



3 SIDES TO EVERY STORY

A PROFILE OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS ON THE THAILAND BURMA BORDER

THAILAND BURMA BORDER CONSORTIUM

JULY 2010

Note on the Title: The “three sides” refers to the three self-identified sectors of Muslim communities in the camps, defined by the reasons for their presence in the camps (see “Muslim Lifestyle Practices and Preferences/ Socio-Cultural/ Self-identity”).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The social dynamics of the refugee camps along the Thailand Burma border have shifted considerably in the past several years to the point where they now display significant diversities in ethnicity, religion and cultural practices. In order to better inform itself of these changing dynamics, in 2009 TBBC undertook research to gain a fuller understanding of one of the more distinct groups within this shifting landscape – that of the Muslim communities. This report is the result of that process, and provides analysis and ways forward to ensure the programme reflects sensitivities to their practices and preferences.

The Muslim sector of the refugee populations along the Thailand Burma border is a significant and distinct minority centred, for the most part, in the Tak camps – namely, Mae La (ML), Umpiem Mai (UM) and Nu Po (NP); with a very small community also in Mae Ra Ma Luang (MRML). The population consists of three main sub-sects, representing divergent relations to the wider refugee community – both in terms of geographical origin, political persuasion and social inclusion.

A singular classification of the root causes and motivations for their entry into the camps is not possible – as they range from genuine cases of asylum to the capitalisation on economic opportunities – although one summarising their lifestyle practices and preferences is more feasible, as specific and wide-ranging commonalities exist across the communities.

Socio-cultural:

The different motivations for entering the camps creates a degree of compartmentalisation within the Muslim community, with elements not taking part in camp life and therefore widening the gap of potential understanding and social inclusion of minorities. Despite this, Muslim camp society is highly-structured with core traits surrounding collectivism, social cohesion, and mutual dependency, underpinned by strict moral and religious codes. Gender roles are highly defined and segregated, offering increased space for abuse and exploitation – both at the household and societal levels.

Many elements distinct in Muslim culture surround marriage. These include the prominent involvement of religious leaders, the marriageable age (tied to the physical development of the female, with less importance placed on prior completion of education), the dowry system, and the rights to, and process of divorce.

As with all sectors of the populations, modern lifestyles and imported values are increasingly shaping Muslim life, bringing significant changes to younger age groups and widening previously intimate generational bonds.

Food and Shelter:

Fishpaste is rarely claimed or consumed, compromising nutritional requirements.

Cooking oil and fuel ration levels, widely perceived as insufficient within the broader beneficiary community, fail to a greater degree to meet the needs of Muslim households, due to their distinct cooking practices. This promotes movement outside camp perimeters to source supplementary fuels, and thus risk of arrest, abuse and deportation.

The “teashop culture” substantially challenges the rice-based, two-meal-a-day stereotype of eating practices camp-wide, representing a significant divergence from the norm.

Health:

Muslims lack access to clinic staff of the same faith, making addressing sensitive health issues less comfortable. Despite the low confidence levels reflected in the annual nutrition survey, preliminary indications suggest that Muslim children suffer from higher proportions of acute malnutrition than other sectors of the populations. Further research should be conducted to confirm whether this is actually the case and, if so, identify its causes.

Education:

Muslim children have a range of secular and religious schooling opportunities, although with various constraints surrounding language of instruction in the main camp schools, and the range of languages to acquire and the length of daily study when attending religious classes. These likely explain the increasingly low levels of Muslim students seen through the camp primary and secondary streams. Muslim girls face additional challenges in attaining a high standard of education, due to expectations in fulfilling other roles and obligations. The low level of Islamic educational staff in the system is also seen as a barrier to greater inclusion and equity.

Muslim students’ utilisation of the services of boarding houses is minimal, possibly due to a number of factors surrounding faith and caseload demographics. Cohesion within Muslim communities may also reduce the need.

Livelihoods:

Muslims are centrally involved in the trade and service industries, as well as livestock breeding and raising. The main trading activities include retailing and shipment of goods between Thai towns and the camps, while services revolve around the repairing of household items and casual labour. Most retail and livestock activities are based on the function of “middleman”, making their profits from stock provided on credit, although more wealthy individuals are able to invest in and manage their own stock. Livestock operations are closely interconnected with those in the wider surrounding area.

The backbone of the camp economies are generally those that entered the camps to capitalise on economic opportunities – compromising camp-wide social inclusion and cohesion – while those increasingly engaged in casual labour services do so on the back of the growing class-base of the communities and, for those not yet receiving basic rations, as a poverty-alleviation strategy.

The scope and scale of agricultural practices – both in-camp and outside – vary from camp-to-camp depending on a number of factors, including land utilisation priorities although, in general, kitchen-gardening for self-consumption is less prioritised than in other sectors of the population. Working as hired-hands on Thai-owned farms is reported as a consistent theme – on commercial farms in the Tak camps and for subsistence-based agriculture in MRML.

Representation:

With gender still a work-in-progress, the representation of Muslims on camp committees is the most pressing equity issue in ML and UM. Despite being democratically-based, substantial inadequacies exist in the election of Muslims, and this compromises the abilities of camp management to resolve inter-faith conflict. Muslims also question external agency expectations, and whether they would employ the same approaches if they managed the camps.

Some under-representation of Muslims exists in most areas of camp management staff, but is more pronounced at the camp committee and distribution staff levels.

Muslim CBOs currently only exist in UM, yet have rarely functioned in a “check-and-balance” role within their own community due to role of influential religious leaders in the “establishment”. Social dynamics further limit their influence in the wider structure. Consequently, their main areas of intervention surround health, protection and empowerment. In UM, they are part of a CBO network under the Community Support Centre, formed to share resources and strengthen their individual and collective roles as actors for the community.

Resettlement has resulted in the breakdown of both Muslim women’s and youth groups in NP and ML, leading to significant consequences on potential for representation in camp co-ordination. In addition, Muslim leaders are almost completely sidelined in NGO consultations with the community – not only denying representation in programme planning and implementation, but also failing to take advantage of valuable opportunities for inclusion and sensitisation. A further under-utilisation by NGOs is the low recruitment of Muslims as camp-based staff.

Protection:

As with other sectors, unregistered Muslims are being denied status determination and full access to services.

Although minorities face disproportionate challenges in accessing camp justice and lack confidence in the system, Muslims express less concern about this – possibly due to the parallel system of being able to hear rulings under Sha’ria law for minor transgressions. Religious leaders only handle civil cases involving Muslims; other cases are passed onto responsible authorities.

Religious differentiation – rather than intolerance *per se* – is a reality in the camps, but commonly based on recognition of lifestyle divergences rather than any explicit “crusade”. Despite the occurrence of generally isolated incidents easily categorised as racially- or religiously-based, Muslim leaders advise external actors to resist drawing broad conclusions based on stereotypical social dynamics they may have experienced elsewhere.

Muslims feel a growing threat to personal security from the increasing prevalence of youth gangs in camps, and see its impacts on the social climate – young Muslims also being an active element in this development.

