry of Education has always been very politically sensitive… it's always been one of the most conservative ministries to work with and very set in its ways*" (int. 4). A strong sentiment, particularly from key segments of civil society, is that despite the rhetoric of change, little has actually changed substantively in how the government has carried out the reform process. An article from University World News quotes U Thein Lwin from the NNER: "there were changes to some of the wording but not the substance of the National Education Law" (Phaw Waa 2015).

Peacebuilding Logic "Being Everywhere and Nowhere" in Reform Texts

A key area of UNICEF's work in supporting the reform process has been to ensure that a peacebuilding rationale is considered in the work that was to be undertaken. This commenced in the early stages of CESR, where a consultant employed by UNICEF ran a series of workshops in 2014 for the CESR team. The key messages shared by UNICEF at these workshops were that:

1. Education needs to be delivered effectively, equitably and conflict sensitively in order to ensure that it is a driver of durable peace rather than a cause of division and conflict in society;
2. Getting educational reform right in Myanmar by ensuring that it is conflict sensitive and inclusive in its design and delivery will advance the nation's prospects for peace and prosperity. Getting it wrong will risk undermining a potential pillar for peace and the country's ability to realise its full potential;
3. Educational policies and practices have the potential to cause harm as well as good, particularly if they are conflict insensitive (Harris 2014).

Additionally, one of the key recommendations from Phase One of the CESR is to "use education as a tool to strengthen peaceful coexistence among ethnicities and exchange strategies," (MoE 2013, 41) and to:

> encourage more cooperation between the MoE and international/local NGOs in border areas and areas that have no peace. In doing so, the Ministry should first develop trust from the people and then collaborate according to the Nay Pyi Taw Accord. (MoE 2013, 41)

It is identified that in Phase Two of the CESR detailed studies of educational provision in conflict-affected regions of the country would be undertaken, yet this work was never completed.

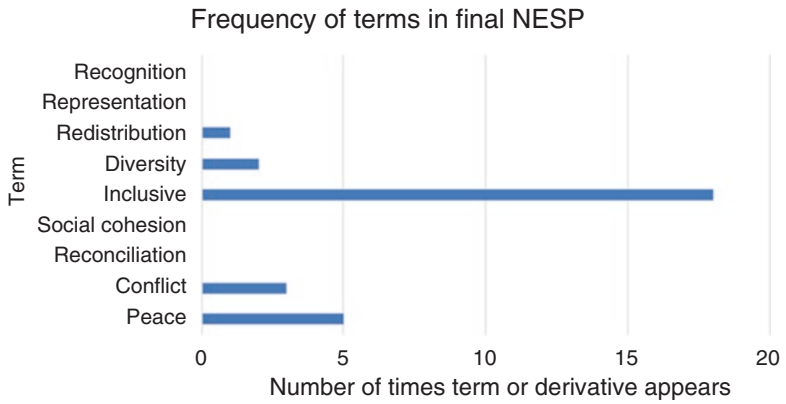

Fig. 5.1 Frequency of peacebuilding terms appearing in NESP (2016)

Content analysis of the final 2016 NESP suggests that concepts of peacebuilding and conflict were mentioned infrequently, and understood rather narrowly (see Fig. 5.1).

Firstly, in the NESP the government specifies clearly that "education will play a key role in securing the lasting peace and security of the nation" (7) and that "education…is a key driver to support the democratic and peace-building process" (32). The NLD's education minister has also been quoted as acknowledging the past grievances held by minority actors about the education system, and specified that, "educational development in ethnic minority areas is directly linked to the success or failure of Myanmar's peace process" (Htut 2016). On the other side, however, there is no specification in the 2016 NESP of how it might concretely do so. This signals that the current political climate prefers to move beyond the past, and in a way leave aside a commitment to reconciliation, rather than to recognise the enduring legacies which sectarian and ethnic-based conflicts in the country have and continue to have on the country's current development trajectory.

Secondly, what also becomes clear is how education is situated very firmly within the liberal peacebuilding lens (Paris 2004, 2010), with the 2016 NESP arguing that

> Myanmar has embarked on a period of profound political, economic and social change involving three major transitions to: a democratic governance system, a market-oriented economy and peace within its border area. (32)

Education's role is to service this market-oriented economy, to "achieve the national goal of Myanmar becoming an upper Middle Country by 2030" (Ibid, 32). In other words, peace is not an outcome in and of itself, but rather the security it might afford is intended to drive the country's growth and prosperity.

