



EMReF
Enlightened Myanmar
Research Foundation



Border Lives

The Kachin-China Border



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List of acronyms

BGF	Border Guard Force
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
EMReF	Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation
GAD	General Administration Department
ID	Identity Document
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
KDNG	Kachin Development Networking Group
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
MMK	Myanmar Kyats
NDA-K	New Democratic Army-Kachin
NRC	National Registration Card
VTA	Village Tract Administrator

Currency

Most wage and price amounts quoted during interviews in Kachin-China border areas were in the Chinese currency, the Yuan. Amounts of money, when quoted in Yuan in this report, are also given with the corresponding amounts in Myanmar Kyats. As at April 1, 2019, one Yuan was approximately equivalent to 224 MMK.

Measures of weight

In some interviews people gave measures of weight of commodities in relation to prices paid for them. One jin (used in Chinese measures of weight) is equivalent to 596.8 grams. One viss (used in Myanmar measures of weight) is equivalent to 1.63 kilograms.

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The Kachin-China Border and adjacent areas in Myanmar and China. (Source: Google Map Data© 2019)

(1)

Introduction

The lives and relationships between people connected across borders through family ties, work and business, religious, cultural or other activities often transcend the conception of internationally recognised state boundaries. Myanmar shares extensive borders with China (2,185 km), Laos (235 km), Thailand (2,107 km), Bangladesh (271 km) and India (1,643 km). These border areas have been home to a variety

of peoples whose languages, cultures and histories often differ in certain respects to those of people living in central areas of Myanmar. People in border areas frequently also have connections to co-ethnic groups living across international borders in the countries neighbouring Myanmar.

An underlying objective of this project is to

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raise awareness for people in central and urban parts of Myanmar about the lives and circumstances of people living in border areas. In the mainstream media and public discourse in Myanmar they have sometimes been less visible or presented mostly as participants or victims of distant armed conflicts. What happens in Myanmar's border areas has clear implications for political and economic developments in the future for the country as a whole. The lives of people in border areas, who are both involved with and affected by those developments, need to be considered. This study aims to contribute to greater understanding of the range and diversity of experiences of people living on and across Myanmar's border areas and the social, economic and political factors that influence their circumstances.

The border lives project is a locally driven research initiative that has been conceived and implemented by the Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF). The research conducted for this pilot study on the Kachin-China border informs the key findings presented in this report and it also contributes to a collection of creative non-fiction short stories in Myanmar language, available in a separate publication from EMReF. The short stories are based on the experiences of people interviewed for this study and are written by a senior EMReF researcher who is also a member of the border lives research team.

This report documents a short three-month pilot exploratory research project to try to better understand the lives of people living in the Kachin-China border context with field work conducted at two different locations on that border. It presents a snapshot of aspects of people's lives in those two border areas in terms of the information they presented themselves about their own lives. Inevitably, this report presents an incomplete and fragmentary picture due to the limitations of time and scope, but it does raise some significant points within the themes it explores. It also provides an insight into the ways people engage with borders

imposed on their daily lived experiences by states and by non-state actors and the ways they live with, navigate and sometimes circumvent those boundaries. A point of difference in perspective for this research project to what are often top-down analyses of political, economic or military developments in these areas, is that this research focuses on how those developments impact on and influence people's daily lived experiences.

The Kachin area of the Myanmar-China border was selected as the location for this pilot study as this border region has certain dynamics likely to present in other Myanmar border areas. For example, economic cross-border relations with a neighbouring country and demands for resources and labour, periods of armed conflict and displacement involving state and non-state armed actors and some border areas under the control of ethnic armed organisations. Several factors made locations on this border suitable for research at this time. The Myanmar Army (the Tatmadaw) declared a ceasefire with ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) in northern and eastern Myanmar from December 2018 to the end of April 2019 coinciding with the research time line in that area for the study. It presented a moderately improved situation and window of opportunity for access for EMReF's research team to potential research locations. Members of the EMReF border lives research team also had existing connections with communities and civil society organisations in Kachin State. Two members of the EMReF research team had ethnic or linguistic connections and/or previous research experience there as had two further researchers who joined the team early in the project. An initial scoping trip to the Mai Ja Yang area of the Kachin-China border in late December 2018 by members of the EMReF team also established valuable connections and relationships with a post-secondary education institution that was able to work with EMReF on parts of this project.

In the following sections of this report, the key

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findings are first presented followed by a brief overview of the background history, context and theory relevant to this project's research in the Kachin border area. Following the background and context, the research design, methodology and field work are set out. The detailed findings based around the themes of livelihoods, education, families and governance are then disaggregated between the two

border locations at Mai Ja Yang in southeast Kachin State and Hpimaw in northeast Kachin State. Brief case studies drawn from some of the in-depth interviews are included for each of the two border locations. The case studies illustrate in more detail many of the points that are raised across the four main themes relating to lives in border areas that are discussed in the detailed findings sections for both locations.

(2)

Summary of Key Findings

Prior to presenting the key findings, from this report, it is useful to first briefly outline the approach taken in this study. International state borders appear on maps as static lines drawn between countries, but they are imposed upon a much more complex reality for the people who are directly affected by them. The theoretical framework that is applied to this research, follows ideas developed in human geography that focus on the lived experiences of people subject to the influence of borders created and enforced by recognised states and sometimes by non-state authorities. Therefore, the central focus of this research is on how borders impact on people's daily lives, how people perceive those boundaries and, consequently, how they live with, adapt to, navigate or work around them.¹

The following are the most significant overall findings related to people's border lives that were raised during research for this study. These key findings emerged through thematic analysis of interview data, summation of the

most significant trends and through repeated discussion and cross-checking of information from the interview data by the research team. Some aspects of the central themes and their impacts on people's lives outlined for the Mai Ja Yang and Hpimaw areas are common to both border locations, while others are more relevant to one location or they differ in significant ways between the two locations. Those similarities and/or differences are outlined within these key findings.

2.1 The economic role of China

Whether for migrant workers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) around Mai Ja Yang or for residents at Hpimaw, higher wages from working on farms, in factories or in construction work across the border in China and Chinese demand for commodities from Myanmar are major factors drawing people and resources to and across the Kachin-China border. The demand from China, the second largest economy in the world, for workers and for a range of commodities such as timber, sugarcane, bamboo, walnuts or

¹ See the theoretical framework, section 3.1, for more details

even medicinal plants, influences the types of work that people do, where they go to do it and how much they earn from it. Fluctuations in prices of commodities from Myanmar and its border area or bans on certain imports have direct effects on the lives of people who depend on income from employment in planting, harvesting or extracting those commodities, or on people who grow and/or extract resources themselves to sell across the border. The impact of China economically on the daily lives of many people on the Myanmar side of the border at both the locations was also apparent in the widespread use of Chinese currency, Chinese-manufactured goods and Chinese telecoms networks.

2.2 Livelihoods: competition and income

Around Mai Ja Yang, the higher wages people can earn in daily labouring on farms or in factory work on the China side of the border compared to the Myanmar side were frequently mentioned. Income from work on farms on the Chinese side has assisted the livelihood support of IDPs near the border and, increasingly, also drawn migrant workers looking for work from areas further afield inside Myanmar. However, as was mentioned in many interviews, the potential work force and competition for work has increased and people at IDP camps near Mai Ja Yang reported there is now less work available to them. This competition alongside government restrictions on international aid to IDP camps in non-government-controlled areas have led some internally displaced people to seek alternative means of generating income, sometimes with greater risks. For example, respondents at IDP camps reported temporarily returning to land they had previously fled from to plant and harvest crops or tend livestock, or to seek work in other conflict-affected areas further inside Kachin State.

A significant difference between the two locations was that average daily wages on the China side of the border from Mai Ja Yang were quoted by both

IDPs and migrant workers at around 50-70 Yuan (11,000-16,000 MMK). In comparison, daily wages for labouring on the Myanmar side of the border were quoted as being around 4,000 MMK (18 Yuan) per day (the minimum wage in Myanmar is now 4,800 MMK per day). However, daily wages on the China side of the border at Hpimaw in farming or construction were consistently reported higher than those at Mai Ja Yang, at from around 100 Yuan (22,500 MMK) to a very high 150 Yuan (32,000 MMK). These differences in wages were consistent across several different respondents at each location. A potential explanation for this difference is in greater numbers of people and consequent competition due to the influx of both IDPs and migrant workers around Lwe Je and Mai Ja Yang seeking work on farms or in factories. In comparison, Hpimaw has a lower population density and people expressed less reliance on work across the border and more focus on crops and livestock near their villages to provide food or on small-scale enterprises like crops, livestock or extraction of resources to sell at, or across, the border to Chinese buyers. Employment around the Hpimaw area in the past has also included work on the Myanmar side in logging which respondents claimed had reduced in recent years.

2.3 Education: restrictions and distance

At both locations there are considerable challenges to education. This is due to government restrictions, armed conflict and displacement around Mai Ja Yang and to distances from schools at Hpimaw. The ability for students to transfer from schools in non-government-controlled areas to government schools has been restricted by the Myanmar government since the resumption of conflict with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), the armed wing of the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), in 2011. However, in some instances, parents from non-government-controlled areas have found ways to circumvent this boundary to enable their children to attend government

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schools. Parents were reported to have also sent children to boarding schools at Mai Ja Yang from other conflict-affected areas to escape fighting or recruitment by armed groups or because parents cannot afford to send them to government schools.

Higher education institutions in Mai Ja Yang present some alternative educational paths for students who are unable to attend government universities or who lack financial support to do so. However, support from the KIO for students at these institutions was mentioned by some respondents as coming with an expectation of their future service to the organisation. As well as the Myanmar government's restrictions on access to education in government schools from KIO controlled areas, China was reported to also enforce restrictions on certain 'sensitive' education materials, for example English language text books on politics, being taken across its territory to higher education institutions in Mai Ja Yang.

Hpimaw has been under a succession of armed non-state actors since the early 1960s that were reported to have not supported education very much up to recent times. Primary schools teaching the government curriculum are now in the villages visited by the research team but middle schools are only located in Hpimaw and Kang Fang. Distances are significant for access to education in this area with the only high school at the town of Na Zun Baw two hours away from Hpimaw on bad roads. As a consequence, parents sometimes send their children for high school education to stay with relatives or at boarding houses attached to schools in larger centres like Myitkyina or Bhamo. Respondents also claimed that some children from Hpimaw are able to attend primary schools on the China side up to grade six before the requirement for Chinese ID to attend schools at higher grades further inside China beyond the border area prevents them

progressing further.

2.4 Cross-border family connections and economically motivated 'marriages'

At Hpimaw, there are many cross-border family connections. These were reported by respondents as due to people escaping conditions in China during the 1950s and 1960s, the moving of the official border here in 1960 and the continuing cultural relationships and marriages between co-ethnic groups on either side of that imposed boundary since. There was less mention of long-standing cross-border connections between families in the interviews around Lwe Je and Mai Ja Yang. However, this is likely due to most respondents that were interviewed there for this report being IDPs or migrant workers who make up more than half the population of the area and who have come from further inside Myanmar to escape conflict, or to seek work across the border in China.

Economically motivated 'marriages' of young women across the border into China were reported at both locations, but mostly connected in interviews with the desperate economic circumstances and fragmentation of IDP families. The greater wealth of Chinese men able to offer high 'bride prices' of 10,000 to 50,000 Yuan (2,238,000 to 11,193,000 MMK) according to respondents, was often seen as presenting an economic option for some families as well as a means of securing the future of daughters facing many years in IDP camps. The consequence of these 'marriages' and the ill treatment of some of the women by the men who paid for the marriages is exacerbated by the women's frequent lack of marriage registration or formal documentation for living in China rendering them illegal and subject to arrest. The legal difficulties due to lack of formal Myanmar ID and consequently inability to get Chinese ID faced by Myanmar women living in China married to Chinese men were raised at both locations.

2.5 The boundaries of states and of non-state authorities

While there are officially recognised borders between the countries of Myanmar and China close to both locations, non-state authorities also play a role in governance and also enforce boundaries. The KIO controlled area at Mai Ja Yang on the China border is technically inside Myanmar but controlled by an ethnic armed organisation that has been in conflict with the Myanmar military while it also maintains its own border system and relations with China. The administration of the town included a ward system similar to other Myanmar towns, but with its own immigration officials and traffic police and the administration was claimed to conduct health checks and issue permission letters for people wanting to set up shops or food stalls in the town. While Chinese citizens were reported to have relatively easy access to the town, they still needed to exit and re-enter China through official China immigration gates. If they stayed for longer periods or set up shops, they also required permission letters and health checks from the Mai Ja Yang administration. The Mai Ja Yang administration also collects various fees and taxes from passenger vehicles and trucks entering or leaving the town.

The border at Hpimaw between Myanmar and China is patrolled by a militia that is nominally aligned with the central Myanmar government. The militia has been influenced by its distance both physically and politically from the rest of Myanmar and by its close proximity to China across the border. Having evolved out of a long-standing ceasefire armed group in northeast Kachin State, it operates in a hybrid arrangement with the central Myanmar government in a devolved security role in villages and along the border near Hpimaw. Government schools and the government's General Administration Department (GAD) system are present at Hpimaw and in villages in the area while the militia also extracts taxes and rents, has a role

in enforcing the border with China and claims to be the final arbiter in resolving problems between residents.

2.6 Enforcement of the border

The levels of enforcement of the official border at both locations, particularly how it is policed by China, impacts on the livelihoods of people who need to cross it regularly and on their choices about how they choose to navigate it. At Mai Ja Yang, the relationship between the KIO and China appears to influence the dynamics and enforcement of any boundaries between those two entities. Chinese citizens were reported as having relatively easy access to Mai Ja Yang which may relate to the KIO's need, in terms of its wider strategic situation, to maintain its relations with China. Another reason that respondents offered for this relatively relaxed policy was that Mai Ja Yang residents had requested to the KIO that Chinese citizens be able to access the town for economic purposes to bring in business. Informal crossings are common because the border area around Mai Ja Yang is relatively open physically in many places. IDPs and migrant workers have been able to cross into China for work from around Mai Ja Yang and have often done so informally. However, increased restrictions and stricter policing of the border by China were reported at the time of this research.

At Hpimaw, respondents indicated the border has been very porous in the past, and informal pathways for visiting relatives or even moving commodities or livestock for sale are still possible. However, the border gates on the China side have been enlarged and moved closer to the border and Hpimaw residents now require official passbooks to enter China. Residents now need to go to Myanmar immigration at Pangwa or Kan Pike Tee border crossing which involves considerable distance and expense, as well as requiring them to have an National Registration Card (NRC), to be able to get the passbook issued.

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At both locations, fluctuations in the level of enforcement of the border by Chinese authorities were mentioned with the general perception from respondents being that it was being enforced more strictly in recent times than it had been in the past. Examples cited for this in interviews included tougher penalties for being caught on the China side without the correct ID, more surprise ID checks by Chinese police and drug testing of men detained without ID. However, the reasons for these changes in the level of border enforcement from Chinese authorities were usually less clear to respondents who directly experienced this enforcement.

2.7 Informal crossing of borders: the lived reality

Frequent informal crossing of the China border was acknowledged in many interviews at both

locations. The main reasons people gave for crossing informally with risk of arrest by Chinese authorities were for work and buying goods or selling commodities on the China side. Respondents reported undertaking informal border crossings because they did not have the appropriate passbooks due to their lack of Myanmar ID required to obtain the pass book; because of the close proximity of the border across roads, fields or streams compared to the greater distance to travel to formal border gates; because of the expense of travel to official border gates and fees; and to avoid bans, inspections or taxes on certain items that are levied at official border gates. Chinese employers and business interests are also part of the informal crossing context as they were reported to contact IDPs and migrants by phone to come across the border when the employers required workers.

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While attention in recent years has, understandably, been on the armed conflict and its humanitarian consequences in Kachin State (Amnesty International, 2017; Troicare/Oxfam, 2017; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018), the focus here is on how a variety of interrelated factors influence people's daily lives on and across border areas between Kachin State and China. The following sections first present historical background and theory relevant to the approach of this study. Significant themes raised by academic literature and civil society reports relevant to people's lives in Kachin-China border areas are then outlined.

