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The Right to Education in a Conflict Affected Area: A Case Study of Access to Basic Education in Rakhine Region, Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

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The armed conflicts in Rakhine State, Myanmar, have caused more than 128,000 internally-displaced people (IDPs), of which more than half are children. Most of the displaced children are living difficult lives and facing challenges in accessing to school. This research studies the challenges in ensuring basic education for displaced children during armed conflicts, with particular focus on the situation of children in the IDP camps and nearby areas in Rakhine region. It looks into how the Myanmar Government and other civil society sector attempt to address those challenges in Rakhine State. The research analyses the state of the rights to education in armed conflict through findings from interviews with civil society sectors working to provide education to children in Rakhine state, analysis of relevant laws and policies, and review of government's programs to support education to displaced children. It recommends that more collaborations between the state and civil society sectors are needed to overcome the challenges caused by the on-going armed conflicts.

Introduction

The ongoing armed conflicts in Rakhine State, Myanmar, especially in the latest round since 2016, has resulted in the high level of displacement and increased numbers of internally

displaced persons (IDPs). The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) estimates that there are up to 505,000 internally-displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar (as of 31 December 2020), who were forced to flee their homes by armed conflict and inter-communal violence (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center [IDMC], 2021). Most of the recent displacement are caused by the conflicts in Rakhine State. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports over 105,000 displaced people in Rakhine and southern Chin states with more than 94,000 of them in 169 displacement sites in Rakhine (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2020). In 2020 alone, it is estimated that the armed conflict between the government and the Arakan Army led to about 58,000 displacements in Rakhine and Chin States (IDMC, 2021).

The prolonged conflicts have caused difficulties for the displaced communities to access basic livelihoods and for the displaced children to access school. With such large scale displacement and ongoing conflicts, children's access to education in Rakhine region is limited. The government and non-governmental organizations have been working to provide education to displaced children but in practice many children still cannot obtain effective and quality education. With nearly 80 percent of households in Rakhine state are living below the poverty line, the situation of rights to education gets even worse. Just over 40 percent of children are estimated to be out of school (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2019).

This paper explores challenges for access to basic education in conflict-affected area like in Rakhine State. It looks into how the Myanmar Government and civil society sector attempt to address the challenges on access to basic education of the displaced children.

Research question(s)

- 1) What are the challenges for access to basic education in conflict-affected area as Rakhine State?
- 2) How do the Myanmar Government and civil society tackle those challenges regarding to access to basic education in Rakhine State?

Objective(s)

The paper intends to identify the situation of education rights of children from IDP camps in Rakhine in the context of internal armed-conflict. The paper also aims to analyze the efforts of different stakeholders in addressing providing education to the displaced children and the challenges they face.

Literature Reviews

Right to Education and Legal Framework

The right to education has been recognized as a human right in a number of international and regional human rights instruments. Article 26 of Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) provides that everyone has the right to education and elementary education shall be compulsory and free, and higher education shall be equally accessible for all people (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Similarly, Article 13 and 14 of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) guarantees the right of everyone to compulsory and free primary education while secondary education and higher education shall be made generally available and accessible to all. The ICESCR also reaffirms the liberty of parents to choose their children's education (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1976, Article 13 and 14). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides similar guarantee of the right to education with further elaborations. Article 28 of CRC states that state parties recognize the right of the child to education and they shall make primary education compulsory and available free to all, encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means, make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children and take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates. Article 29 of CRC includes the goal of education, which should be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential and the development of respect for human rights and

fundamental freedoms (United Nations General Assembly, 1990).

The rights to education, as stipulated in international human rights laws, include both the element of access to education especially at the basic education level and also the element of the goals of education which should be towards the development of the child and to inculcate human rights values.

In Myanmar legal system, rights to education centers around the access to education. Myanmar acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in July 1991 and ratified the ICESCR in October 2017. It has incorporated provisions guaranteeing access to education in its Constitution and domestic laws. The right to education is recognized as a fundamental citizens' right under the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008. In Chapter VIII of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008, as Citizen, Fundamental Rights and Duties of the Citizens, Section 366 of the Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar 2008 provides that:

“Every citizen, in accord with the educational policy laid down by the Union:

- (a) has the right to education;
- (b) shall be given basic education which the Union prescribes by law as compulsory;
- (c) have the right to conduct scientific research explore science, work with creativity and write to develop the arts and conduct research freely other branches of culture” (Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2008, Section 366).

