Conflict Assessment in Rakhine State

February/March 2013 byJosefine Roos

The analysis in this report is that of the consultant only. Due to the sensitive situation on the ground any references to the organisation/s initiating/funding this report are omitted.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ALD	Arakan League of Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DNH	Do No Harm
CDA	CDA Collaborative Learning Projects
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
ICG	International Crisis Group
INGO	International Non Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
RNDP	Rakhine National Development Party
RPP	Reflective Peace Practice
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees
USDP	Union Solidarity Development Party
WFP	World Food Program
YMA	Young Monk Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Myanmar is currently undergoing a remarkable transition. But in the midst of positive change and political reform, localized violence in Rakhine state is creating new levels of suffering for the population. Rakhine state has experienced two outbursts of violence in 2012, first in June and then again in October. An alleged rape and murder of a Buddhist woman followed by the killing of ten Muslim pilgrims triggered long-simmering tensions between the ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population[1]. In early November the UN recorded that more than 115,000 people had been displaced from the June and October violence[2], 167 persons killed[3] and considerable damage of property had taken place in 11 out of 17 townships.[4] The situation for the people on the ground remains dire. While the government and military have increased their presence and assistance, and with several UN and INGO agencies providing assistance, tensions between the ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population remain high. Against this backdrop the purpose of this study was to produce a conflict assessment in Rakhine state in order to better understand the dynamics on the ground to help inform conflict sensitive programming for an INGO.[5]

Context

Due to its inter-communal and religious dimensions, the conflict in Rakhine is commonly described as different from other conflicts in Myanmar that play out between ethnic minority groups and the central government[6]. Its unique features often exclude the Rakhine issue from national peace processes, yet ethnic Rakhine share similar grievances and interests to other ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. They are also fighting for their rights, use of their own language, prospects for a peaceful future with economic opportunities, some degree of autonomy and resource sharing. These grievances of the ethnic Rakhine vis-à-vis Myanmar's center are often neglected in understanding the development of conflict within Rakhine State. The relationship between the central government, the ethnic Rakhine and the Muslims gives the conflict in Rakhine a unique triangular character, which illustrate how center-periphery imbalances and divide and rule strategies from the center have pitted communities in Rakhine against each other and led to localized conflict.

Causal Analysis & Conflict Dynamics

For the purposes of this analysis the causal factors of conflict are divided into root causes, drivers, mitigators and triggers. The methodology applies a systems approach that emphasizes the need to not only identify factors that influence conflict, but also consider how these factors interact over time to increase or decrease the likelihood of violence. This holistic understanding is achieved by producing feedback loop maps, which are included in the report.

The analysis finds that the root causes of the conflict are ethno-political and socio-economic as opposed to religious. Root causes include political, social and economic marginalization combined with ethnic discrimination from the center to the periphery. The ethnic Rakhine feel they have been victims of several invasions, the Bamar in 1784, the British in 1824 and the Muslims ever since. Over time, drivers such as statelessness (of the Muslim population mainly), divide and rule policies, segregation between groups and lack of resource sharing have served to sustain and deepen the conflict locally. As tensions persist, religious differences and fear of the other feeds extremism,

---

[1] See a note on terminology in section 1

[2] UN OCHA Revised Rakhine Response Plan July 2012-June 2013, Nov 2012

[3] Government of Myanmar Data

[4] WFP Rapid Assessment of non-displaced populations in Rakhine. January 2013. Likely a very modest number, the author heard accounts of more than 10,000 destroyed houses.

[5] Due to the sensitive situation on the ground any references to the organization/s initiating this report are replaced by "INGO".

[6] In this assessment the central government is recognized as primarily being dominated by an ethnic Bamar elite

4

increasing the role of religion as a sustainer of conflict. While Buddhism serves as a link between the ethnic Rakhine and the Bamar center, extremists use international narratives of Islamic terrorism to feed the local conflict in Rakhine. In a worrying trend, this appears to be spreading through other parts of the country igniting tensions between religious groups. Combined with ethnically disproportionate and inadequate national and international responses to Rakhine State's development and humanitarian issues, the interaction of these causes and drivers have produced a vicious cycle, whereby the ethnic Rakhine population feel that their identity, culture and land are increasingly threatened. The feedback loops show how "quick-fixes" like exclusion and segregation of the Muslim population only serve to make the core problem worse.

While tensions between communities have consistently existed below the surface, political and military control prevented conflict from breaking out. Thus, Myanmar's reform process, including relaxed control of media and increased opportunity for ethno-nationalists to act politically, actually provided the conditions for this conflict to manifest. The analysis shows how these factors increased the feeling of threatened identity, and mistrusts between the local communities, 'boiling over' when an ethnic Rakhine woman was allegedly raped and murdered.

Conclusions

The analysis of root causes and drivers suggests that the ethnic Rakhine's focus on the Muslim population as their main adversary might in fact be misdirected, diverting them from efforts to address the rights and socioeconomic concerns that they share with the other ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. This distraction feeds ethnic Rakhines' disinterest in the broader peace process and represents a missed opportunity to solve their real grievances.

This report illuminates the risks of not targeting interventions at the real problem. Well-intentioned interventions that treat symptoms rather than causes of conflict can produce unintended consequences that make the conflict worse. Thus there is a need to shift from a 'quick fix' mentality to focusing on fundamental problems, which should be informed by updated analysis and conflict sensitive approaches. This also implies a shift from solely focusing on needs and vulnerabilities as identified by the international community, and beyond humanitarian action, engaging comprehensively and proportionately with the community regarding a broader set of economic, relationship, and political concerns.

Conflict sensitivity requires continuous analysis of the conflict and the impact of interventions. Ideally analysis should be mainstreamed into the program planning, implementation and evaluation cycle in conflict-affected areas. This helps making interventions effective, adaptable to changing circumstances, and sensitive to the risk of unintended consequences.

Key priorities and advocacy points are listed in the table below, and are described in detail in the final section (VIII) of the report. They are intended to address root causes and drivers of the conflict, prevent further polarization between groups, and begin to support future reconciliation between ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population. They are also aimed at supporting mitigators and guarding against triggers by increasing the communities resilience to conflict.

Address the key issues– by identifying and focusing on key needs
Work with religious, political groups and individuals to support a shift of the narrative in Rakhine from the position (expulsion of Muslims) to a dialogue that focuses on addressing core grievances and needs of all of the population.
Urgently address civil rights for all individuals in Rakhine state
Moving from group rights to individual rights is contentious, especially as other processes in Myanmar are highlighting the need for ethnic rights vis-à-vis the center. Yet in order to balance the ethno-nationalism that is contributing to conflict in Rakhine, rights need to be seen as something needed for all individuals in Myanmar, rather than groups.
Implementation of the 1982 citizenship law
Implementation of the 1982 law is in the interest of both ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population. The law states that citizenship can be fulfilled by having resided in Myanmar for three generations

or more. A majority of the Muslims in Rakhine have enough documentation to receive some kind of national identity card.[7]

Avoid permanent segregation of groups
Humanitarian agencies are well aware of the challenges and the constant need to balance the humanitarian imperative against risks of sustaining the existing segregation. As such any actions that may further delay the return to normality for the IDPs should be seriously considered prior to implementation to ensure that humanitarian actors are not contributing to perpetuate or exacerbate the situation.

Use economic opportunities as a vehicle for cooperation, integration and income generation
Economic integration and inter-dependency used to be the main source of interaction between the Rakhine and the Muslim population prior to the conflict. Economic opportunities carry potential for future integration, as well as risks depending on how profits are shared.

Promote dialogue and reconciliation efforts between the Rakhine and the Muslim population through identifying community leaders, supporting religious dialogue, and youth and women's participation
One can start by studying community dynamics, which can lead to the identification of and support of moderate community leaders in both Muslim and Rakhine camps/communities. Community leaders from both groups will in the future need to play an important role to quell tensions between groups in order to build peace.

