



Workshop on Faith and Development in Focus: Myanmar

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) convened a consultation meeting on February 22 in Washington DC, as part of a series of country “mapping studies” that are being conducted in partnership with the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD). Drawing on prior literature reviews and discussions about both Myanmar’s religious landscape and development strategies and programs, the meeting’s aim was to explore priority topics for continuing research on Myanmar. The meeting will be followed by further consultations and field work; a report on faith dimensions of development in Myanmar is to be completed before September 2019. This note summarizes the February discussions.

The February 22 day-long event (at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs), was conducted with Chatham House rules and drew on a concept note circulated beforehand. It was preceded by an informal dinner the evening before. Twelve scholars and development specialist (Annex 1) contributed their insights and experience on Myanmar and the broader region. They, alongside other individuals who have expressed interest, are invited to engage in the research process as an informal advisory group.

The discussions ranged widely across peace and development agendas but a central theme was the complexity and tight linkages involved in the nexus of conflict and development challenges. In this highly religious country (as in others) pinpointing what phenomena are “religious” and how religious beliefs and institutions affect broad developments is especially challenging. Among topics that emerged repeatedly were complex and at times fraught relationships among different communities, institutions, and groups and their ethnic and religious connotations. Gender roles (and specifically barriers to women’s full involvement) and Myanmar’s relationships with neighbors, including through religious links, were seen as significant and worth further exploration. Topics seen to deserve special focus (always with a religious “lens”) also included extractive industries, environmental protection, special economic zones, migration, livelihoods, understandings and applications of human rights, and, of course, the ongoing Rohingya/Rakhine crisis. Several participants stressed the importance of focusing on younger actors (more than on the present generation of leaders).

OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSION

The conundrum of ethnic and religious identities in a highly plural society: A continuing theme was the central importance of Myanmar’s intricate and intersecting ethnic and religious identities. These play essential roles in the complex and protracted conflicts that have long affected Myanmar but also in people’s daily lives. Myanmar remains entangled in one of the world’s longest-running civil wars (at least from 1948). The ruling military junta, which deliberately isolated Myanmar from regional and international affairs, gave way officially in 2011 (following the 2010 general election) to a nominally civilian government. The initial transformation led to the release of key political

prisoners, particularly Aung San Suu Kyi; better foreign relations; the easing of trade and other economic sanctions; and improvements in what had long been a rather dismal human rights picture. A range of international actors, eager to contribute to the country's peace dividend and sustainable development plan (2018-2020), expanded their engagement in Myanmar or set up new offices.

The picture today is complex, with the luster of the post-2011 period dimmed, in significant measure because of the government's treatment of ethnic and religious minorities. The Burmese military remains a powerful force in political, economic, and security spheres and the democratization process is clearly a partial one. The National League for Democracy (NLD) led government has fumbled in many ways in peace and developments processes. Tensions around ethnic and religious minority roles and rights contribute to protracted and social strife, deepening conflict fault-lines. Grave and seemingly escalating tensions and violence in Kachin and Karen States and the Rakhine/Rohingya crisis are visible manifestations. Overall, communal distrust reflects anxieties among minorities, especially Muslims, but also Christians and Hindus.

Consultation participants highlighted Myanmar's striking ethnic and religious diversity and its many ramifications for peace and development. Negatively, ethnic and religious divides have contributed to subnational conflicts. More positively, faith and faith actors (community to international) have played important roles in responding to the various emergencies that Myanmar has faced, as well as social protection, advocacy of various sorts, and development roles within diverse communities across Myanmar. The most internationally well know instance of religious engagement at the national level, the Saffron revolution in 2007 was cited—Buddhist clergy peacefully marched and advocated for affordable fuel prices but met violence and arrest by the military government. Various faith institutions played significant roles following Hurricane Nargis, providing, inter alia, emergency supplies to communities. This contrasts with the current focus on extremist approaches within parts of the Buddhist leadership that contributes to suspicion, divided communities, and violence. Looking deeper into history and the country's ethos, religious bodies have played well documented roles in providing education, running health clinics, and promoting child protection in their communities, with support from international faith inspired actors. The current tensions have spurred a range of interfaith dialogue intended to promote social cohesion across faiths. The ongoing series of Forums promoted by Religions for Peace is an example.