Further details on rights to education are stipulated in the National Education Law (2014) and the Basic Education Law (2019). Under the National Education Law (2014) which provides the framework to education in the country, Section 3 (h) mentions the right to enjoy by citizens the vested right of access to education to citizens and Section 4 (g) provides educational opportunities for every citizen to have the right to education and opportunities for life-long learning. And Section 38 provides the types of school that the Ministry and regional

administrative bodies shall arrange to establish mobile school for the children and family members of mobile workers, so that they would complete their free, compulsory basic education primary level and for enabling to extend it to higher levels (The National Education Law, 2014, Section 3 (h), 4(g) and 38).

The Basic Education Law (2019), Section 4 (b) guarantees the right to access the basic education for all school-aged children and all youth including the disabled and everybody who cannot access education under various reasons to education at all levels under Inclusive Education, Special Education Program, Lifelong Education and Special Education Service through formal education or informal education. This section supports the children who can loss right to education because of various reasons including armed conflicts. The Ministry has to create special education service by using formal or informal education systems.

Chapter 13 of the Child Rights Law (2019) also provides the right to education. Section 46 and 47 mentions the opportunities of acquiring education without discrimination and have the right to acquire free basic education at schools opened by the State with the National Education Law (2014). The Ministry of Education shall implement free basic education system and alternative educational programs, including non-formal education, to enable children who cannot attend school and children with disabilities to attend school for various reasons (The Child Rights Law (2019) Section 46 and 47).

In other words, Myanmar legal system guarantees the right to receive an education. However, given the post-conflict context, discrimination against ethnic minorities and on-going armed conflicts in some areas, the right to education, especially the availability and accessibility of education, is severely affected in Myanmar.

Access to Education in Conflict Situation

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has elaborated the rights to receive education (Article 13 of the ICESCR) to include the elements of availability of education facilities, non-discrimination on accessibility, physically and economically, of educational institutions and programmes, acceptability of education contents to all groups of people, and adaptability of education to respond to different needs of students (United

Nations Economic and Social Council, 1999). There have been a number of studies of education in conflict situation that show that the accessibility and availability of education are severely affected in those areas.

In the study of education in the context called “conflict-affected fragile states”, Dryden-Peterson (2009, p. 4) identifies three barriers to access to primary education in these areas. First, he argues, under-investment in education infrastructure and resources caused by the economic affected by the conflict of fragility resulted in limited availability of education. Second, exclusion related to certain characteristics of the children, including their economic status, their gender, their residency, disability, ethnicity, age, displacement, are heightened due to the conflicts and make some children unable to access education. Last, the systemic discrimination in policies and practices are in place during the conflicts.

Similarly, Justino (2014, pp. 4-6) looks at the "supply-side barriers" to education in conflict-affected area and identifies three effects of the conflicts on the education system. Justino's list extend beyond physical availability of education and exclusion of certain groups of children to cover the direct impacts of violence itself. She argues that in conflict-affected area, education right suffers from destruction of infrastructure, the breakdown of communities during displacement, and the effects of conflicts on distribution and equity. Sometime schools become target of violence as they represent the authorities (Justino, 2014) and lead to further limitation of school infrastructure in the area.

Myanmar is one of such conflict-affected fragile states. Since the World Bank started to classify states as "fragile states" in 2009, Myanmar has always been in that list. The World Bank identifies the country with one or more of the following situations as fragile state: the country's weakest institutional and policy environment, the presence of a UN Department of Peace Operation (DPO), the flight across borders of 2,000 or more per 100,000 population across border. If the conflict is intense, then the country will move beyond "fragility" to medium- or high-intensity conflict situation (World Bank, 2021b). In 2020, Myanmar was categorized as being in high institutional and social fragility situation. It is moved to the medium-intensity conflict situation in 2021 (World Bank, 2021a), probably with the coup d'etat in February 2021.

