YOUTH-LED ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This youth-led assessment, carried out in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council and Mercy Corps, has sought to elevate the voices and experiences of young people in order to ensure programming is both youth-responsive and youth-centric. This youth-led assessment was conducted over a period of five months, from August to December 2019, across three states in Myanmar: Rakhine, Mon and Kayin States. Conducted first in Sittwe and Maungdaw townships of Rakhine State, the assessment was later carried out in Mon and Kayin States in Myanmar's Southeast.

The goal of this work is to better understand youth aspiration for the future, how youth participate in their communities and what barriers they face in accessing safe and decent employment. The assessment, which was led by the youth themselves, sought to both learn from them while also building their skills for the future. Ultimately, the assessment seeks to identify opportunities that support youth engagement and participation, including the identification of positive development pathways for Myanmar's young people.

For this assessment, 79 youth facilitators interviewed over 800 youth and over 400 business, while also participating in a variety of different focused discussions around youth issues. Their hard-work and ideas, which have been captured here, are critical to helping actors look deeper into youth needs and aspirations when designing and implementing their programming.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Young people represent 50% of the population in Myanmar and are the driving force of the country's future political, social and economic development. However, young people do not exist in a vacuum and are actually more vulnerable to changes in the nation's socio-economic status than other groups due to their transitional phase of life. Particularly between 15-24 years old they are experiencing extensive changes and often a re-orientation of their role in the family and community as they become contributors to the family's economic and social well-being. Young people are very aware of this phase of their lives and are highly oriented towards the future in terms of what they need to achieve for themselves and their families.

As a result it is critical to look at the state of the nation through the youth lens. Below is a snapshot of the nation and reflections on how these realities impact young people in Myanmar. The state-level reports will go into more detail.

	OVERVIEW	YOUTH SPECIFIC
EDUCATION	24.8% of the population have not completed primary education and only 8.7% have completed secondary education. This implies that over 90% of the population have not completed secondary education.[i] 1/3 of those who complete primary school do not move on to secondary school.[ii] The proportion of the working age population that have completed high school is 6.5%. It is 11.1% in urban areas and only 4.4% in rural areas.[iii] Myanmar is the bottom of the ASEAN countries for financing of education as a part of the national budget.[iv]	Of the about 1.1 million new primary school entrants each year, just over 10% go on to successfully complete upper secondary education (USE; grades 10–11) eleven years later. This leaves nearly a 'missing million' youth who exit basic education every year with limited-to-no access to many forms of employment, training, or higher education.[v] Youth with low education levels are more likely to engage in low wage employment or to be unemployment than more educated youth.[vi]
RURAL/URBAN DIVIDE	Over 83% of the total population live in rural areas, whereas 17% of reside in urban areas. Urban population has doubled since 1975 from 7.1 million to 16.1 million.[vii]	75.5 % of children and youth (20 and under) reside in rural areas. [viii] The high % of youth living in rural locations make it expensive and challenging to provide organized, quality education.[ix]
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT & POVERTY	Myanmar ranks 145 out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (an index of potential human development (or the maximum IHDI that could be achieved if there were no inequality).[x] Myanmar ranks 109 out of 150 countries on the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (The IHDI can be interpreted as the level of human development when inequality is accounted for).[xi] The proportion of the population living in poverty declined substantially - decreasing from 37% in 2009/2010 to 26% in 2017. The number of poor people is 6.7 times higher in rural areas than urban areas, and those residing in rural areas make up an overwhelming majority (87 %) of the nation's poor.[xii]	Children and youth below 20 years old constitute a disproportionately high share of the total poor population. Almost half (48 %) of all poor people are below the age of 20.[xiii]
TECHNOLOGY	Myanmar is behind other ASEAN countries in terms of business and government use of digital services and individual use of digital applications.[xxxvi] Since 2013 from a mobile penetration rate of 5-7% to having more mobile subscriptions than people in early 2019.[xxxvii] Women are 28% less likely than men to own a mobile phone.[xxxviii]	Access to technology and technology skills are considerably low in rural areas where most young people live and work. This inhibits their ability to seek and access better jobs. Typically businesses do not use or require technology skills for employment in rural areas.

