

Management of Drugs Rehabilitation Strategies in Kachin State

Jen Lomethong* & John Walsh**

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a programme of qualitative research and ethnographic observation aiming to discover the nature of the management of rehabilitation of drug offenders in Kachin State in northern Myanmar. Although the growing and use of opium in Kachin State is a tradition of longstanding, it has recently reached unprecedented levels as its sale has become essential in prolonging the armed struggle for autonomy pursued by the Kachin Independence Army and which has considerable support in society. This results in a large number of drugs offenders. Are there opportunities for such people to be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society in a positive way? This is the central question of this study. It is found that currently rehabilitation programmes are largely successful and unpleasant. It is also found that they are mostly administered by religious bodies and it is likely to be through church-based networks that any change might be effected.

Keywords: Kachin State, Myanmar, Narcotics, Opium, Rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

Kachin State is located in the north of Myanmar with a border to China to its north. It is a mountainous and forested region with little infrastructure or industry. The principal economic activity is agriculture, mostly subsistence

agriculture with rice paddy farming, supplemented by vegetables, livestock and some seasonal cash labour. Many Kachin people have been fighting for independence from the state of Myanmar (previously Burma) and have supported the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) as a result. To fund the armed struggle for autonomy, the KIA have encouraged farmers to become involved in opium production (and facilitated other forms of illegal drugs) which they will collect and pay for in cash – factors which make it almost impossible for other forms of production to be viable. Opium production and use has long been known in Kachin State and neighbouring regions but has now reached unprecedented levels of use such that the presence of drugs is almost ubiquitous. Many people in dangerous and discredited jobs (e.g. in jade and gold mining or long-distance fishing) are paid wages in part in opium, which they take to help deal with the drudgery of their daily lives.

What happens to those people who take drugs or deal in them and are caught by the authorities, since despite its widespread use opium is still an illegal narcotic drug that can do enormous amounts of damage to a society. What are the practices involved in rehabilitation and reintegration of people into society? These are the questions addressed in this paper. The paper reports on a programme of qualitative research and ethnographic observation over the course of

* Research Scholar, School of Management, Shinawatra University, Thailand

** Lecturer, International Business, RMIT, Vietnam

a number of years to build a triangulated and deep description of the situation, which is not, on the whole, very positive. The paper continues with a literature review that aims to frame the gaps in knowledge which the research aims to fill, followed by a description of the research methods, findings and then the implications of those findings. The research gap that is being addressed in this paper is the nature and effectiveness of the management of drug rehabilitation strategies currently being employed in Kachin State with a view to understanding how this might be improved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Drug Eradication Strategies

Although new forms of technology have made a difference, it seems to remain true that, globally, the risk that farmers face in growing opium, coca or marijuana are still comparatively low (Farrell, 1998). In 2017, for example, Afghanistan witnessed record high levels of opium production at 9,000 metric tons, which showed an annual increase of 87% (UNODC, 2017a). This took place despite an increase of 111% in land area of opium eradication across the country and intensive scrutiny of agricultural production. Nevertheless, incentives to grow poppies greatly exceeded the risks faced and the number of provinces involved increased. This is not the result of individual farming households or communities, of course, since criminal interests and/or insurgents as part of organized crime are also involved (as is the case in Kachin State):

“It is well established that there are terrorists and non-State armed groups profiting from the drug trade – by some estimates, up to 85% of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is in territory under the influence of the Taliban.

However, evidence on the organized crime-terrorism nexus remains patchy at best. Moreover, these links are not static. Relations between organized crime and terrorist groups are always evolving, much like drugs markets themselves (UNODC, 2017b:4).”

Just as modern technology can assist in tracking down drug growing areas, so too can it also assist in avoiding the security forces, especially when difficult terrain with limited amounts of transportation infrastructure are involved. After all, the so-called Golden Triangle region just north

of Thailand has historically been the home of opium growing in the region:

“Opium production in mainland Southeast Asia has always been concentrated in the tri-border region, in the mountainous borderlands of Burma, Laos, and Thailand, where rugged hills and mountains, heavy monsoon rains, and lack of transport infrastructures have long protected rebel armies from the writ of Central government and anti-drug agencies (Choavy, 2013).”

Even so, official estimates are often contested by on the ground non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups and, clearly, no methodology that does not require a thorough and comprehensive census will always be subject to qualification. Further, some of the assumptions made about the decision to grow opium might be challenged:

“... production of a highly labour-intensive crop at anything near these [record-breaking] levels benefits smugglers and impoverishes farmers. My own studies have shown that (among the Akha) it requires a minimum of 387 man-hours to produce 1.6 kilograms of opium (1.6 kilograms = 1 viss or joi, the standard unit of opium). This is about 80 per cent more than the labour input into upland rice. Opium is also a delicate crop: not enough rain or too much rain at the wrong time of year and the entire crop can be wiped out. This accounts for the fact that a single field can show up to 300 per cent variation in yield from year to year. There are strong indications that current returns to the farmer per unit of labour are significantly lower than they were twenty years ago, while the costs of lowland goods deemed essential to village life have risen precipitously in both absolute and relative terms during the same period (Feingold, 2000).”

