



Rapid Assessment of Non-Displaced Populations in Sittwe Township



January 2013

Introduction

In June and October 2012, tensions between communities living in Rakhine State culminated in violent and deadly sectarian clashes, leaving over 5,000 houses and buildings burnt and more than 100,000 people displaced. Displaced people gathered in overcrowded camps or were hosted in nearby villages, with most completely reliant on assistance (from friends/ relatives, religious institutions, the Government or the international community) to meet immediate, basic needs. With tensions between communities still very high, return to places of origin is not envisaged in the near term and additional flare ups of violence and increased displacement remain real concerns.

While the focus of the Government, civil society and international community to date has rightly been on addressing immediate security concerns and providing for the immediate needs of displaced populations, it is imperative that all actors begin to look at the broader impacts of the violence with an eye towards understanding the full spectrum of needs in the affected areas. This means cataloguing the potential impacts on well-being and livelihoods amongst all of the affected populations, from those most acutely impacted by the violence to those least directly affected.

Recognizing this, WFP recently conducted an assessment of non-displaced populations in Sittwe township. The objective of the assessment was to better understand how the livelihoods and well-being of less affected communities have been impacted by the violence and to determine how the particular circumstances of villages mitigates or exacerbates these impacts. The assessment was designed to examine the following widely held assumptions:

- Historic interactions between Muslim and Buddhist Rakhine communities have largely ceased in the aftermath of the violence, severely impact the economy in Sittwe.
- Population displacements are overstressing resources in the relocation areas and host communities;
- Fear of movement or actual movement restrictions (i.e. curfews) is limiting income generating activities for large segments of the population;
- Access to productive lands or conduct of productive activities (fishing e.g.) is constrained because communal tensions, the presence of displaced families or because of limitations of movements;
- Movement of basic commodities between main markets remains more difficult than pre conflict.

Field visits were conducted in a number of villages of Sittwe Township, as Sittwe has the highest number of IDPs and is amongst the worst-affected townships. Depending on results, similar assessments may be conducted in the near future in other, violence affected townships.

Methodologies

Selection of places to be places visited

In total, 8 villages were assessed, all located in Sittwe Township. Villages were selected on the basis of particular characteristics, including ethnicity of inhabitants and proximity to villages of other ethnicities and/ or IDP camps. Characteristics of the 8 villages selected are summarized in Table 1 and Map 1 below.