	OVERVIEW	YOUTH SPECIFIC
EMPLOYMENT	2 of 3 workers are engaged in low-skilled or subsistence agricultural work, the lowest paid and most informal type of work. Nearly 38 % are working in unskilled jobs.[xiv] The primary sector of employment is agriculture, forestry and fishing, employing 46 % of workers - this sector has the lowest median wage and few workers exceed the daily minimum wage. 3% of Myanmar's workers are classified as professionals, managers, technicians. These occupations drive an economy and manage a government.[xv] Growth has been anchored in extractive industries and job creation has been weak. The economy continues to base its industrial competitiveness on low wages. The local demand for skilled labour is very low and as a result skilled workers are not finding employment.[xvi]	9 million youth in the working age group of 15-24, the largest of any age category in Myanmar.[xvii] More youth are living and working in rural areas compared to urban areas.[xviii] Youth rates of unemployment are higher than any other age group.[xix] Children between 15-17 are the largest group engaged in hazardous work (19%).[xx] Current growth patterns can trap the economy in a model based on unskilled labor and natural resource exploitation, while leaving the majority of youth with limited prospects for full-time, formal, and productive employment.[xxi]
MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT	Most migration is internal toward economic centers. Nearly 20% of the population has migrated within Myanmar during their lifetime, most moving between states or regions. Almost three million Myanmar people are living outside the country. Nearly all international migration is jobs-related to states that share an economically dynamic international border: Thailand, India and China. Refugees from Myanmar accounted for the fourth largest refugee population in the world in 2018.[xxiii] Women are now more likely to move as undocumented migrants which limits their protections in the destination country.[xxiv]	Myanmar's relatively young population is able to fill a need for workers as populations age in other countries in the region.[xxv] Young people - aged 15-24 - are driving the rural-urban migration, making up 30.7 % of migrants. Among the cohort aged 15-17, an estimated 40 % migrate before the age of 14.[xxvi] Most male and female migrants move during their 20s. Women tend to migrate at slightly younger ages. 70.6% of all internal migrants are aged below 35.[xxvii]
INFRASTRUCTURE	Myanmar has comparatively low access to infrastructure, particularly to electricity, compared to the region.[xxviii] 37% of rural households have little or no access to electricity compared to only 7% of households in urban settings.[xxix] Frequent power outages affect almost 90 % of micro-enterprises, hurting their productivity. Myanmar has the poorest tourism infrastructure in ASEAN.[xxx]	Safe and decent employment for youth depends upon infrastructure to support new businesses (electricity), mechanization (agriculture and tourism) and access (transportation) – both of which are in poor condition. Youth in assessment locations listed the need for better roads and transportation as the most important thing that they want to change in their communities.
SECURITY	Almost 1/3rd of the country is conflict-affected. Populations in Rakhine, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin and Shan are experiencing, or are prone to, humanitarian crises.[xxxii] Myanmar's continuing instability breeds serious, non-traditional security threats, including narcotics production, massive refugee flows, and the possibility of terrorist groups.[xxxiii] Myanmar is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world.[xxxiv] Armed conflicts between the Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups intensified over the course of 2018 in Rakhine, Kachin, Shan, and Karen States, stoked by development projects and disputes over natural resources.[xxxv]	Lack of security has a significant impact on young people accessing education delaying or denying skill development. Lack of security hinders the creation of safe and decent jobs and demand for skilled labour opportunities for young people. Ethnic conflict has restricted movement of many young people- particularly Muslim youth - which has a profound impact on their access to education and employment today and in the future.
GENDER	• Female labour participation is low, 47% compared to other countries in ASEAN (Vietnam 79%, Cambodia 77%).[xxxix] • On average, women earn 25 % less than men.[xl] • Women are often employed in the informal sector which increases the risk of exploitation.[xli] • 83% of its workers in the garment industry are women.[xlii] • More than a quarter of female household heads (27.3%) have never attended school, compared with 10.4% of male-headed households.[xliii] • Myanmar is one of the few countries in ASEAN where women outnumber men in post-secondary education, representing approximately 60% of the total number of students enrolled in higher education.[xliv]	

METHODOLOGY

To ensure programs meet the diverse needs of young people a youth-led assessment was commissioned by NRC in partnership with Mercy Corps as a means to elevate the experience of young people and expand their role to serve as youth leaders in the design and data collection process.

The assessment was initiated as a means to identify youth needs, barriers and opportunities within their communities from a youth perspective. The assessment examined youth participation in the community and within the labour market. It was designed to examine youth activities through a market lens with a focus on youth access to safe and decent livelihoods and educational pathways. Since the field work was entirely youth-led it was also designed to build youth skills and knowledge through a participatory process. This assessment is not a labour-market assessment and is not meant to replace the plethora of work on the labour market in Myanmar, it is rather a platform to share the experience of young people in the context of their experience with training, access to jobs, and education. A wealth of research and data exist on the labour market and conditions inside Myanmar but very few of these reports mention or survey youth directly and none of the reports produced thus far have been led by young people themselves.