Nevertheless, opium growing has benefits over rice production in upland areas, both because of the weight-reward equation and because rice does not grow well at altitude while poppies flourish at one kilometre or more above sea level (*ibid.*). It is perhaps not a coincidence that, as Wheatley (1975:251) observed, “... the Sanskrit tongue was stilled to silence at 500 meters.”

After being defeated in the Second Indochina War (1955-75), the USA acted to try to eradicate the

drugs trade that had been stimulated at least in part by US military forces on rest and recreation breaks across East Asia and that spread to include the domestic market. US military and security interests helped in spreading the drugs trade while in pursuit of other goals (Scott, 2010).

American air power was used to access the difficult to find areas but air power alone is not enough to convince people to change their lifestyles, especially when there are powerful incentives to do otherwise. In addition to drug eradication, it is also necessary to encourage people to find alternative means of making a living. This approach is at the heart of the opium substitution strategy. These programmes combine destruction of illegal crops with education and provision of some necessary inputs with respect to growing substitute cash crops.

CURRENT SITUATION IN KACHIN STATE

As part of the movement to a democratically-elected government, albeit one that would still be guided by the military, government agencies sought to make peace treaties (or at least ceasefires) with all the insurgent groups seeking autonomy or independence. This is known as the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) or, informally, the Panglong Conference – named after a first Panglong Conference which took place in the aftermath of WWII in 1947 (Transnational Institute, 2017). The NCA had been created under the leadership of former president Thein Sein and was widely regarded nationally and internationally as a necessary but not sufficient approach to achieving its goals. The principal problems have been identified as follows:

“Amidst urgent concerns: there is a lack of inclusion in the present peace process; Tatmadaw domination still continues; there is an over-reliance on the inconclusive Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement of ex-President Thein Sein; land-grabbing, natural resource exploitation and economic opportunism remain widespread; and military-first solutions are still being pursued in several parts of the country. Meanwhile civilian displacement and humanitarian suffering have not ended, highlighted by continuing emergencies in the Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States (*ibid.*).”

These problems are testament to the limited reach of the state. Across northern Myanmar, instances of cowboy capitalism mix with ungovernable,

semi-autonomous areas. This makes it more difficult to deal with crises such as the confluence of extreme Buddhist nationalism and the apparent genocide of the Muslim Rakhine people, whose legitimacy as genuine citizens of Myanmar has been called regularly into question (cf. Stokas, 2017). The incendiary comments of the Buddhist monk Wirathu have enflamed many bourgeois Myanmar citizens, which indicates how shallow is the settling of peaceful relations in society and how quickly scars can be reopened (Lone, 2017). There are terrible scenes of Rakhine villagers being driven out of their homes and across the border into Bangladesh (UN, 2017). Claims from the Tatmadaw and their allies that the Rakhine people burned down their own houses have been thoroughly discredited (e.g. Head, 2017).

The relationship between what is happening in Rakhine and the situation in Kachin State is not directly comparable but there are, clearly, some parallels. Both situations are of historical longstanding and much of that history is little known by the people of the country or its representatives. Instead, the situation is akin to that described by Marx (1852): “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living (*ibid.*).” The forces of globalization are continually reducing the ability of nation to enforce control over activities within and beyond the borders. Also, the impact of global climate change is looming over all other forms of change. As Wallenstein (2011) observed, “Capitalist civilization has also been built around a geo-cultural theme which has never previously been dominant: the centrality of the individual as the so-called subject of history (*ibid.*:151). This brings about a double-edged sword of, on the one hand, the Promethean will to win necessary to get ahead in the capitalist system (and thereby strengthening the capitalist system) and the dominant mode of social relations, on the other hand, being all against all ferocity. In both these cases, the ability of the state to enforce and retain control over inter- and intra-state relations is much diminished. This can be seen in the case of Kachin State in that warfare persists and any peaceful halt is very fragile, while numerous internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain in perilous conditions. Since 2013, at least, Tatmadaw forces have been using heavy munitions

to force Kachin people from towns and villages and have been resisted at every step of the way (Myat, 2013). This is taking place in a general issue of lawlessness related to the nature of resource extraction and the use of drugs. For example, people continue to be killed around mining operations (AFP, 2017). Meanwhile, thousands more IDPs are joining camps in the northern part of the State and on the Chinese border (Aung, 2017). Conditions in IDP camps are fraught and many men are required to leave to search for paid work and leave the women and children behind (Paing, 2017). Drug use overlays all of these problems: people use drugs to survive miserable working conditions in mines and may even be paid in drugs, at least in part, while a draconian police effort to incarcerate drugs users has been unhelpful either in rehabilitating criminalised people or enabling affected family members to improve their livelihoods and escape from the drugs industry.

