

Displaced Women's Experiences, Opportunities and Priorities in Kachin State

Durable Peace Programme – Discussion Paper
April 2020



Conflict and protracted displacement in Kachin State have disproportionately impacted women by perpetuating and exacerbating gender inequalities. Kachin women face physical security threats both inside and outside their homes, take on increasing unpaid care burdens, face barriers to livelihoods and essential services and are widely excluded from leadership and decision-making processes. Yet, despite these challenges, displaced women work bravely and tirelessly every day to improve the lives of their families and their communities. Women have unique priorities in returns and resettlements and hold holistic hopes for an equitable and peaceful future – visions that must be supported and celebrated to achieve a just and durable peace in Kachin State.

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Immense gratitude is extended to all the women, and men, who spared their time and shared their experiences, visions and priorities with the DPP team, both through the DPP Phase II Baseline survey and subsequent interviews and focus group discussions. We hope that by presenting these displaced women's voices, opportunities and hopes, this Discussion Paper will enable more gender responsive and transformative programming in Kachin State.

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Graphic Design: Bridge
Published : 2020

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This Discussion Paper was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of DPP and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Since 2011, armed conflict and protracted displacement in Kachin State have disproportionately impacted women by perpetuating and exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities and discrimination. Kachin women have unique experiences of conflict and the militarisation of the state, facing physical security threats both inside and outside their homes. They also face additional challenges living in protracted displacement, taking on increasing unpaid and unrecognised care burdens – often without male support – and face barriers to livelihood opportunities and ownership of land and other assets. Despite these unique experiences, women are widely excluded from decision-making and leadership and are unable to raise their voices in critical processes that impact their lives, such as returns and resettlement and peacebuilding. However, Kachin women should not be seen as passive victims – as they work bravely and tirelessly every day to improve the lives of their families and their communities. Women’s priorities in returns and resettlements must be heard and their visions for peace and gender equality should be supported and celebrated to achieve a just and durable peace in Kachin State.

**Discussion
Paper
Approach:**

This Discussion Paper draws on the findings of the Durable Peace Programme (DPP) Phase II Baseline Survey (October, 2019) and highlights women’s voices from interviews and focus group discussions (February, 2020), supplemented by a literature review. Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics are drawn from the Baseline Survey. To access the Baseline Survey Report, please visit: <https://durablepeaceprogramme.com/resource/>

The DPP seeks to achieve lasting and equitable peace and sustainable development in Myanmar’s Kachin and northern Shan States through a range of interventions including support for durable solutions, resilient livelihoods and social cohesion. Central to achieving this goal is the promotion of gender equality, both through standalone women’s empowerment initiatives and gender mainstreaming across the entire programme.

Women’s Experiences of Conflict and Protracted Displacement

Women face disproportionate vulnerabilities in conflict and protracted displacement

The resumption of conflict between the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in 2011 has resulted in the displacement of close to 100,000 people across Kachin State.ⁱ Women, men, girls and boys are differently impacted by conflict and displacement, and women and girls face disproportionate vulnerabilities due to pre-existing and persistent gender inequalities. Myanmar’s political and legal framework fails to promote and protect women’s rights to substantive equalityⁱⁱ and cultural norms and social practices across the country restrict women’s participation in social, economic and political life.ⁱⁱⁱ These gender inequalities are perpetuated and exacerbated by conflict and displacement.

“ [Since the conflict started] it is very clear for us that the situation has got much worse. Especially for us, our main income back home was cattle and farming. Even though we were not educated, we had a vision for our future. But then, suddenly the war broke out and we had to flee. We lost everything. We lost all of our cattle, we had no chance to bring any of our belongings or to sell anything, so we lost everything when we fled. Now we have to live off nothing – only this small MMK 11,000 ration we receive.

Kachin woman, internally displaced person (IDP) camp, Waingmaw Township

“ In my opinion, within Kachin society, women seem to be oppressed, especially in their rights – when we look at education or economy, the business sector, for the knowledge and the learning opportunities, when we look at women, they are limited in those areas or sectors.... All the burdens are on women. These challenges are within the Kachin community. [Yet] women are still trying really hard in every sector.

Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town

Gender inequalities interact with other forms of social discrimination and result in marginalised groups possessing less resilience to survive and recover from conflicts and less opportunities to influence and prevent future shocks. Displaced women in Kachin State face multiple and intersecting layers of discrimination according to their gender, ‘IDP status’, belonging to an ethnic minority and being dependent on humanitarian aid.

Female headed households, women living with disabilities, elderly women, adolescent and young girls, pregnant and lactating women and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations are among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

“ NGOs supporting us IDPs really need to consider the specific vulnerabilities and needs of the mothers, the women who are responsible for looking after children – they have so many needs and vulnerabilities and need the most support.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

Women living in Kachin’s protracted displacement camps voice concerns about the crowded and deteriorating living conditions and a lack of sufficient aid and money to care for their families. They also face barriers to accessing essential services, with previous studies illustrating that the lack of services and support targeted to women and girls are a gap in the humanitarian response in Kachin State – and that few sectors meet international gender in humanitarian action standards.^{iv} These daily challenges are exacerbated by the fact that only 51% of displaced women in Kachin have access to the National Registration Card (NRC), in comparison to 61% of displaced men. The NRC is a critical precondition for freedom of movement and access to basic services, particularly in a context of heightened militarisation and checkpoints. Women face gender-specific barriers to obtaining the NRC, as they are less likely to have access to relevant information, contacts and financial resources, face restrictions to travel in order to obtain required documents – and their families may preference obtaining citizenship documentation for male household members.^v



“ As women, we are really struggling living in this kind of camp... we are all struggling to survive in here. There is very little money for us to survive on, the rations we get are really low and not enough to survive off. All the families in this camp have sons or daughters who are students – young ones and older ones. And each family has to support these students, but they are really struggling to do this.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

Yet, despite the disproportionate impact of the conflict and the unique challenges posed by living in protracted displacement, it is clear that displaced women in Kachin hold a range of active leadership roles in their households and communities and have clear priorities for the future. Displaced women hold strong visions for how the situation could be improved, for themselves, their families and their communities – but particularly for their daughters and other women. These visions often center around increased gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men.

