KEY INDICATOR REPORT

Report 01

KAREN SOCIO-ECONOMIC HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

A Karen family on the way to work on their fields taken by Blessing Thaw

October 2023

foreword

The Karen Socio-Economic Household Survey (KSEHS) is the first-ever comprehensive assessment of the wellbeing of people living across Kawthoolei's seven districts in southeast Burma/Myanmar. The survey was conducted during some of the most challenging times for the people of Kawthoolei since World War II. The ongoing attacks of the Myanmar Army, including indiscriminate artillery shelling and air attacks, have led to significant negative impacts on peoples' livelihoods and wellbeing and have resulted in the displacement of over half a million people throughout Kawthoolei since February 2021. We are launching this report at a time of significant suffering and hardship for the people of Kawthoolei and the people of Burma/Myanmar as a whole.

The survey provides reliable, accurate, and up-to-date data that can be used to inform policies and programmatic interventions for the future development of Kawthoolei, as well as addressing humanitarian needs. It also establishes a baseline for future surveys in order to measure progress over time. This Key Indicator Report is the first in a series of reports drawing from the KSEHS that will be produced by the Karen Economic Committee Secretariat (KECS) and technical partner organizations.

We are grateful for the generous financial support to conduct this survey by our international partners, as well as for the technical assistance provided by our trusted advisors and partners. I would also like to give sincere thanks to the Karen Economic Committee, its Secretariat, respective Karen National Union (KNU) departments, as well as all seven District Administrations for their role in implementing this important survey.

We hope that the report will assist KNU policy and decision makers, as well as civil society and trusted development partners in policy making and designing relevant program interventions and strategies for the people of Kawthoolei.

P'doh Saw Tah Doh Moo
Chairman of the KNU Central Economic Committee

acknowledgements

The 2023 Karen Socio-Economic Household Survey (KSEHS), carried out by the Karen Economic Committee and its Secretariat (the KECS), is the first-ever multi-topic household survey of its kind for Kawthoolei. The gathering and interpretation of socio-economic data falls under the mandate of the KECS. This Key Indicator report presents the initial findings of the survey from Kawthoolei's seven districts.

The successful implementation of the KSEHS was made possible through the support of a range of actors during the design and implementation phase. We would like to thank the Executive Committee, all District Administrations, the entire KECS team, the data processing staff, the technical advisors and especially the 73 enumerators for their tireless efforts to make the survey process a success. The enumerators took significant personal risks during the implementation of the survey on the ground, operating often in conflict-affected areas and across frontlines. Their commitment to the people of Kawthoolei speaks for itself.

This report presents some of the initial findings across the eight different categories of the KSEHS. Further thematic as well as geographic reports will follow in the coming year. We sincerely hope that the information in this report will assist policy makers, civil society, development partners and the private sector in designing interventions to improve the wellbeing of the people living throughout Kawthoolei.

P'doh Saw Thaw Thi Bwe
Secretary of KNU Central Economic Committee

Saw Sakda Pawsoe
Deputy Head of KNU Economic Committee Secretariat

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

CDM Civil Disobedience Movement

EHO Ethnic Health Organization

KDHW Karen Department of Health and Welfare

KECD Karen Education and Culture Department

KECS Karen Economic Committee Secretariat

KNU Karen National Union

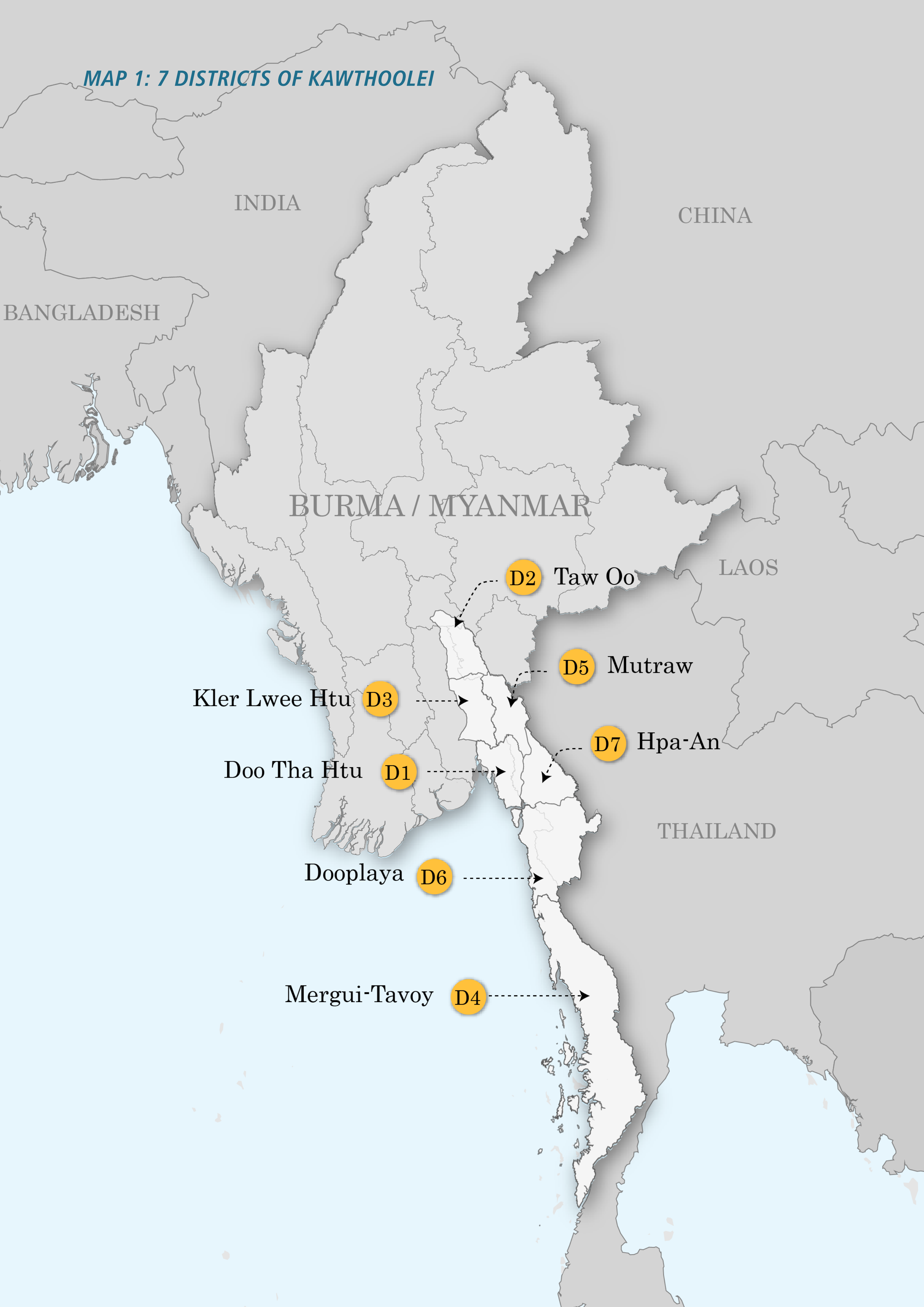
KSEHS Karen Socio-Economic Household Survey

MLCS Myanmar Living Conditions Survey

MMK Myanmar Kyat

SAC State Administrative Council

USAID United States Agency for International Development


MAP 1: 7 DISTRICTS OF KAWTHOOLEI
INDIA
CHINA
BANGLADESH
BURMA / MYANMAR
LAOS
THAILAND
D2 Taw Oo
D5 Mutraw
Kler Lwee Htu D3
D7 Hpa-An
Doo Tha Htu D1
Dooplaya D6
Mergui-Tavoy D4

Introduction

This report is the first in a series of analytical products that will be produced using the information collected in the 2023 Karen Socio-Economic Household Survey (KSEHS). The objective of this report is to provide the reader with highlights from the survey and to provide a snapshot of the overall socio-economic living conditions of people in Kawthoolei during 2022/23.

The key findings of the KSEHS are summarized below and grouped into 10 sections focusing on demographics, living conditions, education, livelihoods and health.

While the survey results present the socio-economic living conditions of people living in Kawthoolei during 2022/2023, it needs to be acknowledged that the ongoing armed-conflict is having a significant negative impact on peoples' lives. It is estimated that over 500,000 people have been displaced due to indiscriminate attacks by the Myanmar Army throughout Kawthoolei since the February 2021 coup.

The KSEHS does not specifically collect information on newly displaced populations, who may have significantly different lived experiences and needs as a result of their displacement.

It is hoped that the evidence-based information will assist policy making, the improvement of public services and the development of relevant interventions to reduce poverty.

Methodology

The KSEHS was originally drafted in English, then translated into Burmese and Karen, with back translation to English to ensure the accuracy and precision of the survey questions. The primary objective of the survey was to gather a contemporary understanding of the socio-economic and living conditions of the people in Kawthoolei. Outcomes of interest included indicators for key demographic characteristics, living conditions, income, expenses and debt, education, health, agriculture and telecommunication. From November 2022 to March 2023, the KSEHS was conducted with 6,475 household representatives (3,152 male (48.7%) and 3,323 female (58.3%) respondents) across Kawthoolei, in all seven of the KNU's Districts: Doo Tha Htu, Taw Oo, Kler Lwee Htu, Mergui-Tavoy, Mutraw, Dooplaya, and Hpa-An. The survey enumerators requested that the household representatives respond to the questions on behalf of all members of the household. In addition to household-level indicators, the household representative was asked to enumerate the individuals living in their household and provide information on demographics, employment, education and pregnancy (as applicable).

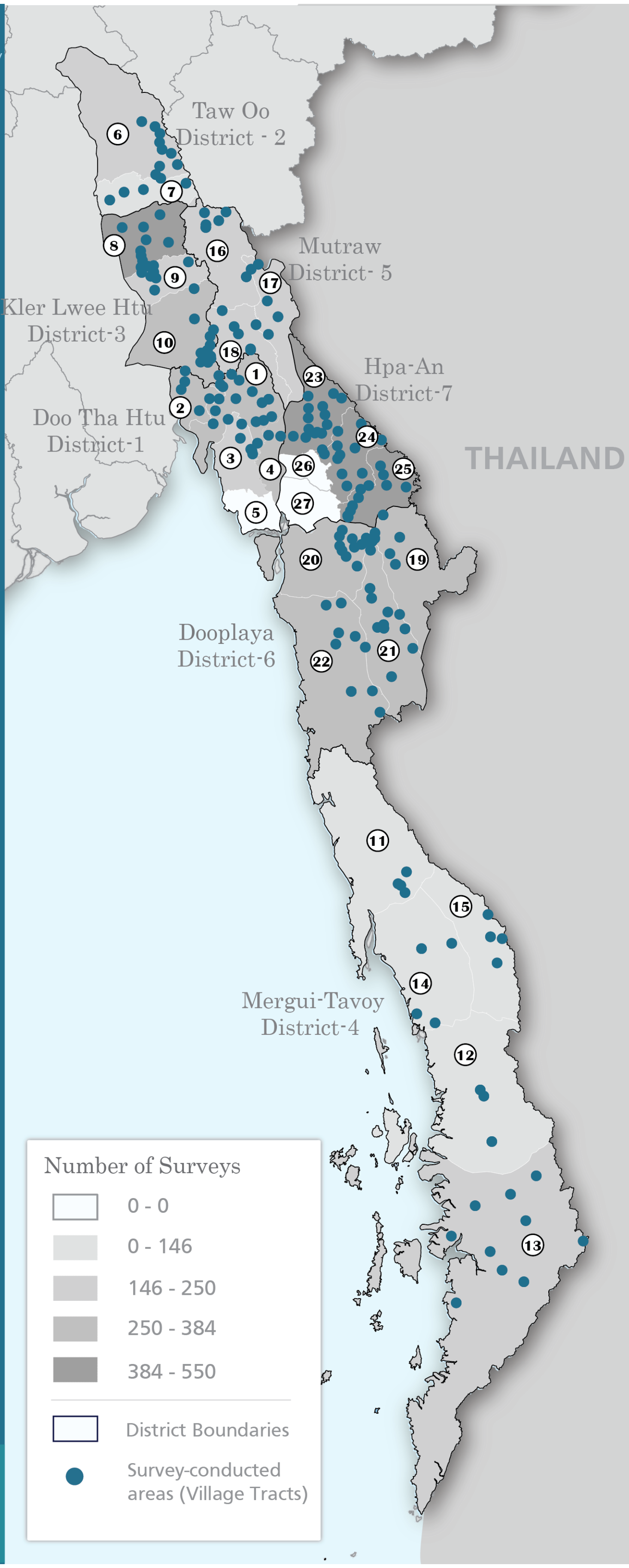
A multi-stage sampling strategy was designed to conduct surveys in all seven districts of Kawthoolei. The total sampling frame of 1,248,871 individuals (202,302 households) was constructed based on population data collected by KNU administrators at the district and township levels. Each of the 27 townships in the KNU's administrative area were selected to be included in the sampling frame, with the number of clusters in each proportioned to the total population size of the township. Unfortunately, information could not be collected from 3 of the 27 total townships: Paung, Tilon and Du Yaw, due to security reasons. The surveys intended for those areas were equally redistributed among other townships in the same district.