The discussions made abundantly clear that there are no simple or single solutions to the large challenges facing Myanmar. Indeed, transition insecurities may be increasing as people look to their religious identity for a stronger sense of security. A central theme was the importance of increased understanding of the roles that both faith actors and faith itself play, both positive and negative. Another was the need to seek better ways to engage them in their roles as development actors, notably because of their crucial roles in social cohesion and advancing a plural society.

OBSERVATIONS ON PRIORITY, CROSS-CUTTING TOPICS

Peace and Development

Continuing military engagement in many sub-national conflicts highlights the limited progress that has been made during the current political transition period towards the goals of ceasefires and robust peace agreements. Thus, while steps to advance the development plan are at times impressive, from a longer-term perspective, ongoing conflicts mean that the hoped-for peace dividends remain elusive. Indeed,

ethnic and religious divides are utilized to further fuel communal conflicts in communities, with development language and programs involved. Given Myanmar's diversity, emergency, development, and peace efforts need to be analyzed, understood, and tailored to specific contexts; Rakhine, Kachin and Karen States are clear examples. A "zoom-in" and "zoom-out" approach can better capture Myanmar's complexities.

In this context, and given current trends, development efforts need to be designed and implemented with an eye to their impact on social cohesion and specifically consider religious and ethnic factors, actual and perceived. An important reality highlighted often during discussions is the lower levels of development along border areas, the result (and perhaps also cause) of decades of repression and violent conflict. Special focus on these areas and the roles of religious institutions deserves special attention.

Emergency Response

Both historically and at present, the role of religious institutions in emergency and humanitarian activities are significant, though concrete data is difficult to obtain. Where government support has remained limited, faith actors often are the community focal points for emergency, social, and development needs (e.g. Cyclone Nargis, Kachin and Karen State). Insights can be gained from viewing humanitarian and development work in tandem.

Religion and Civil Society

The roles of religious institutions in contemporary Myanmar (and thus in its development) is intimately linked to the changing roles of civil society more broadly. Overall during the transition period, civil society institutions and activities have multiplied, but operate with some uncertainties as to status and role. Wide diversity is a feature, with organizations, old and new, bringing differing perspectives on the development and conflict dynamics. Caution was noted as a shared characteristic and roles vary widely according to context. National to community level faith actors, it was observed, are often able to maneuver more effectively under-the-radar. They do experience security challenges (such as arrests) and constraints (including requiring and not receiving permission to implement actions), particularly when government actors perceive it as a challenge to their authority (for example, U Gambira arrest). Major international faith actors experience government constraints, including threats to in-country registration and blocked access to sensitive locations, when working on emergency, development, and peace initiatives. While not unique across the development field, when identity tensions flair, government constraints rise.

The Silo Issue

Many development programs tend to work within quite restricted sectors and understandings of purpose and scope. Several participants urged more strategic focus in design and implementation, reflecting thoughtfully on political, economic, social history, and identity nuances. Staff training can be helpful. National actors might benefit from understanding human rights and development from a broader, global perspective, as well as providing fresh perspectives on their own society and history. This may help diverse actors speak from a common understanding, thus breaking down silos and support more collaborative engagements.

Regional Religious Dynamics

Myanmar's majority Theravada Buddhist population is located in the religiously diverse South and Southeast Asia region. There are important majority/minority dynamics at play within and among countries across the region. Identity related incidents in one country ripples across the region; examples include the Buddhist alliance MaBaTha in Myanmar, Bodu Bala Sena in Sri Lanka, and Chittagong in Bangladesh. Appreciating the impact of these regional factors, specifically their religious aspects, is important across development agendas. One approach suggested was to build on the “zoom in/zoom out” concept, thus linking broad perspectives and topics at national and regional levels and by topic with local analysis. A thoughtful review of the roles of international Muslim actors, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and power centers like Indonesia and Malaysia, was also recommended.