“ My vision is that there is no ‘women’ and ‘men’ – we are all just human beings, according to our capacities and skills. For example, even we are controlled with what we wear. People might say “Oh, why is your daughter wearing that? You didn’t teach her the right way”. So, my vision is that we can all be equal – based on the person’s abilities and capacities – we all get the same opportunities. Our clothing, our behavior – none of that has to be controlled.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township



“ Sometimes, as a woman, we feel like we cannot do many things. We don't feel brave. But actually, we as women have the same capacities, the same skills as men. We have just been told to think like that. We have been oppressed for a long time by the men in our households and in our community. But now we are learning that women have the same skills and capacities as men – and we should have the same opportunities. We can do anything they can do! We can be brave!
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

Women take on increasing household responsibilities and face economic vulnerabilities

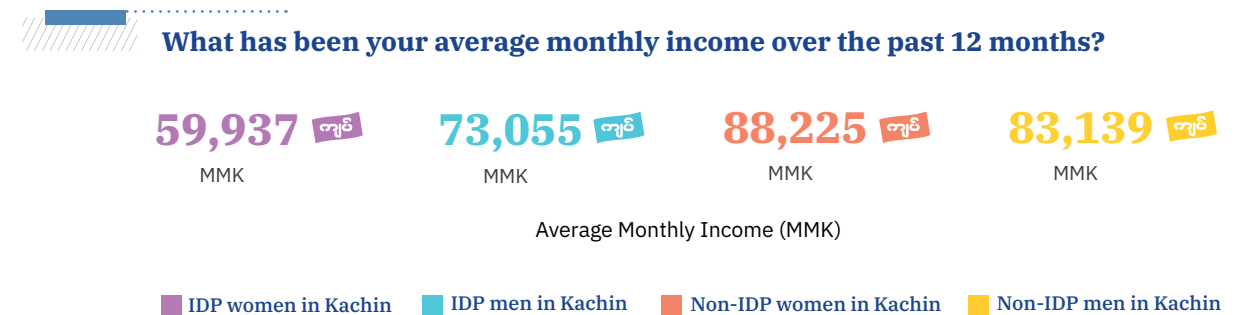
In the face of the significant challenges posed by conflict and displacement, women continue to work tirelessly and courageously for the benefit of their families and communities. In Kachin, women widely bear the responsibility for taking care of their children, the sick and the elderly, and managing household chores such as cooking, cleaning and collecting firewood. Conflict and displacement have added to this work, as men often travel for livelihood opportunities and women are left camp-bound and responsible for extensive burdens without male support. Women often express feeling overwhelmed by this unpaid care work – and explain that it poses a barrier to participating in other activities. Furthermore, women's care work is widely unseen and undervalued, with women being considered 'dependents' in the household, despite their work's critical contribution to the entire family's wellbeing.

“ Most of the women are standing in supportive roles. We can see their capacities and skills in cooking, management of money and taking responsibility for their children's education and babysitting.
Kachin man, Myitkyina Town



“ As a woman and as a mother, we women have a very important role in the family. As women, we need to care for our household and family. This is not only true for mothers, but also for us grandmothers. Women take on so many more responsibilities than men. Men don't understand the needs of the family – the food, the water, the children's needs, their education etc. etc.
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

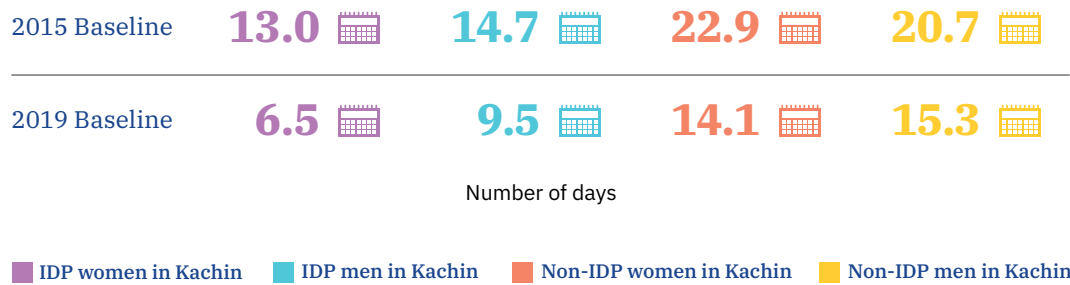
In addition to this extensive unpaid care work, women are often responsible for generating incomes – a critical pre-condition to accessing basic services and providing for their families, as well as developing resilience to shocks and realising independence. This is particularly true for female headed households, who make up 27% of households in Kachin.^{vi} Yet women face disproportionate barriers to gaining employment and accessing markets, with only 46% of women participating in the paid labour force – compared to 86% of men^{vii} – and 64% of displaced women facing barriers to selling products. Furthermore, when displaced women can find work, they are often paid significantly less than men and non-displaced persons. As a result of these barriers, displaced women's monthly incomes are almost 20% lower than displaced men's incomes and over 30% lower than non-displaced women's incomes.^{vii}



“ We can work some small jobs, but they are only available for 1-2 days in a month, it is not enough for us – and it is unstable – sometimes there is work and then sometimes there is no work. And there is discrimination against us as IDPs, for example a local will get paid MMK 8,000 for the daily labour, but us IDPs we would only get between MMK 5-6,000 – just because we are IDPs. And sometimes they [the landowners] won't even hire us – they will only hire the local labour, even if they have to pay them more – because they discriminate against us IDPs and they prefer the local people.
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township.

Due to women’s extensive unpaid care burdens and other barriers to income generating opportunities, they are significantly more economically vulnerable than men and non-displaced persons. Displaced women in Kachin report only having sufficient savings and cash for their households to survive for 6.5 days – in comparison to 9.5 days for displaced men and 14.1 days for non-displaced women. Concerningly, this economic vulnerability appears to be increasing with time, as this number of days is half of the number of days that women said that their households could survive for when asked the same question in 2015.^{ix} This economic vulnerability has left many displaced women feeling ashamed and frustrated that they are unable to take care of their children and that they are failing as mothers to provide a safe and supportive environment for their families.

How many days would your household be able to survive on your current savings and cash?



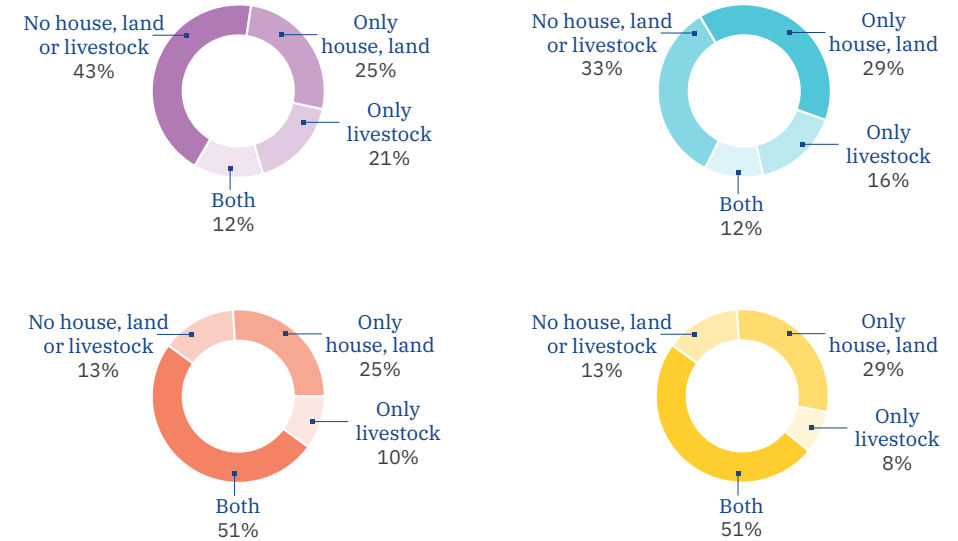
“ We can’t even buy a school uniform for our children – and they face discrimination at the school for being IDPs. As a mother we want to support them with a clean and new uniform – but we cannot do that because we do not have enough income.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

Further exacerbating this economic vulnerability is women’s lack of access to, and ownership of, land and other important assets. Land is a substantial means of income in Kachin State and it plays a particularly important role for women’s economic empowerment and safeguarding against economic loss and crisis.^x While Myanmar’s law affirms that women and men have equal rights to land, women in Kachin State are widely denied these rights due to discriminatory social customs – with 32% of women and men believing that a son should inherit land, not daughters. As a result, IDPs in Kachin report that women’s names are only included on 25% of land ownership documents, compared to men’s names being included on 84% of such documents. In addition, displaced women’s households are significantly less likely to own a house, land or any livestock than

displaced men’s households. Women’s lack of land ownership documentation particularly impacts displaced female headed households who fled their land during the conflict and plan to reclaim their land when they return.