Based on relative population size, clusters (defined geographically by the KNU's delineated village tracts) were selected randomly from within each township; within each selected cluster, 50 households were selected to be included in the survey by proximity sampling. The survey was administered by enumerators recruited from each of the townships in the sampling frame, who participated in training workshops to familiarize themselves with the data collection methodology and ethics protocols prior to the commencement of the data collection period. Written informed consent was collected from each household prior to proceeding with the questionnaire.

MAP 2: LOCATIONS OF THE KAREN SOCIO-ECONOMIC HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

	No of Survey
1. Doo Tha Htu District	
1 Bilin Township	280
2 Kyaikto Township	287
3 Thaton Township	250
4 Hpa-An Township	205
5 Paung Township	0
2. Taw Oo District	
6 Daw Pha Koh Township	178
7 Htaw Ta Htu Township	145
3. Kler Lwee Htu District	
8 Mone Township	461
9 Ler Doh Township	217
10 Hsaw Hti Township	301
4. Mergui-Tavoy District	
11 Ler Doh Soe Township	119
12 Ler Mu Lah Township	120
13 (Tanawthari + Ler Ka Soh) Township	237
14 Ka Ser Doh Township	90
15 Htee Mo Bwar Zone Township	55
5. Mutraw District	
16 Lu Thaw Township	178
17 Bu Tho Township	204
18 Dweh Loe Township	200
6. Dooplaya District	
19 Kawkareik Township	350
20 Kyondoe (Kru Tu) Township	334
21 Noh Ta Kaw Township	383
22 Win Yin (Worray) Township	384
7. Hpa-An District	
23 Lu Pleh Township	550
24 Ta Kreh Township	500
25 Ta Nay Cha Township	447
26 Tilon Township	0
27 Du Yaw Township	0

TOTAL SURVEYS **6475**



1 Population and Demographics

It is estimated that in 2022/2023, there are approximately 1.25 million people under KNU administration, living in 202,302 conventional households. This population data were collected by and received from respective KNU District and Township Administrations, prior to the administration of the survey. Table 1 below shows the estimated number of individuals and households for each of the seven districts in Kawthoolei which are currently under KNU administration.

TABLE 1. ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS AND TOTAL POPULATION IN KAWTHOOLEI

DISTRICT	# of HOUSEHOLDS	# of INDIVIDUALS	% of TOTAL POPULATION
Doo Tha Htu District (D1)	36,456	194,085	15.54%
Taw Oo District (D2)	11,967	62,506	5.01%
Kler Lwee Htu District (D3)	33,035	185,821	14.88%
Mergui-Tavoy District (D4)	19,732	124,014	9.93%
Mutraw District (D5)	18,478	116,273	9.31%
Dooplaya District (D6)	56,558	278,589	22.31%
Hpa-An District (D7)	49,184	287,583	23.03%
Total KNU (7 Districts)	202,302	1,248,871	100.00%

1.1 HOUSEHOLD SIZE

The survey estimates an average of 5.4 people living in each household in Kawthoolei. The average household size varies somewhat across the districts, reflecting in part regional differences in fertility rates. The three northern Karen Districts (Taw Oo, Kler Lwee Htu and Mutraw) show the overall highest average household size number, as seen in Figure 1.

Overall, the average household size reported in Kawthoolei is higher than the average household size in Burma/Myanmar, which was estimated to be 4.3 people in 2017 (Myanmar Living Conditions Survey (MLCS) 2017) and 4.4 people in 2014. (Census 2014).

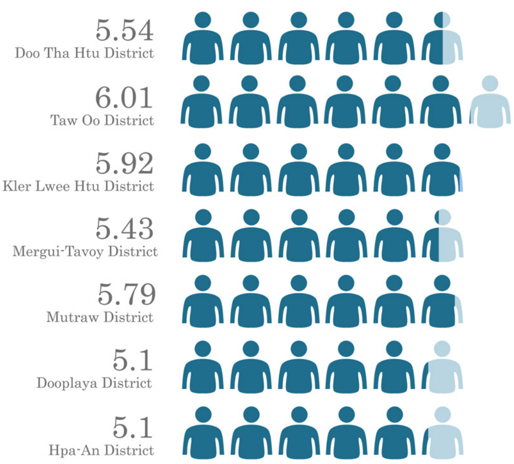


FIGURE 1: AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE BY DISTRICT

1.2 POPULATION AGE-SEX PYRAMID

A population age-sex pyramid was created based on the demographic information collected for all individuals in the households surveyed in the KSEHS, and can be seen below in Figure 2. The population pyramid is expanding widely at the base and narrowing near the top, indicating a high birth rate and a low life expectancy, which are often expected among populations in under-developed areas. From this figure, it is evident that the majority of the population of Kawthoolei is relatively young. A drop in the total population in the age group from 0-5 years however, could indicate a drop of the birth rate, or a higher under-five mortality rate during the last five years. This could potentially be an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, or of the unfolding violence and insecurity following the February 1, 2021 military coup, which also led to significant displacement throughout Kawthoolei and may have impacted fertility.

The high population under 20 years of age indicates that there is a need for labor force development in order to support a comparatively larger co-hort of Karen coming into the workforce. For instance, a stronger workforce can provide an opportunity to increase Kawthoolei's Gross Domestic Product. However, to prepare the youth for entering the workforce, formal education and vocational training need to be strengthened.

1.3 ETHNICITY AND RELIGION

The overwhelming majority of individuals (92%) surveyed identify as Karen, an ethnolinguistic group of Tibeto-Burman-speaking people, with the most belonging to the S'gaw or Pwo sub-ethnic groups. The second largest group of people identified as ethnically Bamar (4.5%), followed by Shan (1.1%), Mon (0.6%) and Pa-O (0.5%).

The majority of individuals surveyed place their religious affiliation with Buddhism (69.4%) followed by Christianity (25.1%), Animism (3.7%), Islam (0.8%) and others (0.9%).

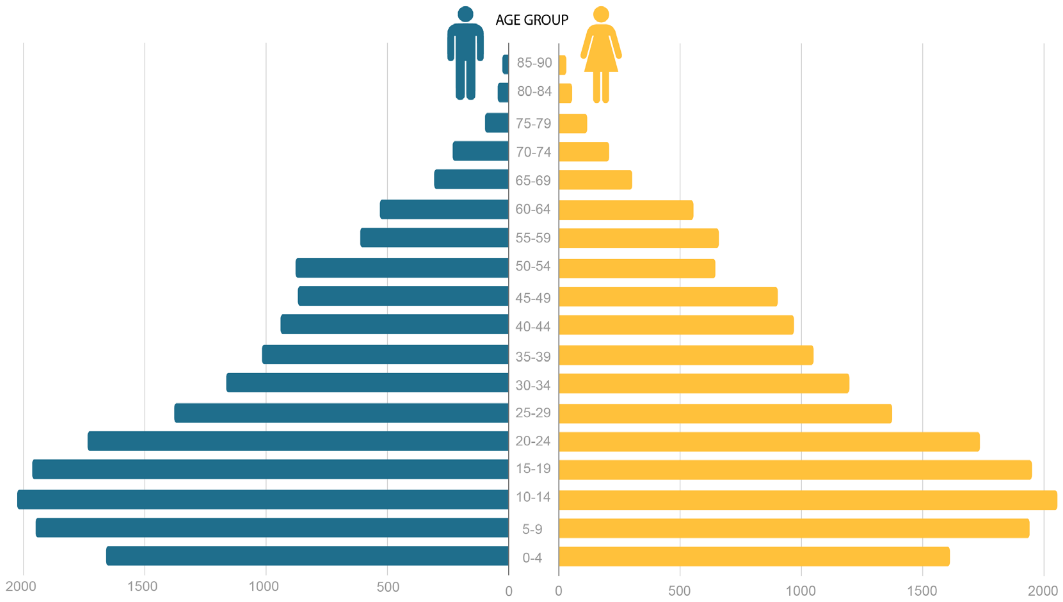


FIGURE 2: AGE-SEX PYRAMID OF ALL INDIVIDUALS SURVEYED, LIVING IN CONVENTIONAL HOUSEHOLDS IN KAWTHOOLEI

1.4 DISPUTES AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

To gain deeper insights into community cohesion and social dynamics, KSEHS inquired with household representatives about any recent inter-household social disputes within the community over the past 12 months. Interestingly, only a handful of such cases were reported. Over 98% of households responded that there were no recent disputes or disagreements between their household and others in their community. Among those who claimed to have experienced a dispute or disagreement (2%), most were related to land issues (31%), rumors and gossip (24%), drug/alcohol abuse (14%) and business issues (9%). The overall low rates of social disputes between households indicates high social cohesion within local communities.

2 Housing Materials and Assets

The proportion of respondents asserting ownership of their residential property was remarkably high, at 98%, as seen in Table 2. In comparison, the 2019 Myanmar Intercensal Survey found that 90% of households were owner occupied. However, caution should be taken since the KSEHS did not distinguish between home and land ownership, or whether homeowners had registration for their land. Nevertheless, the high percentage of households owning their own home is advantageous for the resilience of families in coping with the recent economic upheavals.

TABLE 2. HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE OWNER-OCCUPIED IN KAWTHOOLEI

Households that are Owner-Occupied - Yes	6,363	98%
Households with Non-Occupying Owner - No	111	2%

As previously mentioned, the KSEHS found an average of 5.4 people living in each household in Kawthoolei, with each district having an average household size larger than the average household size in Burma/Myanmar. However, the KSEHS found over 65% of households have one or less rooms for sleeping, indicating a poor level of housing quality and overcrowding. The distribution of the number of rooms used for sleeping across households in Kawthoolei can be seen below, in Figure 3.

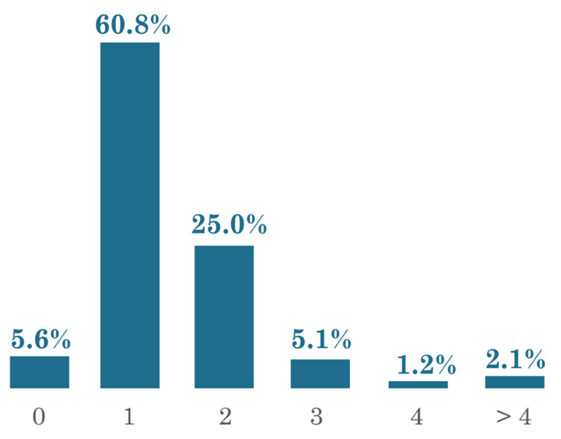


FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF BEDROOMS IN THE HOME

The material used in the construction of a home is frequently used as a measure of housing quality and overall socio-economic status. In the collection of data for the KSEHS, enumerators observed the material of the floor, roof, and wall of each home, scoring them as either natural, simple, or finished. The results are shown in figures 4 to 6 below.

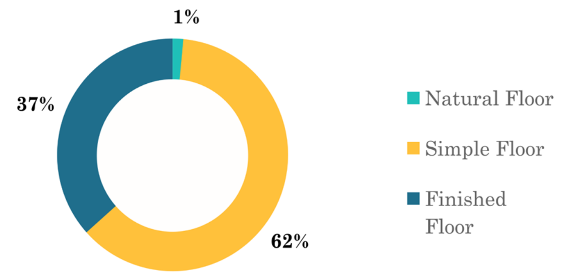


FIGURE 4: MATERIAL OF THE FLOOR OF THE HOUSE

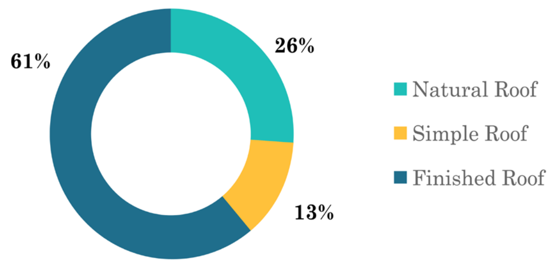


FIGURE 5: MATERIAL OF THE ROOF OF THE HOUSE

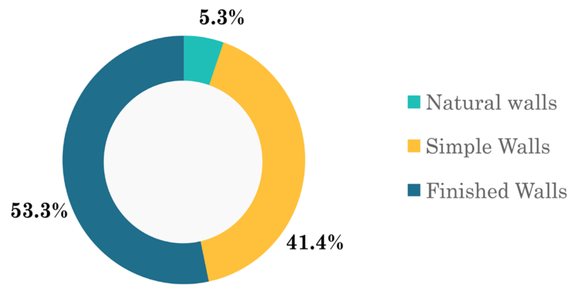


FIGURE 6: MATERIAL OF THE WALLS OF THE HOUSE

Compared to the results of the MLCS shown in Table 3, the biggest variation with the KSEHS is with the flooring of dwellings. Only 37% reported having finished flooring in the KSEHS whereas the MLCS reported quality flooring of over 77% in all regions in the southeast. This larger difference could be due to the categorization and subjective nature of establishing between simple or quality materials. The materials used for walls and roofs do appear well aligned between the MLCS and KSEHS. The MLCS did, however, report large regional variations, further geographic analysis will be conducted on the KSEHS to provide a greater comparison in follow up reports.