In terms of durable solutions, repatriation is seen as a step backwards both in economic and political terms, and resettlement only suitable for households with existing networks in the receiving country. Local integration is considered the most appropriate and feasible solution, enhanced by their existing links with urban centres.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS BY RELIGION – MAE LA CAMP

SECTOR	INDICATOR	CRITERIA	ANIMISM	BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM	OTHER
OVERALL CAMP POPULATION (%)			0.4	50.3	37.7	11.6	0.1
REPRESENTATION	Camp Management Staff	Camp Committee	---	4.0	96.0	---	---
		Zone Committee	---	38.1	61.9	---	---
		Section Committee	---	20.0	80.0	---	---
		Distribution Staff	---	23.5	76.5	---	---
		Security Personnel	---	27.8	69.1	3.1	---
		Advisors/ Judiciary	---	12.5	75.0	12.5	---
	CBO Committees	CCEG	---	40.0	60.0	---	---
		IEKNG	---	30.0	70.0	---	---
		KHWA	---	---	100.0	---	---
		KSNG	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		KWO	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
		KYO	---	22.8	77.2	---	---
		MWO	---	---	---	100.0	---
PKLCC	---	94.1	5.9	---	---		
TYG	---	100.0	---	---	---		
PROTECTION	Unregistered Camp Population		0.0	46.5	40.8	12.7	0.1
	Resettled Caseload		---	20.5	58.4	21.0	0.1
FOOD AND SHELTER	Monitoring and Warehouse Staff		---	23.5	76.5	---	---
	TBBC Beneficiary Monitoring		---	57.2	42.8	---	---
	CMP Extra Needs Allocation	Rice	---	42.0	50.0	8.0	---
		Beans	---	28.5	55.5	16.0	---
		Chili	---	36.0	47.0	17.0	---
		Fishpaste	---	42.0	58.0	---	---
		Oil	---	35.5	56.5	8.0	---
		Salt	---	30.0	53.0	17.0	---
		Charcoal	---	30.0	60.0	10.0	---
HEALTH ¹	Under-5s Identified with Chronic/ Acute Malnutrition	Chronic/ Survey-wide	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.4/ 11.6	n/a
		Acute/ Survey-wide	n/a	n/a	n/a	13.6/ 11.3	n/a
	Right to Play Engagements	Staff	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Volunteer coaches	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Dormitory coaches	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.0	n/a
		Dormitory trainees	n/a	n/a	n/a	8.8	n/a
		PE teachers	n/a	n/a	n/a	3.2	n/a
PE children	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.0	n/a		
EDUCATION	2009/ 10 Academic Year Enrolment and Staff	Primary students	---	50.0	40.7	8.9	0.4
		Secondary students	---	22.4	76.5	1.0	0.1
		School staff	---	17.5	81.0	1.3	0.2
		RTT	---	---	100.0	---	---
		VT staff	---	---	100.0	---	---
		OCEE staff	---	18.7	81.3	---	---
	Total Boarding House Students		0.1	46.1	52.6	1.4	---
	Separated Children in Boarding Houses		0.7	56.6	41.7	1.0	---
	SVA Engagements ¹	Library committees	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Library clients	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.4	n/a
		Cultural activities	n/a	n/a	n/a	10.9	n/a
Other activities		n/a	n/a	n/a	1.7	n/a	
LIVELIHOODS	CAN Camp-based Staff		---	20.0	80.0	---	---

¹ Health and other agency data disaggregated simply by “Islam” and “Other”.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS BY RELIGION – UMPIEM MAI CAMP

SECTOR	INDICATOR	CRITERIA	ANIMISM	BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM	OTHER
OVERALL CAMP POPULATION (%)			---	45.6	34.4	20.0	0.1
REPRESENTATION	Camp Management Staff	Camp Committee	---	40.0	60.0	---	---
		Section Committee	---	43.8	30.0	26.3	---
		Distribution Staff	---	14.6	72.9	12.5	---
		Security Personnel	---	32.0	48.0	20.0	---
		Judiciary	---	16.7	50.0	33.3	---
	CBO Committees	CCSC	---	6.3	75.0	18.8	---
		KSNG	---	32.4	67.6	---	---
		KWO	---	28.1	50.9	21.1	---
		KYO	---	20.0	80.0	---	---
		MWA	---	---	---	100.0	---
MYA		---	---	---	100.0	---	
CBO Capacity-building Trainees		---	---	---	---	---	
PROTECTION	Unregistered Camp Population		---	46.4	40.0	13.6	0.1
	Resettled Caseload		<i>At the time of the research, data is unavailable.</i>				
FOOD AND SHELTER	Monitoring and Warehouse Staff		---	14.6	72.9	12.5	---
	TBBC Beneficiary Monitoring		---	40.2	49.8	10.0	---
	CMP Extra Needs Allocation	Rice	---	37.0	35.0	28.0	---
		Beans	---	37.5	37.5	25.0	---
		Chili	---	39.0	28.0	33.0	---
		Fishpaste	---	52.0	48.0	---	---
		Oil	---	42.0	37.0	21.0	---
		Salt	---	33.3	33.3	33.3	---
		Charcoal	---	33.3	33.3	33.3	---
HEALTH ¹	Under-5s Identified with Chronic/ Acute Malnutrition	Chronic/ Survey-wide	n/a	n/a	n/a	18.2/ 17.9	n/a
		Acute/ Survey-wide	n/a	n/a	n/a	45.5/ 20.2	n/a
	Right to Play Engagements	Staff	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Volunteer coaches	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Dormitory coaches	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.9	n/a
		Dormitory trainees	n/a	n/a	n/a	7.2	n/a
		PE teachers	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.9	n/a
		PE children	n/a	n/a	n/a	18.0	n/a
EDUCATION	2009/ 10 Academic Year Enrolment and Staff	Primary students	---	61.9	23.7	14.3	0.0
		Secondary students	---	52.1	39.5	8.3	---
		School staff	---	26.7	65.8	6.8	0.8
		RTT	---	8.3	91.7	---	---
		VT staff	---	4.5	95.5	---	---
		OCEE staff	---	20.0	80.0	---	---
	Total Boarding House Students		---	61.7	35.5	2.9	---
	Separated Children in Boarding Houses		---	67.2	30.1	2.7	---
	SVA Engagements ¹	Library committees	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.8	n/a
		Library clients	n/a	n/a	n/a	6.0	n/a
		Cultural activities	n/a	n/a	n/a	20.3	n/a
Other activities		n/a	n/a	n/a	1.3	n/a	
LIVELIHOODS	CAN Camp-based Staff		---	---	100.0	---	---

¹ Health and other agency data disaggregated simply by "Islam" and "Other".