Table 1: Characteristics of assessed villages

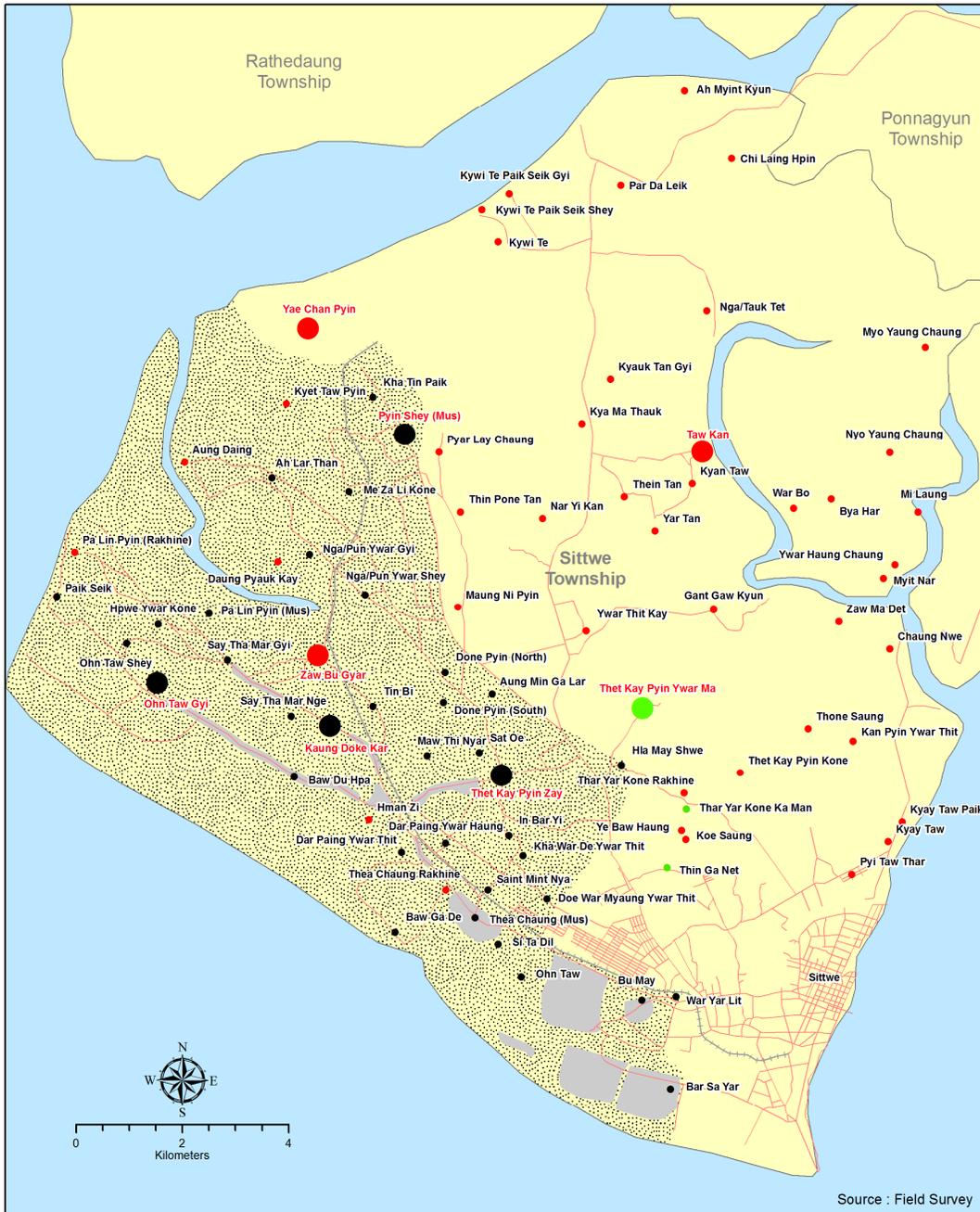
Sample Village	Population	Pre-conflict population figure	Location of community? (Muslim or Rakhine area)	Nb of IDPs located in the vicinity	Increase in area pop.
Kaung Doke Kar	Rohingya Muslim	1,363	Muslim	1,296	95%
Thet Kay Pyin Zay	Rohingya Muslim	12,295	Muslim	15,998	130%
Ohn Taw Gyi	Rohingya Muslim	2,383	Muslim	7,200	302%
Pyin Shey (Musl.)	Rohingya Muslim	1,425	Muslim	0	0%
Taw Kan	Buddhist Rakhine	832	Rakhine	0	0%
Zaw Bu Gyar	Buddhist Rakhine	339	Muslim	0	0%
Yae Chan Pyin	Buddhist Rakhine	1,250	Rakhine	0	0%
Thet Kay Pyin Ywar Ma	Kaman Muslim	1,470	Rakhine	0	0%
Total visited villages		21,357		24,494	115%

Focus and tools used

The assessment was designed to capture dynamics at community (rather than household) level. As such, the primary tools utilized were focus group discussions (one per village) and key informant interviews. In addition, enumerator observations as well as transect walks were also utilized. This allowed enumerators to assess village resources (lands, water sources, etc), general infrastructure (public service buildings, roads, etc) as well as gather overall impressions on the situation facing most households.

A guideline module was prepared (see Annex 1) to outline the minimum information to be collected in the course of the assessment. This module helped frame the discussion but enumerators were encouraged to probe deeper into important issues, even if it meant straying slightly from the guidance provided. Information was collected between December 19 and 25, 2012.

Figure 1: Location of villages assessed in relation to ethnicity and settlement “area”



Legend		Muslim Village Area	
Assessed Villages	Non Assessed Villages	Muslim Village Area	Estimated location of Camps
Rakhine Village Assessed	Non Assessed Rakhine Village	Estimated location of Camps	Railway
Muslim Village Assessed	Non Assessed Muslim Village	Road	
Kaman Village Assessed	Non Assessed Kaman Village		



Projection : Geographic Lat/Lon
Datum : WGS 84
WFP Map 2013

Main Findings

Current Context

As shown in Figure 1 above, Muslim¹ populations in the aftermath of the violence are now concentrated in the western part of Sittwe township, inside and around Muslim villages existing prior to the conflict. Displaced populations fled their homes either because their houses were burned and/ or residual tensions were elevated to an extent that the environment was not conducive to staying.