Does your household own a house, land and/or livestock?



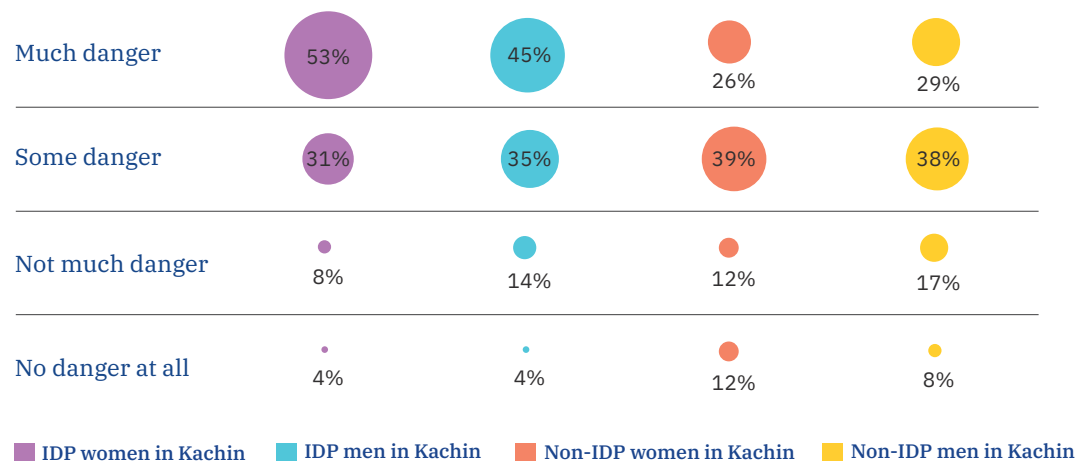
“ For land ownership, however, mostly men inherit the land because they are heads of households and the inheritors of family lines... So, according to the customary practice, mostly men are the ones who inherit. They are the ones who continue the family line and expand the clan.

Kachin man, Myitkyina Town

Women face physical security threats – both inside and outside their homes

Compounding these daily challenges living in IDP camps, women face threats of violence and conflict both outside and within their homes. While men are more likely to be directly engaged in conflict, for example as armed soldiers, women are more likely to have experienced danger from armed conflict – with 84% of displaced women stating they have felt ‘much danger’ or ‘some danger’ from armed conflict in the past 12 months.

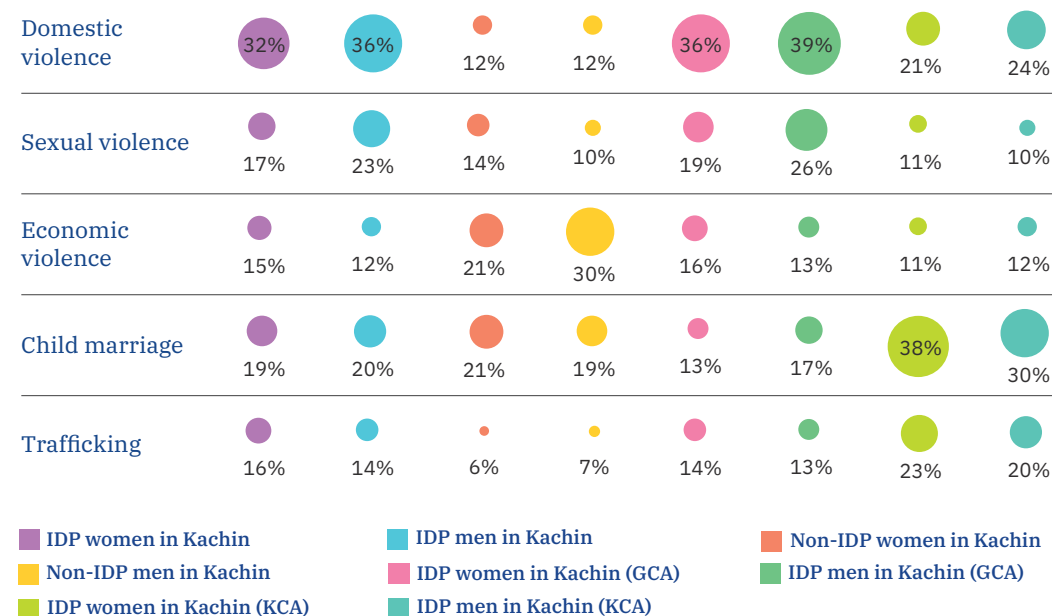
Over the past 12 months, how much danger have you felt from armed conflict?



In addition, the militarisation of Kachin State more broadly poses threats to women’s safety. Women often express that their movements are restricted by military bases and armed soldiers – impacting their ability to access services and fulfil their daily tasks. This also shapes women’s preferences for returns and resettlement (R&R), as women repeatedly state they cannot return if there is a military base within proximity of their home village. The militarisation also puts women at increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), with 20% of displaced women and men identifying that sexual violence is a common occurrence in their communities. This is further evidenced by the findings of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on SGBV in Myanmar, which outlines that uniformed soldiers have routinely and systematically employed rape and other acts of sexual violence against ethnic minority women, including in Kachin, as “part of a deliberate, well-planned strategy to intimidate, terrorise and punish a civilian population.”^{xi}



Are the following forms of GBV common in your community?



“ Our home village is close to a military base – so as women we have concerns about returning there and being close to that base... It is not safe for us women to move around there freely. We have to be very careful for our safety near that military base. We women need to take extra care.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

In addition to the risks of gender-based violence (GBV) posed by the conflict, IDPs may adopt negative coping mechanisms in response to the challenges of living in protracted displacement. These negative coping mechanisms put women and girls at risk of exploitation, abuse and violence – with 21% of IDPs living in Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) Controlled Areas (KCA)^{xii} identifying trafficking as common and 34% identifying child marriage as common in their communities. Concerningly, GBV is most likely to take place within women’s own homes, with 34% of IDPs identifying that domestic violence is a common occurrence in their communities. While domestic violence sadly remains prevalent across the country, and the world, displaced women in Kachin State face increased risks due to widespread drug and alcohol abuse, crowded conditions with a lack of privacy and feelings of frustration linked to protracted displacement and men’s inability to fulfil their gender-prescribed roles as ‘the provider’.

“ In our society, especially in the rural areas, men’s livelihoods depend on natural resources, vegetation and forestry. But the natural resources are reducing day by day and so we cannot depend on it anymore, which is causing not enough income and a fall in living standards. As a result, men become addicted to drugs or sell their wife to other nation, mostly to China, as their income. In some households women are shouted by their husband...“this curry is so bad, how do you cook it and I cannot eat it!” This is moral problem of men in our society.