Support opportunities to build trust between the Rakhine, Muslim and the central government
Successful social cohesion and conciliation is based on rewriting the future narrative of Rakhine state in a way that includes people and creates unity. A triangular approach whereby the state government, ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population undergo conflict management / resolution training individually, and then gradually come together facilitated by external actors could help to build trust and provide a first step towards future reconciliation.

Introduce counter-communication strategies
Community initiatives, ideally based on youth communications teams, using counter strategies to dispute false rumors could be one way of reducing the rumor mill.

Transparency and communication on behalf of the international community in order to build trust with the local population
There is a need to start to proactively communicate, engage and build local relationships within the local communities. A transparent approach, where program strategies and selection criteria are clearly articulated and communicated to communities is needed. However there might also be a need to reconsider program strategies and selection criteria to ensure that assistance actually includes all groups and meets the needs also of the ethnic Rakhine.

---

[7] International Crisis Group, Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon Crisis Group Asia Report N°238, 12 November 2012

I. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Report Purpose & Scope

The report analyses the conflict in Rakhine State, Myanmar, that surfaced in June and October 2012. The INGO commissioned this study in November 2012, and the assessment is based on data gathering and analysis by one consultant in Yangon and Rakhine State between the 15th of November 2012 and the 1st of February 2013. The purpose of the study was twofold: to conduct a conflict assessment with recommendations to inform conflict sensitive INGO programming, and to build capacity of national and international staff in conflict sensitivity. The findings from the conflict assessment are presented in this report.

The scope of the assessment was to focus on Sittwe, camps outside of Sittwe, and Myebon Townships. The scope was not to cover all Rakhine State, and the assessment does not include visits or interviews from Northern Rakhine State (NRS). It is noted that NRS, with its majority Muslim population, is different compared to Sittwe and Myebon. With that caveat in mind, the analysis can still help to understand key conflict dynamics throughout Rakhine State.

Methodology

The assessment methodology is based on systems thinking. A systems thinking approach emphasizes the need to not only identify factors that influence the tendency for conflict, but instead adopts a more holistic approach that also considers how these factors interact over time to increase or decrease the likelihood of violence. Systems mapping is one tool to reveal these dynamics and has produced several loop diagrams for the purpose of demonstrating how these factors interact over time.

Thirty-six key informant interviews with government officials, political party representatives, religious leaders, business organizations, informal community leaders, UN agencies, INGOs, and donors were conducted between November 2012 and February 2013 in Yangon, Sittwe and Myebon. Following the systems thinking approach, questions were specifically aimed at identifying key drivers of conflict, relationships among these drivers and key actors.

One full day conflict assessment/sensitivity workshop was conducted with 15 local/national staff in Myebon Township. The purpose was to gather information on the conflict (to feed into the assessment) and introduce the staff to tools for conflict analysis as well as conflict sensitivity.

At the beginning of February a second workshop was carried out with the INGO international staff and a few humanitarian partners in Sittwe. The purpose was to test and validate findings, and, based on those findings, use systems tools to map possible future interventions. A hybrid version of "Do No Harm" and Reflective Peace Practice (RPP)[8] informed the workshop activities in both Myebon and Sittwe, as well as served as a foundation for providing recommendations for INGO programming.

Context & Existing Analyses

Accounts for how and why conflict is taking place in a certain area can be contentious at times. Root causes, drivers, or triggers identified in relation to a conflict can differ depending on the perspective of the analyst and the information available to them. The analysis in this report is based on information from the interviews and workshops mentioned above and literature available at the time of analysis. The analysis should not be understood as indisputable fact, but an effort to apply analytical tools to broaden and deepen understanding of the conflict and counteract common and clear misconceptions. Further, as perspectives and conditions on the ground change and new facts come to light, analyses should be updated repeatedly and interventions adapted according to

---

[8] For more information on DNH and RPP, including training materials visithttp://www.cdainc.com

shifting dynamics. For further reading, additional assessments on the situation in Rakhine State have been conducted by International Crisis Group, November 2012[9], Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's report on Myanmar (2009), as well as internal reports from DFID/IDL/British Council, Oxfam, Save the Children and the United Nations Residence Coordinators Office (UNRCO).

A Note on Terminology

Language, and the use of terms to name groups in Myanmar carry strong value judgments. The author has decided to make use of the terms "Ethnic Rakhine" and "Muslim" to identify the two communities, without implying that the conflict is religious in nature. The use of terms such as "Rohingya" and "Bengali" for the Muslim population carry value judgments implying an acceptance or refutation of their origin within Myanmar. The term Muslim cover people with conflicting claims in religious and cultural identities in various places of Rakhine, of which all do not want to be called "Rohingya". The use of "Ethnic Rakhine" in this report is not implying that the Muslim population is not from Rakhine State. The Myanmar Citizenship Law of 1982 recognizes the Muslim Kaman population as one of Myanmar's 135 ethnic groups. For the purpose of this report the Kaman are not implied in the term "Muslim".[10] That being said, the Muslim Kaman has also been affected by the conflict.

---

[9]International Crisis Group, Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon Crisis Group Asia Report N°238, 12 November 2012

[10]From FAO Rakhine Community Crisis Needs Assessment Mission, 13-25 January 2013

II. CONTEXT: CONFLICT IN RAKHINE STATE

Rakhine state has experienced two outbursts of violence in 2012, first in June and then again in October. An alleged rape of a Buddhist woman by three Muslim men, followed by the killing of ten Muslim pilgrims was the trigger that led long-simmering tensions between the ethnic Rakhine Buddhist and the Muslim population to flare.

In early November the UN recorded that more than 115,000 people had been displaced from the June and October violence[11] and the government reported 167 persons killed and more than 223 injured.[12] Considerable damage of property had taken place in 11 out of 17 townships, with more than 5,000 buildings destroyed.[13]

Displaced people have since then resided in camps throughout the state, with an estimated 20,000 people residing with host communities.[14] While both communities have been affected by the conflict, a great majority of those displaced are Muslims. Many Muslims have been pushed out of the towns, resulting in a population that can increasingly be divided into urban (ethnic Rakhine) and rural (Muslim). The government and the international humanitarian community are responding to the humanitarian needs, but the conditions for many of the IDP's are dire. Valerie Amos, UN Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, described the situation after her visit to the camps in October as "the worst she had ever seen".[15]

The government has, since the October violence, asserted control of the situation through an increased military presence, and the state government is playing an important role in planning and coordinating humanitarian aid. The government also established the Rakhine Investigation Commission whose report, expected in March, is tasked to cover the causes of violence, the official response, how to resolve the situation, and suggestions for reconciliation and socio-economic development of the area.

At the moment however, tension between the communities remains very high, with almost daily rumors of incidents. The government has responded by enforcing a policy of separation between the communities. For example, in Sittwe almost all of the Muslim population are residing in camps outside of the city guarded by the military, and the small Muslim population that remain in Sittwe town are confined to an area marked by road blocks, barbed wire and the military. In Myebon, the Muslim population has been pushed to a hill. With the rainy season approaching, humanitarian agencies struggle to balance the humanitarian imperative (of providing shelter, protection etc.) versus encouraging permanent separation. At the moment there is a risk that the international community becomes the government's vehicle for permanently separating the population.

Economically the conflict has also hit both ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population hard. Rakhine State with its estimated population of just less than 3 million is one of the least developed states in Myanmar. Poverty, lack of infrastructure, few basic services combined with an exposure to extreme weather events has left the state particularly vulnerable.[16] Ethnic Rakhine and Muslim interviewees explain how the conflict has made an already difficult economic situation unbearable. Displacement, fear of the other community, as well as repercussions from your own group if you engage with the other community leaves farmers without access to their land to cultivate crops, fishermen do not dare or are not allowed to go to sea, and trade between the communities has almost completely stopped.[17] Moreover cross-border trade with Bangladesh has significantly reduced.

---

[11] UN OCHA Revised Rakhine Response Plan July 2012-June 2013, Nov 2012

[12] Government of Myanmar Data

[13] WFP Rapid Assessment of non-displaced populations in Rakhine. January 2013. Likely a very modest number, the author heard accounts of more than 10,000 destroyed houses.

