

Institution: Institute of Education
Unit of Assessment: 25
Title of case study: Myanmar: how education research is helping the peace process
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

IOE researcher Marie Lall has set up the first joint discussions between representatives of Myanmar's ethnic armed group education departments and a Ministry of Education team that is leading the country's education reform process. This breakthrough is believed to have assisted not only the rebuilding of the Myanmar (formerly Burma) education system but also the national peace process. Lall's research has played a key role in persuading UNICEF, AusAID¹ and other international organisations, such as the European Union, to make further investments in the reconstruction of the country's education services. She has also helped to highlight the importance of mother-tongue teaching – an issue that must be resolved if Myanmar's Burmese-speaking majority are to reach a lasting settlement with other ethnic communities.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Context: Half a century of military rule, economic stagnation and civil strife have exacted a heavy toll on Myanmar education. Although the government and the country's diverse ethnic groups are now involved in peace negotiations, schools are still hampered by inadequate teaching and chronic underfunding. These problems afflict not only the state sector but the wide range of parallel school systems that the Mon and Karen peoples, and other ethnic groups, have established to provide mother-tongue education for their children. Their schools have also had to contend with a protracted armed conflict that has forced many children into refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border. The research described below was designed to evaluate the contrasting Karen and Mon school systems and identify the most appropriate model for ethnic education provision in a post-civil-war Myanmar.

Researchers: Dr Lall is Reader in Education Policy and South Asian Studies at the IOE. She has specialised in Myanmar politics and education since 2005. Lall conducted this study between February 2011 and April 2012 with Dr Ashley South, an independent consultant.

Key findings: Mon schools: The research found that the 1998 ceasefire enabled the Mon education system to expand and improve – see references **R1** and **R2**. More than 150 Mon national schools were preparing pupils to sit government matriculation exams that allow them to enter the national higher education system. Informal partnerships had also been established with more than 100 'mixed' schools in Mon areas that are shared with the government system. The Mon national schools use the Mon language at primary level, but Burmese is the language of instruction at the middle and high-school levels.

Karen schools: By contrast, many Karen areas were blighted by armed conflict (**R3**) until the January 2012 ceasefire, and Karen children were being educated into a separatist identity. The Karen National Union has developed a curriculum based upon one Karen dialect, which is used in about 1000 schools, including some based in refugee camps. Interviewees told the researchers that Karen schools produce teenagers who are qualified to work for aid agencies and/or opposition groups, or possibly go abroad. However, as they do not speak Burmese fluently they are unable to matriculate and enrol at the country's universities and colleges and are therefore unable to reintegrate into Myanmar society.

Conclusions: Lall and South emphasised that the Karen community – like the Mon – deserved credit for their strong commitment to education under extremely challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, they concluded that Karen educators need to re-think their implicitly separatist agenda now that a substantial peace process is under way. The Mon education experience may offer a useful model, they argued. Lall and South also called on international donors to work with all stakeholders to produce a 21st century education system for Myanmar. The government, in turn, should provide support for local school systems and adopt a more tolerant policy on mother-tongue

¹Australia's overseas aid programme

Impact case study (REF3b)

teaching. No mother-tongue instruction is yet allowed in government schools during school hours (the mixed schools in Mon State are the only partial exception to this rule).

Research methods: Lall and South examined secondary and archival sources and undertook five field trips: three to Karen State (February, March and October 2011) and two to Mon State (May 2011 and April 2012). Both states are in the south east of the country. Lall and South interviewed teachers, parents, students and Mon and Karen education officials, as well as domestic and international donors. Interviews were conducted in English, or in Mon or Karen (using translators). The research covered three primary schools in the south of Karen State, one high school, a Karen teacher training college on the Thai border, semi-structured interviews with Karen education officials, and visits to a monastic school and a teaching centre. Focus group interviews were conducted at the training college and one primary school, and with educators, including monks and pastors. In Mon State, the research covered four Mon national schools, one mixed school and four monastic schools. Semi-structured focus group discussions were held with parents and, separately, with teachers and education officials. In Karen State, information was gathered from 34 teachers, 14 education officials, 15 parents and 30 students. The equivalent figures for Mon State were 22, 21, 8 and 2.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1: Lall, M. & South, A. (2013) Comparing models of non-state ethnic education in Myanmar: the Mon and Karen national education regimes, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. Published online: August 6, 2013.