RELIGION AND THE KACHIN

Kachin people traditionally believed in Buddhism with various animist additions, as is common among many people in mainland Southeast Asia or Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Kinship and gender relations are complex, sophisticated and govern a great deal of how daily life is managed. In recent years, Buddhism has become strongly associated with nationalism, as leaders of the junta attempted to demonstrate their legitimacy in part by the ardour of their beliefs (Rogers, 2008). Consequently, the adoption of an alternative faith, in a post-colonial context, can have different meanings:

“For many, Christian conversion is not considered a legacy of colonial brain-washing but rather as a liberating force of mind, body and spirit that invigorates their struggle against the overwhelming claims of Burmese state sponsored Theravada Buddhism and thus of Burmanization in the post-colonial state (Sadan, 2013:7).”

That is to say, the normal expectation of a post-colonial state, that its people will demonstrate their desire for emancipation by rejecting an imposed religion, is reversed in the case of the Kachin people (and others). This is because the imposition of religion actually comes from the new political elites and, also, as shown below, the alien religion comes from the USA rather than from the UK. Consequently, as Sadan (*ibid.*:8) goes

on to say, “Christianity has become their [Kachin people] own market of a distinctive Kachin modernity with political as well as spiritual implications.”

Despite the 2008 Constitution formally guaranteeing freedom of religion, there is reason to suspect that there has been some infringement of these rights (Gravers, 2003). This was evident from the Saffron Revolution, where the sacred nature of monks with The ravadin Buddhist tradition caused problems for the military seeking to crack down on them. More recently, the Buddhist-nationalism axis has been brought into sharp focus by the obnoxious, ranting bigot Wirathu, who is a Buddhist monk who has played a prominent role in enabling the apparent ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Rohingya minority people (Head, 2017). There has also been some evidence of direct repression (e.g. Human Rights Watch, 2017).

During the C19th, as European imperialism more fully exerted itself across Southeast Asia, American missionaries began to arrive in Burma and began preaching and proselytizing activities. The first to do this was Adoniram Judson, who spent much of his life in the country before dying in 1850. He intended to translate the entirety of the bible into the majority local language but was unable to achieve this (Pierard, 2006).

In common with many of the other missionaries who reached Burma and, subsequently, Kachin State, Judson was a Baptist. The Baptists are a group of Protestant Christians whose history reaches back to early C17th English-Dutch nonconformity and who are characterised by their antipathy to Catholicism and its forms. There are an estimated 40 million Baptists around the world today.

In subsequent years, American missionaries pushed further north to meet and interact with non-Burman Burmese, achieving success in converting some Karen and Shan people. In Burma, adopting Christianity has been regarded as being related to westernisation and colonialism (Lim & Dengthuama, 2016). It is certainly true that British imperialists preferred to use outsiders as civil servants and needed people who could speak in English, which is why so many Indians were imported to Rangoon on the divide and rule policy that had been so successful (Odaka, 2016). Religious identity in Myanmar has, therefore, become a potentially fraught situation.

WWII was a confused and difficult period in Burma as some Burmese fought for the allied and some fought with the Japanese against the imperial power. When peace was won and the missionaries returned, they found that all they had been building had been destroyed by the fighting and long years of rebuilding were necessary. This has been undertaken and with some success, although it is true now that Kachin Christianity is divided into a number of different denominations and relations between them have not always been cordial.

THE ROLE OF KACHIN CHRISTIANS IN FIGHTING DRUGS

Although representing quite a small part of Myanmar's overall population, Myanmar Christians have been prominent in promoting social development in the country: "... building and running hospitals and schools, providing aid to the displaced, fighting drug addiction, speaking up for the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, and promoting peace ... Christianity is particularly influential among a number of Myanmar's ethnic nationalities, where religion and cultural identity are tightly intertwined (Rogers, 2015)." These efforts have been assisted by the ability to import resources, expertise and ideas from overseas. However, the issue of illegal drugs is a wicked problem: that is, it is a problem (or set of problems) that "... are ill-defined; and they rely upon elusive political judgment for resolution. (Not 'solution.' Social problems are never solved. At best they are only re-solved – over and over again.) (Rittel & Webber, 1973)." Drug usage is wicked in this sense because it is not clear what should be done about them, in a world in which zero tolerance of drug usage does not seem to be a pragmatic response since, according to research, it provides many incentives to hide what is happening (Staff and Agencies, 2013). It can represent a significant deterrence effect (Mekay & Pacula, 1999) but, in complex societies, can become intertwined with discriminatory action against people with minority or marginalised status and makes no meaningful provision for people who, for whatever reason, fall foul of the laws (Skiba, 2010).