TABLE 3: HOUSEHOLDS WITH QUALITY DWELLINGS ACCORDING TO MLCS RESULTS

Percentage of households with dwellings a quality wall, floor and roof by urban/rural and States and Regions				
	Quality Wall	Quality Floor	Quality Roof	All Three
Bago	33.7	77.3	82.7	31.9
Kayin[1]	78.3	91.1	80.2	69.5
Mon	76.3	92.7	78.2	70.1
Tanintharyi	66.8	91.8	41.3	36.1

In many cases, people living in poverty may not have access to quality building materials and may have to rely on cheaper natural materials such as mud, banana leaf, or straw, or simple materials like corrugated iron sheets. It is important to note that the construction material of homes is not always a reliable indicator of poverty, as it can also depend on other factors such as location and cultural preferences. Nevertheless, quality of housing is an important factor in measuring multi-dimensional poverty and the use of housing construction material remains one of the best indicators for measuring poverty.

The household ownership of assets to facilitate transportation, communication or other daily activities can be indicative of quality of life, and socio-economic status. As another measure of affluence, and indicator to multi-dimensional poverty, the KSEHS aimed to ascertain the ownership of various assets by each household. The majority of households reported ownership of a motorcycle (70%) and a mobile phone (77%).

Overall, there were considerably fewer household assets reported in the results of the KSEHS, than those reported in the MLCS 2017, in which households in Kayin State reported ownership of TVs (61% vs. 15%), charcoal stoves (47% vs. 15%), rice cookers (32% vs. 5%), and gas stoves (10% vs. <1%) at much higher rates than they were reported across Kawthoolei in the KSEHS. The MLCS also reported that Kayin State had the largest percentage of households reporting car ownership in Burma/Myanmar at 14%; however, the KSEHS reports less than 10% ownership. The only assets more commonly reported in the KSEHS responses was for motorcycle, which was 10% higher. Although there are five years difference in the sampling between the two surveys, these differences are more likely due to the KSEHS having a more rural sampled demographic, than the MLCS.

1 "Kayin State" is the term used in the MLCS to denote the area surveyed. The KNU does not use this term and the boundaries of Kayin State are different to the boundaries of Karen State (Kawthoolei).

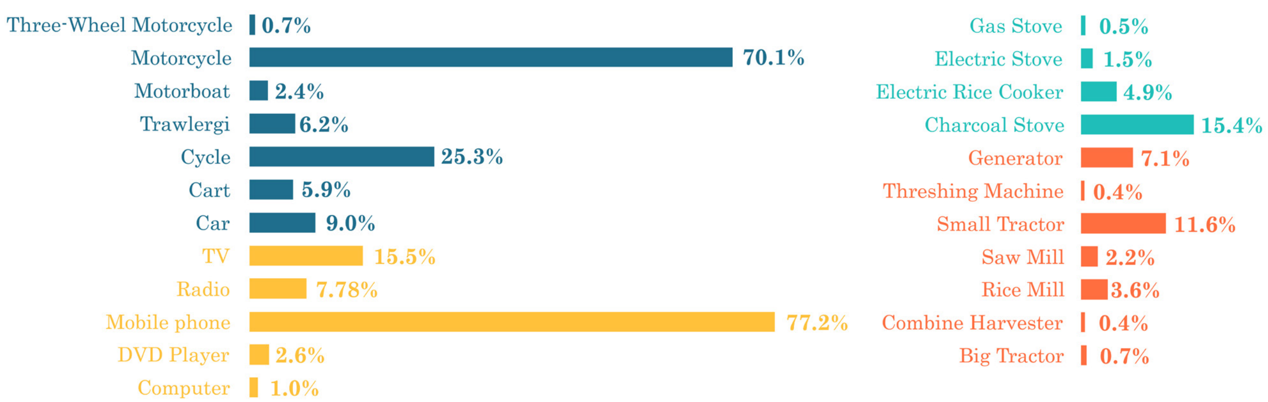


FIGURE 7: ASSETS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Children at recess time taken by Saw Dellin Htoo

3 Education and Language

3.1 LEVEL OF EDUCATION

When assessing education, participants were asked whether they had a primary, middle school, high school, monastic education, or none. Higher education was not surveyed. The majority of respondents, both over and under 18 years of age, had at least a primary level of education, with the second-highest response being "No Education". The rate of unschooled participants appears higher than that in the MLCS, where only 11.8% of rural adults over the age of 15 reported having no education. One key difference is that the results of these include all ages from 5-18, whereas the MLCS focused on the answers from individuals 15 and over and looked only at enrollment for children.

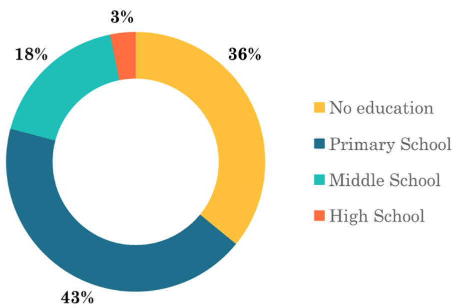


FIGURE 8: HIGHEST EDUCATION AMONG ALL SURVEY RESPONDENTS

3.2 ENROLLMENT

KSEHS respondents indicated whether they had attended school at any time. The highest attendance rates appear to be in Mutraw District, with Dooplaya District being second highest. Inversely, the lowest rate of attendance is in Mergui-Tavoy District, followed by Hpa-An District.

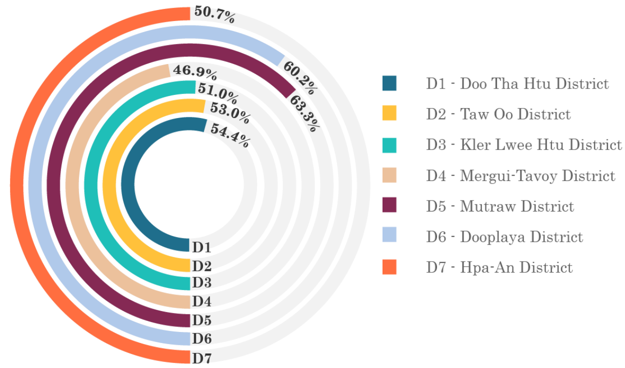


FIGURE 9: RATE OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AT ANY TIME DURING THE MOST RECENT SCHOOL YEAR (2022-2023)

Official figures obtained from the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) are quoted below:

TABLE 4: OFFICIAL KECD NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS FOR 2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR

No.	DISTRICT	Total # of Schools	Total # of Students (Primary Schools)	Total # of Students (Middle Schools)	Total # of Students (High Schools)	Total # of Students
2022-2023 Academic Year						
1	Doo Tha Htu District (D1)	151	5,456	5,516	3,891	14,863
2	Taw Oo District (D2)	103	3,125	2,453	2,660	8,238
3	Kler Lwee Htu District (D3)	101	2,304	2,228	1,880	6,412
4	Mergui-Tavoy District (D4)	65	2,949	724	1,070	4,743
5	Mutraw District (D5)	318	12,087	7,696	6,111	25,894
6	Dooplaya District (D6)	367	12,849	12,288	12,896	38,033
7	Hpa-An District (D7)	128	3,441	2,935	4,754	11,130
Grand Total		1,233	42,211	33,840	33,262	109,313

The results from the survey appear to correlate with the KECD's official numbers, as respondents from Dooplaya and Mutraw Districts self-reported the highest rate of attendance (see Fig. 9). The survey's lowest attendance was in Mergui-Tavoy District, and one possible reason could be that KECD only administered 65 schools in that district.

A number of reasons were given by participants as to why they did not attend school during the 2022-2023 school year. The most common reasons were conflict and security concerns (29.3%) and the COVID-19 pandemic (24.5%).

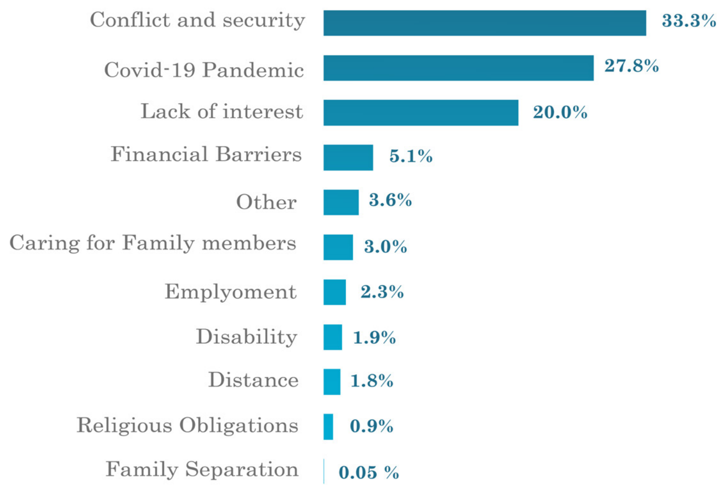


FIGURE 10: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL IN 2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR

When the results are examined by district, it is apparent that conflict and security concerns were a universal factor in education disruption, with the COVID-19 pandemic being more of a reported reason in some districts than in others. This discrepancy apparently exists because the conflict impacts some districts more than others. Furthermore, school closures due to COVID-19 were decided at the district level rather than the central KNU level.

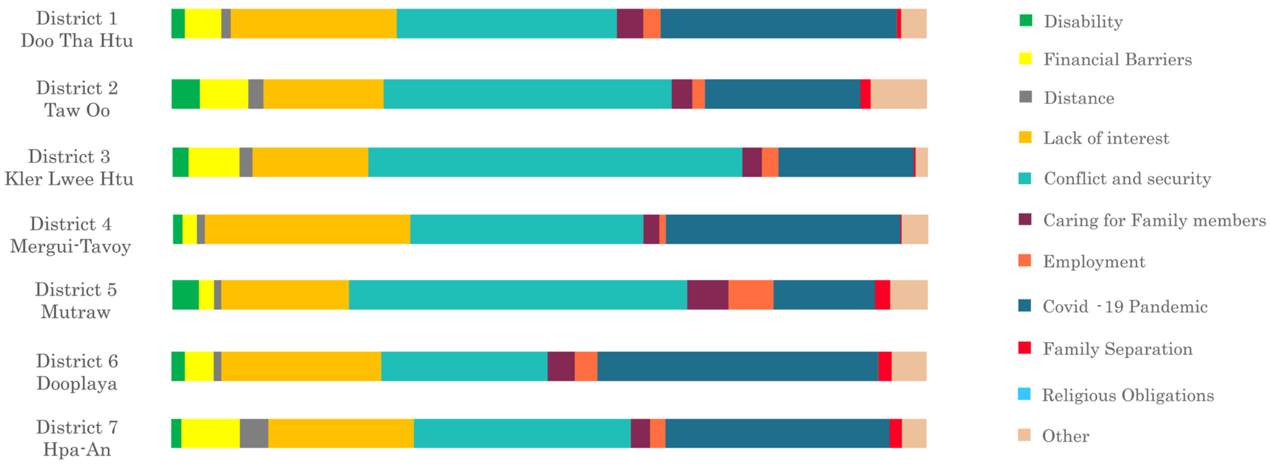


FIGURE 11: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL - BY DISTRICT (2022-2023)

Similarly, participants were asked whether they had attended school in the previous 2021-2022 school year.

