

LETTERS FROM THE FIELD

Sagaing Region



For 45 days, CDNH's researchers travelled extensively in Sagaing Region, collecting a total of 2,836 questionnaires to examine Social Harmony and 2,838 questionnaires to explore the Political Process. The research team surveyed 16 townships from Hkamti to Kale, Monywa to Sagaing, and Sagaing to Banmauk, capturing Sagaing Region's diversity. In addition, they conducted 73 in-depth interviews with residents to further explain regional events and bring analyses to life.

On April 30th, our team began field research in Sagaing Region. The initiative is part of a wider CDNH research program that aims to provide data and analysis of the state of Social Harmony in Myanmar (hereafter 'Social Harmony' research) as well as

on Citizen's Voices in Myanmar Transition (hereafter 'Political Process' research).

Following Shan State, Sagaing is the second largest administrative entity of Myanmar. With a population of approximately 5.3 million inhabitants (2014 Census data), it is also one of the most densely populated areas of the nation. In total, 34 townships, from the north of the country to Mandalay, form the region. It borders the Indian States of Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Within Myanmar, the Region shares its border with Chin State, Magway Region, Mandalay Region and Kachin State.

Shwebo, the former capital of Alaungpaya Kingdom, stands out as one of the most historic cities in the

region. The leader of the eponymous kingdom, Alaungpaya also founded Kounbaung dynasty, the last ruling lineage prior to British colonial rule. With the restored palace of Alaungpaya and several ancient monasteries, Shwebo holds great potential for tourism. Moreover, Katha, a Sagaing city close to Kachin State and Mandalay Region, was the station post of the British novelist George Orwell, who was said to have written the well-known *Burmese Days* there between 1926 and 1927.

Sagaing Region's diversity leads to the multiplication of questions for the research team. The interviews conducted with school teachers, political leaders, Civil Society Organization activists as well as with religious leaders and general Sagaing residents allowed CDNH to gain a clearer understanding on a myriad of issues. These include ethnic tensions, religious tensions and political issues such as land grabbing and the lack of rule of law.

As part of the findings, the research team noted a clear difference between three areas of Sagaing: From Kale to Hkamti, the townships are ethnically diverse with a number of Taing-Yin-Tha groups present and coexisting on varying levels. Mountainous terrain defines the geography of the region. However, there is a dry zone from Monywa to Kanbalu, with simi-

lar landscapes as well as similar social and religious issues to other areas of Sagaing. Finally, the eastern part of Sagaing, north of Kanbalu, belongs to another geographic and social area, with landscapes similar to south Kachin. The section has specific social issues such as drug addiction and drug trafficking. However, commonly shared features amongst all Sagaing Townships include illegal logging and mineral extraction industries that severely endanger the Region's ecosystem as well as the Sagaing residents' quality of life.

Furthermore, due to its history, Kyunhla serves as a very interesting place to run surveys and to conduct interviews. In 1996, the city and its inhabitants were relocated further south to accommodate the construction of a dam. Forced labour as well as poor compensation have been reported. In addition, city inhabitants harbour a strong resentment against the neighboring city, Kanbalu. They feel that the development of their

city is being forgotten and that the authorities favoured Kanbalu.

Because of the unique status of the Naga Self Administered Zone (SAZ), the Research Team decided to exclude three townships within the zone from this Sagaing research project. These townships are: Leshu, Lahe and Nanyun and they all border India. However, in Hkamti Township and Homalin Township, CDNH researchers met and interviewed several Naga representatives, preparing the ground for more specific CDNH research on the Naga SAZ.

Reports analysing the data collected and providing key elements of understanding on Sagaing Region will be published by mid-August 2016 and shared with relevant stakeholders. For more information and to keep posted on our reports, please subscribe to CDNH Research Team Updates research.cdnh@gmail.com.

The CDNH Research Team.