Within Christianity, attitudes towards drugs and towards people who use them can vary significantly. There are strands of Christianity, for example, in which drugs are classified along with alcohol and other stimulants and rejected entirely,

for social as well as religious reasons. For example, the influential Southern Baptist Convention declared in 1920:

"Resolved, that in view of the world-wide interest at the present time in the cause of Temperance and the growing volume of public opinion in India against the use of intoxicants and drugs like opium and morphine, the consumption of which is alarmingly growing and thus is a serious menace to the physical health, and moral and spiritual well-being of the three hundred millions of people of India, the Southern Baptist Convention, representing three million white Baptists of America, in its annual session held in Washington, DC, May 12th to 17th, 1920, earnestly requests the Government of India to prohibit the import, manufacture and sale of alcoholic liquors and drugs – particularly prohibition of the cultivation of poppy and manufacture and sale of opium in India for other than medicinal purposes (Southern Baptist Convention, 2017)."

Many people adhere to this resolution or others like it. For example, the Pat Jasarn movement includes members of both the Catholic Church and the local Baptist Church. It claims to have more than 100,000 members who have, it is said, spent most of their time "... raiding drug dens, seizing shipments of methamphetamine and harassing drug users – often flogging addicts until they repent (*Southeast Asia Globe* Editorial, 2016). Pat Jasarn members dress like paramilitaries and organise raids on opium-growing farms, which occasionally leads to armed confrontations (Cousins, 2016). Police and authorities may represent something of a moveable feast on occasions such as this, since they seem to choose sides depending on local factors.

Nevertheless, the persistence of many of their members and their well-resourced nature mean that church-based or faith-based networks can be effective means of transfer of ideas and of resources. The flows can work in both directions, of course:

"The complex channels of communication that were forged to facilitate the flows of arms, money, people, resources and trade also supported flows of a different kind: those of religious ideas and missionary proselytization (Sadan, 2013:361)."

The research reported on in this paper considers the role of traditional religious beliefs and practices in Kachin State and their impact on drug usage and eradication. It is shown that the internationalisation of communications and information have changed the nature of religious practice in a variety of different ways.

METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

Krippendorff (1988) defined content analysis as "... a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their contexts." He wrote about it in this way:

"Content analysis ... seeks to analyse data within a specific context in view of the meanings someone – a group or a culture – attributes to them. Communications, messages, and symbols differ from observable events, things, properties, or people in that they inform about something other than themselves: they reveal some properties of their distant producers or carriers, and they have cognitive consequences for their senders, their receivers, and the institutions in which their exchange is embedded (*ibid.*)."

In other words, content analysis goes beyond listening, transcribing and reordering the content available (which is mostly text in the form of discourse) and considers the meaning of the content within its specific context. In this case, this represents the discourse of people from a wide range of different perspectives, including western and western-educated scholars, community leaders and members of drug rehabilitation centres. The languages used varied and some care has been taken to harmonise the different registers employed. To some extent, local colour as centralised in the discourse has been abstracted in the conversion of the original into the attempt at providing an academic level of discourse.

Content analysis can take a variety of forms. For example, it can be employed in conventional, directed or summative aspects. Conventional content analysis begins with observation and employs codes derived from the text and which are defined during the process of analysis. Directed content analysis begins with theory with codes defined by the theory which are modified as required both before and after the analysis takes

place. Summative content analysis, on the other hand, begins with the search for keywords which are identified prior to analysis because of a specific theoretical position or desire to explore a specific situation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

In this research, both conventional and summative forms of content analysis have been used. The former was principally employed to examine the perspectives of various people with respect to the eradication of drugs. However, this approach was supplemented with the summative approach with respect to the examination of rehabilitation. A mixed methods approach of this sort is common in social science research such as management studies. For example, Denscombe (2008) describes the communities of practice approach to a mixed methods study which is "... (a) consistent with the pragmatic underpinnings of the mixed methods approach, (b) accommodates a level of diversity, and (c) has good potential for understanding the methodological choices made by those conducting mixed methods research (*ibid.*)."

It is considered an appropriate approach because of the diversity of viewpoints exposed and types of evidence gathered.

Although there is software available to support content analysis, this paper used a more traditional approach of immersion into the data which are in the form mainly of transcripts, with codes generated both by the process of analysis and, subsequently, through examination of specific concepts. The results are provided in the following chapter.

ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

Ethnography is the study of human peoples in the context of their society, culture, historical location and awareness of related concepts. It calls for an immersive experience within a particular society or culture which the researcher is able to identify. The researcher is required to understand the culture in which s/he is immersed but also able to separate the secondary context from the individual personality. This means that an interviewer can be born into and live with the people involved and still be an objective investigator of the ethnographic group involved. However, it is necessary to triangulate observations in order for the researcher to demonstrate that this is true. Triangulation involves the observation of the same phenomenon from a variety of different perspectives to try to determine whether a consistent view of results

can be obtained. This concept has been a part of mixed methods research for some decades. For example, Bouchard (1976:268) observed that the conclusion that results are confirmed by more than one form of observation "... enhances our beliefs that the results are valid and not a methodological artefact (*ibid.*)" Boring (1953:222) argued that: "When the defining operations, because of proven correlations, are many, then it becomes reified."

The term 'reification' can have a number of different meanings but it is used in this case as a naïve (i.e. lacking in ideology) term indicating the process of an idea or understanding (which is unproved and possibly inchoate) becoming acceptable in the mind of the researcher. It is the qualitative research equivalent of rejecting a null hypothesis in quantitative research. It is not, therefore, an act to take lightly. A certain amount of care should be taken, therefore, in taking this step.

The two most important activities in ethnographic research are participant observation and key informant interviewing. The first of these involves spending extended lengths of time with the people observed taking both subjective and objective perspectives of the ways that people behave in parallel. The crucial role for the researcher in this case is the ability to be aware of the need to interact fully in society while also being able to take a step back from everyday life to measure the meanings of what has been observed and try to understand them. Key informant interviewing means identifying those individuals or groups whose opinions or behaviour are considered to be the most likely to be able to provide insights into the meanings of everyday activities, whether or not they themselves are aware of this. A semi-structured research agenda is used to guide discussions, which are recorded or accompanied by extensive note-taking for subsequent transcription. It uses a judgement sampling approach.

DATA COLLECTION IN MYANMAR AND THE KACHIN STATE

Data collection issues in Myanmar and, in particular, Kachin State poses some problems which would be of a much lower level in developed countries. These problems include infrastructure, language, gender issues and general access. These will be dealt with in order.

The first problem is the infrastructure and, in particular, the poor transportation infrastructure which makes it difficult and time-consuming to go from place to place and actually locate people for interviewing. Across the country, there are various areas where access is not permitted by government or military officials. Most of the jade and gold mining areas in the north of the country are interdicted because these are considered to be sensitive areas. In Kachin State, of course, areas where fighting is taking place also exist and these are not possible to access. There are other areas where IDPs are living which also pose challenges to security forces. Even where there are no problems with transportation infrastructure, at least in comparative terms, physically moving from one place to another can be problematic owing to the hilly or mountainous terrain and because of the climate. In some cases, it has been possible to overcome these problems by the use of technology, including mobile telecommunications and the internet, since contact can be made by other means. In addition, many Kachin people live as part of a diaspora as they have found ways of living in other parts of the world for a variety of reasons. Semi-structured interview agendas were sent to people who were unable to be interviewed personally and a number of written responses were obtained in that way.

The second issue relates to language. Interviewing was conducted in English as far as it was possible. However, for many respondents English was not their first language and it may not even have been their second language. Figure 3 below indicates the complexity of the linguistic patterns of Myanmar. In some cases, respondents received assistance from others in giving their opinions and, in other cases, interpretation has also been used. In reporting the actual words spoken or written by respondents in this paper, minor editing has been used where necessary to remove ambivalence or distracting ungrammatical formations. However, in every case where this has been done, care has been taken to ensure that, so far as it is possible to ascertain, the correct meaning has been preserved. For infelicities in language in already published material, any errors employed have been retained. Some footnotes have been added where it has been deemed necessary or helpful to explain some issues related to language use.

In terms of gender, it has become evident from research elsewhere (e.g. Walsh, 2016) that it can be difficult to obtain sufficient numbers of female

respondents especially in rural areas where levels of education are lower and people may feel ashamed of not being able to answer questions. There is also the issue of gender discrimination, which is widespread across Myanmar and a number of different ethnic groups. However, the relationship between gender and willingness to participate in research or any kind of political debate is complex and has results which might be difficult to anticipate. As one expert has written:

“An example of how insecurity is gendered can be seen in the number of female-headed households, or in the way that gendered norms work to position women as the caretakers of families. Being responsible for the survival of near and extended families means that women often lack the time and income to participate in public decision-making processes. In this way we see how gender, material insecurity at the household level, and political marginalisation all combine (True, 2015).”

