

Annual Report 2021

2021 was a disastrous and chaotic year for Myanmar. While the Corona pandemic was ongoing, the Burmese Generals toppled the freshly re-elected civilian government under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi on 1 February 2021.

To the surprise of the Military and the outside world the young Myanmar population rose up against the Generals. In the first couple of weeks after the Military putsch, the whole country showed its opposition in cheerful and colorful, peaceful mass demonstrations in towns and villages all across the country.

When the Generals recovered from their surprise about this large unexpected mass opposition, they hit back with increasing violence and brutality. Up to year-end 2021 at least 1393 civilians including children had been killed by the soldiers, and more than 11296 people had been arrested. The Myanmar Army didn't shy away from burning villagers alive in their houses and bombarding fleeing civilians with Russian fighter jets and helicopter gunships.

Targeted killings, mass arrests and torture of unarmed people changed the peaceful resistance. Numerous armed militias, so called People Defense Forces (PDFs), sprung up all across the country. The PDFs fight the army together with the established ethnic rebel groups which have long fought for autonomy from the central government. Increasingly, the country is engulfed in a civil war. Every day bombs and explosive devices are set in cities and in the country. In the Central lowlands underground militias attack security posts and army transports and take control of villages and districts.

The disruption through civil war coupled with Covid-19 had a devastating effect on the economy and living standards, poverty is on the rise. As many civil servants have resigned in protest of the military takeover or have been sacked, the administration is not functioning well and schools, universities and many hospitals had been closed until June 2022.

Given this deteriorating environment, People In Need continues to help and support the young and vulnerable in Myanmar. We look back on a truly chaotic and sad year in which we concentrated on three major activities: education, feeding children and finding ways to transfer donations to our projects and helping third parties to channel aid to their relief projects.



Mass demonstrations after the Coup in February 2021



Riot Police and Soldiers fire live ammunition

Our Projects in 2021

1. Sisters of Charity: Kindergarten Shwe Bo

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Myanmar closed all airports in March 2020 and did not issue any visas anymore. As a consequence, our Myanmar friends had to start the construction for a new Kindergarten building in Shwe Bo in December 2020 without us. The new building was funded by a grant by the German “Reiner Meutsch Stiftung – Fly and Help”. The kindergarten was to be operated by the Catholic Sisters of Charity in Shwe Bo, about 110 km northwest of Mandalay.

Despite all challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, our Myanmar colleagues and friends completed the building for 60 children in May 2021. However, the Sisters were only allowed to open the nursery and receive children in June 2022. Today, the Sisters run the “Holy Child Mary’s Daycare Kindergarten” with 40 children and will expand the number of children shortly.



The new Kindergarten in Shwe Bo



Children and teachers

2. Leadership and Vocational Training for Girls, Mandalay

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 had a very negative effects on the Leadership Vocational Training Program (LTP) for Girls in Mandalay which is managed by the Good Shepherd Sisters. As schools, kindergartens and universities had to be closed in 2020 because of Covid-19, the authorities requested the Sisters to reduce the number of students. Starting with the 5th LTP Class in July 2020 the LTP was restricted to the training of tailoring and training of make-up and hairdressing for a total of 25 girls.

After the military putsch in February 2021, the public schools stayed closed and many teachers went on strike and became unemployed. With no school education available, the idle high-school girls faced the threat of being married in their home villages instead of continuing school or starting university. The Sisters reacted to the urgent requests of the young women for continuing their school education. The Sisters succeeded to agree informally with village headmen and unemployed teachers to offer an informal high-school education. Early 2021 we accepted 20 young women for a Matriculation Class into the 5th LTP Class of the Leadership and Vocational Training. The teaching followed the Myanmar Curriculum with its core subjects and was held by qualified and licensed teachers.

As the schools stayed closed in the 2021 academic year, we continued the Matriculation Class in our 6th LTP Year starting in July 2021. Together with a total of 23 girls being trained in the tailoring and the beauty courses 44 students live at the Vocational Training Center in Mandalay. They will finish their training and education in June 2022.



Hairstyling



6th Class Leadership and Vocational Training (LTP)

3. Summer School in Loikaw, Hopin and Tachileik

Myanmar schools are run by the government with the exception of a few private school in the cities and some Buddhist Monastic Schools which offer primary schooling in villages. Because of Covid-19 the Ministry of Health had ordered all schools and kindergarten to be closed for the Academic Years 2020/21 and 2021/22 (June 20 to March 22). At the end of the 'lost' school year 2020/21 we followed the Mandalay example of Matriculation Classes and initiated Summer Schools in different locations. Together with our friends at the German charitable association "Wir machen Schule e.V.", the Good Shepherd Sisters started 3-months school classes in Hopin, (Kachin State). Tachileik (Shan State) and Loikaw (Kayah State) for a total of about 200 pupils.