Apart from looking at the context of fragile conflict-affected states, Talbot (2013) added that the study of impacts of conflicts on education should also look at the middle and high income countries affected by conflict and the post-conflict contexts as these different situation have different implications on the access to education. Myanmar, especially with the on-going armed conflicts in Rakhine state, is under the conflict-affected fragile state which Talbot argues, have out of school children as the key issue in term of education.

The Myanmar state has adopted specific policies and mechanisms to address the specific situation of Myanmar's ongoing armed conflicts. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center estimated that by 31 December 2020, there are at least 505,000 internally displaced person (IDPs) caused by conflicts and violence in Myanmar (IDMC, 2021). Among these, 226,804 are estimated to be in Rakhine State in September 2020 (Rakhine Ethnic Congress (REC), cited in Hla, 2020).

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is the main authority providing services for IDPs. They give services for assisting the displaced people due to man-made disasters including armed conflicts. Under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, there are three departments: Department of Social Welfare, Department of Disaster Management and Department of Rehabilitation. One of the main functions of Relief and Resettlement Department is the provision of assistance for the Internally Displaced Persons due to armed conflicts. The Department of Rehabilitation (DR) undertakes its tasks by underlining the rehabilitation programs on peace and ethnic affairs and providing rehabilitation programs for people with disabilities, ex-drug addicts, human trafficking, sex trafficking, child soldiers, abandoned children, child rape survivors, children in conflict with the law, street children, pregnant women, older people, commercial sex workers, natural disasters and manmade disasters. In 2019, The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement made a "National Strategy on Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of Camps". Under this strategy, one of their purposes is to ensure right to education for people from IDPs camps.

The National Education Law 2014's provision of mobile school also aims to provide education special service through emergency temporary schools opened in less developed areas, non-peace areas, poor transportation areas and areas which are affected by natural

disasters (National Education Law, 2014, Section 3 (h), 4(g) and 38). These sections provide some special school system for non-peace areas. Under this law, the ministry and regional administrative bodies have the duties to create special school types such as mobile school and temporary schools for children from IDPs camp. The Myanmar government initiated multiple reform processes, including an education sector since 2011. Current education reform is deemed as vital to securing peace dividends through improved service delivery and a renewed focus on inclusion and equality of provision (Smith et al., 2016, p. 29).

Despite the government's attempts to address the issue of education in IDP camps, there is limited resources on the state of education in the conflict-affected areas and in IDP camps in Myanmar beyond some news reports. Moe Myint reports in Irrawaddy (Myint, 2019) that there was no school registration nor information on number of students living in IDP camps in Rakhine state at the beginning of 2019/2020 academic year. It is also reported that between 150-200 schools in many townships have no students even after two weeks of the semester.

This research does not aim to document the state of the right to education in conflict-affected Rakhine state, nor does it claim to fulfil the existing gap in literature in that area. On the other hand, the research attempts to provide a context to the situation and the ground-based information on how the local communities and authorities struggle to overcome those challenges.

Research Methods

The research was primarily done through review of documents and semi structure interviews. Interviews were conducted to obtain not only government and non- governmental views but also experiences and views from the regional civil society organizations which are working specifically on education of children in Rakhine region. The researchers first looked at the census data to ascertain the areas in the Sittwe region with high number of internally displaced persons (IDP) and have identified Sittwe Township, where there are relatively high number of IDP children from conflict affected areas as research area. The research team then

identifies relevant government officer, teachers, local people and non-government organizations and regional civil society organizations in Rakhine region working in Sittwe Township for key informant interview.

The semi-structured interview was conducted with 12 people, including 1 government officer from education office, 3 teachers from Rakhine region, 4 local volunteers for IDP camps, with focus on education for children, 3 person from the local civil society organizations especially working in child education rights in Rakhine region and 1 monk who support education for children in Rakhine region. The interviews were conducted during March to June 2020.