R2: Lall, M. & South, A. (2012) *Education, conflict and identity: non-state ethnic education regimes in Burma/Myanmar*. Open Society Institute. http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/Non-state_Education_in_Burma-Myanmar.pdf

R3: Lall, M. (2009) *Ethnic conflict in light of the 2010 elections in Burma/Myanmar*, Chatham House Briefing Paper <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/109182>

Indicative funding:

IF1: The Open Society Institute provided US\$20,000 (just under £13,000) for the Mon and Karen study (**R2**). Lall was the contract-holder.

IF2: As a direct result of (**R2**), AusAID awarded Lall a two-year part-time contract to provide technical advice on its education programme. The contract runs from November 11, 2012 to November 11, 2014 and is worth AU\$124,795 (£73,970).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Principal beneficiaries: Minority ethnic children across Myanmar are likely to benefit most from Lall's work. International aid agencies have also gained from the research as it has enabled them to target their education spending more effectively. Ultimately, the people of Myanmar stand to benefit from her research too because the discussions that she initiated – and led -- between representatives of ethnic armed group education departments and a Ministry of Education team are believed to have furthered the overall peace and reconciliation process. Academics have also benefited from research methods training that she has been providing in Myanmar.

Dates of benefit: The impact of Lall's research on the Mon and Karen education systems began to be felt immediately after the publication of her 2012 study. The benefits of her training in research methods have been accumulating since 2005.

Reach and significance: It is difficult to estimate the number of children who are likely to be affected by her research as the precise number of school-aged children in minority ethnic communities is not known. No census has been carried out in Myanmar for more than 30 years. However, as UNICEF believes that Myanmar has a child population of 18 million² and ethnic minorities are thought to make up a third of that group this would suggest that up to six million children should benefit in some way from Lall's work. Her research is being considered at the very highest levels of Myanmar policy-making – a fact that was underlined by an invitation to her to brief the Minister in charge of national peace negotiations. Lall can therefore point to the instrumental

²http://www.unicef.org/myanmar/overview_20839.html

Impact case study (REF3b)

impact³ (influencing policy and/or practice) of her work. She has also had two other forms of impact: conceptual (enhancing general understanding and informing debate) and capacity building.

Pathways to impact: The 2012 study paved the way for further discussions with Myanmar government representatives, Mon education officials and international donor organisations.

National level: After the study was completed, Lall had a meeting with the head of the Ministry of Education's Comprehensive Education Sector Review team, which is leading the national reform process. At this meeting Lall presented her with a copy of the report (R2). In June 2013, Lall was also asked to meet and brief a senior Myanmar Minister, U Aung Min, on ethnic education issues. This was also extremely significant as U Aung Min, Minister of the President's Office, is leading the peace negotiations with the non-state armed groups.

Mon education: Lall and South were invited to advise the Mon National Education Committee following the publication of their report. This committee is the education arm of the Mon people's armed group, the New Mon State Party, who are in peace talks with the Myanmar government. The researchers provided guidance on how the Mon education system could be expanded and how it could link in more – through mixed schools – with the government system. They also offered advice on the school curriculum and teacher training.

International donors: Lall was also asked to provide advice for AusAID, the largest donor to Myanmar's education sector. AusAID found her advice so useful that it awarded her a two-year consultancy contract amounting to almost AU\$125,000 (see Indicative Funding).

Instrumental impact: National level: As the Ministry of Education review team had never met with any ethnic education department previously, Lall recommended that workshops be held to bring the government side face to face with representatives of the ethnic school sectors. The first two workshops were held in March and June 2013 in Yangon (formerly Rangoon). They were led by Lall and funded by AusAID. The first workshop (March 1) was for ethnic education representatives but the second one (June 24 to 27), which focused on mother-tongue issues, was attended by the Ministry's review team. This second workshop generated intensive discussions that linked education issues with the peace process and continued the debates around separate schooling, devolution and decentralisation. Representatives of the Mon, Karen, Karenni, Shan, Kachin, Chin and Rakhine states and Sagain Region took part. There were also representatives from the Myanmar NGO, Shalom, which has been involved in ethnic education for many years. The workshop was held behind closed doors to allow for discussion of some sensitive and difficult topics. This event was seen as a remarkable breakthrough (testimony below) which reflected the confidence that ethnic groups and the Ministry's team have in Lall. As a result of the workshops' success, Shalom asked Lall in June 2013 to facilitate a third workshop for education officials from the Mon, Karen, Karenni, Shan and Kachin non-state armed groups.