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS BY RELIGION – NU PO CAMP

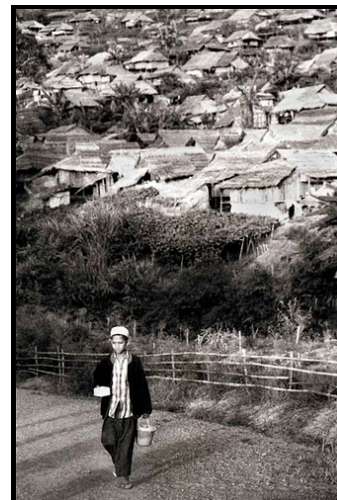
SECTOR	INDICATOR	CRITERIA	ANIMISM	BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY	ISLAM	OTHER
OVERALL CAMP POPULATION (%)			---	43.4	48.5	8.2	0.0
REPRESENTATION	Camp Management Staff	Camp Committee	---	33.0	67.0	---	---
		Section Committee	---	35.0	52.5	12.5	---
		Household Leaders	---	22.0	64.0	14.0	---
		Distribution Staff	---	29.0	71.0	---	---
		Security Personnel	---	3.0	89.0	8.0	---
		Judiciary	---	40.0	50.0	10.0	---
	CBO Committees	KSNG	---	15.8	84.2	---	---
		KWO	---	18.9	81.1	---	---
		KYO	---	23.3	76.7	---	---
CBO Capacity-building Trainees		---	73.3	46.7	---	---	
PROTECTION	Unregistered Camp Population		0.0	56.8	39.0	4.1	---
	Resettled Caseload		<i>At the time of the research, data is unavailable.</i>				
FOOD AND SHELTER	Monitoring and Warehouse Staff		---	16.2	83.8	---	---
	TBBC Beneficiary Monitoring		1.7	20.8	74.0	3.0	0.6
	CMP Extra Needs Allocation	Rice	---	69.0	31.0	---	---
		Beans	---	62.0	38.0	---	---
		Chili	---	73.0	27.0	---	---
		Fishpaste	---	77.0	23.0	---	---
		Oil	---	63.0	37.0	---	---
		Salt	---	74.0	26.0	---	---
		Charcoal	---	69.0	31.0	---	---
HEALTH ¹	Under-5s Identified with Chronic/ Acute Malnutrition	Chronic/ Survey-wide	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.6/ 7.0	n/a
		Acute/ Survey-wide	n/a	n/a	n/a	22.2/ 6.8	n/a
	Right to Play Engagements	Staff	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Volunteer coaches	n/a	n/a	n/a	0.0	n/a
		Dormitory coaches	n/a	n/a	n/a	5.3	n/a
		Dormitory trainees	n/a	n/a	n/a	4.1	n/a
		PE teachers	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.7	n/a
		PE children	n/a	n/a	n/a	14.0	n/a
	EDUCATION	2009/ 10 Academic Year Enrolment and Staff	Primary students	---	43.6	53.7	0.7
Secondary students			---	25.4	73.8	0.5	0.3
School staff			---	31.7	67.8	0.5	---
RTT			---	---	100.0	---	---
VT staff			---	13.6	86.4	---	---
OCEE staff			---	11.1	88.9	---	---
Total Boarding House Students		---	53.6	46.4	---	---	
Separated Children in Boarding Houses		---	63.3	36.7	---	---	
SVA Engagements ¹		Library committees	n/a	n/a	n/a	7.1	n/a
		Library clients	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.6	n/a
		Cultural activities	n/a	n/a	n/a	7.2	n/a
	Other activities	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.0	n/a	
LIVELIHOODS	CAN Camp-based Staff		---	---	100.0	---	---

¹ Health and other agency data disaggregated simply by "Islam" and "Other".

PREFACE:

Muslims have been part of the refugee setting on the Thailand Burma border since the first caseloads arrived in 1984. When the first “official” refugee camps were established however, the communities were, for the most part, largely homogenous in their ethnic self-identification – any differences being diluted and somewhat obscured by their shared geographic origins. Likewise, despite strongly conservative elements within the Buddhist, Christian and Islamic faiths represented within the populations, religious tolerance was, to a large extent, a universal facet of the camps – on the surface, at least – which further reinforced the sense of communal harmony. In the 25 years since, a significant diversification in the ethnic and religious composition of the camps has taken place, impacted by a number of specific developments:

- The arrival of “democracy students” into border areas under the control of the KNU after 1988 and their gradual movement into the border camps;
- The formation of the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) in 1994, capitalising on disaffections within the rank-and-file of the KNU, and the subsequent fall of Manerplaw, the headquarters of the KNU, in January 1995.
- Large-scale displacement from Dooplaya and Pa’an districts of Karen State into Tak camps during 1995-1997, due to sustained Burma Army offensives against, and subsequent control over large swathes of central and southern Karen State;
- The mushrooming (in scale and scope) of economic activities in the camps following the 1995-1997 period – especially those well-served by Thai infrastructure – due to consolidation of camps for security;
- The opening of opportunities for resettlement to 3rd countries in 2005 which created a pull-factor for various populations to seek access to the camps;



*Muslim Refugee at Umpiem Mai
(© Jason Miller, 2002)*

In addition to these specific milestones, the ongoing widening of the Burma Army’s sphere of influence in the eastern borderlands as well as its increasing economic and political mis-management over the past 25 years has driven people from wider walks of life and geographic areas to seek asylum in the Thai border camps.

These influences have led to the current state-of-affairs, where camp populations display significant diversities in ethnicity, religion and cultural practices – which, due to their prevalence, no longer remain obscured and have visibly undermined the original “communal harmony”.

In order to keep a handle on these and other changing social dynamics (which ultimately and directly affects programme delivery), TBBC closely follows diversity issues and considers varying needs of different sectors of the populations in its operational planning.

To gain a better understanding of one of the more divergent groups within the ethno-cultural mosaic of the camp populations, in 2009 TBBC conducted research into Muslim communities in the camps. The aims of the project were to:

1. Gather a better understanding of the nature of camp-based Muslim communities and how this correlates to that of “mainstream” populations.
2. Understand suitability of current TBBC operations and outputs in relation to differing practices and norms.
3. Consider operational modifications to deliver more appropriate services and ensure their better utilisation.
4. Ensure Muslim communities are engaged and involved in TBBC programme in an equitable manner.

The original timeline of the project was 12 months, with research taking place over the first 9 months of 2009, with the final quarter of the year set aside for compilation and validation of the findings. Due to various factors, including negotiating through sensitivities, the project actually took place over twenty months – fourteen months for the research stage (Jan 2009 to Feb 2010), and six months to draft, validate and finalise the report.

The first four months were dedicated to desktop research – sourcing existing, available data and narrative documentation from CCSDPT agencies and other key stakeholders, as well as defining areas and methods for investigation and documentation in the field. This also included holding orientation and planning sessions with TBBC field staff. Field research was conducted over the following eleven months:

Research Process	2009											2010		
	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F
Desktop research														
Field research														

The field research stage consisted of a diverse series of consultations, engaging Muslim religious leaders and community representatives, as well as household visits. Religious leaders were generally represented by elderly men, while community representatives consisted of a range of men and women – both young and elderly – and were consulted through targeted (gender- and age-specific), as well as collective plenary. In total, 139 members of the Muslim communities (47 F, 92 M) were consulted through formal consultations; with other perspectives gathered through informal discussions in tea-shops and markets, and in other casual social and personal interactions.

Due to potential sensitivities surrounding the project, camp committees were approached in advance to ensure transparency in the process and common understandings in the project's aims. As well as camp management bodies, community-based organisations were engaged in discussions to gather wider perspectives/ perceptions of Muslim practices and positions in camp life – this helped to further sensitise the researcher and substantially widened the identification of areas for exploration and investigation. All consultations took the form of formal focus group as well as informal discussions, rather than scientific surveys or questionnaires.

Consultation Methodology	2009									2010	
	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F
MRML – Religious leader focus group						✓					
MRML – Community representative focus group								✓			
MRML – Camp Committee discussion			✓								
MRML – CBO discussion	✓										
ML – Religious leader focus group						✓			✓	✓	
ML – Community representative focus group							✓		✓		
ML – Household visit											✓
ML – Camp Committee discussion			✓	✓							
UM – Religious leader focus group						✓	✓		✓		
UM – Community representative focus group							✓		✓		
UM – Household visit										✓	✓
UM – Camp Committee discussion		✓									
UM – CBO discussion		✓									
NP – Religious leader focus group			✓			✓	✓			✓	
NP – Community representative focus group							✓			✓	
NP – Household visit										✓	
NP – Camp Committee discussion		✓									
NP – CBO discussion		✓									

The final stage to draft, validate and finalise the report also took longer than planned, due to the unanticipated and extended process of gathering community and academic feedback on the findings and ensuring endorsement.

