



# NEXT GENERATION

Myanmar  
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# > FOREWORDS

We are delighted to introduce the Next Generation report for Myanmar, which connects the voices of young people here to counterparts in countries who have conducted similar studies – Pakistan, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey and Colombia to mention just a few.

The British Council's Next Generation series focuses on countries undergoing change, whether social, economic or political. It aims to understand youth attitudes and aspirations, amplify youth voices and in turn contribute to improved youth policy and programmes.

Through studies such as this one, we help ensure that young people's voices are heard on issues that affect their lives. Here in Myanmar we have seen, and continue to see, social, economic and political change. This study reveals a wide range of insights about the aspirations and attitudes of Myanmar's youth.

*Next Generation Myanmar* was conducted by the British Council and VSO in partnership with Conflict Management Consulting and the Center for Diversity and National Harmony, and with the support of the Ministry of Social Welfare. It was led by, designed by and shaped by a task force of young people from across Myanmar. In their own voices, young people articulate their aspirations and attitudes in this significant period of the country's history.

The report clearly highlights the optimism of young people in Myanmar and their hopes for economic wellbeing and peace. Youth also express their positivity about their goals and their chances of realising their ambitions. They are upbeat about opportunities for political and social engagement, tempered to a degree by concerns about employment prospects and around crime and drugs. Attitudes to social media are also enlightening, with many young people outlining concern about the impact of social media on their lives and their country.

The study further helps us understand the views of Myanmar's youth. It also helps policymakers and practitioners understand how best to support youth and the prospect for the demographic dividend in Myanmar.

On the positive side, young people feel a sense of personal agency, albeit slightly tempered by parental oversight. They report the importance of a sense of purpose in life and their desire to contribute to the communities around them. Myanmar's youth also articulate clear views on the challenges ahead. They express concern about racial, religious and other forms of discrimination and outline their anxieties about their own financial future and that of their families. The study highlights increased levels of political engagement

among young people across Myanmar, a growing desire to influence change, and ideas for how to shape Myanmar's place in the world.

The British Council and VSO are committed to working with the Ministry of Social Welfare and local and international partners to support the aspirations of young people, helping them take advantage of opportunities and make a positive contribution to their country and to the world.

To quote one of our research participants, 'youth are an untapped potential in Myanmar'. Combining this potential and the optimism expressed in this study, we are confident that Myanmar's youth can play a positive role in the country's future.

**Joyce Laker,**  
**Director VSO Myanmar**

**Richard Sunderland,**  
**Director British Council Myanmar**

In our *Next Generation Myanmar* research, young people across Myanmar expressed their hopes and aspirations for the future. As a member of the youth-led task force that shaped the design and delivery of the study, I feel proud to have helped our generation talk about such a pivotal stage of life; one that we must navigate successfully to unleash our extraordinary potential. In this study we explored youth voices around six key topics – expectations about life opportunities; values and identity; social engagement; attitudes towards institutions; Myanmar in transition; and Myanmar's place in the world.

The research tells us that we have the chance to deliver the 'demographic dividend' – by this we mean the positive benefits of youth engagement in society and in economic and political development. We can be the drivers of future growth. Our study helps us understand youth views on how we can support this positive progress and avoid issues that young people face around the world when they do not successfully make this transition, for example youth unemployment. We want to support positive progress and build a successful future for our country. We don't want to lose ground. We give our ideas for policies and programmes that help address the opportunities and challenges we face. With limited resources, how can we best make sure we are investing in the most effective programmes? How can we

make sure these programmes are rigorously evaluated and tested by young people on behalf of young people? How do we assess what we know, and what we still need to know, to scale up workable solutions for Myanmar's youth? Our research highlights the positive role young people can play in the public sphere when we actively participate socially, culturally and politically.

We feel proud of our research and are pleased to present its publication. *Next Generation Myanmar* offers a comprehensive and accessible analysis of the important topic of youth development. We feel our research presents a valuable contribution to the evidence base for policy and programme development. This research has given young people in Myanmar a chance to have a stronger voice and advocate for successful programmes for youth.

Young people in Myanmar have enormous potential to contribute to the successful future of our country. We look forward to continuing our work together, providing young people with the skills and opportunities they need to be successful workers, entrepreneurs, parents, citizens and, indeed, leaders. This publication is one key effort in that regard.

**Phyoe Phyoe Aung**  
**National Student Union/  
 The Wings Institute**

# > EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth in Myanmar have inherited a very different country to that of their parents. Today's young people can vote in competitive elections, use modern communications technology and work in an economy emerging from decades of isolation.

Myanmar's political and economic opening may allow today's youth, defined here as people aged 18–30, to chart the country's future in ways unavailable to previous generations.

Despite this potential, youth opinion has seldom been examined as an object of study. Existing research may account for youth behaviour in particular policy areas, but rarely details the attitudes, aspirations and concerns of young people. To date, no study has attempted to answer the question: **what do youth across Myanmar think?**

*Next Generation Myanmar* aims to address this research gap. Through interviews, group discussions and a national survey of more than 2,000 youth, this study provides a detailed account of the worldview of youth. Its findings, summarised below, amplify the voice of Myanmar youth, bringing them from the margins of the country's democratic transition to the fore.

## Opportunities and expectations towards life

Over three-quarters (76 per cent) of youth felt their quality of life would improve in the next five years, citing training opportunities and greater freedoms as reasons for their optimism.

Youth qualified this positive outlook with concerns about drug use, social media, parental restrictions and unemployment. About one in four (26 per cent) of survey respondents said they were jobless and searching for work.

## Values and identity

Youth surveyed in this study felt family was most important in life, above money, work and education.

Youth felt religion was less important than personal accomplishments, and in many cases downplayed its role in national identity.

Despite this, many youth reported to have experienced religious discrimination. About one in five survey respondents (21 per cent) said they had concrete and recent experience of discrimination based on their faith. Roughly the same number of respondents (19 per cent) said they had concrete and recent experience of discrimination based on their ethnicity.

Discrimination against other personal characteristics, such as one's level of education, job, wealth and language, was also common.

## Social engagement

Nine out of ten (90 per cent) survey respondents felt that making contributions to their societies or communities was important to them. Eighty-five per cent agreed that youth have a responsibility to involve themselves in addressing community issues.

Many youth complained that financial concerns and strict parenting prevent them from participating in civic activity as much as they would like. They explained that for many parents, any

activity beyond religious service or ethnic preservation activities seems like political activism, and is thus discouraged out of concern for youth safety.

Young women in particular feel greater restrictions are placed on them than on their male peers. Many female discussion participants felt that curfews and travel limits make it difficult to remain socially engaged.

## Attitudes towards institutions

Youth largely approved of the actions of local government in their areas. When asked about the actions of their local/village administrations, 72 per cent of respondents approved of them. At township level, 58 per cent approved of the actions of the civilian administration, and 59 per cent of respondents approved of the actions of the military administration (the General Administration Department).

Fewer youth approved of the actions of regional/state- or Union-level government in their areas. Notably, state governments were the least approved bodies among youth surveyed, with only 54 per cent of respondents reporting to approve of the Union *Hluttaw's*<sup>1</sup> actions. Youth explained that these institutions were too 'far flung' from their daily lives.

Youth approved of civil society and community-based organisations more than non-governmental organisations, with some citing sustainability concerns.



## Myanmar in transition

Nearly nine in ten (89 per cent) felt making Myanmar more democratic was important for the country's development, and 92 per cent of youth said the same of reaching a peace agreement. Though higher-educated youth and minority-ethnic youth were less likely to agree that democracy had 'come a long way', few doubted that Myanmar's recent reforms brought about positive change.

Many youth felt their ability to participate in politics was limited, citing the lack of formal opportunities for youth and strict parental concern. While many expressed concern about restrictions on political speech, a majority felt free speech should not be absolute. When asked if the state should have the right to censor mass media 'to ensure civic order and morality', 68 per cent of youth agreed.

Half of respondents (50 per cent) felt the ongoing peace process would result in an agreement in the next five years. However, many youth expressed scepticism about the ability and interests of each party to peace negotiations. Some youth doubted the civilian government's ability to negotiate with hard-line ethnic armed groups (EAGs), and others explained that the Tatmadaw's<sup>2</sup> reputation remains poor, particularly in minority-ethnic areas. EAGs were also not particularly popular among discussion participants in this study, though some made pains to distinguish between them and the ethnicities they claim to represent.

Many youth felt the high-level constitutional concerns discussed in the peace process, such as federalism, were less important to lasting peace than economic development and improved education. However, some groups were more likely to agree that federalism was important than others. Relatively fewer majority-ethnic respondents said federalism was important than minority-ethnic respondents.

## Myanmar in the world

About two-thirds of survey respondents (66 per cent) felt it was good for Myanmar that foreigners were coming to the country, particularly for business and tourism. Eighty per cent of youth surveyed agreed it is good for Myanmar that tourists come to visit.

Nearly half of youth surveyed (46 per cent) agreed that the international community's criticism of the military's operations in Rakhine State shows that 'people in the outside world don't understand Myanmar'. Half of respondents agreed that the 'army did the right thing in Rakhine,' though in interviews and discussions, youth offered various explanations for the cause of the conflict. Seventy-nine per cent of youth surveyed reported to be concerned with the situation in Rakhine State, but many were hesitant to assign blame for wrongdoing.

## Recommendations

Informed by these findings, the *Next Generation Myanmar* study makes a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners working with youth. The policy options included in this report can help government officials and aid providers better design programmes for the youth they serve. Informed by youth opinion, such programmes may affect outcomes in ways that have significant secondary effects for Myanmar's democracy and peace process.

# > INTRODUCTION

Youth are a catalyst in Myanmar, as in any other country. From the independence movement to the student demonstrations of 1988, the aspirations of young people have shaped the country's history. Today's events are no different: the outcome of Myanmar's transition will largely depend on the views of its youth, a demographic that now accounts for a third of the country's population.

Youth in Myanmar have inherited a rapidly changing country. They work in an economy emerging from decades of isolation, using modern technologies wholly unavailable to their parents. They vote in competitive elections<sup>3</sup> and organise themselves in advocacy groups as they observe the government's partial transfer of power to civilian authorities. Myanmar's political opening may allow the influence of today's youth to surpass that of generations before them.

Despite this potential, youth opinion has seldom been examined as an object of study. *Next Generation Myanmar* aims to address this research gap. In partnership with VSO, and working with Conflict Management Consulting (CMC) and the Center for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH), the British Council polled 2,473 youth throughout Myanmar. Youth were asked for their thoughts on politics, identity, economics and

development. Focus-group discussions and key informant interviews then complemented the survey's findings with rich qualitative information. The study's mixed-method approach allowed a rigorous analysis of youth opinion on an unprecedented scale.

The *Next Generation Myanmar* study illustrates the worldview of Myanmar's youth. Its findings can support policymakers as they design programming for youth or policies affecting youth interests. Future research into youth issues in Myanmar can adopt the study's methodology and build upon its results. Most importantly, the survey's findings can amplify the voice of Myanmar youth, bringing them from the margins of the country's democratic transition to the fore.

*Next Generation Myanmar* is the latest study in a global body of research. The British Council's Next Generation research series illuminates the attitudes and aspirations of young people, as well as the policies and conditions that support their becoming fulfilled and active citizens. Congruent studies have been conducted in the UK, South Africa, Colombia and other countries undergoing dramatic changes in their society and politics. Myanmar joins them with the publication of this study.



# CHAPTER 1:

## YOUTH IN MYANMAR: CURRENT RESEARCH AND REMAINING QUESTIONS

Research into Myanmar's development has greatly expanded with the country's gradual liberalisation. Numerous institutions, both foreign and domestic, public and private, have commissioned studies into a wide range of policy areas. Few of these, however, have explicitly focused on youth opinion.

Youth account for roughly a third of Myanmar's population.<sup>4</sup> This demographic, defined in this study as young people aged 18 to 30, is of critical importance to the development of their country. Not only will youth assume positions of leadership, many are already politically active, finding ways to participate through civil society organisations (CSOs), ethnic interest groups and the youth wings of political parties. They are also the first generation to begin work within Myanmar's slowly reforming economy, and the first to do so with modern communications technology. Their attitudes and aspirations will steer the country's transition for decades to come, underscoring the importance of youth opinion research.

The limited amount of such research limits effective policy. No national-scale research of youth opinion, stratified by essential demographics like geography, gender and education, has yet been available to policymakers. Government programmes and foreign-assisted development initiatives have had limited guidance on youth values and interests – a serious limitation for programmes affecting youth.

Researchers are aware of this problem. 'The absence of data about [the situations and aspirations of] youth in Myanmar is striking to many participants

in this research – including the staff of international aid agencies as well as government ministries,' write Lopes Cardozo, et. al in their 2016 study of education and peacebuilding. 'This consequently has repercussions on effective policymaking tailored to the specific needs and concerns of youth across the country'. The *Next Generation Myanmar* study begins to address this absence.

Grounded in a thorough review of existing literature, *Next Generation Myanmar* combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to overcome limitations found in previous studies. Its survey of youth across the country explores youth opinion on a number of topics, while focus group discussions and key informant interviews add qualitative depth to the survey's findings. Each method contributes to the central question asked by Myanmar's demography, but only partially understood by existing literature: **what do youth across Myanmar think?**

### Literature review

Existing research in Myanmar does not ignore youth. Many studies account for the effect of given policies on the lives of young people, while others describe the role youth play in particular policy areas. Most of these studies focus on policy areas that directly affect youth well-being.

Reports on healthcare in Myanmar, for example, provide detailed information on the health outcomes of youth. Policy papers jointly prepared by the government of Myanmar and the UNFPA<sup>5</sup> (2013a, 2013b, 2017) provide a range of youth health statistics, citing trends in youth behaviour to support their policy recommendations. Some publications rely on external data to estimate healthcare needs,<sup>6</sup> though the government of Myanmar has also conducted its own surveys to collect healthcare data. The *Demographic and Health Survey 2015–16* (Ministry of Health and Sports and ICF, 2017),<sup>7</sup> for example, reported health indicators specific to youth behaviour, such as school attendance rates and age of first marriage.

Similar research efforts explore youth trends in education and employment outcomes. A 2016 study from the Asia Development Bank examined private tutoring fees and matriculation rates, alongside student perceptions, to propose reforms in education policy (Spohr, 2016). Policy documents from the Ministry of Education cite enrolment and achievement figures by age group (Government of Myanmar, 2014). Newspapers often report on youth employment, particularly in Yangon, while commissioned studies have examined the financial resources available to youth.<sup>8</sup> Like their equivalent

4 > See Government of Myanmar (2017b: 13), Figure 1.2.

5 > United Nations Population Fund.

6 > See Track20 (2018).

7 > See also Government of Myanmar (2016).

8 > See Thu (2015), Han (2016) and Internationale Projekt Consult (2015).



studies in healthcare, these reports account for youth behaviour within their respective policy area.

Further, youth participation in Myanmar's ongoing peace process has often been studied.<sup>9</sup> A discussion paper published by the Paung Sie Facility (2017) provides detailed accounts of youth contributions to peace efforts, both under the Thein Sein government and the current National League for Democracy (NLD) government. Earlier studies conducted by foreign academic institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) highlight youth efforts in inter-religious mediation, and propose reforms to political processes and education to expand youth engagement.<sup>10</sup> Youth participation in peace negotiations is also a frequent subject covered in local journals and periodicals.<sup>11</sup>

Many of the above materials rely primarily on qualitative information, though some quantitative data is available. The 2014 census provides several statistics on youth in Myanmar, such as marriage rates, migration rates and literacy rates, each disaggregated by age group (Government of Myanmar, 2017a, 2017b). Thematic reports subsequently released by the Department of Population further elaborate on the demographic profiles of young people (Government of Myanmar, 2017c). Complementary surveys on social harmony and perceptions of the political transition have been conducted by CDNH (2017a, 2017b). Though unpublished, this data was referenced for the purposes of this study.

## Limitations of existing research

Spanning across policy areas, the studies cited above are of significant value to policymakers, donor agencies and youth themselves. Indeed, many of these same policy areas are named in the Government of Myanmar's 2018 Youth Policy (Myanmar News Agency, 2018). The utility of these studies in understanding youth opinion, however, is limited in three critical ways:

1. **Narrow research focus:** policy-specific research can infer only a fraction of youth opinion. Studies dedicated to healthcare, education and peacebuilding can only account for youth perceptions relevant to their particular subject, if they account for youth perceptions at all. Studies in employment, for example, may help policymakers understand young people's experience in labour markets, but they cannot assess youth opinion on Myanmar's international reputation. Separate and independent studies are similarly unable to determine the relative importance of different issues to youth. A report may provide detailed recommendations for greater youth inclusion in the peace process, but it cannot alone assess the extent of youth interest in the peace process in comparison to other issues. For officials with limited resources, the dearth of comparative information makes decisions between worthwhile but disparate programmes difficult.
2. **Unrepresentative samples:** most topical studies that consider youth opinion in Myanmar rely primarily on qualitative research methods. While valuable, such data cannot claim to be representative of youth as a national demographic.

Further, many studies rely heavily on research conducted in major urban areas in Myanmar, such as Yangon and Mandalay.

3. **Youth behaviour over youth opinion:** the available quantitative data on youth, enumerated on a national scale, avoids the limitations of representation exhibited by the qualitative studies reviewed above. However, this research focuses on youth habits or outcomes, not youth attitudes or aspirations. Data from the 2014 Myanmar Census and the UNICEF-supported U-Report (2018) platform, for example, present useful indicators of youth behaviour on a national scale, but little information about youth opinion. Data such as enrolment figures, literacy rates or migration patterns is of immense value, but offers little to no information on the worldview of youth.

The existing literature provides a wealth of information about youth, but invites further exploration. Issue-specific research on youth behaviour, often relying on data from sources unrepresentative of youth nationally, produce disparate findings that are difficult to compare in terms of importance to their subjects. The result is a rich collection of information tailored to particular issues, with little data with which to understand youth attitudes and aspirations generally.

Indeed, no previous study has yet attempted to study youth opinion across Myanmar. This is precisely the contribution of the *Next Generation Myanmar* study to the existing literature. With its wide topical scope, sample-based survey methodology, and explicit focus on youth opinion over behaviour, the *Next Generation Myanmar* study begins to address the research gaps detailed above.

9 > For a useful bibliography on youth in Myanmar's peace process, see Joint Peace Fund (n.d.).

10 > See Grizelj (2017a) and Lopes Cardozo et al. (2016). See also Gray and Roos (2014), Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding (2016), Swe Tha Har Social Services (2014) and UNDP (2017).

11 > See Danmark (2013), Grizelj (2017b), Nyein (2018) and Mang (2018).

## Identifying research questions

In identifying research questions for the *Next Generation Myanmar* study, the research team took a participatory approach, involving the key constituency of the project: young people. A task force of youth leaders and practitioners oversaw the implementation of the research from beginning to end, and an advisory board revised its research questions. After the research team identified seven areas to explore from the literature review, the advisory board reviewed and refined proposed questions.