The interview questions center around the respondent's experiences related with education activities in Rakhine region and the current situation relevant with access to education. All interviewees permit recording at the time of interview and detailed notes were taken during interview with each respondent. Individual interviews were conducted in a space that was deemed as comfortable for the respondents, within their respective homes and in some cases respondents were interviewed over phone due to the COVID 19 crisis. The researchers got translation support from interpreters to translate from Rakhine language to Myanmar language for more accurate understanding. For security reason and because the interviewees do not give permission to use their name in the research, this paper does not use the real names of the informants.

Because of COVID19 restriction measures, the researchers cannot go to the IDP camps and therefore had to rely on the information gain from the interview with those working on the rights to education for IDP children.

Research Framework

In analysing the rights to education of the children in armed conflicts area, especially among the IDP communities, this research uses the framework developed by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1999). The Committee proposes that the rights to receive education could be

analysed from the perspectives of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. The first two focus on the availability of education to the children and how the children can access to those available. The latter two looks at the nature and quality of available education whether it is acceptable by the community and whether it is flexible enough to adapt to the needs of changing societies and respond to the needs of students with diverse social and cultural settings. When applied to the situation of ongoing armed conflict in Rakhine state of Myanmar, this research focuses mainly on the availability and accessibility aspects as they are most relevant. As the discussion on the situation in Rakhine region in the next section describes, the most challenging issues facing the internally-displaced communities are their insecure livelihoods and lack of access to basic infrastructure, including education.

Research results

Myanmar has experiencing armed conflicts for decades, including the struggles of armed ethnic groups for greater self-determination, the pro-democracy movements resisting oppressive practices by the military-dominated State and the more recent resurfacing of inter-religious tensions. As a result of the conflicts, the interests of the country as well as the fundamental rights including education right of its citizens have been severely undermined. The Education under Attack (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2020, pp. 170-172) reports attacks on schools, sexual violence at or on the way to and from the schools, military use of schools, and attacks on universities in Myanmar in 2019, mainly in Kachin and Rakhine states. This is the continued trend from the previous years.

In Rakhine region, the northern and central townships of Kyauktaw, Mrouk-U, Rathedaung and Buthidaung have been most effected by conflicts. Some people are displaced across the state, protracted and repeated displacement have left them confined in camps with no access to education, healthcare, or livelihood opportunities (ACAPS, 2020). In Rakhine, there are 169 displacement sites with more than 94,000 internally-displaced persons (IDPs) (OCHA, 2020). Because of armed conflicts and ethnic conflicts, many schools have been closed and IDP students face educational roadblocks in the villages of Rakhine region. Although the

government is implementing education reforms, its implementation in conflict areas is insufficient. Since before the conflict, education sector in Rakhine region was perceived to be relatively weaker; the situation is now getting worse (U Tun Tun, member of Rakhine civil society organization, interview on 26-5-2020). The armed conflicts have seriously affected the availability and accessibility of schools in Rakhine area.

The following section discusses the situations of education rights as the result of these conflicts. It is followed by the discussion on how different actors respond to the challenges in order to provide more education to the local children.

Armed conflicts and impacts on rights to education

In analysing the state of the rights to education in conflict-affected Rakhine state, this research identifies both the supply side (the availability of education infrastructures) and the ability of local children to attend schools.

Insufficient Teachers, School Spaces and Facilities in School

Despite a significant amount of school construction in Myanmar over the past decade, availability of education is still not fulfilled. Although the government has managed to get more students into school by supporting free basic education system under national laws and policies, the number of teachers' remains poorly equipped to manage instruction in such settings. Overcrowded classrooms are still the norm. Teacher shortages in remote or conflict-affected areas as well as adequate preparation for low-resource settings remain under-addressed (Smith et al., 2016, p. 64).

Armed conflicts in Rakhine state makes availability of education even further limited, despite initiatives from local communities. Before the conflict, there were both the teachers who was appointed by the government and the private teachers who supported by local people in Rakhine state. With the current situation of armed conflicts, and the attacks on schools as mentioned earlier, some teachers do not want to come to the Rakhine region for fear of their own safety. Currently, there are almost 94,000 people in IDPs camps in Rakhine state (OCHA, 2020). Among them 30% are students. As a result, not only IDP students but also

students in the region in general are facing difficulties in their education. The problem also extends to the Rakhine-speaking area in Chin state. For example, it is reported that Paletwa Township, border to Rakhine state, there were armed clashes and kidnapping of teachers. As of October 2019, 188 out of 388 schools in Paletwa did not have teacher and 94 schools had only one teacher as the teachers left due to fear of safety. Most of the schools had not been able to open because of instabilities and violence (Tun, 2019).