The eastern part of the township as well as Sittwe Town is now exclusively occupied by Rakhine populations. Rakhines² also experienced population displacements in the aftermath of the violence, but to a lesser extent than Muslim populations. Temporarily displaced Rakhines arrived in Sittwe town and the eastern part of the township immediately following the outbreak of violence but most were able to return to their home villages relatively quickly. As a result, in the Rakhine villages visited for this assessment, there were no IDPs reported.

There is some overlap between Rakhine and Muslim villages, as a limited number of Rakhines live in the predominantly Muslim areas in the western part of the township. A total of 6 Rakhine villages remain in the western part of the township³ as shown in Figure 1.

Tensions between communities remain very high across the township. As a consequence, Rakhines do not go into Muslim “areas”, with the exception of a very limited number of traders, and Muslims avoid Rakhine “areas”. As a consequence, Muslims remain unable to access Sittwe Town. At the time of the assessment, a township-wide curfew was in place between 10pm and 4am.

Security forces remain integral in maintaining peace. Sittwe town is guarded by the military and police. ““isolated””⁴ Rakhine and Muslim villages have a small number of military posted outside the village to prevent violence between groups. Finally, military forces are also in charge of security around IDPs camps, with Nasaka personnel from the base in Ohn Taw Gyi supervising the overall security situation.

The economy of Sittwe township is severely impacted, but still functioning

Historically, there have been complex socio-economic interactions between Muslim and Rakhine communities. Interactions, in the form of exchanges of goods and use of workforce, have in the past served to ensure that commodities circulate freely between communities and that labor is available for optimization of agriculture.

In terms of workforce interactions, a patron-client relationship has developed between the two communities, with Muslims providing the main labour force for Rakhine agricultural and economic activities. This dynamic developed because of issues with land division between communities and

¹ For purposes of this report, “Muslim” will essentially refer to Rohingya Muslim

² For purposes of this report, Rakhine will essentially refer to Buddhist Rakhine

³ There are 7 of such villages shown on the map but one of them (Hman Zi) was abandoned and IDPs have not returned.

⁴ For purposes of this report, “isolated” villages refer to either Rakhine or Muslim villages which are situated amongst villages of different ethnicities (ex. Rakhine villages situated amongst Muslim villages/ Muslim villages situated amongst Rakhine villages).

government policies which increased the proportion of Muslim families without productive means. This has also led a significant proportion of Muslim families to seek non-agricultural, casual labour opportunities in Sittwe town.

The eruption of violence in June and October of 2012 significantly disrupted these interactions, severely affecting the economy. With elevated levels of mistrust and fear between communities, Rakhine traders have been less willing (or able) to interact with Muslim traders, restricting the flow of goods between communities. This has resulted in price increases, particularly for non-food⁵ commodities (clothing, petrol, etc). Likewise, Rakhine farmers are also less willing (or able) to hire Muslim casual labourers to tend to crops, thus reducing work opportunities, lowering purchasing power and constraining productivity. Muslim non-agricultural casual labourers are also now unable to access work opportunities in Sittwe as it would not be safe.

The cessation of these economic interactions has thus created a ripple effect, disrupting many facets of the economy. The lack of labour for Rakhines and thus work opportunities for Muslims has limited productivity in both communities. With livelihoods and incomes reduced, purchasing power has declined, leaving many unable to afford basic food needs. This has lowered demand in the marketplace and forced farmers to sell goods at lower prices. Given the combined pressures of lower productivity and depressed food prices, farmers are increasingly unable to pay back loans which were accrued to purchase agricultural inputs. The inability for farmers to pay back debts will have impacts beyond the next farming season, likely resulting in lower production for the foreseeable future.

The asset loss experienced during the violence and continued impact of generalized insecurity in the area only exacerbates the situation. The fishing sector, one of the pulling factors of the township economy, is perhaps most impacted by this. Many villages reported that boats and other fishing assets were destroyed, lost or stolen. Without assets, these fishermen have been unable to resume their livelihoods. For those who did not lose assets, movement restrictions (which limit access to fishing grounds), curfews (which limit time spent on fishing grounds) and increased Navy presence (and the reported taxation that accompanies their presence) is currently hindering productivity. Continued displacement and the unstable security environment are also impacting aquaculture activities, as villages have reported loss of shrimp ponds.

Despite this rather pessimistic appraisal of the situation, this assessment offers positive news that, while admittedly quite limited, exchanges of goods still occur between Muslim and Rakhine traders, ensuring that at least a minimum of economic activity is maintained. These interactions are occurring in 2 key places:

- Thea Chaung village/ marketplace: Thea Chaung borders Sittwe town and remains a mixed Muslim/ Rakhine village, as traders from both communities continue to buy and sell from each other. Goods then flow from Thea Chaung to other villages in the predominantly Muslim area of Sittwe township, with mobile traders playing a key role.