Starting with overviews of the introduction of Islam to Burma and Burmese Muslim displacement into Thailand, the following chapters lay out the findings of the research – conducted in camps which host Muslim communities – namely Mae La (ML), Umpiem Mai (UM) and Nu Po (NP), and also Mae Ra Ma Luang (MRML) – and focuses on the unique divergences in their practices and preferences from those of the “mainstream” population in the camps. The main body of the report culminates with a conclusion and recommendations for improvements in the suitability of current TBBC programme delivery as well as for more equitable inclusion of Muslim communities. A bibliography for further reading on the topic is appended to the report.

“The vulnerability of less visible groups, such as... Muslims in predominantly Christian or Buddhist camps, has seldom been examined”, Edith Bowles (1997)¹

¹ Edith Bowles, ‘Assistance, Protection, and Policy in Refugee Camps on the Thailand-Burma Border: An Overview’, Refugee Studies Programme, Oxford University, 1997, at http://www.burmafund.org/Pathfinders/Research_Library/EdithBowlespaper.htm.

BACKGROUND:

INTRODUCTION OF ISLAM TO BURMA

According to Burmese and non-Burmese sources, Islam reached the shores of Arakan State as early as 712 AD, via ocean-going merchants, and in the form of Sufism. The conversion of local inhabitants to Islam was more by choice than coercion, and the same phenomenon was also the trend for all South-East Asian nations, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. There were no Muslim attempts to invade Burma from outside or to proselytise within.

Muslims in Burma are mostly Sunni, of the Hanafi jurisprudence school, with a small and ever decreasing number of Shi'ite sect followers. Today, Muslims could constitute as much as 13% of the population, although some Burma experts assume them to constitute about 4% or less, as stated in the official Burmese census. Burmese Muslims themselves estimate that they number approximately eight million.

Muslims in Burma can be categorised into four groups, omitting some significant Muslim minority communities:

- Pantay, the largest group, includes the Rohingya of Arakan, whose members number approximately one million throughout the country;
- Bamar who converted to Islam in the time of Bamar kings and who call themselves 'pure Bamar Muslims';
- Indian Muslims born in Burma of two Indian Muslim parents;
- Zerbadees, who are children of mixed marriages between Indian Muslim fathers and Burman mothers.¹

DISPLACEMENT OF BURMESE MUSLIM COMMUNITIES INTO THAILAND

This section details a list of specific incidents and contexts of Burmese Muslim communities and their movements into Thailand. It is not intended as a comprehensive listing, but rather to provide a timeline, and illustrate the nature of root causes of displacement.

Border-wide:

1980s/ '90s – The All Burma Muslim Union (ABMU), formed in 1983, had its own battalion of troops and fought together with the KNLA. After the outbreak of anti-Muslim riots in Martaban, Moulmein and other towns in lower Burma, the Muslim Liberation Organisation of Burma (MLOB) was formed. Both the ABMU and MLOB are 'active members' of the DAB.²

1995-1998 – Muslim communities, especially those close to markets, were targets of cross-border attacks by Burma Army units and their proxies.

1997 – Some 10,000 Muslims from Burma take refuge in Thailand.³

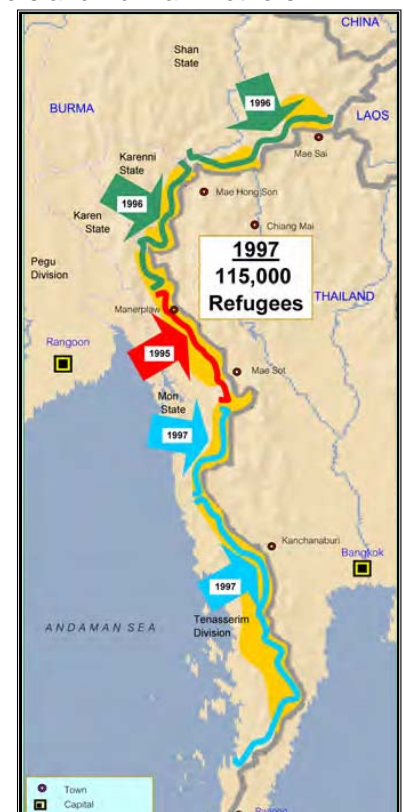
1997, March – Anti-Muslim riots in Mandalay and other parts of Burma.

1998 – A member of a British human rights organisation who visited several camps early in the year reported that "10,000 Muslims from all over Burma now live in the border refugee camps".⁴

1998 – Human Rights Watch reported that "a disproportionately high number of Muslims joined ethnic Karen refugees" fleeing Papun and Dooplaya Districts during 1997, and that "Muslim refugees reported that soldiers had destroyed their mosques and schools and had ordered them to convert to Buddhism or leave the country".⁵

1998, February – Muslim-majority bazaar in Mae Salit, Thailand across from the black market Karen village of Po Pa Ta in Burma, attacked. By 2001, it was "much reduced to just a pale shadow of its former self, to merely three or four stalls". "Only 20 Muslims now in Mae Salit".⁶ Many of the Muslims at the Po Pa Ta bazaar moved to ML.⁷

2001, July – About 2,000 Muslim refugees sought refuge at ML in June/ July, by which time the rate was almost 200 a day. This influx came from the larger inner cities, including Rangoon and Mandalay, rather than the villages in



1995 to 1997: The Buffer Falls (TBBC)

¹ Adapted from 'Islamic education in Myanmar: a case study', Mohammed Mohiyuddin Mohammed Sulaiman, from 'Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar', Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson (editors), The Australian National University, 2008.

² Rianne ten Veen, 'Myanmar's Muslims: The Oppressed of the Oppressed', Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), Wembley, UK, October 2005, at www.ihrc.org.uk.

³ 'Burma Says No to Return of Muslims', Bangkok Post, 11 August 1997.

⁴ 'Burma: The Great Betrayal – and Another Tragedy is Waiting to Happen', Jubilee Campaign, 24 February 1998, at <http://www.jubileecampaign.co.uk/world/bur3.htm>.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, 'Human Rights Watch Report 1998: Burma', at <http://www.hrw.org/worldreport/Asia-01.htm>.

⁶ Interviews, Mae Salit, Tha Song Yang district, Tak province, 19 October 2006.

⁷ Christian Goodden, 'Three Pagodas: A Journey Down the Thai-Burmese Border', (Jungle Books, Halesworth, Suffolk, Second edition, 2002), p. 276.

Karen state like most of their brethren already in the camps. Many of them had escaped from the anti-Muslim riots that had recently erupted in Toungoo.¹

2002 – A survey conducted in Karen refugee camps found that 11% were Muslim.²

2002, Dec – Violence and discrimination against sizeable Muslim communities in the main urban areas such as Rangoon, Mandalay, Prome and Moulmein has been a constant feature of communal tension in Burma. Following the September 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre, attacks on Muslims have increased, and these are largely orchestrated by state forces or Buddhist nationalists whipping up local grievances.³

2003, April – Muslims from Kamaw Kashu village in Hlaing Bwe Township escaped into Thailand. About 200 people, led by Karen monks and DKBA soldiers burned down the entire village of about 60 homes as well as the mosque. DKBA soldiers blocked the villagers from extinguishing the fires and from recovering any possessions.⁴

2004, July – Karen refugee leaders complained to UNHCR representatives about “problems with unwanted economic activities in the camps”, especially ML. “Since the arrival of new refugees from around Myawaddy -- many Muslim businessmen – “little Bengals” popped up, with so-called economic refugees who make money with trading goods’.⁵

Camp-specific:

Mae Ra Ma Luang:

1995 – Muslim community originally from Karen State, and entered the camp as part of the original caseload following the Burma Army’s capture of Manerplaw (the KNU’s former headquarters) and surrounding areas.⁶

1998 July – 1,401 Muslims living in camps in Ban Mae Saam Laep in Sob Moei district were being transferred to MRML.⁷ They would have comprised about 19 per cent of the 7,356 refugees at MRML in December 1998, not counting any Muslims who may have already been living there.