Kachin man, Myitkyina Town

“ Drug issues are our biggest concern. Around this area there is a big drug problem. We worry so much for our sons, husbands and fathers. But we also worry about how this issue will affect our daughters. Everyone in the community is impacted by this drug problem.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

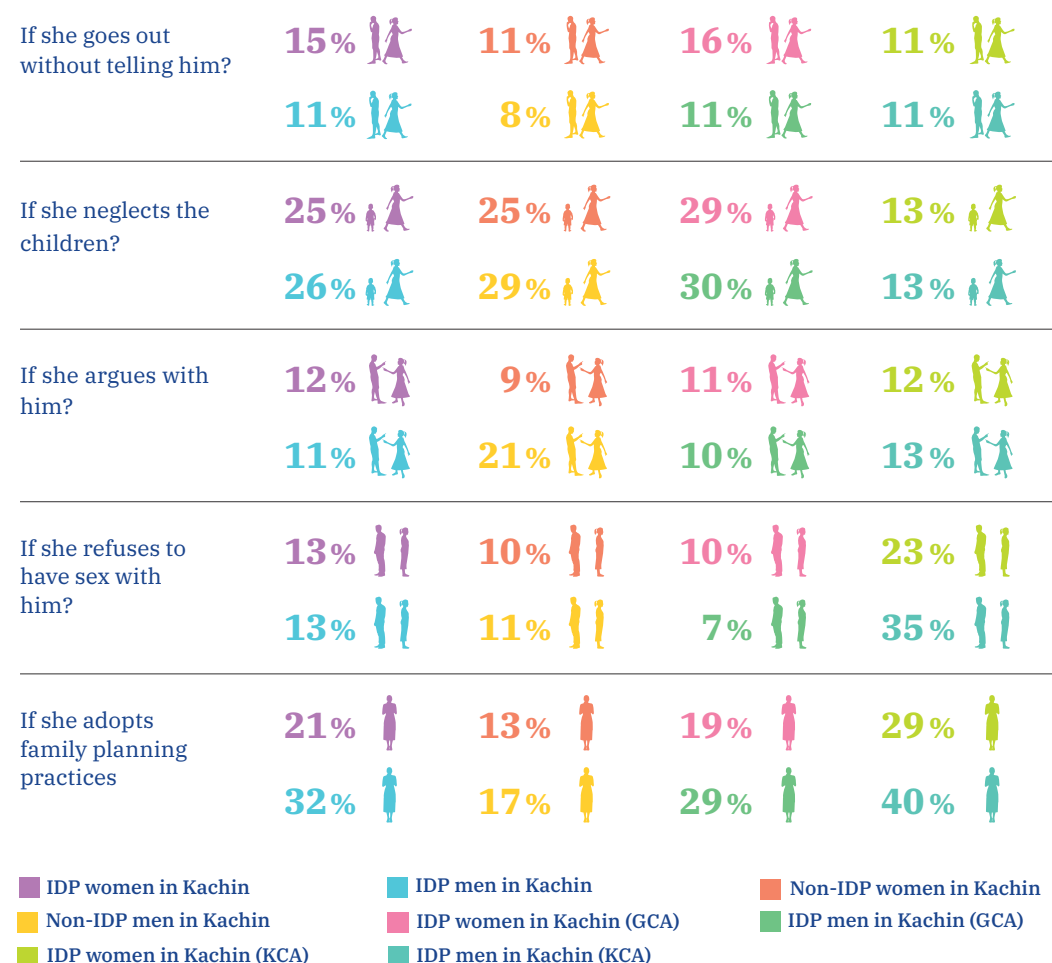
Despite the widespread prevalence of GBV in Kachin State, the majority of people have not spoken out or taken any other actions against it. This inaction can be linked to the pervasive social stigma attached to GBV and the barriers to reporting or seeking justice for cases. It is also linked to the high rates of acceptance of GBV – with 40% of displaced men living in KCA believing that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife if she adopts family planning and 35% believing this behavior is justified if she refuses to have sex with him. There are also high rates of victim-blaming, with over a quarter of displaced women and men in Kachin believing that it is a woman’s fault if she gets harassed while walking outside alone at night.

“ One of the biggest concerns is that women in our community suffer from violence and also they are considered as existing for men’s sexual satisfaction.

Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town

Yet, despite these concerning high rates of acceptance of GBV in Kachin, many women continue to envisage and work towards a future that is safe and dignified for themselves and their daughters. As women’s experiences of violence in conflict and displacement often span from the public to private realms, so do their visions of peace. Therefore, women will often integrate the absence of violence against women and the upholding of women’s rights into their broader hopes for a peaceful future in Kachin State.

In your opinion, is a husband justified in hitting or beating his wife in the following situations



“ Not just in Kachin, but I want in the future for all women to be free from oppression, violence, and discrimination. To be able to have that, we have to support it right now, to get that in the future, everyone has to work together to get it.... Not just women leaders, but every woman has to be united in our vision and we have to work together. If we are not united, there will be many factors that will stop us getting what we want. For example, within Kachin communities, we have different communities and sub-groups – all groups have to be united to help all women get this vision, regardless of our different sub-group.

Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town



Women's Opportunities to Engage in Leadership and Decision-Making

Women's unique skills, knowledge and priorities are critical to leadership and decision-making

According to women's unique experiences of conflict and displacement, they often hold different concerns, priorities and visions. For this reason, women widely express that only they can truly understand other women's needs and interests.^{xiii} Furthermore, due to women's gender-prescribed care responsibilities, women articulate that they are well positioned to fully understand and represent the priorities of all family members – especially their children. Therefore, to ensure that women's and their families' specific needs and priorities are reflected in decisions that affect their lives, women must be involved in leadership and decision-making.

“ As women, we all share these concerns. But men don't understand these details. Men only think about getting enough money and a job. If they get the money, they think that everything will be okay [to return to the village]. But as women, we need to think about all the details – we need to think about whether that money will actually be enough for the family, will the money cover the education of our children, will there be food for the family, will there be a school there

for us, how will we get the firewood, will it be safe for us and our children to move around, etc. etc. Men say that they understand – but they don't. This burden is for women alone.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

Women have visions and hopes for the roles they can play in their households and communities – and are ready to contribute their knowledge and skills to critical processes in Kachin. As stated in the Common Charter of Demands by Women's Groups for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment across the Peace-Humanitarian-Development Nexus in Kachin State, prepared by the Kachin State Women's Network (KSWN), “If given the opportunity, women have the capacity and willingness to shape the future of the country.”^{xiv} Strengthening the capacities of women as leaders, recognising their visions as important and providing them with the space and opportunity to participate in critical processes is essential to achieving a gender just and durable peace in Kachin State.