In choosing these questions, the research team ensured they contributed to the findings of previous studies, rather than replicated them. The team also selected questions addressing areas that previous studies overlooked. Other *Next Generation* studies conducted by the British Council in other countries also informed the questions included in this study.

The areas of opinion researched in the *Next Generation Myanmar* study are below.

## Opportunities and expectations towards life

*Next Generation* studies conducted elsewhere examined youth attitudes and expectations towards life in general.<sup>12</sup> To our knowledge, similar studies do not exist in Myanmar. Given the policy-specific focus of previous studies, existing literature omits more general inquiries about youth attitudes towards the future and their prospects within it. The *Next Generation Myanmar* study includes such questions to better understand the outlook of Myanmar youth – the first time such questions have been systematically posed on a national scale.

Youth were asked about their personal goals, as well as issues that concerned them. Youth aspirations were explored alongside issues that they feel might prevent them from reaching their goals. Informed by previous studies, youth were asked how unemployment, drug use, social media and other features of youth life affect their expectations for the future.

To maintain dialogue with recognised research, questions on life expectations included in the *Next Generation Myanmar* study were informed by those asked in the 2018 World Values Survey (WVS), led by American political scientist Ronald Inglehart. The WVS seeks to ‘help scientists and policy makers understand changes in the beliefs, values and motivations of people throughout the world’ (World Values Survey, n.d.). The WVS has been conducted globally in six separate enumerations since 1981, yet it has never included Myanmar. The questions included were updated with the help of the advisory board to ensure contextual relevance.

## Values and identity

The *Next Generation Myanmar* examines the aspects of their lives that they value, from family to friends, education to religion. These findings then inform questions of identity – a complex feature of everyday life in Myanmar.

Building upon examples set by the *Next Generation* studies conducted in Ukraine and Bangladesh,<sup>13</sup> these questions assess the degree to which youth value ethnicity and religion, compared to other aspects of their lives. The study then examines how these views inform ethnic and religious identity among Myanmar youth. In detailing the questions related to identity, the research – in addition to input from the youth advisory board – drew on academic research, including by Australian political scientist Michael

Leach, whose work includes longitudinal studies of youth identities in Timor-Leste (Leach, 2008, 2012).

## Social engagement

Myanmar’s new institutions offer new opportunities for youth engagement, but few studies have explored youth interest in them. The *Next Generation Myanmar* study asks youth about their involvement, or lack thereof, in student unions, civil society organisations, political parties and other civic groups. These questions ask if social engagement is an emerging norm in Myanmar, and if so, to what extent. The study also examines disparities between different groups of youth in taking advantage of these new opportunities.

## Attitudes towards institutions

Like the *Next Generation* studies conducted in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the *Next Generation Myanmar* study includes various questions on the political and social institutions under which youth live. Survey questions not only examine youth perceptions of formal institutions, such as parliaments, the military and religious bodies, but also of several informal and cultural norms. These social institutions, sometimes collectively referred to as ‘social terrain’, are the socio-political forces upon which youth must navigate their lives.<sup>14</sup>

Questions included in this study probe for youth’s perceptions of implicit gender roles, emerging norms of civic activity, and other elements of their social terrain. Questions about ‘elders’ were also included, accounting for Myanmar’s particular tendency for older leadership. These questions build upon research conducted by the Paung Sie Facility (2017: 46), which identifies inter-generational relations as an important social institution for further study.

<sup>12</sup> > See British Council (2009), Chapter 2. See also British Council (2015b: 2).

<sup>13</sup> > See British Council (2015a and 2015b).

<sup>14</sup> > For an example of the concept of social terrain, see Vigh (2006).

## Myanmar in transition

Next Generation studies are conducted in countries experiencing a period of significant change. With its complex democratic transition and ongoing peace process, Myanmar is changing in significant ways. Though several studies explore the role that youth play in these transitions (see Paung Sie Facility, 2017), few detail how youth in Myanmar have come to understand them.

The *Next Generation Myanmar* study includes questions about Myanmar's political changes and peace process, as well as the various actors within them. These questions assess how confident youth are in the country's changing institutions, and whether or not they see these changes as improvements. They also explore the extent to which youth feel involved in the country's changes.

## Myanmar in the world

Over the last decade, Myanmar has opened to the world, and the world has opened to Myanmar. Myanmar once commanded near-prodigal hopes from the international community, not least due to Aung San Suu Kyi's international status as a democracy icon. The situation in Rakhine State after August 2017 has damaged such expectations. Deteriorating circumstances have marred the country's reputation abroad, sparked defensive nationalist reactions domestically, and caused concerned countries to question Myanmar's commitment to reform (Fisher, 2017).

While many reports of the situation in Rakhine State include opinions from the public, few account for youth specifically. The *Next Generation Myanmar* study includes questions that ask youth to reflect on Myanmar's relations with other countries, how they feel about external criticism of Myanmar, and how important Myanmar's global standing is to them.



## > CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The *Next Generation Myanmar* study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data on youth opinion. Survey questions, in-depth interviews and group discussions documented young people's views on each of the topics identified in the literature review. Along the process, the research team were in dialogue with a task force of youth leaders and practitioners, who provided critical insights to the study.

The study first involved a household survey of individuals between the ages of 18 and 30 across the country.<sup>15</sup> A total of 2,473 individuals were surveyed between August and October 2018. The survey aimed to achieve a sample that would allow analysis of the data disaggregated by gender, age, education, income, religion and other critical demographics. The sample was drawn through a multi-stage stratified, clustered sample design. While it aimed to achieve national representativeness, it is inevitable in a country as diverse and geographically distinct as Myanmar that at lower levels, specific communities (e.g. religious or ethnic) are not represented. Youth from open-conflict areas were under-sampled, mostly because of the randomised sampling employed. The perspectives of youth in conflict zones was nonetheless sought through key informant interviews and focus group discussions held in Yangon and other places.

The survey's findings informed subsequent key informant interviews and focus group discussions, held in various locations across Myanmar in October and November 2018. These in-person meetings allowed the research team to complement the survey's quantitative data with rich qualitative information about critical issues affecting youth today. A total of eight focus group discussions and 18 in-depth interviews were held.

The findings of the survey were also reviewed in five policy workshops that were conducted in different parts of the country during November 2018. During these workshops, participants reflected on the emerging findings of the study and devised policy recommendations based on them. In addition to the 2,473 individuals who were surveyed for this study, around 200 young people from all over the country have contributed to this report.

For a more detailed account of the methodology, please see the Appendix.

15 > While this study defines youth as young people aged 18 to 30 years old, many organisations in Myanmar use wider age ranges. In some cases, researchers in this study interviewed members of youth organisations open to youth aged 15 to 35, the same range as the Myanmar government's official youth policy. In rare cases, qualitative data collected from these interviews is included in this report, recognising that people aged 30 to 35 are often considered youth by many in Myanmar. See the Demographics section in the Appendix (page 50).





# CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

## Opportunities and expectations towards life

Youth in Myanmar are optimistic. Of those surveyed, 67.9 per cent felt that the quality of life in Myanmar will improve over the next five years, while only seven per cent predicted it will become worse. When asked about their own quality of life, 75.9 per cent felt it would improve, with only 2.7 per cent expecting worse. The proportion was even higher among educated youth: 85.8 per cent of respondents with university educations felt their future would be brighter than their present. Much of this positive outlook was shaped by new opportunities for skill building and political involvement.

Youth optimism, however, is not blind. Youth consulted in this study expressed concern with a range of problems that

they felt prevented young people from achieving their goals. Unemployment, crime, drug use, social media obsession, and restrictive parenting were each concerns widely held among youth, and precisely the problems they hope to overcome.

## Goals for the future

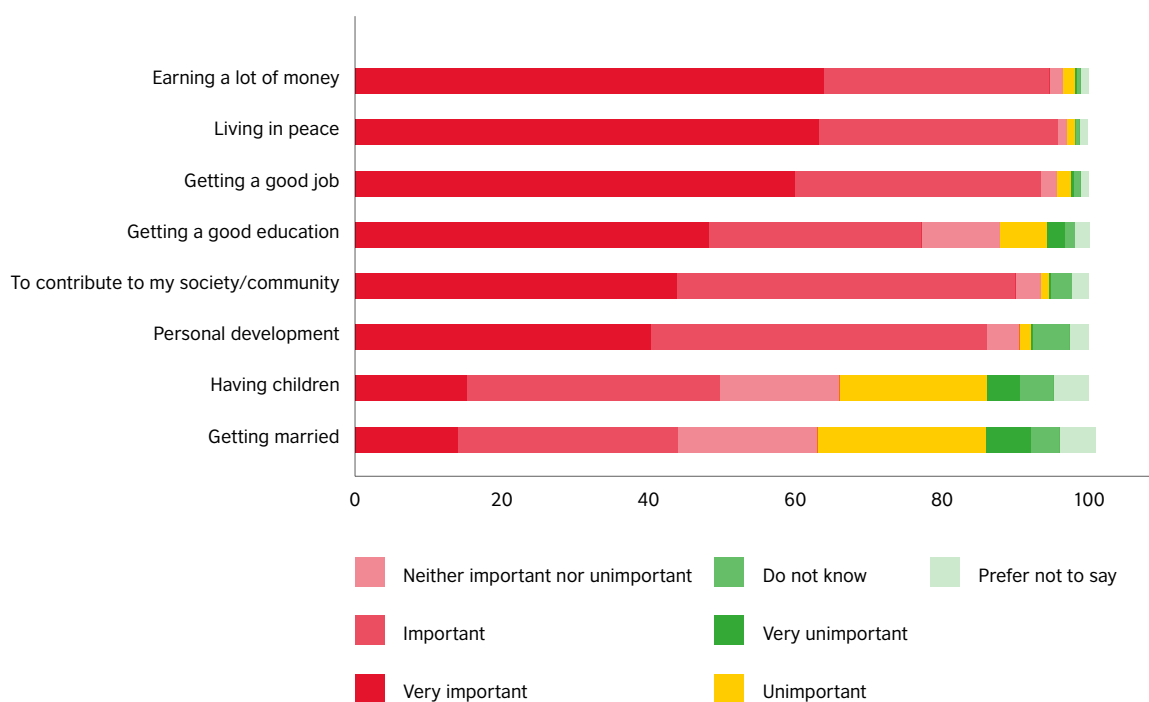
If most youth feel their circumstances will improve in the future, what do they hope to achieve? When surveyed, youth prioritised three simple hopes: earning a lot of money, living in peace, and getting a good job (see Figure 1).

Notably, having children or getting married were ranked the least important among youth surveyed. Men and women expressed different views of both. Male respondents were more likely than women (48.4 per cent versus 39.3 per cent) to say marriage was important;

women were also more likely to say marriage was unimportant (30.6 per cent). Men were likewise more likely to say having children was important: more than half (53.9 per cent) of men felt having children in the future was important to them, compared to 45.8 per cent of women. As much of the responsibility of childrearing falls on women, female respondents may feel to a greater extent that marriage and motherhood compete with other priorities, and therefore may value marriage and family less for their futures than their male peers.

In interviews and group discussions, many youth explained that while achieving these goals is difficult, it is more possible than ever before. Youth felt that new training opportunities and greater political involvement may help them overcome the obstacles they face.

Figure 1: Importance of different hopes and goals for the future



## Training opportunities

*'The future of the youth is bright because there are many groups and social organisations that promote the skills of the youth. Before I joined the Red Cross, I had no clue of the outside world.'*

Student activist, male, Mon State, age 26

Thanks to the greater number of training opportunities available, many young people felt their future goals were more achievable. They explained that training offered in their areas by local CSOs and international NGOs, particularly vocational trainings, gave youth a chance to build valuable new skills – an opportunity that only recently became available. They hoped that skills could then translate into greater opportunities for education or employment, and even greater political awareness.

*'If I think of the five years to come, I believe the situation will get a lot better. There were no CSOs previously. Now that there are a lot more CSOs, I believe they will give a hand to the youths, providing trainings where young people can improve their communications and public speaking skills.'*

Student, female, Kayin State, age 20

*'I believe the conditions of the youth will be better in five years from now because I can see that there are more and more training opportunities for the youth, which are offered by both local and international organisations.'*

Male, Mrauk U, Rakhine State, age 23

*'I believe that having youth working in CSOs is making them closer to politics rather than individual actions. Working in CSOs, you can be known by more people, you will get exposure to a lot of issues. [It helps youth] learn more about politics and keep increasing their knowledge.'*

Lawyer, female, Shan State, age 25

## Political involvement

Many others cited their greater political freedoms as reason for optimism.

Youth expressed appreciation for their expanded freedoms of expression and association, even while noting these freedoms are still constrained. Some highlighted the fact that today's youth can now participate in political activities wholly denied to generations before them. Some youth interviewed in this study believed these freedoms will allow young people to enjoy greater influence over public affairs, pushing issues most important to them.

*'If we compare, in the previous regime, there was no press freedom. No freedom of expression. Now, things are getting better of course, but the transition is only halfway now. There are a lot more opportunities. For example, previously, CSOs could not organise trainings. The freedom of expression has been significantly increased also. Still, the public is not exercising the rights enough.'*

CSO leader and peace activist, male, Kachin State, age 30

*'More men and women work with the youth to involve them. They do training to involve them into political parties. The generation born after 2010 is promising. Others did not have the chance to take part in such activities.'*

Student, male, Bago Region, age 24

## Unemployment

Youth consulted in this study tempered their optimism with a realistic account of difficulties that young people face in Myanmar. The priority youth placed on future employment as a goal reflects the fact that finding a job is a widespread concern now: 92.7 per cent of survey respondents reported being concerned about unemployment. The proportion was even greater among youth from border states, such as Kayah State (96.5 per cent), Kayin State (97.4 per cent), and Shan State (94.6 per cent). About

one in four (26 per cent) of survey respondents said they were jobless and searching for work.

In interviews and group discussions, several youth explained that they and their peers most often had to migrate to larger cities or neighbouring countries if they wanted to find a decent job. Some felt that youth who remained at home were more likely to get into trouble.

*'The problem also is that youth struggle to find job opportunities. Youth need to have money if they are to be involved in activities. Also, the question of drugs is impacting a lot of youth. In rural areas, there are only a few youth remaining, they often lost faith in their business as they are not earning enough, so they leave and go to urban centres or Yangon, even sometime abroad!'*

CSO employee, female, Ayeyarwady Region, age 25

*'I want to do volunteering, but I think there isn't much opportunity here. There aren't even job opportunities in Taunggyi. Of course, there are more opportunities to do volunteering than to find a job, but to find a proper job, you'd better go to Yangon.'*

Lawyer, female, Shan State, age 25

*'We cannot see many young people in the town. The youths are migrating to Hpakant and China as there are not many career opportunities in the region. Right after the youths pass the matriculation exam, they migrate to the places which are offering the jobs...'*

*'...the boys are having more difficulties in getting jobs in Kachin. It is one of the reasons that the current education does not relate to any vocational opportunities. Thus, the boys are migrating to Hpakant to find jades, and some are going to the other countries. As a consequence of rare job opportunities, youths are getting depressed and becoming addicted to drugs. There are not many households*

*from where the youths do not take drugs. In some houses there are three brothers, and all are found to use drugs. So that I think creating jobs for youths can reduce the rate youth of drug use.'*

Youth activist, male, Kachin State, age 29

*'Indeed, there is a [significant] crime rate in the area due to a lack of job opportunities.'*

CSO employee, female, Ayeyarwady Region, age 25

Others complained of ongoing corruption in the market for jobs. Several youth explained that nepotism and corruption too often barred qualified youth from good jobs, even those with university educations.

*'Even if you have a good education background, there are only limited job offerings for youth in your area. Even if there are many teacher posts offered, only those who can bribe get the jobs. Thus, there are many university graduates who do not have jobs.'*

Male, Rakhine State, age 22

*'There is also a problem with the civil servants. What I dislike about civil servants is that they have a mentality to oppress fellow citizens. If there are some job opportunities in the departments they are working in, they engage in nepotism and favouritism towards their relatives. But this does not concern the village administrator.'*

Peace activist, male, Kachin State, age 30

In group discussions, many participants debated whether or not the job market was tougher for young men or young women. Some felt men were limited to high-risk jobs in construction, whereas women could access higher-paying and less risky employment in factories or shops. Others disagreed, arguing that young men have more choices than women, who also fear harassment and abuse in the workplace. 'The men can

work as mine workers, jade dealers or traders or open mobile shops when you can afford it,' contested a 29-year-old young man from Kachin State. 'The women have some more money, they can just make their own small business like opening beauty salons. I feel that women have more hardship in choosing careers than men.' Nonetheless, the vast majority of both young men (93.1 per cent) and young women (92.4 per cent) reported concern about finding themselves unemployed, with no statistically significant difference between them.

### Youth crime and drug use

Many youth interviewed in this study blamed the lack of quality jobs for the problem of youth crime and drug use. In the absence of employment, according to youth interviewed in this study, many of their peers turned to drugs and associated crimes. Interviews and discussions suggested that the 63.1 per cent of survey respondents that said 'living in peace' was very important for their future likely had drug-related crime and violence in mind.

Many youth felt these crimes threatened their personal safety. 'The first thing I am concerned about is security. Even I go out with my friend, I dare not stay and talk relaxingly after 8pm,' explained a 31-year-old activist from Kachin State. 'I feel insecure automatically at that time.'

Nearly all youth consulted in this study were concerned about Myanmar's drug problem. Of those surveyed, 93.7 per cent said reducing people's use of drugs was important to the development of Myanmar. In border states and regions, the proportion was even greater: 99.7 per cent of respondents from Tanintharyi Region said curbing drugs was important, as well as 95.6 per cent of respondents from Shan State and 95.1 per cent of respondents from Kachin State.

Youth explained that in some of these border areas, drugs have almost become a form of currency. One 27-year-old male from Paletwa, Chin

State (where 95.1 per cent of survey respondents said reducing drug use was important), explained:

*'Drugs is a major problem for the youth in Myanmar. When I talk to friends from different places, I can see that it is not just in Paletwa. Here, the drug issues are rampant. In donation ceremonies, people use to treat tea and alcohol to those who helped with chores. Now, they are offered two tablets of narcotic drugs each. That has become a culture especially near the town of Paletwa. Some people wanted also to be provided tablets with narcotic drugs as part of the compensation for their casual labour.'*

Male, Paletwa, Chin State, age 27

Others interviewed in this study explained that drugs had become commonplace in communities across the country. Some guessed that the supply of drugs in their townships must have increased over the past two years. Most agreed that Myanmar's drug problem prevents thousands of young people from reaching their potential across the country.