⁵ Food prices have actually decreased, to the dismay of farmers. This is blamed on lack of demand (due to very low purchasing power) and to the large influx of food assistance into the area.

- Thet Kay Pyin Zay village and Marketplace: Thet Kay Pyin Zay is a Muslim village. People from surrounding villages purchase directly from this market and mobile traders from this marketplace visit more remote villages.

Local production, such as rice, vegetables, etc., can be found at both markets, as both Rakhine and Muslim villages take advantage of these continuing commodity flows to maintain a small income.

Displacement and livelihood constraints are stretching resources in the western part of the Township

Alongside significant livelihood constraints (discussed above), certain non-displaced Muslim populations have to cope with substantial IDP populations in the vicinity of their village (see Figure 2). Among the 5 Muslim villages assessed, displaced populations reside in or around 3; namely Ohn Taw Gyi, Kaung Doke Ka and Thet Kel Pyin Zay.

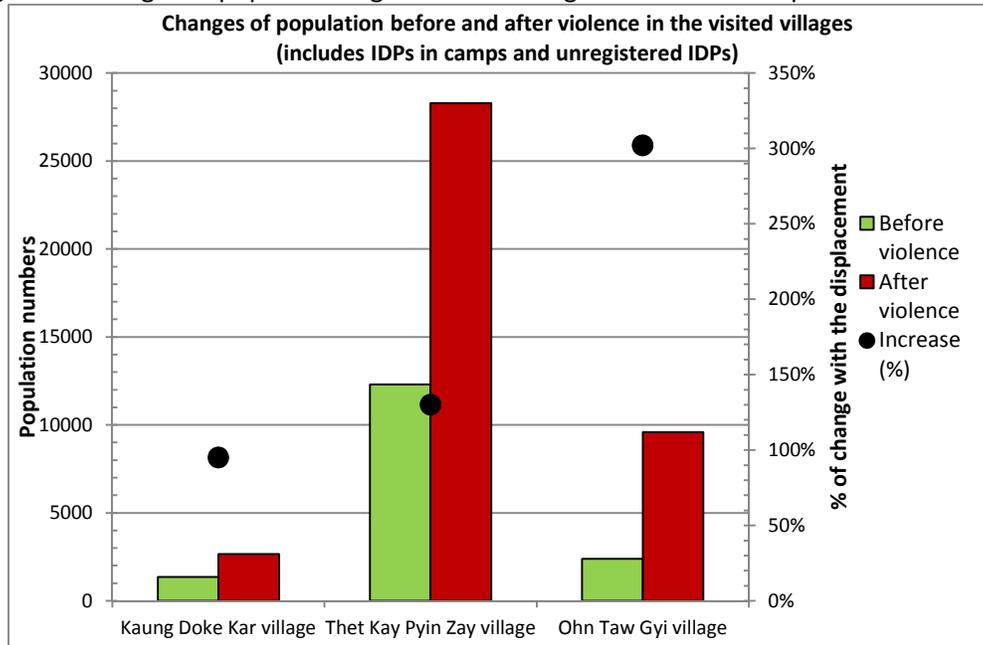
The presence of IDP populations is placing additional strains on village livelihoods and is requiring village resources (which may be just sufficient to cover needs in normal times) be stretched to meet the needs of both villagers and IDPs, resulting in shortfalls across the board.

Farmers and casual workers are the most affected by the presence of IDPs. Table 2 details the extent of their livelihood displacement.

Box 1: Types of IDPs in Rakhine

There are two types of IDP populations in Rakhine, “Registered” and “Unregistered”. Registered IDPs reside in official IDP camps recognized by the government. These IDPs receive regular food and non-food assistance from the international community. “Unregistered” IDPs, by contrast, are being hosted by villagers (with the largest population seen outside Thet Kay Pyin Zay) and thus live outside of recognized camps (often staying in schools or along the side of the road). “Unregistered” IDPs do not receive assistance from the international community, leaving them largely reliant on donations from host villagers and external religious organizations. As a consequence, living conditions for “unregistered” IDP populations are not good, with most living in small huts made of straws and pieces of tarpaulins.