TOPIC AND SECTOR REFLECTIONS

The Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan 2018 - 2030 (MSDP)—with a cross-cutting focus on equity and inclusion—aims to promote development and to address persistent disparities. The consultation discussion focused on several sectors that are priorities in the MSDP.

Human Rights Protections

Faith actors, particularly engaged Buddhists, have, historically and today, played important roles in promoting understanding and action on human rights and broader social protections. Myanmar is said to have more self-help organizations than any other country in the world. Many local civil society organizations (CSOs) are faith inspired or directly linked to faith institutions. Faith actors are known for active engagement in non-violent movements. Buddhist clergy, based on their teachings and government pressures, are not to be involved in politics, but are nonetheless engaged, especially supporting children and youth protection. Buddhist monasteries and churches support orphaned and street children, providing housing, food, and education, though they often lack resources to adequately support all of the children in their care. Faith actors work with young people to advance social and generational change and attitudes toward the “other” to advance peace and development. Supporting youth leadership development was highlighted as a topic of exploration.

Gender

Consultation participants focused on the important issues around gender in Myanmar, which is often overlooked and understudied, despite various initiatives. Some faith actors are actively engaged in mitigating and responding to sex trafficking within their communities, which typically involves girls and women. Likewise, there are some notable efforts addressing gender-based violence within communities, through training and family support structures. Participants cited women's groups, often informal, active in social protection and development activities, including running health clinics, formal and non-formal education, and livelihood programs, however, the evidence on both the scale and religious links is patchy. There are growing women's movements inspired by faith and often supported by international faith actors, including the Karen Women's Movement. With the rise of Buddhist inspired nationalism, some such groups have been at the forefront of the response, for example speaking out (at considerable risk) against the four “race and religion protection laws” and against the treatment of the Rohingya in Rakhine State. There are some clear barriers to women's access to formal roles within different religious organizations (Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian), which further research can contribute to a deeper knowledge.

Education, Health, and Livelihoods

A quite wide range of faith actors are involved, in various ways, in education, health, and livelihoods initiatives across Myanmar. Faith actors' engagement in education was said to be quite well documented, from its historical origins to the present. Monasteries, churches, and mosques educate children, playing a particularly vital role in areas along the borders where state provided education is limited. However, information surrounding faith-linked approaches to informal education is not as well documented, for example in areas where the former military government's closing of schools and the strategic destruction of the education systems were a way to counter student movements, such as the 8888 student up-rising in 1962. There is a need for a new generation of teachers with higher levels of teaching capacity and more progressive pedagogy. Approaches to teaching about religion, religious literacy, ranging from primary and secondary schools to higher education, as a vital means to promote social cohesion and collaborative development can be further explored. Some international organizations are engaged in education curriculum reviews that include the goal of promoting interreligious understanding. The topic is not without sensitivities: in the recent past, there has been ultra-nationalist pushback against religious literacy education in schools.

Faith involvement in the health sector is diverse, with participants noting high levels of support for community health clinics. Concrete examples of faith engagement in health include, a Muslim inspired hospital that provides health support across faith and ethnic communities in Yangon, the Muslim Free Hospital and Medical Relief Society; a drug treatment and support effort in Kachin State supported by a Christian organization; and awareness efforts on the effect of drug use, leading to citizens' arrests of drug dealers in Kachin State (drug addiction is usually related to heroin in the North, with methamphetamines having an impact across the country). Large organizations, like Population Services International (PSI) work with faith inspired actors to promote health in communities across Myanmar.

Involvement in livelihoods support takes the form of small scale initiatives, many focusing on environmental protection. Engaged Buddhists are known for their work in promoting environmental protection projects that are designed in line with Buddhist teachings. Further research is needed to understand the role of faith actors in microfinance and agricultural loans.