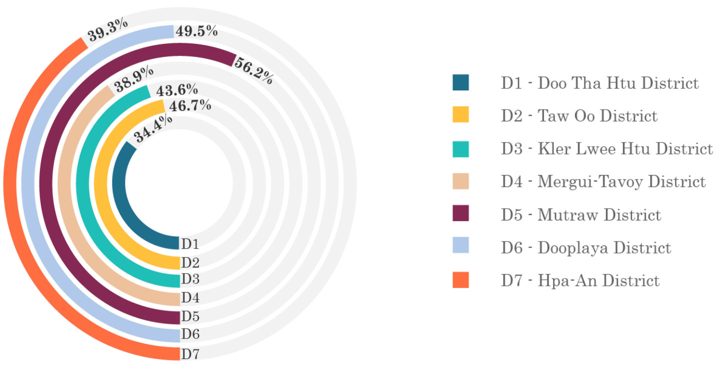


FIGURE 12: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE DURING 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

As shown above, the majority of participants indicated that they did not attend school at all in the previous year. Unlike the gender gaps reported in the MLCS, the margin between genders was not as defined with a <5% difference for those attending school and a <2% difference for those not attending school.

TABLE 5: OFFICIAL KECD NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS FOR 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR

No.	DISTRICT	Total # of Schools	Total # of Students (Primary Schools)	Total # of Students (Middle Schools)	Total # of Students (High Schools)	Total # of Students
2021-2022 Academic Year						
1	Doo Tha Htu District (D1)	140	6,881	3,979	2,543	13,403
2	Taw Oo District (D2)	80	3,262	1,263	1,353	5,878
3	Kler Lwee Htu District (D3)	86	1,939	1,816	1,541	5,296
4	Mergui-Tavoy District (D4)	72	3,608	554	689	4,851
5	Mutraw District (D5)	299	10,751	5,984	6,006	22,741
6	Dooplaya District (D6)	294	10,982	6,973	10,309	28,264
7	Hpa-An District (D7)	122	3,365	2,747	3,334	9,446
Grand Total		1,093	40,788	23,316	25,775	89,879

When contrasted with the data from the 2022-2023 school year, school attendance was demonstrably lower in the 2021-2022 school year, which is particularly visible in the Dooplaya District with 28,264 students in 2021-2022 and 38,033 students in 2022-2023. The reason for the sharp increase is twofold: Recovering from strict COVID-19 prevention measures and stabilizing the KNU Districts from the turmoil caused by the military coup. In conjunction with the second point, many people (both Karen and non-Karen) seeking refuge in Kawthoolei from other areas of conflict subsequently enrolled their children into KECD-administered schools, thus contributing to the increase.

When divided by age, participants aged five and aged between 14 and 17 faced the most disruption in education. In KECD-administered schools, the minimum age is 5[2] and the maximum age is 17-18.[3]

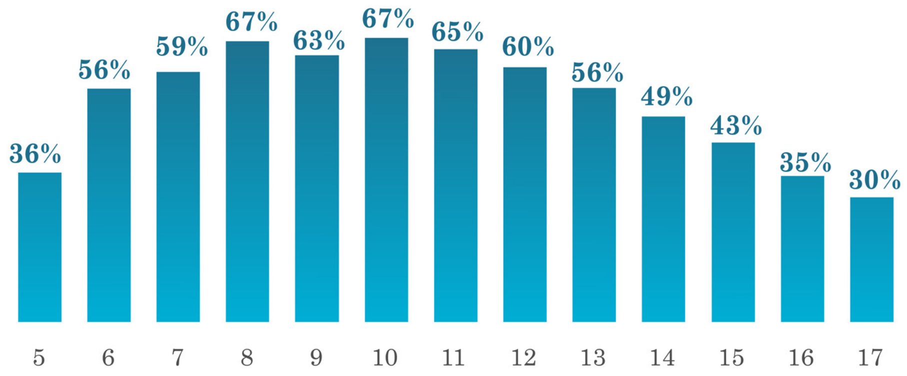


FIGURE 13: 2021-2022 ATTENDANCE, SEPARATED BY AGE

The most-common reported reason for not attending school in the previous year was the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as most education providers had formally closed their schools, making access to education for rural communities very difficult. Unlike the Burma/Myanmar government's mandate to close schools during the pandemic, however, the KNU never issued any mandate from a central level. That decision was left to District leaders.

2 According to a source in the KECD, some district schools will allow for children aged four to attend school under extreme circumstances, but the standard is to only admit children aged five.

3 18 year olds are not represented in the figure, because the sample size is too small.

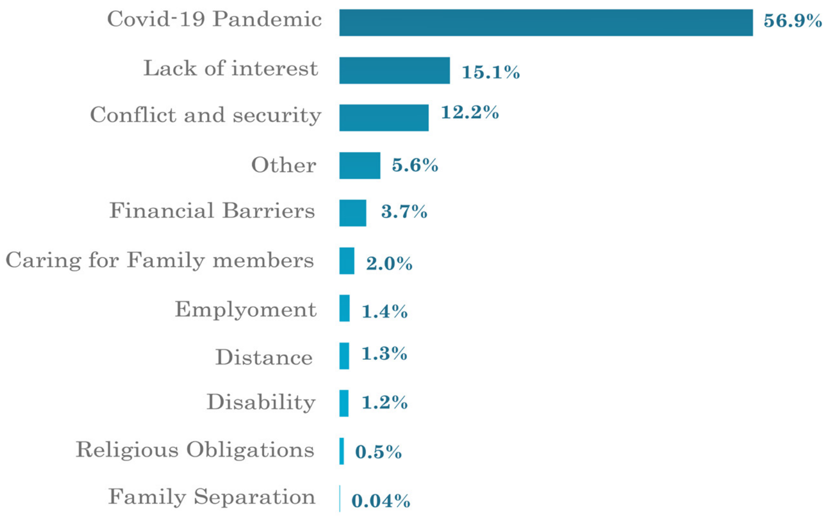


FIGURE 14: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL 2021-2022

The results are further delineated by district below:

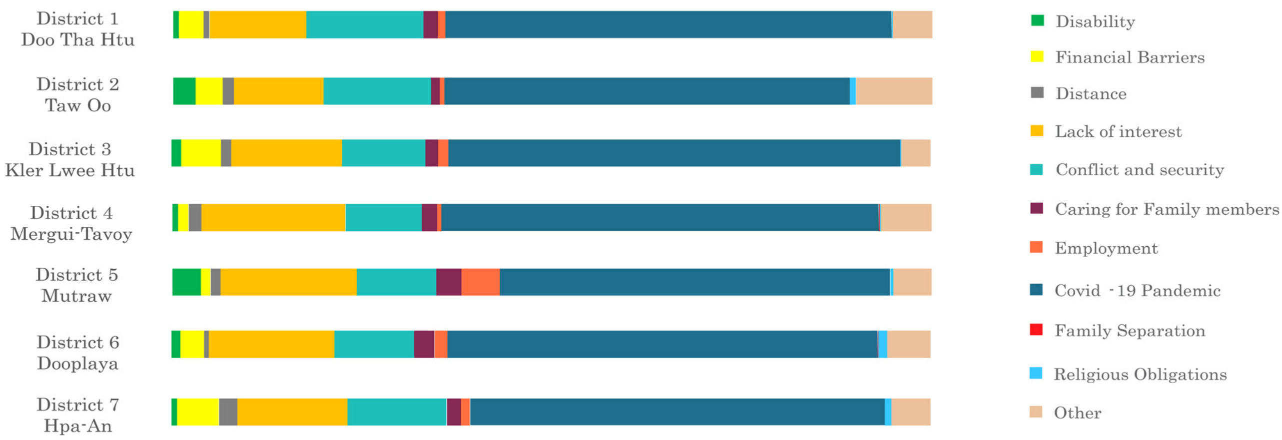


FIGURE 15: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL - BY DISTRICT (2021-2022)

One question asked in this HH survey, which was not asked by the MLCS, was regarding the primary educational provider of the area. In the majority of Burma/Myanmar, education is provided by the central government. However, in the KNU-administered area, as reflected by the results of this survey, many, if not most, of the educational institutions are operated by entities other than the SAC. The majority of respondents indicated that they were educated at institutions administered by the KNU. The second largest response was the SAC, which peaked at 57.2% and 56.3% in Mergui-Tavoy and Hpa-An Districts, respectively. Other educational providers included private institutions, mission schools, Buddhist schools, and self-help (tuition) centers.

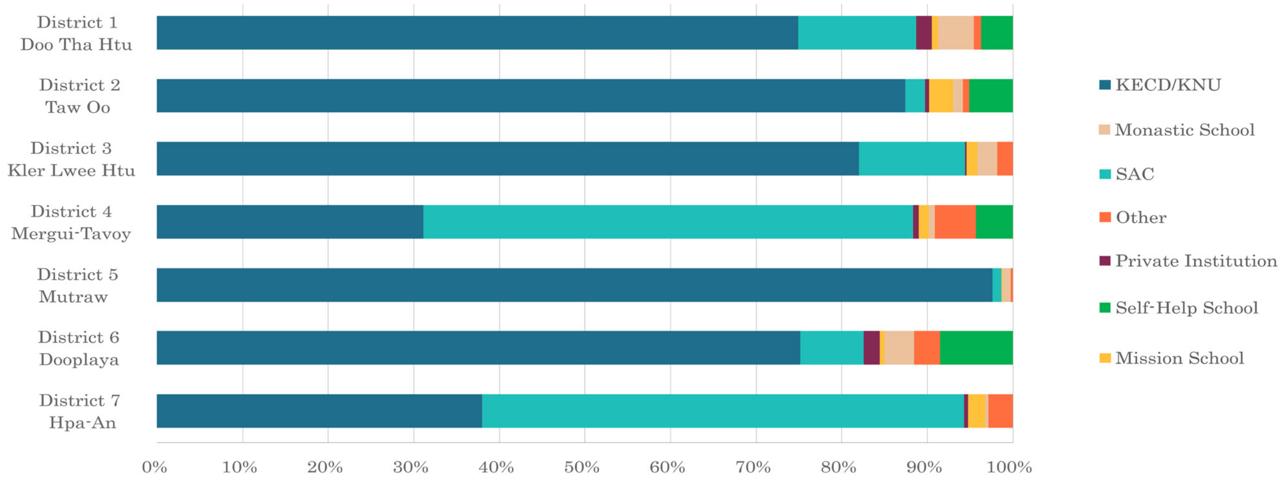


FIGURE 16: EDUCATION PROVIDER BY DISTRICT

3.3 LITERACY RATES

The majority of respondents indicated that they were literate in at least one language. This statistic is self-reported and was not tested with any educational or literacy assessment tools.

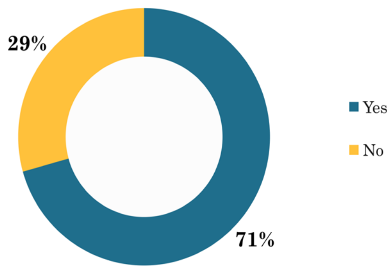


FIGURE 17: LITERACY RATE ACROSS KAWTHOOLEI (ALL INDIVIDUALS SURVEYED)

These self-reported results are comparable with the self-reported results from the MLCS, which put literacy in Kayin State at 75%, with only Shan State behind it at 65%. Besides their ethnicities, which are covered above, participants also reported their mother tongues, which are delineated below.

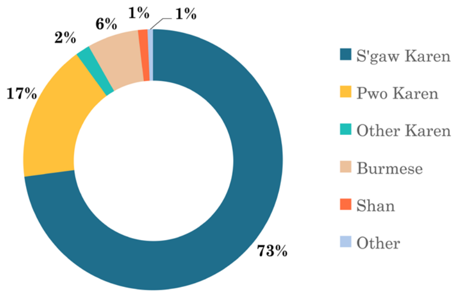


FIGURE 18: SPOKEN MOTHER TONGUE

The majority of participants speak S'gaw Karen as their mother tongue. S'gaw Karen is the most widely-spoken Karenic language in Burma/Myanmar. Pwo Karen was indicated as the second most-widely-spoken, mother-tongue language, with a wide margin of 56% between it and S'gaw Karen. Interestingly, while respondents who self-identified as ethnic Burmese made up for 4.5% of the total respondents, 6% of respondents indicate that Burmese is their mother tongue. This discrepancy could suggest a language shift: A voluntary or involuntary change from using an ethnic minority language in the home to Burmese.

Participants were asked whether a member of their household spoke a language other than the mother tongue. The majority of respondents said "No" (71%). The responses of those who answered "Yes" (29%) are represented below.

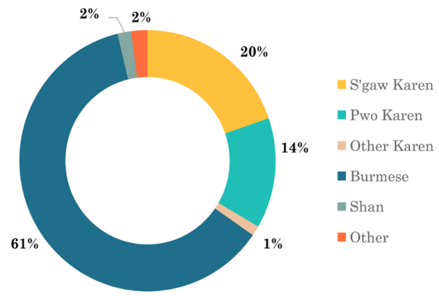


FIGURE 19: OTHER LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS ACROSS KAWTHOOLEI

These results demonstrate that Burmese is the most common second language (L2) in the area of the KSEHS. Assuming that the school attendance indicators are accurate, it appears that the use of the Burmese language is brought on by more factors than just education, i.e. business/trade, migration, and intermarriage.