While there are many assistances provided to the displaced people in the region, support related to education is very limited. The support for internally displaced persons in Rakhine state are mainly provided by two organizations; the World Food Programme (WFP) mainly supports Kyauk Taw, Mrauk-U and Minbya regions, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) mainly supports Buthidaung and Rathedaung regions. They support mostly foods. However, there is no non-governmental organization that mainly focus on education sector (U Tun Tun interview on 26-5-2020).

Inside the IDP camps, schools are set up to provide education to displaced children. Not every schools are recognized by or receive funding from the Myanmar authorities. For example, Tein Nyo School inside Tein Nyo IDP camp, situated between Kyauk Taw and Mrauk-U townships, was built and has been funded by local people. Later, the regional Member of Parliament requested the government to recognize it as a temporary school. The government did recognize and sent some teachers but didn't provide any other support such as tables, chairs, text books, blackboards etc. In another IDP camp, Aung Mingalar, which most of the residents are ethnic of Rakhine such as Mro and Kamein, there is also a school supported by the local people. The Education Department officially accepts the results of exams taken by students at these temporary schools. Civil society organizations provide various kinds of support for the IDPs which extend to some education activities organized by young volunteers for children in the IDPs camp. They teach children in the camps by age groups or class levels and donate some teaching materials (tables, books, pens, etc). Such support, however, is still very limited; the teaching material and teaching facilities are insufficient and there is not enough the volunteer teachers (U Aye, interview on 23-5-2020; Daw Khin, interview on 1-6-2020).

Education of the displaced children is not limited to the schools inside the IDP camps. Regular schools in Sittwe city also accept the children from IDP camps. Some volunteer groups from the region provide the displaced children with books and school uniforms. As the number of IDPs is increasing constantly, however, some schools cannot provide enough space nor have facilities for all displaced children in their locality (U Thet Aung, interview on 29-5-2020; Daw Myint, interview on 2-6-2020; and Daw Chit, interview on 4-6-2020).

The quality of school buildings in Rakhine State and their replacement or upgrading was one of several issues discussed at meeting of the Amyotha Hluttaw (House of Nationalities) in Nay Pyi Taw. U Win Maw Tun, Deputy Minister for Education, replied to a question raised by U Kyaw Than of constituency in Rakhine State with details on construction of school buildings in Manaung township in Rakhine State that the Ministry of Construction is carrying on that there is a lump sum fund of 179.3 million Myanmar Kyats for 2017-2018 fiscal year. The information discussed during that meeting gave a picture of poor conditions of primary schools in Rakhine states; examples include a State primary school in Thein Gone Village which has a one-storeyed school measuring 40 by 30 feet with a corrugated iron-sheet roof and timber wood walls, and housing 19 school-children. Other State primary schools in Kokko and Kyundone villages have one-storey school building measuring 25 by 15 feet with corrugated iron sheet roof and timber wood walls. They were attended by only 18 students (The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, 2017).

In short, with the precarious situation and increasing number of displaced people, availability of education in Rakhine state, both for the displaced children and the children in area side-affected by the conflicts. Despite some supports from the civil society organizations and the state's attempt to mitigate the situation, availability of education and school facilities are still very limited in conflict affected area in Rakhine state. A representative from civil society organization in Rakhine sees that the Myanmar government should provide more protection of students, teachers and schools to address this issue (U Tun Tun, interview on 26-5-2020).

The ongoing violence and challenges in attending schools

Even if there are schools available, the displaced children still face many challenges to attend the schools due to various impacts from the conflicts. Children, who make up 37% of the total population of more than 2 million people in Rakhine State, have suffered devastating impacts amid the humanitarian crisis, including both the physical and psychological aspects.