“ My vision is for women and girls to face no limitations.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

“ That women can stand up – can speak their minds, to express their priorities. That is my vision and my hope.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

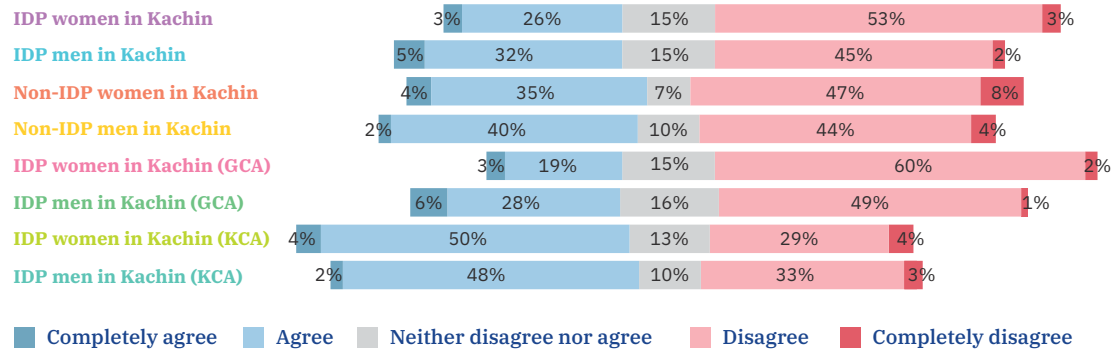
Yet, women continue to be excluded from leadership and decision-making

Despite the critical contributions women could make, they face significant barriers to participating in leadership and decision-making – from within the household through to the church, community and state levels. While women take on important roles in leading much of the unpaid care work within their households, men are considered the ‘head of household’ and therefore the leaders of the family. Consequently, while smaller and daily decisions are often made by both women and men, 37% of displaced men and 29% of displaced women believe that men should have the final word about decisions in their households.

“ As it is said in the Bible, Jesus is the head of the church, and men are the head of the family. As it is the head – when we are looking at a person – it is eyes, and ears, and brain – that means you have to lead the family – it is very important. Men are very important for the family, to lead the family in a good way.

Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town

Do you think that a man should have the final word about decisions in the home?



These gender norms are replicated outside the home, with men playing an elevated role in community decision-making and political activities, and women being relegated to domestic and administrative tasks. While many of the Kachin IDP camp leadership structures – the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Committee (CMC) – have a small number of female representatives, these women are often in junior and administrative positions and are excluded from decision-making processes.^{xv} This reflects broader trends, where women are not permitted to hold senior positions within the Church, only account for two state-level ministerial positions in Kachin and comprise less than one per cent of ward and village tract administrators across the country.^{xvi}

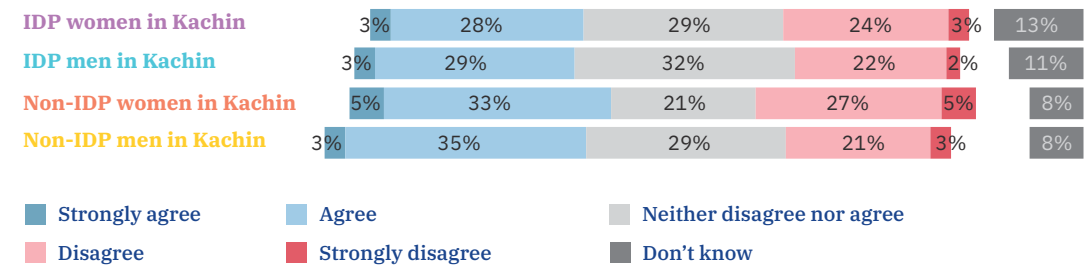
“ We never tell anyone what we want or think. We as women have no opportunities to participate in decision-making or leadership. We don’t even have any women’s groups or committees in this camp.
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

“ There are some positions or situations that because you’re a woman you cannot do, for example... we tried to propose that women should be allowed to be a Pastor, but it was not accepted.
Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town

The barriers women face to leadership and decision-making are multiple and overlapping. The gender division of labour in Kachin strictly determines that women should prioritise unpaid household and care responsibilities at the expense of any other work, such as leadership roles. This is compounded by the personal attributes and characteristics that are expected of women according to dominant gender norms in Kachin, which often inhibit women from developing and exhibiting leadership skills and confidence. As one displaced

woman describes, a ‘good woman’ in Kachin is “someone who doesn’t talk much, stays at home, looks after children, gives birth to children, wears appropriate clothes, is modest, quiet and shy.” As a result, 40% of displaced women do not believe, or do not know if they believe, that they have the skills or knowledge to contribute to decision-making in their communities.

Do you believe you have the skills or knowledge to contribute to decision-making in your community?

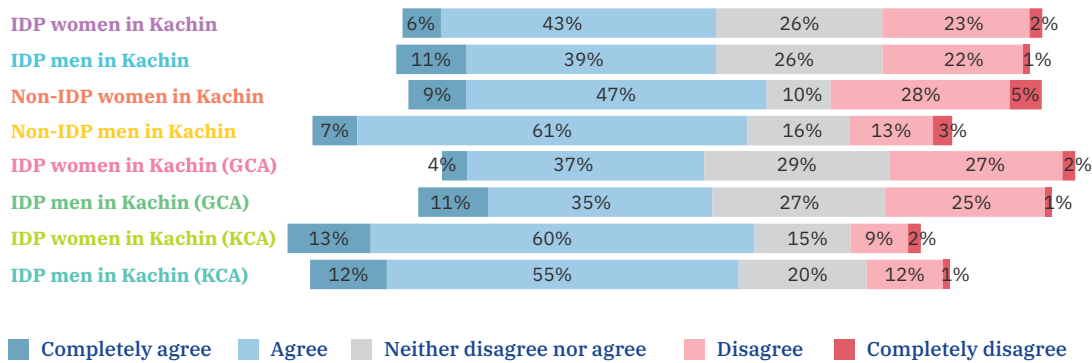


“ For women the thing is, we have our families. Even if we have the capacities and skills to be leaders – we won’t do this because we have our families and they are always the most important thing for us. For men, it’s not that they don’t love their family – but if the child is crying they will just say to their wives, “oh look, the child is crying” – and they expect that she will look after the child. So, men can move forward and take opportunities – but we women cannot move forwards, because we are always looking back to care for our families... So, we get left behind.
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

“ Right now – there are very few women leaders. We need more. The reason is that women have limited capacity – it’s very difficult to choose women leaders. Another reason is that even if some women have capacity or are very smart – for example there are women who will have the capacity for positions like general secretary or leader of the church – but they are not given that position, because some people will say: ‘is it appropriate for women to be in that role?’ That’s why women are usually not selected for those positions. When women leaders talk, they don’t want to accept or listen – or they don’t care much – if women are the ones talking. Those are also the reasons we have few women leaders.
Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town

In addition to these barriers, many community members remain skeptical of whether women should hold leadership or decision-making positions – with 50% of IDPs in Kachin State believing that men make better leaders than women. Such beliefs are not only held by men, as many women are also reluctant to accept and trust female leaders. While disappointing, this is not surprising, as women’s beliefs and personal aspirations are also shaped by restrictive gender norms.

Do you think that men make better leaders than women?



“ We tried to get people to accept that the women can also be Camp Coordinator, we proposed it be a woman leader. Even one young man from this camp understood this – he said there are even women leaders in other camps. But the thing is, there are some women who disagree – they said that women shouldn’t be in that sort of position, or as leaders. They said, ‘We have a saying where the morning only comes when the rooster crows, not the hen.’