Mandy Sadan (2013; 2014) in her extensive research work with the people broadly defined today as Kachin points to them having a significant historical role in the wider political and military relations of pre-colonial times. By the late 18th Century, they controlled border passes into China and India, and were involved in cross-border trade and shifting political and military alliances

and tributary arrangements involving their larger imperial neighbours; the Qing dynasty in China and the Taungoo and Konbaung dynasties in Burma. Consequently, in the pre-colonial era they had "considerable influence over the flows of goods, people and international diplomacy that required passage through these passes" (Sadan, 2014, p.285). Karin Dean, another scholar who has studied the Kachin with a specific interest in the role of borders, points out that later colonial era boundaries "could not wipe out automatically the de facto geographies that continue to persist, in a modified way, under the present system of states" (Dean, 2007, p.123).

The Kachin-China border exemplifies a situation where current international boundaries between internationally recognised states have been overlaid onto pre-existing economic, social and cultural relationships which do not necessarily cohere with the more recent lines represented on maps of the international

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system of states. This is further complicated by other contemporary factors that have led to people navigating those boundaries due to changing economic circumstances, armed conflict and displacement. Therefore, older relationships alongside more recent movements of people often continue in various forms despite the imposition of the more recent construct of international borders.

3.1 Theoretical framework: borders as conceived, perceived and lived

Karin Dean (2005) suggests in her studies of the human geography of people living in the Myanmar-China border region of Kachin State that they have adapted to living with artificially imposed borders that came with the colonial and then post-colonial eras. Dean sees the establishment of the Union of Burma in 1948 and the People's Republic of China in 1949 as having eventually spatialized the Kachin people within the two internationally recognised states as they exist today (Dean, 2007, p. 130). Drawing on theorists in human geography (Soja, 1999; Rajaram & Grundy-Warr, 2007), she applies a three-dimensional framework for understanding international state boundaries and people's relationships to them; these are 'conceived', 'perceived' and 'lived'. This approach sees boundaries as conceived by authorities (both recognised states and non-state actors) who construct and enforce them, the boundaries are perceived by people who are subject to them, and they are lived in reality by those people, often in ways that seek to bypass or mitigate the restrictions of these boundaries (Dean, 2005, p.810; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, p.xxiv). In the case of those officially demarcated international borders, Dean examines how "boundaries are challenged, defined and ignored," and "how de facto phenomena frequently undermine de jure meanings and practice" (Dean, 2005, p.811). That is the ways the everyday lives of people divided by internationally recognised state boundaries adapt to, navigate or transcend the conceptual and sometimes physical barriers of the borders of recognised

states (Myanmar and China) and unofficial non-state (KIO and other armed groups or militia) authorities that separate families and communities that straddle both sides of the border. As Sadan (2014) points out, "neither the pre-colonial Burmese state nor its colonial successor had fully incorporated this region into either of their respective political systems" (p.286). Up to the present day, because of the long history of armed conflict between the Myanmar army (the Tatmadaw) and various ethnic and formerly (up to the late 1980s) communist insurgencies, people living along the Myanmar side of the border with China have been subject to various forms of governance, sometimes overlapping, from armed state and/or non-state actors for most of the last five decades.

3.2 Existing information about life in the Myanmar/Kachin-China border

As a starting point for the present study it is useful to consider existing information about the circumstances of people's lives in Kachin border areas. Some valuable information about local lives, cross-border relations, economic and governance structures comes from research conducted during the 1994-2011 ceasefire period between the Tatmadaw and the KIO/KIA. Features that have been identified by researchers include relatively unimpeded travel during the ceasefire era for Kachin people from the Myanmar side inside China between KIO controlled enclaves (Jaquet, 2016, p.199). An increase in cross border cultural connections and participation in joint events such as through Manau festivals also developed during the ceasefire era (Ts'ui-p'ing, 2016). This occurred during a period when Chinese authorities were reported to often waive the requirement for people to have ID from the Myanmar side when crossing into China and could access three, six-month, or year-long Chinese residency certificates if they were regular commuters across the border. Marriages between members of co-ethnic groups across the China-Myanmar border were common occurrences as was the shifting back and forwards between villages across the

China-Myanmar border of 'five-day markets.' According to Dean, during this period there was less emphasis on, or enforcement generally, of the formal international border compared to enforcement of boundaries between KIO and government-controlled areas further inside Myanmar (Dean, 2005, pp. 821-824). The economic impact of the ceasefire period was evident in the existence of unofficial roads and border gates operated by ceasefire EAOs that were sometimes associated with unregulated economic activities such as logging (Woods, 2011 p. 487). The economic influence of China in Kachin border areas grew during the ceasefire period with an influx of Chinese goods and access to Chinese TV and telecommunications along the border (Jaquet, 2016, p. 194).

Thematic categories that are considered in the research design and findings that follow in this report were mentioned in early discussions with Kachin civil society organisations (CSOs) in Mai Ja Yang and Myitkyina. They were incorporated into the research design and asked about in interviews with participants during field work. These themes include livelihoods, access to education, and family connections and marriages across borders. Recent literature relevant to these themes in the context of Kachin State is outlined below.

3.2.1 Livelihoods

The means, by which people can support themselves, generate income and have access to food and shelter is central to their living conditions and family lives and, in border areas, the ways people are affected by, navigate or work around borders. Reports in recent years about displaced communities in border areas and for those still remaining in rural conflict affected areas of Kachin State identify the predominance of land-based farming activities as the main sources of their food and income. These activities include cultivation of paddy rice, corn, beans, and peanuts, as well as raising livestock and seasonal labouring (RAFT, 2018, p.26; UNHCR, 2015, p.16; INTERSOS,

2014, p.8). According to INTERSOS, farming was the main source of income for 88 percent of displaced people they interviewed in southern Kachin State, with labouring being the main income for the other 12 percent. As a result of conflict and displacement, 75 percent of those displaced people had lost crops and between 50 and 75 percent had lost their farm tools or they had been stolen (INTEROS, 2014, p.8).

Once displaced from their land, ongoing armed conflict, the presence of landmines and frequent checkpoints make it difficult and dangerous for farmers to return to their land to tend crops and livestock (if they are still there) or to maintain a presence against potential land grabbing (Amnesty International, 2017, pp. 8, 33 & 47). Furthermore, lack of livelihoods and consequent unemployment, lack of money and loss of the traditional roles for men are frequently cited as contributing significantly to other social problems such as alcohol abuse and domestic violence (Trocaire & Oxfam, 2017, pp.43-49). Another consequence of the loss of livelihoods and attempts to generate income has been increased economically motivated forced or arranged marriages of young female family members to men from across the border in China (Human Rights Watch, 2019; UNHCR, 2015, p.14; Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health & KWAT, 2018, pp.14-15).

Around Hpimaw in northeast Kachin State, the main forms of income for people involved in farming has been reported to include growing walnuts and oranges for export and rice and corn for local consumption (KDNG, 2017, pp.20-21). Medicinal plants are also collected in the area but it is unclear as to if they are a source of income or used locally (KDNG, pp.22-23). Extractive industries have also employed people around Hpimaw, in particular for logging and mining. However, available information for the area around Hpimaw is more sparse due to its remoteness and restrictions on access, and that is part of the reason for the area being chosen as one of the locations for the present research.

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3.2.2 Education

According to UNICEF, in 2015, there were at least 60,000 primary school-aged children who had been displaced in Kachin State and northern Shan State by the resumed armed conflict since 2011 and who were in need of education assistance. Access to basic education was described as being better for children displaced into government-controlled areas as they were able to attend schools in host communities. However, access to education was more difficult for children who had been displaced into IDP camps in non-government-controlled areas (UNICEF, 2015, p.27). There is strong evidence for the effect that armed conflict has on education and especially on school enrolments. For example, in 2011, the Education and Policy Data Centre found that areas of Myanmar experiencing armed conflict were 25 percentage points lower in terms of primary school enrolments compared to those areas of the country not experiencing armed conflict (EPDC, 2011, p.9).

Research by Ashley South and Marie Lall (2016) into ethnic-based education systems, in Myanmar, including those in Kachin, provides valuable insight into the parallel education systems of ethnic non-government education providers and also the challenges they face, such as with the renewed fighting. Significant EAOs in Myanmar, such as the KIO and the Karen National Union, have maintained schools in areas they control for decades as part of education systems that operate in parallel to that of the recognised state of Myanmar. The KIO education system has been reported as teaching the Myanmar government curriculum in Jingphaw language with extra classes teaching Jingphaw history and culture, and then later in Burmese (South & Lall, pp. 7 & 17-18). In 2015, the KIO education department administered 180 schools including 25 middle schools and four high schools with

over 1,500 teachers and nearly 27,000 students. Kachin churches, such as the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), have also sent teachers to schools in remote areas of Kachin and Shan states, although this has been problematic due to the limited experience of teachers and increasing security threats (South & Lall, 2016, pp.14-15). There were also at least four higher education institutions located in the KIO-controlled town of Mai Ja Yang and another in Laiza (South & Lall, 2016, p.7).

Children displaced in non-government-controlled areas with their families by renewed fighting since 2011 can attend primary schools in IDP camps run by a range of organisations including Kachin CSOs and faith-based organisations such as the KBC. With the conflict having continued for the last eight years, many children in IDP camps, especially in non-government areas, continue to face severe limitations to their access to education and to any education opportunities beyond that. Meanwhile, schools in areas controlled by the former NDA-K, now BGF 1001-1003, around Pangwa and Chipwi in northeast Kachin State, which includes the Hpimaw area, have been described as operated by a 'hybrid' administration of government, armed group and civil society groups (South & Lall, 2016, p.16).

A consequence of the current conflict for children and young people in KIO controlled areas has been the end to their ability to sit Myanmar government 10th grade matriculation² exams at schools in KIO areas or transfer to Myanmar state high schools to sit matriculation exams (South & Lall, 2016, p.7 & 14). This was significant as it meant during the ceasefire period from 1994 up to 2011 students from KIO areas could still have a government-recognised qualification and greater opportunities to find employment.

² In the government education system, students sit matriculation exams at the end of high school in Grade 10 (although it is reported to be changing to a 12 grade system). The exam results dictate which students can go on to university and, depending on their marks, which subjects they can major in.

3.2.3 Pressures on families and marriage

Kachin communities have maintained relationships across the border with co-ethnic groups in China, especially in terms of cultural ties and through family relationships and marriage (Dean, 2005; Ts'ui-p'ing, 2016). Traditional gender dynamics in Kachin society have tended to place men in roles as the family head, breadwinner and protector of family and land, whereas women have been viewed as homemakers, family organisers and carers of children, the sick and elderly (Lawn & Najouks, 2016, p.8). Consequently, where families have been displaced by conflict, the loss of livelihoods and the associated disruption of traditional community and family structures have exacerbated social problems including domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse and trafficking or forced marriage of girls and young women (HARP-F, 2018, p.14; Trocaire-Oxfam, 2017, pp.48-49; UNHCR, 2015, p.1 & 14).

According to the UNHCR (2015), young women from IDP camps in the years since 2011 have increasingly been forced or manipulated into marriage to co-ethnic or ethnically Chinese men across the border in China. A quantitative

study into trafficking and forced marriages across the Kachin-China border in 2018 found that out of a sample of 394 respondents, 157 (39.8%) had experienced forced marriage³ and 119 (30.3 %) of those in forced marriages reported forced childbearing (KWAT and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2018, pp. 25-27). The study identified these types of forced marriages as one type of economically driven negative 'coping strategy' in the case of families dealing with poverty and financial difficulties. Young brides, in particular, were able to bring in a higher 'bride price' from prospective husbands from China (KWAT and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2018, pp.54-55). The young women once in these forced economically motivated marriages across the border in China face a range of risks. They often do not have Chinese ID or recognised marriage certificates and face risks if they try to leave their husbands and return to the border. Some husbands were reported to have only used the women for childbearing and would then divorce them or even sell them on to another man (KWAT and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2018, pp.xii-xiii).

³ Forced marriage is defined in the study as a situation where one partner could not refuse a marriage or exit a marriage without risk of penalty. According to the study, "penalties include physical, sexual, emotional, financial or legal consequences" (KWAT and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2019, p.vi).

(4)

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Research Questions

The literature that has been outlined leads to some central questions regarding how people's lived experiences and perceptions of the conceived boundaries on the border and in the cross-border context have been impacted in recent years by renewed conflict, changing economic dynamics and changes or continuities in the forms of governance by state and/or non-state authorities.

This study seeks to address the following key questions:

1. What are significant features of livelihoods, education, families and governance that impact on the everyday lives of people living in border areas?
2. How do people adapt to, navigate or circumvent borders in their daily lives?
3. What impacts do the governance systems of recognised states and of non-state actors have on the lives of people in border areas?

The overall plan for this pilot research project involved initial scoping trips to Mai Ja Yang on the Kachin China border in a non-government controlled area and to Myitkyina in Kachin State to meet with local Kachin civil society organisations, education institutions and others with in-depth local knowledge of the conditions and issues faced by people living in border areas. In some cases, contacts were established with organisations and individuals who could further assist with the research process and with access to local communities. This was then followed by two rounds of field work lasting two and three weeks respectively. Each round of field research was conducted at the same two locations on the Kachin-China border.

4.2 Scoping trips

The EMReF border lives research team conducted initial scoping visits to Mai Ja Yang in late December 2018 and to Myitkyina in mid-January 2019. Contacts were also established with a post-secondary school in Mai Ja Yang that was willing to work with EMReF. This involved both practical logistical assistance on

the project and providing two extra local researchers from the Mai Ja Yang area to work with the EMReF team during its field work. The visit to Myitkyina focussed on meeting with local Kachin civil society organisations (CSOs) that were involved in a range of activities related to border areas. Their activities included humanitarian assistance, post-secondary education with students from those areas, social and environmental impact monitoring of development projects and women's empowerment and livelihoods training in IDP camps.

Following these scoping trips, the research team held a research design workshop in late January. Initial observations and themes that were raised about conditions for people in border areas were outlined. These included, for example, livelihoods, education and work or family connections across borders. The theoretical approach of seeing borders in terms of 'conceived, perceived and lived' were illustrated through the research teams' discussions, observations and photographs from Mai Ja Yang.

4.3 Selection of sites

The research team then planned for the first round of in-depth field work and interviews. Based on the previous scoping trips, Mai Ja Yang was chosen as one site for the Kachin-China border research. A second border area was identified through local contacts made during the Myitkyina visit and through churches and the post-secondary institution. The area of the border near Hpimaw in Chipwi township further north on the Kachin-China border was selected as another site for the research. The Hpimaw area offered different social, linguistic, economic and governance factors impacting on people's border lives compared to those around Mai Ja Yang and Lwe Je. For example, Mai Ja Yang has long been under KIO administration, while the area around Hpimaw has been controlled by the NDA-K which transitioned from a ceasefire EAO to a Tatmadaw-controlled border guard force (BGF) in 2010. Villagers

around Hpimaw, many of whom have lived there for a long time, often come from Ngo Chang, Lisu or Lachid ethnic groups that speak different dialects to Jingphaw, the language more often spoken around KIO-administered Mai Ja Yang. Mai Ja Yang hosts a lot of internally displaced people from other parts of Kachin State as well as northern Shan states. In comparison, many people at Hpimaw have long ancestry there and some others have migrated there rather than having been displaced by armed conflict.

4.4 Selection of participants

Selection of participants involved both purposive and snowball sampling. Initial participants were identified and contacted by the research team with the assistance of local CSOs, the post-secondary institution and its local researchers in Mai Ja Yang and through churches and schools in Hpimaw. People from a range of different backgrounds and life experiences were sought.

These included:

- people who had lived in the border areas for a long time;
- people who had moved to border areas for economic purposes;
- people in border areas who had been internally displaced by armed conflict, and;
- people working in local institutions, CSOs and in local governance.

As part of these first interviews, participants were asked if there were others that they could think of who would have interesting and useful input and if they could recommend them to participate in interviews. When it was possible, these further contacts identified via this snowball sampling were followed up with and invited to participate in interviews. Interviews were conducted in two rounds, the first for two weeks and the second for three weeks, so that

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further participants could be contacted and followed up with.

4.5 Interview process

4.5.1 Ethics and security

When participants were approached for interviews they were informed about the purpose of the research and how their input would contribute to a report in English and to a collection of short stories in Myanmar language about the lives of people in border areas. They were also assured of their anonymity in the report and books produced by the research and that they were always free to not answer any question or to end the interview at any time. Their verbal consent to be interviewed was then sought before continuing.