Thirdly, we analysed how conflict in the same document is viewed as a reason for inequalities in educational access and outcomes, but inequality itself is not specified as a driver of conflict. For example, the 2016 NESP acknowledges that living in conflict-affected areas can act as a demand-side barrier to accessing quality education, and that

there is a need to disaggregate access-related indicators by several dimensions, including whether children live in a "post-conflict" setting in the country (72). The NESP, however, is silent on how education itself may and might continue to be a driver of conflict. The result is that the NESP largely portrays the country's conflict-affected situation as a past condition, rather than an ongoing concern, and very little specification is given to how education structures, systems and processes might be part of the transformative remedy. In particular, issues of reconciliation are notably absent.

Fourthly, the need to recognise diversity is mentioned largely within the parameters of the Education Law and its subsequent amendment, which offers opportunities for the learning of ethnic languages and culture, and the use of ethnic languages as a classroom language. In the NESP, priority is given to the development of the 20% local curriculum, namely the development of textbooks for teaching national races, languages and booklets that reflect culture and tradition of national races groups. In relation to new textbooks, the 2016 NESP specifies that, "All new textbooks and teachers' guides will be trialed with a selected sample of schools across the country in order to ensure their relevance and suitability for Myanmar's diversity" (117). Yet, links of these efforts to peacebuilding are only mentioned once, in the chapter on early childhood, where the 2016 NESP specifies that "Research in other countries has shown that culturally and linguistically appropriate ECCD services can also help achieve peaceful relations among ethnic groups" (73). Importantly, while the NESP places recognition of language and culture more centrally, this is only for those ethnic groups who are national races. It implies that groups such as the Rohingya, who are not 'counted' as national races, will not be included in the reformed system.[4] Additionally, the Education Law repeatedly mentions education being offered to citizens, who are defined as: "…someone who, according to Myanmar law, is a citizen, visiting citizen, or person who has been granted citizenship as well as foreigner who have been given legal permission to study" (draft NESP 2015 Chaps. 1 and 2). Given Myanmar's exclusionary citizenship laws,[5] there are several minority groups who under this definition will not be guaranteed the same rights of access, quality and relevance of education as granted to others.

Fifthly, the 2016 NESP also only briefly alludes to the importance of redistributing access to education from a peacebuilding perspective, arguing that:

[4] 135 ethnic groups are officially acknowledged. Changes to citizenship laws in 1982 resulted in citizenship being denied to many who had previously been recognised as citizens including ethnic groups which were no longer legitimised, which included the Muslim Rohingya (TNI 2014, 5).

[5] In the 1982 Citizenship Law, full citizenship was offered to only those who could prove ethnic and territorial connections to groups who arrived in the country prior to 1834, setting up arbitrary notions of the 'indigenous' and 'authentic' inhabitants of geographical territories (TNI 2014, 5). The Rohingya communities were reframed as "Bengali illegal immigrants" (Fortify Rights 2014, 11; TNI 2014, 11), setting up hostilities with ethnically recognised Rakhine Buddhist communities. Others such as those from Chinese and Indian heritage had their citizenship rights similarly revoked by the 1982 act.

> Increased funding needs to be spent more equitably and more efficiently, with some redistribution directed to geographical areas of educational disadvantage and lower socio- economic groups, combined with gender-responsive budgeting. (56)

Access to quality and relevant education is even of more concern for displaced school-going children, for instance in Kachin and Shan States, who due to continuous violent conflicts in the ethnic areas are forcedly displaced. Even though in some cases these students might be able to still learn in their own languages, there are often scarce resources like teachers, text books and other teaching and learning materials to support forced migrant students in their learning.

Analysis of both the draft and final NESP and Education Law would suggest that overall, a peacebuilding logic or language is notably absent from key reforms that will set the scene for the country's educational landscape moving forward. As was stated by one participant, with the logic of peacebuilding being "*everywhere and then…nowhere*," (int. 79) in current policy texts, the danger is that important components of education contributing to positive peace are being squandered for the sake of political expediency. According to several individuals involved in the reform process, the reason to not push the peacebuilding agenda more strongly in such reforms was over concern that it could politicise the process even more. One individual, involved heavily in the NESP process noted that, "*people have intentionally avoided [discussing conflict/peacebuilding] because it is too difficult…too sensitive…too much of an unknown*" (int. 8). When asked about the visible absence of a discourse of peacebuilding in the NESP, this person went onto discuss how, "*It's too obvious to talk about it in a conflict-post-conflict language so [we use] a stealth approach to addressing issues of concern*" (int. 8). Using the language of strengthening and improving service delivery was perceived by reformers and development partners as a way of, *"…helping the government to deliver results...[that will] then …achieve all of these things automatically*" (int. 8).