Summer School in Hopin...



...and in Tachileik

4. Children Protection Center, Myit Nge

Since many years the Good Shepherd Sisters in Mandalay take care of street girls and victims of gender-based violence by visiting the slum areas and assisting the girls in the Government Juvenile Detention Center. The Sisters provide psycho-social support, non-formal education

and vocational training for children and youth in the slums and in the squatter areas and in the youth prison.

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and with all schools and nurseries being closed, the situation of the children in the slums and villages in and around Mandalay deteriorated dramatically. Gender-based violence, poverty, and street crimes were on the rise. It became necessary to establish a better and safe environment for the street children. In 2020, the Sisters established a new Children Protection Center close to the squatter wards in Myit Nge, a small town close to Mandalay.

People In Need helped the Sisters to start the program which offered education, daycare and lunch for 20 - 40 children. People In Need provided the funding for proper toilets and washrooms for girls and boys and basic equipment for kitchen and education. Later, we helped the Sisters to build a wall and a fence around the open compound to create a protected space.

After the military coup on February 1, 2021 the security situation in Myit Nge got worse. Partly, it was a result of the special situation of Myit Nge. The Myit Nge Children Protection Center is located next to the main “Myanma Train Engine Factory” which is a government-owned company under the Ministry of Rail Transportation. The ministry’s workshop is the main employer in Myit Nge and most residents and their families earned their living with the railways.

Immediately after the military takeover, all railway workers under the Ministry of Rail Transportation joined the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and went on strike with disastrous consequences for the families. The workers lost their income and the number of children going hungry multiplied. With our support the Sisters initiated daily informal classes for about 30 children who also received lunch in the Center.

In April 2021, the military junta cracked down on the railway workers and drove the families out of the railway housing where they had been living for decades. Parallel to the military crackdown the violence, tension and turmoil in Myit Nge further increased and affected the work and the safety of the Sisters and the project. After an army truck drove forcefully into the Children Protection Center (CPC), the Sisters, staff and students evacuated the Center.

In view of the precarious security situation, People In Need funded a security wall and high fence around the CPC-property of approx. 4,500 square meters. The wall is to improve security of the Sisters and the children and to protect the program from prying eyes as educational activities are not welcome by the military. The Sisters finalized the walling quickly and a couple of weeks later the Sisters could slowly restart the program. Over the next months an average of about 120 children joined the feeding program daily.

The Children Protection Center also became the new home for 20 young girls under 18 years. Despite of Covid-19, military takeover and rising poverty, the soldiers had forcefully removed squatter quarters across Mandalay and dislodged many vulnerable youths who had no home and income. In Myit Nge, the Sisters provided a safe home to these displaced girls. PIN

refurbished a former chicken coop as a temporary shelter in the Myit Nge Center. At year end the Sisters also accepted some girls from Loikaw who had to flee from the bombardment by the fighter jets of the Myanmar Air Force.



Children and Teachers in the Children Protection Center in Myit Nge



Schoolteaching in Myit Nge



Lunch in Myit Nge

5. Community-based Learning Program, Mandalay

Following the mandatory school closures in the academic year 2020 due to Covid-19, we had hoped that the public schools and preschools would reopen in June 2021. However, the military coup on February 1st resulted in nationwide general strikes with thousands of civil

servants, doctors and medical staff and school teachers and staff at the forefront of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). The military junta threatened, dismissed and arrested these CDM participants, but the movement is still ongoing.

With all schools being closed and families falling into poverty, the children suffered dramatic consequences from the lack of food and the loss of another school year (June 2021 – March 2022). To help this dramatic situation, the Good Shepherd Sisters in Mandalay started a new program which People In Need joined. Under the Community-based Learning Program the Good Shepherd Sisters organized daily school classes in five different slum locations in Mandalay. The program employs 10 community teachers who give daily classes to about 110 children in all 5 locations. In cooperation with the local communities, the Sisters set up basic class rooms and organized basic healthcare and basic welfare services.

