

## **Hurdles to a better educational prospect in Burma**

Plagued by a multitude of problems including decades of widespread poverty, repressive military rule and political instability, Burma (Myanmar) is in a dire situation following the coup d'état in the February of 2021, dashing any remaining hope of democratic progress. Burma's military (The Tatmadaw) has forced the country into an unprecedented, political, socioeconomical and humanitarian turmoil by usurping the democratically elected president Aung San Suu Kyi. Aggravated by continual human rights abuses, Burma is increasingly under strain from the escalation of the atrocities committed by the military junta along with being underpinned by a stark economic landscape.

Perpetrating countless acts of human rights violations with callous impunity, Burma's volatile situation acts as ground to the military junta's pernicious regime over civilians. In misguided pursuit of fighting communist and ethical insurgencies, the military's maliciousness has brought bereavement to the country, displaced thousands, imperiled many lives by purposely targeting civilian infrastructure and hindered the much-needed humanitarian aid. While many lives remain at stake, education does too.

Although a census in 2017 revealed the youth literacy rates were relatively high at 94%, educational attainment in Burma is low: 61.3% of the population aged 25 and over are uneducated or just have attended primary school. Only 7.3% of

the population aged 25 and over have a university-level degree. Another blow to Burma's educational future is the fact that the annual budgetary allocation by the government is meagre- only 1.2% is spent per year. This highlights the policy implications in these statistics; to achieve socioeconomic development, there needs to be a literate population. This shocking revelation calls for a concerted effort by the government, society, academia, and international organisations to use education as a platform to improve the lives of people of Burma now and for generations to come.

The impact of education on young people are significant in numerous aspects of life including job security, self-esteem, mental health, and communication skills. Not only does it serve as a medium to impart knowledge and understanding, but it also disseminates the vitality of ethics and social values. Education has propelled improvements in demographic and health outcomes, decreasing infant mortality rates and minimising malnutrition. In brief, a summary of the impacts of education:

- **Economic:** Education increases labour productivity and wages and contributes to economic growth.
- **Health:** Education improves health outcomes, such as lower infant mortality and longer life expectancy. It also promotes healthy behaviours and heightened awareness of diseases.
- **Social:** Education fosters tolerance, communication, and civic engagement. It also helps build social capital and networks and reduces crime.

- **Environmental:** Education encourages sustainable practices and helps mitigate the effects of climate change and natural disasters.

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

This quote was attributed to Nelson Mandela, Nobel Peace Prize laureate and former South African president; saying this in a speech in 1990, Mandela wished to accentuate that education is the key to eliminating gender inequality, fostering peace, and creating a sustainable environment. However, many people still take education for granted, plausibly due to:

- Upbringing in a privileged context; not realizing how many citizens in the world are deficient in elementary literacy skills or face obstacles to learning.
- Lack of appreciation for the intrinsic values of education as the fount of cultural diversity and universal acceptance that extends beyond merely getting a job or degree.
- Unmotivated, disengaged or stultified by the curriculum and education system they are in; they might not see the relevance or applicability of what is taught.

Moreover, education is a powerful and multifaceted phenomenon that can have sundry positive effects on individuals and societies including:

- Change- the possibility of challenging the status quo and creating new windows of opportunity.
- Knowledge- the acquiring of basic information and skills that paves the

way for young people to explore their potential.

- Morals- the fundamental discernment from right and wrong and learning the expectations and mannerisms of modern society.
- Development- improvements to well-being and contributions to general social and economic progress.
- Diversity- the respect for both differences and similarities between various cultures and ethnic groups alike.

Knowledge can be a weapon against oppression, ignorance, and inequity, but also a tool for peace, enlightenment, and justice- the things so desperately needed globally. However, the quality and accessibility of education varies widely across the world, and there are still many challenges to overcome in Burma. But through investment and collaborative engagement in education, the young and old may have the essential opportunity to learn. Using a metaphor for war to juxtapose the dangers that people face when pursuing knowledge, the poet Imtiaz Dharker wrote in *A Century Later*, "Knowledge is power, and the battleground of the school is compared to the more traditional battleground of armed warfare and the conflict between opposing (male) soldiers."