Figure 2: Changes of population figures in the villages of the western part of the Township



Farmers

In terms of farming, the construction of IDP camps on agricultural land was reported to be a primary constraint for crop, and particularly paddy, production during the 2012 monsoon season. This constraint alongside violence and security-related impacts on farming⁶ has the potential to result in significant reductions in paddy production for the next cultivation cycles in 2013. As table 2 indicates, farming livelihoods were most disrupted in Thet Kay Pyin Zay and Ohn Taw Gyi villages, which are both located near large IDP populations.

The continued presence of these IDPs on paddy lands will soon become a factor for the next monsoon crop as well. Thus, impacts on production are likely to be long-term.

Casual labourers

The presence of large IDP populations near villages is resulting in increased competition with villagers for, already scarce, casual work opportunities. Increased competition also translates into lower wages, with casual workers in Kaung Doke Kar reporting wages as low as 500 MMK per day for work including carrying bags or food commodities, construction / land clearing or working in vegetables plots.

⁶ Generalized impacts of the violence on the agricultural sector include 1) continuing inability to access farmlands due to security concerns; 2) inability to repay loans contracted for the 2012 monsoon season due to production losses and depressed food prices and 3) inability to access new inputs, due to movement restrictions, lack of income and lower overall availability of inputs.

Table 2: Share of livelihoods in the Muslim “areas” before and after the conflict, by numbers of HH conducting and % of change

Livelihoods		Ohn Taw Gyi village - 495hh	Thet Kel Pyin Zay village - 2050hh	Kaung Dok Kar village - 217hh	3 villages combined
Farming	Before	80	50	50	180
	After	40	10	50	100
	Difference	-50%	-80%	0%	-44%
Casual work	Before	100	700	167	967
	After	0	300	60	360
	Difference	-100%	-57%	-64%	-63%

Even with these additional livelihood constraints, villagers continue to share resources with IDP populations, despite the fact that resources are insufficient to meet needs. The most common resources shared with IDPs include the following:

Food

Villagers report providing certain food items to IDP populations on a sporadic basis to help diversity diets, as external assistance (provided either by the international community or religious-based organizations) provides a limited food basket. In cases where assistance was insufficient to cover needs, villagers also share staple foods with IDPs to help cover shortfalls. Reliance on villagers for staple foods was most often reported in villages that were hosting “unregistered” IDPs, as these populations were reliant on religious-based assistance which tended to be more irregular than assistance delivered by the international community or government. Most host villages reported religious-based assistance only one or two times in the months preceding the survey.

Given irregular assistance to host communities and the burden on these communities to cover IDP shortfalls, a key recommendation of this assessment is to address the problem of “unregistered” IDPs. A first step would be to conduct a survey of “unregistered” IDPs to clearly identify the reasons for not being registered and assess the extent to which they are receiving regular food assistance.

Firewood

Firewood availability was reported as one of the main constraints in villages near IDP settlement areas. The doubling in the population size has led to a rapid use of available resources, which has left villagers without sufficient cooking fuel. To make matters worse, displaced people have no resources to procure firewood on the markets and it is not regularly provided to IDPs by the international community. Likewise, there was no external provision of firewood provided to affected villages. Instead, IDPs and villagers were reportedly coping with firewood shortfalls by foraging railway sleepers.

As resources dwindle, it will be important to monitor interactions between villagers and IDPs, as tensions may develop. To prevent this, it may be necessary to redefine rules on the use of available resources.

Box 2: Case studies detailing reliance of “Unregistered” IDPs on host communities

“Mr. Mohammed” heads a family of 8. He lived in Thinganet village before the violence, working as a daily wage labourer on construction sites in Sittwe Town. Other family members worked as Trishaw drivers. The combined household income was 4,500 MMK/ day, which was sufficient to meet their daily needs.

The onset of violence changed the situation immediately. “Mr. Mohammed” and his family were confined to the village for security reasons and were thus unable to continue their livelihoods, resulting in a complete loss of income. After several days, resources and particularly food became scarce and authorities suggested that the villagers relocate to safer areas where they could receive assistance. Thus, “Mr. Mohammed” and his family relocated to Thet Kay Pyin Zay Village, residing initially at the village’s government school and later in make-shift camps on the outskirts of town.