YOUTH-CENTERED

As noted above this assessment was done in partnership with young people – termed a youth-inclusive process in which young people are engaged in appropriate aspects of the assessment with the aim to ensure that their voices and perspectives are captured. This assessment ensured youth participation and input into the design of tools and training while the field work was led entirely by young people, with ongoing staff support. The goal was to not only capture youth voice and experience but to build youth skills and knowledge. Youth facilitators learned new technical skills such as data collection, leadership and communication while increasing their knowledge of the labour market and future development opportunities.

Youth-led and youth-inclusive assessments are often considered best practice particularly when considering market opportunities for young people.[xlv] In order to build responsive programming it is critical to build young people's understanding of their local economy and the workforce in which they participate as well as gain their experience and perspective.[xlvi] NRC and Mercy Corps have employed a variation of this methodology across a variety of contexts to design youth-inclusive programming - including but not limited to a joint assessment in Greece, Mercy Corps youth-led market assessments in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, and a wealth of other international actors including but not limited to Womens' Refugee Commission, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee, among others.

WHY YOUTH-LED?

1   Youth are experts of their own experience

2   Youth are more comfortable speaking to other youth from their community than hired enumerators or people they do not know

3   Youth are frequently left out of decision-making processes and often participate (or are surveyed) as part of assessments but then do not have access to the resulting information

4   Learning data collection techniques is a powerful skill for young people to learn and apply for both soft and hard skills development

5   This type of work is an important and powerful partnership for youth to work with community leaders, parents, employers and development partners

YOUTH FACILITATORS

Youth facilitators ages 18-24 were selected by program teams under the following criteria: a) ensure representation of ethnic and religious groups b) equal male and female representation c) demonstrate basic numeracy and literacy skills (education levels included primary to university levels of education) d) previous engagement in skill development courses e) availability to participate f) commitment to participate for the entire process.

Below are the primary roles and responsibilities of youth facilitators throughout the assessment process.

Table 1. Primary roles and responsibilities of youth facilitators throughout the assessment process

Input & Test Tools	Share Experience	Survey Youth	Survey Businesses
Provide ideas and suggestions on the design/questions and data collection tools.	Participate in focus group discussions to share their experience and perspective.	Learn from and gather information from youth in their communities.	Capture information and experience of business owners in their communities.

DATA COLLECTION

The youth-led assessment was conducted from August to December 2019 and consisted of 5 phases:

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reports were via keyword search and recommendations from different actors and key informant interviews. Presentation on labour market was developed before conducting field work to inform tools and data collection approach.

2. TRAINING (Youth Trainers & Youth Facilitators)

Youth Trainer ToT: Youth trainers were identified through NRC and Mercy Corps teams and had previous experience working with young people. Trainers were heavily involved in tool adaptation and development. All youth trainers attended a week-long Training of Trainers workshop led by the consultant.

Youth Facilitator Training: Youth trainers hosted training and supported data collection with youth facilitators (18-24 years old). The training and data collection occurred over 2 weeks (for each group) with time dedicated to topics on data collection, safety and ethical considerations and labour market information with opportunities to adapt and test tools prior to collecting data in the field.

3. FIELD WORK

The youth survey and business survey were collected by youth facilitators while other data was captured by the consultant in partnership with NRC and Mercy Corps staff. Preliminary data was shared in a presentation format in each state with.
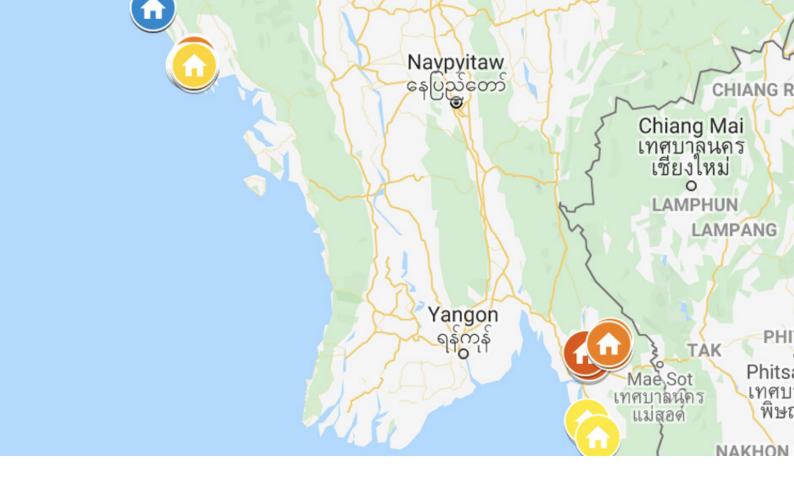
PARENT FGD	PARENT FGD	Youth-led Youth Survey	Youth-led Business Survey	Key Informant Interviews
2 FGDs per location, Sex segregated	2 FGDs per location, Sex segregated	8-10 surveys collected per youth facilitator	5-7 surveys collected per youth facilitator	Includes INGOs, Local CSOs, youth, trainers, businesses
79 youth	126 parents	827 youth	442 business	28 KII's

4. PRELIMINARY PRESENTATIONS

Preliminary data was shared in a presentation format in each state with the youth trainers, youth facilitators, interested key informant interview participants and other partners. Presentations were a means to confirm collected data, gather additional feedback from youth trainers, youth facilitators and community members as well as a means to share the results of their handwork with youth facilitators.