Extractive Industries, Environment, and Special Economic Zones

Myanmar's natural resource wealth includes oil and gas, various minerals, precious stones and gems, timber and forest products, and hydropower potential. These resources provide a substantial proportion of Myanmar's national income and also play central roles in subnational conflicts. Since the 2011 transition, the pace of exploration and development has intensified, exacerbated by Myanmar's role as a bio-diversity hotspot. The discussion focused on the actual and potential faith roles in both strategic and regulatory measures to ensure sound development of resources and protections of the rights and welfare of affected communities. Faith actors are thought to have primarily engaged with populations living in proximity to and working in extractive industries, with a particular focus on labor protections (e.g. child labor).

Various faith actors focus specifically on environmental protection, especially at a local level. Socially-engaged Buddhists are seen as proactive in addressing environmental issues, explicitly linking their protests and advocacy to faith teachings. Examples include promoting tree planting and environmentally friendly small-scale agriculture. Deforestation linked to illegal logging is significant in

places like Mon State and along the China border. Another focus is protests against large hydropower projects, notably the Myitsone Hydropower Dam in Kachin State, which involved flooding and resettlement. Dam construction by the Burmese contractor Asia World and the China Power Investment Corporation was suspended in September 2011 following public pressure led by faith actors. This resulted in diplomatic unease between Myanmar and China.

Special economic zones are being developed in collaboration with countries in the region; these have significant potential, but also carry risks. Again, understanding current and/or possible roles of faith actors in the decision-making process deserves attention.

Sub-national Conflicts, Rakhine State, and Peace Developments

Myanmar has been involved in numerous sub-national armed conflicts with over 30 ethnic armed organizations (EAOs), leading to development consequences. Causes are complex and include EAOs seeking self-determination, ethnic and faith equality, and development opportunities, in the face of protracted state-sanctioned exclusion and discrimination. These conflicts, despite high hopes around the political transition, have not been resolved. The rise of Buddhist nationalism has exacerbated inter-communal conflicts and violence. The conflicts in Rakhine State, and the direct impact on the Rohingya population, are an obvious area of focus. Participants described a broader sense of tension and fear escalating among the Muslim population across Myanmar, highlighting several violent attacks, for example in Mandalay. Muslim citizens are experiencing movement constraints, sometimes required to submit requests and seek approval to travel. Christian communities express fear and concern that they would also be targeted. While the Rakhine State has obvious and critical importance, others areas in the country, such as Kachin State, are also directly affected by violent conflict.

An area to explore is engaged Buddhist roles and, more broadly, interfaith initiatives, of which there are many. Questions include a basic mapping of initiatives and their impact, drawing on several reviews by Burmese and international entities.

A factor not often recognized is that Buddhist nationalist movements, particularly MaBaTha, provide significant and much needed social and economic support to communities. While they are known for their divisive rhetoric, particularly against the Rohingya and Muslim population, they are perceived by communities as responsive to their needs and able to deliver results. Some MaBaTha members are more progressive and inclusive than others, though progressive thinking appears to be the minority.

Further research into youth peace efforts with religious links and the involvement of specific religious actors (institutional and individual) in efforts to address inflammatory social media patterns were suggested.

NEXT STEPS AND RESEARCH PLAN

The next steps in WFDD's Myanmar research will focus on in-depth interviews with specialists in and outside Myanmar, to sharpen research questions and to gather further information on priority topics. Limited field research is planned between May and July 2019. It will focus on qualitative interviews with a range of identified key actors engaged in faith and development. While the primary contacts will be with faith-inspired organizations and actors, WFDD researchers will also consult with government, UN, international, and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations

(CSOs), and private sector actors. The report resulting from the research is designed to serve a diverse audience with the overall purpose of providing information that can enhance policy and practice through improved knowledge and appreciation of Myanmar's intersecting faith and development.

Outputs will include the final country report, *Faith and Development in Focus: Myanmar*, and selected interviews transcripts published on the WFDD website with the expressed consent of participants.

This document was reviewed by consultation participants and reflects their observations. WFDD invites comments on the draft country report and on its dissemination. Other further reflections or suggestions are also welcome as we proceed.