Efforts have been taken to try to obtain views from respondents exhibiting all kinds of demographic characteristics and this certainly includes gender. However, it cannot be argued that there is a guarantee that every sector of society is fully represented, given the issues relating to access that have already been enumerated. Some people, for example those under rehabilitation in the Pat Jasan centre, could only be interviewed with the assistance of Pat Jasan staff. This is sub-optimal but unavoidable. In other cases, for example Kachin diaspora, it cannot be guaranteed that some circumspection of speech was used because of concern about whether comments made would be made public, notwithstanding efforts taken by the researcher to ensure all respondents of appropriate scholarly levels of confidentiality.

FINDINGS

The Perspective of the Authorities

There are political and state institutions that have responsibility for maintaining law and order in Kachin State at different levels. From the perspectives of these authorities, drug use is not only illegal but poses a perhaps existential threat to the legitimacy of their authority. They understand their role to be one that eliminates drugs use as much as possible, to punish transgressors and to ensure that any threat to

their legitimacy is neutralised. They are also in possession of more facts with respect to the actual nature of the drugs trade and its complexity. For example, one respondent, previously a military officer, contrasted the changing nature of drugs production and consumption in the country over the past twenty five years:

“I first came to experience illegal narcotic drugs in 1995 when I was a junior military officer assigned at one of the military units based in Yangon, the capital of Myanmar at that time. Between 1995 and 2000, I was assigned to be the team leader of the military command Anti-Narcotics Unit (ANU) which included also police personnel from the Yangon-based Anti-Narcotic Task Force (ATTF). During that time, my drugs team seized different types of illegal drugs including raw opium, solid opium, brown opium, opium oil, low-grade opium, heroin and marijuana in the Yangon region. Until 1998, the production and use of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS) was non-existent in Myanmar. It was around 1999 that my drugs team seized ATS 80 pills in Yangon bearing a ‘WY’ logo, which were pink. Later on, precursor chemicals ephedrine and phencidine were also seized by my team in Yangon. Based on the statements given by the apprehended offenders, the precursor chemicals were mostly imported from India and China at that time.”

This officer continues to be active in anti-narcotics activities today and is still involved in seizing the same products. However, the range of drugs involved is continuing to grow and the sources are becoming diversified: “... ATS tablets spreading across the whole country and coming from Bangladesh via Rakhine State), ecstasy pills (imported from Malaysia), diazepam, tramadol, mitragynaspeciosa, methamphetamine ICE (not for domestic consumption), ketamine (not for domestic consumption) cocaine (never seized before in Myanmar), buprenorphine codeine and phencidine”. There are also various precursor drugs found in the country and, also, adulterated caffeine imported from Lao PDR through the Golden Triangle region. The situation is, in other words, becoming much more complex with more advanced forms of production, distribution and consumption and the use of information technology tools to assist in distribution and sales intensifies the problems for the authorities. Perhaps just as important is the fact that drug

consumption has become acknowledged as an acceptable way to behave and users now include: "... young people, high school students, university students, workers in factories, workers in jade mines and gold mines, fishermen along the coast, long-distance truck drivers, some celebrities, actors and actresses, KTV (karaoke television) girls who work at nightclubs across the country have all become regular or occasional users." Both supply and demand factors have become strong and multi-sectorial. Further, Myanmar has become integrated more firmly into an international if not global trade in illegal narcotics. International problems require international solutions, as noted by another respondent, who is a professional person:

"Internationally, supply reduction includes building consensus; bilateral, regional and global accords; coordinated investigations; interdiction; control of precursors; anti-money laundering initiatives; drug crop substitution and eradication; alternative development; strengthening public institutions and foreign assistance."

Various other respondents noted the importance of good governance systems and institutions but noted that this in itself would not be sufficient. It is necessary also to implement some measures of alternative development, including in particular the sharing of natural resources in an equitable manner under conditions of peace. Brave thinking is required to introduce and sustain peace, with one respondent making this claim:

"[to obtain peace] Ethnic armies must be integrated to the Union army under the government budget through granting equal rights and self-determination demanded by the ethnic nationalists."

It is difficult to imagine quite how this would effectively be managed. Nevertheless, some efforts must be made towards the rehabilitation of inter-personal relations within the country if peace is to be established.

REHABILITATION

One respondent, a police officer, reported that there are some government-run rehabilitation centres, which are doing some good work, although they too are facing numerous problems. By contrast, NGOs and Church-based groups find it difficult to accumulate sufficient resources to meet the international norms of proper medical

treatment that they wish to offer. Even quite well-resourced and well-supported international NGOs (INGOs) find it difficult to provide the range of integrated medical services they would feel it necessary to provide. For example, the Geneva-based NGO Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders – MSF) reported of its activities in Kachin and Shan States as follows:

"During the second half of 2016, conflicts in Kachin and northern Shan State intensified, hampering access for staff and patients. In Kachin, MSF continued providing care to 11,020 patients with HIV, TB and MDR-TB [tuberculosis and multi-drug resistant tuberculosis]. Teams also conducted 68 mental health consultations at a camp for internally displaced people. In Shan, MSF provided treatment to 4,628 patients with HIV and MDR-TB, and a mobile team conducted 900 primary healthcare consultations across the north (MSF, 2018)."