As a result of intensified fighting since 2016, the killings and injuries of children and the frequent infringements on the schools occur in the conflict-affected areas of Rakhine State. Disruption of schools become regular (see for example, Two youths injured, 200 villagers flee homes amid clashes in Myanmar's Northern Rakhine state, 2019). For 2020 alone (United Nations General Assembly Security Council, 2021), the United Nations has verified at least 11 attacks on schools in Myanmar, all of which happened in Rakhine and the neighboring Chin states. The United Nations also reported that the military used 30 schools in Rakhine, with different ranges of period. The armed attacks may harm the students and school personnel; school facilities may be damaged. In one of the most reported attacks, an artillery fire hit a primary school in Khamwe Chaung village in Buthidaung Township on the morning of the 13th February 2020. There was a fighting between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar army about three kilometers away. No party claim responsibility of the bomb that injured at least 21 students (Students injured in shelling at school in Myanmar's Rakhine state, 2020). The armed conflicts also lead to less support from civil society organizations. While some NGOs want to come and support the displaced people, travel restriction to Rakhine region due to security concern makes that almost impossible. Monk Ashin Agga believes that it will be more effective if international organizations were be able to help (Ashin Agga, interview on 21-5-2020).

Even when the students could get access to schools, many of them dropped out due to reasons related to the impacts from conflicts. One of the key issues is the economic status and living conditions of the displaced families. Although the government is building schools for IDPs, there is no such project at Sittwe City. Most IDPs come to Sittwe and live in a monastery (U Thet Aung interview on 29-5-2020). The students have other challenges there, mainly about psychological matters. The volunteers providing assistance to the IDPs all share

that some displaced children do not want to join the schools that situate in Sittwe City because they feel ashamed that they do not have good clothes and sometimes they absent from the school for this reason. Most of the assistance provided by different organizations focus on food and household items. Donations related to education are mainly school textbooks, but not clothes. It is especially difficult to provide accommodation, food preparation and financial support for the students.

Most of the displaced childing living in Sittwe city have to try to make a living, with only few of them can afford the cost to transfer to schools in Sittew. Most families could not give priority to children's education and most of the children focus on jobs such as searching for firewood and catching fish. Most of them do not think that they need to continue education beyond Grade 5 (U Tun Tun, interview on 26-5-2020).

Another problem is the distance between the some IDP camps and schools. Some trips to school take at least an hour walk through unsafe path. Sometime on the way to school, the students encounter landmines. Their parents therefore are worried about their children going to schools. The security concerns affect the parent's decision to send their children to schools, as will be discussed below.

Priority setting and particular challenges for primary and secondary educations

With limited resources, those who work in the area have to prioritize the assistance they provide. Since the volunteers who mainly support education service in the IDPs camp cannot support all these students, they prioritize those who have relatively more difficulties in accessing education. From the discussion with those providing support on education to displaced children, the priorities are given to the students in the IDPs camps, students from remote area in Sittwe Region, and children with disabilities who are affected by the conflicts.

Working to provide education to the primary and secondary schools have proved to be more challenging than high school level. Ashin Agga, a Buddhist monk who supports high school students in his monastery also raised this concern during the interview (Ashin Agga, interview on 21-5-2020). He enols the displaced students in nearby high schools. He collaborates with the officer of education for his students' documents for enrolment. He

provides all facilities; food, shelter, health services for all these children by himself without a cooperative with other organizations. Ashin Agga, admitted that there are many difficulties in providing support to the primary and secondary students, whose numbers are higher than those in high school level, in his monastery.

Apart from the higher number of younger children, they also need closer care from their parents, which is difficult in the context of armed conflicts and displacement. Many primary and secondary students do not wish to study far away from their parents and therefore their choice of education is further limited (Daw Myint, interview on 2-6-2020, and Daw Chit, interview on 4-6-2020).

In 2019-2020 academic year, there were many serious conflicts caused in North of Rakhine Regions which caused high schools in Rathedaung, Khout Tan, to close. The organization called Rakhine Civil Social Organization (RCSO), which has many offices in the region, cooperated with Rathedaung and Thandwe Townships to support the students from this conflict affected areas who desire to transfer for study and willing to stay away from his or her parents. They also get support from the teachers of Taungup University who help with some teaching facilities. They made a list of students who wanted to transfer and prepare the necessary documentations, including the documents to change the school, recommendation from the Head of Township or Police station and other necessary documents. In the last academic year, 30 students studied well under this support. After their exam, the students went back to their parents' IDPs Camps. As this is high school level, it is more feasible than in the primary and secondary school levels as the younger children do not desire to transfer to study away from his or her parents.