During the research design workshop prior to field work, the research team members practiced conducting interviews. Discussions were also had about sensitivity in interview situations where some people may have previously experienced trauma which could be triggered during interviews and important verbal and body language cues to be aware of that may reveal stress with participants.

4.5.2 Interview Questions

The research project aimed to be inductive as much as possible, allowing for the individual stories of respondents' border lives (particularly for development of the Myanmar language short stories) to emerge during the interviews. However, to build trust with participants and collect data useful to this report, interview questions initially focused on a short set of broad themes that had often been raised by CSOs in Mai Ja Yang and Myitkyina during the initial scoping trips. Questions about livelihoods, education, family or work relationships across borders and the governance systems people experienced were asked consistently of participants.

Information about economic circumstances

and the conflict situation were also assessed through indirect rather than direct questions. For example, responses to questions about people's reasons for why they had moved to an area and their previous occupations and livelihoods would generate information about these more sensitive topics without the interviewers directly raising them first with participants.

Livelihoods-related question asked:

- How long they had lived in the present location;
- What they or other family members did for income;
- If they had moved to the present location from somewhere else, what they or other family members did for work and income there;
- If any of the work they or other family members did for income involved crossing borders.

Education-related questions asked:

- If they were young, what education they had or were currently in;
- If they were parents, what forms of education their children were currently in;
- Their hopes and plans for their children's futures.

Families and relationships-related questions asked:

- If they had family connections across the border;
- If they experienced or knew about the nature of marriages across the border;
- If they experienced or were aware of any economically motivated marriages.

Governance-related questions asked:

- How authorities governed in their areas;
- How processes for crossing borders worked;
- About any difficulties associated with governance systems and borders.

To help longer-term or deeper life stories to emerge, questions asked:

- About their lives long-term in previous locations, or in the present location, if they had lived there all their lives.
- About any important events or changes in their long-term living situations and how those had affected them.

As indicated earlier, these questions also indirectly raised conflict or displacement-related issues that were discussed further, if the participant was comfortable to do so. At the conclusion of the interview, the participant was thanked and asked if they had any questions for the reviewers or about the research. They were also asked if they would be available for some further questions when the researchers returned to the location in three weeks' time during the second phase of interviews.

Scope and limitations

This short pilot study provides a brief snapshot of aspects of people's lives in two Kachin-China border locations based on data consisting of 54 in-depth interviews and 37 shorter informal interviews as well as observations and photos by the research team. This project was designed and implemented within a tight time frame of about two and a half months. It is an exploratory and qualitative study and, while this research seeks to reveal features illustrative of thematic issues like livelihoods or education common to people's border lives in those two locations, it does not claim to be statistically significant or generalisable.

4.6 Field Work Round One

The first round of field work in the two locations, Mai Ja Yang and Hpimaw, was conducted from January 31st to February 12th. The questions asked of participants in this first round of interviews (informed by feedback from Kachin-based CSOs during the initial scoping trips to Mai Ja Yang and Myitkyina in late December and January) had two main purposes:

1. To obtain information pertaining to the themes of livelihoods, education, families and governance. These opening questions also served to help build rapport and trust with the respondents if they were to be asked for more in-depth information about life stories further into the interview or in a later follow-up interview during round two.
2. To identify and establish contacts with potential participants who could provide in-depth life stories and be interviewed in more detail during phase two of the project in the same two border locations.

In Mai Ja Yang, between February 1st and 7th, the team conducted 12 formal interviews: six males and six females and 21 shorter informal interviews: eight males and 13 females. In Hpimaw between February 9th and 12th, the team conducted four formal interviews: three male and one female and four informal interviews: three female and one male. This gave an overall total from both locations of 16 formal interviews and 25 informal interviews, giving a total of 41 respondents (18 male and 23 female) involved in round one.

During the first round of field work, formal interviews were often conducted by the team as a whole, with one person asking questions and other team members taking notes. The team members' notes were then able to be compared during the sharing and debriefing sessions to verify and corroborate details. In other instances, the team broke into two teams to cover more interviews (including also informal

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conversational interviews) in a short period, such as during a visit to a village, a town and an IDP camp.

On returning to Yangon, from February 15th the team discussed and summarised the most important aspects of interview responses to each of the thematic topics: livelihoods, education, families and governance. From the 18th to the 20th February, each of the formal interviews was then outlined in detail so the team members were able to add missing details and correct or corroborate each other's notes. The key findings from the first round of research were summarised and presented to reviewers on February 21st. The data from this first round contributed significantly to discussion of the thematic areas covered in this report.

4.7 Field Work Round Two

The EMReF team undertook preplanning for the second round of research on the 22nd and 25th February. The team identified and planned to follow up with several participants that had been met and with whom relationships were established during the first round of interviews. They also planned to meet further participants to extend the data on the thematic areas. The team also reached out to some different key resource people and organisations at both locations to broaden their contacts and to improve their access and opportunities to engage with new participants. While three members of the team spoke Jingphaw as well as Burmese, and could interpret where necessary at Mai Ja Yang, two interpreters who spoke Lisu and Chinese were employed during the second visit at Hpimaw to assist with interviews.

In and around Mai Ja Yang between February 28th and March 5th, the team conducted 23 formal interviews: seven male and 16 female and eight shorter informal interviews: five male and three female. In and around Hpimaw between March 8th and March 12th the team conducted 15 formal interviews: seven male and eight female and seven informal interviews:

four male and three female. This gave an overall total from both locations of 50 respondents in the second round. Therefore, in total there were 41 respondents in round one plus 50 respondents in round two giving a total of 91(39 male and 52 female) respondents for the study consisting of 54 formal interviews and 37 informal interviews.

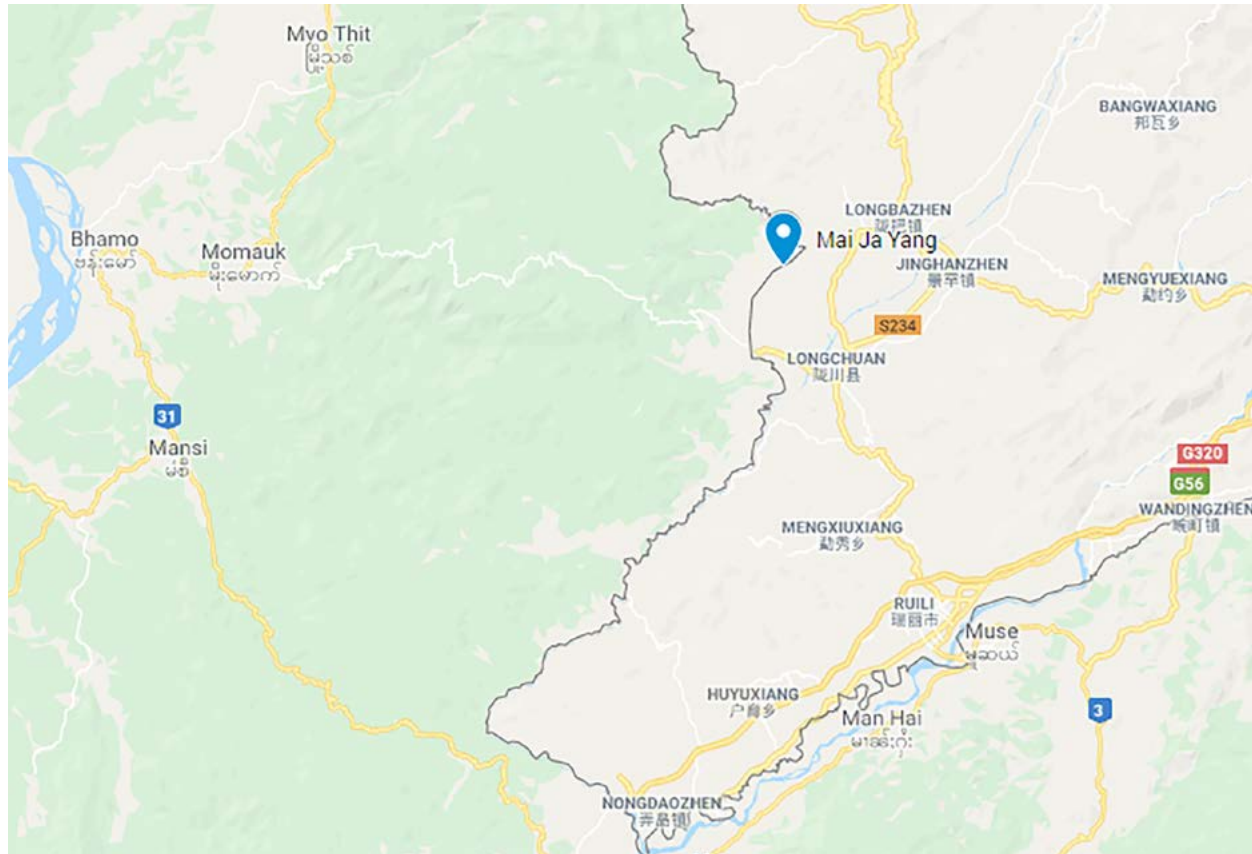
4.8 Analysis

The team summarised the thematic areas based on new information from the interviews and then each interview was gone through in detail with the team cross-checking details between them from their interview notes. This new interview information was then compared and combined with that from the first round where it often added to existing trends in themes and, sometimes, provided new perspectives on them, contributing to the following findings in this report.

The interview responses were analysed for details and for different perspectives relating to the central research questions about context and impact of borders on the lives of people and ways they lived with, navigated, adapted to or circumvented those circumstances. In the following detailed findings section, examples from relevant interviews are cited to support points made in relation to the themes and, where appropriate, direct quotation has been included if particularly illustrative of certain points.

Note: The information given for interview respondents in corresponding footnotes usually includes their age and gender and sometimes occupation if it is relevant to specific information they provided. These details are also included to distinguish between respondents since sometimes several people were interviewed on the same day at the same location. All participants remain anonymous for their security and privacy and in a few instances some details have been altered if they could potentially be identified from their age, occupation and location.

Findings



The Mai Ja Yang area and adjacent areas in Myanmar and China. (Source: Google Map Data© 2019)

(5)

Mai Ja Yang

Areas where interviews were conducted: Mai Ja Yang (KIO controlled area), Nkhawng Pa IDP camp, Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, Lai Ying and Zhang Feng (towns in China) and Lwe Je (Myanmar border). Available population figures for this area include 8, 597 people in 4 IDP camps around the Mai Ja Yang area (OCHA, 2017), 10, 039 people at Lwe Je sub township in Myanmar (Republic of the Union of Myanmar Census, 2014, p.50) and an estimated 8,000 people in Mai Ja Yang town (Hein Htet, 2016).⁴

⁴ The total population in this area is likely to be considerably higher than just the 35,729 total from these figures, including towns and villages just inside China from Lwe Je. These figures are included here to provide a comparison to the much smaller population size of around 4-5,000 at the second border location at Hpimaw.

5.1 Livelihoods

5.1.1 Migrant labour

Early in the first round of research around Mai Ja Yang, the EMReF team met Myanmar migrant workers in the Chinese town of Lai Ying just inside China beyond the Myanmar town of Lwe Je. They noted that many people at a football match at Lai Ying during the Chinese New Year were speaking in Myanmar language. When they spoke to these people, they discovered one team was composed of Myanmar migrant workers at Lai Ying and the other team was mostly made up of workers who spoke Jingphaw and had come from Lwe Je. Many of the Myanmar migrant workers explained that they had come to live and work in this border area of China from as far as the dry zone in central Myanmar. One couple stated that they had met in China, returned to Myanmar to get married, and returned to work at Lai Ying in a furniture factory, where many of the people at the football match worked. Their plans, which were also expressed in similar ways by others, were to work in China for a few years before returning to Myanmar to start their family and business.⁵

They stated that they could earn 1,500 -2,000 Yuan (337,000- 449,000 MMK) per month working at the furniture factory in China. As they were unlikely to get many days off per month, dividing those figures by an estimated 28 days' work per month gives a daily wage of from 54-71 Yuan (12,000-16,000 MMK).⁶ The workers from the furniture factory also mentioned an advantage with their job was that they had accommodation supplied as part of their conditions, meaning they could save more money. By comparison, other migrant workers at Lai Ying pointed out that labouring work on the Myanmar side of the border could only bring in about 4,000 MMK (18 Yuan) per day which would work out to be around 120,000 MMK (534 Yuan) per month if they worked every day.⁷ Other types of work Myanmar migrants described being employed in on the China side of the border included noodle factories, tea plantations, construction, steel and aluminium production, making tyres and working in shops.⁸ Some migrants who worked on sugar cane plantations said they did package work where, rather than being paid per day, they were paid on completion of an entire field or farm being planted or harvested.⁹

Myanmar migrant workers at a sugarcane field near Mai Ja Yang



⁵ Short interviews with Myanmar migrant workers at Lai Ying, February 5, 2019.

⁶ To be comparable with other daily wage amounts quoted in this report.

⁷ Short interviews with Myanmar migrant workers at Lai Ying, February 5, 2019.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ This was later reiterated by people at IDP camps near Mai Ja Yang who pointed to the role of package deals with migrant labour offering lower wages to farmers as having reduced their own work opportunities and wages: Interviews at Pa Kahtawng and Nkhawng Pa IDP camps March 2nd and 5th, 2019.

Migrant workers reported a variety of methods for sending money back to families in Myanmar. One that was often mentioned around the border area was through the Chinese telecoms network using the messaging application 'WeChat.' This could be used to transfer Yuan to another WeChat user within the border area at Lwe Je where WeChat pay could also be used at many shops and within China to buy goods. However, for migrant workers transferring money to families further inside Myanmar the main methods were through the 'Wave Money' service that can be used via the Telenor telecoms network within Myanmar (although non-Telenor users can also use the service) that requires an NRC. Another option was through traditional money transfer services for which the person sending the money has to provide the ID details of the person receiving it. Others just sent money back physically with friends, relatives or

car drivers.¹⁰

While citing better pay and conditions as their reasons for working on the China side of the border, Myanmar migrant workers also mentioned challenges they faced including fluctuations in prices for commodities which affected their wages and available work, the expense and time of obtaining border passes and reliance on work brokers for finding work and cases of being cheated by those brokers.¹¹ If migrant workers were cheated or robbed of their pay in China they were at a disadvantage due to lack of language, potentially not having legal rights through not having correct ID or work permits for China, unable to directly approach employers and, sometimes, being reliant on work brokers who organised their employment to get them back to the border.¹²

Case Study: A migrant worker at Lai Ying

X came to the Kachin-China border from the dry zone in Myanmar two years ago. Her sister had been working just across the border in China at Lai Ying near Lwe Je. Her sister said she could earn more money working there compared to back home in Myanmar. When X arrived at Lwe Je, her sister introduced her to a man who invited her to work with a team of other Myanmar migrant workers. The man said she could earn one Yuan per plant planting tea on a plantation about ten miles inside China. He was a work broker who was also from Myanmar although he also spoke some Chinese. She agreed and joined this 'package' work team. The broker told her she would get a large pay when each plantation contract was completed.

When she started work on the tea plantation, she crossed the border at Lwe Je into China. With her NRC, she was able to get a red passbook at Myanmar immigration and was stamped in at the China border gate. The passbook with the Chinese stamp allowed her 13 days and 14 nights stay in China each time. She would then have to go back across the border and renew it by getting a new stamp from Chinese immigration when she re-entered China. The broker met her and other Myanmar workers just past the border and they were taken in a truck to the plantation. She met other workers on the team who had also come to China for work. Some of them had crossed the border over streams or fields away from the official border gates. They did not have NRCs and therefore could not get the passbook for China. After a week, they finished work on one plantation. However, the pay they received was a lot less than they had expected after all the work they had done. One worker who spoke a little Chinese went to the owner to ask why they were paid less and the owner told him 'I paid for all the work you did and I gave it all to the broker and this is not my problem.' They realised the broker had cheated them and did not pay them all the money he was given for them by the owner. Although they knew they were cheated, they were afraid to complain as they thought they would be fired. They could not just leave as they did not know where they were or how to get back to the border easily and did not speak much Chinese. Also, some of the other workers did not have the border passbooks and had crossed the border without going through the China border gate so they could be arrested for being in China illegally.

X did not work for the broker again and, instead, found out about a job in a furniture factory just inside China near Lai Ying from friends. She then started working there. The factory provided workers accommodation and paid 1,500 Yuan per month. This meant she could save more money. While working at the factory, X met her husband. They plan to work for another three years to save money in China and then go back to Myanmar to start a business and a family.