[14] FAO Rakhine Community Crisis Needs Assessment Mission, 13-25 January 2013

[15] UN OCHA December 2012

[16] FAO Rakhine Conflict Assessment Crisis Needs Assessment 13-25 January

[17] Exception of ad-hoc trade that has resumed between groups

Relief efforts have been met with animosity from some vocal groups within the ethnic Rakhine community. In early October pamphlets and t-shirts that listed UN/INGOs that were perceived as biased for providing aid to the Muslim population (mainly in NRS prior to the outbreak of violence) circulated in Sittwe and other townships, and anti-UN/INGO demonstrations took place. While no UN/INGO workers were physically harmed the protest and intimidations limited humanitarian access to provide relief. Local staff were, and are still, under particular pressure. In some townships local ethnic Rakhine organizations even stopped humanitarian actors to access the Muslim population. [18]

Common explanations for the conflict

Comparable levels of inter-communal violence occurred in Rakhine in the 1940s and since then tensions have brewed under the surface, occasionally boiling over. Inter-communal grievances, animosity and religious tensions have been used to describe the conflict.[19] UN has identified further root causes to the conflict such as statelessness, discrimination, poverty and lack of education.[20]President Thein Sein also recognized weak rule of law and poor socio-economic conditions and lack of jobs across the state as a source of violence, and responded by announcing a four-point plan to resolve the conflict that includes removing prejudice, promoting education, creating jobs and improving birth control in line with international standards. While these explanations are valid, to really understand what is driving the conflict and why it is happening now we need to look into the key dynamics of the conflict, the drivers that are sustaining the conflict and what triggered the recent outbreak of violence.

---

[18] At one reported occasion in Myebon local organization demonstrated and effectively stopped WFP to deliver food to the Muslim camp

[19] MOFA (Myanmar Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 2012, and NOREF (Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center) 2012

[20] UNHCR 2012, OCHA 2012

III. CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE STATE

For the purposes of this analysis the causal factors of conflict are divided into root causes, drivers and mitigators. Root causes are often structural factors that provide deep, historically-rooted sources of division, inequality and grievance in and between groups. In contrast, conflict drivers can be factors that mobilize, accelerate and deepen the conflict, or factors that sustain the conflict over time. Drivers might differ from what initially started the conflict, though often sustain or exacerbate root causes. Mitigators are factors that reduce the potential for conflict, sometimes by counteracting or reducing the effects of root causes or conflict triggers. Conflict triggers are relatively short-term factors or events specific to a particular context that has the potential to 'spark' violent conflict.

ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE STATE

Introduction to the Conflict in Rakhine State

Due to its inter-communal character and religious dimension the conflict in Rakhine is commonly described as different from other conflicts in Myanmar that play out between ethnic groups and the central government.[21] Its unique character means that it is often neglected from national forums and the ongoing peace process. While the Rakhine (as well as the Mon) were excluded from the 1947 Panglong conference that attempted to address the "ethnic question"[22] they share similar grievances and interest to other ethnic groups in Myanmar. They are in quest for their rights, use of their own language, prospects for a peaceful future with economic opportunities, some degree of autonomy and resource sharing. These grievances and quests for rights from the ethnic Rakhine vis-à-vis the center are crucial in order to understand the development of conflict within Rakhine State. The conflict needs to be understood from the relationship between the central government, the ethnic Rakhine and the Muslims. This triangular dimension is key in order to understand how center-periphery imbalances and divide and rule strategies from the government have played communities in Rakhine against each other. The result is a conflict with a two-dimensional surface described as an inter-communal conflict, but with a triangular dimension that connects inter-communal violence to the relationship with the center. The main causes of the conflict are therefore ethno-political and socio-economic as opposed to religious. However as the key issues are not dealt with, religious differences and fear of the other plays into extremist's hands. Religion serves to mobilize people both within Myanmar and internationally, and over time religion therefore becomes an important element in sustaining the conflict.

Ethno-politics
The mobilization of ethnic identity as a political force is a salient feature in Myanmar politics. With ethno-politics comes the idea of legitimization through group identity, and survival depends on legitimacy vis-à-vis other ethnic groups. Ethno-politics has both been implemented from the center as a means of control; meanwhile ethno-nationalism has been suppressed so that it does not become a threat to the center. The Rakhine ethnic identity is very strong, perhaps as a result of feeling that their identity is threatened. Ethnic Rakhine perceive themselves as victims of several invasions, the Bamar in 1784, the British in 1824, and the "Bengali" (Muslim) ever since. The 1784 Bamar conquest of the Kingdom of Mrauk U (today's Rakhine) and the consequent theft of important historic and religious symbols[23] is still commemorated and resented by ethnic Rakhine. The British colonization reinforced those grievances and when the colonizers left Burma the new ruling elite (the Bamar) inherited the colonial legacy of indirect rule which further mobilized ethnic identity as a political force. The ethnic Rakhine perceive themselves as being marginalized from the center as well as within their own state. A small Rakhine independence movement still exists today. It is in this ethno-political context that the threat that the different groups in Rakhine perceived from

---

[21] In this assessment the central government is recognized as primarily being ethnic Bamar dominated.

[22] Ashley South, Mon Nationalist Movements: insurgency, ceasefires and political struggle, Published by the Mon Unity League, Bangkok, January 2008

[23] Historical symbols such as the Mahamuni image which was stolen with the Bamar invasion, as well as a huge bell stolen from one of the monasteries by the British

the center began to present itself as a threat to identity and legitimacy from within the state. The discrimination against the Muslim was one way for the center to control the ethnic Rakhine, as at least it meant the ethnic Rakhine were comparably better off and as such "legitimized" within Rakhine State. Over time (and through policies described below) the ethnic Rakhine began to direct their fear towards the Muslim population that had been living in Rakhine for generations, and the continued cross border migration began to be perceived as a real threat to the land, power and identity of the ethnic Rakhine.

Center-Periphery Imbalances

Center-periphery imbalance whereby social and economic opportunities are directed towards certain areas of the country creates great disparity among ethnic groups and regions, and leads to grievances that become the underlying cause of conflict. The whole population in Rakhine has been socially and economically deprived compared to the center (Myanmar's central plains, predominantly Bamar majority areas) and Rakhine state is the second least developed state in Myanmar. FAO states that only 48,1% of the population in Rakhine have access to primary health care,[24] access to education is limited, and infrastructure is weak. Rakhine State lacks major communication links to the rest of the world, truck or bus to Yangon takes 2 days, resulting in inflated prices for any goods from Yangon,[25] and limited opportunities for economic development. The ethnic discrimination leading to land and cultural conquest combined with center-periphery imbalances has made the ethnic Rakhine feel as if their identity, culture, land access and power is threatened and needs to be protected. Over time, this fear that sprung from the imbalanced relationship with the center has been (mis)directed towards the Muslim population. Ethnic Rakhine have mistakenly seen the Muslim population's influence and presence as a threat, not only to their land and resources, but to their identity and culture, when rather the threat to the identity and prosperity of the ethnic Rakhine is more likely a consequence of the policies and practices of the state.

DRIVERS OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE STATE

Immigration and Statelessness

The degree of polarization associated with the conflict in Rakhine is clear in the controversy over the name "Rohingya". Cross border immigration and population movements over the Myanmar border of what today is Bangladesh dates back into history. But the "Rohingya" are not included on the lists of the 135 ethnic groups recognized as residing in Myanmar prior to the British invasion in 1824. Belonging to an ethnic group is a legal term that confers basic rights in Myanmar. As such, individuals not belonging to an ethnic group are essentially without rights. Over time the Muslim population in Rakhine has understood the importance of belonging to an ethnic group and as such it appears as if the narrative of the "Rohingya" as an ethnic group residing in Myanmar prior to 1824 has grown stronger. The word "Rohingya" becomes so contentious since the ethnic Rakhine fear that the recognition of a "Rohingya" ethnic group would empower them vis-à-vis the ethnic Rakhine and marginalize the ethnic Rakhine from within Rakhine State.