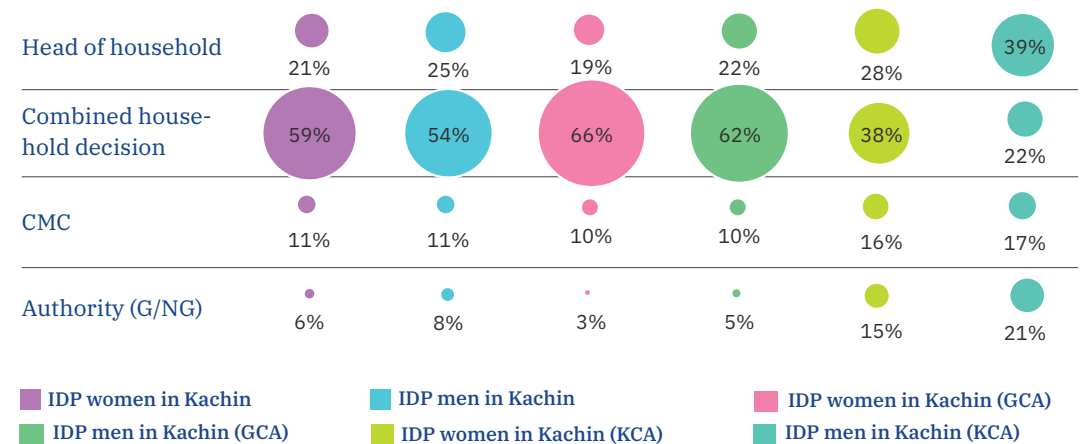
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

Women have limited opportunities to participate in returns, resettlement and peacebuilding

Women’s exclusion from leadership in Kachin State means that their own and their families’ specific needs often go unmet and their priorities unheard. This is particularly concerning for the returns and resettlements (R&R) process, which is currently in various stages of planning and progress in Kachin State since the launch of the Government of Myanmar’s National Strategy on the Resettlement of IDPs and Closure of IDP Camps on the 19th November 2019. While R&R inevitably holds significant impact on women’s lives, almost half of all IDPs indicated that the household head, CMC or other authority will make final decisions on R&R. Considering that each of these decision-making bodies are male-

dominated, displaced women in Kachin are left with limited opportunities to meaningfully engage in these important decisions. As one displaced woman responded when asked who makes decision about R&Rs, “we [women] can only have our wish, we cannot decide”. This exclusion from the R&R process appears to also extend to consultations, including those conducted by the non-government and international community, as several women expressed that they had not yet been consulted independently as women or specifically about women’s concerns in any of the R&R consultations that had taken place in their IDP camps thus far.

When return, resettlement, relocation or location integration happens, who makes the final decision?



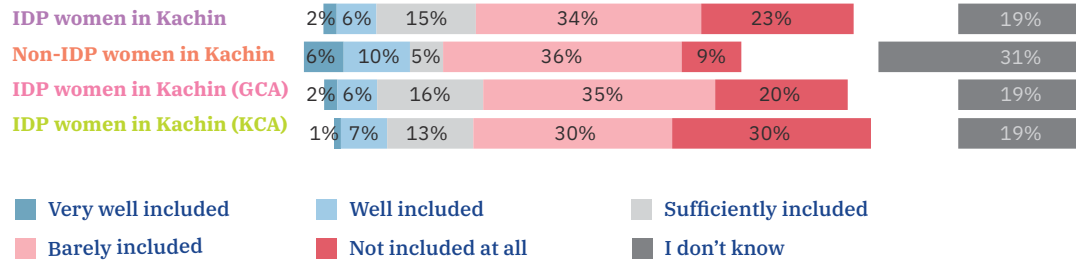
“ So many organisations have come here but none of them takes the time to speak to just us women – about our needs and feelings as women.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

Women’s exclusion from important processes also extends to peacebuilding, as Kachin women are systematically excluded from meaningfully participating in all levels of the peace process. From the community to the national level, the peace process remains male-dominated and many women in Kachin are not even sure if they have the right to participate in peacebuilding initiatives.^{xvii} As a result, 66% of displaced women in Kachin do not know what their opportunities are to participate in community level peace initiatives or believe their opportunities are poor, very poor or non-existent. Furthermore, over half of all displaced women say that they have not, or do not know if they have, received information about the national peace process – which is an essential prerequisite for women to raise their voices and participate in peacebuilding efforts. Unfortunately, as a

result of this exclusion, less than a quarter of displaced women in Kachin believe that women's priority issues are being adequately included in current community level-peace initiatives.

How do you feel women's priority issues are included in current community level peace initiatives?

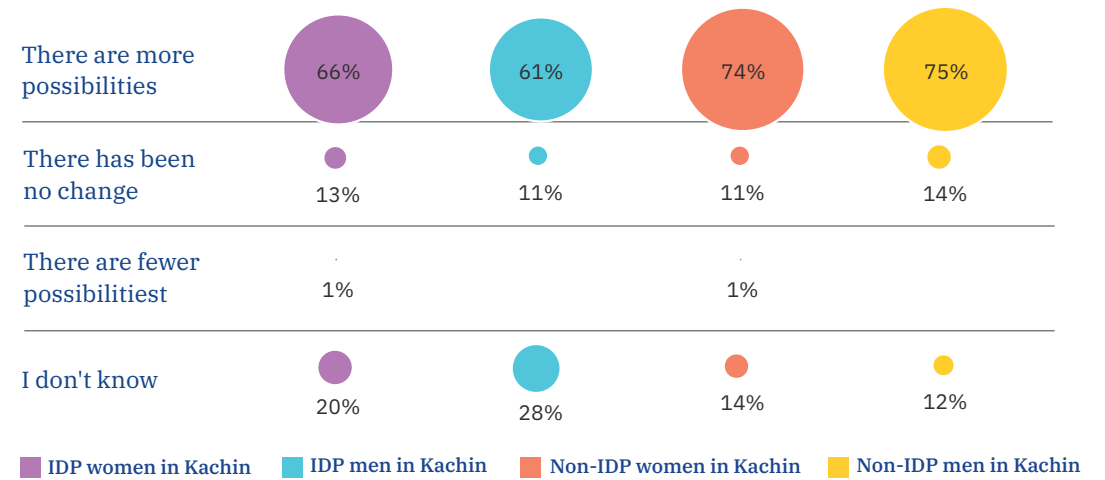


However, opportunities for women's leadership are slowly opening

Displaced women in Kachin continue to work overcome these barriers and many hold active leadership roles in their households and communities – from formal positions within governance structures such as the CMC to less visible leadership roles as teachers, community mobilisers and role models.^{xviii} Further, conflict and displacement can at times create increased opportunities for women's leadership and participation in important decision-making processes. This is illustrated by the fact that 66% of displaced women believe that there are more opportunities for women to take on leadership positions in their communities today than there were five years ago. This shift can be linked to changes in restrictive gender norms as a coping strategy in displacement, for example with women having to take on increased roles in income generation and community leadership as men migrate for work. Women also identify that these shifts are directly linked to the awareness raising activities conducted by NGOs in their IDP camps.