¹⁰ Interview with a car rental driver that frequently worked in the area, March 7, 2019, and interviews and observations at Lai Ying, Mai Ja Yang and Hpimaw.

¹¹ Short interviews with migrant workers at Lai Ying, February 5, 2019. Three women migrant workers mentioned specific cases of being cheated by work brokers while working at factories. Another instance of being cheated by work brokers for a factory in China was also mentioned in an interview with a former migrant worker who now lived at Kang Fang near Hpimaw, March 11, 2019.

¹² Interview with local governance official, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Interviews with IDPs at Nhkawng Pa, IDP camp, MJY, February 4, 2019; Short interviews with Myanmar migrant workers at Lai Ying, February 5, 2019. Interviews with IDPs at Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

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5.1.2 IDP camps

The IDP population in camps closest to the Mai Ja Yang area according to a local Kachin CSO that works in the IDP camps is estimated to be 9,000 which is equal to or exceeding the population of Mai Ja Yang town itself which is estimated to be between 6-8,000 people.¹³ Most IDPs were originally farmers before displacement,¹⁴ but now forced to be in the IDP camps, they seek work on locally-owned farms and many do daily labouring work across the border in China.¹⁵ There is potential for some tension between the permanent local and IDP communities especially with limited access to land and resources. Livelihoods training from some local Kachin CSOs working with IDPs are intended to provide some alternative sources of income for IDPs and reduce the drain on local resources. One CSO stated that it includes 30% local community members alongside 70% IDPs in trainings it provides to reduce these potential tensions.¹⁶ Programs from local CSOs to improve IDP livelihoods include cotton, mushroom, chicken and pig farming.¹⁷ One CSO in the IDP camps has worked with IDPs to help them create a small company that develops value-added products that can be then sold back into Myanmar to generate income. IDP produced goods included woven goods like bags and clothes as well as organic soap and cakes.¹⁸



¹³ Interview with a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps at Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019. This is slightly higher than the total figures for the four IDP camps in the Mai Ja Yang that was estimated to be around 8, 597 in 2017 by OCHA.

¹⁴ Interviews with IDPs at Nkawng Pa IDP camp February 4 and March 5, 2019; Interviews with IDPs at Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019. See, regarding the previous livelihoods of IDPs in Kachin state, INTERSOS, 2014; Amnesty International, 2017.

¹⁵ Interview with a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps at Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019. Interviews with IDPs at Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019 and Nkhawng Pa IDP camp, March 5, 2019. Interview with three members of a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps, Nkhawng Pa IDP camp, March 5, 2019.

¹⁶ Interview with a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps at Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019.

¹⁷ Interviews with Kachin CSOs, Myitkyina, January 20-22, 2019.

¹⁸ Interview with a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps at Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019





Vocational training at an IDP camp

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A consistent theme mentioned in interviews with people at IDP camps was the reduction in their work opportunities and wages in the last few years that some attributed to the influx of migrant workers from further inside Myanmar seeking work on the China side of the border.¹⁹ These new workers were reported to have established different relationships with employers and often did package work as a group for an employer sometimes competing or putting the previous workers from IDP camps out of jobs. One IDP respondent summarised this by stating “Some people come with a group and they do the whole of the village farms plot by plot so the farmers only hire this group now and they don’t hire outside workers.”²⁰ Alongside this increased competition for work from new migrants and potentially also reflecting a simultaneous reduction in international aid due to government restrictions on access to the IDP camps in non-government controlled areas in recent years, some IDPs mentioned seeking other livelihood support options that involved travelling further inside Myanmar and, sometimes, to areas still affected by armed conflict. For example, one IDP described earning only 30 Yuan (6,700 MMK) per day from work on sugarcane plantations²¹ and augmented their income by travelling to an area where they could harvest edible bamboo shoots in demand in China. They transported these shoots back to sell for around 70 Yuan (15,700 MMK - comparable to wages for day labourers in China) per viss (1.63 kilograms) at the border to Chinese traders. However, the area they travelled to for this bamboo was known to contain landmines and access to it was via a road maintained by the KIA who charged a small fee to travel on it.²² Others described returning temporarily to their villages or farms that they had been displaced from, despite the threat of armed conflict, landmines and potential harassment or arrest, to try to grow crops or tend to livestock there that they could eventually sell to generate some income.²³

¹⁹ Interviews with IDPs, at Pa Kahtawng and Nkhawng Pa IDP camps, March 2 and March 5, 2019.


²⁰ Interview with an IDP woman (47), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019

²¹ Other IDPs mentioned earning as much as 50 to 60 Yuan per day doing work on sugarcane plantations.

²² Interview with IDP woman (50), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019

²³ Interviews with an IDP woman (47), an IDP man (50) and an IDP woman (30), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019; Interview with an IDP woman (31), Nkhawng Pa IDP camp, March 5, 2019.





An IDP camp with the China border across a nearby stream

In terms of seeking work across the border, IDP camps are located some distance by roads away from the official border gate entry into China but in some cases they are adjacent to China just across streams, roads or fields.²⁴ Chinese farmers who had established contacts with IDP workers over the years, often through exchange of phone numbers, were reported to call IDPs across the border when they needed work done.²⁵ People frequently cross informally saving time and money by avoiding travel and fees, and also because they lack, or no longer have, a Myanmar NRC and therefore are unable to obtain a passbook required by the Chinese authorities to use the formal border gate system.²⁶ Respondents stated that enforcement of the border by Chinese authorities, at least at the time of these interviews, had been increased with compulsory drug checks for men found without ID or permission to work in China.²⁷ As a result, IDP workers, in particular men, are not crossing the border informally as often as they have in the past and if they do they avoid towns or roads in China where they could be seen and questioned by Chinese police.²⁸

Case Study: An IDP family near Lwe Je

Y is 62 and lived at a village near Lwe Je with his wife and their six children. They lived on the family land there during the 1980s. X remembers in those days that the KIA controlled Lwe Je. In 1987, there was fighting between the KIA and Tatmadaw near his village so he fled with his wife and children across the border to Lai Ying in China. They were able to rent a small plot of land. He worked as a butcher and his wife worked in daily labouring and sometimes had a small stall selling snacks. In those days, he recalls, it was easier to cross the border and stay in China. They stayed in China for eight years. Their oldest children were able to attend school in China while they stayed near La Ying. However, in the early 1990s, Chinese businesses near Lai Ying wanted to use the land they were staying on. Because they were not citizens of China and did not own the land they had to move again. In 1994, they heard there was a ceasefire between the Myanmar army and the KIA. They also heard that the KIO was calling people who had fled the fighting to come back and that the KIO was developing their area and could offer them some land. They had been living in China for eight years and considered trying to get citizenship. However, they had land at Lwe Je and wanted to bring their children up in Kachin State.

²⁴ Observations and photos by the EMReF team while visiting IDP camps around Mai Ja Yang, March 2-6, 2019.

²⁵ Interviews with an IDP man (50), an IDP man (42), an IDP woman (52) and an IDP woman (40), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019

²⁶ Interviews with an IDP woman (47), an IDP woman (50), and an IDP man (50), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

²⁷ Interview with an IDP man (50), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019

²⁸ Interview with an IDP woman (40), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

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They returned to Kachin State from China in 1996. They sold their land at Lwe Je and moved to a small plot of land at a village near Laiza that was offered by the KIO. Because it was a small area of land Y did not have to pay for it but he did have to clear it. He believed the new land was good for growing vegetables. For income he sometimes worked in logging in nearby areas and farm work. His wife raised pigs and sold snacks from a small stall. Then in 2011, the fighting started again. They had to dig shelters at the village to hide from bombs, but when the fighting got too close, they had to run from the village and their land to an IDP camp near Laiza. At the IDP camp they could not support themselves anymore because they had no land or money. Now they had to live in a crowded camp and had no space to grow vegetables or raise animals. Instead, they had to survive on aid provided by NGOs and Kachin civil society and church groups. After they had been at the IDP camp at Laiza for about a year, a relative called them to tell them there was some space available at an IDP camp near Lwe Je. At the IDP camp at Lwe Je they have some space for growing vegetables and a space near the camp to raise some animals. Y also collects bottles to resell and he and his wife sometimes go to work as daily labourers across the border in China when businessmen or farm owners call for workers. It has been nearly eight years since the war started again. Y's second son was arrested when the war started again in 2011 and he has been missing ever since.

5.1.3 Mai Ja Yang

Mobile 'five day markets' that operate alternately between border areas consisting of mostly Chinese stall holders selling goods were described by respondents as still operating at border towns around Mai Ja Yang on the China and Myanmar side including in Mai Ja Yang town (non-government controlled area in Myanmar), Zhang Feng (China), Lwe Je (Myanmar), and Lai Ying (China).²⁹ Inside Mai Ja Yang town itself, available work included selling goods from stalls and in small shops and restaurants, working in the institutions of the KIO administration and at a casino.³⁰ The town was observed to be mostly deserted in December, while the casino presented one of the few forms of employment remaining inside the town itself.³¹ It was stated that most of the casinos in the town were opened around 2003 and were closed between 2015 and 2017.³² One former casino building is now used as a higher education facility.³³ The main current casino complex in Mai Ja Yang operates as a small town within a town, with its own services, shops and security. Present and former workers at the casino described conditions of working

12 hour shifts seven days a week and having to work a 24-hour shift to get one day off with pay deductions for any errors they made during their shift. Those directly hired by the casino company said they could earn 2,000 Yuan (449,000 MMK) per month or more. In terms of living costs, rent for apartments for casino workers was said to be around 300 Yuan (67,400MMK) per month for a single room or 150 Yuan (33,700 MMK) per month for a room with shared bathroom.³⁴ Between 300 and 500 youths, some local or from IDP camps and others from further afield in Myanmar, were claimed to be employed at the casino.³⁵ Most clients of the casino are Chinese citizens and Chinese authorities were reported to periodically crack down on cross border gambling by their own citizens but this was only partially effective, since during these periods, online gambling from inside the casino could still continue.³⁶



²⁹ Interview with a local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019; Interview with a small shop stall holder (female, 24), February 28, 2019. Some of the locations of the 'five-day markets' varied in the descriptions given in these two interviews, but 'five-day markets' are a consistent feature of this area and were mentioned by Dean in her research in 2005-2007.

³⁰ Interview with a local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019; Interview with a small shop stall holder (female, 24), February 28, 2019; short interviews with two casino workers, Mai Ja Yang, March 4, 2019

³¹ Observations by the EMReF team during scoping trip to Mai Ja Yang, December, 2018.

³² Interview with a local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019. Potential reasons put forward for the closing of most casinos in the town have included as a reaction to crime and murders associated with them, and to the KIO's desire to promote the town as a centre for education. See, for example, Ei Ei Toe Lwin. 'Mai Ja Yang gambles on a new political venture as focal point for ethnic summit.' Myanmar Times, July 25, 2016.

³³ Observations and discussions with local education institutions during EMReF scoping trip to Mai Ja Yang, December, 2018.

³⁴ Interviews with present and former casino employees, Mai Ja Yang, February 28th and March 4th, 2019.

³⁵ Interview with a local governance official (47), Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Interview with a female preacher, Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 4, 2019. Interview with two casino employees, March 4, 2019.

³⁶ Observations during EMReF scoping trip to Mai Ja Yang, December, 2018.

5.2 Education

The resumption of armed conflict between the Tatmadaw and the KIA since 2011 has had significant effects on education in the Mai Ja Yang area.³⁷ It has interrupted the basic education of children who have fled with their parents to IDP camps in the KIO non-government controlled area. At the same time, Myanmar government restrictions have prevented students from schools in KIO-administered areas transferring to the government education system and sitting government matriculation exams. Many students who attend primary or middle schools in the IDP camps were reported to drop out at middle school around grades five or six due to frustration and pressures to support families.³⁸ Mai Ja Yang has a lot of primary schools and a few middle schools, but only one high school and one IDP high school.



A middle school at an IDP camp

Often because of the interrupted education, the children at these schools are older than is usual for the grades they are in leading to potential behavioural issues.³⁹ Children of wealthier families were sometimes able to be sent to boarding houses in Lwe Je or to stay with relatives in Myitkyina or Bhamo so they could attend government high schools.⁴⁰ One reason this would mostly be an option for wealthier families is that it would require some payments for 'documentation' to schools or government officials to show students had previously lived and attended a school in a government controlled area and to show they had completed grades at a government school previously.⁴¹

Children from conflict-affected areas of Kachin and northern Shan states are sometimes sent by their parents to stay at boarding schools in Mai Ja Yang. Reasons given by students for their attendance at a boarding high school in Mai Ja Yang included it being cheaper than attending government schools, escaping from trouble in their families, escaping recruitment by armed groups and through their families being told about the boarding schools by their churches.⁴² The children are then often separated for long periods from their parents if the parents do not have ID which prevents them from being able to travel to see them. This was highlighted by a respondent who remarked that "some parents don't have the ID cards so they send their children (to the schools) the 'illegal' way, but they can't meet easily with them again."⁴³ As with basic education schools around Mai Ja Yang, the boarding high school curriculum is similar to the government one but they also learn English and Jingphaw.⁴⁴

³⁷ According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Myanmar, as of July 2018, 37,777 out of a total of 96,767 (39%) of IDPs in Kachin State, were located in non-government controlled areas.

³⁸ Interviews with teachers and a CSO leader working in IDP camps, Mai Ja Yang, and with IDP women, Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 2-4, 2019.

³⁹ Interview with a teacher at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019.

⁴⁰ Interview with a teacher at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019.

⁴¹ Interviews with students attending post-secondary schools in Mai Ja Yang. This was also mentioned in an interview with a member of a Kachin education CSO in Myitkyina, January 19, 2019.

⁴² Interviews with three students at a boarding high school, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019.

⁴³ Interview with a member of a Kachin CSO that works in IDP camps, Mai Ja Yang, February, 3, 2019.

⁴⁴ Interviews with three students at a boarding high school, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019.

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At least four higher education institutions have developed in Mai Ja Yang since the early 2000s. These have taken on greater significance since 2011 with restrictions on students accessing government education from KIO administered areas and the ongoing conflict leading to further development of parallel non-state education systems. These institutions vary from claimed independence from the KIO through to being a direct part of the KIO higher education system. For example, a student from one institution had an IDP background. He passed matriculation while at a government school and then worked in a junior position in the KIO administration in a non-government-controlled area. The KIO now supports him while he is at the higher education institution in Mai Ja Yang and when he finishes he will return to work with the KIO for two years.⁴⁵ A similar arrangement was mentioned by another former IDP student interviewed at a post-secondary school at Mai Ja Yang who stated that when she completed her education there she would be expected to serve at least three years in the KIO health department.⁴⁶



Another development in higher education that was mentioned has been opportunities for a few students following education in KIO-controlled Mai Ja Yang to pursue further education in China. It was claimed by respondents from two higher education institutions in Mai Ja Yang for it to be possible for graduates to go on to study Chinese language for two years in China. If this was successful, then the student could then study at a university such as in Kunming in Yunnan province.⁴⁷ The KIO itself, in a few instances, would support students into higher education in China and Thailand with the expectation that they would return to work with the organisation.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Interview with a student (male, 19) at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 3, 2019.

⁴⁶ Interview with a student (female, 19) at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019.

⁴⁷ Interview with a teacher at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019

⁴⁸ Interview with a student (male, 19) at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 3, 2019;

Case Study: A student at a higher education institution at Mai Ja Yang

A is 19 and is originally from Maung Win Gyi in Mansi township in a KIA-controlled area in Kachin state. When she was 12, she had to flee with her family and other villagers when fighting started again between the Tatmadaw and KIA in 2011. The KIA had warned them there would be fighting and when they fled they had to travel at night. They also only cooked at night to hide the smoke and hid in the morning before sunrise. After two days her group came to a place near the China border. The KIA provided boats to help them cross a stream to the China side. A stayed with her family at an IDP camp just on the China side of the border. While they were at this camp the KIA provided some rice, salt and oil for the residents.