Divide and Rule Strategy

"Divide and rule" tactics inherited by the center from the colonizers have historically pitted ethnic groups against each other as a means of control. The minimal rights provided to the Muslims and the master-servant relationship with the Muslim population that developed in Rakhine meant that the ethnic Rakhine were comparably better off on a state level, while still feeling discriminated against from the center. Military rule also applied tactics of intentionally altering the ethnic composition of the population by moving Bamar people from the center to the periphery to try to control ethno-nationalism as a force against the center. Along the same lines there are also stories of the military rule inciting tensions between communities where there where previously none. The analysis suggests that the divide and rule tactic served to fuel the conflict and help explain how ethnic Rakhine grievances were increasingly diverted towards a threat within the state.

---

[24] FAO Rakhine Conflict Assessment Crisis Needs Assessment 13-25 January
[25] FAO Rakhine Conflict Assessment Crisis Needs Assessment 13-25 January

1982 Citizenship Law and Lack of Rights

The 1982 Citizenship law stripped many Muslims of both citizenship and basic rights to services. Many Muslims living in Rakhine today cannot move freely, need permission to marry, are only allowed to have2 children,[26], and have very limited access to primary health care, education and economic opportunities. As the law deems many Muslims stateless some external actors are advocating having the law revoked. The 1982 law however states that those that have resided in Myanmar for three generations could become citizens. Both ethnic Rakhine and Muslims complain that the law has not been applied fairly, ethnic Rakhine arguing that corrupt border officers have allowed illegal immigration to take place anyway, and the Muslims that the law has been neglected. A recent ICG report says a survey conducted in May 2012 suggests that 70% of the Muslim population have sufficient proof of descent to be eligible for some form of national identity cards.[27]The lack of right drives the conflict as it creates divisions between the populations, contributing to lack of services for the Muslim population as well as ensures that international assistance is targeted towards the Muslim population.

Lack of Trust

Lack of trust is a result of the interaction of many factors over time. The lack of rule of law to solve grievances, segregation and policies of inciting conflict between communities have created both a lack of trust in government, as well as between communities. Over time lack of trust becomes part of a vicious circle which helps to sustain conflict as communities are segregated from each other, and to mobilize or fuel violence once the threshold of lack of trust is reached.

Religion becoming increasingly important due to religious nationalism and external reporting

Religion is not the main driver of conflict in Rakhine. However, religion has been used to mobilize conflict parties, as monk associations in Rakhine and nationally have actively supported and even led the spread of the anti-Muslim message. Buddhism unites the Rakhine with the center, a well sought after link between core and periphery. Religion now has the potential of becoming a key sustainer of the conflict as extremists are using internationalized narratives of Islamists and terrorism to feed into the local conflict in Rakhine. International media reporting on events feeding the idea of "ethnic cleansing of Muslims", as well as some Muslim countries attempts to provide assistance only to Muslim population is making the issue increasingly religious. Many ethnic Rakhine already have a very one-sided view of Islam as violent and seeking to dominate others. The low status of women, combined with the large families observed in many Muslim communities is used as evidence to fuel the conspiracy-theory of Muslims driven by an Islamist agenda to turn Rakhine into a separate Islamic state. Even as religion was not a root cause it has emerged as a conflict driver, and is now becoming part of sustaining the conflict.

Few coping mechanisms and past unresolved grievances

There are few traditional means of solving conflict between communities in Rakhine which means that there are few coping mechanisms to control or stop conflicts once tensions have surfaced. Little mediation or dialogue appears to have taken place in Rakhine during the conflict.[28]Moreover it has been difficult to identify local leaders, especially among the Muslim community. Perhaps this just means that Muslim leaders are not visible as they might be seen as a threat and therefore targeted, or there might be a leadership vacuum. In either scenario it is important to start to identify community leaders, as they will be pivotal for future efforts to reconcile communities and quell tensions between groups.

Natural Resources and Economic Opportunism

In 2010 new projects such as the building of the Chinese gas pipeline and related infrastructure offers both potential opportunities and new fears for the population in Rakhine. Similar to other Chinese and state-sponsored infrastructure developments in Myanmar the Shwe Gas project has

---

[26] In practice many family households are still more than four and the law is not actually enforced. It might mean however that any additional children have even less rights and recognition than the two that are legal.

[27] International Crisis Group, Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon Crisis Group Asia Report N°238, 12 November 2012

[28] Except for a few cases heard of in NRS – that potentially might serve as good case studies

induced tensions.[29] Local communities are concerned with land confiscation, lack of structures for resource and revenue sharing, as well as environmental hazards.[30] These tensions relate back to the root causes of ethnic Rakhine grievances. It was also thought that new jobs would likely benefit the Muslim population (with their reputation of being hard workers). Thus while economic development is crucial in order to meet core grievances of both communities, unequal opportunities and lack of resource sharing might further fuel the conflict.

MITIGATORS OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE STATE

Not surprisingly more conflict drivers were identified compared to conflict mitigators. Prior to the elections and political reform process that begun in 2010 that started to move Myanmar away from military rule, mitigators included strong political control, whereby any kind of organization or meeting of more than five people had to be sought permission for, effectively controlling the population and its means to self-organize. Also media was censored, limiting the mass dissemination of volatile reporting. However while military and police control served as mitigators, authoritarian structures including repressed expression of public opinion was also part of the problem.

Socio-economic mitigators included economic-interdependence between the ethnic Rakhine and the Muslims, whereby both communities fulfilled important and complementary functions in the economic value chain. In the fishing industry that could mean that one group owned boats, the other caught the fish, and the first would sell the fish at the market. In agriculture it could mean that one group produced the vegetables and the other would sell them at the market. Economic interdependence and an ethnically integrated economic value chain make it less profitable to engage in conflict, which serves to mitigate conflict. It is also a means for communities to engage with each other in non-conflict ways, working against segregation that can be followed by increased lack of trust. Economic opportunism can however be a trigger of conflict as discussed below.

---

[29] Ashley South reports in "Prospects for peace in Myanmar: Opportunities and Challenges", PRIO 2012
[30] Ashley South reports in "Prospects for peace in Myanmar: Opportunities and Challenges", PRIO 2012

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE CAUSES AND THE DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

This section explores the key conflict dynamics by analyzing how structural causes (root causes) and drivers interact with each other in causal loops. The loop diagram (Figure 1) below helps conceptualize the interaction between the structural causes (the ethno-political and socio-economic marginalization) and the drivers of conflict (exclusion & statelessness), in order to demonstrate how the interaction of those elements reinforces the negative conflict dynamics.

A note of clarification on the loop diagrams below
The reader should not pay too much attention on the exact labels used in the diagram (be it the description of a process such as exclusion/segregation or of an emotion such as fear, threat etc.), as these are just labels created by the analyst. Beyond labels, what is important is the conceptual understanding of how structural causes, drivers and misdirected responses feed negative tensions in a reinforcing cycle, that escalates conflict over time.