Looking back over the past five years, do you think there has been a shift in the opportunities for women to take leadership positions?



“ I have to say that [before the conflict] was very, very different to my situation right now... there were very limited opportunity for all this awareness back in the village... After we moved to the camps, there are many opportunities for trainings – so, whenever I have time, I try to attend all the different trainings that are available. Now, to speak in front of people, in public, in the past I would never have been able to do that, I wasn't confident enough, but now because of joining all these trainings, I can speak in front of public and I've become more confident.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

“ Before 2011, women...were not really active or doing anything, but after the war broke out, women became very much awakened and then they got more developed – now we can see that women are very active and participating – in national affairs, in Kachin issues – even now, we can see within the village, we have village women's committees. Before, we didn't have those kind of things and we didn't think we needed them. Now, at village level and township level, we have different women's groups – these women are doing everything they can. Supporting learning, driving political discussions, engaging. The role of women is really changing.

Kachin woman, Myitkyina Town



Women’s Concerns and Priorities for Returns and Resettlements

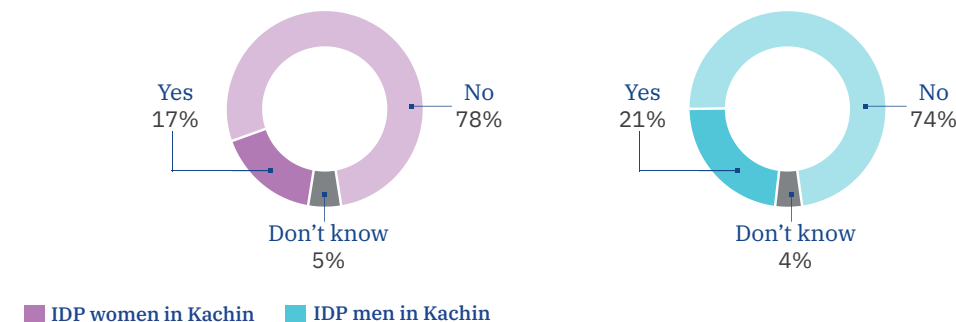
Displaced women have specific priorities for the Returns and Resettlement (R&R) process in Kachin

Of urgent importance in the current climate is hearing and prioritising women’s concerns and priorities for the R&R process in Kachin State. While women hold a lot of hope about returning to their villages and leaving the IDP camps, this is mixed with deep feelings of fear and uncertainty. Tellingly, less women feel ready for returns, resettlement, relocation (i.e moving to another IDP camp) or local integration than men do. Women express concerns that they do not know what services will be in place if they return to their villages, what has been lost since the conflict and what aid will be provided by NGOs. This uncertainty adds to the daunting responsibility of re-starting their entire family’s lives again from nothing.

“ If someone says – you can return right now, I would be so happy. I would grab my things and leave here tomorrow. But what is there back there? We lost everything. Our land, our cattle – and now after all this time the forest has grown over our place. We would have to start again from nothing. This is very difficult for us.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township

Do you feel prepared for a potential return, resettlement, relocation or local integration?



Women’s concerns do not only center around their own priorities, but they expand to include the entire family – and particularly their children – in line with their gender-prescribed care responsibilities. The most common priority expressed by women for R&R is the presence and quality of schools. Similarly, women are concerned whether there will be adequate food and other essential supplies for all their family members. Women also express concerns about their physical safety and security if they return, particularly in terms their ability to move freely and fulfil their daily tasks. Finally, women voice the ever-present fear that the armed conflict may resume.

“ Now we are in the camp for 8-9 years. As a woman and as a mother we have really big concern about what we will do if we go back. We are concerned about the fighting. If it might start, we worry about the education of our children. When we were displaced our children were very small – now they are bigger – we as mothers are worried about disrupting their lives and their education. They have grown up here, gone to school here. What will happen for them if we go back?

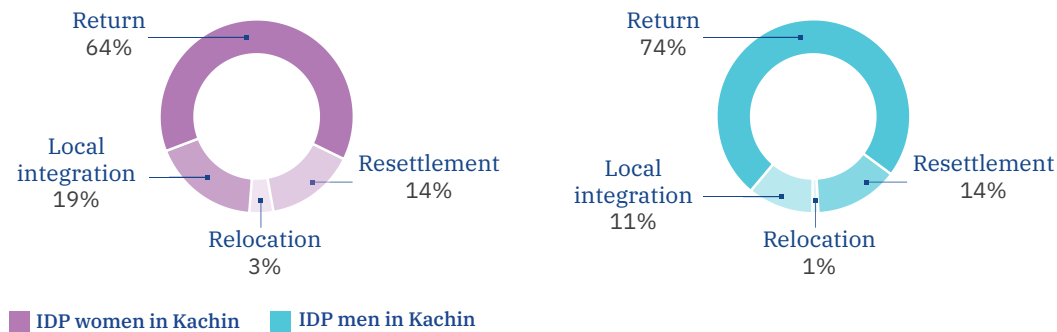
Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

“ When we are in the village we have to collect the firewood in the forest. As a woman, this is very dangerous. At least here [in the IDP camp] we can buy the wood in the compound, or we can collect it around the streets and from people’s backyards. It is safe for us to collect the firewood here, and we can find many of the things that we need. But if we are return, it will be very difficult and dangerous for women to get those important things for our families.

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

As previously outlined, women clearly express that they have different concerns and priorities in R&R to men, and that men cannot represent women’s opinions in decision-making. Even in the preference to return, resettle, relocate or locally integrate, there are differences according to gender – with 10% less women wanting to return than men and 8% more women wanting to locally integrate than men.

If you had to choose between return, resettlement, relocation or local integration, what would be your preference?



“ Women and men have different priorities. Men’s priority is money and land. But women’s priority is their children... For example, some men say, ‘oh we should go back quickly because there is land confiscation and land grabbing going on.’ So, men really want to go now. Men also hear what is happening with Nam San Yang Village – and that makes them think, ‘Quick, we should go now too!’ But for women, we are much more worried about the security and the situation that will be there when we return. We have so many worries. What will be there for our children? Will our children be safe? What if there is a Military Base there now? If there is Military there now, it will not be safe for us.”

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Waingmaw Township



Women’s priorities for R&R are diverse and may change over time

However, we must be careful not to consider ‘displaced women’ as a singular category with homogenous and unchanging concerns and priorities. Women hold a range of different concerns and priorities that should be understood and prioritised, particularly women with diverse experiences and identities. Furthermore, women’s priorities for R&R have in some cases changed over time – and shifted based on their experiences living in displacement for the past nine years. This is especially true for women originally from remote rural areas whose visions and aspirations may have changed with the opportunities they have been afforded while living in semi-urban IDP camps with active awareness raising trainings.

“ For me, I don’t like war and fighting and living in that village between two groups of armed people – and you’re just stuck there. I don’t want that kind of life anymore. I also don’t want to just live in a farm, go back to the home, go to the farm – I don’t want to return to that life. I want women to be more developed, getting more knowledge, getting a more developed life. I want women to be in that stage, so we need a lot of education and awareness – for a better life – and I want women to be in leadership in all different areas, in the future.”