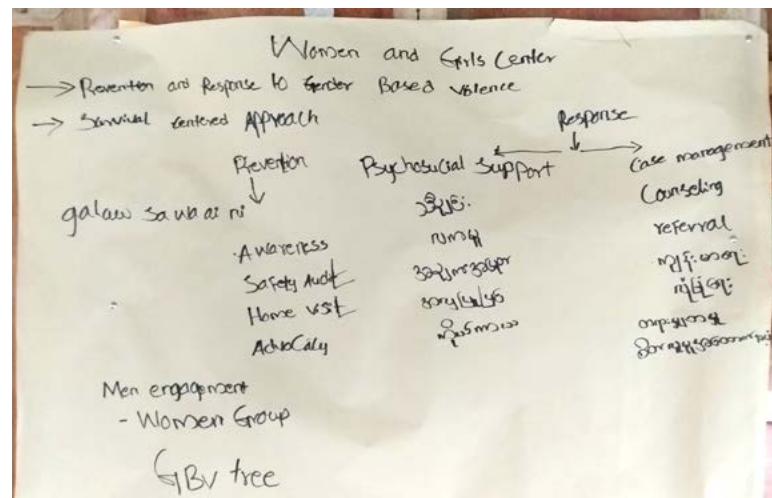
After about one year, men from China came and forced them to go back to the Myanmar side. They went across the stream again in boats and went to stay at La Na Zup Ja IDP camp which was in a KIA-controlled area. While she was at this camp, A's oldest brother worked as a daily worker in road construction across the border on the China side. He was able to send some money back to the family. The KIA expects one person from each household to serve the organisation. Since her oldest brother was working in China to help support the family, her second oldest brother had to serve and became a soldier in the KIA. She had shown an interest in studying at university, but she couldn't because of the war and she has never had an NRC and could not study in a government school. Her second oldest brother in the KIA tried to ask the KIO for help for her education. Eventually, she got a scholarship from the KIO to study at one of the higher education institutions in Mai Ja Yang.

Her father had an accident and suffered a broken leg so he can't work very much to support the family in the IDP camp. Now her mother has to support the family in the camp and try to get some income from working on farms around the camp. Her oldest brother came back from China and got married and he and his wife now live in the IDP camp. He makes some income for them from making charcoal. In the holidays, A goes back to the IDP camp and helps her mother with work. When she has completed her education at the higher education institution in Mai Ja Yang she will serve in the KIO for at least three years as they supported her education.

5.3 Families and marriage

Family-related issues in the Mai Ja Yang area mentioned in interviews included pressures due to family separation. Many IDP women in the camps are frequently separated from husbands for long periods especially if their husbands are working across the border in China or are serving in the KIA.⁴⁹ Some women who have absent husbands away for a long time were reported to have developed new relationships leading to separations and divorce and sometimes to children being placed with relatives after marriages broke down.⁵⁰ Children in boarding schools in Mai Ja Yang were also separated for long periods (sometimes for years) from parents who had sent them there and this was pointed to as leading to frustrations causing emotional and behavioural issues.⁵¹ Problems associated with the breakdown of traditional family structures and livelihoods due to armed conflict, displacement and separation

of family members were mentioned. For example, one respondent at Mai Ja Yang had previously been in an IDP camp where his father was reported to have become an alcoholic and violent towards his family.⁵² Social problems of this nature were also noted by other IDPs and local CSOs working in the IDP camps.⁵³



⁴⁹ Interviews with Kachin CSOs working with women IDPs, Myitkyina, January 21, 2019; Interview with women IDPs, Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 4, 2019.
⁵⁰ Interview with three members of a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps, Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, March 5, 2019.
⁵¹ Interviews with a CSO working in IDP camps, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Interview with local governance official (47), Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Interview with a female IDP, Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 4, 2019; Interviews with CSOs working in the IDP camps, Myitkyina, January 19-22, 2019.
⁵² Interview with a student (male, 19) at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 3, 2019.
⁵³ Interview with a woman IDP, Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019. Interviews with members of a Kachin CSO, Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, March 5, 2019; Interview with an IDP camp leader, March 2, 2019.

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Economically motivated marriages of girls often under 18 years of age from poor IDP families to men from China who wished to 'buy' a bride were also mentioned.⁵⁴ Chinese men were believed to often come to Mai Ja Yang for that purpose.⁵⁵ Instances of trafficking or economically motivated marriages of women were said to be frequently facilitated by someone known to the woman such as a family member or friend,⁵⁶ while in some cases men came directly to the camps themselves to seek brides.⁵⁷ The high 'bride prices' that families could ask was presented as one of the main reasons for these marriages.⁵⁸ This was clearly expressed by one respondent, "my son in law gave 10,000 Yuan (2,238,500 MMK) for my daughter but my son in law's family is not too good. If they were rich they would pay more money."⁵⁹ Another reason that was given was that these marriages were a means for struggling families of providing some form of stability or security for daughters who otherwise face an uncertain future in an IDP camp. "People are afraid for the future. What will come? They have no secure job so daughters are married as there is no security."⁶⁰ Another problem associated with these economically motivated marriages across the border is that most women married into China often cannot obtain Chinese ID, even in situations where they have been there for many years.⁶¹

Outcomes for the women and girls from IDP camps in these economically-motivated or forced marriages across the border were varied. One interview participant had two



'Five-day Market,' Mai Ja Yang

sisters who had both married Chinese men and moved with their husbands into China. In this instance, they had not experienced any problems that he was aware of.⁶² However, ill treatment by husbands that was reported by individual respondents and CSOs working with women in the IDP camps included threats of violence, divorce after producing children and the

⁵⁴ Interviews with Kachin CSOs working in IDP camps, Myitkyina, January 19-22; local governance official, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Kachin CSO working in IDP camps, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; IDP camp leader (male, 35), IDP man (40), IDP woman (47) and IDP woman (50) Pa Kahtawng IDP camp March 2, 2019; Small shop stall holder (female, 42), Mai Ja Yang March 2, 2019.

⁵⁵ Interview with local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Interview with three members of a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps, Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁵⁶ Interview with a female preacher at Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 4, 2019; Interview with an IDP camp leader, Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019; Interview with three members of a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps, Pa Kahtawng, March 2, 2019.

⁵⁷ Interview with a woman IDP (50), Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 4, 2019; Interview with a student at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019; Interview with a CSO working with women in IDP camps, Myitkyina, January, 21, 2019.

⁵⁸ Figures of from 10-30,000 Yuan being offered for brides were mentioned in interviews with an IDP woman (47), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp and a small shop stall holder (female, 42), Mai Ja Yang, March 2, 2019. However, an even higher figure of 50,000 Yuan was mentioned in a later interview at Hpimaw.

⁵⁹ Interview with an IDP woman (47), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁶⁰ Interview with a female preacher at Nhkawng Pa IDP camp, February 4, 2019.

⁶¹ Interview with an IDP woman (47), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019 (her daughter had been married for two years in China with no Chinese ID); Interview with an IDP woman (42) Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019 (her daughter has been married for ten years in China with no Chinese ID); Interview with three members of a Kachin CSO working in IDP camps, Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019 (cited a case of two sisters who married Chinese men, one now has ID and one still doesn't have ID after 15 years).

⁶² Interview with a student (male, 16) at a boarding school, Mai Ja Yang, February 4, 2019.



husband marrying another woman or on-selling the bride to another man.⁶³ Another frequent problem the women faced was discrimination from their own communities along the border, often forcing them to move elsewhere, if they returned back to IDP camps from China having left their husbands.⁶⁴

As well as the obvious harm caused by these types of marriages, they were also legally problematic for the women and girls as the Chinese government would not recognise KIO marriage certificates (although they do recognise

Myanmar government ones) consequently denying the wives' access to Chinese ID if they married in Mai Ja Yang.⁶⁵ There are also many problems for the bride if she is later abandoned, abused or on-sold by a husband in China and has no legal rights, ID, money or means to get back from further inside China to her family at the border.⁶⁶ The KIO was reported to not as yet have specific laws applying to the trafficking of women and girls although this has been recognised by local CSOs and international NGOs as a serious problem in this area.⁶⁷

⁶³ Interview with Kachin CSO (a) working in IDP camps, Myitkyina, January 21, 2019; Interview with a small shop stall holder (female 42) Mai Ja Yang March 2, 2019; Interview with a Kachin CSO that works in IDP camps, Nkhawng Pa IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁶⁴ Interview with a CSO (a) working with women in IDP camps, Myitkyina, January, 21, 2019; Interview with an IDP camp leader, Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁶⁵ Interview with a local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; Interview with a CSO (b) working with women in IDP camps, Myitkyina, January, 21, 2019.

⁶⁶ Interviews with an IDP woman (42) and an IDP man (40), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019; Interview with an IDP woman (31) Nkhawng Pa IDP camp, March 5, 2019.

⁶⁷ Interview with local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019; See further, regarding trafficking and forced marriages across the Kachin-Myanmar border, Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health and KWAT. (2018). *Estimating trafficking of Myanmar women for forced marriage and childbearing in China*.



5.4 Governance

People's daily lived experiences of navigating the Kachin-China border at Lwe Je and around Mai Ja Yang depend on their purposes for crossing it, access to ID, the expense, the distance they live from the official border gates and the extent to which Myanmar, China and KIO authorities enforce it. In relation to how China's enforcement of its border is perceived by people in their daily lives, one respondent pointed out "the China government is always changing the border control policy."⁶⁸ Similar comments were made by other respondents which highlight ground level perceptions of enforcement of the state conceived border and its impacts on their daily lives. It is likely that for many people who rely on crossing the border in their daily lives the actions of China's authorities would

seem opaque. For example, potential reasons just in the last year for changes in the level of China's border enforcement could be attributed to a temporary Tatmadaw-declared ceasefire in northern Myanmar, clashes with an armed group in Rakhine state that has a base in KIO territory, import bans on certain commodities from Myanmar and political tensions and pressure in relation to China's role in Kachin State and in Myanmar's peace process. Apart from restrictions to the movement of people and goods across the border into China, certain items were also not permitted to cross through China's official border gates to enter Ma Ja Yang. This was reported, for example, in the case of medicine and English language text books on 'sensitive' topics like politics in the case of a higher education institution in Mai Ja Yang.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Interview with a small shop stall holder (female, 24), Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019.

⁶⁹ Interview with a director of a higher education institution in Mai Ja Yang, February 3, 2019.

There are two roads by which Mai Ja Yang can be approached, one runs through China and the other remains within Myanmar. The Myanmar road is often used by trucks transporting commodities like sugarcane to Lwe Je from farms between Mai Ja Yang and Lwe Je and is not in good condition. The other road passes through China and requires a border passbook to officially cross into China from Myanmar. The border passbook acquired at the Lwe Je border gate costs 5000 MMK (22.2 Yuan) if the person crossing into China is from the appropriate area on the Myanmar side of the border. For example, at Lwe Je, to enter China if people have the correct NRC that shows they are from Kachin State, then the border pass book costs 5000 MMK (22.2 Yuan) and lasts one year. The amount people pay at that gate if they have NRC cards from other states or regions in Myanmar appears to be at the discretion of immigration officials. By comparison, the border gate at Muse in northern Shan state, according to respondents, charges the 5000 MMK (22.2 Yuan) flat fee for the border pass to people from

all states and regions. This difference between the fees charged may be because Muse is the largest and most often used export gate into China from Myanmar. Chinese immigration gives a stamp in the passbook that allows the person to be in China for 13 days/14 nights.⁷⁰ To continue staying in China legally, the person is required to leave China and then re-enter to obtain another 14-day visa stamp.⁷¹



Border gates to enter China at Lwe Je

⁷⁰ Short interviews with migrant workers, Lai Ying, February 5, 2019.

⁷¹ Observations and discussions with migrant workers crossing the border at Lwe Je, February 2 -5, 2019.

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After entering China at Lwe Je, to enter Mai Ja Yang, there is another China border gate to pass through where the pass-books are stamped again to exit China. There is a KIO immigration office at the entry to Mai Ja Yang which takes a 5 Yuan (1,125 MMK) fee for entering the town and checks vehicles. Chinese citizens were reported to be able to enter Mai Ja Yang without any need to report officially to the KIO authorities although they do need to show formal ID when exiting and entering China.⁷² This likely demonstrates the KIO's need to maintain amicable relations with China in the wider political climate and the importance to the KIO of China's tolerance of their presence in border towns such as at Mai Ja Yang and Laiza. It was also pointed out that residents at Mai Ja Yang had requested to the KIO to allow easy access of Chinese citizens to the town due to their importance for the local economy.⁷³ However, it was also claimed that Chinese citizens who stayed for longer periods and wanted to set up shops or food stalls in Mai Ja Yang required permission letters from the KIO authorities and underwent medical checks as did local shop and stall holders.⁷⁴

Mai Ja Yang has a similar administrative structure to Myanmar townships with a township broken into wards (five in Mai Ja Yang) each with its own ward leader. The KIO administration in the town includes uniformed police, immigration and traffic police.⁷⁵ However, in terms of solving problems or disagreements between residents that are of sufficient importance to people to require administrative or legal intervention, it was stated that people will go to the ward leader first and then the township administrator. The KIO Mai Ja Yang administration was also reported

to maintain relations with government authorities in China including the Chinese police with whom the KIO works with on some human trafficking and drug cases.⁷⁶

It was not clear the extent to which the KIO administration enforced their formal border between Mai Ja Yang and China other than through an immigration office facing the China border gate opposite. However, the KIO have a formal checkpoint on the road that entered Mai Ja Yang through Myanmar from Lwe Je.⁷⁷ According to respondents, enforcement of the KIO's border into and out of Mai Ja Yang appears to depend on the discretion of KIO immigration officers and whether people were local and known to them or perceived as 'outsiders.'⁷⁸ Some customs taxes levied by the KIO administration were mentioned including a vehicle tax of two Yuan (450 MMK) for trucks, a five Yuan (1,125 MMK) fee for passenger vehicles of non Mai Ja Yang residents entering the town and a goods tax of two Yuan (450 MMK) per ton for exports leaving town.⁷⁹



Border fence at Lwe Je

⁷² Interview with a local governance official, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019

⁷³ Interview with a local governance official, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019

⁷⁴ Interview with small shop stall holder (female, 24), Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019; Interview with a local governance official (male, 47), Mai Ja Yang, February 2.

⁷⁵ Observations during visits by EMReF researchers to Mai Ja Yang in December 2018 and February, 2019.

⁷⁶ Interview with four teachers at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, February 6, 2019; Interview with a local governance official, Mai Ja Yang, February 2, 2019.

⁷⁷ Observations during visits by EMReF researchers to Mai Ja Yang in December 2018 and February, 2019.

⁷⁸ Interview with four teachers at a higher education institution, Mai Ja Yang, March 6, 2019.

⁷⁹ Interview with a local governance official, Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019. It is likely these taxes are open to the discretion of KIO immigration officials as to whether they are enforced or not.

Informal crossing of the border between the Mai Ja Yang area and China and at the official border near Lwe Je and China was a common theme in many interviews. As identified in the section addressing livelihoods earlier, for many IDPs around Mai Ja Yang as well as for migrant workers at Lwe Je, it is quicker to just cross the border informally than travel to an official gate. This is especially the case if they do not have Myanmar ID and therefore cannot get the red passbook that is required by the Chinese authorities and stamped for their entry and exit.⁸⁰ In some other cases, people's passbooks have expired and they cannot afford the money and travel time to renew them.⁸¹ One respondent

explained the ease of informal crossing and also of the more recent stricter enforcement of the border by Chinese authorities. "We don't need the passbook. The border is really close so we can just cross the stream to the farm. But since last year we can't go freely like before. The Chinese policy is a bit strict now."⁸² For some individuals or small-scale traders who are transporting goods into China, or buying goods in China to sell at profit in Myanmar, official bans or taxes on certain goods and commodities, plus the finger print scan identification system used at the official Chinese border gates, are also reasons cited for choosing informal crossing of the border.⁸³



Informal crossing through a stream to China

⁸⁰ Observations by the EMReF team at Lwe Je; Interviews with a local governance official , Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019; IDP woman (40), IDP woman (50), IDP man (50), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁸¹ Interview with an IDP woman (50), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁸² Interview with an IDP woman (47), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019.

⁸³ Interview with a local governance official , Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019; Interview with an IDP woman (47), Pa Kahtawng IDP camp, March 2, 2019; Interview with a small shop stall holder (female, 24), Mai Ja Yang, February 28, 2019. There have been frequent temporary bans on imports of commodities from Myanmar across the China border. For example, in November 2018, China banned the import of rice, sugar and maize from Myanmar. See for example, Chan Mya Htwe. Merchants request ASIQ certificates for exports to China. *The Myanmar Times*, March 26, 2019.