2010 – Head *Imam* recently arrived in the camp – originally from Hlaingbwe, although unable to speak Karen as he attended religious studies in central Burma.⁸

Mae La:

1997 January – about 200 Muslims from Nabu village in Kawkareik Township sought refuge at ML. About 1,000 Muslims were forced at gun-point to leave their homes, and their mosque was torn down by SLORC troops.⁹

2001 July – About 2,000 Muslim refugees sought refuge at ML between 15 June and 2 July, by which time the rate had increased to almost 200 a day. This influx came from the larger inner cities, including Rangoon and Mandalay, rather than the villages in Karen state like most of their brethren already in the camps. Many of them had escaped from the anti-Muslim riots that had recently erupted in Toungoo.¹⁰

2001 October – a third of new arrivals seeking refuge at ML are Muslims.¹¹

2006 January – “about 8,000” Muslims living in the camp¹² (about 16%). Reportedly 4,000-5,000 in 1999, or between 12 and 15 per cent of a then total population of 33,000.¹³

Huay Kolok:

1997 January – Attacked from across the border on 28th Jan by DKBA and Burmese troops – camp mosque burned down.¹⁴

1998 March – Attacked again on 11th March by a combined force of 200 DKBA and Burmese troops – camp mosque burned down again.



Muslim refugee at Huay Kalok (unaccredited, 1998)

¹ ‘Muslims Fleeing Religious Riots Swell Numbers at Thai Border’, DVB News, 4 July 2001.

² ‘Crisis Education Project Profile: Education Assistance to Refugees From Burma’, March 2005, at: http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/PDACF424.pdf.

³ Human Rights Watch, ‘Crackdown on Burmese Muslims’. New York, Human Rights Watch: 12, 2002.

⁴ ‘Muslim Village Torched in Karen State’, The Irrawaddy, 30 April 2003.

⁵ Hugo Rami, ‘Mission Report: Mae Sot, ML Camp, NP Camp, Umpiem Camp, 19-24 July 2004’, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Regional Office for Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, Bangkok, 28 July 2004, p. 3.

⁶ Interviews with Muslim community representatives, 12th January 2010.

⁷ Cheewin Satha, ‘Relocation: Tougher Measures to Control Refugees’, Bangkok Post, 15 July 1998, p. 2.

⁸ Interviews with Muslim community representatives, 12th January 2010.

⁹ ‘Burmese Muslims Say forced to Flee Homes’, Reuters, 22 January 1997; and ‘Muslims Forced to Flee Homes’, Burma Alert, (Vol. 8, No. 3), March 1997.

¹⁰ ‘Muslims Fleeing Religious Riots Swell Numbers at Thai Border’, DVB News, 4 July 2001.

¹¹ ‘Forced Conversion Order Drives Muslims From Karen State’.

¹² Edward Blair and Aung Zaw, ‘A Seat at the Table’, The Irrawaddy, January 2006.

¹³ Interview with NGO worker, Mae Sot, Tak province, February 2006.

¹⁴ ‘Burma Urged to Probe Raids on Karen Camps’, The Nation, 5 February 1997; and ‘Burning Down of Karen Camps’, Asia Human Rights, 8 February 1997.

Mawker:

1997 August – 280 Muslims were among 499 migrants arrested by Thai authorities on charges of illegal entry, most of them working in border villages in Phop Phra district. Burmese soldiers and DKBA accepted the return of the other 219 refugees, but said the Muslims were “aliens and not Burmese nationals”. The Muslims were taken to Maw Ker “pending further arrangements”.¹

1998 March – Attacked by 40-50 DKBA on 23rd March. 50 houses were burned down in Zones 6 and 7, leaving more than 200 Muslim refugees homeless.² The assailants ransacked the camp markets before torching them. Many of the refugees said later that they “were questioned by [the attacking DKBA] soldiers on the whereabouts of the Muslim sections of the camp”.³

(Note: Huay Kolok and Mawker camps were relocated for national security issues, and amalgamated into the new site of Umpiem Mai in 1999)

Nu Po:

1997 March – Camp established with “some 2,000 Burmese Muslim refugees” and about 8,000 Karen refugees from makeshift camps around several villages along the border in Umphang district. They had crossed into Umphang district after Burmese troops burned down several mosques and Muslim religious schools around Kyaikdon on 13 February. About 4,000 Muslims were forcibly removed from Kyaikdon and three other nearby villages to a new settlement lacking “basic utilities such as water”.⁴



*Displaced Muslim family
(unaccredited, 1997)*

1997 November – According to an NGO ‘Situation Report’, Section 12 in the southwest part of the camp was ‘the predominantly Muslim quarter’. There was one mosque in NP at this time, also located in Section 12.⁵ The Muslim community is now centred in sections 11 and 12 and the adjacent Section 14.

Other Influxes:

Rohingya “Boat People”:⁶

During the last three dry seasons there was an escalating problem of Rohingya people arriving by boat along the Andaman coast in south-western Thailand. Most were young men escaping abject poverty in Arakan state where they were effectively stateless under the Burmese Citizenship Law, denied even the most basic rights to travel, work or study, marry and have children. They paid brokers in the belief that they would be taken to jobs in Malaysia or Thailand. Smuggling patterns and the treatment of the boat people in Thailand changed each year as the authorities attempted to stem the flow.



The problem reached a crisis at the end of 2008 when Thai security officials were accused of pushing Rohingyas back to sea in boats without engines and without adequate food and drink. Hundreds were reported missing, although Thai security officials denied the allegations.



With several Asian countries now affected, the Rohingya issue became one of regional concern and was discussed at various ASEAN meetings including the “Bali Process”. Recipient countries urged the Burmese Government to accept their citizens back in return for helping to reduce the poverty which contributed to the root causes for their flight. The regime, however, has denied their right to live in Burma agreeing to take back only those whose residence in Burma is verified, an improbable proposition and a dangerous one unless protection can be guaranteed.

After all the international attention received, it appeared that by the end of 2009, boat departures had all but stopped, although more recent reports state that overland and air routes are now being exploited by smugglers.

¹ ‘Burma Says No to Return of Muslims’, Bangkok Post, 11 August 1997.

² ‘DKBA Incursion: Army Told to Protect Border at All Costs’, Bangkok Post, 24 March 1998.

³ ‘A Question of Security: A Retrospective on Cross-border Attacks on Thailand’s Refugee and Civilian Communities Along the Burmese Border Since 1995’, Images Asia and Borderline Video, Chiang Mai, May 1998, p. 8.

⁴ Supamart Kasem, ‘Cleric Says Mosques and Schools Torched; Forced Relocation of Villagers Reported’, Bangkok Post, 10 March 1977.

⁵ ‘Situation Report on Noh Poe Camp’, 26 November 1997.