Mon testimony: The significance of Lall's work has been confirmed by the most senior official of the Mon National Education Committee – see impact source S1. She said that Lall's 2012 report helped her organisation to review its policies. It had also brought the mother-tongue debate to the national level. "We feel that the research is not only informing the education reform process but also helping establish the parameters for the role of education in the peace process", the Mon official added.

Influence on Australian policy: The First Secretary (S2) in the Australian Embassy in Yangon has said that Lall and South's study (R2) helped to deepen AusAID officials' understanding of ethnic education issues in Myanmar. The embassy official added that Lall's subsequent advice had improved the effectiveness of the agency's education activities and "thus had an impact on the Myanmar people". However, the Australians believe that Lall's biggest achievement has been in helping to bring ethnic representatives into the national education reform discussion through the two AusAID workshops. These achieved their objective of helping ethnic groups to identify common issues which could be passed to the Ministry of Education review team. "Not only has this strengthened the CESR [education review] process but getting education policies right will also have a major impact on the peace process which is moving forward in parallel", the embassy official said.

Influence on UNICEF: The United Nations Children's Fund recently indicated that it is minded to divert additional funding to Mon State. This extremely important decision was partly based on Lall and South's research. The amount of funding that Mon State will receive will largely depend on an

³ Using Evidence: How Research can Inform Public Services (Nutley, S., Walter, I., Davis, H. 2007)

Impact case study (REF3b)

assessment exercise that the American University in Washington DC is currently undertaking in collaboration with UNICEF and the Myanmar government. Lall is acting as a consultant to the team that is leading this work. UNICEF is also paying for an international mother-tongue specialist to help underpin the work of the Ministry's education review team. That decision also stemmed in part from Lall and South's report.

Donors' report: Their research has also fed into a report published in April 2013 by Myanmar's Peace Donor Support Group – a network of wealthy nations and international bodies that provides aid to areas of the country worst-affected by years of conflict. The education section of this report **(S3)** quotes extensively from Lall and South's study **(R2)**.

Influence on other governments: Lall also provides research-based briefings on Myanmar for the US and Norwegian governments, the German Ministry for Development **(S4)** and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2011, the Germans asked for her advice on education organisations that they could fund. Money was later given to those she had nominated. A senior Japanese government representative also confirmed that Lall's briefings are valued. Sasayama Takuya, Head of the South East Asia division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said: "Her analysis is always clear cut and very sharp. On peace-making with ethnic minorities in Myanmar, we are very much interested in what is going on" **(S5&S6)**.

Conceptual impact: Lall is regularly interviewed about political and educational developments in Myanmar by media organisations such as the BBC, Aljazeera and Sky News. She has written six Op Ed articles on Myanmar politics for the BBC News website since 2010 **(S7)** and has produced briefings for the UK's influential Chatham House international affairs think tank **(R3)**.

Capacity building: Lall has provided training in research methods for more than 150 Myanmar students and academics since 2005 – first at universities and then at Myanmar Egress, a Yangon-based civil society group pushing for further reforms. The training was funded by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation and – most recently – the European Union. The EU project involves setting up a research centre and training the staff. Researchers that Lall has trained are now producing briefing materials that are being presented to Myanmar's president. This work is funded by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, which co-holds the EU grant with Egress.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S1: Secretary, Mon National Education Department (testimonial provided)
 S2: First Secretary, Australian Embassy, Yangon, Myanmar (testimonial provided)
 S3: Peace Donor Support Group, *Desktop Review of Needs and Gaps in Conflict-Affected Parts of Myanmar* (2013) see page 30
http://www.peacedonorsupportgroup.com/uploads/1/8/1/9/18194913/stocktake_mpc_20130701_final.pdf (accessed 17/10/13)
 S4: Desk officer for Myanmar at the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development, Germany
 S5: Sasayama Takuya, Head of SE Asia Division, MOFA, Japan (short emailed testimonial)
 S6: Second testimonial available from official in UN section of MOFA, Japan.
 S7: Lall, M. (2012) More milestones in Burma, BBC Website, 24/01/2012