The Hpimaw area and adjacent areas in Myanmar and China. (Source: Google Map Data© 2019)

(6)

Hpimaw

Areas where interviews were conducted: Hpimaw (Lower Hpimaw in Myanmar and Upper Hpimaw in China), Kang Fang village (on border), Galan village, Lote Naw Jan village, Shee Bya village and Htang Dung village. According to the Kachin Development Networking Group, there are an estimated 4,500 people living in this area in villages along the Ngo Chang Hka river valley (KDNG, 2017, p.6).⁸⁴

6.1 Livelihoods

The economy around Hpimaw and its effects on people’s lives has been significantly influenced

by the area’s political and geographical distance from any major centres further inside Myanmar and by its close proximity to the Chinese border and infrastructure. The NDA-K and its successor BGFs 1001-1003 in Kachin Special Region One in northeast Kachin State have controlled this area for the last 30 years. This BGF-controlled area has in the past facilitated the unregulated movement of timber and other resources directly across the border into China, regardless of any central government-mandated logging bans (Woods, 2016, p.130). Around the village of Kang Fang near the border, men were reported

⁸⁴ There may be some other villages where interviews were conducted around Hpimaw that are not included in this population estimate. However, these figures indicate a very much lower population density in this area relative to the conservative estimate of 35,729 people in the area around Lwe Je, Mai Ja Yang and IDP camps in the Mai Ja Yang area.

to still work in the forest cutting trees for export to China. One respondent described the situation: “before now, the government couldn’t reach to here, but now China bans the business like logging so we can’t export like before because the Chinese now enforce the rules. Still people can do business on the China side and export illegally”⁸⁵ In the last few years, while the amount of logging in the area had declined, Chinese influence was still evident with timber now being cut to specific sizes determined by Chinese demand.⁸⁶ However, logging was greatly reduced to the preceding two decades as there were reported to be far less trees left.⁸⁷ One respondent made this point succinctly, “you can see the mountains and no trees now.”⁸⁸ Other natural resources that were reported as being grown or extracted from around Hpimaw and exported into China include marble, walnuts, nutmeg, cardamom, aloe, peppers, livestock, wild animals like bears and monkeys, and medicinal herbs.⁸⁹

In the case of some rare plants from forest areas around Hpimaw used for medicinal purposes in China, demand for them had increased recently with a consequent impact on some people’s methods of income generation. These plants are collected and then taken to the border and sold to a broker for Chinese businesses who pays one Yuan (224 MMK) per plant. The work involves a lot of travel for the pickers as the plants are located in a remote area that takes two hours to reach and two

hours to return from.⁹⁰ Walnut and nutmeg are also grown around Hpimaw for sale across the border in China. An orchard of around 20 walnut trees was stated to have been able to produce an income of four to five thousand Yuan (895,000 MMK - 1,119,000 MMK) in a year.⁹¹ However, the prices for these commodities were reported to have fallen from six Yuan (1,343 MMK) per one jin (596.8 kilograms) of walnut to between one and two and half Yuan (224 MMK - 560 MMK) per one jin and from nine Yuan (2,000 MMK) per one jin of nutmeg to three Yuan (675 MMK) per one jin.⁹² It was also claimed that China had banned the import of walnuts this year, although they were still being transported and sold in China via informal pathways across the border.⁹³



⁸⁵ Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 11, 2019.

⁸⁶ Interview with a woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019.

⁸⁷ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019. The lack of trees was also remarked upon by many other interview respondents around Hpimaw.

⁸⁸ Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

⁸⁹ Interviews with villagers at Hpimaw, Kang Fang and Galan, and observations and photos by the research team, February 10-12 and March 8-12, 2019. It should be acknowledged that there has been recent media attention on the increase in often Chinese-owned ‘tissue banana’ plantations associated with land grabbing and associated excessive use of pesticides in parts of Kachin State, including the area of the BGF in Special Administrative Region One. However, the area at Hpimaw is too elevated to grow bananas, and tissue bananas were not mentioned by people in the border villages during interviews. Also, according to media reports, the main road route into China for tissue bananas grown further inside Kachin State SR1 appears to be further south through Sadung township to the Kan Pike Tee border gate. See, for example, Nan Lwin, ‘Infographic: China’s Plantation Greed.’ The Irrawaddy, March 8, 2019. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/infographic-chinas-plantation-greed.html>

⁹⁰ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019.

⁹¹ Interview with a woman (32) Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

⁹² Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a woman (32) Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

⁹³ Interview with a woman (32), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019. This ban is likely to be an example of frequent temporary bans enforced by China on imports of plant and animal products from Myanmar. Hpimaw is also not one of the main recognised border trade gates for export of commodities between Myanmar and China, unlike Kan Pike Tee, Lwel Je or Muse. See, Chan Mya Htwe, Merchants request ASIQ certificates for exports to China. The Myanmar Times, March 26, 2019.

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Harvesting and sale to China of bamboo, another locally plentiful commodity, was reported to have increased in the last year. One respondent stated that the bamboo trade has the advantage of being unregulated and bamboo is plentiful compared to official bans and lack of trees in the case of logging which he had previously also done.⁹⁴ The bamboo is collected from the forest, packed into bundles of about 20 and transported by car to Hpimaw where it is collected by Chinese traders and it is allowed to pass through the official border gate as it is not subject to a ban.⁹⁵ The amount paid for the bundles depended on the quality of the bamboo, with an estimate being 20 Yuan (4,500 MMK) for the bundle. Certain types of rare hardwoods from the forests are also still sought after from the China side with a 30cm square piece claimed to fetch from five to 20 Yuan (1,125 MMK - 4,500 MMK) depending on the quality.⁹⁶



Hardwood at Hpimaw for sale to China



Bamboo at Hpimaw for sale to China

⁹⁴ Interview with a man who harvests bamboo for income, (50), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

⁹⁵ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019; Observations and photos by the EMReF team, Hpimaw, March 8-12, 2019.

⁹⁶ Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Photos and observations by the EMReF team, Hpimaw, March 8-12, 2019.

Rice, corn, potatoes and vegetables are mostly grown nearby for the villagers' own consumption while livestock, in particular, cows, goats and pigs were raised with some sold or traded across the border to China.⁹⁷ Goats are often sold to other villagers and also to Chinese butchers who come to the villages to collect them. Pigs are currently officially banned from being traded across the China border into Myanmar,⁹⁸ so they are usually sold and eaten within the villages. Most households have at least four to five cows which, as well as a source of dairy products, are often part of the value of a dowry presented by a potential husband to a potential bride's family in the local Ngo Chang culture.⁹⁹ However, not all people grow their own food or can grow enough to be self-sufficient all year round as a respondent at Shee Bya village mentioned the prices for buying rice (two Yuan per one jin) and corn (1.3 Yuan per one jin) from sellers on the China side.¹⁰⁰



Household expenditure excluding rice, oil and salt was estimated by respondents to be around three to four hundred Yuan (67,158 MMK - 89,500 MMK) per month.¹⁰¹ Manufactured goods like electronic appliances, clothes, cars or motorbikes are usually purchased in Liuku (Nujiang) in China. In some cases, people buy these goods and bring them back via informal routes to sell around Hpimaw.¹⁰²



Cattle shelter at Galan

⁹⁷ Interviews with a woman (32), a woman (46) and a Pastor (male, 60), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

⁹⁸ There has been an outbreak of African Swine Fever in China, including in Yunnan province bordering Kachin State, since late 2018, and there has been a corresponding ban on pigs and pork products into Myanmar.

⁹⁹ Interview with a woman (46), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with a woman (46), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹⁰¹ Interview with a woman (21) Kang Fang village, March 11, 2019; Interview with a woman (46), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹⁰² Interview with a woman (46), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Interview with a woman (21) Kang Fang village, March 11, 2019; Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019.

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Employment opportunities other than in farming around Hpimaw are limited and it was reported that many young people leave the area to seek work further inside Myanmar and do not return or they work across the border in China where workers could earn more. Available work on the China side that was mentioned in interviews included work on plantations, mining and construction work, raising livestock or working as drivers to transport people or goods.¹⁰³ In some cases, relatives on the China side will call people from Hpimaw when there is available work on that side.¹⁰⁴ Pay for daily labouring in construction work on the Chinese side was stated to range from around 100 Yuan (22,500 MMK) to a high 150 Yuan (32,000 MMK).¹⁰⁵ Daily labourers on Chinese farms were believed to be able to earn about 120 Yuan (26,800 MMK) per day.¹⁰⁶ Mining workers were claimed to be able to earn as much as 2000 Yuan (449,400 MMK) per month and up to 3000 (674,500 MMK) Yuan per month if they could speak Chinese.¹⁰⁷ However, over the last two years, China's policy towards migrant workers from Myanmar was reported to have become stricter here as well, making it harder for people from around Hpimaw to get work in China informally.¹⁰⁸

Drugs have been a significant livelihoods-related issue in this area. They were claimed to still be readily available in border villages, especially at Kang Fang. A local resident from Kang Fang made a connection between the level of drug

use and economic factors in the recent past from the boom in the logging business around the town. "The main issue in our village is drugs. It is getting better now. Around 2011-2014 it was the worst. Every house would buy or sell drugs. Now for the last two years it is getting better. People have less money (to spend on drugs) as the economic situation is reducing."¹⁰⁹

A significant influence on people's livelihoods and their relationship to the border around Hpimaw is the long distances to Myanmar towns, institutions and governance, the mountainous terrain and the condition of roads. The road leading to Hpimaw from Myitkyina had at least five checkpoints (Tatmadaw and BGF) who extract a range of taxes and was in poor condition, hilly, winding and steep-sided.¹¹⁰ As a consequence, work and trade for local people the short distance across the border to China is easier than with towns like Chipwi or Myitkyina further away along poor roads further inside Myanmar. The village at Kang Fang on the border had no road access at all from the Myanmar side until 2005. The roads inside China by comparison are in much better condition.¹¹¹ A consequence of this is that most goods in Hpimaw come via China where they can be transported to the border more easily rather than from Myanmar, especially during the rainy season.¹¹² One shop owner stated that they ordered their goods online from China and had them delivered to Hpimaw as they arrived more

¹⁰³ Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019; Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019. This does seem a very high rate, considerably higher than the pay rates of around 50-70 Yuan per day quoted at the Mai-Ja Yang area. However, these amounts for working in China across the border from Hpimaw were quoted by three different respondents at different locations and times.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019. The woman who quoted these figures had two sons working in mining in China. One son could speak Chinese and one could not.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019.

¹¹⁰ Observations by the research team during travel to Hpimaw from Myitkyina, February 8, 2019; Interview with a middle school teacher, Hpimaw, February 9, 2019; Interview with members of a local health care NGO, Hpimaw, March 8, 2019.

¹¹¹ To illustrate this point, during the second round of field work in March 2019, it was more comfortable and safer for the research team to travel from Myitkyina to the Kan Pike Tee border crossing and obtain the appropriate border stamp in their passbooks there for the county in Yunnan they would enter. They then travelled along the roads inside China most of the way, then obtained an exit stamp at Tsit Kyi and crossed back into Myanmar and continued on Myanmar roads to Hpimaw. There were still BGF checkpoints that charged taxes (between 5-50 Yuan) along this last stretch in Myanmar.

¹¹² Interview with a woman (21), Kang Fang village, March 11, 2019. This woman owned a shop and had transported her goods to Hpimaw from Myitkyina via the Chinese roads during the rainy season, but she claimed she had not been able to do that in the last year and had instead transported her goods to Hpimaw on the Myitkyina to Hpimaw road before the rainy season.

quickly on better roads from inside China.¹¹³ Illustrative of the ubiquitous role of China's economy and telecommunications infrastructure along its border with Kachin State, there were some Chinese workers living on the Myanmar

side at Hpimaw who received their wages via the 'WeChat' payment application.¹¹⁴ Most shops in Hpimaw were also able to process this form of payment for the goods they sell.¹¹⁵

Case Study: A former migrant worker and shop owner at Kang Fang village

Z was born in Myitkyina and completed school up to the 10th grade. After school, she went to Yangon to do training in cosmetics and beauty. She returned to Myitkyina to start a beauty shop business but it was not successful because there was too much competition. At this time, a friend called her and told her about work in China at a mobile phone factory. They said she could earn 5,000 Yuan per month doing this work. The factory would provide accommodation, food and transport. She quarrelled with her family and said she would make lots of money. She travelled to the China border and crossed at the Kan Pike Tee border crossing. She joined a group of other Myanmar migrant workers and they were taken to the phone factory. She started work at one factory, but after a short time they were all moved to another factory. The company gave them accommodation and a card with 200 Yuan they could spend for food. However, 200 Yuan was not enough money for food for a month in China and at the factory the card only paid for food at the company's food stalls. After a few weeks of work and being moved to different factories, some of the workers realised the stamp in the red passbook when they entered China only allowed them to stay for two weeks. They were now illegal workers in China.

After a month, when they finally got their pay, instead of getting 5,000 Yuan as promised, they only got 1,500 Yuan. The travel inside China from one location to another had been deducted from their pay as 'travel expenses'. Then the factory where they were working was raided by Chinese police and they were arrested and spent two weeks in jail. The friend who bought them to China for the work had cheated them. Worse, because he knew they were working illegally in China, they suspected he had tipped off police causing the raid that allowed him to keep their wages. They were a long way from the Myanmar border after being moved around many times between factories in China. When they were released, about 15 of the workers, including Z, decided to travel back to Myanmar. But they had to pay far more for the taxi driver as they were illegally in China and risked arrest. It cost 1,700 Yuan rather than 950 Yuan to travel to Tenchong and 90 Yuan rather than 30 Yuan to travel from Tengchong to Kan Pike Tee. Some of her other friends from the factory are still working at factories in China illegally.

When Z got back to Myitkyina, her sister-in law told her about relatives who live at Kang Fang near Hpimaw. She decided to set up a shop there. The building her shop is using is owned by the BGF who she pays 5,000 Yuan per year rent to. She also pays them a 'house tax' of 250 Yuan per year. The road from Myitkyina to Hpimaw is very poor especially during the rainy season and has many BGF checkpoints. Instead of bringing products for her shop from Myitkyina to Kang Fang, Z orders them online from Baoshan in China as they arrive more quickly on the better roads from China. She pays for her products using We Chat pay.

6.2 Education

Access to education in Hpimaw and surrounding villages was described as very limited up until recently. It was claimed that an important contributing factor to suppressing education here had been the role in the past of armed conflict actors who controlled the area. The CPB from the late 1960s to late 1980s and then the NDA-K up to 2010, it was argued, had focused largely on recruitment of young men for their fighting forces and then on business

interests rather than on improving education.¹¹⁶ The schools around Hpimaw teach the government curriculum and some have teachers who have come from outside of the local area.¹¹⁷ One woman villager made this education related point, "the main difference compared to the past is education. Most parents didn't support education or want to learn Burmese (in the past), but now we must know Burmese and support children to go to school."¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Interview with a shop owner (female, 35), Kang Fang village, March 11, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Interview with two Chinese workers (male, 56 and 42), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Observations by EMReF research team, Hpimaw, March 8-12, 2019.

¹¹⁶ Interview with a militia leader, Hpimaw, February 10, 2019. This person had experienced first-hand the CPB and NDA-K eras in Hpimaw.

¹¹⁷ Interviews with Kachin education CSOs, Myitkyina, January 20-22, 2019.

¹¹⁸ Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

Primary school Lote Naw Jan village



Distances and roads, as was the case with livelihoods, also impact here on education opportunities for children beyond the primary level. Although villages had basic primary schools, until 2013, there had only been a middle school at Hpimaw and at Kang Fang and children had to walk from surrounding villages to attend school and, therefore, often stayed at the schools during the week.¹¹⁹ Few students continue past primary school and reasons cited for this included the expense of fees, travel distances and the alternative option of going on to work to support families.¹²⁰ The nearest high school is at Na Zun Baw further inside Myanmar in Chipwi township that is two hours by car on poor roads from Hpimaw and, consequently,

some parents send children to attend high schools in Chipwi, Pangwa or Myitkyina where they can stay with relatives or at boarding houses attached to schools. It was also reported that in the past, due to conservative traditions in villages and the role of armed actors, girls had often been discouraged from attending school although they were now encouraged more to do so.¹²¹ Less value being placed on education for women and girls was evident in the expectation in the past that girls would be married around 14-18 years old and produce from six to 12 children. However, improved education and awareness about birth control in recent years was claimed to have reduced this expectation to between three and five children.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Interview with woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019

¹²⁰ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a woman (32) Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019 (she had two children at Kang Fang middle school and the figure of 10,000 Yuan was stated as inclusive of transport, food and fees for the middle school).