*'Drugs can be easily bought in the villages – even in betel shops. So it is easy to destroy the youths. Then the youths themselves have the desire to test the drugs. But when they start using the drugs, they become worse.'*

Teacher, female, Shan State, age 26

*'Drug issues are rampant in Kawkaik township. I witnessed a lot of people being addicted to drugs. Drugs limit the potential of the youth.'*

Student, female, Shan State

*'Their lives are ruined. If someone who is working become addicted to drugs, they are no long willing to work. After they have addicted to drugs, they become spoiled guys. Then their futures as well are destroyed.'*

Teacher, female, Shan State, age 26



Many felt that the police approach to the drug problem in their areas has been inadequate or counterproductive. According to youth interviewed in this study, the police too often punish drug users or small-scale dealers instead of drug producers. Some respondents suspected that police would sometimes take bribes to release drugs-related criminals, or even profit from the trade themselves.

*'There is no rule of law... For the drug cases as well, though the police officers do know who are trading and who are using, they themselves do not get involved in such cases. Mostly, they do not take any actions on the criminals. Even if they arrest one of them, if you can bribe them, they can arrest and send someone else to the jail.'*

Activist, male, Kachin State, age 29

*'The police arrest individual drug users, not those trading the substances. The police will arrest some drug users and release them after receiving money. And then, they will arrest the drug users again later for more money.'*

Female, Shan State, age 27

*'In Maungdaw, there was a capture of drug traders in September. In that seizing, there were gold and money beside drugs: WY tablets. But the gold and money were not found when people arrive that office. It is said that police hide and occupy those gold and money for themselves... If the police arrested about the tablets of 3 lakhs<sup>16</sup> worth, they burned the tablets of 1 lakhs worth to show. There are corruptions as well. If you can bribe 50 lakhs and someone else 100 lakhs, the police is going to arrest who only give 50 lakhs. The one who can pay more can trade drugs and tablets.'*

Student, male, Rakhine State, age 23

## Social media

*Smartphone is my enemy to be honest. Phones are smart, but people are stupid... They play online games all the time. If you do that, then do not blame the government for not providing jobs. If you want a job, then you need to invest time and energy in it.'*

Activist, male, Yangon, age 19

Smartphones have become ubiquitous in Myanmar. Across the country, youth use their phones on a daily basis to view and share content on social media. This technology has allowed youth to interact with each other and with the world in ways unimaginable to their parents.

Despite its popularity, not all youth think social media is good. Most youth interviewed in this study expressed disappointment in social media, arguing it claimed far too many hours of young people's attention. They complained that most young people do not realise the opportunity cost of social media, citing smartphones as one reason why many youth are ignorant of politics or current affairs.

*'There is a 60 per cent chance of getting more improvements for youths. There is 40 per cent tendency for worsening conditions such as drugs and social media/games addiction. I mean youth spending too much time on social media and games can be a major issue for their personal development in terms of education attainment. Since 2013, people have access to mobile phones and now they are spending a lot of time using their phones.'*

Student, male, Rakhine State, age 19

*'I think that in five years from now, the future of the youth will become worse. They are always using their mobile phones for Facebook and playing games. They do not use it for education purposes. Only few youth make good use of their access to mobile phones and internet.'*

Student, male, Kayin State, age 21

*'The improper use of mobile phones. Because of that, the youths do not read anymore, and they lack ambition. They spend their time playing games instead of working at school. There are many jobs that young people can take up too. They can work in gold and gems mines or in farming if they want. There are many jobs out there, but they do not make good use of their time to improve their knowledge. And when they have money, they waste it on social media...'*

Male, Chin State, age 27

Some youth highlighted the benefits of social media in Myanmar. One activist in Yangon shared that after he founded his CSO, social media allowed him to share its services with a diverse audience, thereby connecting groups that might not otherwise interact. 'To match with the youth, we use a lot of technologies and social media,' he explained. 'My belief is that digital media are the only way to narrow the gap between the high class and the low class.'

Optimism towards social media, however, appeared a minority opinion. Most youth were critical of social media and how youth make use of it. While their views reflect a global debate on the merits and faults of social media, such criticism is particularly salient in the context of Myanmar. Social media, especially Facebook, has become one of the primary means of communication among the country's residents. Scepticism of its benefits challenges the assumption that youth are uniformly enthusiastic about its rise.

Notably, youth surveyed in this study widely regard internet access as a good thing: 93.5 per cent of youth surveyed said 'improving communications infrastructure like phone coverage and internet access' was important for Myanmar's development. Youth do not seem to object to connectivity in itself. Rather, they are concerned with the addictive effect of social media on their peers' behaviour.

### Parental oversight

*'I think the youths who are graduated from the university are able to decide by themselves these days. Parents used to intervene in career choosing for their children. But now, the youths are allowed to work in the fields which related to their hobbies. But parents still are intervening in the decisions before the youths get the jobs.'*

Teacher, Shan State, age 26

Most youth surveyed felt they had agency over their own future. Of those surveyed, 86.9 per cent said they were able to decide their futures, with 46.8 per cent saying they were 'very much' able to decide. Interviews and discussions with youth, however, revealed that this agency was rarely individual, but rather shared with parents, family and community elders.

Some youth interviewed in this study felt empowered to make all their own decisions ('Personally, I am allowed to make my own decisions'), while others deferred all decision-making to their parents or elders ('I personally accept and follow the decisions of my parents'). Most youth, however, felt they stood in a middle ground of parental influence: decision-making was negotiated between these youth and their parents.

A few youth shared that they were able to discuss decisions with their parents, but they were ultimately responsible for the choice they made, especially as they aged. Many, however, felt parents exercised too much control over their decisions, and their preferences were often ignored. While most of the time, parents' interference and 'overprotection' was viewed as coming from love and concern, in many cases, this meant youth were discouraged from pursuing their interests.

*'I accept the decisions of my parents even when I don't like it. I am interested in politics and economics. My parents want me to become a teacher and think politics is not good for a girl. So, I am training to become a teacher. But on the other hand, I still keep my interest in politics and economics.'*

CSO member, female, Kayin State, age 20

*'Mostly our parents decide for us. For one instance, as my brothers are in Thailand, I want to go there to work. But my parents do not agree to go there but instead they would like me to go to Singapore. Thus I prepare to go to Singapore.'*

Male, Bago Region, age 20

In interviews, some youth complained that this parenting arrangement, sometimes maintained well into a child's young adulthood, deters youth from politics or civil society work. These youth felt this parenting style was all too common and a detriment to Myanmar's emerging democracy.

*'Community leaders such as the elders are limiting the youth. Most of the important position are occupied by the elders and the adults. They do not leave space for the youth because they think they are unexperienced [sic]. It is because of the system. The community is structured in a way such as youth cannot be involved in decision-making power. We can only participate but we do not really have a word to say.'*

NLD activist, male, Bago Region, age 24

*'I believe I have the capacity to decide for my own future. I do not want to take decisions with my parents. Only then is it no more like the 18th century. We should not rely on our elders any more like in the past. Youth must take the challenge to take decisions related to today's world. I believe the elders should step down from politics. But I do not think it would be feasible.'*

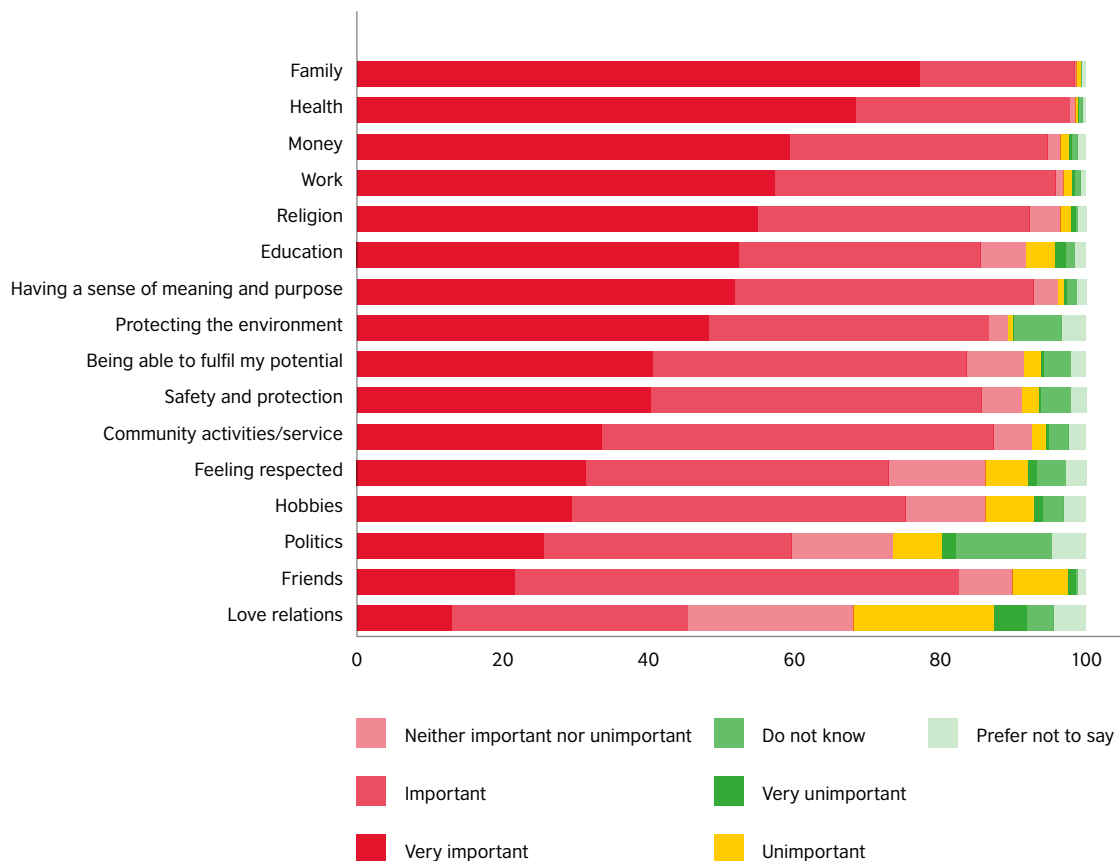
Lawyer, female, Shan State, age 25

Despite particular family arrangements, many youth still expressed a cautious optimism about their personal agency, especially those with university educations. Over nine-tenths (92.7 per cent) of youth with higher education felt they had the ability to decide their own future, compared to 84.4 per cent of youth with little or no education. Reflecting on Myanmar's recent changes, some youth interviewed in this study concluded that even if parents still exercise outsize influence, youth decision-making is stronger today than at any time in recent memory.

The optimism expressed by Myanmar youth is not unique. Next Generation baseline studies conducted in Bangladesh, Pakistan and elsewhere have similarly demonstrated that youth look positively towards their futures.<sup>17</sup> Other studies, such as a recent Ipsos poll supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have found congruent results in India, China, Mexico and Nigeria (Ratcliffe and Aguilar, 2018). As with these studies, the optimism found in this study may be coloured by a 'social desirability bias', or a social pressure to present oneself as satisfied or happy (one informant explained 'it is something we have here – a *happy personality*'). Nonetheless, Myanmar appears to leave its youth comparably optimistic to their peers in other countries, despite the country's challenges.

17 > See [https://www.britishcouncil.org.bd/sites/default/files/next\\_generation\\_bangladesh\\_2015\\_-\\_brief\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org.bd/sites/default/files/next_generation_bangladesh_2015_-_brief_report_0.pdf) and [www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next\\_generation\\_goes\\_to\\_the\\_ballot\\_box.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.pk/sites/default/files/next_generation_goes_to_the_ballot_box.pdf)



**Figure 2:** Importance of different things in life

## Values and identity

Values and identity are inextricably linked. The people, communities and activities most important to youth inform the identities they hold close. In Myanmar, these identities carry significant weight, as the country debates what a national identity might look like. Some of these identities open youth to a greater chance of experiencing discrimination.

### Values in life

Despite any frustrations with parental oversight, family was the most important value in the lives of youth surveyed (see Figure 2). Family was reported as 'very important' by 77.1 per cent of all respondents, with an additional 21.3 per cent saying family was 'important'. Family was also equally important between male and female respondents, suggesting that while young men and women might feel differently about having an immediate family of their own,

both genders widely believe family comes before health, employment or safety – the concerns youth expressed about the future.

Notably, those surveyed valued politics the least. Only 59.6 per cent of youth said politics was important or very important to their lives.

In contrast, youth placed a comparatively high value on non-material values: 92.9 per cent of youth said 'having a sense of meaning and purpose in life' was important or very important in life. A similar proportion felt the same about religion: about nine out of ten youth (92.1 per cent) said religion was important or very important in life. This proportion held across respondents of different religious backgrounds, with the exception of atheists.

In interviews and group discussions, some youth expressed that they felt religion was secondary to personal values and accomplishments: 'What is

more important I believe is my personal identity. It is not the ethnicity or the religion. Focusing on your personal identity allow you to have better achievements,' explained one 31-year-old from Shan State. Others felt their religion was an important part of identity. 'I am proud of being Buddhist' said a 27-year-old from Rakhine State.

Many, however, felt that religious discrimination was not a significant problem in Myanmar. After expressing his pride, the man from Rakhine State added: 'I do not underestimate the other religions.' Others shared stories of their friends of other faiths, making a point to downplay the importance of any particular religion in Myanmar identity.

*'Love for Myanmar's culture is another thing. I don't think religion (belonging to one of the four main religions) in Myanmar do not matter to being a Myanmar.'*

Female, Shan State, age 27



*'One religion will definitely not be enough to represent the whole country. We have different religion here.'*

Student, female, Patheingyi, age 18

*'For me, I accept the idea of [Burmese] being an identity of Myanmar even though I am Kayin. It is the same as English in the end. But religion is more complex, it is a really bad idea... it is a stereotype to think that Bamar are by definition Buddhist and Kayin are Christians.'*

Nurse, female, Patheingyi, age 22

One young woman interviewed in this study went as far as to say: 'for religion, there is no discrimination' in her area. Survey results, however, challenge this claim.

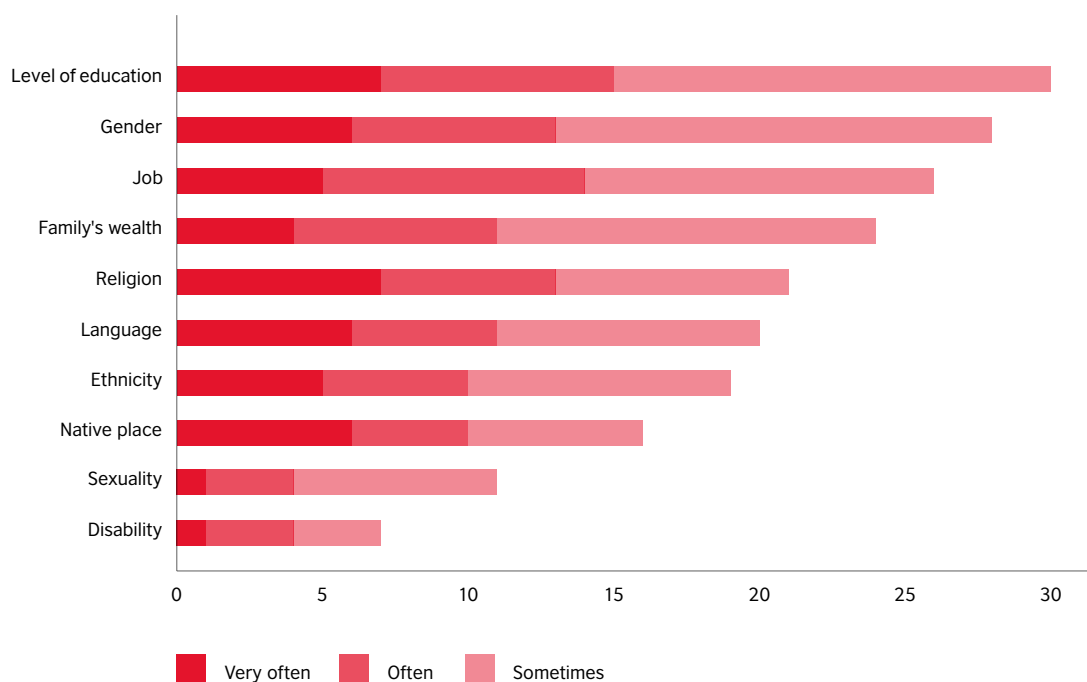
### Discrimination

Across the country, about one in five (21.2 per cent) of survey respondents said they experienced discrimination based on their religion, at least sometimes (see Figure 3). Respondents were more likely to say they experienced religious

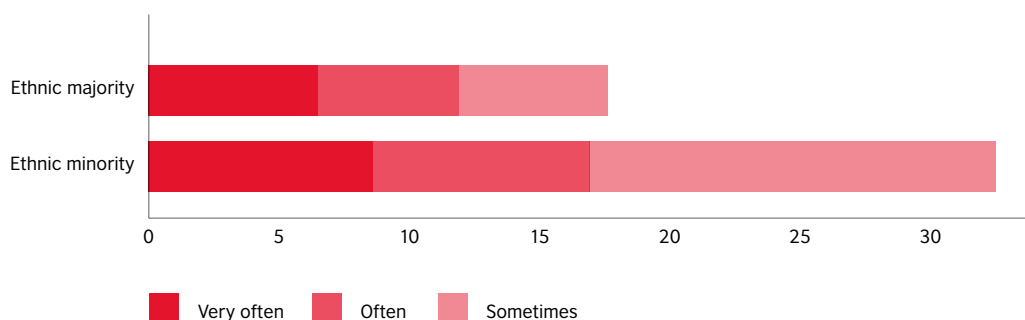
discrimination 'very often' than any other kind of discrimination.

Religious discrimination appeared to affect minority-ethnic youth more than it affected majority-ethnic youth. Among youth surveyed, minority-ethnic respondents were more likely to say they had been discriminated against because of their faith than were majority-ethnic respondents (see Figure 4). They were also twice as likely to say they experienced discrimination against their ethnicity than majority-ethnic respondents.

**Figure 3:** Experience with discrimination over the past year



**Figure 4:** Experienced discrimination because of religion



In interviews, several youth shared their experiences with discrimination. Many noted that language was often an element in these experiences.