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township

These shifts also highlight the importance of engaging host communities^{xix} in gender-related programming once R&R does commence. While incredibly grateful for the learning opportunities they have been afforded, displaced women often expressed concern that the education and awareness they have gained in the IDP camps may cause tensions with the surrounding villages when they return or resettle. As one displaced woman explained, “We have a lot of knowledge, because we have received so many trainings while we are living here in this IDP camp.... But we also need to get this information to the rural villages. Because back in the village they live a very simple and rural lifestyle. Otherwise there will be issues in the gap in knowledge.” This is especially critical to mitigate tensions that may arise between returning/relocating communities and host communities who hold different gender norms and expectations of women’s behaviours.

“ We want you to continue this kind of work when we go back to our village. We need this kind of support, on women’s empowerment, support for women’s groups and women’s skills, communication and influencing. In fact, this kind of support to women is even more important when we go back there!”

Kachin woman, IDP camp, Myitkyina Township



Recommendations

Women have strong and holistic visions for a peaceful future in Kachin State, encompassing gender equality, women's rights and a life of dignity free from violence. Women are ready to add this perspective and their skills and experiences to leadership and decision-making – and they must be supported to do so.

- All leadership and decision-making structures in Kachin State must achieve meaningful and equal representation of diverse women, including within IDP camp and village governance structures, peacebuilding delegations and R&R committees.
- Initiatives developing women's leadership skills, capacities and confidence must be scaled-up. Women's groups and women-friendly spaces should also be established and supported to strengthen women's collective voices and networks of solidarity.
- Kachin State's strong existing network of Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) play a critical role in advancing women's leadership and empowerment and must be supported. Other actors should develop meaningful partnerships with WROs, involve them in strategic decision-making and support them through long-term and flexible funding.

As women have unique experiences of conflict and displacement and hold specific priorities – no decision should be made that impacts their lives without their meaningful

engagement. Not only will this enable women to articulate their gender-specific concerns, but often they are also best placed to represent the needs and priorities of their families and communities.

- Regular and participatory consultations must be conducted with diverse women of different ages and other identities, separately to men, in the planning, delivery and assessment of all programmatic and policy interventions – including R&R.
- Safe, anonymous and gender responsive community feedback and complaint mechanisms must be established in all IDP camps, sites flagged for returns and resettlements and host communities.

Gender mainstreaming must be strengthened across all humanitarian, peacebuilding and development initiatives to ensure gender responsive programming. This is particularly important to fulfil the needs and priorities of displaced women as they face disproportionate vulnerabilities.

- Programming across all sectors must meet international gender standards, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, the IASC Gender in Humanitarian Action Handbook and the IASC Gender and Age Marker.
- Needs assessments, beneficiary selection criteria and delivery of basic supplies and essential services must be gender responsive and should be conducted at the individual (not household) level to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups, including female headed households, women living with disabilities, elderly women, adolescent and young girls, pregnant and lactating women and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations.
- Sex and age disaggregated data must be systematically collected and utilised across all sectors to monitor the inclusion of women and progress towards gender equality.

Women continue to be at risk of GBV both inside and outside their homes and activities to prevent and respond to GBV must be expanded. However, programming must go beyond seeing women as victims to achieve a gender transformative agenda and promote women's empowerment.

- Gender awareness raising trainings must be scaled-up and should also target men and community leaders. These sessions

should seek to transform harmful gender norms, for example by highlighting the critical importance of women's unpaid care work and advocating for men to share this burden to achieve greater equality within the household.

- Support for women's economic empowerment should be prioritised through vocational skills development, especially of non-gender stereotypical livelihood activities. Ensure a do no harm approach is taken to avoid putting women at risk of GBV and provide in-kind support for women's care responsibilities (ie. childcare) to avoid adding to women's burden of work.

Women play critical roles in building resilience and leading their households and communities through crises and change. Therefore, the continuation and expansion of gender responsive and transformative programming must be prioritised as new opportunities, challenges or crises emerge in Kachin State, including peacebuilding and returns and resettlement.^{xx}

- UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and its sister resolutions must be operationalised to achieve a gender just and durable peace in Kachin State. For example, by including issues of GBV and gender equality in peace negotiations and achieving equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels of peacebuilding.
- At all stages of the R&R process, attention must be paid to gender-specific considerations and women's priorities and affected women must be meaningfully engaged in all decision-making exercises. Furthermore, to avoid tensions between returning/relocating IDPs and host communities, all gender initiatives such as gender awareness raising and women's leadership trainings must target both returning/relocating IDPs and host communities.

Finally, the government of Myanmar and key stakeholders must uphold the country's international and national commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

- These commitments are outlined in Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UNSCR 1325 and the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW).

Acronyms

CMC	Camp Management Committee
DPP	Durable Peace Programme
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
I/NGO	International/ Non-Government Organisation
KCA	KIO Controlled Areas
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
NRC	National Registration Card
R&R	Returns and Resettlements
S/GBV	Sexual and/ Gender-Based Violence
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

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- vi. Department of Population & UNFPA 2017, The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Gender Dimensions, p. 105
- vii. Asia Development Bank 2016, Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in Myanmar: A Situational Analysis
- viii. It is interesting to note the DPP Phase II Baseline Survey finding that non-displaced women report earning more than all other respondent groups. While outside the scope of this Discussion Paper, this requires further research.
- ix. This compares data collected in the Phase I DPP Baseline Survey conducted in 2015, find the full report here: <https://durablepeaceprogramme.com/resource/>
- x. NDI, Nyein and Oxfam 2018, Displaced and Dispossessed: Conflict-affected communities and their land of origin in Kachin State, Myanmar, May 2018, p. 23
- xi. United Nations Human Rights Council 2019, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Myanmar and the Gendered Impact of its Ethnic Conflicts, A/HRC/42/CRP.4, p.19
- xii. KCA refers to areas of Kachin State that are controlled by the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO). These areas may also be referred to as non-government-controlled areas (NGCA).
- xiii. Trocaire & Oxfam 2017, Life on Hold: Experiences of women displaced by conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar, p. 14
- xiv. KSWN 2018, Common Charter of Demands by Women’s Groups for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment across the Peace-Humanitarian-Development Nexus in Kachin State, Myanmar, p. 5
- xv. UN Women 2019, Gender Profile for Humanitarian Action, Myanmar
- xvi. UN Women 2019, Gender Profile for Humanitarian Action, Myanmar, p. 10
- xvii. Trocaire & Oxfam 2017, Life on Hold: Experiences of women displaced by conflict in Kachin State, Myanmar, p. 14
- xviii. See Oxfam’s case studies on displaced women in formal and informal leadership positions in Kachin State: <https://myanmar.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/good-woman> and <https://myanmar.oxfam.org/latest/blogs/red-cross-backpack-%E2%80%93-bawku-awng>
- xix. The term ‘host community’ refers to existing residents either living in the home communities that IDPs are returning to or the communities that IDPs are resettling or relocating to.
- xx. This includes the global health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic which, while not a focus of this paper, has significant gender dimensions which must be considered.



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