¹²¹ Interview with woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019; Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019. One woman had never attended school and another had only gone as far as grade one or two.

¹²² Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a woman (43), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.



Middle school, Hpimaw



Middle school, Kang Fang

Children at middle school in Hpimaw were reported to often be older than they would be normally for the grades that they were in due sometimes to starting school later, consequently leading to frustration and behavioural problems. Vandalism, especially of the new middle school in Hpimaw,¹²³ and occasional violence from older children and even some parents of children towards schoolteachers was raised as a problem. One middle school teacher highlighted this point and stated “being a teacher in Hpimaw is not easy. A teacher should be like a fighter.”¹²⁴

The few students who had gone on to post-secondary education from Hpimaw had attended

government universities at Myitkyina or Bhamo. A few are also able to attend non-formal post-secondary institutions in Myitkyina that provide comparable or better education but not government-recognised qualifications.¹²⁵ It was pointed out that some students could have attended higher education institutions in Mai Ja Yang but their parents in the Hpimaw area had objections to the influence of the KIO.¹²⁶ Reasons for this are potentially due to inter-ethnic grievances, the actions of the KIA after the exchange of land with China in the early 1960s and the government-aligned stance of the NDA-K and later BGF and militia around Hpimaw.¹²⁷

In recent years, China has permitted limited access to education in China for some students who come from the Hpimaw area. It was reported that students could attend a Chinese primary school across the border at Tsit Kyi up to grade six. Beyond this grade, however, students would have to travel further inside China beyond the

¹²³ Observations by EMReF research team, Hpimaw, February 8-12, 2019.

¹²⁴ Interview with a teacher (female, 30) from a middle school, Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹²⁵ Interviews with Kachin education CSOs, Myitkyina, January 20-22, 2019.

¹²⁶ Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹²⁷ Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019.

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border zone to attend middle or high schools. However, there is a limitation as they do not have Chinese ID which they would need to have to travel to and attend those schools.¹²⁸ While attending school just across the border in China from the Myanmar side at Hpimaw, children do receive a student ID from the Chinese school which allows them to pass through the border gate to attend that school.¹²⁹ For those children whose parents have Chinese ID (it was reported that there were some instances of this) or who can find a way to buy ID in China, they can potentially continue on into higher education in the Chinese system. For example, one respondent reported that their daughter, after passing matriculation, was able to study Chinese at Manshi in China and upon successful completion of that they planned to go on to study at Kunming University in the capital of Yunnan province.¹³⁰ In another example, a respondent had studied at theological college at Shweli in China.¹³¹ It was pointed out that the Chinese government has shown an active interest in attracting students from this area of Kachin state to attend education in China. It was claimed that each year through 2014 to 2016, around 100 students (who had completed Grade 10), as well as teachers and pastors from around Kachin Special Region One were selected for a 10 day educational tour of Yunnan and two weeks of Chinese language instruction.¹³² In regard to these developments, one respondent suggested that there were potential advantages in the future for Chinese government and business interests in employing people who have come from the Hpimaw area of Kachin State who have Chinese language and education.¹³³



6.3 Families and marriage

Family connections across the border at Hpimaw have developed due to historical changes in the border, migration from the China side since the late 1950s and the porous nature of the border which is easily crossed informally for work, family relations and trade purposes. For example, a woman from a village near Hpimaw stated that her grandparents had originally come to the area from China during the Mao era to escape the 'Cultural Revolution.' Consequently, she still had relatives on her father's side living across the border in China.¹³⁴ In another case, the parents of a man with Myanmar ID living in Hpimaw had originally come from Tsit Kyi in China and he still had siblings in Tenchong in China and some of his children were attending school on the China side although they did not have Chinese citizenship.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019; Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote ¹²⁸/₁₂₉ Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019. A young woman from Hpimaw working as a translator with the research team had attended a school at Tsit Kyi inside China to grade six, she also had an older brother who had completed grade six at the Chinese school and a younger brother still attending at the school. However, after Grade 6, they cannot go on to high schools further inside China without China ID and also cannot get work in China without ID.

¹³⁰ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

¹³¹ Interview, Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹³² Interview, Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹³³ Interview, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

¹³⁴ Interview, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

¹³⁵ Interview with a woman (23) Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹³⁶ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.



Remains of a house at Galan village built for people when the border was moved in 1960

There has also been some immigration across the border into the area from China since the 1990s facilitated by the administration in Special Region One at the time. As part of its ceasefire arrangement, the NDA-K leadership could control the village administrations in their area that were able to issue recommendation letters to the township level that enabled some people to then go on to obtain Myanmar ID.¹³⁶ This has resulted, in some instances, with people holding ID for both Myanmar and China.¹³⁷ Some of the people who had moved across from the China side previously have since returned to China.¹³⁸ In other cases, people who moved to the Myanmar side from China have been able to continue to use relatives, or deceased relatives, Chinese ID.¹³⁹ In particular, these IDs were reported to be used to access Chinese health services across the border by some people living mostly on the Myanmar side.¹⁴⁰



Children playing next to machinery at Hpimaw

¹³⁶ To obtain an NRC, usually a recommendation letter from a village tract or ward administrator is required.

¹³⁷ Conversation with a woman resident, Kang Fang, February 11, 2019. It was claimed that some people were invited across the border from China some years earlier to increase numbers in the sparsely populated area so that the administration at the time, which was not under direct government control but could assist the ID process with recommendation letters, could make a claim to becoming a self-administered zone within Myanmar.

¹³⁸ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a woman (23) Hpimaw, February 9, 2019;

¹³⁹ Interview with a woman (23) Hpimaw, February 9, 2019;

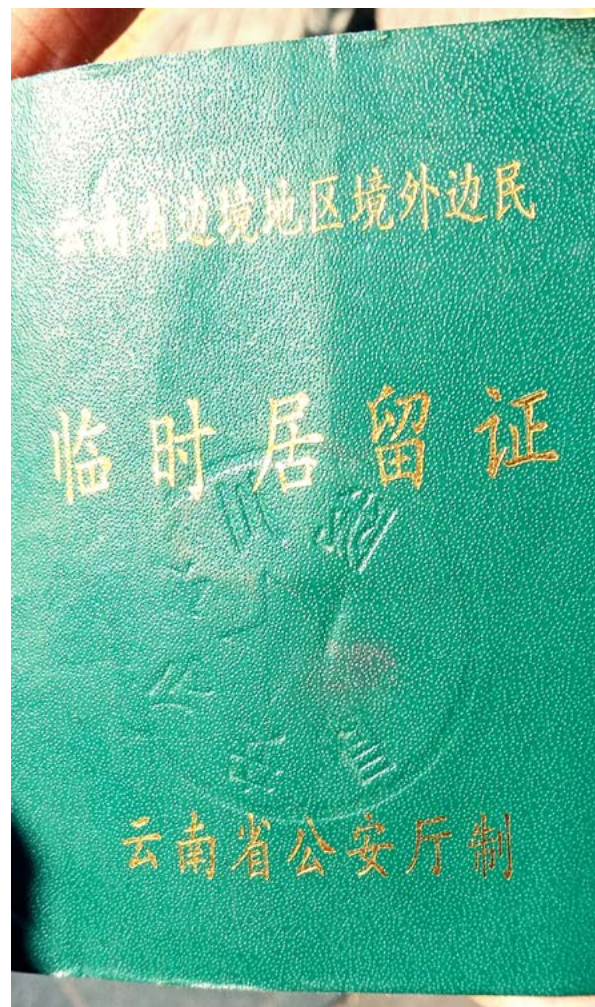
¹⁴⁰ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a woman (23) Hpimaw, February 9, 2019; Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019.

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Economically motivated marriages were also reported at Hpimaw. One respondent indicated how strong the incentive was for families where they could ask for a 'bride price' of around 50,000 Yuan (11,193,000 MMK) from Chinese men for daughters and that the families preferred Chinese sons in law since they could pay more.¹⁴¹ Indicative of the informal nature of people's relationship to the official border and to marriage arrangements, there are also Chinese men living in Hpimaw who had married women from the Myanmar side.¹⁴² One of these mentioned the role of a marriage 'broker' to arrange marriage to a woman from Hpimaw. In this instance the bride price amount was 10,000 Yuan (2,238,000 MMK) with the broker taking a 3000 Yuan (671,000 MMK) fee.

Lack of ID for women who married men from China was often cited as contributing to problems they then face in China such as arrest or the constant threat of arrest and deportation to Myanmar, restrictions to travel and health care.¹⁴³ As an example, one respondent living on the China side at Upper Hpimaw had been married to a Chinese man for 10 years. She still does not have Chinese citizenship. She has the green permission book that allows her to stay for one year at a time but she still needs to continue to renew the stamps in her red passbook every two weeks. As a result, she cannot move around freely due to frequent police checks as she only holds the green permission book. Medicine and healthcare is also difficult and expensive to obtain without Chinese ID. She stated that until three years ago it had been easier for her to stay but now the rules were being enforced more strictly.¹⁴⁴ Another respondent claimed Chinese authorities had

sent back an estimated 50 women across the border to Hpimaw in 2018-19 who had been trafficked into marriage or who were in marriages to Chinese men but the women did not have Chinese ID.¹⁴⁵ Aside from the issue of legality, the threat of ill treatment and physical abuse remains a constant for women in economically motivated arranged or forced marriages in China. This was starkly demonstrated when one of the Chinese workers interviewed in Hpimaw mentioned how his colleague, who had located a wife in Hpimaw, had beaten her as well as his previous wife who had both left him.¹⁴⁶



The green permission book for one year stay in China

¹⁴¹ Interview with woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019.

¹⁴² Interview with two Chinese workers (male, 56 and 42), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

¹⁴³ Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019; Interview with a woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019; Interview with a Pastor (male, 60), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12,

¹⁴⁵ This was an estimate from a respondent who had close connections to the Border Guard Force in the area. He stated that the Chinese authorities sent the woman back to the BGF who then sent them back to their villages.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with two Chinese workers (male, 56 and 42), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019. The on-selling of brides by husbands if they failed to produce children, or after they had done, was also mentioned in an interview with a woman (43), Kang Fang village, February 11, 2019.

Marriages of women from the Hpimaw area to men from co-ethnic groups (such as Lisu or Ngo Chang) across the border on the China side were often mentioned suggesting that when people spoke of marriages to ‘Chinese’ men that was often meant in terms of the man’s citizenship rather than ethnicity.¹⁴⁷ For example, within Ngo Chang and Lisu communities around Hpimaw, church networks play a role in arranging marriages between families, and those networks can also operate across the conceived state borders separating those communities on the Kachin-China border.¹⁴⁸ For example, it was indicated that the church committee for the potential husband’s family first sends a letter to the potential bride’s family’s church committee. A letter is then sent back and passed back to the man’s family if the advance is acceptable and eventually the potential husband visits the bride’s family with gifts to continue the negotiations.¹⁴⁹

Members of co-ethnic groups that straddle the border at Hpimaw have continued their connections and traditions despite the official boundaries imposed between and within the two countries in some instances, while in others, the state itself has assisted these. For example, in China, government officials are not allowed to attend church and neither are their wives. However, a Christian woman from Hpimaw married to a Chinese official and living in China had joined a WeChat group that enabled her to still engage with and share in her religious beliefs with other Kachin Christian women in similar circumstances to her in China even if she could not physically attend church services.¹⁵⁰ Another We Chat group she belonged to connected and offered support for women from Kachin state that had married Chinese men and moved to China.¹⁵¹ In the case of the cultures of the ethnic groups that lie on both sides of the Kachin-China border, the Chinese



Manau Park, Upper Hpimaw (China side)

¹⁴⁷ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019;

¹⁴⁸ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019; Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹⁴⁹ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 & 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019.

¹⁵¹ Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019.

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government has to some extent been supportive of them celebrating their culture. For example, the imagery of Jingphaw and Lisu culture and traditions are openly displayed in well maintained parks and on signs at villages and along roads on the China side opposite Hpimaw. The largest Lisu celebrations are held in Liuku in China.¹⁵² However, the Lisu celebrations on the China side with China government support highlight the animist and non-Christian traditions of their culture while, over time, Christianity has become more important for Lisu communities on the Myanmar side.¹⁵³



6.4 Governance

Pianmazhen in China opposite present day Hpimaw on the Myanmar side of the border was part of an exchange of border areas between Burma and China in 1960. An estimated 2-3000 people from the villages on the (now) Chinese side of Hpimaw either moved just over the border from China to the current villages on the Myanmar side or were relocated further into Kachin State (Traeger, 1964, pp. 53-54). A man in his 60s who had lived all his life in the area recalled that the then Burma government built some new houses for returnees from the China side at the new Galan village and only a few houses from that time still remain.¹⁵⁴ Hpimaw has been under the control of a succession of armed non-government authorities since the early 1960s, including initially the KIO, then the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) from the late 1960s to 1989 and, following the collapse of the CPB in 1989, the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) which was formed from the remnants of the CPB's northeast Kachin State War Zone 101. The NDA-K maintained a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw while keeping its arms and also engaging in lucrative resource extraction businesses such as logging. The NDA-K officially transformed into a Myanmar Border Guard Force (BGF) in 2009.



¹⁵² Observations and photos by the EMReF team, March 8-12, 2019; Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019; Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019. Liuku is the main town in the Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in China adjacent to northeast Kachin State.

¹⁵³ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019.



Myanmar border gate, Hpimaw

The Ngo Chang¹⁵⁵ and Lisu villages in the Hpimaw and Htang Dung village tract areas appear to remain under a hybrid administration of the central Myanmar government GAD, BGF and local militia. However, other armed actors, such as an armed security force associated with a mining company and under the command of a powerful political and business leader in Special Region One, were also identified as having a presence in the area. As one woman stated in relation to the many different authorities and often armed actors around Hpimaw, “with all these groups we don’t know who to call the father.”¹⁵⁶ A militia leader stated in regard to their role “we want to show them we have our

own group to protect our area. We don’t need KIA or Tatmadaw. So we reform the pyithusit.”¹⁵⁷ This suggests that the militia views itself as at least partly independent from direct central government control and as somewhat different to the BGF which is under direct Tatmadaw control with embedded Tatmadaw officers. A former soldier of the CPB and NDA-K described his understanding of the differences between the BGF and militia. “When the NDA-K transformed to the BFG no one wanted to join the BGF, so they formed the militia and they are both under the same leader. There are two separate groups, the special group has only single men who go far from the village to man

¹⁵⁵ The people in some of the villages around Hpimaw identify ethnically as Ngo Chang. Respondents from this group sometimes also accept the term ‘Lashi’ but stated that they see themselves as distinct from the ‘Lachid’ ethnic group.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with a militia leader, Hpimaw, February 10, 2019. Note: “The term pyithusit literally means “people’s war.” It is often used in English in reference to Tatmadaw-supported local militia units. The term is also used generically to refer to many types of local armed groups” (Buchanan, 2016, p.iii).