*'Yes, we are discriminated against compared to the people from other country. Rakhine people are being discriminated... As I could not speak Rakhine language and speak only [Myanmar] language despite being Rakhine, I was discriminated in the school too. I did not use to understand anything taught in the school because of the language barrier.'*

Ethnic Rakhine, male, Rakhine State, age 27

*'In Chin State, we also discriminate a lot among ourselves. It is not only the Tatmadaw. There are 50 tribes in Chin State. Since they all have different languages, they use [Myanmar] as the lingua franca. We are often despised if we speak [Myanmar]...'*

*'...Some make jokes at my ethnicity. Some despised my ethnicity. In school, some do not want me to sit beside them. Especially Rakhine and Bamar people discriminated against us. I once shared a room with a Bamar boy. He gossiped a lot about me and discriminated against me.'*

Ethnic Rakhine and Chin, male, Chin State, age 27

*'There are some cases where Muslims are being discriminated against and still lacking opportunities in education. Since 2015, some [Kaman] Muslims have been issued National Registration Cards, the situation gets a bit better. In the first semester I went to the college, I didn't have the card. Because I didn't have the card, the headmaster said I need the card to be enrolled in the college. I cried because I felt so frustrated. For National Registration Cards, we can't get them easily even when we pay a lot of money for the service. I faced discrimination in school especially from Rakhine.'*

Ethnic Kaman, female, Rakhine State, age 20

A greater proportion of youth, however, reported to have been discriminated against based on their level of education (29 per cent) or their job (26.5 per cent). This of course suggests that youth are not concerned about employment prospects purely for financial reasons, but also for reasons of social standing. One 26-year-old shared the experience of her younger brother, whose friends have not had employment deemed worthy by his family:

*'He did not pass the matriculation exam and is working some temporary jobs outside. He has a lot of friends and always go out with them... but my mother always scolds for he always goes out with friends without [a] job.'*

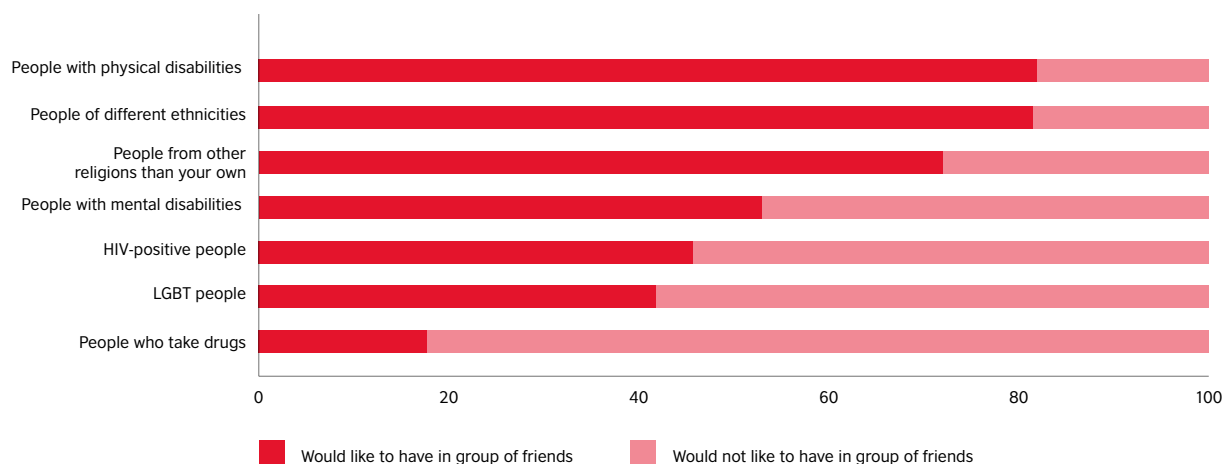
About as many youth (28.6 per cent) reported to have experienced discrimination based on their gender. Among female survey respondents, nearly a third (31.3 per cent) said they had experienced gender-based discrimination, at least some of the time. Youth with higher levels of education reported to have experienced discrimination more often than their less-educated peers, suggesting the problem is worse for women beginning professional careers. One 27-year-old woman in Shan State shared:

*'There is gender discrimination in the workplace... For instance, I was assigned as an engineer in the company. However, the construction workers whom I managed such as masons and carpenters do not pay any respect to me because I was a female. Moreover, the higher personnel also tested the capabilities by asking more than the assigned jobs. As it was the construction site, there are some hardships by the time of concrete mixing at night as it was not convenient time to go home for the girls.'*

*'Of course there are many female engineers. There is a half-half ratio of who are adaptable to the workplace situation and who are not. There are many who are not willing but forcing themselves to work in that engineering career just because to earn money. There are many friends of mine who do not live as engineers and work their own business despite of graduating with engineering majors.'*

Other youth interviewed in this study agreed that women were held to a different standard than men in professional contexts, adding that they are also expected to tend to family affairs more than men. When asked about the future, one young woman argued 'it is going to be better for the boys. For the girls, it will not be that easy... they cannot afford to attend further trainings. The girls also need to support the family so that [makes them] unable to keep going to higher places.'

Taken together, almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of all survey respondents reported to have experienced discrimination in their lives. More than half (59.9 per cent) said they 'sometimes' experienced discrimination. About a third of all respondents (36.3 per cent) said they were discriminated against 'often' or 'very often'.

**Figure 5:** Acceptance of friends from specific groups

### Preference for friends

The *Next Generation Myanmar* survey asked youth if they would like to have certain groups of people as a personal friend (see Figure 5). These questions revealed areas where survey respondents might participate in discrimination, even if they may not realise it themselves.

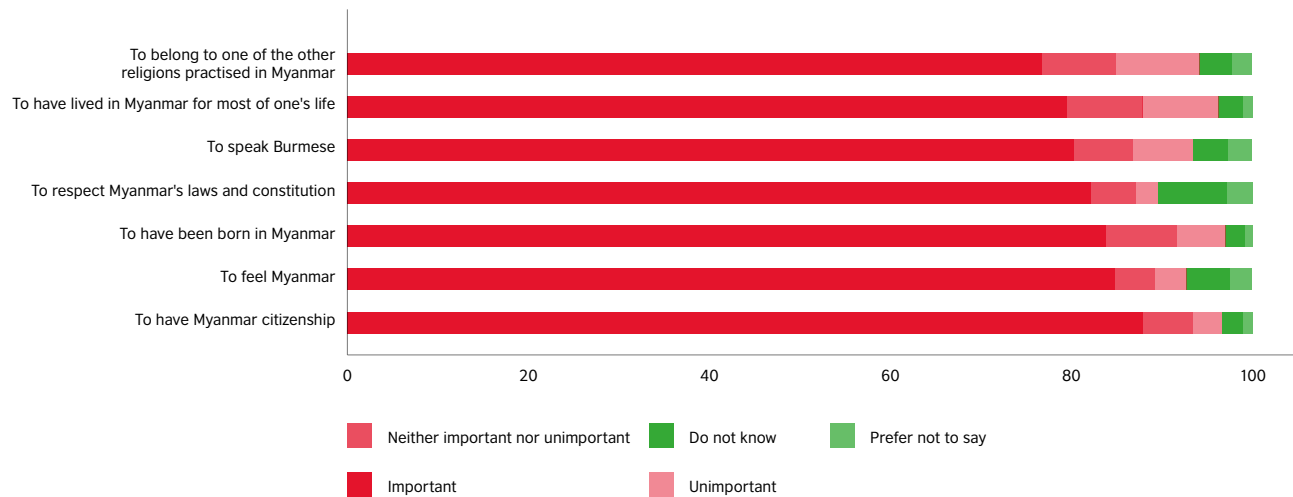
Four out of five youth (82.3 per cent) said they would not like to have people who take drugs as friends, resonating with the widely held concern about Myanmar's drug problem. One youth shared that this was not always the young person's choice, and it is often difficult:

*'In the ward I live, there are some spoiled young people as their guardians are divorced and there is no one to take care of them. Sometimes, they drink and even use drugs. As some parents force their children not to continue to be friends with them, some children dare not call them though they still want to continue their friendship as they had been friends for a long time.'*

**Male, Phyu, age 20**

Following drug users, LGBT youth were least accepted as potential friends among youth surveyed: 58.2 per cent of respondents said they would not like to have LGBT people in a group of friends. 'If somebody changed their orientation, I would not be as friendly with that person, I think,' said one 18-year-old woman when asked about her LGBT peers.

Youth with mental disabilities were also seen as less desirable friends. About half (47.1 per cent) of respondents said they would not like to have a mentally disabled person in a group of friends. Conversely, physical disabilities were far less of a problem to surveyed youth, with 81.9 per cent of respondents saying they would like to have a disabled person in their group of friends. The experience of disabled youth, however, suggests otherwise. 'Often, when I go out with friends, I am seen as an alien,' shared one disabled youth interviewed in this study.

**Figure 6:** Importance of being truly Myanmar

Notably, a wide majority of survey respondents did not feel ethnicity or religion was a problem in choosing friends: 72 per cent and 81.5 per cent of respondents said they would like to have a person of a different religion or ethnicity in their group of friends, respectively. 'I only devote to Theravada Buddhism. I have many friends who are different in religion, but I go to their religion festivals and they come to ours as well. So, we do not have problems,' shared a 27-year-old teacher from Shan State. Though roughly one in five youth reported to have been discriminated against based on their religion or ethnic background, few youth took issue with the idea of religious or ethnic diversity in their personal friendships, though religion appeared a more consequential factor in choosing friends than ethnicity.

### National identity in Myanmar

In this context of diversity and discrimination, youth in Myanmar have inherited a debate on Myanmar identity. Though youth interviewed in this study held a wide range of ideas of what truly constituted a 'Myanmar person' (see Figure 6), a wide majority of survey respondents felt citizenship was most important: 87.9 per cent of youth surveyed said it was important to have Myanmar citizenship to be 'truly Myanmar'.

Among youth surveyed, citizenship was more important than religious affiliation or how long one has lived in Myanmar. Youth of both majority- and minority-ethnic groups felt citizenship was the most important factor in 'true' Myanmar identity. 'We, ethnic people, are also proud of being citizen of the country, we are born here,' said a young man from Shan State. 'A lot of us think that way.'

Speaking Myanmar was less important to youth surveyed. Though a few youth expressed their comfort with Myanmar as an official national language, some interview respondents emphasised their opinion that language ability should not disqualify one from being 'truly' Myanmar.

In the words of one 18-year-old student in Patheingyi: '[Myanmar] language cannot represent Myanmar identity because there is different ethnicity... only because they may not be able to speak Myanmar does not mean that they are not Myanmar!' Others expressed concern about the future of their minority languages: 'If we cannot protect our dialects, it will come to an end.'

Many youth acknowledged the difficulty of arriving at a comprehensive and inclusive Myanmar identity, but still felt it was important to try. Many felt such an identity could combat 'ethnocentric' feelings in the country. One student stated, 'I think that at the centre of Myanmar identity should be the mention of diversity and peaceful coexistence.'





## CASE STUDY: ETHNICITY

*'It is important for me to mention my Pa'O identity. I am proud of being Pa'O, and I love my ethnicity. I like when people greet me and ask me if I am a Pa'O.'*

To discuss identity in Myanmar is to discuss ethnicity. When asked how they self-identify, youth most often first spoke of the ethnic group they belonged to. They shared that ethnic identity is important to young people, and shapes their everyday interactions with others. Many also expressed a desire for an inclusive, national identity for each ethnic group in Myanmar.

Ethnicity is a central fault line in Myanmar's civil conflicts. Ongoing warfare has politicised many identities, as ethnic armed groups and the Tatmadaw compete for allegiance, particularly in border states. Minority-ethnic groups have resisted what they have called 'Burmanisation' policies, such as education and language restrictions, that began under military rule. Ethnic armed groups have responded with calls for self-determination, while also fighting for economic control and access to natural resources.

Youth in Myanmar have had to navigate life in this context of conflict. Many youth consulted in this study shared grievances with ethnic identity, from everyday discrimination ('Some despise my ethnicity. In school, some do not want me to sit next to them') to structural oppression ('Ethnic people say that the Bamar dominate them, they impose on them Burmanisation'). Access to National Registration Cards (NRCs) was often cited as a frequent case of discrimination, as many ethnic minorities feel they are denied the card to bar them from social services and job opportunities.

*'In applying for jobs, particularly for civil servant postings, Bamar people get special preference, while Kachin applicants are neglected. For schoolteacher posts, hardly one out of 100 applicants who are appointed are Kachin. It is the same for the other civil servant postings too. And it is also the same for other minority-ethnic groups. The Burma/Buddhist NRC holders have the privilege in getting government jobs.'*

Survey results suggest that this kind of discrimination is common: nearly a fifth of all respondents and a third of all respondents identifying as an ethnic minority in their area said they had concrete experience with ethnic discrimination over the past year. Many youth interviewed in this study felt that the 'ethnocentric' ideas fuelling such discrimination were damaging to the country:

*'If we look at Shan and Kachin, of course there are ethnocentric people. [...] Youths cannot go against the label put on them: their ethnic identity. Kachin will recruit only Kachin people. None of these groups are able to work effectively because they only recruit people of their own ethnic grouping. It leads to rivalry especially when one group is stronger than another.'*

'I believe it is good to have an ethnic identity and for it to be displayed on the [National Registration Card]. But what is important is not to have ethnocentric feeling. It is fine to be willing to protect our culture, identity, but it should be made without ethnocentrism.'

Nonetheless, many youth felt their ethnic identity was important, and wanted to see it preserved. Several youth consulted in this study expressed a pride in their particular ethnic group

and an anxiety that its particular language customs may fade away.

*'The Sgaw Karen identity is important to me. I need to be able to speak, read and write it. However, I do not know much about how to read and write it [...] The government is supporting the ethnic languages, but it is definitely not sufficient. If we do not do anything, the next generation may not be able to talk Sgaw or Pwo anymore. My concern is that one day our dialect may come to an end. One day will come that we will only be able to speak [Myanmar] [...] Little by little, our language will become obsolete.'*

Some youth have begun to organise around the preservation of ethnic identities. Numerous associations, festivals, libraries and Facebook groups have sprung up around particular ethnic identities, through which young people learn about a given culture and its practices. A 23-year-old student from Rakhine spoke about his mission to increase awareness about his ethnic group, the Thet, complaining that: 'Some people have never heard about Thet ethnicity in their life. Even in Rakhine, there are people who still don't know us.' He had participated in the Rakhine Youth Forum, and 'the authorities in that forum asked our ethnicity when they saw our costumes. When I answered that we were "Thet", even the authorities like them said that they have never heard of it.' He reasoned that because of this, 'it is necessary to determine what "Thet" ethnicity is, and to talk about it. So we are now working on developing and determining Thet literature and history.' Youth in his area, he explained, have 'mobilised to organise the "Thet Youth Network", to publish books, and to start teaching.'



## CASE STUDY: SEX WORKERS

Other informants gave similar accounts. A 31-year-old Ta'ang male informant said that 'Youth in [his] area are trying to preserve their culture and traditions: music, clothing... the objective is to promote ethnic-nationalistic feeling of the youth. We are few in numbers so we need to preserve our culture.'

A 31-year-old male informant from Kachin State – member of the Kachin Youth Affair Committee – said he and his associates had 'spent about seven years working hard to get people to recognise Tai Shan', noting nonetheless with some disappointment that still 'only a few people in Yangon are getting to know us.' But he said they were continuing to 'work for improving our literature. The purpose is to showcase our particular identity.'

Despite (or perhaps because of) the discrimination they may face, particular ethnic identity remained important to youth. Many felt, however, that the weight given to particular ethnic identities should not preclude an inclusive national identity. When surveyed, 57 per cent of youth felt that promoting a national Myanmar identity was important for securing lasting peace in Myanmar. In the words of one youth from northern Shan State:

*'We, ethnic people, are also proud of being citizens of the country – we are born here. A lot of us think that way. If external forces were to invade the country, we would all fight together.'*

He lamented, however, that in the meantime,

*'we are having dog fights among ourselves. Each group tries to support its own ethnic group. The day we have a visible national characteristic, then we can overcome the difficulties.'*

One small sub-group of individuals who are particularly marginalised are sex workers. In general, life as a sex worker in Myanmar is tough, marked by crippling stigma – many sex workers live a double life to conceal their identity and protect their families. With no legal venues to work, sex workers sell their services in the street, in karaoke bars, or as call girls/boys, and are vulnerable to malicious clients who may abuse the sex worker, make unreasonable demands or refuse to pay. Sex workers are also vulnerable to harsh treatment by authorities.

A special grievance for the sex worker community, and in particular those sex workers who are men who have sex with men, is the attitude that the community face at hospitals. There are organisations driven by volunteers who help sex workers test for sexually transmitted diseases and, in the cases of positive results, seek treatment. But hospital workers' attitude towards the community often function as a barrier to sex workers' access health services. Sex workers report being scolded to the extent that some, one informant who works in a sex worker support organisation told us, come back to his organisation and say they 'would rather die than go back to hospital'.

Once a sex worker, informants told us, it is difficult to find other employment. Most take up the work because they see no other way to earn the money they need to support themselves and in many cases their dependants. One informant, for instance, said he sold sex because it was the only way he could get enough money to feed himself and his siblings after their parents died. He was illiterate, as were many of his friends in the same situation.

Informants also described a strong resistance to hiring people who had formerly been sex workers, especially LGBT people in this group. Informants said any hint of a non-heterosexual gender or sexual identity was enough to discourage employers from recruiting. Tattoos were said to be seen as typical for sex workers and could also threaten chances for employment.

## CASE STUDY: LGBT

Much has changed for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth in Myanmar. While change is incremental and happens only thanks to dedicated work undertaken by a network of youth activists, Myanmar has taken notable steps towards a more inclusive and progressive posture towards tolerating and, to some degree, accepting sexualities that aren't heterosexual. In interviews and focus discussions, youth explained that they are more accepting of peers with different sexualities than are their parents.

Networks of organisations dedicated to LGBT visibility stretch across the country, with Yangon and Mandalay serving as community hubs. These organisations regularly organise meetings, events and even concerts to promote their cause. In January 2018, these organisations reached an unexpected milestone when authorities gave them permission for an annual pride festival, titled &PROUD. With more than 10,000 attendants, the festival celebrated the LGBT community

through films, performances, debates, music and dance.

These developments have left many optimistic, though significant barriers to LGBT equality remain. Colonial-era anti-homosexuality laws are still in place, despite Aung San Suu Kyi's calls for decriminalisation. LGBT youth are often subject to stereotyping, discrimination and even ridicule. For instance, many LGBT activists have spoken out against the clown-like portrayal of LGBT characters in Myanmar films.