Peacebuilding is presumed to automatically occur from efforts to improve service delivery of education, which may not be the case, particularly when concerns around recognition and representation, let alone reconciliation, are not adequately considered in the policy texts itself and in the policy development process. Another development partner supporting the efforts acknowledged that, "*I'm not sure the 4Rs are well represented or taken care of in the sector plan…..and its surely a weakness of it*" (int. 6), and another respondent described conflict-sensitive and peacebuilding perspectives in these texts as "*a periphery issue*" (int. 4). When thinking about why this might be, another individual observing the development of the NESP from the outside noted:

> We have a lot of technical experts in education helping the team to develop their chapters, but they are education experts and not necessarily Myanmar experts…[they're] doing a sector planning as it was any other country. And…people are uncomfortable to acknowledge that there is no peace and there is no social cohesion…it's easier to pretend that it's already there. (int. 79)

Summing this up, we find the description of peacebuilding "*being everywhere, and nowhere*" to accurately reflect the current state of affairs when reviewing the absence

or presence of a peacebuilding logic in current reform processes. It is everywhere in the sense that there seems to be a recognition of the need to place education reform process in the actual context of inequalities and frustrations, while it is mostly absent due to the often strategic neglect of the direct connotations to peacebuilding or related terms, or perhaps a lack of awareness and capacity to effectively address the reform process in a conflict-sensitive manner. In doing so, there runs the danger, as Harris (2014) reflected on, that the reform and policy direction as they seem to take shape potentially might do more harm in the future, rather than address the root causes that drove many aspects of the conflict in the first place: a lack of fair *redistribution* of resources and opportunities; a reflection of *recognition* of the various linguistic and cultural needs and aspirations of all those living in the country (and not only those granted citizenship); a sincere *representation* and a participatory process that not only informs, but rather engages with oppositional and minority perspectives—including the perspectives of teachers and students/youth alike; to in the long run, enable some first steps to addressing the grievances expressed through and inflicted by education through *reconciliation*.

Addressing Inequalities: The Quick Wins Platform

Against the backdrop of the sector redevelopment process described in the preceding section are a series of significant policy initiatives that have been started by the former government since 2011. These actions are predicated on the pressure, identified in the prior section, for quick visible actions which address some of the ongoing grievances held regarding the state of the education system at present. As has been discussed in Smith and Elison's (2015, 11) literature review, an important aspect of education acting as a peace dividend may be a focus on "highly visible improvements in service delivery rather than long term systemic reform." Doing so may help the state to (re)gain legitimacy by improving citizens' subjective perceptions of the quality and effort which it is putting into redressing public concerns about education. This point was acknowledged on more than one occasion by those interviewed. For example, a representative from an international organisation felt that: "*the enormous build-up of frustration, about the underfunding, about the declining quality, about the centralized control, about the exclusion, so many elements that civil society is angry about in education*," (int.79) meant there was a strong imperative for the government to show progress quickly.

Since 2011, there is evidence of clear efforts on the part of the government to reduce access and quality related barriers in the education system, particularly in the basic education sector. This is particularly true in regards to redistribution efforts by both increasing overall expenditure to education, and to reallocate resources already available.

Specific changes include:

- **Increased salaries for all teachers:** From April 2012, all civil servants, including primary and secondary school teachers on permanent contracts were given an allowance of 30,000 Kyats per month on top of their salary (approximately $38 USD). Government staff serving in remote and conflict-affected townships and sub-townships saw their salaries doubled, in addition to the monthly stipend of 30,000 Kyats. Daily wage teachers also say their salaries nearly doubled (from 1100 to 2100 Kyat/day). An additional salary increment of 20,000 Kyats for each civil servant was put in place in April 2013. The aim of improving salaries, particularly for those serving in remote and conflict-affected areas, is to improve retention of staff deployed to such areas, and redress traditional distributional imbalances in regards to student-teacher ratios (NESP 2016, 38).
- **Construction of new school facilities:** In 2015–2016 the government made a commitment to constructing 3000 new ECCD classrooms onto existing primary schools, and building 2000 new classrooms for secondary schools based on a mapping exercise. Additionally, 2795 libraries are to be constructed in secondary schools throughout the country. Priority is to be given to remote and border areas.
- **Ensuring the establishment of kindergarten level in all schools:** By the end of 2016, the government committed to ensuring that all 44,401 primary schools have instituted kindergarten level as part of the basic education programme.
- **Increasing the teaching workforce:** 72,000 primary teachers have been appointed as 'daily wage' teachers to support effective teaching and learning process as well as to increase the number of teachers in primary schools.
- **Scholarships for deserving students:** A scholarship programme, managed at the township level has been instituted since 2012 to high achieving students who are unable to complete or transition to middle or high school due to financial constraints. According to data presented in the draft NESP, the scholarships for those in middle schools have increased to 20,000 Kyat/month with 1002 scholarships awarded in 2013–2014; and scholarships for high school aged students are valued at 30,000 Kyat/month with 414 students receiving this award in 2013–2014.
- **Increased government financing to education:** The education budget had been increased from 0.6% of GDP in 2009–2010 to 2.1% of GDP by 2013–2014. The government views this as critical to their financing of free and compulsory education at primary level, with the possible later extension to middle and secondary.
- **Provision of school grants:** Through support of the World Bank, and the Government of Australia the government has provided school grants to all state schools for basic maintenance needs in an attempt to, reduce the burden of school maintenance costs on the community.
- **Addressing hidden costs of education:** Acknowledging the 'hidden costs' of attending school, the government has since 2012, provided all primary students with free textbooks and exercise books, and granted them 1000 Kyats to purchase stationery costs.

These initiatives were generally lauded by the international community as a signal of genuine concern and political will to address past educational grievances. One individual acknowledged the importance of what the (former) government had done arguing that:

> Education is very high profile… every child every family is affected by education and if [the government] can be seen to be doing well or getting results then obviously it's helpful… So for instance the textbook exercise where all of the children got a new textbook was really something which was very visible and reached all children. (int. 4)

In line with this, and making explicit reference to some of the 4Rs, the same individual went on to recognise how such efforts could be linked to concepts of redistribution, recognition and reconciliation:

> …The government is making enormous effort to enlist equity in all schools, so everyone is getting school grants now with World Bank support…[this includes] school grants to monastic schools… so that's extremely progressive. They're looking at textbooks this year… this year's budget is one set of textbooks for every child which is very progressive and uniforms for every child so yes, from a recognition point of view [the government is acknowledging that] all children are equal…And reconciliation...[it is about] getting those visible outputs there to every school in the country. (int. 4)

However, in seeking to universalise current reform efforts as benefiting "every child" such comments risk overlooking the continuing implications of an inherently discriminatory state educational system in which non-state schools are under and inequitably resourced.

From the government's perspective, there is a sense that these quick wins efforts are 'apolitical' and non-objectionable to any side. It is for these reasons that it is believed that action can be taken in the absence of consultation or further discussion:

> Improving teaching and learning in school, getting textbooks to students and better management of schools… they are exactly the same [interests across the political spectrum]… they are not going to deviate too much...in terms of a policy agenda. (int. 4)

The only danger, according to this interviewee, was the government setting up a precedent of high expectations that it would need to deliver on into the future:

> School grants are there… the ball has started rolling [and] it is very hard to bring those back… one set of textbooks per child has been promised…those things are out there, those promises are made... the government can't just stop. (int. 4)

The promises made have meant that wittingly or not, the international community has been asked to support aspects of this quick wins agenda. The World Bank and Government of Australia, for example, have been the organisations that have funded the provision of school grants to all state schools. Other development partners, have supported other components of the programme, such as the funding and/or training of teachers in the monastic sector, the training of head teachers on school based management, and the provision of educational facilities and materials in border, remote and conflict-affected areas where the state still finds it difficult to penetrate. The need for the development partners to support the government's ambitious new agenda was

universally recognised by those interviewed. According to a representative of one agency:

> We see the need to substitute the state in some areas especially for school construction and especially for teacher training…There's a lot which is said about the content of the national education sector plan but in a sense nothing has started…so teacher training is still the same…so the quality of education is still as poor as it was before. (int. 6)

Often, such support was explicitly targeted at sectors and regions where it was deemed that grievances, inequities and a lack of government support were strongest. The international community, in essence, often played an important role in trying to rebalance the locus of resources and support in efforts to strengthen or gain traction behind the peace process. The same interviewee mentioned how:

> For example [our support] in Rakhine is about establishing a balance by addressing the needs of those who are in a difficult situation … in a more equal manner…it is about continuing to provide education to the kids but also using that as a kind of peace dividend. (int. 6)

This higher level of engagement with state actions to redress past grievances did not come, however, without levels of mistrust or suspicion by those traditionally aggrieved by inequities. As the next section discusses in greater detail, there was concern about the (former) government's 'true intentions' behind this new focus. With the international community increasingly involved as a partner in such actions, knowingly or not, they too were being viewed with the same concern. One international advisor felt that:

> There is this sort of nation building/state strengthening agenda in a context where the state has been perceived as illegitimate by many citizens, but certainly in conflict-affected areas. The government over some many years has been adopting militarized assimilation policy through education and the expansion of state services (education, health etcetera) into the ethnic areas. I think there is a perception of the different ethnic groups that the international community is facilitating [the] expansion [of] problematic state education into these autonomous areas. A classic example would be the World Bank allocating millions of dollars to support school grants and that's all in government schools, but in conflict-affected areas. (int. 87)

There were also some concerns raised, however, about how these actions sat alongside the CESR/NESP process. For instance, with the deployment under the quick wins programme of over 72,000 day-wage teachers into schools, new questions surface about how these new teachers may or may not be eventually incorporated into the professional (and qualified) workforce which the reforms hoped to build over time. Even the more 'simple' actions as part of the quick wins strategy were perceived, by some development partners, to not have sufficient long-term insight:

> Quick wins are trying to address gaps…..by building middle school classrooms so that there's less of an [inequality]… so that children are able to stay on at school beyond primary… I think that's a really good intent…[but] one of the challenges is I think looking at those plans really strategically… so for example when we saw the government's education budget, details was to the level of a paintpot and one set of easels per classroom… but there wasn't an overall rationale for what was the purpose for that whole package…and that's needed so that addressing inequalities in a coherent way [is done]. (int. 4)

With a matter like the deployment of 'unqualified' day wage teachers into hard to staff areas, namely conflict-affected and border regions, there could be a long-term consequence in terms of establishing a system where qualified teachers remain in the majority heartland with less qualified teachers operating in the fringes—creating potential differentials in terms of actual or perceived educational quality. As experience has shown from other countries in the region, such as Timor-Leste, this could lead to new forms of grievance or concern in the long-term (Shah 2012). A 2015 report by the Myanmar Education Consortium highlights many negative impacts of the hiring of these daily wage teachers, and questions whether this component of the quick wins package has addressed or worsened educational inequalities. Specifically, the report notes that, "teachers often are unmotivated and keen to return to their home areas which results in long periods of absenteeism", and that the program has also, "attracted the teachers of some ethnic education systems, contributing to a loss of teachers in those systems" (MEC 2015, 27).

Educational Governance: A Push and Pull Between Centralisation and Decentralisation

A significant concern raised about the Quick Wins programme is the sense, that purposefully or not, it aims to increase the control and reach of the state into sectors that have traditionally sat as distinct to the state system, namely the Monastic schools and the schools run by ethnic actors. The increasing role of the state, in terms of funding teacher salaries, providing learning resources, and allowing development partners to engage more deeply with non-state actors, is part of a broader agenda of bringing together a fragmented education system under one umbrella—what some have referred to as a convergence agenda.

A key component of the peace dialogue process is to identify ways in which the activities of state and non-state actors can be (re-)integrated into a single system. For a number of years, non-state actors have been extensively involved in substituting for a lack of state attention and/or meeting the demands for the promotion of an alternative ethnic narrative within the schooling experiences of local communities in conflict-affected and border regions. The fragmentation of social service provision is seen by the state as a threat to national unity, and thus convergence of educational provision under the auspices of the state is seen as critical to the notion of a unitary, federalist system of power sharing. As one peace advisor identified:

> The connector part of that is the peace processes and education service delivery…the convergence of education…reassimilation of refugee and IDP children…the alternative or complementary education systems in the state and border areas…makes education very important in the broader agenda as well. (int. 4)

That stated, there remains deep suspicion amongst those who for decades have now actively fought for their autonomy to cede control back to the state, even if ultimately the aim is to devolve control back to the regions and ethnic groups. Another

peace advisor acknowledged that, *"…the suspicion on the part of the ethnic organisations will always be that you are trying to get them subsumed into a unitary public system*" (int. 3). At the same time this interviewee felt that education was an important "*entry point*" for commencing a process of convergence: "*where you can do stuff that's practical and actually useful in terms of service delivery…and helps to continue to build trust*" (int. 3).