5. ANALYSIS & REPORTING

The consultant analyzed data collected throughout the youth-led assessment process and produced a final report for publication.

LOCATION

NRC - in Rakhine State - and Mercy Corps - in Kayin and Mon States - identified program locations with a focus on areas where agencies had programmatic presence ahead of the assessment. This was important given the youth-led nature of the work to ensure youth facilitators and survey participants would be able see the results of their work and have ways to engage with the programs in the future.. The only location without existing NRC and Mercy Corps programming was in Mon state where teams worked with strong local partners to conduct the assessment. Villages were selected to ensure ethnic and religious groups were intentionally and equally represented.

To ensure representation of different ethnic and religious groups the assessment is divided into 7 groups which serve as the framework of the analysis format.

STATE	GROUP DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF VILLAGES
Rakhine	GROUP 1: Sittwe Township: Rakhine Villages	8 Villages
Rakhine	GROUP 2: Sittwe Township: Kaman Villages	5 Villages
Rakhine	GROUP 3: Sittwe Township: Muslim Villages	6 Villages
Rakhine	GROUP 4: Maungdaw Township	3 Villages
Kayin	GROUP 5: Hpa-An Township	3 Villages
Kayin	GROUP 6: Hpa-An Township	3 Villages
Mon	GROUP 7: Thanbyuzayat Township	3 Villages

LIMITATIONS

As noted above this assessment is not a research study nor is it a labour-market assessment. This body of work was conducted to elevate the voices and experiences of young people while contextualizing their needs against the complex reality in which they live. This body of work brings together an in-depth contextual analysis that reflects leading research on young people globally and inside Myanmar and combines that with the results of 827 youth-led surveys of young people and 442 youth-led surveys of businesses. As a result this body of work serves as a comprehensive foundation for understanding youth experiences and serves as a guide to meaningful youth engage strategies for young people in Myanmar.

As with any body of work several limitations should be noted when reviewing the findings:

1. **Representation:** This assessment looks at the experience of young people across three states in Myanmar and youth in Rakhine state are the most represented. As a result the assessment cannot and should not be considered representative of the youth experience in Myanmar. However, while not nationally representative at the local level surveys were collected with a 10% margin of error and 95% confidence levels and are therefore highly representative of those surveyed.

2. **Second,** while the assessment was designed to collect as many youth voices as possible we cannot guarantee that it is representative of the hardest to reach populations. Youth were surveyed in camps and other hard-to-reach areas where partners were implementing programming however the survey was not conducted in areas where security was compromised in any way to protect youth facilitators and staff. Additionally youth facilitators occasionally reported some challenges accessing working youth or young people that were not allowed to participate by their families.

3. **Data Quality:** For all participating youth facilitators (18-24 years old) this was their first experience working on an assessment and collecting data in their communities. As a result youth faced a variety of challenges during the data collection process including but not limited to: data entry, comprehension of questions and answers, and lack of experience and related comfort levels when collecting information. To compensate for these challenges the process was designed to provide extensive training prior to data collection, staff support in the field at all times, paired groups for peer support, image-based tools, and a layered training approach that allowed youth to learn and apply the youth survey first and the following week survey businesses.

ADAPTATIONS

This assessment is essentially two bodies of work and was adapted to take into consideration geographic, ethnic and religious differences, local context and the lead organization's programmatic focus in that location. NRC served as the lead in Rakhine state and Mercy Corps as the lead in Kayin and Mon state.

The Rakhine component of the assessment was conducted first and adaptations were made to the tools and audiences surveyed in Kayin and Mon state. The Kayin and Mon component of the assessment were conducted together due to the similarity of context and proximity.

Across all locations the assessment looked at youth needs, barriers and opportunities to education, safe and decent employment and participation levels within their communities.

Adaptations due to organizational focus and approach in respective locations are outlined below:

1. **NRC (Rakhine State):** Focus on education, youth skill development and linkages to safe and decent employment opportunities.

2. **Mercy Corps (Kayin & Mon State):** Focus on agriculture and value-chain interventions that engage youth and communities in safe and decent employment opportunities.

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