FIGURE 1: ETHNICITY BASED DISCRIMINATION & IDENTITY THREAT
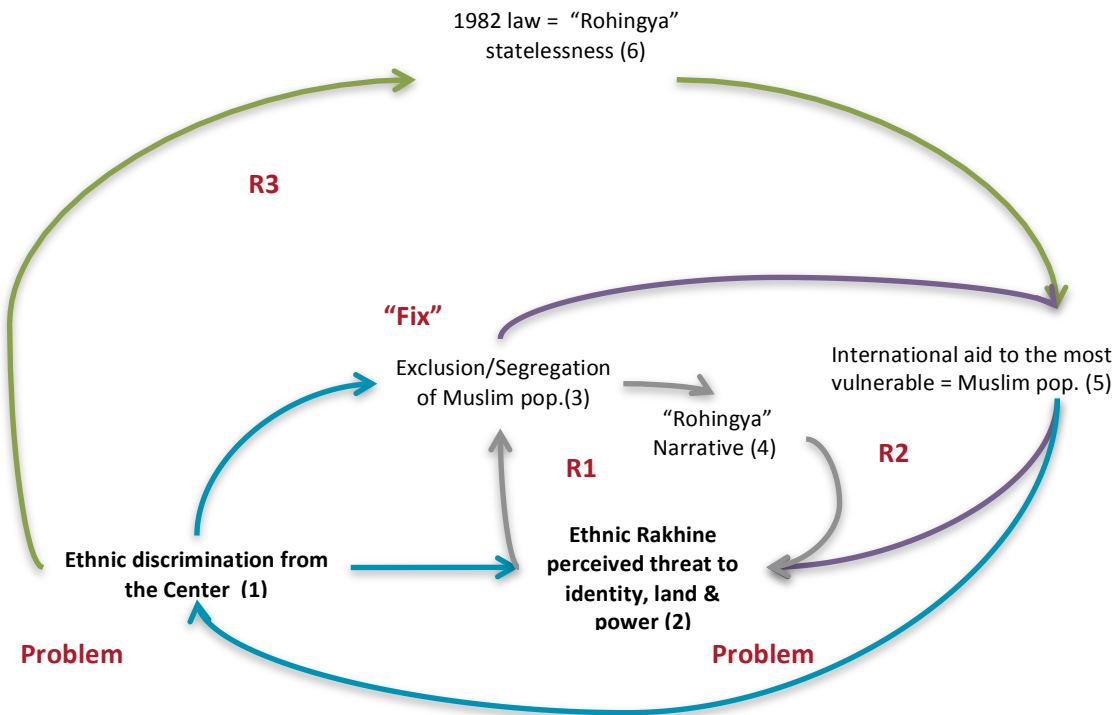

Figure 1, loop R1 shows how the structural causes of ethno-political discrimination combined with socio-economic marginalization from the center (1) contributes to the ethnic Rakhines' perceived threat to their identity (2) (which is based on the legitimacy of their ethnic group vis-à-vis other groups) as they feel that they are being politically, socially and culturally marginalized from their state. According to the analysis, the response to this threat is not directed back towards the center, but is directed within Rakhine state and leads to the exclusion and segregation of the Muslim community (3). It was found that this improper "fix" to the structural cause becomes a driver to the conflict, as the exclusion is justified on the basis that the "Rohingya" are not a Myanmar ethnic group, which leads the Muslim population to intensify their narrative of being native to Rakhine State (4). This narrative increases the ethnic Rakhine fear of marginalization in their state (2). Loop R1 demonstrates how a misdirected solution to (1), in this case the exclusion of the Muslim community (3) becomes a driver of the conflict which increases the tension in (1).

Figure 1, loop R2 demonstrates how the international response prior to 2012 (5) responding to the exclusion of the Muslim community does not address the root causes (1 & 2) but feeds the ethnic Rakhines' perceived threat (2) and contributes to increased tensions. Loop R3 shows how the implementation of the 1982 law (6) (which is justified on basis of ethnic discrimination (1)) excludes the Muslims from rights and services, while at the same time confines the Muslim population to Rakhine restricting them from travel. The 1982 law does therefore not address any of the threats felt by the ethnic Rakhine (1,2) but instead leads to an international response (5) which is perceived as aimed only at supporting the Muslim community, neglecting the ethnic Rakhines' fears and contributing to reinforcing the negative dynamics.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE AS A CONFLICT DRIVER?

Members of ethnic Rakhine religious and political organisations, civil society organizations and local businessmen have been involved in an anti UN/INGO campaign against international organizations operating in Rakhine State during the past months. The anti UN/INGO campaign led by ethnic Rakhines was not only a response to the international assistance in 2012, but is a consequence of perceived bias towards the Muslim community for two decades. Indeed, based on humanitarian need and vulnerability, a majority of the international engagement in Rakhine State prior to 2010 focused on providing basic services in NRS, where the majority of the population is Muslim. Due to the political context the mandate of humanitarian organizations was very restricted and access was negotiated with the central government. Unfortunately this meant that insufficient local relationships were built, entry points and local understanding of communities was limited, and some local actors felt bypassed and marginalized.

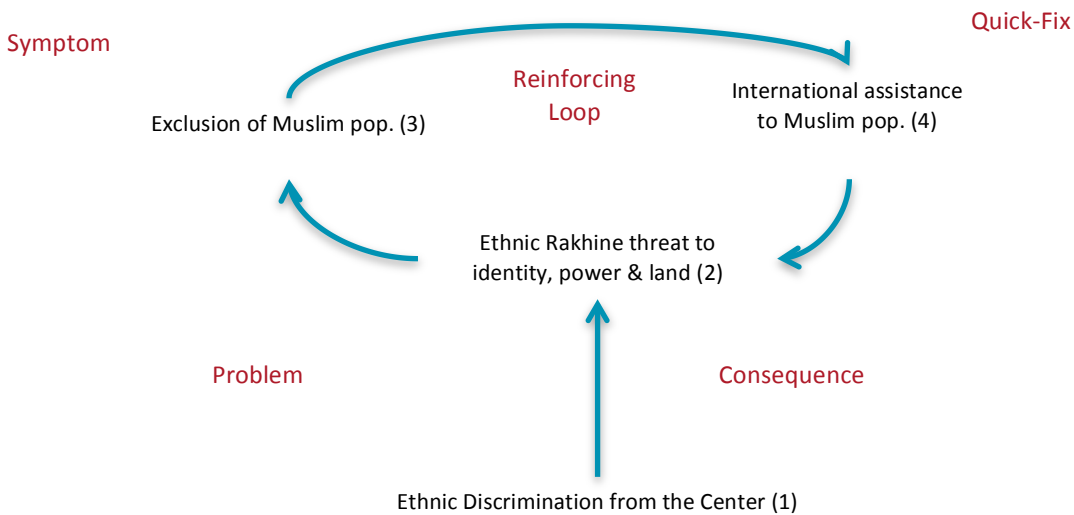## FIGURE 2: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Figure 2 captures the unintended consequences of the international response. Given the political context the international response (4) was aimed at the symptom of the conflict, the exclusion/segregation of the Muslim community (3) rather than the root causes of ethnic discrimination (1) and ethnic Rakhine fears of being marginalized (2). The unintended consequence of primarily providing the Muslims with assistance was its contribution to feeding the ethnic Rakhine fears (2)while neglecting the needs of the Rakhine. Figure 3 demonstrates the interaction of these dynamics. The intention is not to put blame on the international actors but to show some of the unintended consequences of the response.

In 2010 cyclone Giri hit Rakhine State. At this time some humanitarian organisations' response in Rakhine State focused on other areas than NRS. Aid became more equally distributed between the ethnic Rakhine and Muslims. It is unclear how and if perceptions of the international response

changed among the local population during this time. Some organisations that had not operated in NRS were not included in pamphlets that circulated during the Rakhine anti-UN/INGO campaign. An OCHA report however suggests that the response to Giri was seen by the local population as "different" and did not change their perception of the international community as being biased.

V. KEY TRIGGERS OF CONFLICT IN RAKHINE: WHY NOW?

Triggers are elements or events that escalate a conflict or make tensions erupt into violence.

Political rivalry and ethno nationalism made possible by political reform process

When tensions flared in 2012 it was in the midst of Myanmar's positive changing political context including relaxed freedoms and increased political space. Political change however can be destabilizing. In Rakhine state the reform process removed some of the mitigators in place such as military oppression of any uprising and the censored media. This opened the opportunity for ethnic nationalism to emerge through political mobilisation. 2010 state elections led to party-political rivalry between the Union State Development Party (USDP) and the Rakhine Nationalities Development Party (RNDP). In a move that has been described as an attempt to gain votes in RNDP territory, USDP issued voting cards to the Muslim population as well as attracted Muslim votes by raising expectations of citizenship. Tensions were fuelled by RNDP response of spreading anti-Muslim messaging which was picked up by the new and less censored media. The changing political context opened up for the possibility of having elections. The analysis finds that the tensions that arose from the elections however served to trigger the outbreak of violence.