Many youth interviewed in this study explained that the problem went much further than film. One respondent explained that ridicule is common on social media:

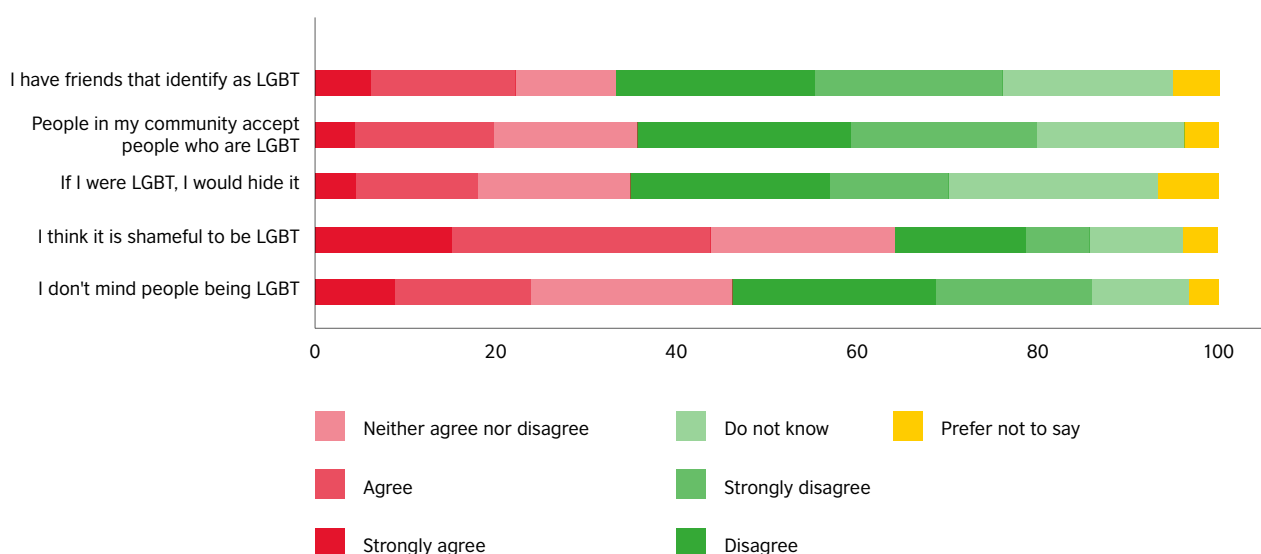
*'From [when] they are small, children are brainwashed [to think] that [...] guys need to be masculine. If a man is a gay, they will criticise more often. Guys are insulted and discriminated against in Myanmar. "Unusual engagement" is prohibited and punished by law. The*

*media are [...] showing that some of these people are getting married. But afterwards, the comments on social media are often denigrating the news and making fun of the situation. It is not a sign of acceptance; it is treated as a joke.'*

Such a bias against LGBT youth was evident among survey respondents (see Figure 7). Nearly three out of five (58.2 per cent) youth said they would prefer not to befriend an LGBT person. Only drug users were seen as less preferable friends among youth surveyed. Respondents from rural areas were even less likely to prefer an LGBT friend. Only 21.5 per cent of respondents disagreed that it is 'shameful' to be LGBT.

Many youth, however, responded that they simply did not know when asked questions about LGBT youth. This suggests that awareness campaigns may be able to educate the public on LGBT life, countering the stigma that many LGBT youth face.

**Figure 7:** LGBT acceptance







## Social engagement

*'In the past, there were not many trainings for young people. Now, we see more training organised. As organisations reached out to more young people with their training programmes and get better access to mobile phones, the interest in such organisations has grown larger. A lot of people despised organisations in the past.'*

*'Now, some has shown the interest in them. Now the youth are more involved in civil society organisations and the work they are engaging in. There are some Kumi youth organisations for*

*example and for the issues in Chin State, youth organisations and the state government can now work together. A youth forum has been organised too, and the youth committee has been created.*

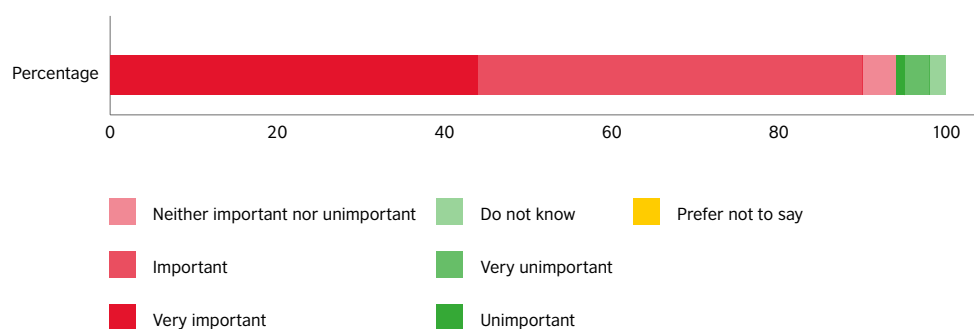
*'But still, these concern few youth only. Young people have little interest in organisations.'*

**Member of Chin Youth Committee, male, age 27**

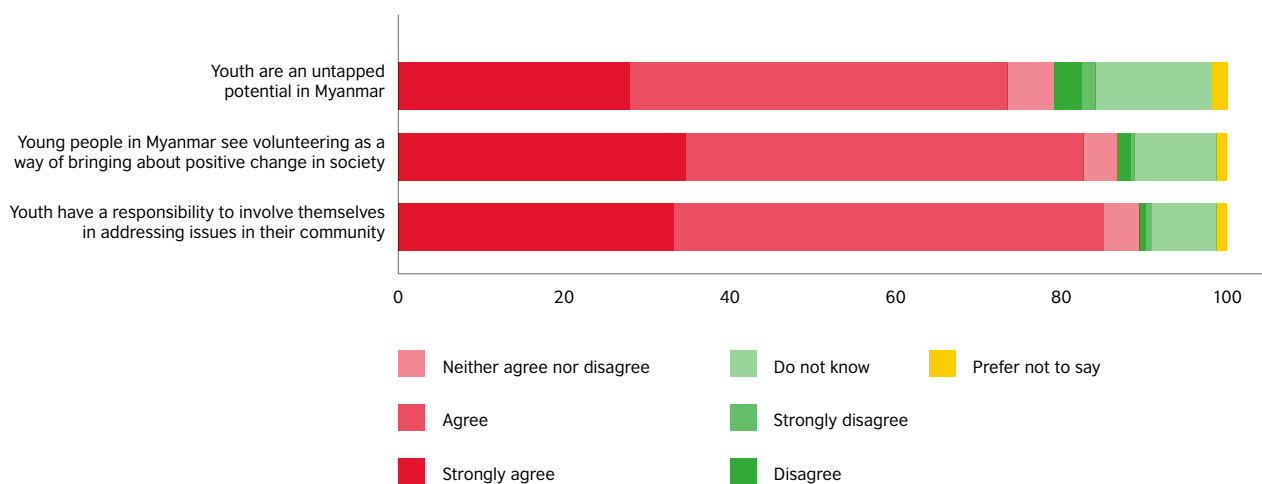
As restrictions on expression and association have loosened in Myanmar, political activity has expanded. Youth across the country have started student unions, joined civil society organisations

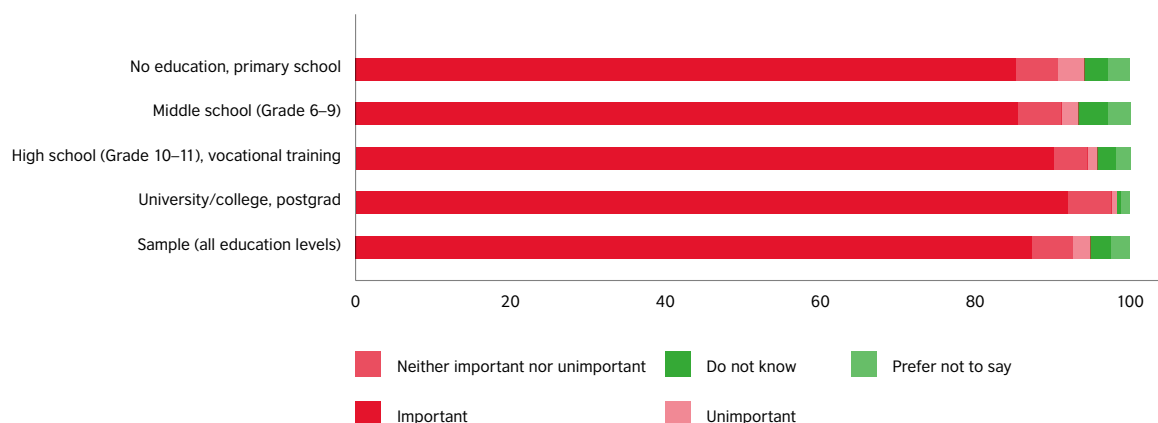
and volunteered with ethnic interest groups. In interviews and group discussions, youth explained that while volunteering has always been important in Myanmar, such political activity would likely have been criminally punished in the past. Now, this political activity is common. Youth have largely welcomed the change: nine out of ten (90 per cent) survey respondents felt that making contributions to their societies or communities was important to them (see Figure 8), and 82.7 per cent of survey respondents agreed that youth see volunteering as a way of bringing about positive change in society (see Figure 9).

**Figure 8:** How important is it to contribute to your society/community?



**Figure 9:** Youth contributions to society

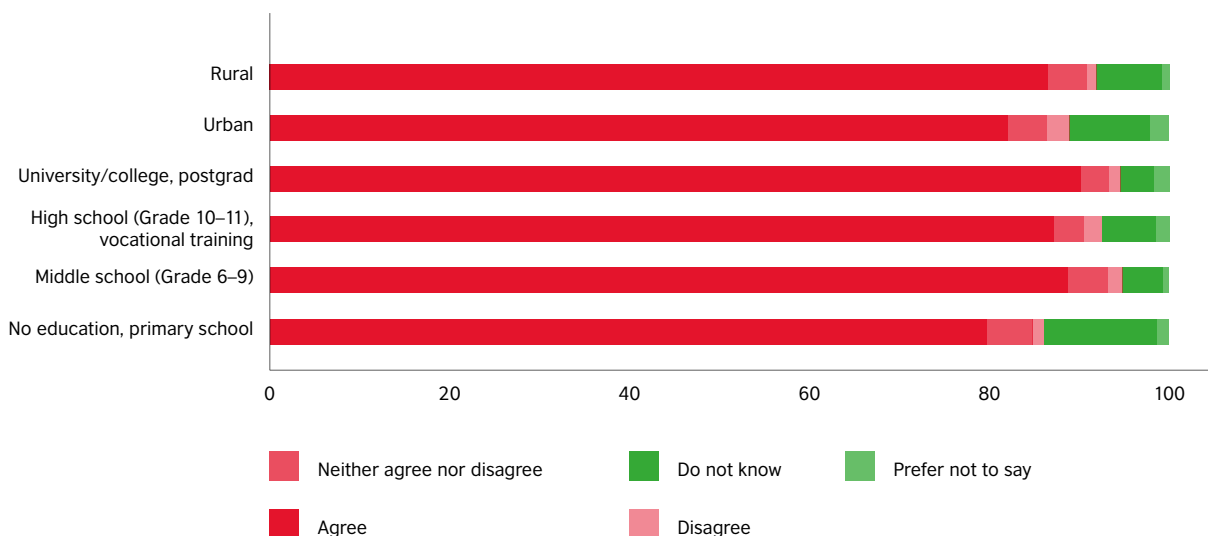


**Figure 10:** Importance in life, community activities/service

This view was especially pronounced among educated survey respondents. Youth with university or high school educations were more likely to say community activities or service are important in life than their less-educated peers (see Figure 10). They were more likely to say that ‘contributing to my society/community’ is an important goal for their future, and more likely to agree that youth have a responsibility to involve themselves in addressing community issues. Among youth surveyed in this study, higher levels of education were closely correlated with a greater emphasis placed on social engagement.

In interviews, many youth with higher levels of education acknowledged that their opportunities had shaped their perspective towards social engagement. Some shared how their education or travel opportunities had sparked their interest in civic activity. Many of these youth felt this interest was not widely shared among their peers, reporting that relatively few youth volunteered in civic activities. In the words of one 21-year-old in Hpa-an, ‘I think that youth are not so interested in social work. They rather [prefer] entertainment and recreative activities. They may also not have access enough to the information. Some youth have appropriate contact, but they are just not interested.’

Survey results, however, suggest otherwise. Of those surveyed, 85.1 per cent across all education levels agreed that youth had a responsibility to involve themselves in addressing community issues (see Figure 11). In fact, survey respondents from rural areas were *more* likely to agree that such a responsibility exists than their urban peers. While education may strengthen one’s conviction, the vast majority of youth value social engagement, regardless of their education or background. What then are the major factors in limiting youth participation?

**Figure 11:** ‘Youth have a responsibility to involve themselves in addressing issues in their community’

In many cases, youth seem to be constrained by their families' finances. Participants in group discussions explained that the opportunity cost of many activities, such as volunteering, participating in a CSO event, or attending a training, is often too great for poorer youth from rural areas. They complained that social engagement was only accessible to those with time and money, while interested youth of lesser means are often unable to join. 'Poorer families will not let their children [get] involved in social activities because the youth have to work in these families,' one discussion participant explained. 'I myself lost 20 lakhs [2,000,000 kyat] in order to attend a training last week.'

As explained above, youth also feel the pressure of strict parenting. Youth interviewed in this study described the limitations that parents often set on their children's activities, sometimes well into their young adulthood. Most viewed these restrictions as well intentioned, but over-cautious. To older generations, they explained, any social engagement beyond religious service or ethnic preservation activities seems like political activism, a field that was completely off limits when their parents were young. Student union meetings or training organised by civil society organisations are considered 'politics',

and in the words of one 24-year-old NLD activist, 'politics equal jail in the people's mind'.

To the youth interviewed in this study, this conflation is needlessly restrictive. One 19-year-old student from Rakhine State explained that many youth in Mrauk U, where she studies and participates in a students' union, are very interested in volunteering. Their participation, however, 'depends a lot on the elders and the parents who are concerned about us'. She elaborated:

*'My mother, for example, is over-protective, but two years ago I attended a training and went against my mom by attending it. These days, I go to a lot of training without even telling her.'*

*'Parents are a major limitation to the youth being involved in volunteering. They cannot distinguish what would be political work and social work. We need to make sure they do not confuse the two of them.'*

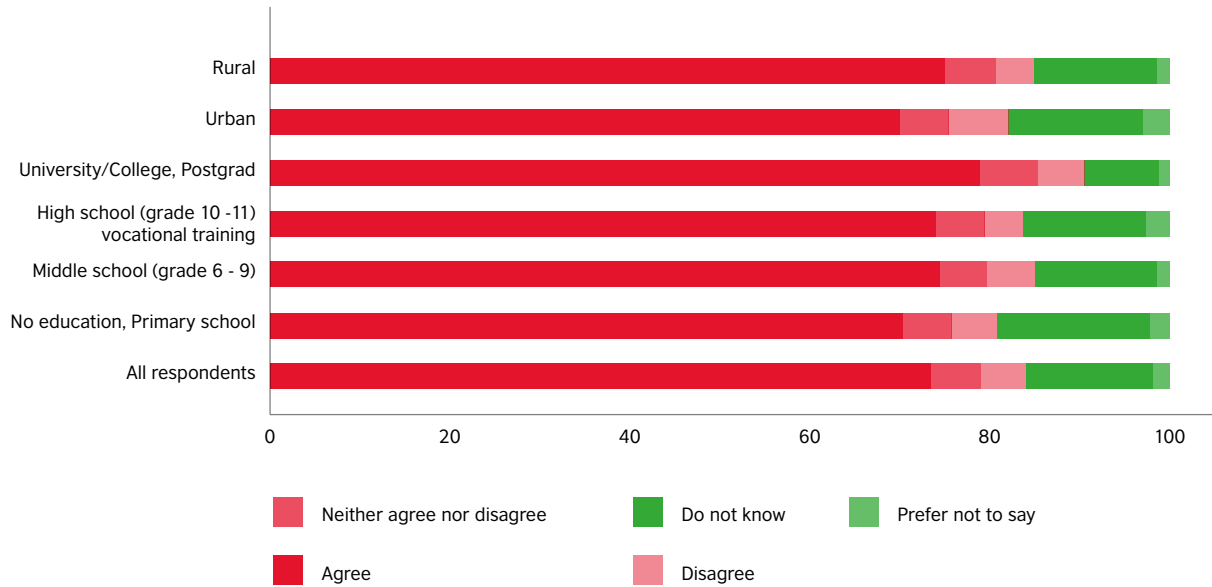
*'Us, the youth, we have to forge our own path, we have to create our opportunities. Opportunities will not find us.'*

In addition, young women often face even further restrictions in their participation than young men. Many

discussion participants felt parents were more strict with their daughters than with their sons, limiting their curfew and travel, making it difficult for young women to be socially engaged. One youth activist complained that his student organising efforts too often only included men, as female students had to follow stricter dormitory rules. In part, this may explain why female survey respondents were more likely to respond 'I don't know' to questions about social engagement than their male respondents.

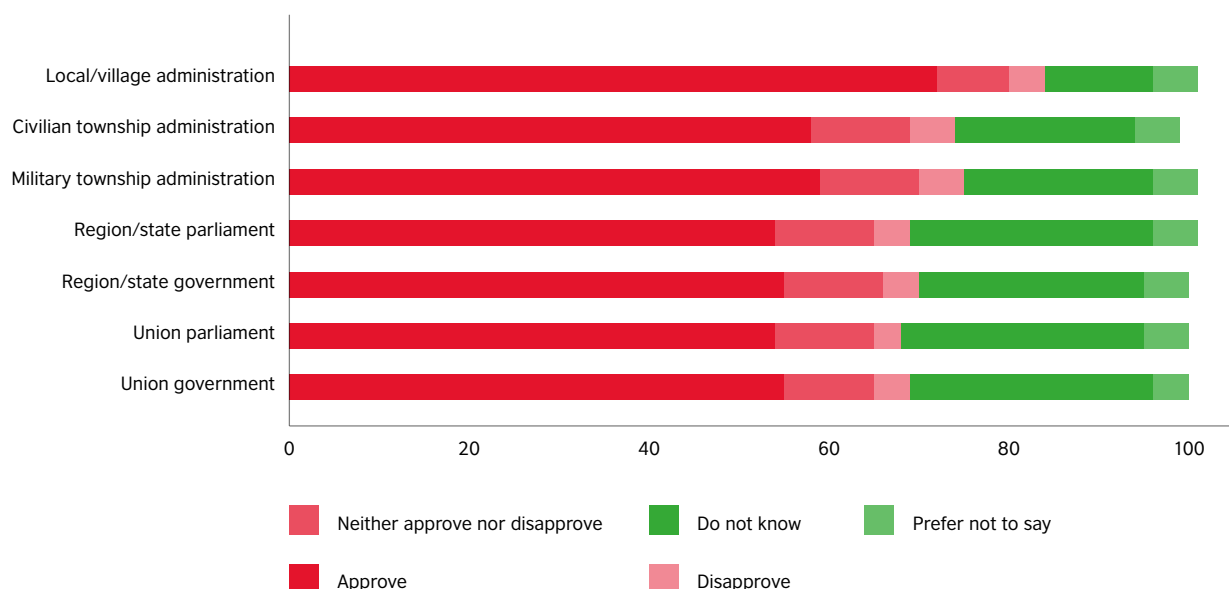
These financial and cultural realities may explain why 73.4 per cent of youth agree that youth are an untapped potential in Myanmar (see Figure 12). Among older youth (25–30 years old) and more educated youth, even more agree. Notably, rural youth surveyed in this study are more likely than their urban counterparts to agree to the untapped potential of youth, suggesting that while participation in social and civic activity varies between different groups of young people, the value of social engagement is shared between them.



**Figure 12:** 'Youth are an untapped potential in Myanmar'





**Figure 13:** Approval of institutions in respondents' areas

## Attitudes towards institutions

### Government institutions

Myanmar's transition has changed the structure of its government. The 2008 constitution maintained the delineation of its 1974 predecessor, demarcating the country into 14 administrative states and regions, each with its own elected civilian parliament. Now, young voters not only elect their Union government officials in competitive elections, they also choose their representatives for their regional *Hluttaw* in competitive contests as well.