The government-led rehabilitation centres include Wet HteeKan centre, May Khae centre in Kaya State and Tee Mar centre in Muse-Lashio. Wet HteeKan centre is located in Pyay township and is organized by the Myanmar Anti-Narcotics Association (MANA). Wet HteeKan centre, unusually, offers services for women, who are not well catered for in most government centres, which are focused on male addicts and staffed primarily by men, which means there can be cultural issues related to women obtaining the services they need. These centres are managed by the Department of Social Welfare. It is becoming understood that cultural forces mean that women cannot benefit fully from most rehabilitation centres like they can from Wet HteeKan, which is community-based and locally embedded, although there is an urgent need for more trained women workers.

The centre benefits from an amendment to a law on drug addiction that means these affected can now take part in social service work and stay away, therefore, from both prisons and judgemental churches (*Myanmar Now*, 2017).

Another respondent, speaking on behalf of a local community centre, admitted that conventional approaches do not work:

"From the religious point of view, when someone is imprisoned, we do make a special effort to evangelise them when we have a chance. And then, some of them change. We

also see that they try to step towards getting a better job when they come out of prison ... [However] ... for most people, they are just the same when they are released even if they have been imprisoned for many years. It is rare to see a person who changes or becomes better after they were imprisoned. We do not see that in more than one in ten persons (respondent).”

In other words, people believe that the standard approach to treating drug addicts does not really work. The same respondent claimed that, in Myitkyina, working with young people on a religious basis has seen some fruit being born from this. However, it is not clear how sustainable this approach might be. Other respondents noted that the ability to find decent work was essential in trying to keep ex-offenders away from returning to drug use. Many addicts had turned to drug use in the first place because of boredom and under-employment or, else, because the work they could find was so difficult that only the use of drugs enabled people to endure it.

One respondent from Pat Jasarn also acknowledged the difficulties involved in expecting individuals to be able to reclaim their lives through individual efforts:

“It is very difficult [for people] to change mentally and spiritually, even though law is conducted properly. [A] former user could relapse again because of [returning to the] old environment (respondent).”

This respondent felt that the best way to treat individuals is to do so on an holistic basis:

“A person is totally free from drugs when he or she gets physical, mental and spiritual treatment. Therefore, religion-based organizations are implementing this method and it is effective (respondent).”

Other respondents were also wedded to the religious approach and felt that the innate spirituality within released ex-addicts would be the most important factor in their re-integration into society. Other respondents still were divided in their opinions about religion-based approaches such as Pat Jasarn. While some placed their faith in it above all else, others took a more sanguine approach:

“... my sense is that they are driven by a desperation to stem the devastating impact that the drug problem is having but that in

many ways they are also embracing the same failed and damaging policies of the war on drugs more broadly – i.e. a militarised response to the destruction of crops (without understanding or caring about the impact this has on poor farmers), the unsustainability of such approaches when the underlying drivers of why people grow drugs are not addressed (respondent).”

In the absence of reliable statistics, it is difficult to know for sure the extent to which it is possible to divide this issue into a dichotomy and, if so, on which side of the line does the truth reside. The most likely response is that complexity outweighs simplicity, since there are various forces acting at different societal levels and different spatial considerations:

“... the different programmes that have been developed over recent years have been disrupted by the breakdown on the KIO ceasefire in 2011. This has made it much more difficult for drug users to attend programmes on a sustainable basis as well as different health agencies to gain access to the needed areas and communities (respondent).”

This observation adds strength to others which have also stressed the difficulty of access and organizations in areas with low levels of infrastructure and suffering from warfare and disruption. The same respondent went on to reinforce the complexity of different scales of action:

“... there are also different regions and peoples involved, including the Kachin State and northern Shan State, where drug use crosses ethnic and territorial lines. It also needs to be stressed that both opium/heroin and methamphetamines are problematical drug issues in this region where different approaches are underway (respondent).”