ANNEX 1: CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

Priscilla Clapp, USIP and the Asia Society

Priscilla Clapp is currently a senior advisor to the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Asia Society. A retired Minister-Counselor in the U.S. Foreign Service, during her 30-year career with the U.S. Government she served as chief of mission and permanent charge d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Burma (1999-2002). She also served in South Africa, Russia, and Japan and as principal deputy assistant secretary of state for Refugee Programs. Ms. Clapp spent ten years in foreign policy and arms control research, with the MIT Center for International Studies and as a Research Associate at the Brookings Institution. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Ms. Clapp's books include: with Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Brookings, 2006), with I.M. Destler et al., *Managing an Alliance: the Politics of U.S.-Japanese Relations* (Brookings, 1976), and, with Morton Halperin, *U.S.-Japanese Relations in the 1970's* (Harvard, 1974). She is a frequent media commentator and the author of numerous publications on Burma and U.S. Burma policy with USIP, the Brookings Institution, the East-West Center, Australia National University, the Asia Society, the National Bureau of Asian Research, Singapore's ISEAS and others.

Drew Christiansen, Georgetown University

Fr. Drew Christiansen is Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Human Development in Georgetown's School of Foreign Service and a senior fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. His current areas of research include nuclear disarmament, nonviolence and just peacemaking, Catholic social teaching, and ecumenical public advocacy. He is a frequent consultant to the Holy See and a member of the steering committee of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network. He served on the Atlantic Council's Middle East Task Force and on the Holy See delegation that participated in the negotiation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Fr. Christiansen has served as director of the Office of International Justice and Peace of the U.S. Catholic Conference (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) and editor-in-chief of the Jesuit weekly *America*. He has taught at the Jesuit School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union-Berkeley and the University of Notre Dame, where he was a member of the founding team of the Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies. He holds his Ph.D., M.Phil., and M.A. from Yale University; an S.T.M. and M.Div. from Woodstock College; and an A. B. from Fordham University. For his service to the Holy Land Christiansen was named a Canon of the Holy Sepulcher of Jerusalem.

Christiana Fink, George Washington University

Dr. Christiana Fink is a Professor of Practice of International Relations and the Director of the MA Program in International Development Studies at George Washington University. A cultural anthropologist, she has combined teaching, research, and development work throughout her career. Her current research focuses on political reform and development in Myanmar, the role of civil society in Myanmar and Southeast Asia, and land rights. She was a visiting lecturer at the Pacific and Asian Studies Department at the University of Victoria in 1995, and from 2001-2010, lecturer and program associate at the International Sustainable Development Studies Institute in Thailand. During that period, she ran a bi-annual capacity building training and internship program which she developed for members of Burmese civil society organizations, including women's groups. She has worked as a coordinator for the Open Society Institute's Burma Project, a trainer and project consultant for an

InterNews oral history project, and a program evaluation consultant for the Canadian International Development Agency, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation. She received her B.A. in International Relations from Stanford University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Social/Cultural Anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley.

William Ford, USIP

William Ford is a Burma Program Officer at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Before joining USIP in 2019, he worked for The Asia Foundation in Burma, providing policy analysis and support to municipal governments on tax policy, public service delivery, and community engagement. At The Asia Foundation, he co-led the City Life Survey initiative, one of the largest public perception surveys in the country. Billy previously worked for Freedom House, where he served in a variety of roles, including as the organization's first Country Representative in Myanmar. At Freedom House, he oversaw programs on inter-communal harmony, think tank development, and human rights defenders support. He has produced research for the Tharti Myay Foundation and the Global Justice Center on land governance in Burma. Billy holds a bachelor's degree in Religious Studies from Hamilton College and a Master's in Public Policy from the University of California, Berkeley. In 2011, he served as a Fulbright Fellow in Malaysia.