Local governance, however, remains a complex balance between civilian and military rule. The day-to-day governance of Myanmar's 330 townships, and the villages they contain, is centralised within the General Administration Department (GAD). At the time of writing, the GAD remains a division of the Ministry of Home Affairs, a ministry reserved for the military by the 2008 constitution, though plans for reform have recently been announced. Myanmar's unique hybrid of civilian and military authority is present even at the most local level of government.

Youth surveyed in this study, however, made little distinction between civilian and military authorities at the local level: 58 per cent and 59 per cent of respondents approved of the actions of the civilian and military township administrations in their area, respectively (see Figure 13). Survey respondents also disapproved of civilian and military local authorities at an equal rate of five per cent. When asked about the actions of their local/village administrations, bodies that are part of the GAD that is overseen by the military, 72 per cent of respondents approved of them. Nearly one in five (18.5 per cent) reported to strongly approve of them.

Approval varied between administrative divisions (ranging from around 60 per cent in Mandalay, Kachin, Chin and Bago to over 80 per cent in Ayeyarwady, Kayah and Magway), though a great majority approved of their local administrations throughout the country.

The actions of Union- and region-level government institutions in respondents' areas were approved less frequently. Little more than half of respondents (55 per cent) approved of either level of government's actions in their areas.

Notably, elected bodies were the least approved bodies among youth surveyed, with only 54 per cent of respondents reporting to approve of *Hluttaw* actions.

In interviews, several youth explained that these government institutions simply seemed too distant, too 'far flung' from their daily lives. 'I do not keep track of the activities of the Union *Hluttaw*. We do not have the information, I feel,' said one recent graduate and activist in Bago. 'Here I am involved in the local level, that's why I know the local level.'

Others felt elected bodies could do more to be more representative and more accountable. This view is summarised in the account of one 25-year-old female social worker, who explained:

*'The Ayeyarwady region government is very different from before. There is more transparency, they welcome the youth and meet often with the public. The social welfare minister often asks the youth what they want, he is really friendly. However, in general the government is slow at working.'*



*'The regional Hluttaw is slow at working too. They are busy dealing with the old problems. They are stuck. Also, they are mis-co-ordinated with the government. It creates additional problems and prevents from solving past ones.'*

*'The representatives of the Hluttaw are not working well, even in Labutta township. Though they are representative, they are never doing any field visits. They spend most of their time in urban areas.'*

A 25-year-old female lawyer in Taunggyi complained about the Shan State Hluttaw:

*'I am not satisfied with the Hluttaw, for example. There are a lot of things on the table, but nothing really happens. I am unsatisfied with all the Hluttaws in general. I see through the Hluttaw channel, they are talking no sense, about things that does not really concern about the people.'*

*'In the news, they talk about buying cars for the government but they do not discuss about what concerns the grassroots people and about what could be done to develop their constituencies.'*

### CSOs and NGOs

When asked about organisations outside of government, survey respondents similarly favoured smaller local groups over larger organisations. Of youth surveyed, 75.8 per cent approved of the actions of CSOs and community-based organisations operating in their areas. In contrast, only 48.9 per cent approved of those of NGOs. The activities of NGOs were approved of more by rural youth (50.6 per cent), but less than half (40.9 per cent) of urban youth shared their opinion.

In interviews, some youth criticised NGOs, which are generally larger than local CSOs/CBOs<sup>18</sup> and often supported with foreign funds. One youth activist did not mince words: '[Some youth] are attending [training] for getting the per diem. INGOs (international NGOs) can corrupt the youth. We need to prevent them from doing so.'

Others expressed sustainability concerns. 'In Shan State, we have been trying to allocate the budget of the state for the youth in Shan State. We want the public money to be more sustainable,' explained a 26-year-old in Shan State. 'We do not want to depend on NGOs.' These views may explain why NGOs had a disapproval rating of 16.2 per cent – the highest among non-governmental groups.

Myanmar is a very religious country, and many important civil society organisations are religious bodies. Religious leaders from Myanmar's many faiths lead charity and advocacy organisations, some of which are overtly political. Most Myanmar youth appear to approve of their work: approximately two-thirds of youth surveyed (66.9 per cent) said they approved of their religious leaders.

This approval, however, varied between youth of different faith backgrounds. While 66.4 per cent of Buddhist survey respondents approved of the religious leadership in their areas, the proportion was even greater for those practising minority faiths: 69.9 per cent of Christian respondents approved of their religious leadership, while Muslim respondents approved of their leaders at a rate of 78.2 per cent.

Survey respondents were also asked for their opinion of the Buddhist nationalist group Ma Ba Tha: 38.8 per cent of youth surveyed approved of the group, controversial for its hardline nationalist and anti-Muslim positions. More men supported the group than women, and less educated and younger youth were more likely to express approval. Predictably, approval varied greatly between different religious groups, with 41.9 per cent of Buddhist respondents reporting approval, compared to just 14.9 per cent and 2.2 per cent for Christian and Muslim respondents, respectively.

## Myanmar in transition

*'They say Myanmar is a democracy now. Of course, whether it is fake or right is another question. To have democracy, we need to let go of something, people need to be more disciplined. We need to change our mind-set; we need to be accountable. There is ethnocentrism and people talk with their religious mind-set. We need to change that.'*

*'The problem is that we do not change and then we criticised the system. Democracy start[s] with our own self.'*

University student, female,  
Bago, age 20

Myanmar's recent political reforms have been dramatic. Competitive elections, censorship rollbacks and greater freedoms of association have opened politics to civilians for the first time in decades. A federal union, once a political taboo, is now openly discussed in peace talks between the elected government, the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups. While the reforms are far from exhaustive, the process has already created a very different political environment for today's youth than that available to previous generations.

Many youth came of age as the Myanmar government began this transition, and most feel the reforms are 'on track'. Three out of five youth surveyed (60 per cent) agreed that the process of developing democracy has come a long way in Myanmar. Particular groups, however, were less likely to agree.

Youth with higher levels of education were more likely to disagree that Myanmar had made progress: 17.9 per cent of university-educated respondents

disagreed that Myanmar had come a 'long way', compared to just 7.1 per cent of youth with only a primary education or none at all. Educated youth interviewed in this study, many of whom were politically active, cited continuing restrictions as reasons for their scepticism. Some doubted the integrity of the transition entirely. 'People in Myanmar consider that democracy is fake. It is the same as between real gold, and a monument painted in gold colour. Myanmar is painted in gold colour,' said one recent university graduate and activist from Mon state. 'We practise democracy for a short period of time only. It is still authoritarian rule here.'

Respondents that identified as ethnic minorities were also less likely to agree that Myanmar had progressed towards democracy. While 61.5 per cent of majority-ethnic respondents agreed with the statement, only 55.3 per cent of minority-ethnic respondents shared this opinion. In interviews, minority-ethnic youth often spoke about political reforms in terms of the peace process, the success of which is seen as critical to democracy in Myanmar. One 22-year-old Kayin woman called it a 'vicious circle', explaining: 'We are ongoing reform to make a democratic federal union. But we are not at peace. So we cannot have a democratic federal union, and vice versa... what can we do to regain trust?'

Few youth, however, disagreed with the transition itself. By a wide margin, survey respondents believed that the transition was worthwhile: 88.5 per cent felt making Myanmar more democratic was important for the development of Myanmar, and 91.8 per cent of youth said the same of reaching a peace agreement. Few youth questioned the value of political reforms or peace

negotiations. Rather, many seemed to take a sceptical middle-ground view: while Myanmar's transition is significant, its reforms have fallen short of youth expectations.

## Youth and political reforms

Many youth consulted in this study felt they should influence authorities more than they are currently able to. When asked if 'people like me should be able to influence the authorities' actions', roughly half (49.4 per cent) of survey respondents agreed. When asked if they could influence them, only 25.7 per cent agreed. In discussions and workshops, many youth felt that their limited influence left them unable to address issues that mattered to them, such as land confiscation, drug abuse and corruption.

Some youth shared that while many authorities have expressed interest for youth involvement, few make youth participation possible. One 21-year-old student in Bago went so far as to claim that youth 'are exploited by the elders and the adult', explaining:

*'They say we should be more involved, but they do not provide space and we struggle because of our financial situation. So we cannot participate in these events.'*

*'Here, the youth have no space. These days it has improved, [youth can] learn new skills and get more talented. But they never reach the position that they deserve [because] the elder push them back.'*

In other interviews, many of his peers agreed, with several adding that parents and local authorities often restrict the political activity of their children. One 24-year-old explained that 'youth can actively participate in social activities, such as health education, free funeral

services, religious activities... it is more difficult with political activities. The parents will likely say no, and their school authority will also say no.' Parental restrictions were one of the most common reasons given in interviews and discussions for why youth feel unable to influence authorities and their decisions.

In part, these restrictions may explain why surveyed youth felt freedom of expression was less protected than it should be. While three out of four youth (78.4 per cent) surveyed agreed that citizens should have a right to free expression and peaceful protest, even when they hold an unpopular view, less (about 70 per cent) agreed that citizens currently have these rights in Myanmar. However, many youth felt restrictions went beyond families and local authorities. Several youth also cited controversial laws, such as Section 66(d) of the Telecommunications Law, as reasons why free expression remains limited in Myanmar. One teenager even shared that he and his peers often self-censor their social media posts to avoid run-ins with such laws, and even possible imprisonment.

Notably, youth surveyed in this study did not feel freedom of expression should be absolute. When asked if the state should have the right to censor mass media 'to ensure civic order and morality', 67.8 per cent of youth agreed. While a range of content could fall under such censorship, youth expressed most concern with misleading or 'fake' news in interviews and group discussions. When asked why only a little more than half (56.6 per cent) of survey respondents approved of the media's activities in their areas, participants in a youth policy workshop said the reason was the problem of 'false news' that could lead to 'religious, ethnic, and

political violence'. They added: 'If we can get rid of these false news, we will be able to bring development. We can also reduce the conflict in the country. The government should monitor the media so as to share only real news.'

While this view was common among interview participants, some suggested it was a symptom of a larger problem. These youth suggested that many in Myanmar, civilians and officials alike, have little understanding of what 'democracy' really means. They explained that due to Myanmar's poor education system and the widespread fear of anything political, few youth adequately understood government institutions, their obligations or their rights as citizens. According to youth interviewed, this often leads to conceptions of democracy with prosperity, absolute freedom or even simply the 'end of all suffering'. A male charity worker in Yangon offered the example: 'When a motorcycle [rider] was arrested for not wearing [a] helmet, he would answer that it is his right not to wear the helmet as we are in a democracy.'

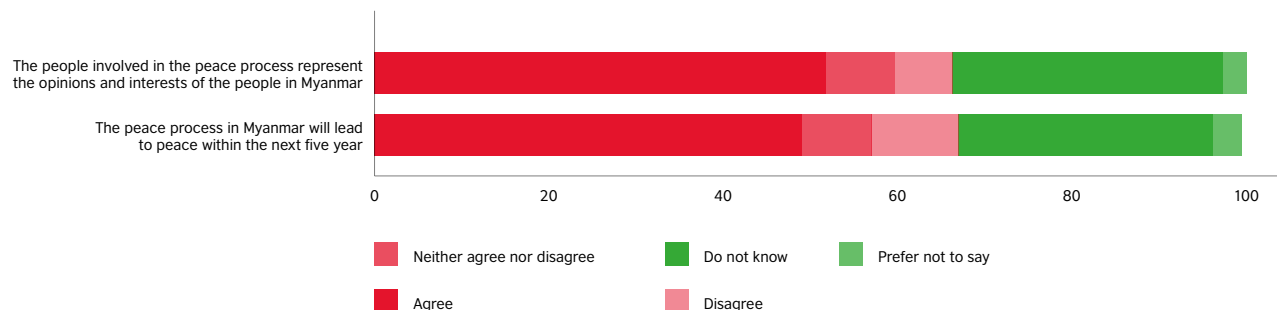
This limited understanding of democracy may explain why many youth surveyed in this study answered that they 'did not know' when asked questions about political norms or government institutions. When asked about freedoms of expression, government censorship, political opposition and youth influence beyond elections, roughly a quarter of youth on average said they did not know. When asked about their approval of government bodies, an average of 22.1 per cent of youth said they did not know about the actions of a given institution. Nearly seven in ten survey respondents (69.3 per cent) agreed with the statement: 'Sometimes politics is too

complicated and people like me can hardly make sense of what is happening.'

In interviews and discussions, many youth implied that improved education would address misunderstandings about democracy, and therefore improve the practice of democracy in Myanmar. They suggested that an education system that promoted critical thinking would prepare youth for democratic activity and promote co-operation between religious and ethnic groups. One 22-year-old from Patheingyi exclaimed:

***'Democracy? We need to change the education system first! The exam is about getting 40/100 so as to pass. So the knowledge of the student is very limited. And there is the problem of rote memorisation. We need an education system that allow people to think and analyse the situation.'***

While improved education may be warranted, protecting the rights and civil liberties of citizens may only be of secondary importance to youth. Among those surveyed, 69.4 per cent agreed that security and welfare are more important than freedom. This suggests that reaching a peace agreement and ending Myanmar's ongoing civil war may be slightly more important to Myanmar youth than the political freedoms it may bring. As one 25-year-old lawyer in Taunggyi put it, 'overall, I just want a peaceful Union where everyone can finally thrive'.

**Figure 14:** Expectations from peace process

### Youth and the peace process

Reaching such a Union depends on the success of the peace process, a series of negotiations between the government, the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups from across the country. The process is ongoing, but half of youth (49.5 per cent) surveyed agreed that the talks will lead to peace within five years (see Figure 14). When asked if the people involved in the peace process represented the opinions and interest of the people of Myanmar, the response was roughly the same: about half (51.8 per cent) agreed.

Youth consulted in this study expressed various criticisms of parties to the peace process, explaining in part why they doubted that each party had the people's interests in mind. Some youth doubted the civilian government's ability to negotiate with hard-line ethnic armed groups (EAGs), and many felt that elected officials were distant from issues on the ground. Others explained that the Tatmadaw's reputation remains poor, particularly in minority-ethnic areas,

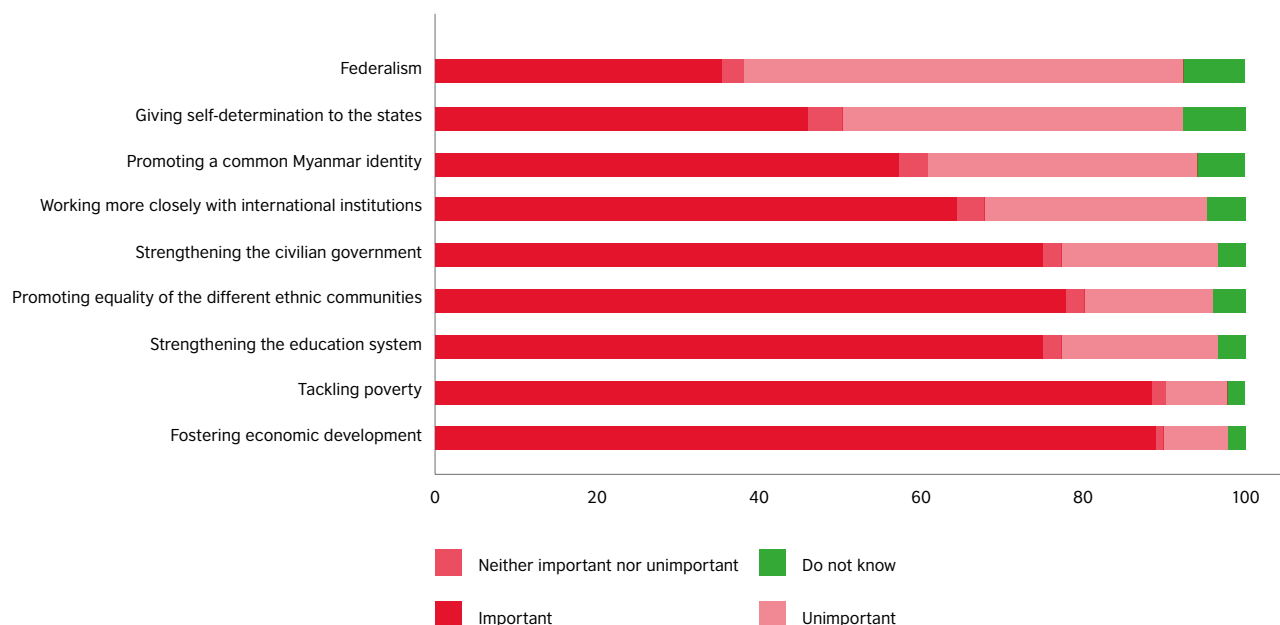
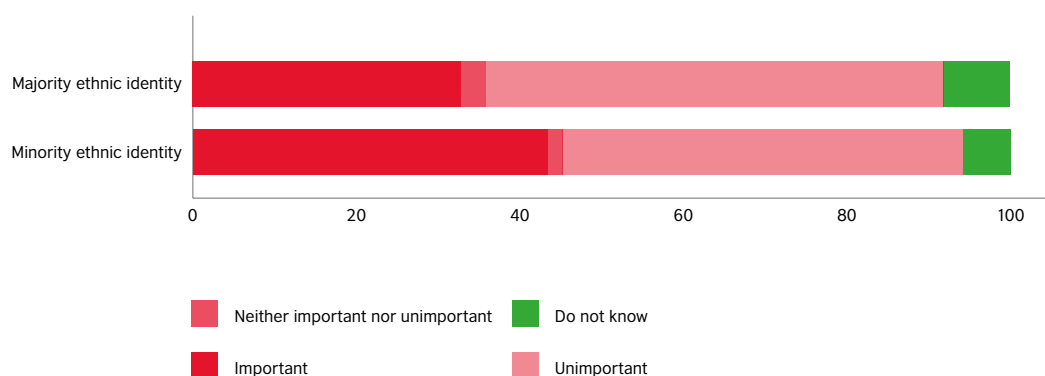
where youth explained that many associate the military with land confiscation, corruption, human rights abuses and other wrongdoing. Minority-ethnic youth also described how the Tatmadaw is associated with Bamar identity in minority areas, leaving them less likely to win minority-ethnic support. It is far from all, however, who view the army critically. After the events in Rakhine, pro-military demonstrations have frequently taken place in Yangon and other cities.

EAGs, however, were also not particularly popular. While in some areas EAGs play an important role in service provision, several youth also shared negative experiences with EAGs. They complained that villagers in EAG-controlled areas were double-taxed, once by an EAG and again by the state, a system they described as enforced through threats of violence. Some made pains to distinguish between EAGs and the ethnicities they claim to represent: as one Shan youth from Kachin State emphasised, 'we remind our people to

differentiate between KIA [Kachin Independence Army] and Kachin people. Is the KIA which we hate, not the Kachin. We know that even Kachin people cannot report or complain what they have been suffering from KIA.'