Generally, the parents do not want their children to go back to the IDPs Camps because it is very dangerous. While most of them go back to their IDPs Camps, the RCSO then prepares a back up plan if the students do not want to go back the IDPs camps. The RCSO faced many challenges such as finding a place for the students to stay and other facilities, and securing financial support for health, food and teaching materials, etc. Nevertheless, they have a plan to support more than 100 students in the coming academic year and other RCSO divisions in Sittwe Region plan to provide similar support in their areas. As Daw Win Yu, the representative

of the RCSP, pointed out, they need to reinforce the parents and students' aspirations and confidence in the educational and social environment so that they continue with the children education (Daw Win Yu, interview on 25-5-2020).

The dangerous situation, therefore, makes it more difficult to the younger children to access education. While primary and secondary education are crucial element of basic education that should be guaranteed for all children, the lack of schools in safe environment has significantly affect the accessibility of education for all. These reasons prevent children from accessing education, and it associates schools with violent and traumatic events. Such a situation make access to education even more challenging. Construction of schools are, therefore, not the only solution to the children in conflict area.

Government's activities on education in Rakhine region

As the basic framework of governmental obligations, government have to make education available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable. In Rakhine state, there have been initiatives to those objectives. As recounted by a government officer of the Education Office Sector working in the area (U Zaw Zaw interview on 20-5-2020), the government has developed measures to support students from IDPs camps. Firstly they collect data about students in IDPs camp to identity where they live and the number of students. With that information, the authorities try to arrange for the students to attend nearby school, even without any required documents, to ensure continuity of their education. The documents can be provided later for exam. The authorities try to link the data about displaced students at the original and the exam-host schools so the students' status could always be updated. Teachers from the schools said that some students transfer to their school from conflict areas with the support of the Social Welfare Department and other civil society organizations, while a few of students transfer to their school on their own. In some cases, the relevant government departments help to prepare necessary arrangements to verify the required documents. Sometimes the students may attend the class without any necessary documents because the principals of schools allow temporary permission for students to learn from time to time (Daw

Thazin, interview on 9-3-2020; Daw Yadanar, interview on 10-3-2020; Daw Yimon, interview on 12-5-2020). Later the authorities check the enrolment and school's validity and make an exam result for the students.

Although the government takes into account the conflict situation and offer more flexibilities in terms of student registration, those supports cannot keep up with the scale of conflicts. As mentioned earlier, there are also many difficulties in providing education services to IDPs students. For example, there is not enough teachers to teach, nor enough school space for students.. Currently, the Rakhine education officials are preparing to open high schools for students at two camps for people who had to flee their homes because of fighting (Soe, 2020).

Conclusion

The ongoing armed conflicts in Rakhine state have severely affected the rights to education of displaced children. As described in this paper, there is no sufficient school facilities in the area and the schools are not easily accessible by many students. Those who manage to enroll in schools still face further challenges, such as safety issues, and may drop out of school. The immediate needs of people displaced by conflicts have resulted in the priority given on providing for livelihoods of the IDPs, not education.

Currently Myanmar still has conflict areas in some regions. The Government needs to emphasize improving access and quality of education and protecting children from violence, abuse and exploitation in armed conflict area to ensure availability and accessibility of education to affected children. With limited resources, it is important that there are collaborations with relevant the civil society and other organizations especially in education sector. In addition to the solutions to practical issues such as insufficient of teacher, classroom and teaching facilities, it is important to implement measures to assure the school as the safe zone by coordinating with all armed groups to ensure full respect of the safety of the schools.

With the protracted armed-conflicts, and the escalating violence after the coup d'état in February 2021, the rights to education of children in conflict-affected areas, especially with

the displaced children, continues to be at high risks. Any further attempt to address conflicts and violence situation, the security and development of children of different groups needs to be prioritized.

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