While “Mr. Mohammed” and his family have benefitted from assistance provided by both external and internal Muslim organizations (which is funneled to villages and IDPs by decision-makers in Thet Kay Pyin Zay), the assistance is sporadic and limited mainly to rice, with each person receiving 0.5 tins/ person /day whenever assistance is provided (≈125g/person/day). Thus, “Mr. Mohammed” indicated that they were reliant on farmers in Thet Kay Pyin Zay to provide the commodities needed to round out the food basket, including complementary commodities like vegetables and additional rice when necessary. This continues to place strains on the community, as a portion of local production is needed to meet IDP needs.

“Mrs. Than Than” is married and the mother of two children. She lived in the Bumay Quarter in Sittwe prior to the violence. Her family was relatively wealthy prior to the violence, owning a shop and 8 trishaws. Daily income was around 15,000 MMK and they never had problems accessing food, health care or any other needs.

With the onset of the violence, the Bumay Quarter was burned and her family was forced to flee, first to Da Bine village and later to her mother-in-law’s house in Kaung Doke Kar village. “Mrs. Than Than” reported that they lost all possessions in the fires, including their house, trishaws and shop. Upon arrival at her mother-in-laws house, she was forced to sell her jewelry in order to contribute to the income of the household. As these assets have now been sold, the entire household is completely reliant on donations from external actors (i.e. Muslim organizations) and farmers in the community as well as small gifts from neighbors. Again, this reliance on local farmers and more well-to-do households is stretching the capacity of Kaung Doke Kar village, particularly as farmers were only able to cultivate 25% of their land in average in 2012, affecting production, trade and casual work opportunities.

Fear is a significant livelihood constraint in “isolated” Rakhine communities

While population movements post violence have created clear Muslim and Rakhine “areas”, six Rakhine villages remain in the Muslim “area” (see Figure 1⁷). Findings from one of these villages, Zaw Bu Gyar, indicate that security concerns remain a major constraint to resumption of normal livelihoods activities. In the case of Zaw Bu Gyar, villagers are heavily reliant on Sittwe town for both casual work as well as sale of agricultural products. At the time of the assessment, however, villagers remained afraid to travel to Sittwe, as they have to pass near Muslim villagers to do so. This fear has forced them to change their behaviors, with traders only willing to make the trip to Sittwe during daylight. As a result, they arrive late at the market, often after peak time which impacts the price at which they can sell their products.

⁷ The map actually shows 7 Rakhine villages in the Muslim “zone” but Hman Zi village is now abandoned, as Rakhines relocated to safer areas.

Villagers also mention that they are likely to face difficulties in the resumption of normal agriculture activities, especially during the next monsoon season when casual workers will be needed. Farmers here usually contracted workers from surrounding Muslim villages, which is very unlikely to happen if tensions and mistrust remain at the current levels. Finding willing Rakhine labourers to fill the void will be just as difficult, as these workers would be fearful of working near Muslim villages.

In addition, as in other visited places, problems with reimbursement of loans contracted for the last monsoon season were repeatedly mentioned. Current inability to pay back debts alongside the fact that farmers will likely need to contract new debts for the next monsoon season has the potential to trap farmers into more and more severe debts cycles. This will have long term repercussions on food production and overall access to food.

Table 3 presents the difference of livelihoods shares before and after the conflict in the visited village.

Table 3: Share of livelihoods in Zaw Bu Gyar village before and after violence

Zaw Bu Gyar village (96 HH)	Before conflict	After conflict
Farming	45hh - 47%	45hh - 47%
Fishing	26hh - 27%	26hh - 27%
Casual work	55hh - 57%	25hh - 26%

Impacts extend to seemingly “secure” villages, in the eastern part of the Township

Finally, assessment findings indicate that Rakhine or Kaman⁸ villages located in seemingly secure Rakhine areas are also impacted by the current unrest, despite the fact that few (if any) experienced any violence first hand. Findings from these villages (Taw Kan, Yae Chan Pyin and Thet Kay Pyin Ywa Ma) point to disruptions in the agricultural and fishing sectors as well as lower availability of casual work and lost opportunities in terms of petty trading.

The agricultural sector has been impacted by a combination of factors. First, production was disrupted briefly by population displacements. After both waves of violence (in June and October), small numbers of displaced people (<200 households) sought refuge in each village. Support was provided by host communities (in the form of food and shelter), with IDPs housed on farmlands. As the displacement was short-lived, IDPs were quickly able to return home. This allowed cultivation to resume straight away, resulting in only small-scale production losses.