As some cease-fire agreements have been signed in recent years, there is hope for greater integration and dialogue between the parallel system and the state apparatus. The draft NESP, for example acknowledged the important role of ethnic schools in substituting for the absence of state presence in the past, and argued that:

> The contribution of these schools needs to be recognised. Ideally there should be space within government systems to allow coexistence and coordination between the two systems, including for children's ability to transition between these schools and take government exams. (draft NESP 2015, Chap. 3, 42)[6]

Such integration is already happening. In Mon State, for example, the longer standing cease fire has meant that Mon education authorities have expanded their presence into government controlled areas of the state through 'mixed' schools. Here, the government curriculum is followed, but indigenous language is maintained in instruction at primary school level. In Karen state, however, the more recent nature of the cease-fire has meant a lack of integration until now. Outside of full alternative schooling provision, education authorities in these areas have also set up summer learning and after-school programs to supplement state education provision, and ensure that students' ethnic identities and languages are maintained (Lall and South 2013; Lorch 2008).

That stated, the draft NESP is also cognisant of the concerns raised by such convergence in terms of an encroachment of state control into affairs that have traditionally been maintained by separatist, ethnic actors. It acknowledges that:

> Relationships between some ethnic education providers and the government is more tentative and these education providers may not wish to share information about their schools; they also see government attempts at increasing provision in areas that they cover as a threat if it is not properly managed. (draft NESP 2015, 42)

Indeed, concerns about such convergence were raised quite clearly in interviews with representatives from both, the monastic and non-state (ethnic) education sectors. From the monastic sector, one representative felt that the government's payment of teacher salaries was ultimately about it exerting greater control over the quality and nature of the education being provided within its schools:

> Now in the monastic schools, the government provides the teacher salaries. [The government's feeling] is …schools are not qualified in the teaching or management. I agree [with] that. We need to provide and strengthen the monastic schools systematically. If the principals even set up the schools, if they can't do the quality in education system, this school should be closed, I agree. But don't control our schools through [increased] contribution. (int. 15)

[6] It is notable that this same acknowledgement, however, was not made in the final NESP produced in 2016 where this statement has been removed.

The same individual argued that what was needed was not more resources, but greater autonomy for the sector to reform itself. According to this respondent, the state's increased support of the sector was "*only about being under [their] control*" and did not acknowledge that many monastic schools, "*have the ability, they have infrastructure…enough resources*" (int. 15).

For non-state actors and conflict-affected minority communities who have traditionally borne the costs of educating children in their jurisdictions, increased resourcing to their schools from the state was welcomed. At the same time, concerns were raised that it should not occur at the expense of reduced autonomy, as expressed by a local staff member of a donor organisation:

> [Ethnic actors are saying] education should be taken responsibility by the government. The government says… OK but only if you use the same curriculum [as government schools]… but we want to have our own curriculum…we want our ethnic language as medium of instruction…we want to include our history…it is only the cost and the responsibilities [that] should be [with] government. (int. 74)

What is occurring, is an interesting pull towards *recentralising* control over a system that has become fragmented along identity-lines (by religion and ethnicity), while at the same time a discourse, at least in current reform efforts, to then *decentralise* control of education back to regions, states, townships and schools. The push to decentralise control, within the framework of the CESR, is driven by a logic of improving the distributional and representational inequalities that have been part of educational service delivery for some time. It is believed that districts, townships and schools, with the right information, can better serve the needs of their communities and identify pockets of disadvantage.

Constitutional reforms and the present government's Framework for Economic and Social Reform have instituted an architecture for decentralisation (or deconcentration) to occur. Specifically, 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 (since 2012) *khayaing*, or District Education Offices, below which are Township Education Offices, one for each of the 325 townships of the country. However, a key issue remains the extent to which the state-level administrative infrastructure is equipped with decision-making authority, rather than simply bearing the burden of increased bureaucracy.