Afterschool play time taken by Saw Dellin Htoo

4 Water and Sanitation

Most households interviewed in the KSEHS use either well water (42.7%), pipe water (30.1%), and flowing surface water (13.1%) as the main source of water for their household activities. A breakdown of the types of water sources used, by district, is shown below in Figure 20. The vast majority of households (96.4%) indicated that their main source of utility water is also their main source for drinking water. The KSEHS did not ask households if dug wells and springs were protected, but according to field observations, it can be assumed that a majority of these sources are unprotected. 50% of households stated that the main water-access challenge was related to seasonal water scarcity.

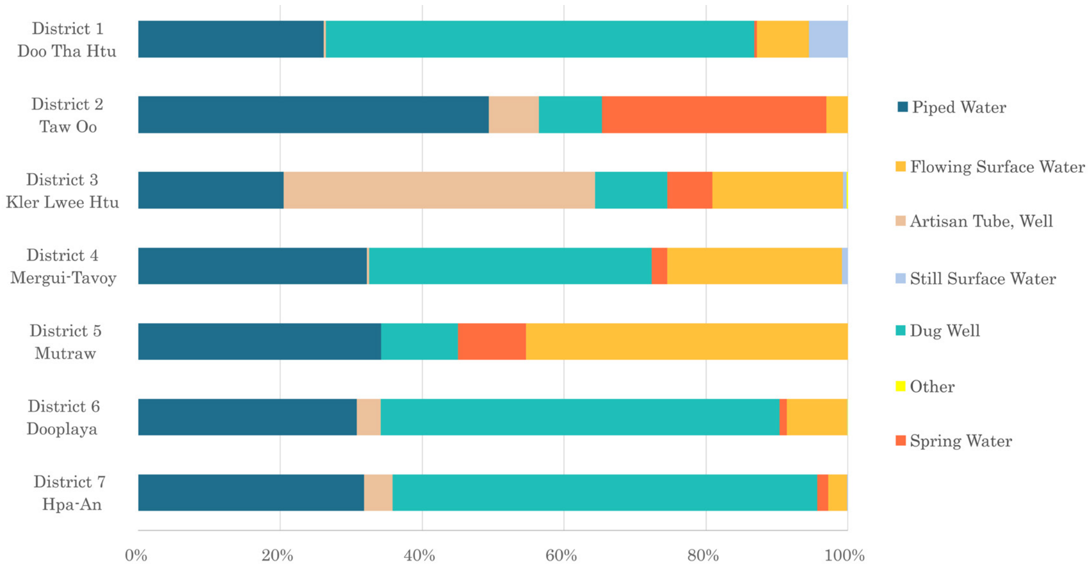


FIGURE 20: PRIMARY WATER SOURCES FOR DAILY ACTIVITIES IN EACH HOUSEHOLD, BY DISTRICT

Most households in Kawthoolei use pour-flush toilets (80%), but there are variations across districts, and there are still a significant number of households without a toilet. In Mutraw District, nearly half of households (48.4%) have no toilet facilities (open defecation) and in both Doo Tha Htu (27%) and Kler Lwee Htu Districts (23%) the percentage of households with no toilet facilities also remains high. Furthermore, 30% of respondents stated that they are using a toilet facility shared with other households. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 6.2.1, does not recognize/classify shared toilet facilities as improved sanitation.

In both the Census 2014 (24%) and MLCS 2017 (12%), Kayin State was the second worst performing state in terms of households without toilet facilities, only better than Rakhine State. These findings are in line with the KSEHS which had 1,057 (16%) households reporting no toilet facility.

Solid waste management does not seem to be practiced on a wide scale throughout Kawthoolei. The majority of households reported significant challenges in managing solid waste, with 78.2% of households reporting the burning of waste and 4.8% the dumping of waste into nearby water sources.

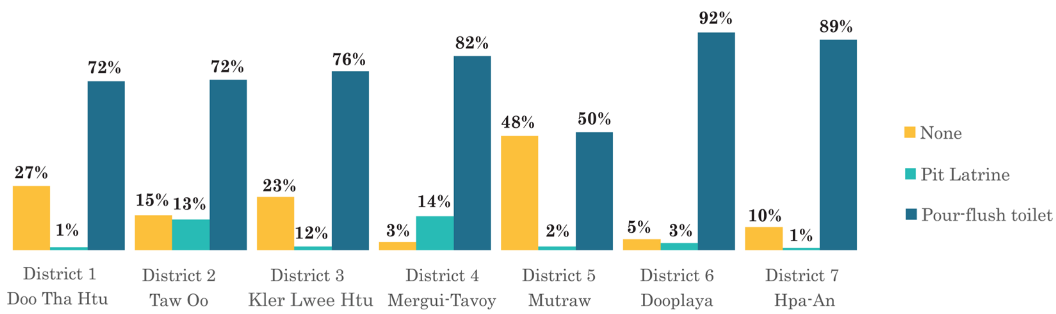
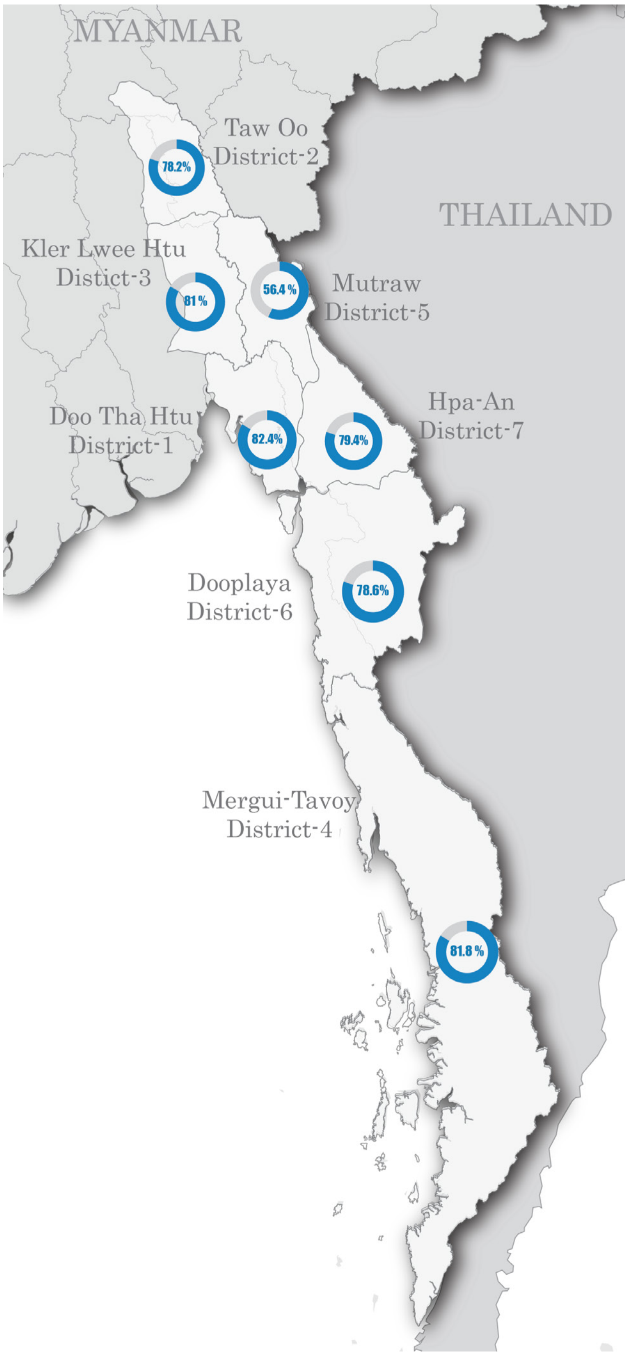


FIGURE 21: TYPES OF TOILET FACILITIES USED BY HOUSEHOLDS, BY DISTRICT

5 Technology: Mobile Phone, Internet, Computer



MAP 3: HOUSEHOLD MOBILE PHONE OWNERSHIP THROUGHOUT KAWTHOOLEI

Burma/Myanmar saw a rapid expansion of mobile phones since 2010. In 2017, the MLCS reported that 81.5% of households in Burma/Myanmar owned mobile phones, with 81.5% of urban households and 76.6% of rural households reporting mobile phone ownership. In Kawthoolei, the KSEHS reports that 78.1% of households own at least one mobile phone. Mutraw District has the lowest share of mobile phone ownership (56.4%), while Doo Tha Htu District (82.4%) has the highest percentage of ownership.

The KSEHS asked households to report whether they owned a smartphone or non-smartphone separately, allowing the survey to track what type of phones have access to data, and which phone service providers were being used. The survey reveals that smartphone penetration is extremely high, implying that households in Kawthoolei have moved directly to purchasing smartphones, leapfrogging earlier technologies. Among households that own mobile phones, 90% own smartphones. The ownership of computers or laptops was reported to be low (1.1%).

MPT (29.4%), Telenor (now Atom) (33.0%) and Mytel (27.8%) are the preferred mobile network providers throughout Kawthoolei with Ooredoo (2.9%) and Thai operators only playing a limited role. Thai mobile phone operators play a more significant role in Hpa-An and Mergui-Tavoy Districts. The usage of Thai mobile phone operators however depends much on communities' proximity to the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border and could be substantially higher in border areas.

6 Energy and Electricity

Data from the KSEHS show that access to the public electricity grid in Kawthoolei remains generally low, with only 11.3% of households reporting to have access. This is significantly lower in comparison to 24.7% in rural areas of Burma/Myanmar as reported in the MLCS 2017. There is no significant variation across the seven districts in the number of households that are connected to the public grid. Solar energy is the main electricity source with 84.2% of households reporting the usage of solar systems. These are most likely predominantly used as lighting sources, since most households reported using firewood (84.5%) and charcoal (14.7%) as the main fuel sources for cooking. This overreliance on biomass energy for cooking could contribute to high rates of deforestation and indoor pollution.

and alternatives such as community-level or private grids should be considered to support development. The MLCS 2017 reported that about 14% of Kayin State households relied on border grids to substitute for the public grid from Burma/Myanmar. It was also reported that Tanintharyi, which corresponds to Mergui-Tavoy District, has no access to the public grid and relied heavily on community grids to make up for that lack of access.

With solar the main source of power for 84% of households, it is unsurprising that the availability of electricity is limited. Data indicates the use of batteries to provide constant power is not widespread. In Figure 23 below, a breakdown in the frequency of access to electricity for households is provided.

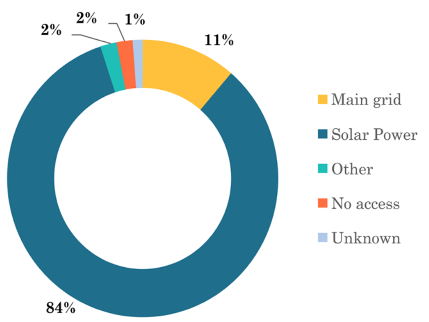


FIGURE 22: PRIMARY SOURCE OF HOUSEHOLD ELECTRICITY IN KAWTHOOLEI

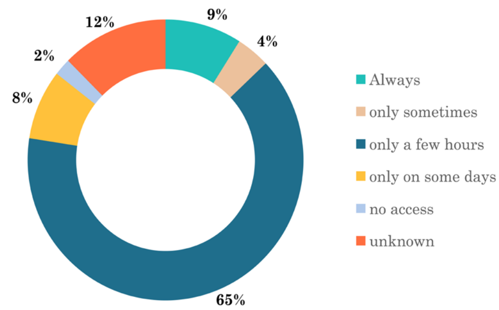


FIGURE 23: FREQUENCY IN ACCESS TO ELECTRICITY

Given the current socio-political situation in Burma/Myanmar and the ongoing conflict throughout Kawthoolei, it is unlikely that access to grid electricity will improve in the near future. Households will therefore have to continue to rely on solar systems for lighting

Interestingly, the primary challenge with electricity was not the intermittent nature of power supply, which only 8% noted as a problem, but rather the inadequacy of the power itself, which was reported by 47% of households.