Secondly, low commodity prices are impacting farmers’ income, which in turn is impacting the capacity of farmers to reimburse debts accrued from the previous monsoon season. Lower incomes and higher debts equates to less investment on farmlands in the future cropping seasons, which will likely have long-term implications on productivity. At present, prices are so low that farmers prefer to maintain higher stock levels, rather than sell their goods. As in other areas, farmers attribute the low rice prices to lower demand (lower purchasing power, lower trading) and the influx of external food assistance.

⁸ Kaman people are Muslim and live in Rakhine. They speak Rakhine language and have citizenship.

The fishing sector has been constrained due to the existing curfew and the extensive naval presence. Fishermen usually go to sea for several days at a time, spending nights on the boat. With the curfew in place, this is currently not possible. Likewise, the naval presence serves as a disincentive. To cope with the situation, fishermen are more reliant on fishing nearer to the village, in rivers and creeks.

Certain fishermen in Yae Chan Pyin and Taw Kan village also reported lost fishing assets (boats, nets, etc) during the unrest. In Yae Chan Pyin, nets were left unaccompanied on the shore/ riverbanks as fishermen were afraid to leave the village. When fishermen returned to collect them they were missing, having either been stolen or taken away by the tides. Fishermen in Taw Kan reportedly lost boats which they stored in Sittwe. In both villages, affected fishermen report difficulty recovering from these losses.

Table 4: Livelihoods share, before and after the conflict in Rakhine “areas” of the township

Livelihoods		Taw Kan village (153hh)	Yae Chan Pyin village (295hh)	Thet Kel Pyin Ywa Ma village (295hh)
Farming	Before	50	10	150
	After	50	10	150
	Difference.	0%	0%	0%
Fishing	Before	40	150	20
	After	20	50	15
	Difference.	-50%	-67%	-25%
Casual work	Before	75	40	60
	After	35	15	60
	Difference.	-53%	-63%	0%
Petty trade	Before	0	50	0
	After	0	0	0
	Difference.	0%	-100%	0%

As in much of the rest of the township, casual workers in these Rakhine villages are facing difficulties finding work. Availability of jobs in Sittwe (carpentry, fishing sectors) has drastically reduced as has local work opportunities.

A depressed fishing sector combined with an inability to maintain shrimp ponds (that are located too close to Muslim areas) has also heavily affected petty traders in Yae Chan Pyin. In normal times, traders would travel to Sittwe to sell locally-produced fish and shrimp and return to the village with goods from Sittwe. Now, fish and shrimp yields are low, leaving little to trade.

Programmatic implications

The economy of Sittwe Township has been severely impacted by the two waves of communal violence that swept through the area in mid-to-late 2012. The historic economic inter-dependence of Muslim and Rakhine populations has ensured that impacts are felt across both communities and across all livelihood groups. This said, the magnitude of affectedness as well as the way in which communities are impacted clearly differs depending on ethnicity, location and the particular situation of the village (host community e.g.). Certain Muslim villages, for instance, not only suffer from generalized economic paralysis, but they have the increased pressure to share their dwindling resources with large IDP

populations located on their doorstep. Certain Rakhine villages, by contrast, remain afraid to resume their normal livelihood activities, as the pursuit of these activities requires them to move outside of the safety of their own village.

The following sections look specifically at community specific needs and outlines a series of potential multi-sectoral programmatic responses that may help alleviate the situation to some extent. Most of the proposed responses are aimed at addressing immediate needs or at spurring the local economy in order to provide more opportunities for people throughout the township. These are short-term measures and admittedly do not address the larger political or social issues that will need to be tackled to find a lasting solution.

Muslim villagers

Muslim villages suffer from a lack of job opportunities and continuing movement restrictions. Muslim communities with large IDP populations suffer from the additional burden of having to share village resources with a large number of displaced persons. While a political solution would be required for a return to normalcy, the following programmatic responses could help in the short-term:

Provision of firewood to villages and IDPs: This will provide the obvious benefit of ensuring that all households have sufficient cooking fuel, thus ensuring that tensions do not arise between host and IDP communities. It will also alleviate environmental concerns, as there will be less pressure existing resources.

Provision of inputs to restore small-scale livelihoods (fishing, agriculture, etc): In villages where productive assets have been destroyed, the possibility of re-stocking should be examined, as it would enable livelihoods to be restarted and would potentially have quick benefits for communities.

Support recovery activities that aim to increase community assets, provide employment to casual workers and spur market activity: As casual labour opportunities are quite limited, options for Cash-for-Work activities should be explored. The provision of cash (in lieu of food) would also increase demand at marketplaces (thus increasing prices) and encourage greater interaction amongst communities..