There are several, if not more, cross-border or trans-border issues within the GMS (and also evident further afield) that similarly must engage with various societal and geographic levels of action. One particular issue is that of water management and the management of the River Mekong (Chintraruck & Walsh, 2015), which require coordination on a wide, diverse and contradictory set of interests. This is reflected on the ground in terms of inter-ethnic group relations. Different groups live in different areas, by and large, where there are different jurisdictions

and different political realities. For example, one respondent spoke about personal experiences with various different groups and their livelihoods:

“We found that the majority of the growers then were the Hmong, Yao, Lahu, Akha and Lisu. The last three were mostly cultivating on both sides of the border while the Hmong and the Yao lived on the hills around the larger communities in the North. We spent a year collecting information and the second year on 1979 we called the tribal meetings for the village chiefs and elders of the Hmong, the Yao and the Lisu in Chiang Mai on three occasions. We purposely did not touch the Akha and the Lahu knowing well they were under the influence of the KMTs [Kuomintang] and the warlords across the border and it would pose more dangers to them had we brought them to the meetings. The Hmong were independent, on their own, hate the Chinese and stay away from them except when selling raw opium. The Yao are traders by nature and do whatever needed to earn money while the Lisu were the new tribe and part of the Kachin main tribe, very Christian, religious and can be approached through the Christian circle where we are strong.”

Although the reach of the state has extended since the period described in this recollection, it is nevertheless true that different tribes attempt to establish separate identities from each other – in a globalizing world, the need to retain cultural markers and practices as a means of retaining a sense of personal and group identity appears to become more important. Understanding the dynamics of these forms of identity and the interactions between them can help organizations and government agencies to be able to provide the kind of support and services necessary in dealing with illegal drugs.

DISCUSSION

If drug eradication is to take place and crop substitution replace it, then how is this to happen? Since there have been no successful attempts to achieve this in Kachin State before, the model proposed here will represent the principal claim for contribution to academic knowledge.

Fundamentally, the successful crop substitution programme will rely on organization, co-ordination and integration.

Organization: the affected farmers will need to be part of a (farmer production group) FPG that will help in providing a sense of solidarity between them and also offer support and advice in growing the new crops. There are likely to be some problems along the way because changing agricultural production patterns during a time of rapid and unpredictable climate change will be inevitably risky. Farmers and their families will need to support each other if they are not to be tempted to return to the old ways.

Co-ordination: farmers will need advice and various forms of inputs in order to grow their crops successfully and to have them taken to market in a timely fashion. Harvest and transportation dates will need to be carefully monitored to ensure that goods are moved when required. Coordination will be required at the local level when roads are not available for convenient transportation. Additional income generation opportunities that occur on a seasonal basis will also need to be managed to obtain economy of scale advantages for land and labour made available.

Integration: the crop substitution programme is much more likely to be sustainable if profitability increases in the future and is seen to increase. This could be achieved through integrating more stages of the value chain into the control of the FPGs involved. There would certainly need to be outside involvement with the process of helping farmers to be capable of undertaking more of the stages of production themselves and, thereby, retain more of the value created.

These activities are difficult to achieve but not impossible so long as there is the basis of powerful relations both within Myanmar (i.e. between Kachin State and the national government) and between Myanmar and its neighbours (especially China and Thailand) which offer the best prospects for being export markets. Without peace, the entire system will rapidly disintegrate and opium production will begin again.

The final element that has to change will be the nature of rehabilitation that is being undertaken in the State. Currently, rehabilitation regimes followed those prescribed by the failed War on Drugs thinking that unhelpfully promotes the moral or ethical component of any decision that has been taken with respect to drugs and undervaluing, therefore, the structural issues that have brought drugs into the everyday experience of all areas of Kachin society. The preferred form

of rehabilitation would emphasise re-education and retraining individuals such that they can understand the value of crop substitution programmes and to be more able to participate in them in a valuable manner. Some changes to the legal system might be required to enable this to happen.

The resources that will be required to make this happen will include financial resources certainly but also, perhaps more importantly, there is a need for the willingness to think about the situation in different ways than in the past and to be creative and flexible in outlook. Mechanisms to overcome distrust and suspicion and enhance social solidarity will also be helpful. Discrimination is unhelpful.

CONCLUSION

This paper has reported on a programme of qualitative research and ethnographic observation to consider the nature in which the rehabilitation of offenders against drugs laws is taking place in Kachin State in northern Myanmar. It found that most current programmes are based on outmoded war on drugs era policies that fail to take into account more recent thinking and the larger context, in which the use and production of drugs has become so endemic in Kachin State that it is part of everyday, mundane reality. Breaking free of old-fashioned thinking will require the assistance of faith-based networks, which are the principal means by which resources may be transported into the State and circulated there.

The research is limited by the factors outlined in the section on methodology above and by the common constraints of time, space and human fallibility. It would be helpful if future research were able to link more closely rehabilitation in other contexts and situations with that provided in this paper.

The implications of this research are that the drug rehabilitation strategies being employed in Kachin State are sub-optimal in nature but are constrained by limitations on resources, knowledge and some measure of empathy with those being treated. For the situation to be improved, greater linkages with external sources of these needed resources may be fostered, although it is unlikely that this can effectively be achieved without the precondition of peace. Continued fighting, no matter how it might be justified, will continue to play a major role in destroying the lives of people all across the State and beyond.

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