Ellen Goldstein, World Bank

Ellen Goldstein is the World Bank's Country Director for Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR, based at the World Bank Office in Yangon, Myanmar. She was previously the World Bank's Country Director for the Western Balkans, which includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. Other previous roles include World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh and Nepal. In these two countries she managed a portfolio of more than 50 operations totaling nearly US\$ 6 billion in soft IDA Credits. Goldstein joined the World Bank in 1985 as a macroeconomist. She has worked in West and Southern Africa, South Asia, and Central Europe as a macroeconomist, human development specialist, and as Country Manager in both Burkina Faso and FYR Macedonia. She was the founding manager of the World Bank's Results Secretariat. Goldstein earned Master's degrees in public health from the John Hopkins University and in public affairs from Princeton University.

Michael Jerryson, Youngstown State University

Dr. Michael Jerryson is the Director of the James Dale Ethics Center and Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. He regularly delivers lectures on Buddhism, religion and violence, and the conflicts in South and Southeast Asia (most recently the violence against the Rohingya). Dr. Jerryson is co-founder and co-chair of the Comparative Approaches to Religion and Violence through the American Academy of Religion and serves as a consultant on Southeast Asian conflicts. Over the years, after serving in the United States Peace Corps in Mongolia, Dr. Jerryson has spent over 20 years investigating the relationship between religion and violence and under-explored Asian practices and beliefs.

Sallie King , James Madison University

Dr. Sallie King is Professor Emerita of Philosophy and Religion at James Madison University and currently teaches part-time in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Georgetown University. She works in the areas of Buddhist philosophy and ethics; Engaged Buddhism; Buddhist-Christian dialogue; and the cross-cultural philosophy of religion. She is the author of *Buddha Nature* (SUNY Press, 1991), *Journey in Search of the Way: The Spiritual Autobiography of Satomi Myodo* (SUNY Press, 1993), *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Hawaii, 2005), and *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Hawaii, 2009). Dr. King is coeditor (with Christopher S. Queen) of *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia* (SUNY Press, 1996) and (with Paul O. Ingram) of *The Sound of Liberating Truth: Buddhist-Christian Dialogues in Honor of Frederick J. Streng* (Curzon Press, 1999). She is a former president of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and is a scholar with the Elijah Interfaith Institute.

Thomas Lawo, GIZ

Thomas Lawo is a senior advisor at the German Society for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), attached to the secretariat of the International Partnership for Religion and Sustainable Development in Bonn, Germany. He has worked in development cooperation full time since 1978. He served as a country and resident representative for the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, general secretary of the European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes and executive director of its international secretariat, research fellow at the Asian and Pacific Development Centre in Kuala Lumpur, and associate fellow at the Institute for Development Studies, among other roles.

Michael Ronning, USAID

Michael Ronning is the Director for Asia Bureau's Technical Services Office at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Prior to returning to Washington, D.C., he served as the Democracy and Governance director in Burma. As a Foreign Service Officer with USAID since 2005, Mr. Ronning has served in West Bank/Gaza, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Uganda, in addition to Myanmar and Washington, D.C. He earned his B.A. in International Relations and Spanish from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, and a M.A. in International Relations and Affairs from Alliant International University.

Randall Spadoni, World Vision

Randall Spadoni is World Vision's North Korea Program Director and Senior Regional Advisor for East Asia based in Washington DC. He implements projects in clean water, nutrition, and disaster relief in North Korea and has been traveling to the country since 2007. He has helped World Vision North Korea to navigate the operational, political, legal challenges of working in North Korea, providing responsible and effective assistance that reaches 50,000 North Korean children each year. In addition, Mr. Spadoni coordinates \$14 million of annual investments in the East Asia region, including Myanmar, Vietnam, China, Laos, and Mongolia. His responsibilities include strategy formulation and implementation; program design, monitoring, and evaluation; public policy; and partnerships. He works closely with U.S., European, and UN organizations, coordinating assistance and forming complementary partnerships. Mr. Spadoni has a B.A. in Asian Studies and International Business from the University of Puget Sound and an M.A. in International Affairs from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is married with three children and lives in Wheaton, Maryland.