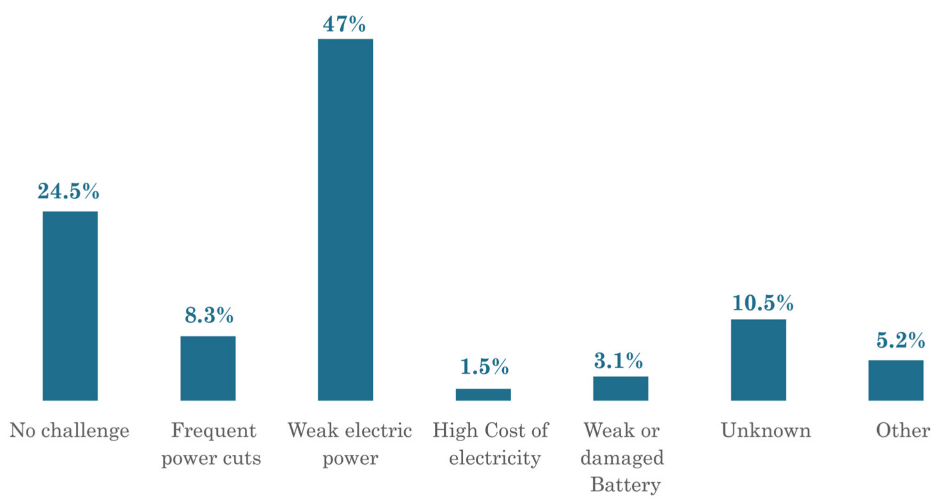


FIGURE 24: CHALLENGES WITH THE ELECTRICITY

Bamboo houses by the foothill of the Dawna Range taken by Saw Dellin Htoo

7 Labour Force Participation and Employment

7.1 LABOR FORCE SECTORAL PARTICIPATION

The overall labor force participation rate was at 52% in the three months preceding the collection of the data (2022-2023). Labor force participation rates vary to some degree between women and men; this most likely does not reflect a lack of activity among women but reflects a focus for women on domestic work. Women account for 50% of those aged 15 and above in the total population, but for only 46% of the labor force.

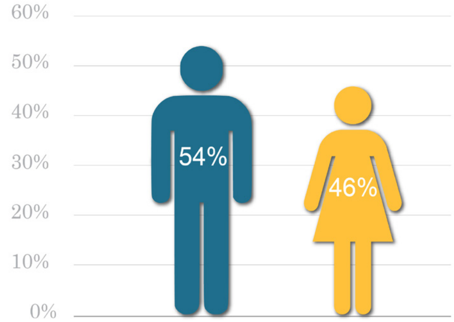


FIGURE 25: RATE OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE THREE MONTHS PRECEEDING DATA COLLECTION

Farming, livestock rearing, forestry and fishing are the most commonly reported labor activities throughout Kawthoolei. Over 68% of interviewed working people reported their labor activity in this sector. This represents a significantly higher percentage than the labor force participation in the agriculture and related sectors in Burma/Myanmar, which was reported in the MLCS at 50% in the dry season and 47% in the cool season.

Taw Oo District (93%) and Mergui-Tavoy District (92%) show the highest percentage of reported labor force being involved in the agriculture and allied sector. The construction sector plays a small role in Doo Tha Htu (16%) and Hpa-An (11%) Districts. The distribution of sectoral particiaption in the labor force by district can be seen below, in Figure 26.

The majority of interviewees reported that they are self-employed in the farming, livestock rearing, forestry and fishing sector (62%), while another 10% were self-employed in an off-farm sector, and 28% are wage-earning employees. Non-farm businesses remain small and informal throughout Kawthoolei and range from a single-person enterprise to a small/medium size company with hired employees.

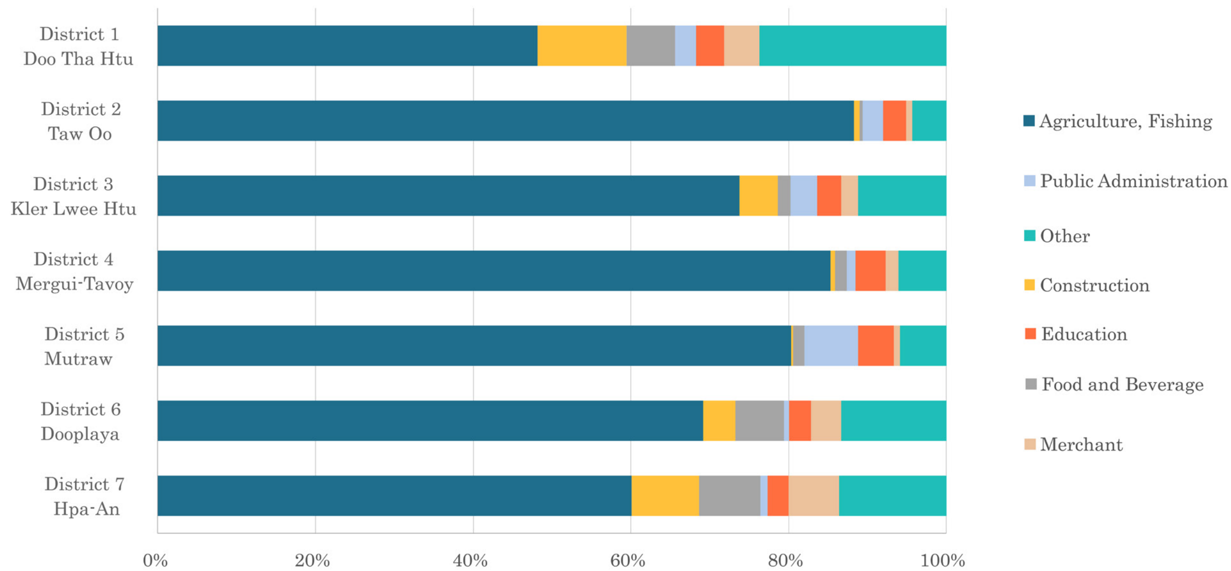


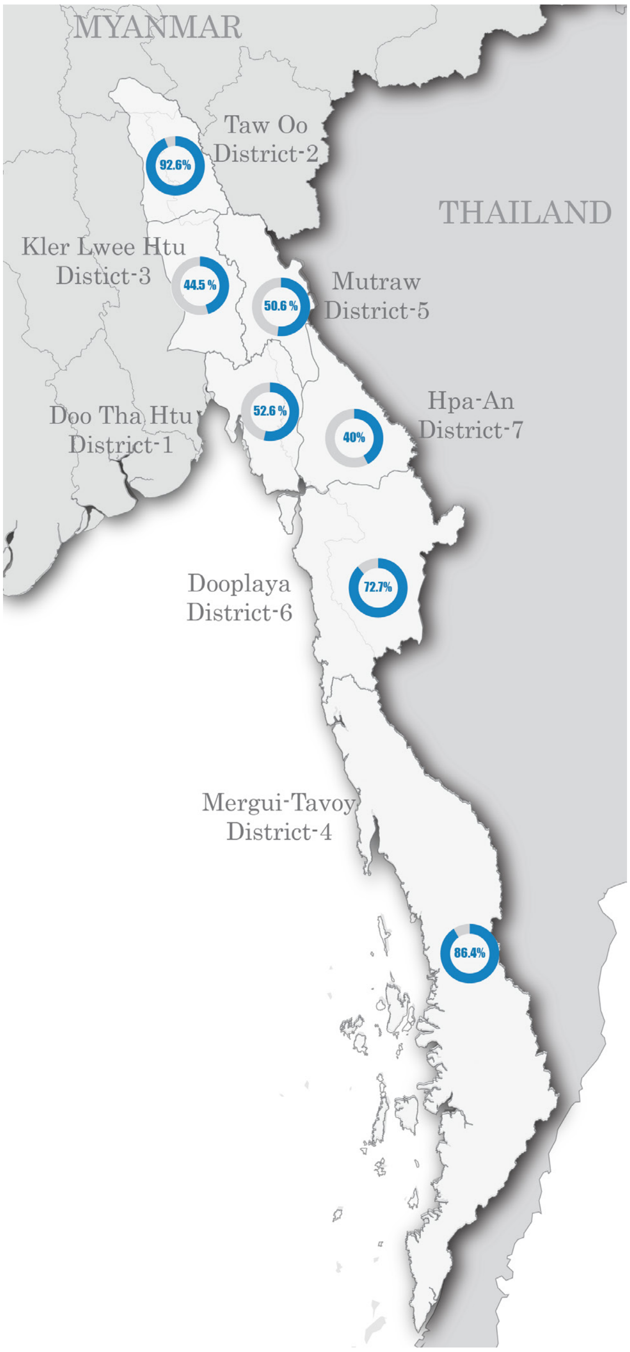
FIGURE 26: SECTORAL LABOR PARTICIPATION RATES, BY DISTRICT

8 Landownership and Agriculture

8.1 LANDOWNERSHIP AND TENURE SECURITY

The people of Kawthoolei are primarily an agrarian society. Hence, the right to access and use land and natural resources is fundamental for sustainable development and food security.

58% of households reported that they own farmland. There are, however, stark differences between the seven districts,displayed in Map 4.



MAP 4: HOUSEHOLD FARMLAND OWNERSHIP AT DISTRICT LEVEL

Taw Oo (93%) and Mergui-Tavoy (87%) showed high farmland ownership, Hpa-An (40%), Mutraw (51%) and Kler Lwee Htu (45%) exhibited lower levels of ownership.

While this might suggest a greater percentage of landless farmers and a lack of private ownership in the latter districts, this might not apply to all households, particularly in Mutraw District where the Kaw, the traditional Karen form of customary tenure, is practiced and where land is community-governed. The Kaw system has been revitalized in many Karen areas during the past decade with the assistance of Karen Civil Society Organisations and KNU oversight. Of the 58% which reported farmland ownership over 80% owned less than 10 acres, with the median average being 5 acres. Regarding women's land ownership rights, when asked whether women have the right to own (88%) and sell land (90%), the majority of respondents affirmed these rights. This indicates a high degree of gender equality in property decision-making.

Land grabbing, defined as the forced confiscation of farmland by private sector or government entities, was a rare incident across Kawthoolei, as 99% of households remained unaffected and were not subjected to this phenomenon within their communities. The 2015 KNU Land Policy, which recognizes and allocates tenure rights, including the rights to customary tenure for indigenous communities and land restitution for displaced communities, has contributed to increased tenure security across Kawthoolei. To gain deeper insights into this occurrence, it will be necessary to conduct more targeted research.

8.2 AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION AND MARKET ACCESS

Households involved in the agricultural sector reported cultivating a diverse range of crops, both for personal consumption and as cash crops. Among these cultivated crops, rice (54.3%), betel nut (44.3%), durian fruit (19.5%), beans (19.0%), and rubber (18.0%) held the highest prevalence.

35% (1,217) of households possessing farmland engaged in livestock raising. The prevalent animals kept were chickens (29%), cows (26%), and pigs (17%). Just over half the households with livestock were raising more than one type of animal. The primary purpose for maintaining livestock was for household consumption (67%), implying that most households only maintain a modest number of animals.

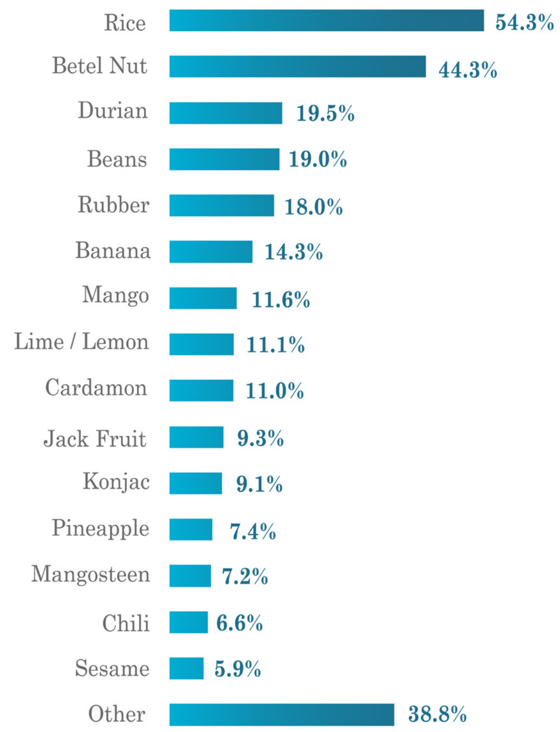


FIGURE 27: CROPS GROWN BY AGRICULTURAL HOUSEHOLDS

Concerningly, most households reported a stagnation (47%) or worsening (28%) in agricultural productivity over the last 5 years. Of those that reported a declining productivity the vast majority (79%) selected the main reason as being "Natural Causes (Weather, Natural Disasters, etc.)", the second most common answer was the availability of fertilizer (6%).