Political, Religious and Economic Opportunism

The way the violence spread in October, within a few days reaching traditionally peaceful communities has made interviewees comment on the violence as "organized" and "planned", with political, religious and business leaders playing a role. However, once the violence and fear spread, even the instigators of the violence appear to have been unable to control it.[31] On a township level economic opportunism such as Rakhine taking over former Muslim market space, or manual jobs such as rickshaws might have been seen as an economic gain for some ethnic Rakhine, but does not appear to have been the underlying motive for the conflict to break out.

News Media and Social Media

With the new freedom more people had access to more media outlets that were increasingly uncensored. Lack of experience in conflict reporting as well as a lack of critically engaging with information meant that biased reporting as well as rumors fuelled the conflict. Vocal Facebook users in a time where people are still not experienced in social media further fuelled tensions and enabled organization. However the role of social media should not be exaggerated. Most of the population does not have access to internet, and word of mouth is still more likely to feed the rumor mill.

The rape case

The ultimate trigger for the June violence was the much reported alleged rape and murder of a Buddhist woman by three Muslim men. Rape in conflict is often used to demonstrate domination and control vis-à-vis another group. The alleged rape has significance as it triggers the underlying threat to land and identity, and feeds into the idea of the Muslims taking over land by out breeding the ethnic Rakhine.

Other potential triggers that might lead to future violence include land grabbing, made possible by a land law stating that where a house is burnt the land becomes government owned. The time up till and during the 2015 elections might also be particularly volatile as the political parties are positioning themselves for the elections.

---

[31] Interview with RNDP and Young Monk association

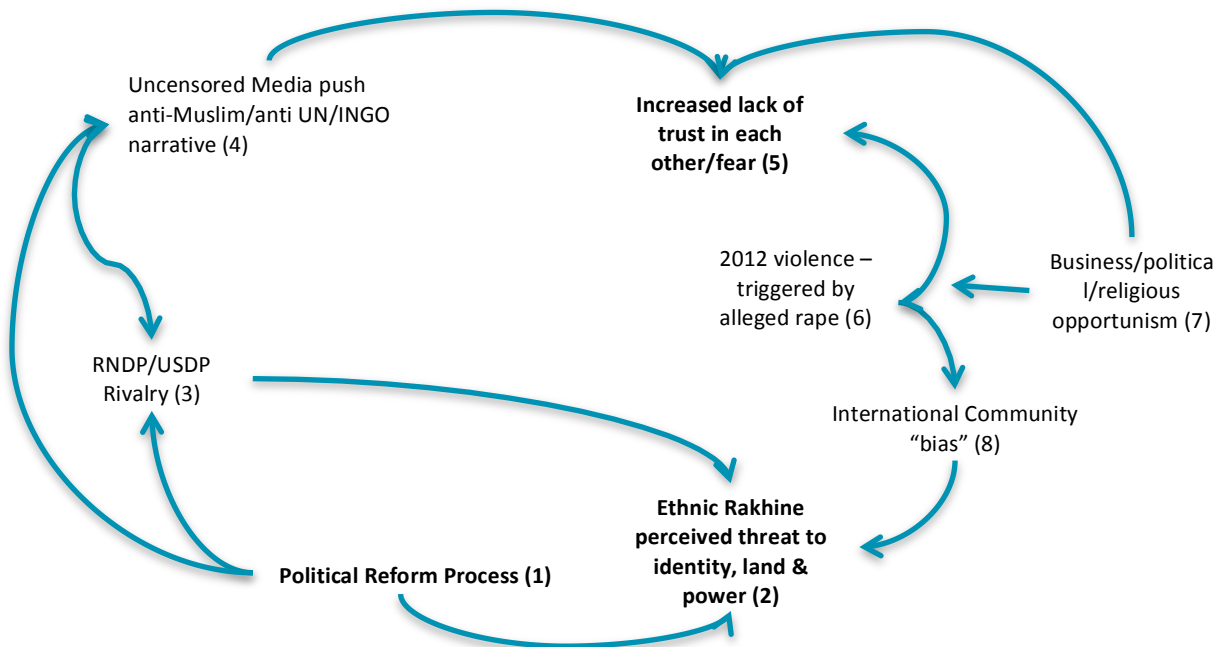# VI. THE DYNAMICS OF CAUSES, DRIVERS & TRIGGERS

FIGURE 3: TRIGGERS

Figure 4 shows what happens when the political reform process (1) removes some of the conflict mitigators previously in place and "releases" ethno-nationalist rivalry between USPD and RNDP (3) that triggers tensions between the ethnic Rakhine and the Muslims (4,5). RNDP, with help from the new and uncensored media spreads the anti-Muslim message (3,4) and triggers increased fear and lack of trust between the two populations (5). The figure shows how several elements (4,6,7) feed the tension of increased lack of trust between the communities. The outbreak of violence in 2012 (6) is both triggered by this lack of trust, as well as it reinforces that tension. Similarly the changing political context (1), the outbreak of violence (6) and the ethnic Rakhine's perception of the international response as biased in favor of the Muslims (8) increase the perceived threat and marginalization felt by the ethnic Rakhine (2). Eventually it is as if these central hubs (2 & 5) reach their boiling point and boils over, resulting in the outbreak of violent conflict. What is happening is the causes and drivers working together in such way that tensions build up over time, and with the removal of mitigators or with a trigger event (or in this case both) conflict is more likely to break out.

VII. KEY ACTORS IN THE RAKHINE CONFLICT

Key Conflict Actors

The way in which the violence spread across Rakhine state (particularly in October) suggests that the conflict was partly orchestrated. Unconfirmed information suggests that there is a core of mainly ethnic Rakhine conflict militants, composed of political, religious and business extremists, nationalists and opportunists that have a vested interest in furthering the conflict. It is not meaning to say that one side perpetuates all violence, but the ethnic Rakhine are more easily identified, especially since they have also been driving the anti INGO/UN campaign. Their interests are of an "elite" nature, taking advantage of ethnic Rakhine fears and the lack of trust between communities while neglecting the general interests (such as peace, livelihoods and economic stability) of both communities.

Political
RNDP, USDP and Arakan League for Development (ALD) are the key political parties in Rakhine. RNDP and USDP political rivalry in 2010 ramped up tensions between the two communities. ALD was banned, but was allowed to resume activities again in May 2012. RNDP is the strongest party in the State Parliament with 18 seats compared to USDP's 15 seats. The most important seats, including that of the Chief Minister however is held by USDP. Military appointees hold an exclusive 25% share of the seats. Interviewees list all 3 parties as influential actors for both peace and conflict. While they play an important role in mobilizing youth, the political parties themselves have expressed that they cannot control them. There is a risk that the 2015 election will provide a new platform for party political rivalry with potential negative consequences for the communities. All three parties admit having strong ties with the local Monks, receiving spiritual guidance and advice. Recently the political parties have expressed an interest in "mapping" the humanitarian aid.

Religious
Local and national monk associations have taken an active role in the conflict, both in the anti-Muslim messaging as well as in the anti-UN/INGO campaign, distributing pamphlets, t-shirts as well as demonstrating on the streets. In particular circumstances it has also been monks that have articulated to international organizations that UN/INGO safety cannot be guaranteed if they visit Muslim camps. Interviewees rate religious leaders to be the most influential actors in their society, both for peace and for conflict. The Young Monk Association (YMA) has been vocally anti-Muslim even though a few interviewees explain that they have become more politically correct in their statements over time, and interestingly appear to be currently advocating for INGOs and even served as interlocutors between INGOS and the local community. Interviews suggest that there are some more moderate religious leaders, but it has been hard to identify if they have managed to mitigate any of the tensions. While religious leaders are quick to point out that this is not a religious conflict, views of Islam as a domineering and war loving religion prevail among this group.