Address remaining information needs: As the presence of IDPs is stretching resources of host villages, an appropriate assessment of the capacities of villages to absorb such population increases should be conducted. This assessment should focus on the impacts on crop production (as IDP camps are often located on paddy fields), food availability (as host communities periodically have to share food items with IDP populations) and water (as water is likely to become more scarce as the dry season progresses).

Rakhine villages (including “isolated” villages)

Secure and “isolated” Rakhine villages are both suffering from the crippled economy, though “isolated” Rakhine villages have the additional pressures of living in a constant state of fear, which erode livelihood options further. While economic improvement and resumption of normal activities require a reduction of tensions and a recognition of economic interdependence, the following programmatic responses could help bolster existing livelihood activities in the near-term:

Provision of inputs to restore small-scale livelihoods (fishing, agriculture, etc): In villages where productive assets have been destroyed, the possibility of re-stocking should be examined, as it would enable livelihoods to be restarted and would potentially have quick benefits for communities. This may be particularly relevant in Rakhine villages, as these villages reported significant asset losses (including fishing assets, shrimp ponds, livestock, etc).

Support the provision of incentives to farmers to encourage the hiring of casual labourers: Problems of access to labour were reported as a constraint throughout Rakhine areas. Incentives for farmers to contract available workers should be looked at, to bolster agricultural production and casual work opportunities.

Rehabilitate community assets to provide job opportunities and support livelihood recovery: As fish and shrimp ponds were reportedly damaged (due to lack of proper maintenance in the midst of the tensions), there are needs for rehabilitation. This and other similar activities could also be supported by Cash-for-Work activities.

Address debt issues among farmers and facilitate access to inputs for future cropping seasons: It has been reported that farmers are having difficulty repaying agriculture loans (taken from Department of Agriculture). This could be directly addressed by proposing means to farmers to repay their loans (allowing farmers to negotiate the loan reimbursements with lower interest, etc.). High debt levels, limited incomes and scarcity of inputs have also made it difficult for farmers to afford seeds, fertilizers and pesticides for future cropping seasons. This could be addressed by provision of inputs or by linking farmers with suppliers and facilitating access to credit.

Address fishermen concerns regarding the township-wide curfew: Fishermen will not be able to resume activities as normal until the curfew is eased and the military presence at sea is reduced. The timing of this, however, should be informed by security needs.

Address remaining information needs: The assessment highlighted complaints from farmers that rice prices were lower than normal. This was attributed to low demand as well as the significant influx of external assistance flowing into the township. It is necessary to have a closer look at markets dynamics and assess capacity of local production to provide, even in part, for the needs of affected people. This could potentially result in a larger role for cash assistance to affected populations.

Displaced populations:

While IDPs were not the focus of this assessment, several clear programmatic implications emerged in the course of the survey:

Tackle the problem of “Unregistered” IDPs and look for ways to ensure registration: Displaced families clearly show the highest level of vulnerabilities as they are entirely reliant on external assistance and have lost access to their regular livelihoods. However, among the displaced groups, the assessment highlighted the need to focus on a portion that is not recognized as IDPs and therefore not receiving regular external assistance, such as the general food distributions.

These families moved following the conflict because of high levels of tensions and fear, sometimes at the behest of authorities. They preferred to relocate to other villages as security in their villages could not be assured. They currently do not live in officially recognized IDP camps but instead now reside in precarious conditions within, or in proximity of, villages. While the loss of livelihoods experienced by these populations is similar to what IDPs living in camps experienced, needs appear to be greater.

Continue general food distributions while seeking alternatives to support local market and diversify food intakes: There is little indication as to when or even whether IDPs will be able to return to their villages of origin. As they remain entirely dependent on external assistance, it is necessary to continue providing regular food assistance covering basics needs.

In addition, assistance should be expanded to focus on developing small scale livelihoods opportunities for displaced populations. Options to extend access to food are limited but seasonal activities such as vegetables production (bag farming), river fishing and fish breeding (in existing ponds) might have the potential to both improve food access and availability and generate small incomes. Obviously, access to water will be a key determinant for the settlement of such activities.

Finally, the assessment also highlights that markets are still running and food items are currently available. If local markets continue to be running and if displaced groups have access, cash transfers to IDPs have a potential to support the local economy and the “host” villagers food production activities while possibly diversifying food intakes.

Provision of firewood should also be explored as there are concerns on the capacity of the area to support increased extraction of the resource over the longer-term.