On the part of the government and some actors within the international community, however, there is a sense that the decentralisation process needs to be managed carefully. There is limited internal capacity at present to manage education both in a community's and the nation's best interest. As one individual working for the government in the reform process noted, "*You're not going to say let the communities run the schools and the government is not going to have anything to do with education*," rebuffing the claims of groups such as NNER whom are asking for immediate, greater autonomy over educational decision-making (int. 8). Rather, decentralisation is perceived within current policy circles as a process that needs to be handled carefully and led through careful capacity building and strict controls and how devolution is carried out. According to the same individual:

> [The] government is quite keen on decentralization … [but] put in place a very strong mechanism for financial control and things… I think that would be something that the government would have to do. (int. 8)

Capacity development activities at the sub-national level, particularly for actors like UNICEF through its Mon Whole State Reform project, are driven by a logic that a federalist state model will be the inevitable outcome of the broader peace process. Current efforts aim to prepare state, district and township education authorities for anticipated key administrative, fiscal and policy decisions:

> What we are doing is sort of capacity building... One of the gaps is that people... at the education officers at sub-national level have never been trained…so when decentralisation does come in whatever form it will be, we need to prepare them so that they understand what their role is, so that they can say... here is my plan. (int. 5)

The aim is to avoid problems that have plagued decentralisation reforms in other post-conflict settings (see Dupuy 2008), and ultimately to embed a culture of evidence-based decision-making into the ethos of these actors. The belief is that by focusing on evidence and logic rather than emotion or instinct, decisions will be made by these actors in transparent and equitable ways (QBEP Joint Improvement Plan, UNICEF 2014). What is important to note about this current capacity-building activity is that it is anticipatory and speculative, rather than reflective of the actual roles and responsibilities such actors have at present. As UNICEF's own concept note from the Mon Whole State Approach describes:

> Eventually the education system will inevitably have to pursue some form of decentralization with local level planning, management and supervision of education programmes in order to adequately respond to the changing context, as well as to respectably fulfill the demands of the clients. It is critically important for the country to establish an effective means of decentralizing management of education to State/Region, township and school levels.

It is important to note that promises of decentralisation remain exactly that: promises of things to come, rather than a reflection of what exists at present. Recent research carried out in Mon State and Yangon found that:

> 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. (Zobrist and McCormick 2013, 4)

From a peacebuilding standpoint, this raised concerns for these authors who note that:

> …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. (Ibid)

Hence, what exists is an uneasy tension between on the one hand a state which has expressed an intent to address issues of redistribution, representation and

recognition through the decentralisation of a strongly centralised system, while on the other hand the connected process of convergence raises questions about whether this limits opportunities (at least in the short term) for trust building and reconciliatory developments, and particularly for minority ethnic groups, to continue to vocalise and represent their interests for schooling.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to indicate how peacebuilding is implicitly part of broader discourses of social inclusion, equity and improved access for those traditionally neglected by the national state, rather than being explicitly mentioned in key policy texts. Additionally, while a draft version of the NESP had included greater mention of some of these issues, the final 2016 NESP had eliminated most mention about the country's past and current conflict. Education reform was firmly positioned within Myanmar's process of economic liberalisation, and a key aspect of its engagement with the global marketplace. This is not to say, however, that the importance of a socially cohesive and harmonious population was not recognised. Rather, the belief was that by improving service delivery—with a key focus on redistributing resourcing and addressing access-related constraints—traditional grievances against the state would be resolved. Yet, what the chapter has also shown is how questions about representation and recognition of perspectives and voices from civil society, non-state actors, and ethnic education authorities remain unanswered, and in fact, the process of reform has made visible these social ruptures.

Specifically, despite a rhetoric of broad participation in the reform process, consultation about the NESP and Education Law has been fairly limited and unrepresentative with many key national stakeholders feeling sidelined. While a number of actors and sectors have been involved in the NESP, these are largely representing the interests of outside actors (i.e. the international community). This is most apparent when it comes to questions such as language of instruction and control of the education system as whole. This has resulted in the reforms being perceived by many to be endogenously rather than indigenously driven.

Importantly, the prioritisation of visible and rapid change (e.i. the Quick Wins) has taken precedent over the need to better consider ways in which education has and continues to be a key and structural grievance of those marginalised by the national state. Thus, despite the belief that the reform package has an implicit peace-dividend built into it, with its promise for more accessible, relevant and quality education, it is big on platitudes but short on concrete promises. As described by one interviewee, the logic of peacebuilding is at once "everywhere and nowhere." As argued at the outset of this book, for education to truly contribute to peacebuilding, root grievances that are the product of education service delivery and governance must be addressed. This, we argue, has not been a key reform focus as of yet.

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