Rakhine Monks have received support from Buddhist leaders across the country. A worrying and possibly escalating factor is how this support has become increasingly anti Muslim, with Buddhist leaders in other areas of the country saying that there should be no dealings with Muslim, followed by some attacks on Mosques.[32]

Imams play an important role in the Muslim community, however it is unclear how far their influences go outside of religious matters. While the ethnic Rakhine point to them as key instigators of violence, no one asked from the ethnic Rakhine community could identify a single Imam in Rakhine. Perhaps this just means that Muslim leaders are not visible, or there might be a leadership vacuum. This dynamic might be different in NRS where the Muslim population is majority and the leaders have a stronger role in the community.

Armed/Security
Local security forces, i.e. the local police and the "Nasaka", a paramilitary border force, are dominated by ethnic Rakhine and are generally seen as pursuing an anti-Muslim agenda. As they

---

[32] Ashley South reports in "Prospects for peace in Myanmar: Opportunities and Challenges", PRIO 2012

were not seen as impartial and some of them were allegedly involved in the violence, the army has replaced them as main provider of community safety.

Few peace actors were identified during the assessment. There are local networks of civil society, women's organizations and youth groups, but they do not appear to transcend ethnic groups. In fact some of the groups have been active in spreading an anti-Muslim message, and there are accounts of, for example, women organizations stopping the delivery of international aid to the other group. Other potential peace actors, such as Aung San SuuKyi have been criticized for not taking a stronger stance against the violence.

Outside Actors

National Government
The national government responded swiftly to the conflict by setting up the Rakhine Investigation Commission, increasing its military presence as well as organizing a Rakhine workshop in Naypyidaw.The investigation commission has the mandate to cover the cause of the violence, how to resolve the situation, and suggestions for reconciliation and socio economic development.[33] Their report was delayed due to the second outburst of violence, but is expected in March. A second workshop on Rakhine in Naypyidaw was planned for January, but has at the time of this report, still not taken place. The state government took an active role as the central hub in the response coordination. The international community has generally seen them as acting correctly, even though concerns have been voiced in relation to access, changing policies and the difficulty in understanding what their real aims and motivations are. It also appears that what is being agreed in Naypyidaw does not always trickle down to state level. In terms of the Rakhine population the government has gained trust from both sides and can be seen as coming out as a winner from this conflict. The political change process is Myanmar is of course not only a threat to peace, but offers tremendous future opportunities for peace. The Myanmar's Civilian Governments interest in peace can have a very positive impact on the conflict in Rakhine if it addresses the ethnic Rakhines core grievances as well as provide a forum where the issues in Rakhine can be included in the national process.

National Army
The army was called in when the local police failed to control (and even reportedly participated in) the violence. The Army has overall been seen as acting correctly and providing security to both sides, and as a result both communities request its continued presence. That being said, in October villages were burned down with 10 days notice and no law enforcement agency was able or willing to stop this, thus there was a general inability to stop the conflict from re-escalating. The army however has through the conflict increased their presence and control in Rakhine State. Interviewees report that the army is also playing a role as a middleman in the trade between the communities, as well as the key enabler for farmers to return to their land.

International Actors

UN/INGO
Following the outbreak of violence UNHCR declined President Thein Sein's request to resettle 1,000,000 Muslims to refugee camps in Bangladesh or another country. In November OCHA released an updated Rakhine Response Plan jointly with the Government. UN and INGOs are now working in coordination with the government to deliver emergency assistance to the population. UN/INGO however were also actors prior to the outbreak of conflict, and helped fuel the conflict due to biased practice and lack of consultation. An increasing amount of actors are now operating in Rakhine. Interviews reveal that Center for Humanitarian Dialogue are looking to get engaged in interreligious dialogue.

---

[33]International Crisis Group, Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon Crisis Group Asia Report N°238, 12 November 2012

International Actors
International actors and dynamics are also important to understand in relation to the conflict. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the government in September to support humanitarian aid in Rakhine, which led to several hundreds of people demonstrating in Sittwe and across the country, which finally meant that OIC could not open an office in Sittwe or Yangon.   Some Muslim countries were particularly strong in condemning the "ethnicity based violence against Muslims", strengthening the religious aspect of the conflict. Pledging support only to part of the population has the potential negative effect of making the conflict increasingly religious and making the situation on the ground even worse. Oversimplification and misrepresentation in media, and the exploitation of the issue for political purposes in Bangladesh are important factors as well. And due to the dynamics of violence and media reporting there is a more unifying front of "victims" that is emerging as well.

Regional Actors
Myanmar is to chair ASEAN in 2014 and there is considerable regional pressure to resolve their internal conflicts. ASEAN's Secretary General issued a statement warning that ethnic tensions in Myanmar could radicalize Muslims and destabilize South East Asia.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS & KEY PRIORITIES

The analysis above suggests that the focus on the "Rohingya" as the main adversary to the ethnic Rakhine might in fact be a focus on the "wrong" issue. Groups within the ethnic Rakhine appear to be carried away by what they think they want, i.e. the expulsion of the Muslim population, rather than focusing on their underlying needs that they share with other ethnic groups in Myanmar: to achieve peace, a prosperous future, some degree of autonomy from the center and resource sharing. This focus on the "Rohingya" issue appear to result in a lack of interest in the national peace process on behalf of the ethnic Rakhine – and could lead to a missed opportunity for the ethnic Rakhine to solve their real grievances. The report intends to shed some light on the risks of not addressing the issue properly which can lead to negative unintended consequences, and the possibility that misdirected responses contribute to make the conflict worse over time.

Key principles to keep in mind:

- When assisting people in need (be it humanitarian, development, peace building etc.) we need to make sure that we do not exacerbate conflict that increases the suffering of those we intend to assist. As such any intervention needs to take into account possible unintended consequences. If the goal is to contribute to the transformation of the system the focus should be on addressing structural causes and conflict drivers, and promoting positive mitigators, rather than simply focusing on the symptoms of the conflict. As such we need to shift attention from the "quick-fix" to the fundamental problem. Some actors are mandated and best positioned to deal with consequences of conflict and can continue doing so with a conflict-sensitive lens. This work needs to be better supplemented by and coordinated with the efforts of other actors on addressing the above described structural causes.

- Conflict sensitivity requires us to continuously analyze the conflict and the impact of our interventions. Ideally analysis should be mainstreamed into the program planning, implementation and evaluation cycle in conflict-affected areas. This helps making interventions effective, adaptable to changing circumstances, and sensitive to the risk of unintended consequences.

- Programs and interventions can be effective at achieving their program goal without 'adding up'[34] to peace. We should work to ensure that our programs are linked across levels – for example if an organisation is working to change individuals perceptions of the other, we need to connect the activities to the socio-economic level so that these perceptions are changed across the society. Or if we base our work around reaching as many people as possible, we also need to make sure that we reach key people that have the possibility to influence others and vice-versa. If not there is a risk that interventions have barely any positive overall effect.

Conclusions/priorities

These conclusions and priorities are designed to address root causes and drivers of the conflict, prevent further polarization between groups, and begin to support future reconciliation between ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population. They are also aimed at supporting mitigators and guarding against triggers by increasing the communities resilience to conflict. Any sustainable peace cannot be imposed from the outside, and as such these recommendations are not framed as outside interventions, but as priorities and processes that should be supported, advocated for, and taken into consideration when developing conflict sensitive interventions and responses.

Address the key issues– by identifying and focusing on key needs
Ethnic-discrimination and lack of self-determination combined with decades of political and economical marginalization helps explain the ethnic Rakhine's perceived threat to their identity and

---

[34] Adding up to peace, or "peace writ large" means that a program is not just effective in reaching its peacebuilding goal, but that there are linkages between the level that the program is working on and other levels of society so that the program "adds up" to peace. For more info visit http://www.cdainc.com

their land. Through center-periphery imbalances, economic, political and religious opportunism, core needs to achieve peace, a prosperous future, some degree of autonomy from the center and resource sharing, has been distracted by the "Rohingya" issue. Segregation, discrimination and exclusion of the Muslim population have not served the ethnic Rakhine to fulfill their core needs. Some ethnic Rakhine already understand the disparity between their position and their interest, while many vocal Rakhine are still holding on to the Muslim as the main adversary. While any significant change must come from within Rakhine state, outside actors can play a role in shifting the narrative in Rakhine from the symptom (inter-communal violence and hatred) to a dialogue that focuses on interests and needs. Ethnic Rakhine share many issues and grievances with other ethnic-groups across Myanmar, but are currently excluded/uninterested in the national process. It is worth considering if/how Rakhine state could be included in the broader peace process moving forward.

