



IOM International Organization for Migration

MYANMAR

Empowering Ethnic Youth as Peace-builders

Context

Decades of conflict, instability and displacement in eastern parts of Myanmar has heightened internal and cross-border mobility, resulting in mixed flows of migrants, victims of trafficking, IDPs and refugees along and across the Myanmar-Thai borderline. Of over 3 million Myanmar migrants estimated to be in Thailand, IOM's study shows that 76.4% of them - or 2.3 million migrants - are from bordering states and regions of Mon, Shan, Thanintharyi, Kayin and Kayar. The same IOM study shows that over 50% of migrants from Shan State, as well as over 20% of migrants from Kayin State, reported conflict as one of main reasons as to why they migrated to Thailand. The Border Consortium reports that over 370,000 people remain internally displaced in eastern Myanmar, and 110,000 taking refuge in refugee camps in Thailand.

As a result of a large-scale out-migration of mainly working-age population, almost all conflict-affected communities have skewed demographics with a critical absence of productive generations who have critical roles in contributing and rebuilding post-conflict communities. This vicious cycle of insecurity, out-migration, and absence of community-based economic activities and eventual running-down of rural communities has a detrimental effect in keeping youths in the villages and getting them to be the contributors of their communities in times of ceasefire and peace building. Deep feelings of mistrust continue to exist in ethnic areas as a result of decades of fighting and animosity between communities.

As peace negotiations between the Central Government and various ethnic groups proceed, it is critical to ensure that the benefits of peace are quickly translated into concrete actions that support stability, development and reconciliation in ethnic areas. Under this environment, IOM in cooperation with Karen Baptist Convention (KBC) in Kayin State and Mon Youth Educator Organization (MYEO) in Mon State implements a project driven by dynamic and innovative energies of youths who make critical changes to break free from the current vicious cycle of mistrust and suspicion, and to engage more comprehensively in the local ramifications of the peace building processes in Myanmar. The project is supported by the UN's Peace Building Fund.

Achievements

40 target youths have reached out to a total of **800** peers and other members of their communities on peace and/or development/reconstruction discussions, including their hopes/expectations, aspirations, and concerns for the peace process and/or future development of their communities.

Target youths have facilitated **40** community-led quick impact/community rehabilitation activities covering a total of **38,000** people as a part of the community outreach efforts through a small scale grant scheme.

Two Youth for Peace and Development volunteer networks established in Kayin and Mon States.

Key issues of concern to local youths identified through community dialogues with targeted youth and their peers, and **two** youth forums were conducted by youth network members.

Objectives and strategic approaches

This project aims to achieve youths of different ethnicities in Kayin and Mon States, to be empowered and make critical changes to break free from the current vicious cycle of mistrust and suspicion, and to engage more comprehensively in the local ramifications of the peace building processes in Myanmar.



The strategic approaches of the project include: a) the varying approaches responding to differences in context between Mon and Kayin States to reflect the particular needs and concerns of youth as shaped by their immediate environments; b) the holistic, community rooted strategy to locating youth agency within particular processes of social transformation; c) focuses and approaches towards peace was contextual owing to how the target youths felt most comfortable and rele-



vant to the situations in particular geographic areas; d) the series of activities were designed to combine both knowledge, actions, reflection and learning; e) incremental approaches to capacity building was used to allow the target youths to reflect what they have gained and what they are capable of improving under

specific contexts; and f) organically evolved capacity building processes are cross-fertilized among different groups of ethnic youths for mutual learning and understanding.

Project activities

The project took the following steps of activities. The progression of activities remained flexible in order to allow youths' organic thoughts and action processes and push limits where they can.

1. Youth camps - Through youth camps, the target youths jointly identified their priority issues surrounding their communities in context of post-conflict and peace, and they themselves designed the training topics and sequences, as well as subsequent activities.

2. Trainings and learning visits - The trainings built the target youths' knowledge on peace-building and peace process; youth related issues on health and migration; and local livelihood. Learning visits to study the peace process of government and NGO also equipped them with information on dynamics surrounding the peace process. The youths learnt skills on facilitation, leadership, community development project management to facilitate community-led quick impact/community rehabilitation activities. In addition, the target youths reached out to peers and other members of their communities on peace and/or development/reconstruction



discussions, including their hopes/expectations, aspirations, and concerns for the peace process and/or future development of their communities.



3. Community-led quick-impact projects

The targeted youths initiated community-level discussions on community development/rehabilitation activities and implement small-scale community projects to benefit their local communities sustained through a small grant scheme.



A number of collaborations emerged from these projects, such as making a larger-impact projects by soliciting additional funding from communities, political organizations and local governments; nearby villages got together in combining their funds together to implement projects which benefits them all.



4. Youth networks

Two fledging youth-for-peace networks established in Kayin and Mon states are to identify any tangible support that they may require to strengthen their increasing role in society.



5. Awareness-raising campaigns and youth forums



The target youth identify key issues of concern to local youth through community dialogues together with their peers, which result in the youth from Kayin state leading a two-day forum in Kawkaireik township on 'Youth and Migration', which focus on key issues of concern to local youths including peace and migration, migration and development, gender issues in migration and safe migration. Identically, the youths from Mon also conduct a two-day youth forum on 'youth and drug issues' where key issues in their region are discussed with communities and youth networks as well as authorities in Mon state.



Min Aung Naing Win (Case Story)

I was born and raised in Taung Soon village, Ye township, Mon State. I am 21 years old now. I am Mon ethnic and Buddhist which is majority population in my village. I went to primary school in my village and for middle school, I went to Mudon, nearest town from my village, to pursue my education at Mon National School. There were robbers and arm conflicts in my village. Changes happened last five years and now there has no robbers or arm conflicts. The conflict had a big impact in my village. Community youths and people in my village are not united and do not trust in arm groups. Some youths are victims of drug abuse.



I gained much knowledge when I met with IOM and MYEO. I got the trainings on Conflict Management, Community Development, Drug Abuse, Family Planning, Youth and Health, HIV/AIDS, and so on. People from the community praised me for my knowledge sharing sessions after the trainings. I also had a chance to participate in the walkathon for International Peace Day. In the event, I saw many organizations were working for peace process, peace building and I was amazed. I had never thought about peace or peace process before joining the Empowering ethnic youths as peace-builders project.

Since I also learned about leadership, I also engaged with youth in the community and took responsibility and accountability to be united and participated in community development activities for peace and development. I gained confidence by working together with village administrator and elders to implement a community development project in my village. The village administrator also supported and advised me how to do things better. Community even praised the project because we knew what we needed and we implemented. I gained much cooperation and contribution from community people and youths to implement the project together.

When some organizations came to the village, they contacted me and networked with me. I got inspiration to participate in the community. I never engaged with organization before but now I work together with community based organizations. I came to understand that development is not about money but about working with organization, gaining knowledge, networking, knowing the mandate. I knew my rights and when the rights were abused, I knew where and how to report. This is the satisfaction of my community and my ethnic group and they are now participated in community peace and development. I will help the youth set goals and vision. I want to be a community leader in the future for my community to be peaceful and developed.

WITH THANKS TO OUR DONORS AND PARTNERS



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

318 (A), Ahlone Road, Dagon Township,
Yangon, Myanmar.
Phone: +95 1 210 588, +95 1 230 1960~2
Mobile: +95 97 323 6679, +95 97 323 6680
E-mail: iomyangon@iom.int
Web: www.iom.int



WE WORK CLOSELY WITH

• Karen Baptist Convention (KBC)

• Mon Youth Educator Organization

November 2015