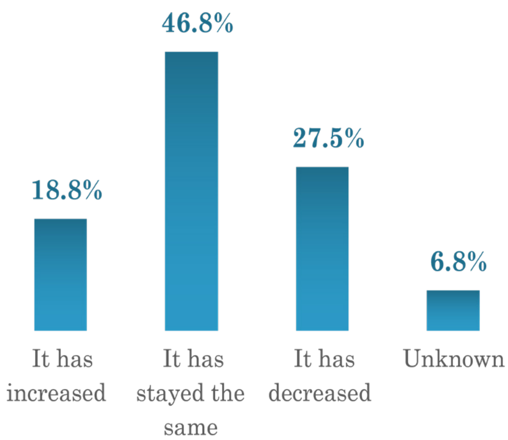
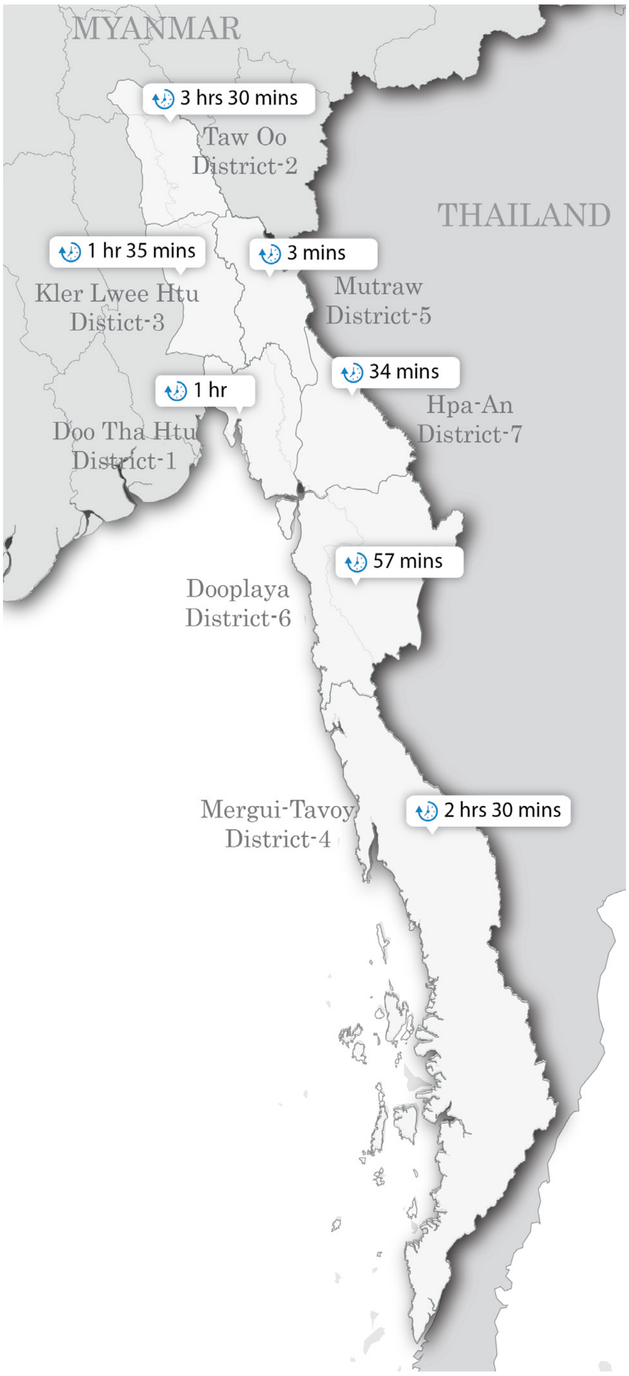


FIGURE 28: AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS

Travel time to local markets exhibit notable disparities across the districts. Taw Oo (3 hours 30 minutes) and Mergui-Tavoy (2 hours 30 minutes) showed the highest travel time for households to reach local markets. The very short travel time in Mutraw (3 minutes) possibly indicates a lack of local markets on village tract or township level and the occurrence of mobile markets and traders who visit remote villages to buy and sell goods.



MAP 5: AVERAGE TRAVEL TIME TO LOCAL MARKETS BY DISTRICTS

9 Income and Sources of Finance

9.1 INCOME SOURCES

Households throughout Kawthoolei are engaged in multiple income generating activities over the course of a year. The top five income sources were: own business agriculture (4,259), employment (2,241), own business non-agriculture (2,121), international remittances (1,382), and income support from the KNU (767). The MLCS also revealed that approximately two thirds of households in the southeast engaged in agriculturally based activities.

22.3% receiving international remittances is higher than the national percentage receiving international remittances reported in the MLCS 2017 (19.5%), the UNDP Peoples Pulse Survey 2021 (2.4%),[2] and Round 4 of the IFPRI survey conducted between October and December 2022 (16%).[3]

In the KSEHS only 88 (1.4%) responded as having domestic remittance income, therefore resulting in a total of 1,470 (23.7%) households receiving remittances. Of these 1,470 households, the proportion with domestic remittances stood at 6.0%, aligning closely with the findings of the MLCS, which reported that Kayin State had the lowest national percentage of remittance source being domestic, at 6.7%.

The southeast states and regions having a high international remittances and low domestic remittance sources is unsurprising given the long border with Thailand. This will result in remittance dependent households in the southeast having greater resilience to a failing Burma/Myanmar economy and depreciating MMK.

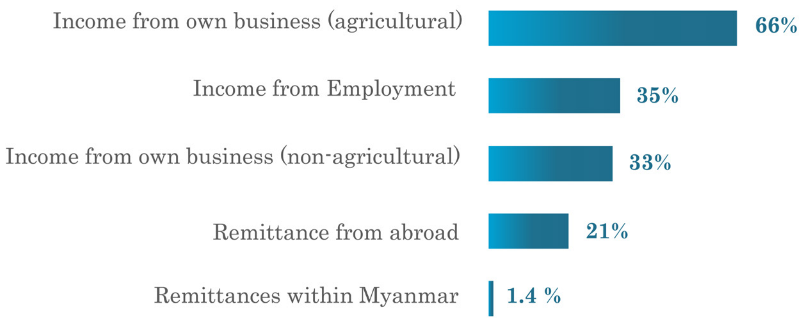


FIGURE 29: SOURCE OF INCOME

Of the households with employment income, over half (1,157) had employment income from more than one family member, providing a greater element of resilience. Employment income was paid monthly for 40% of households, while 41% responded employment income being paid either yearly or occasionally. Agriculture income was often single sourced and unsurprisingly paid seasonally.

A third of international remittances income was received monthly, while another third was received on an occasional basis only. However, there was no significant correlation between how often remittance income was received and the yearly value of remittance income. The vast majority (89%) only had one source of their remittance income. The average yearly value of remittance income was 2 million MMK.

The average annual income is around 1.5 to 3 million MMK, those with employment income reported higher income balances than agriculture or non-agriculture own business owners.

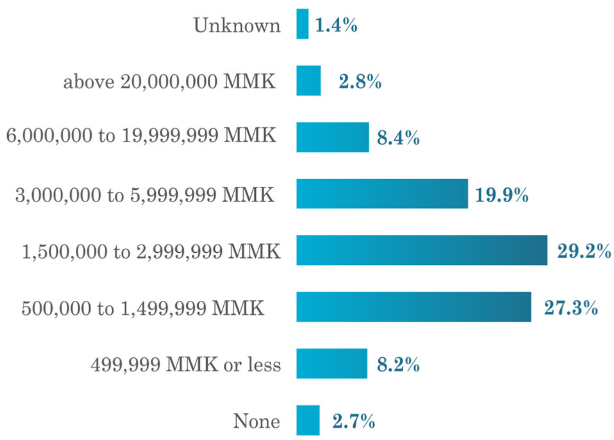


FIGURE 30: INCOME IN THE LAST YEAR

4 See People's Pulse survey by MDO, UNDP.
5 See Vulnerability and Welfare working paper by IFPRI

9.2 DEBT

Overall, 35% (2,272) of households responded to currently having financial debt, a significantly smaller percentage than the 60% recorded in the national MLCS 2017. There are however large district variations with Districts 5, 6 and 7 reporting much lower levels of households with debt.

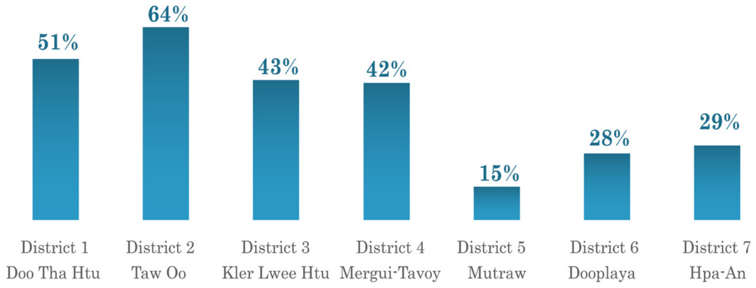


FIGURE 31: HOUSEHOLD CURRENTLY HAVING FINANCIAL DEBT PER DISTRICT

Access to the formal financial sector remains low throughout Kawthoolei. Of the households with debt, very few came from formal sources: public sector banks (3.4%), private banks (1.1%) and microfinance institutions (2.8%). Alternatively, most households borrow money from relatives and friends (51.7%), neighbors and community members (22.4%), money lenders (11.5%) and private sector actors (business owners and traders). Community lending groups (0.5%), including Saving and Loan Associations as well as Self-Help Groups, are rarely available for households despite their introduction across the region by many INGOs/NGOs over the past decade. Borrowing from friends and relatives is regarded as carrying far less risk and typically lower interest rates than borrowing from 'strangers.' The results were very much in line with the MLCS 2017 which reported Tanintharyi Region (96.9%) and Kayin State (98.4%) as having the two highest percentages of households with informal debt.

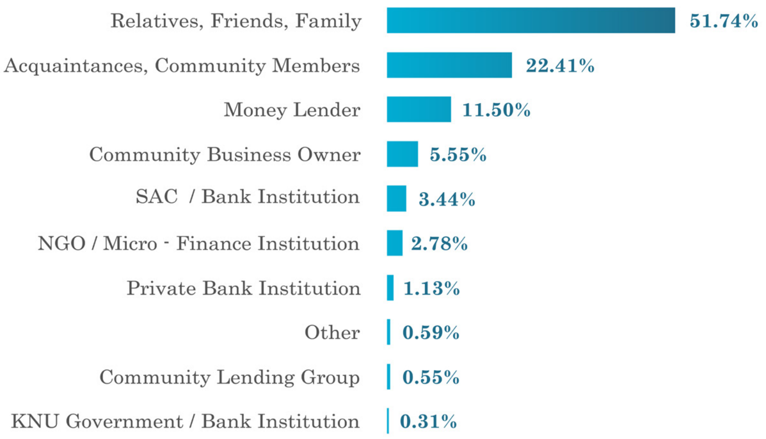


FIGURE 32: SOURCE OF FINANCING FOR HOUSEHOLDS

Health expenses (31%), unemployment due to conflict (20%), and unemployment due to COVID-19 (15%) were the three highest reasons for taking a loan. This indicates that households are borrowing simply to finance their daily living needs rather than investments in future income production, which makes them vulnerable if the debt should become unmanageable.

In terms of the size of the loan, over 46% stated the debt was over 1 million MMK.

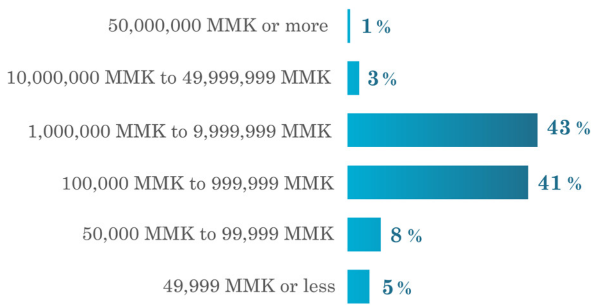


FIGURE 33: VALUE OF DEBT

Morning Assembly at Hto Lwe Wah Karen Public High School & junior College taken by Hseet Poe

10 Health

10.1 ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Historically, access to healthcare services in Burma/Myanmar has been inequitable, and has persisted as a chronic challenge for individuals in rural, conflict-affected areas. The rise in conflict following the military coup in 2021, and the resulting Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), have further limited access to government healthcare facilities, and highlighted the importance of ethnic health and community-based organizations in ethnic areas.

KSEHS survey respondents were asked if there was a healthcare facility accessible in their community that provided services in the past twelve months. They were instructed to discount any facilities that had been closed for more than twelve months, thus excluding any facilities that had closed prior to late-2021 and had not yet re-opened. This included facilities operated by Ethnic Health Organizations (EHOs), government health facilities and private health facilities.