Urgently address civil rights for all individuals in Rakhine state

Moving from group rights to individual rights is contentious, especially as other processes in Myanmar are highlighting the need for ethnic rights vis-à-vis the center. Yet in order to balance the ethno-nationalism that is contributing to conflict in Rakhine, rights need to be seen as something needed for all individuals in Myanmar, rather than groups. As the second poorest state in Myanmar both ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim community suffer from a lack of basic rights and services. While the Muslims suffer comparably more, there is an opportunity to address this issue as a Rakhine state wide issue, highlighting common issues between the two groups and what is needed to change to meet the needs of all individuals in Rakhine state (independent of their status as citizens or not). Civil Rights to all would imply that the Muslim population receives the same basic rights as other individuals in Myanmar, including access to health and education services, freedom to travel and the same rights to marriage as citizens.

Implementation of the 1982 citizenship law

Implementation of the 1982 law is in the interest of both ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population. The law states that citizenship can be fulfilled by having resided in Myanmar for three generations or more. The earlier referred to ICG report[35] suggests that a majority of the Muslims in Rakhine have enough documentation to receive some kind of national identity card. A transparent process where a number of Muslims are provided citizenship would be a first important step, where gradually a larger number of qualified Muslims can achieve citizenship. It is important to show the Muslim population that important steps are being taken, as opposed to immediately make drastic changes that could further increase tensions. Implementing the law is also in the interest of the Rakhine. The Rakhine worries about increased illegal immigration, and the way the law has been applied until this day leaves the Rakhine without any tools to actually tackle illegal immigration through legal means. By implementing the law fairly and transparently the Rakhine can actually be empowered to tackle this issue. Through citizenship, and freedom of travel, the integration of the Muslims also becomes a nation wide issue rather than being confined to something only for the ethnic Rakhine to deal with.

Avoid permanent segregation of groups

Segregation, both physical and through structural causes in the society has served to increase tensions and the lack of trust between groups. While in some areas Muslims and Rakhine lived in close proximity prior to the conflict, many Muslims have been pushed out of the urban areas into rural areas as a consequence of the conflict and there is a risk of permanent separation. There are some worrying developments whereby efforts to make separation permanent appear to be taking place. Humanitarian agencies are well aware of the challenges and the constant need to balance the humanitarian imperatives to risks of sustaining the existing segregation. As such any actions that may further delay the return to normality for the IDPs should be seriously considered prior to implementation to ensure that humanitarian actors are not contributing to perpetuate or exacerbate the situation. Humanitarian actors need to transparently coordinate this response, and should be careful not to become the vehicle for segregation. Relating back to the loop analysis in figure 2, this is important as the unintended consequence of providing relief and assistance could potentially

---

[35]International Crisis Group, Myanmar: Storm Clouds on the Horizon Crisis Group Asia Report N°238, 12 November 2012

(and unwittingly) support segregation (even if it is for the short term good) and could contribute to perpetuate the situation.

Use economic opportunities as a vehicle for cooperation, integration and income generation

Economic integration and inter-dependency used to be the main source of interaction between the Rakhine and the Muslim population prior to the conflict. Economic opportunities carry potential for future integration, as well as risks depending on how profits are shared. Detailed analysis on how economic opportunities could be a vehicle for cooperation and integration amongst the population in general (rather than profiting a few, including for example the military) is greatly needed. On a national level this means looking at larger economic projects taking place in Rakhine, and how the benefits of these projects should be shared at a state level. On a local level ad-hoc trade between communities has returned and provides some economic opportunities. Supporting "Border Markets" at the nexus between Muslim and Rakhine areas can be one way to return to some economic interdependence, a small but important step to avoid the complete segregation of communities. By having an international presence and encouraging small operators efforts can be made to avoid that benefits are concentrated to only a few. It is important to get the economy started and ensuring that people regain livelihoods as well as providing an opportunity for people to engage in non-violent ways. Small infrastructure and road projects could be one way to start. That would support the possibility of increased trade between the populations, as well as decrease the segregation between rural and urban areas in the longer run.

Dialogue and reconciliation efforts to take place between the Rakhine and the Muslim Population - through identifying community leaders, supporting religious dialogue, youth and women participation

There is a big discrepancy of views among external observers of when potential reconciliation and dialogue between the groups can safely and meaningfully take place. One can start by studying community dynamics, which can lead to the identification of and support of moderate community leaders in both Muslim and Rakhine camps/communities. Community leaders from both groups will in the future need to play an important role to quell tensions between groups in order to build peace. Community leadership is a capacity that can be built, and structures such as camp coordination committees and protection monitoring groups could be used for these purposes. Making sure that women are represented in these groups, or have their own groups where leadership and conflict resolution skills are built is important. In Rakhine communities one the one-hand women have been very much at the forefront of demonstrations, blocking access etc. They would therefore be a key actor to have involved. In the Muslim communities on the other hand women have been very invisible, and there is a need to reach this specific group. Religious dialogue is also a potential opportunity that could serve to connect the dialogue to the center. Identifying and including influential moderate Buddhist and Muslim leaders is therefore important. Youth is also an important resource to tap into. Myanmar has an active youth participation culture, and it is important that youth in Rakhine get an opportunity to constructively engage in this conflict, as they otherwise have the potential to become drivers of the conflict. Youth engagement in livelihood could also be a way forward, given the amount of studies pointing at the increased risks for conflict when there is a youth bulge combined with high unemployment.

Support opportunities to build trust between the Rakhine, Muslim and the central government

Dialogue and reconciliation (above) are important steps in order to build trust. But trust also needs to be built between the communities and with the government. Successful social cohesion and conciliation is based on rewriting the future narrative of Rakhine state in a way that includes people and creates unity. Change needs to take place at many levels, the government needs to be transparent in its policies, and implement justice equally to all groups. The state government has little experience in leading conflict management or reconciliation programs. A triangular approach whereby the state government, ethnic Rakhine and the Muslim population undergo conflict management / resolution training individually, and then gradually come together facilitated by external actors could help to build trust and provide a first step towards future reconciliation.

Introduce counter-communication strategies

Rumors, lies and fear have spread quickly through newspapers, social media and the radio. This has contributed to spread fear of other groups as well as the "successful" launch of an anti-

UN/INGO campaign. Community initiatives, ideally based on joint youth communications teams, using counter strategies to dispute false rumors could be one way of stopping the rumor mill. There is a strong tradition of youth initiatives that span across ethnic groups in Myanmar (for example generation wave) that organizations in Rakhine can learn from and work with. External actors can build capacity, provide training in communications and technology, as well as facilitate links between groups. This also relates to the idea of promoting moderate or counter narrative voices, especially within the Buddhist community.

Transparency and communication on behalf of the international community in order to build trust

An anti UN/INGO campaign on behalf of some vocal Rakhine groups effectively demonstrated some of the consequences of not being perceived as engaging with both communities. Since the anti UN/INGO campaign most organizations have chosen a low visibility strategy. While this was very reasonable under the circumstances there is a need to start to proactively communicate, engage and build local relationships within the local communities. A transparent approach, where program strategies and selection criteria are clearly articulated and communicated to communities is needed. However there might also be a need to reconsider program strategies and selection criteria to ensure that assistance actually includes all groups and meets the needs also of the ethnic Rakhine. Arguing with the Rakhine that aid is based on vulnerability has proven ineffective (Rakhine feel that their needs are not being met either, and are not recognizing the scale of needs). Thus there is a need for actors responding to this conflict to carefully consider their programme strategies and engagement, if their aim is to avoid contributing to further conflict.