⁶ Adapted from “TBBC 6-monthly report, July-Dec 2009”.

CURRENT SITUATION: PREVALENCE OF MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN AND AROUND THE REFUGEE CAMPS

MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN CAMPS

There are three camps which house significant numbers of Muslims – ML, UM and NP. As with most sectors of camp residents, Muslims tend to group themselves in clusters within the camp's sections, thereby forming their own communities within the wider populations. MRML also houses a Muslim community, although on a far smaller scale than in the other three camps.

Locations of Muslim Communities in Camp:

ML: Mainly Zones C2 and C4, although significant populations in B3 and B1.

UM: Sections 6, 7, and 8.

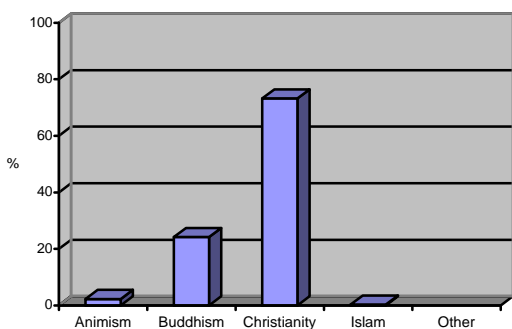
NP: Sections 11, 12 and 14.

MRML: Section 2 (11 of the camp's 13 Muslim households).

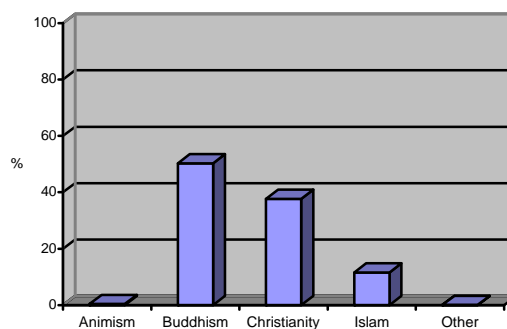
The following charts show breakdowns of the current populations in these camps by religious group. As illustrated, the vast majority of the Muslim populations in the camps reside in the camps in Tak province – a total of over 10,000:

CAMP POPULATIONS – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb 2010)

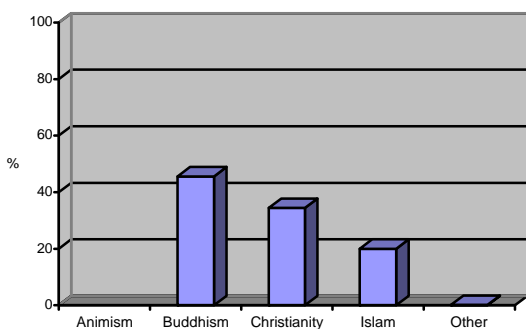
MRML



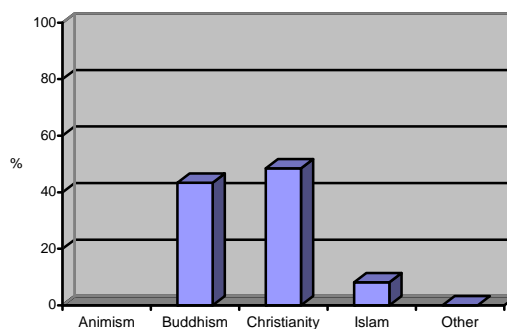
ML



UM



NP



MRML mosque (2009)



Main mosque in NP (2009)

PREVALENCE

MUSLIM COMMUNITIES AROUND THE CAMPS

As with all its neighbours, Thailand is home to significant Muslim populations represented throughout the Kingdom, but especially in the north and south. Phitsanulok is recognised as the largest and most active Muslim community in the north³², and significant clusters are found all along the border in the vicinity of the camps, specifically in:

- Mae Hong Son;
- Khun Yuam;
- Mae Sariang;
- Mae Saam Laep;
- Mae Salit;
- Tha Song Yang;
- Mae Sot;
- Phop Phra;
- Umphang;
- Kanchanaburi;
- Sangklaburi.



*Main Mosque in Mae Sot
(David Mathieson. 2005)*

IMPACTS ON CAMP SECURITY

There are two contemporary issues which have heightened the political profile of Thai-based Muslim communities in the country as a whole in recent years – the ongoing low-level insurgency in the most southern provinces, and the trafficking of Rohingyas through Thailand seeking migrant labour opportunities in Malaysia and beyond. Over the past several years, these dynamics have raised the profile of, and sensitivities to the Islam community nation-wide. This has impacted on Muslim camp communities – particularly in the Tak camps – in several ways:

- In the past few years, intelligence units attached to the National Security Council and the Third Army have been aware that Muslims from the far southern provinces have sought shelter in UM and ML and this led to increased surveillance of the communities in order to ensure they are not used as centres for recruitment or wider organising campaigns. RTG considers this to no longer be the case.
- In relation to this, Thai authorities have conducted lightning raids specifically on Muslim camp communities – the most prominent taking place in ML in early 2007 in which, in the middle of the night and without warning, Thai military personnel forcibly entered Muslim homes and confiscated all types of electronic communication devices, including mobile phones, digital cameras, computers, and MP3 players. The raid was reportedly related directly to the recent arrival and subsequent mistreatment of Burmese Rohingyas on the shores of south-west Thailand, and the resulting pressure from the international community faced by the Thai Government. The widespread confiscation of the items was reportedly aimed to cut communication links between the Rohingya/ Muslim community in the camp and “foreign news agencies”.³³
- The deportation of Rohingya “boat people” back to Burma via Mae Sot in March 2007, resulted in their confinement in the DKBA base of “*Shwe Ko Ko*” (near to ML), awaiting payment of their outstanding trafficking-service fees. Some also sought temporary shelter in ML, again raising the political profile of the camps.

³² Interview with intelligence source attached to the RTA’s Third Army, October 2007

³³ Interview with intelligence source attached to the RTA’s Third Army, June 2007

LIFESTYLE PRACTICES AND PREFERENCES: SOCIO-CULTURAL

THE “THREE SIDES”

The Thailand Burma border is host and home to a variety of Muslim communities, identified by three general geographic areas from which they originate: Karen State; central/ western Burma (with strong roots to Bangladesh and India); and other regions of Thailand (with roots to northern Malaysia and China’s Yunnan province in addition to Burma, Bangladesh and India). This is reflected in the differentiation of three sub-sects within camp Muslim communities identified and recognised by both Muslim and non-Muslim community leaders, each with varying motivations for seeking residence in the camps:

Group 1 – “Karen Muslims”:

This sub-sect is defined by Muslims born and bred in Karen State who have fled to Thailand due to human rights violations associated with the systematic oppression of, and specific operations against ethnic communities aligned to ethnic resistance movements in Eastern Burma. In the main, they identify themselves as Karen Muslims or “Karen Muslims” (“K’Nyaw Thoo” in Karen) and closely associate themselves with the wider Karen struggle for recognition and justice. This self-alignment is widely-held, as illustrated by a UNHCR survey, “The majority of Muslim residents in the camp use “Muslim” as their ethnicity and, when confronted with a need to identify themselves in ethnic terms prefer to call themselves Karen”³⁴. Generally, the main influx of this sector entered the camps from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

Group 2 – The “Central Burma/ Western Muslim Caseload”:

This group comprises Muslims from central/ western Burma, and who fled to Thailand due to a varying mix of economic restrictions and associated human rights violations. Generally, they either spent little or no time in Thailand before entering the camps, or were unable to secure comparatively stable living conditions outside. In the main, they are widely engaged in trade, retail and service activities within the refugee communities, and more closely identify themselves to their Indo/ Bengali ancestry. Generally, the main influx of this sector entered the camps during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Group 3 – “Thai-based Muslims”:

This group defines those Muslims who, for the large part, have entered camps mainly to capitalize on economic opportunities. They stem from established communities in central Thailand, with roots to the wider region (especially Burma, India, Bangladesh, south-west China and northern Malaysia), and who chose to enter the camps with the main purpose of expanding their existing business-based livelihoods. In the main, members of this group form the economic backbone of the camps’ market systems and are the main interlocutors with the wider border economy. Generally, their main influx into the camps occurred during the late 1990s/ 2000s – the period during which the setting began to enjoy reasonable stability and security and, no sooner, the term “protracted” started to be bounded around.