In response, approximately 34% of households indicated that there was at least one health facility providing services in their community. Across the seven districts of Kawthoolei, relatively wide disparities in community access to healthcare facilities were noted. For instance, in Dooplaya District, approximately 50% of respondents indicated the presence of a healthcare facility in their communities, compared to only 22% of respondents in Taw Oo District.

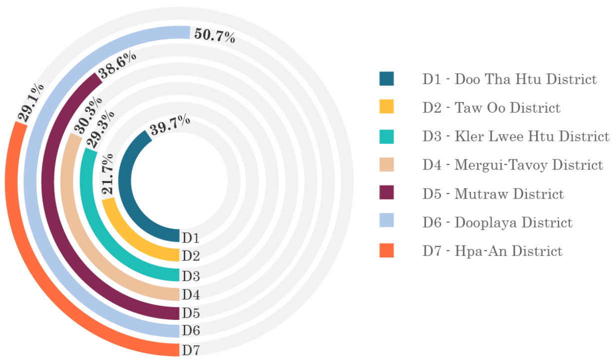
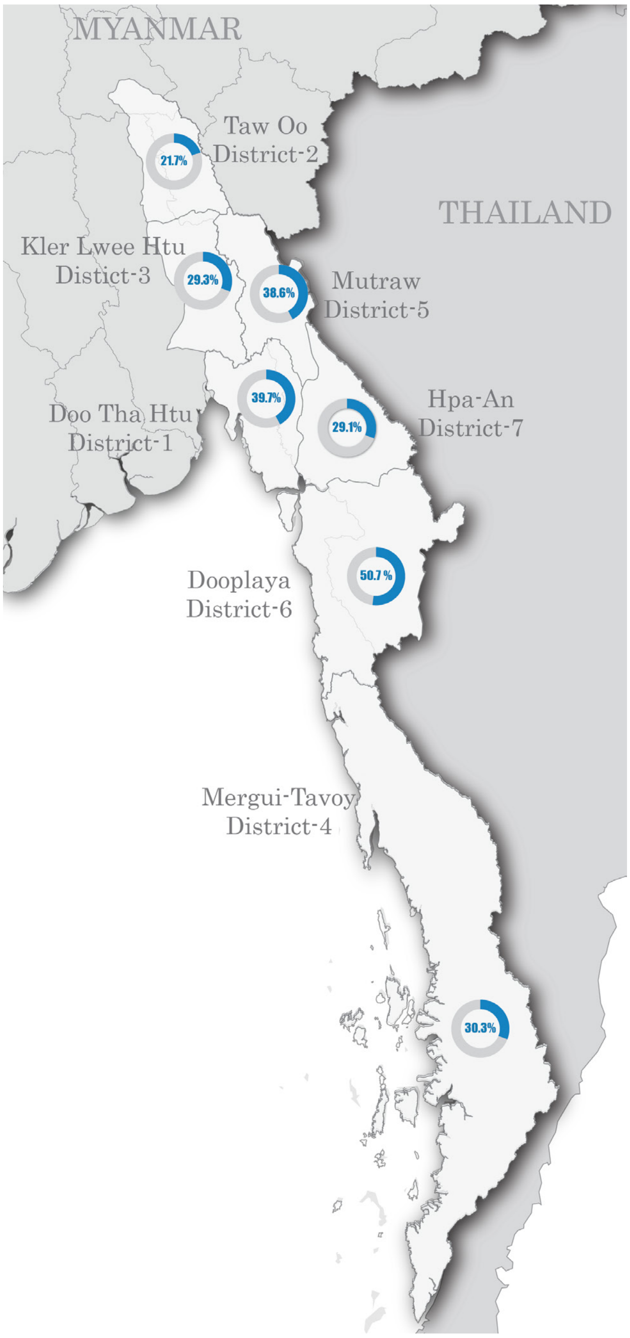


FIGURE 34: COMMUNITY ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

In 2017, the MLCS reported that 'more than half of residents (in rural areas of Burma/Myanmar) live near a government health post, the most accessible public facility in rural areas'. The latest results from the KSEHS indicate that this is not the case, and that access to health services (regardless of the type of provider) is limited for the majority of individuals.



MAP 6: COMMUNITY ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

The primary healthcare provider in Kawthoolei is the Karen Department of Health and Welfare (KDHW). The department was established under the KNU in 1956 with a mission to operate to provide primary health care to all people residing in Karen areas of Southeast Burma/Myanmar. Currently, the department operates 82 village tract health centers as well as 6 secondary health care facilities, covering a total of 798 villages and a population of approximately 310,000.

10.2 HEALTHCARE SEEKING BEHAVIOR

Historically, access to healthcare services in Kawthoolei has been limited due to a variety of factors; notably, the prolonged conflict and the challenges of providing services to isolated rural and remote communities. For decades, ethnic and community-based organizations, in collaboration with civil society, religious and non-profit international organizations, have made efforts to increase access to health services to promote higher health standards.

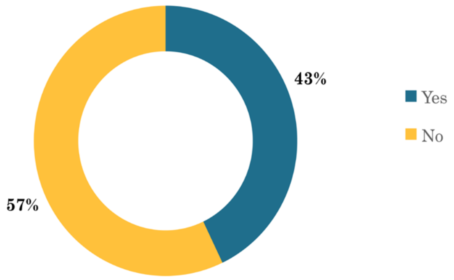


FIGURE 35: ATTEMPTED TO SEEK HEALTHCARE SERVICES

The KSEHS indicates that, in the past twelve months, 43% of households attempted to seek healthcare services for at least one member of their family. While a few households who did not seek care stated that it was due to the cost of healthcare (1%), and confusion on where to access healthcare services (1%), the majority (95%) of households who did not seek healthcare indicated that no family member experienced illness that necessitated that they do so.

Among those who sought care, an average of 31% of households indicated that they faced significant challenges. The expenses of healthcare services and the distance from their home to the healthcare facilities were identified as primary barriers.

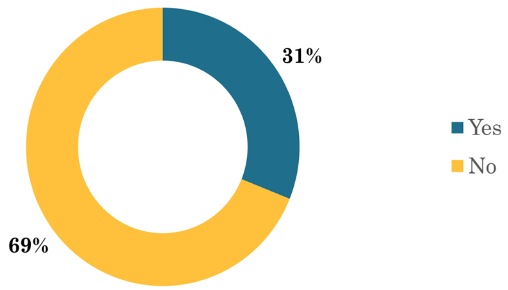


FIGURE 36: CHALLENGES IN ATTEMPTING TO ACCESS HEALTHCARE SERVICES

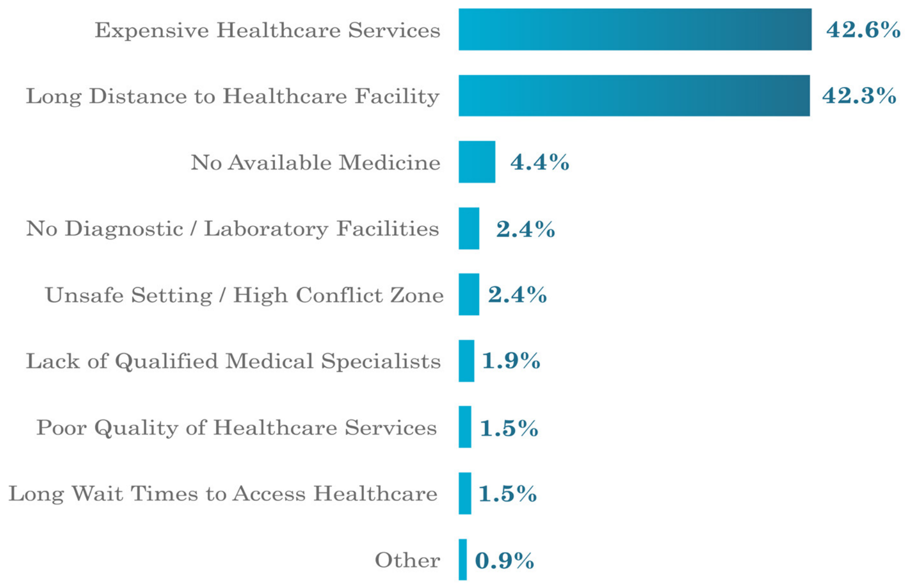


FIGURE 37: MAIN CHALLENGES TO ACCESS HEALTHCARE SERVICE

In addition to the indicators above, the KSEHS also assessed healthcare seeking behavior by provider type, asking 'If someone in your household is in need of healthcare services, which provider would you usually visit first?'. The results indicate significant differences based on districts. In Doo Tha Htu District, the majority of households indicated that they initially access services through community-based providers (rather than at a facility). In comparison, in Mutraw District, the majority of households indicated that they initially accessed healthcare services at KNU health facilities. On average across the sample area, community-based providers were identified as the primary providers of care for (40%) of the population, followed by KNU facilities (29%) and then SAC facilities (20%), among others.

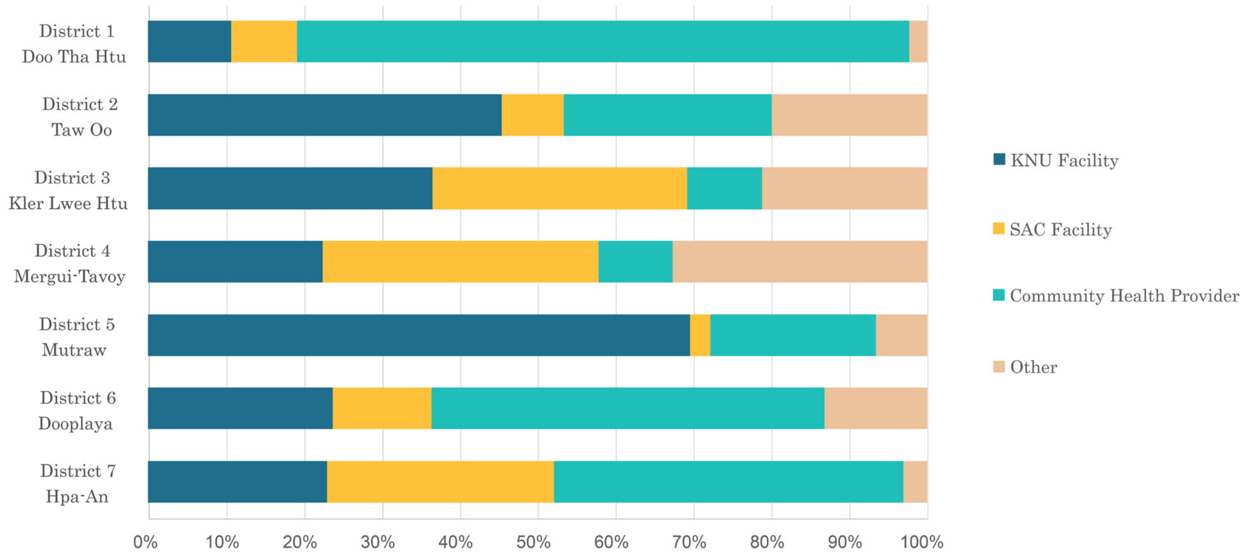


FIGURE 38: FIRST SOURCE OF HEALTHCARE

10.3 COVID-19

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic spread globally, significantly impacting all sectors of daily life and triggering unprecedented challenges for governments and health systems. The KSEHS examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions and prevention measures on local households in the sampling area. The majority of households indicated that health and education had been most impacted by the pandemic, with other aspects also being significantly impacted, as seen in the table below.

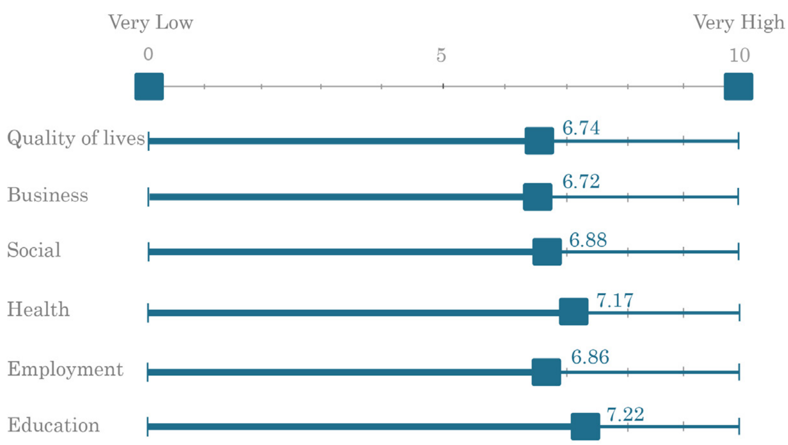


FIGURE 39: IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON HOUSEHOLDS

A regular field day in Lu Pleh Township taken by Saw Dellin Htoo

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