In negotiations, these parties to the peace process discuss high-level constitutional arrangements. Talks are frequently delayed due to disagreements between parties on the terms of a federal union. Despite nearly 80 per cent of youth agreeing that young people's interests are reflected in the peace process, the peace talks' focus on high-level political questions may in part explain why only half feel the people's opinions are reflected in the process. When youth were asked about the importance of federalism to securing lasting peace, 35.4 per cent said federalism was important, while over half (54.3 per cent) disagreed (see Figure 15). Federalism was considered least important among survey respondents among other possible goals.



**Figure 15:** Actions important for securing lasting peace**Figure 16:** Importance of federalism to lasting peace

In contrast, approximately nine out of ten youth felt economic development (88.9 per cent), tackling poverty (88.4 per cent), and strengthening the education system (75 per cent) would lead to lasting peace. In interviews, youth felt that better education would help combat discrimination, while fair employment opportunities would begin to close wealth gaps between groups. Some explicitly dismissed the

government's focus on high-level political arrangements, many of which were included in the government's Youth Policy. 'They focus a lot on peace, religion, federalism... it is too big. I am more in support of township, family-level initiatives,' said one youth leader in Yangon when asked about the Youth Policy. 'They talk about peace, but there is nothing concrete... we need employment!'

Notably, some groups were more likely to agree that federalism was important than others: 43.4 per cent of survey respondents that identified as ethnic minorities felt federalism was important, compared to just 32.8 per cent of majority-ethnic respondents (see Figure 16). They were also more likely to feel that granting self-determination to states and promoting a common Myanmar identity were important to lasting peace.

Youth who felt federalism was important portrayed it as a means to stem reactionary separatism. In interviews and discussions, some felt constitutional issues needed to be settled before the economy could improve. 'Without resolving these conflicts, there won't be any improvements,' said a 27-year-old in Rakhine State. A peer in Taunggyi agreed, arguing:

*'This country is multi-ethnic, there will always be different identity. And it should remain. We can achieve harmony with federalism. There will always be a nationalistic rhetoric, we need to keep this rhetoric as it is a matter of survival... indeed, minority ethnics do not have rights to defend their own future, nationalistic rhetoric is their only solution. It is only when we will have a comprehensive federalism that we will have better solutions.'*

Nonetheless, their opinion was a minority opinion among youth surveyed. Far more youth felt economic development and improved education were more important to lasting peace than federalism. As with the transition's political reforms, most youth felt improved education was critical to the success of the peace process. Among university-educated youth, nine out of ten (91.5 per cent) felt improving education was important.

Youth consulted in this study seemed to believe that if Myanmar's education system could prepare young people for themselves and earn a decent living, Myanmar's transition would be more successful; 56.5 per cent of youth agree that in five years, Myanmar will be a more democratic country. If the peace process pays greater attention to education, even more might agree.

### Myanmar in the world

*'Recently, I went to Singapore. I learnt a lot about the image of Myanmar. It is about Buddhists butchering the Muslims. Here we have a rich heritage and culture. But the international community [only] care about what is happening now. They care about the religious conflict, about ASSK [Aung San Suu Kyi] inactivity, about corruption...'*

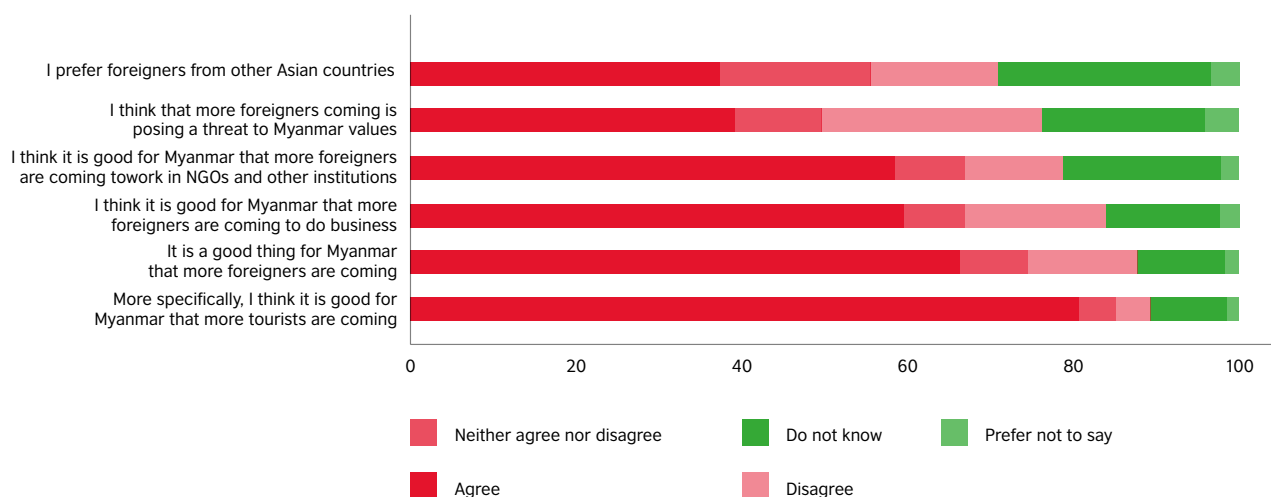
Interfaith activist, male,  
Taunggyi, age 26

Myanmar's transition has opened the country to the world. Foreign capital, businesses, organisations and visitors have come to Myanmar in numbers previously unseen. To most youth surveyed in this study, foreigners coming to Myanmar to visit, live or work presents welcome opportunity. About two-thirds (66.3 per cent) felt it was good for Myanmar that foreigners were coming generally (see Figure 17).

Most respondents (58.5 per cent) agreed that it was good that foreigners were coming to work for NGOs and other institutions. In interviews, several youth felt they could learn from foreigners working in NGOs, on topics ranging from economic development to social issues. As one 19-year-old in Rakhine State explained: 'I believe we can learn from the foreigners. For example, my friends have been sexual harassed. In rural areas, people do not know what sexual harassment is and do not know how to counter it. Foreigners can help us understanding how to answer and respond to these acts.' Another respondent predicted that Myanmar will have less of a need for NGOs when it becomes more developed.

Respondents were slightly more receptive to foreigners doing business in Myanmar: 59.5 per cent of youth surveyed agreed it was good that more foreigners are coming to do business, with many youth speaking about the country's need for foreign investment in interviews. To some respondents, however, some businesses were more welcome than others. 'I believe there is three types of foreigners: there are visitors, the one who come for the development of the country and the worse ones are the ones who come for the extraction of natural resources,' explained a 19-year-old conservation

Figure 17: Attitudes towards foreigners



worker from Shan State. 'There is a lot of negative things coming from these ones [...] They cause a lot of environmental problems in the area I come from.'

Survey respondents were most receptive to foreigners visiting as tourists: 80.6 per cent of youth surveyed agreed it is good for Myanmar that more tourists were coming to visit. In interviews and focus group discussions, many respondents were proud that the country's heritage and culture was gaining international recognition. In one discussion, a 20-year-old chemistry student declared: 'Thanks to foreigners, Bagan and Inle Lake are known to the world.' A 24-year-old working for a tour agency agreed: 'Having foreigners' presence have promoted the values and culture of Myanmar. Bagan is going to become a heritage site. It will provide many opportunities.'

Increased foreign attention on Myanmar has also brought increased criticism, especially concerning the situation in Rakhine State in 2017. The widely reported military operations against the militant group ARSA (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army), and the subsequent flow of hundreds and thousands of Rohingya refugees displaced by these operations, dramatically damaged Myanmar's international reputation. Yet while 78.8 per cent of youth surveyed

reported to be 'concerned about what happened in Rakhine', far fewer (31.9 per cent) felt the international criticism of Myanmar was reasonable (see Figure 18).

Nearly nine out of ten survey respondents (86.6 per cent) reported they were worried that civilians have lost lives in the military operations conducted in Rakhine State, with approximately the same number of respondents agreeing that the government should do a better job protecting civilians. At the same time, half (49.1 per cent) of surveyed youth agreed that the army did the right thing in Rakhine.

Many youth, however, were hesitant to assign blame for the situation, much less call for accountability. In the words of an 18-year-old student from Patheingyi: 'I do not want to enter into the blaming game.' Notably, one of the few criticised participants that directly criticised security forces was Kaman, a government-recognised but still marginalised Muslim ethnic group in Rakhine State.

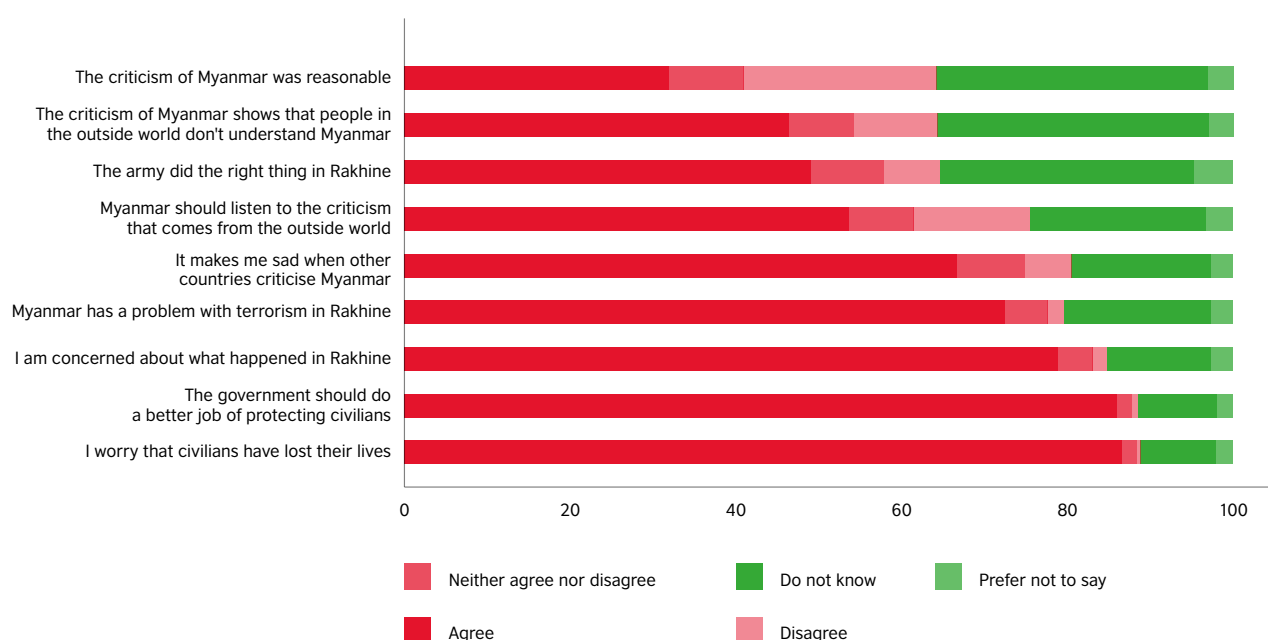
Among survey respondents, 'fighting terrorism' was the most pressing global challenge: 83.6 per cent of survey respondents said it was important to fight it (of which 61.9 per cent said it was very important), while 72.5 per cent

agreed Myanmar had a problem with terrorism in Rakhine. Some expressed concern for repeated violence, and some youth interviewed in this study discussed the situation in Rakhine State in terms of 'terrorism'. Others offered contrasting explanations for the origins of the conflict.

Several youth felt the problem was one of land or national sovereignty. They repeated claims that Rohingya communities had come from Bangladesh to 'build their own nation', as one 27-year-old in Yangon asserted. 'I don't think Islam is teaching people to kill anyone,' he continued. 'Bamar people think Rakhine issue is an ethnic issue, International communities think as a human right issue. From my side, I will not let them to occupy our land.'

Others disagreed, arguing the problem stemmed from intercommunal tensions inflamed by political groups. While only 38 per cent of youth surveyed approved of Ma Ba Tha, several discussed their influence in interviews. According to a 24-year-old NLD representative from Bago, the issue began with 'social and religious instigation from Ma Ba Tha, Tatmadaw and USDP [Union Solidarity and Development Party]. They poisoned the mind of the people... international[s] do not understand and criticise the NLD.'

**Figure 18:** International response to the situation in Rakhine State



Nearly half of youth surveyed agreed that internationals misunderstand Myanmar's context: 46.4 per cent agreed that the criticism of Myanmar shows that 'people in the outside world don't understand Myanmar'. Yet as interviews confirmed that youth hold many different accounts of the situation, it is unclear what foreign observers misunderstand. Several youth suggested in interviews that misleading news and propaganda exacerbated the problem, with some saying media is 'inciting unrest' in Myanmar.

In interviews and discussions, several youth began thinking about how Myanmar could repair its image. 'I did not feel bad when international[s] were criticising us. We should not get emotional,' warned one 22-year-old in Patheingyi. 'In the past, Myanmar was seen positively, how can we regain this position?' Others expressed some optimism. 'Often in a story, there is a climax, and it is often the most painful moment of the story. But there is always a happy ending. We need to work toward the happy ending,' said a 26-year-old in Taunggyi. 'International people have a wrong perception about [Myanmar, and] should help reaching the happy ending of the story.'

This same young person, however, did not believe the solution could come from abroad. 'It is up to the youth to make Myanmar a good country.'







# CHAPTER 4:

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Opportunities and expectations towards life

Much has changed in Myanmar. Youth are now able to organise themselves and attend trainings with local civil society groups and NGOs. They are able to vote, join political parties and start student unions. Many recognise the shortcomings of their country's ongoing transition, but still feel their futures will look better than their current circumstances.

Though optimistic, youth have several concerns about their future. They worry about employment prospects, fearing their education has prepared them to participate in neither Myanmar's emerging economy nor its budding democracy. They chafe at their parents' restrictions and question social conventions about identity. They are concerned authorities aren't doing enough to curb Myanmar's drug problem, and are suspicious of conflicting interests in government. They are concerned about the rate at which their peers use social media, and doubt how free they truly are to express themselves on it. They have also inherited a country divided by ongoing civil conflicts that have left Myanmar with a scarred international reputation.

These concerns can inform policies affecting youth and improve the services provided to them. The following policy options, informed by a series of youth policy workshops held with 200 young people across the country, can help government officials and aid providers better design programmes for the youth they serve. Many of these efforts may affect outcomes in ways that have significant secondary effects for Myanmar's democracy and peace process.

**Table 1:** Recommended policy and programme options

Concern	Policy and programme options
<b>Quality of education</b> Many youth feel the current education system does not prepare young people for employment, social engagement or political activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase youth input in education design through boards and consultations and strengthen feedback to education systems from graduates.</li> <li>• Strengthen inclusivity in education by providing education in locally relevant languages, and by developing a curriculum that reflects Myanmar's multi-ethnic, multi-faith heritage.</li> <li>• Promote the decentralisation of educational institutions, and the autonomy of universities and other higher education providers.</li> <li>• Ensure education is equitable across the country by providing additional and comparable facilities and resources to students in rural areas, including libraries.</li> <li>• Ensure these libraries are equipped with internet access.</li> </ul>
<b>Poor employment opportunities</b> Many youth feel there are few quality jobs for young people, especially in areas outside major urban centres.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate youth entrepreneurship by increasing access to (seed) funding, particularly in rural areas.</li> <li>• Increase public investment in sectors that provide youth employment.</li> <li>• Expand the government's support for technical and vocational education and training by supporting local vocational schools and training centres.</li> <li>• Provide guidance for accessing online job boards, such as the Myanmar Information Management Unit.</li> </ul>
<b>Widespread drug abuse</b> Youth across Myanmar are concerned with the increasing rates of drug use and drug sales among young people in their communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to shift perception of drugs users from criminals and/or 'lost individuals' to victims.</li> <li>• Increase access to rehabilitating treatment.</li> <li>• Focus law enforcement on middlemen and 'bigger fish' rather than on drug users or drug addicts.</li> <li>• Work with international organisations and neighbouring countries to strengthen cross-border law enforcement programmes to disrupt supply chains of drugs and related materials.</li> </ul>

Concern	Policy and programme options
<p><b>Misuse of social media</b></p> <p>Youth consulted in this study feel young people waste too many hours on social media, affecting their education and employment outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop curricula (for primary school and beyond) to stimulate the use of social media and other online opportunities for educational purposes.</li> <li>• Develop curricula (for primary school and beyond) for the critical use of social media. The curricula should focus on critical analysis of information found online and healthy habits around games and other forms of mobile entertainment.</li> <li>• Partner with local community organisations to organise training using the above curricula.</li> <li>• Promote extracurricular programmes in sports, arts, literature and music to provide creative outlets for youth.</li> <li>• Sustain pressure on social media platforms to monitor and remove hate speech.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Limited social or political engagement</b></p> <p>While opportunities for social activism and political activity have increased, many youth are unable to participate due to financial or family restrictions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign to showcase constructive and positive ways of engaging in civil society activities, student unions and other activities seen as political to mitigate parents' concerns.</li> <li>• Produce media programmes showcasing the civic and political activism of youth, emphasising its benefits to both young people and the country as a whole. The shows should target an audience of parents and community elders.</li> <li>• Engage authorities in encouraging youth to participate in social and political activism.</li> <li>• Make additional funds available for youth activism.</li> <li>• Design programmes in which students can earn class credit for time served in a volunteer or internship role.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Discrimination</b></p> <p>More than half of youth consulted in this study felt they had experienced discrimination due to their gender, job, religion, ethnicity, family and/or disability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop curricula and campaign for social tolerance.</li> <li>• Identify key community influencers to support anti-discriminatory messages.</li> <li>• Monitor the extent of discrimination.</li> <li>• Adopt an anti-discrimination day.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Foreign influence in Myanmar</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with youth to produce media promoting safe, responsible and culturally sensitive travel in Myanmar, complementing existing awareness campaigns. This media may include leaders from various faiths in Myanmar to promote appropriate behaviour at the country's diverse religious sites.</li> <li>• Develop curricula to support NGOs' sensitivity to local practices.</li> <li>• Expand responsible tourism campaigns.</li> </ul>

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# > APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Data was collected for the *Next Generation Myanmar* study between August and November 2018. Data collection was staggered between the study's quantitative and qualitative methods throughout the data collection period, allowing initial survey results to inform the content of subsequent focus group discussions and key informant interviews (see overview in Figure 19). Each stage of the methodology following the literature review is detailed below. For an overview of the data collection stages, see figure to the right.

## Data collection 1: survey

As a first step, a household survey was conducted.

## Demographics

The survey universe – or, less formally, the group of people that the survey aimed to say something about – included youth aged between 18 and 30 throughout Myanmar.

This age range is more narrow than the Myanmar government's definition of youth. The government, as well as many Myanmar CSOs/CBOs, define youth as young people aged 15 to 35. The researchers chose a truncated range of age 18 to 30 in order to concentrate data collection on a smaller share of the population, thus allowing a higher level of research validity. However, in rare cases when conducting key informant interviews and focus group discussions, interview subjects aged 30–35 were included in this study, recognising the fact that the age range 18–30 is not universally accepted and is less common than the age range 18–35 among Myanmar organisations. As such, a small number of 31-year-old informants appear in the report. This is not believed to have affected findings.