“786” – the Holy Number

The number “786” is closely associated with Muslim communities and is widely seen on Muslim products, businesses – even on highly sought-after vehicle licence plates.

It refers to the number of Arabic characters in the blessing commonly offered to Mohammad the Prophet:

“Bis mee lah hi rah mah nih rat hee”.

SUMMARY OF PERIODS OF MAIN INFLUX INTO CAMPS OF DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF THE MUSLIM “COMMUNITY”

Muslim Sub-Group	1980s	1990s	2000s
Karen Muslims			
Central Burma/ Western Muslim Caseload			
Thai-based Muslims			

These different motivations bringing them to live side-by-side in the camps creates a degree of compartmentalisation in an otherwise strongly cohesive society.

Relative sizes of the three groups have not been formally quantified, although Muslim and non-Muslim sources in the camps estimate the following proportions (allowing for some inter-camp variation):

- “Karen Muslims” ~60-70%
- The “Central Burma/ Western Muslim Caseload” ~20-30%
- “Thai-based Muslims” ~10-20%

³⁴ “Survey of Unregistered Residents of Mae La Camp”, draft, UNHCR, March 2008

Islam holds an undisputedly fundamental position and driving role in Muslim society, forming the values, beliefs and practices by which it thrives.

In Burma, it is normal to find a *Hafiz* (one who has learnt the Qur'an) or *Mawlawi* (a *Hafiz* who has further learnt *Fique* – Islamic jurisprudence – and Arabic language) in almost every Muslim family, as this is regarded as a great honour. Regarding the hereafter, Burmese Muslims postulate a reported saying of the Prophet that one who memorises the Holy Qur'an can save ten of his family members from hell-fire when the Day of Judgment comes. Therefore, one among every ten family members must be a *madrasah* graduate to save himself and his family from hell-fire.³⁵

Daily Worship:

Although Friday is the holy day of the week, worship is a daily devotion, with prayers taking place five times a day – pre-dawn (*Fajar*), noon (*Zahol*), afternoon (*Aswar*), early evening (*Magrib*) and evening (*Esha*). Men usually perform these at the mosque, while women worship at home. Lay people are able to postpone most prayers if other important commitments conflict. It is a tradition that a man has to be either a *Hafiz* or *Mawlawi* to lead the daily prayers.

Muslim Annual Holy Periods:

1. "*Ramadan*" – the dates of the 30-day observance vary every 3 years depending on the phases of the moon.
 - The 27th day of "*Ramadan*" is known as "*Shabe-Ku-Du-Rel*", during which special devotions are performed.
 - The last day of the period is known as "*Eid-el-Feteree*", during which daylight abstinence of consumption through, and sensory exposure to five areas of the being – mouth, nose, eyes, heart and brain – is practiced to avoid negative influences (no mention was made to the ears or touch).
2. Prior to "*Ramadan*", the 15-day period of "*Shabe-Barad*" is observed at night-time, during which Muslims attend prayers and go to cemeteries to pray for their ancestors.
3. 2 months and 10 days after the passing of "*Ramadan*", the 3-day "*Kaw A'Banee Eid-el-A'Dohah*" takes place, dedicated to selfless donation (ideally of meat, depending on wealth). Here, people donate goat, sheep, cow or buffalo meat to friends and neighbours, etc – hen, duck and fish not being appropriate. Different meats are donated depending on the geographical part of the world where the celebrations are being held (e.g. in Saudi Arabia, donating camel meat is highly regarded).

Festivals vs Festivities

Participation in Water Festival celebrations is discouraged as The Qur'an teaches people to embrace temperance.

However, the non-Muslim nature of the festival's roots also underlies self-imposed exclusion.

Missionary Work:

Muslim religious leaders and the faithful engage in regular inter-communal gatherings, travelling to and hosted by fellow communities in the area on a rotation basis. The MRML congregation participates in monthly gatherings with the Mae Saam Laep community – intending to extend these to include congregations from Mae Sariang and Chiang Mai in 2010. Muslim communities in ML, UM and NP also regularly conduct similar activities, commonly in conjunction with congregations from Mae Sot, with smaller local communities also participating, although details were not explored.

Mosques in the Camps:

- MRML: 1 mosque, in Section 2;
ML: 6 mosques, in Zones C2, C4 (x3), B1, and B3;
UM: 8 mosques, in the bazaar (x2) and Sections 6, 7 (x2), 8, 9, and 16;
NP: 2 mosques, in Section 12 and 14.

Number of Mosques by Muslim Population per Camp (TBBC TPD Feb/ Mar 2010):

Camp	No. of Mosques	Muslim Population	Population per Mosque
MRML	1	59	1 : 59
ML	6	4,369	1 : 728
UM	8	3,555	1 : 444
NP	2	1,265	1 : 633

The Congregation and Charity:

Unlike institutional centres of other faiths, mosques do not organise formalised collections of money or basic items to support impoverished members of the congregation – rather, individual households provide their own support as and when requested, and this reportedly extends to all members of the neighbourhood regardless of faith, reiterated during the TBBC's Livelihood Consultancy focus group discussion with males in NP in October 2009. However, some non-Muslims refute this, stating that "*if non-Muslims ask for support from their Muslim neighbours, they will probably get it, but if they don't ask, the Muslim community doesn't generally go out of their way*". Others go further, saying that Muslim charity "*only extends within its own ranks*", and that, "*the camp committee stretches its limited resources to take care of Muslims not eligible for rations – Muslim entrepreneurs should also be encouraged to set-up self-help mechanisms*".³⁶

³⁵ Adapted from '*Islamic education in Myanmar: a case study*', Mohammed Mohiyuddin Mohammed Sulaiman, from '*Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar*', Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson (editors), The Australian National University, 2008.

³⁶ Zakat or alms giving is one of the five pillars in Islam. There is a debate as to whether it is permissible to give Zakat to non-Muslims, depending on the jurisprudence school. But in practice, zakat is always given to Muslim family, charity/community organizations or local mosque

GENDER ROLES

The Qur'an explicitly lays out the roles, rights and obligations of both females and males; however, Muslim women leaders concede, due to the strongly patriarchal nature of Islam society, that the roles and obligations of females are often highlighted above and beyond their rights, and that most Muslim women acquiesce to the gender-specific roles placed upon them under this dynamic. This socialised compliance, and the filling of any potential political space by males, undermines any latent desires to remould female/ male roles into a more just and contemporary interpretation of The Qur'an's guidance. The lack of equitable access to higher levels of schooling further exacerbates these limitations and, in fact, constitutes a self-perpetuating vicious circle. Muslim women's organisations and leaders are working to bring about change, but clearly under quite adverse conditions offering significant structural resistance.