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checkpoints and the normal group has married men who stay near the village and are only needed in emergencies.”¹⁵⁸ The militia may also have been a means by which some of the soldiers in the former NDA-K were able to be kept aside from direct Tatmadaw control in the BGF and remain under the former NDA-K leadership.¹⁵⁹ The militia was reported to recruit one person per household in the area and that they only pay their soldiers a small allowance of 100 Yuan (22,500 MMK) per month. If a son was vital to a household’s livelihood, it was claimed the militia would permit them to stay working with the family.¹⁶⁰ However, other respondents mentioned that some people from one village had fled to China to avoid recruitment and were not able to return for fear of the militia and they consequently lost their walnut plantations they had planted in Hpimaw.¹⁶¹ The ethnic composition of the militia appears to influence who potentially benefits from or joins it. It was indicated that most militia members are ethnically Ngo Chang and it recruits principally from Ngo Chang rather than Lisu villages.¹⁶² For some though, membership of armed groups has spanned generations. For example, a former CPB soldier at Galan village had served the CPB and then NDA-K for 35 years, his son then took over his role in the armed group and now his third son has joined the militia. His comment on his family’s ongoing generational role in armed groups was to state “we can’t stop, even for one day.”¹⁶³

In regard to their role in governance in Hpimaw, the militia itself claimed they deal with local

disputes, enforced law and order and that they also cooperated periodically with Chinese authorities in Liuku (Niujiang) adjacent to Hpimaw with crimes where suspects had fled across the border.¹⁶⁴ The militia and BGF were both identified as owning properties in Hpimaw through which they collected rent from shop keepers and also collecting taxes. One respondent paid them 5,000 Yuan (1,119,000 MMK) per year for shop rent and a 250 Yuan (55,950 MMK) per year ‘house tax.’ Significantly, in terms of governance authority in Hpimaw, the militia leader claimed that the militia was the last line of redress for people with disputes if those were not solved by the Village Tract Administrator who nominally represents the central government via the GAD in the village. Further demonstrating the militia’s dominant role as a local governance actor, it was mentioned that the government Township Administrator from Chipwi (the township within which Hpimaw village is included) rarely visited Hpimaw.¹⁶⁵ Chinese police were also said to come to the militia first if addressing an issue that involved problems with people from the Myanmar side rather than going to the Myanmar authorities at Chipwi. This point suggests that the real power still remains with armed actors in the form of militia in the village who remain under the NDA-K/BGF leadership. A militia leader at Hpimaw claimed that “our people’s militia has a good structure now, so people come to us to solve disputes.”¹⁶⁶ However, another respondent argued that people prefer to solve issues themselves or through village leaders first to avoid involving the militia.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁸ Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019. The stated difference in militia groups for single and married men could also refer to the outcome of a policy dictated by the Tatmadaw for transformation of former ceasefire armed groups to BGF units, wherein BGF soldiers had to retire at age 50 (Buchanan, p. 25).

¹⁵⁹ The NDA-K had been under the leadership of U Zakhung Ting Ying. He originally led a KIO splinter group that joined the CPB in the late 1960s and following the collapse of the CPB in 1989 he formed the NDA-K which eventually became a BGF in 2009. He remained the most powerful figure in Kachin Special Region One and was an MP in the upper house of Myanmar’s parliament for the seat of Kachin-5 from 2010 to 2015 but was eventually disqualified from parliament in 2016 by the election commission for involvement with election violence in 2015.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with a woman (23), Hpimaw, February 9, 2019.

¹⁶¹ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

¹⁶² Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019; Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019 (this village of more than 200 was mainly ethnically Lisu and only three residents had been recruited to the militia.)

¹⁶³ Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with a militia leader, Hpimaw, February 10, 2019.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with a former VTA and militia member, Htang Dung village, March 11, 2019.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with a militia leader, Hpimaw, February 10, 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with a pastor (60s), Shee Bya village, 10 March, 2019.

Significant to the impact of governance on people's livelihoods in this area, it was also explained that the administration of land ownership and its documentation in rural areas including around Hpimaw had been devolved following the NDA-K ceasefire to former NDA-K leadership rather than being implemented directly through the central government.¹⁶⁸ Despite this, land use by local villagers, especially further away from villages, was described as shared communal land use with no individual ownership or land registration documents.¹⁶⁹ However, one aspect that does reflect some division of labour in the administration between central government and local militia around Hpimaw was a health NGO operating in Hpimaw that had negotiated through the GAD in Chipwi and the Myanmar Department of Health to get permission to set up a clinic in Hpimaw.¹⁷⁰

The formal Chinese border gate into Yunnan at Hpimaw requires the person crossing to have a red passbook for entering China issued from the Pangwa or Kan Pike Tee border crossings. The passbooks do not appear to normally be issued at Hpimaw. The research team discovered this when they were turned back by Chinese immigration at the gate in round one of the field work as they only had the passbook issued from Lwe Je. The requirement for different passbooks at Hpimaw is most likely related to the different Chinese prefectures¹⁷¹ adjacent to Kachin State that one enters at Lwe Je compared to at Kan Pike Tee, Pangwa or Hpimaw. Hpimaw is not an official trade gate between Myanmar and China as compared to those at Muse, Lwe Je or Kan Pike Tee. The gate on the China side is rarely used by vehicles coming from the

Myanmar side due to the restriction at this crossing on taking any goods into China. When the research team visited, there were some vehicles coming from China into Myanmar that were observed being allowed through the border gate.¹⁷² There were also restrictions imposed by China on items including medicine crossing through the gate from China into Myanmar which were mentioned by an NGO operating a clinic at Hpimaw.¹⁷³

The means by which people from Myanmar could pass through the official gate into China has changed in recent years from a two Yuan (450 MMK) fee and an accompanying receipt for a passbook that people left at the immigration office and then collected again by giving their code number next time they entered China, to the red passbook which now has to be obtained from the Myanmar immigration offices at the border crossings at Pangwa or Kan Pike Tee. A woman from the Myanmar side living in China at Upper Hpimaw explained that she has a green permission book that allows her stay in China for one year but that she had to still cross back to Myanmar and return through the China border gate and get a new stamp in her red passbook every 14 days.¹⁷⁴

The border areas around Hpimaw are easily crossed informally as hills, fields or roads are often all that separate Myanmar and Chinese villages with informal pathways through hills and forests.¹⁷⁵ Many respondents acknowledged informal crossings for work, buying and selling goods or livestock that are not permitted through the official gates or for visiting relatives.¹⁷⁶ Similar to around Lwe Je and Mai

¹⁶⁸ Interview with a militia leader, Hpimaw, February 10, 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 and 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019; Interview with a pastor (male, 26), Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Interview with a militia leader, Hpimaw, February 10, 2019.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with a member (male, 30) of a health NGO, Hpimaw, March 8, 2019.

¹⁷¹ Dehong Dai Autonomous Prefecture adjacent to the southeast Kachin State border including the Mai Ja Yang area, Baoshan City adjacent to the central eastern Kachin State border and Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture adjacent to the northeast Kachin state border and the area around Hpimaw.

¹⁷² Observations and photos by the EMReF team, February 9-12 & March 8-12, 2019.

¹⁷³ Interview with members of a local health care NGO, Hpimaw, March 8, 2019

¹⁷⁴ Interview with woman (30) from Myanmar married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019.

¹⁷⁵ Observations and photos by the EMReF research team, Hpimaw, February 9-12, 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in-law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019; Interview with a woman (32) Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019; Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019; Focus group discussion with three women (40, 26 and 25), Lote Naw Jan village, March 9, 2019.

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Ja Yang, it was also reported that up to a few years ago the border here had been much less strictly enforced but that had now changed.¹⁷⁷ Surprise checks by Chinese police were mentioned as now being a risk for people crossing the border informally.¹⁷⁸ Punishment in the past for being apprehended for informal crossing was described as arrest with compulsory labour for ten days, but now the periods of arrest are longer and fines were stated to be 500 Yuan (112,000 MMK).¹⁷⁹ Consequently, people are now going to Chipwi to get the official Myanmar NRC so they can then get the correct pass book to cross formally through the gate to China at Hpimaw.¹⁸⁰

China was reported to have made considerable efforts on its side of the border adjacent to Hpimaw to provide infrastructure, services and even finance for building of homes for people in its ethnic border areas.¹⁸¹ As mentioned earlier, it has actively encouraged the cultural ceremonies and traditions of ethnic groups on its side of the border and also made some education services available to students from Myanmar and has undertaken programs to attract students at higher levels to study in China. The sum effect of Chinese economic and political policies towards its ethnic communities in Yunnan bordering Kachin State has been to draw the area around Hpimaw closer to China through its cross-border connections. The closer relationship of co-ethnic communities with the government on the China side of the border relative to that of Myanmar was clearly expressed by a resident at Hpimaw who said "it is only this side that we are far from our government."¹⁸²

Case Study: A former CPB soldier at Galan village

N was born at Galan village near Hpimaw around 1950. When he was a child his family had to move to a new house at a new village. China and Burma had made an agreement to move the border between the two countries. The village they had to leave was now in China. His family moved to a new village just across the border that the Burma government built for them. Most of the people from his old village moved far away to some land the government said they could go to near Tanai further inside Kachin State.

When N was 18 soldiers came to his village. They told him he had to join an army. This was the army of the Communist Party of Burma. Although he was not very old he saw that some of the soldiers in this army were still younger than him. The army had a lot of new guns and ammunition at that time. N had to go with the army a long way from his village. He recalls one battle when the Burma army made a base at an old fort built by the British in colonial times and the CPB army attacked and won. He served in the CPB for 22 years and became a warrant officer.

In 1989 he heard that soldiers of the CPB at Wa and Mongla areas in northeast Shan state had thrown out their old leaders who fled to China. Some of the old CPB leaders came from China to the area where he was but then they also had to flee back to China. His old CPB army now became the New Democratic Army-Kachin and they had a ceasefire with the Tatmadaw. He continued to be a soldier in the NDA-K and got married and had three sons. Then in 2009, Myanmar Tatmadaw soldiers came and made an agreement that the NDA-K would become part of the Border Guard Force. The rules of the BGF were that they did not include men over 50, so he retired.

N's oldest son took his place in the BGF but he has now left it. There is a militia that recruits one person from each household in the village and his third son has joined the militia. Now N is in his late 60s. His wife has been sick for ten years but the closest place to buy medicine for his wife is from Upper Hpimaw in China where he moved from all those years ago, but medicine is very expensive to buy in China without Chinese ID.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with a car rental driver between Kan Pike Tee and Hpimaw, March 7, 2019; Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019

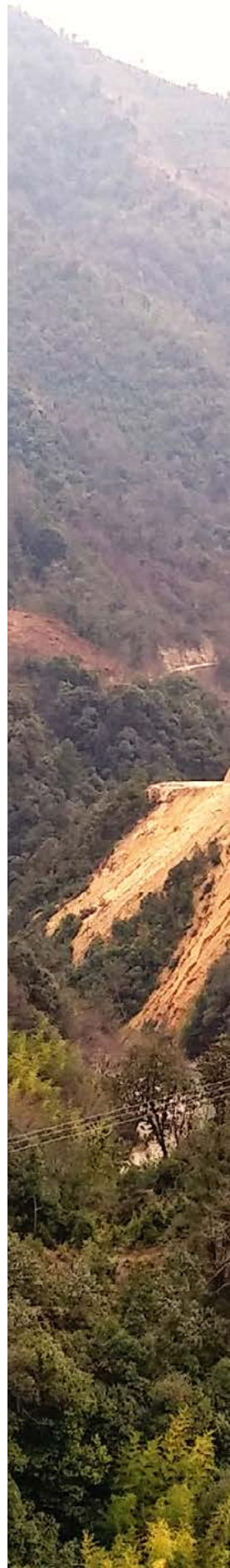
¹⁷⁸ Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with a woman (32) Shee Bya village, March 10, 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with a family: mother and father (50) and daughter-in law (24), Hpimaw, March 10, 2019.

¹⁸¹ Interview with woman (30) married to a man on the China side, upper Hpimaw, March 12, 2019. However, prior to providing support for building in villages the government collects an exact list of residents in the village and then they come to check the conditions.

¹⁸² Interview with a former CPB soldier (60s), Galan village, February 11, 2019.



Road from Chipwi to Hpimaw on the Myanmar side



(7)

Conclusion

The detailed findings across the four themes of livelihoods, education, families and governance that have been presented for the area around Mai Ja Yang and the area around Hpimaw demonstrate the range of lived experiences and factors, often related to the role of borders, that impact on them that were reported during the field work interviews. Central features that emerge from this include the economic influence of China and its relevance to the livelihoods of IDPs, migrant workers and long-term residents in those border areas. The demand from China across the border for workers and for natural resources from the Myanmar side featured in many people's descriptions of how they met their livelihood needs. For example, daily labourers from IDP camps near Mai Ja Yang, migrant workers from central Myanmar at factories near Lwe Je, people collecting bamboo or medicinal plants to sell, or working in construction or mining across the border in China from Hpimaw. The relatively higher wages that were reported for work inside China across the border at Hpimaw compared to across the border from Lwe Je and Mai Ja Yang may be related to the much higher population density and desperate circumstances for people seeking work in the case of IDPs around Mai Ja Yang. Migrant workers coming into the Lwe Je and Mai Ja Yang area from other parts of Myanmar were also reported in interviews as a factor increasing competition for work and potentially keeping wages lower there. Demand for workers from China also plays a part in informal border crossings by people seeking higher wages from work in China while lacking ID, time or money to seek permission books at official border gates, and being in close proximity to places where the border is relatively easy to cross.

Access to education around Mai Ja Yang is dependent on boundaries between government and KIO control and consequent restrictions imposed by the government on students from non-government-controlled areas. The role of non-government administered schools and institutions operating at Mai Ja Yang and at IDP camps in the area as well as boarding schools that take children from conflict affected areas have presented some ways that the state's conceived boundaries and restrictions to education for people in non-government controlled areas have been navigated or circumvented. Around Hpimaw, remoteness of its administration, distance and road conditions impact on access for children to middle or high schools, while the role of China is present in allowing limited access across its border to schools for some children from the Hpimaw area up to grade six.

The economic motivations behind arranged and forced marriages of young women and girls across the border to wealthier Chinese men were raised by respondents at both locations, with the displacement, disruption to families and desperate economic circumstances in IDP camps being central themes identified by respondents as driving this issue. The lack of recognised marriage certificates or permission to stay in China, examples of the state enforcing its conceived boundaries, further adds to this problem for many of the women who have been married and moved to China. Connections between families across the border were highlighted around Hpimaw, where the movement of the border in 1960 and ongoing relations between co-ethnic groups separated by the more recently imposed border have continued. The China government's controlled promotion of the cultures and traditions of co-ethnic groups on the China side of the border adjacent to those on the Kachin side was also noted.

The enforcement of the official border by Chinese authorities was usually reported in relation to the extent that these restrictions impacted on people's livelihoods through undertaking informal crossings to seek employment and on the movement and sale of certain commodities like walnuts or timber across the border. However, the reasons for frequent changes in border policy and levels of enforcement were less clear to the people most directly affected by them. The governance role of armed actors, in the case of the KIO around Mai Ja Yang and the BGF and militia around Hpimaw, present other actors and boundaries that people need to navigate in their border lives. For example, paying vehicle taxes, undergoing health checks or seeking permission letters to stay in Mai Ja Yang, or paying taxes at checkpoints or rent for shop buildings to the militia in Hpimaw.

This research project has demonstrated the complex array of factors that impact on the daily lived experiences of people's border lives in two areas of the Kachin-China border. It has also highlighted the many sometimes innovative ways that people adapt, navigate or work around the restrictions and boundaries imposed on them between the two countries as well as those imposed by non-state entities. It is hoped that this report, and the short non-fiction stories in Myanmar language drawn from some of the interviews that were conducted for it, will help raise awareness in other parts of Myanmar about the many issues faced by people living on and across the Kachin-China border. The economic fluctuations in demand for resources and workers from Myanmar across the border into China and ongoing armed conflicts driving displacement in Kachin border areas have been the backdrop to many aspects of people's lives presented in this report. These are matters of concern for all people living in Myanmar. Lastly, the generosity and resilience of the people from border areas who have taken the time to share their insights, knowledge and experiences through the interviews conducted for this study should be acknowledged.

7.1 Implications for future research

The findings in this report are necessarily tentative given the limited time and reach of a small research project but, nonetheless, they do offer useful insights for further research and for those involved with work in border areas. It is also hoped that this pilot study and corresponding report can provide some useful perspectives relevant to the policies of aid and development organisations currently working in Kachin border areas.

The research conducted for this pilot project provides a starting point for better understanding of the daily lived experiences of people and the central factors that impact on their lives in the case of two locations on the Kachin-China border. This has implications for further research following on from this initial pilot study that would be valuable and that is recommended. Potential avenues for further research include projects looking at other locations along the same border area to identify features within the main themes of livelihoods, education, families and governance that are similar to, or divergent from, the key findings presented in this report. While this pilot project has taken a holistic and qualitative approach by asking about a range of often interconnected thematic areas that impact on people's lives, a more quantitative approach based on much larger samples could potentially now be employed in the same locations. For example, surveys exploring specific aspects of people's incomes, expenditures or their means of employment in the case of livelihoods, or the types of education accessed by children or teens and the reasons for those choices, such as finances, distances from schools or conflict and displacement. Equally, research conducted at locations on another border area that Myanmar shares with a different country, or at a different border area, for example parts of northern Shan state, which it also shares with China, using a similar thematic framework to this study would also provide valuable data for comparison to the key findings outlined in this study in the context of the Kachin-China border.

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