Any research in Myanmar must consider ethnicity. A total of 135 ethnicities are officially recognised in Myanmar, and these have long been invoked as constituent demarcations in Myanmar politics. A possible sample design might allow for disaggregation by, and comparison between, respondents of each of these 135 ethnicities. However, critical limitations make such a design undesirable. First, despite its ubiquity in Myanmar politics, the extent to which this frequently invoked idea in fact depicts Myanmar demography remains a point of ambiguity. Ethnic groups listed among the 135 may not exist, may no longer exist, or may have merged or divided. Further, respondents may belong to more than one listed ethnic group, or none at all (as is the case with the Rohingya-identifying populations from northern Rakhine State). A survey design built from the '135 nationalities' framework would assume the accuracy of the framework before it can be empirically validated. Second, a sample design of 135 nationalities would be costly. Any statistically valid sample would require an absolute minimum of 30 respondents per ethnicity, resulting in a total minimum sample size of at least 4,050. This amount is a minimum, and ideally many more respondents of each ethnicity would be included ( $135 \times 200 = 27,000$  respondents would make for a quality grade sampling size). In the case of the *Next Generation Myanmar* study – as with most studies – such a large sample size and its associated cost was prohibitive. The *Next Generation Myanmar* study therefore does not include membership in one of Myanmar's alleged 135 nationalities as a variable in its survey. However, this does not mean that the study does not explore the role ethnicity plays in the lives of youth, as told by youth in today's changing Myanmar.

Figure 19: Timeline of study





## Sampling

The survey employed a multi-staged sampling plan. The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census served as a sampling frame. In the first stage, Myanmar's states/regions were used as strata, to which sample size was allocated proportionate to size of population. Small states/regions were boosted to ensure at least 100 respondents per region to improve

accuracy in the region-level analysis. In the second, third and fourth stage, cluster sampling was applied. First, townships were selected randomly, within which village tracts and wards were randomly selected. Then, within these, household were selected using skip-step randomised household sampling from a starting point. In each household, a respondent was chosen from household members falling within

the age bracket of the population, using last birthday as a random selection method.

The appropriate sample size was calculated at 2,160 respondents (see Table 2). In each sampling point, a minimum of ten interviews were conducted. Interviewers conducted more than ten interviews in many points, thus increasing the sample size to 2,474 (accounted for in post-weighting).

**Table 2:** Sample size by state/region/territory

State/region/territory	Total youth population	Youth population proportion (percentage)	Calculated sample size	Adjustment (boost)	Adjusted sample	Number of primary sampling units (PSUs) (10 respondents in each)
Kachin	411,967	3.7	62.9	37	100	10
Kayah	66,003	0.6	10.2	90	100	10
Kayin	282,603	2.5	42.5	58	100	10
Chin	90,337	0.8	13.6	86	100	10
Sagaing	1,150,335	10.4	176.8		177	18
Tanintharyi	295,979	2.7	45.9	54	100	10
Bago	1,006,204	9.1	154.7		155	16
Magway	807,445	7.3	124.1		125	13
Mandalay	1,425,865	12.8	217.6		218	22
Mon	396,638	3.6	61.2	39	100	10
Rakhine	429,084	3.9	66.3	34	100	10
Yangon	1,866,067	16.8	285.6		286	29
Shan	1,323,980	11.9	202.3		203	20
Ayeyarwady	1,271,796	11.5	195.5		196	20
Nay Pyi Taw	283,067	2.5	42.5	58	100	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,107,370</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>1,702</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>2,160</b>	<b>218</b>

**Table 3:** Indication of confidence intervals based on the sample size

Size of sample	Example	Survey response				
		50%	60% or 40%	70% or 30%	80% or 20%	90% or 10%
		pp	pp	pp	pp	pp
100	Population in a smaller region	9.8	9.7	9.0	7.9	5.9
200	Population in a larger region	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.6	4.2
500	Sample sub-group (e.g. those with higher education)	4.4	4.3	4.0	3.5	2.6
1,000	Sample sub-group (e.g. women)	3.1	3.0	2.8	2.5	1.9
2,471	Full survey sample	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.2

**Table 4:** Indication of confidence intervals based on the sample size and sub-groups

Size of sub-group samples	Example	Survey response				
		50%	60% or 40%	70% or 30%	80% or 20%	90% or 10%
		pp	pp	pp	pp	pp
100 and 100	Two small regions	13.9	13.6	12.8	11.1	8.4
200 and 200	Two larger regions	9.8	9.6	9.0	7.9	5.9
500 and 500	Two education sub-groups	6.2	6.1	5.7	5.0	3.7
1,200 and 1,200	Gender comparison	4.0	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4

## Weighting of data

To improve accuracy, weights have been applied to the survey dataset on age, gender and education. Again, the 2014 census has been used as the sampling frame.

## Statistical reliability

As in all surveys, the survey respondents are only a sample of the total survey universe or survey population, meaning that we cannot know with certainty whether the figures obtained are exactly those we would have, had all possible respondents been interviewed. It is nonetheless possible to predict the variation between the sample results and the true values that would be obtained under such circumstances. This can be predicted using two factors: knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based, and the number of times that particular answer is given. We can make the prediction with varying levels of confidence – the higher the level of confidence, the wider is the range of the variation. The conventionally accepted level of confidence used in reporting sampled survey results is 95 per cent, and will also be used here. The level of confidence of 95 per cent means that the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value will fall within a specified range.

Table 3 illustrates the predicted ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the 95 per cent confidence interval. An indication of sampling error is also given. Please note that these intervals are indicative as they are calculated on the basis on unclustered simple random sample and do not take into account the effect of clustering and weighting.

For example, with a sample of 2,471, for a question where 30 per cent of respondents gave a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the true value of this answer (which would have been obtained if the whole survey population, all people aged 18–30 in the project regions, had been asked this question) is between 28.2 per cent and 31.8 per cent.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, the results may show a real difference in opinions between these sub-groups, or they may occur by chance and not be conclusive. Testing whether the difference is real or only occurred because of our limited sample depends on the same factors: size of the sub-samples, the percentage of respondents selecting a particular answer, and the degree of confidence chosen. Table 4 shows conventional 95 per cent confidence whether the differences between the survey results of different sub-groups (such as regions or different age groups) are real or inconclusive.

For example, if a particular question response in a region A with a sample of 100 is 50 per cent, and the objective is to compare it with the response in a region B (sample size 100 respondents), then any result below 36.1 per cent or above 63.9 per cent will show, with 95 per cent likelihood, a real observable difference in the opinions of people living in these two regions. Any result falling between 36.1 per cent and 63.9 per cent would not show a statistically significant difference between region A and B. On the other hand, when comparisons are made between gender groups, where there are larger numbers of respondents per group, the span within which differences are inconclusive is smaller. Similarly, answer distributions towards the extremes of 0 per cent and 100 per cent (50 per cent is 'non-extreme') yield a smaller span. If, for example, a particular question response among women is 80 or 20 per cent and the objective is to compare it with the response given by men, then any result below 76.8 per cent or above 83.2 per cent will show, with 95 per cent likelihood, a real observable difference in the opinions of women and men.

Throughout the report, with a few exceptions, only statistically significant results have been reported.

## Data collection and language

Data was collected through pen-and-paper interviewing. While this is associated with somewhat higher degrees of reliability error, it contains advantages in difficult-to-reach territory, insofar as it works entirely independently of web access and does not expose enumerators to potential risks from possessing visibly valuable items. Following data collection, data was coded by data clerks in Yangon.

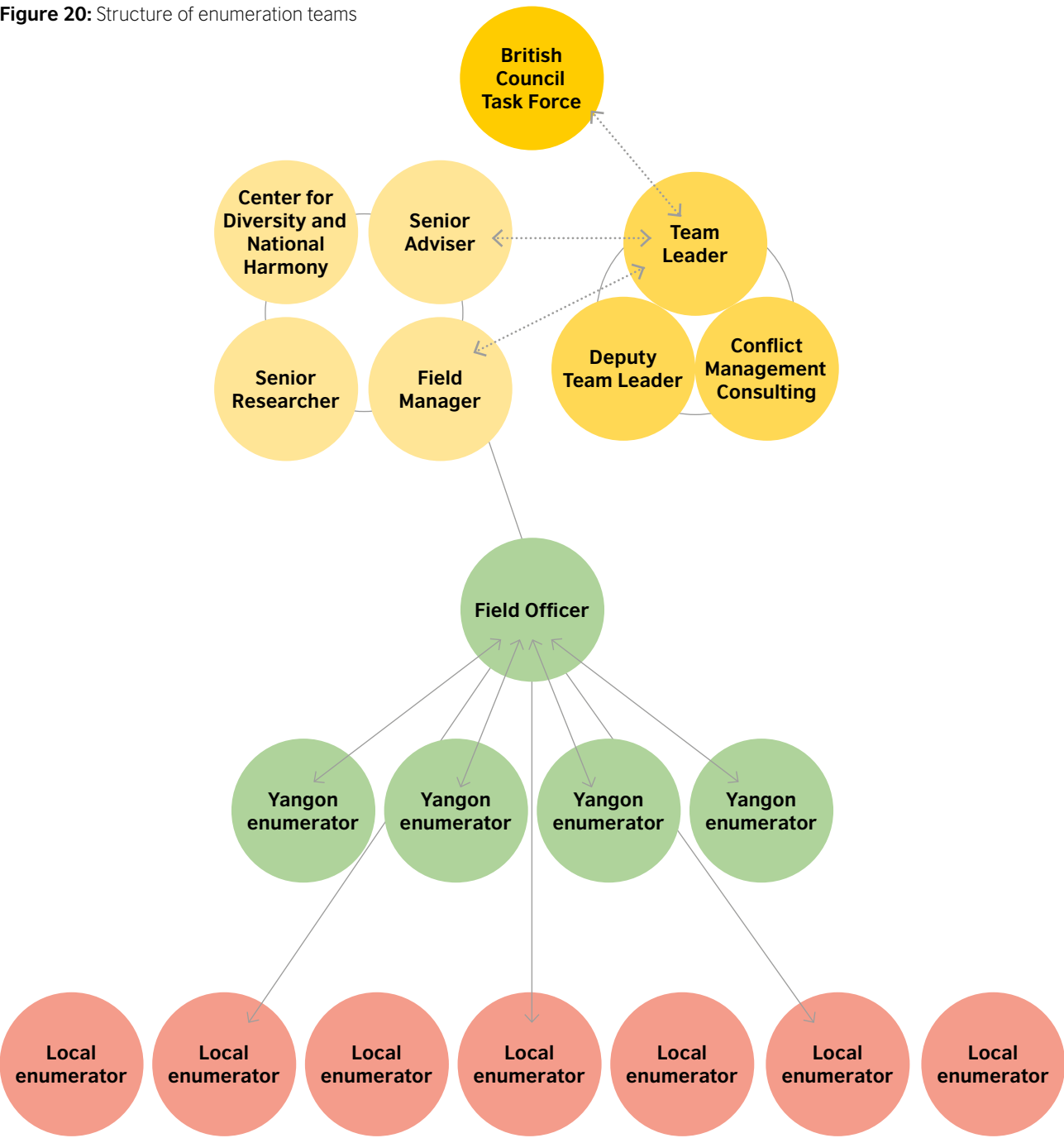
Data is most reliable and accurate when collected in the language most convenient to respondents. Recognising the linguistic diversity of Myanmar, surveys were conducted by enumerators proficient in local languages when the Myanmar language was not appropriate. These enumerators were able to facilitate respondents' answering of the questionnaire. While there is a risk that certain variations may have appeared in the wording of questions due to this modality, it was not seen as possible/feasible to translate the tool to all relevant questions. As a way of mitigating impact, enumerators were carefully trained in the research objectives to ensure questions were understood as intended.

**Enumerators and deployment**

Enumerators were drawn from a large pool of individuals trained in research design and experienced in research in Myanmar. Special attention was given to ensuring that enumerators reflected both genders and a broad range of ethnicity and religious backgrounds. These enumerators were then further trained by the CDNH Research Team.

In the field, enumerators moved in four teams of five under the supervision of one CDNH field officer, themselves experienced and trained enumerators. When needed, these teams recruited additional enumerators from local communities (see Figure 20). With its flexible recruitment, this model ensured each team always had knowledge of the specific contexts in which the survey was conducted.

**Figure 20:** Structure of enumeration teams





## Quality assurance

CMC and CDNH assured the quality of the survey in three ways. First, qualified enumerators were further trained in the research tool devised specifically for the *Next Generation Myanmar* study, ensuring enumerators understood the value of the data they collected. Second, the layered field model of enumeration places a field officer with each enumeration team to provide on-the-ground quality assurance and 'spot-checks', strengthening the quality of the data received for coding. Third, all data collection was overseen by a field manager, who detected any inaccuracies and irregularities that were then addressed by field teams. Such inaccuracies were also caught by research team members coding the data, who conducted telephone checks to ensure interviews indeed took place to protocol. Last, all data collected was reviewed by deputy team leader Morten Nygaard Christensen for consistency.

## Limitations

In several instances, enumeration was delayed by transport complications due to heavy rainfall in the rainy season. While this incurred some delay, enumerators were ultimately able to reach the polling units identified in the sampling plan. A few exceptions were when specific wards or villages that had been identified were not possible to locate, because they either had been vacated or had changed name. In around five cases, it was necessary to re-sample a polling unit. When this was done, the original sampling protocol was followed.

In some areas of Myanmar, active conflict or ongoing travel restrictions make research difficult. This is all the more problematic, insofar as the people who live in these areas share life conditions that are markedly different from most, and thus warrant attention. Due to CDNH's networks and access, restrictions were not faced. It is nonetheless the case that due to the random sampling employed, most conflict areas were under-sampled

(PSUs drawn fell outside these areas). Recognising the importance of representing voices from conflict-affected areas, the research team made alternative arrangements to consult youth from such areas through key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Yangon and other places.

The survey conducted under the study surveyed a total of 2,473 individuals aged 18–30 across the country. The survey aimed to achieve a sample that would allow analysis of the data disaggregated by gender, age, education, income, religion and other critical demographics. The sample was drawn through a multi-stage stratified, clustered sample design. While it aimed to achieve national representativeness, it is inevitable in a country as diverse and geographically distinct as Myanmar that at lower levels, specific communities (e.g. religious or ethnic) are not represented.

Further, survey respondents were not asked to provide their specific ethnic identity. Instead, survey respondents were asked if they identified as an ethnic majority or an ethnic minority *in their areas*. This means that in some cases, a Bamar youth may have identified as an ethnic minority if they were living in an area where a national ethnic minority was the *local* majority. The research team believes such instances were few in number, though they may in some cases have the effect of suppressing figures disaggregated by minority-ethnic status.

Despite these limitations, the research team remains confident that the findings presented in this report represent a unique and unprecedented attempt to measure youth opinion across Myanmar. Its methodology and findings may be further refined in subsequent youth opinion research, while also informing public discourse on the priorities of Myanmar youth today.

## Analysis 1: stock-taking

Using findings from the survey,<sup>19</sup> topics for further exploration were identified and presented in a stock-taking report, which was discussed with the project's task force. Based on their input, interview guides for the subsequent key informant interviews and focus group discussions were prepared. These were tested with field staff from different regions to ensure appropriateness and relevance.

## Data collection 2: focus group discussions and key informant interviews

Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted between October and November 2018. Each collected in-depth accounts of youth experiences, with special attention paid to the findings identified for further exploration during the stock-taking phase.

Both focus group discussions and key informant interviews were facilitated primarily by senior Myanmar research staff, but also involved other members of the core research team. Technical expert and field manager Constant Courtin and deputy team leader Morten Nygaard Christensen joined when necessary, in which case translating staff accompanied the team.

19 > Due to delays incurred in the process of achieving approval from the ethical review board of the Ministry of Social Welfare, it was necessary to conduct the stock-taking using results from only half of the full sample. The differences between this sub-sample and the full sample have nonetheless not proven to be of particular significance

### Focus group discussions

Ten focus group discussions were conducted, each lasting around three hours, with snacks, tea and coffee provided. Appropriate venues were identified and rented as necessary. Discussions were semi-structured, conducted in accordance with a prepared questionnaire while also allowing follow-up questions and off-topic questions to encourage free-flowing discussions.

### Participants

Each focus group discussion included between five and 11 participants, each selected according to either a geographic or topical logic (sex workers were interviewed in Yangon, for example). Participants were sourced through existing youth networks, including through CDNH's youth networks, and through the British Council's Millennium Centres. In selecting participants, the research team ensured those selected represented various demographic groups (gender, age, wealth, location, ethnicity, etc.).

### Key informant interviews

Twenty key informant interviews were conducted, allowing the consortium to further explore in depth the perspectives of key individuals with regards to the topics chosen for further research. Each key informant interview was semi-structured and lasted about an hour. They were typically carried out in connection with focus group discussions.

Participants were selected to maximise the amount of information collected per interview. Informants were typically youth with particular insights into particular areas of youth life. In some cases, participants were individuals who emerged as particularly informative during focus group discussions. Special attention was paid to ensure a diverse range of genders, ages and religious backgrounds were included in key informant interviews.

### Data collection 3: youth policy workshops

Alongside the qualitative data collection, youth policy workshops (YPWs) were conducted. The consortium convened one-day policy workshops in five of Myanmar's states and regions, each with about 20 youth representatives participating. Together with the research team, these participants were invited to contribute to the analysis of emerging findings from the study. While initially the youth policy workshops aimed to use findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative data collection tools, delays in the implementation of the project meant that the findings that were analysed during the YPWs were mainly from the quantitative survey. The research team facilitated discussions among the youth representatives, leading to the identification of concrete policy recommendations aimed at different levels of government, as well as other actors and – not least – youth.

The research team ensured a diverse group of youth representatives were selected to participate in the workshops. Representatives were selected from CDNH's wider network, from a variety of backgrounds, as well as through the British Council Millennium Centres. The diversity ensured each workshop resulted in a rich discussion of different policy preferences.

The policy workshops were facilitated by technical expert and field manager Constant Courtin and deputy team leader Morten Nygaard Christensen, with simultaneous translation provided by CDNH staff.





CMC provides research, monitoring and evaluation, and technical assistance in challenging, conflict-affected and post-conflict areas. We work for international organisations, governments and civil society, deploying multinational and highly specialised teams of experts. Our staff offer in-depth thematic expertise in a number of areas, including on topics like social tension/cohesion, peacebuilding, stabilisation and migration, and have served organisations across the Middle East, Europe, Africa and Asia.

The Center for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH) is an independent non-governmental organisation established with an overall objective to enhance social harmonisation, peaceful coexistence and mitigation of violence in Myanmar. CDNH builds on the research capacity and the community networks of many of the researchers and field staff who were involved in the investigation, data collection and preparation of reports on communal violence that has occurred in Myanmar.



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