To support the families the program provides a daily lunch to all the children. A central kitchen at the Sisters' Convent prepares all daily meals and distributes the meals to the different locations. With the cooperation of the local communities the Community-based Learning Program operated successfully and largely unobstructed by the military.



School teaching in private houses in Mandalay slums

6. Ensuring Access to Education, Loikaw, Demoso, Pekhon

The Good Shepherd Sisters in Loikaw, the capital city of Kayah State, were less lucky than the Mandalay Sisters. The Loikaw Community had started a school education program for 700 children in Loikaw, Demoso and Pekon with the generous support of German “Stiftung Childaid Network” in October 2021. Unfortunately, Sisters, teachers and students had to repeatedly flee from the fierce and brutal civil war which erupted in Kayah State between the Public Defense Forces and Ethnic Troops on one side and the Myanmar Army in Kayah State on the other. The Myanmar Military didn't shy away from using fighter jets and attack helicopters against its own population.

7. Emergency Food Assistance, Myanmar

As in prior years we continue to help people in emergency situations by using our own limited funds or by arranging donations through other NGOs and foundations. People In Need could

support 3 villages of Mohnyin Township, Kachin State. We provided food assistance and seeds to 75 families who had lost their livelihood as a result of the fights between the Myanmar army and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA).

8. Financial Advice and Transfers for Social Projects in Myanmar

During 2021 it became increasingly difficult to transfer money donations to Myanmar. We helped German and European NGOs and Family Foundations to arrange these money transfers and the currency exchange into the Myanmar Currency – the Myanmar Kyat. As the Kyat is nonconvertible, the Central Bank of Myanmar fixes the exchange rate without attention to the real purchasing power of its currency. The current official Myanmar Kyat exchange rate is fixed about 20% below the gray market rates. Changing foreign currency at the official rate which would result in a large loss for any project.



Approximately 80 million Myanmar Kyats

9. Hla Day Shop for Design and Handicraft, Yangon

Hla Day is a not-for-profit company which sells local artisanal products to tourists and expatriates living in Myanmar. Hla Day doesn't pay any dividends or profits to its owners instead it invests potential surpluses in the growth and livelihood of its employees and the producers and artisans of its local products. Hla Day's mission is to give penniless artisans access to a new market, namely tourists and expatriates and their families, and to support the artisans with creative design.

Before the Covid-19 outbreak and the following military coup, Hla Day sold products of more than 50 socially disadvantaged producers and artisans fighting against disabilities, discrimination, exclusion and poverty. In turn, Hla Days producers and artisans employ more than 600 workers and craftsmen in their houses and workshops. For around 75% of these workshops, the income from Hla Day was the main source of income and ensured the livelihood of their families.

Unfortunately, everything changed 2020 with the pandemic. Hla Day's sales collapsed as tourism stopped completely and many of our expat customers returned to their home

countries. The military coup further deteriorated the situation in the country. While the Covid-19 pandemic is mostly gone, most of the country outside of Yangon is engaged in a Civil War between the Myanmar Military and the opposition Public Defence Forces.

Without clients Hla Day generates a negative cashflow month after month. We try hard to keep Hla Day alive. Hla Day has become a beacon of hope for the small remaining foreign community and an essential lifeline for our staff and for artisans and producers of Hla Day products.



Hla Day staff, artisans and producers



Hla Day Pop-up Shop at an local artisan market



Hla Day Shop in Yangon

10. Challenges for 2022

We expect the unstable situation in Myanmar to continue. The Myanmar Army does not give any indication of an end to its strategy of “Kill and Burn” and of spreading terror and fear. According to AAPP (Assistance Association for Political Prisoners) a total of 2953 civilians have been killed and 14,427 persons have been arrested by the Government Army in the 17 months until July 2022. Hundreds of houses and villages have been burned down and destroyed by the soldiers. The People Defense Forces together with the ethnic armies will not give in and continue to fight the Myanmar Army. The opposition controls part of the country already.

The population in cities and in the country is traumatized by the continued fighting and the lack of security. The economic situation continues to deteriorate ever faster and hunger is spreading. The value of the Myanmar currency, the Kyat, is in freefall. While the US-Dollar had a value of 1,300 Kyat on the February 1, 2021, the day of the Putsch, it took 3,000 Kyat to buy one US-Dollar in the free market on August 15, 2022. The effect on food prices and food availability is disastrous as Myanmar depends on petrol imports and all transport is done by road.

People In Need will continue to try to help the Burmese people as much as possible and will channel financial funds into the country to keep the children and youth alive.

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