Muslim leaders recognise that outside observers particularly focus on the fact that gender roles in Muslim households and society are more clearly defined than in other religious communities in the camps but that, furthermore, they perceive the power dynamics of this segregation to be highly inequitable, in preference to the male and at the expense and the subjugation of the female. As stated above, Muslim leaders – both female and male – recognise the enhanced functional distinction; yet almost universally refute the externally-assumed level of inequity this incorporates.

In Defence of the System:

In surprisingly frank discussions, both female and male Muslims consistently defended “the system” – their argument best summed-up in the phrase often heard in other quarters of the refugee communities – that “the man is the head, but the woman is the neck” of the family “corpus”. This analogy literally explains that males assume the face of the family, while females provide the necessary support (while also allowing more progressive females to justify that the head is actually controlled by the neck!). Equally importantly, it encapsulates the mutual reliance that Muslim males and females place on their gender counterparts – a personification of the wider underlying Muslim value of collectivism.

Explaining Gender Roles:

“Yes, the man is the head, but the woman is the neck!”

And it is the lack of understanding of this collective and mutual reliance on which all sectors of Muslim society operate under, which Muslim leaders identify for the external mis-interpretation of their more distinct and segregated gender roles – a perspective seen as being generally defined and espoused by members of the Judeo-Christian community, known for its central tenets of individualism and freedom. It is this fundamental difference in the values of the different societies which Muslim leaders identify as lying at the heart of the mis-understanding.

This disparity in philosophical mind-set is further highlighted by a practice both Muslim women and men regularly referred to during the research – the act of “service”. Service is considered a highly honourable deed in Muslim society, and something which people take great pride and pleasure in performing. Again, leaders feel that this central element of Muslim life is not afforded the importance it deserves in the external observation and assumptions regarding the nature of gender roles within Muslim society.

Recognising the Weaknesses:

Despite the justifications given for the *status quo*, Muslim leaders do recognise significant weaknesses in “the system”, especially those providing greater space for gender-based violence against women to occur, particularly the suppression of women's rights and the undermining of dignity, and domestic violence.

Due to the heightened definition of gender roles in Muslim society, the “heads” of households hold greater, unilateral responsibility (*sic* authority) for ensuring the cohesion and functionality of the family, and therefore men, if so disposed or “triggered”, are well-placed to abuse their position within the household setting. These circumstances also heighten the climate of individual unaccountability. In addition, this segregation of gender roles nurtures the element of submission in the positions women are expected to assume – both in the household and in society as a whole – and promotes a climate of a “conspiracy of silence”.

The Prophet preached all people are equal – regardless of ethnicities or background, slave or free, man or woman ... a radical and emancipating message of the time, challenging many socialised roles in traditional Arab society.

Under these terms, the alternative, destructive channel of response for men who are poorly-disposed to resolve disputes or differences within their families in a constructive manner is closer-to-hand and more accessible – incidents or the ongoing suppression of women's entitlements and domestic violence often being the result.

These discussions also raised observations on gender role structures in non-Muslim societies, especially those which purport greater gender equity. Their perspectives reflected substantial reticence and objection to the expected adoption of supposed “improvements” in women's positions as espoused by critics of the *status quo* – on the individual, family and at the community level. Their main concerns about the functionality of non-Muslim societies related to:

- The uncontrolled behaviour of youths (including crime, substance abuse and social intolerance);
- Sexual liberalism and promiscuity (including disregard for the institution of marriage, homosexuality, as well as the spread of HIV/ AIDS) and the impacts of these on the self-respect of the individual and the dignity of the family; and, underlying all these,
- The rise of individualism, and the negative effects of this on the family and wider social cohesion;

ROMANCE, MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

(see also "Protection/ Justice – Access and Application")

Romance:

Despite the conservative appearance of Islam, young Muslims traditionally approach their potential partners in ways similar to those typically followed in wider Burma – and this is changing with the times. Customarily, the young man will send a letter expressing his emotions to the young woman, whilst seeking a reply. The female rarely replies to the first letter, as this is seen as being somewhat unreserved, and the male will likely send a second; however, if there is no reply after the third attempt, he will typically either give up (the second letter often explaining this impending reality), or ask his father to speak with the young woman's father.

According to the Qur'an,
there are three things
that cannot wait:
Prayer, marriage and death.

This last part diverges from practices common in other sectors of Burmese society, where the spurned male will often approach the woman's father himself (either directly, accompanied by an intermediary of some standing, or indirectly through him). The fact that the young Muslim male will call on the reserves of his father further reflects the strong social cohesion of the society.

(Note: this analysis specifically refers to the practices of young people during their early romantic liaisons, and so the phrases "young man" and "young woman" are explicitly used to signify this. Older members of the community generally do not follow such customs).

As discussed below under "Shifting Lifestyles", this custom is being heavily influenced by "western values", with first-hand reports where not only young women are initiating partnerships, but where pre-marital and casual sex are an increasingly common occurrence.

At the other end of the spectrum, "arranged marriage" is still reported in Muslim communities in the camps, although little information could be gathered as to the nature and scale of the practice; however, it was explained that external and rigid stereotypes do not necessarily apply, as these rarely reflect the element of voluntariness, with each party having a degree of influence in any arrangement.

Age of Consent

Muslim females reach marriageable age once they have had three menstrual cycles, known as "Balé".

Marriage:

As with religious-based marriages under every faith, Muslim couples employ the offices of religious leaders to arrange and conduct the proceedings. In Muslim marriages, the role of religious leaders is more prominent – being involved both in the preparations and post-wedding conduct.

Prior to marriage, the husband-to-be is customarily expected to pay a dowry ("mahr") to the woman – generally gold or money, or both. In the camps, this typically ranges from a minimum of 1 "Baht" of gold (~15 grams) or 1,000-2,000 Thai Baht to a combination of 2-3 "Baht" of gold and 20,000-30,000 Bt. If he is unable to pay some or all of it prior to the marriage, the woman's family may allow him to marry first, with the remainder to be given on demand afterwards (the outstanding amount recorded in the marriage certificate).

Marriage ceremonies generally take place at the mosque, but sometimes are held in the home – in either case, religious leaders always lead the process. If taking place at the mosque, the bride stays at home, and the bridegroom goes to the mosque. He declares his intentions to the religious leaders and is asked to sign the certificate (see inset). His parents will also be asked to sign.



Islamic Marriage Certificate
(translation below)

Following signing of the document, three male representatives of the bridegroom go to the bride's home with the certificate to seek her signature. If she agrees, she signs in front of the representatives, along with a guarantor (usually the parents). The religious leaders will then authorise the document. A copy of the certificate is filed by the religious leaders at the mosque, and the original is given to the wife - NOT to the husband (although other research reports that the mosque keeps the original and copies are given to both spouses). The wedding formalities usually culminate with a feast – the standard of which depends on the husband's family's wealth.

Islamic marriage certificates (see left and below) vary little between communities and from country-to-country, and is universally recognised by Islamic authorities world-wide. This means that although Muslims from Burma seeking asylum in another country might not be recognised by the host national authorities, the marriage certificate assures their recognition within the host religious congregation, and the obligations and commitments contained within it are as equally applicable there as in their home community.

However, as in other faiths, young people adopt different strategies, and the incidence of couples eloping is not a new phenomenon, but is nevertheless increasing. In these circumstances, Islam forbids unmarried parties from living together, and so religious leaders are often requested to require them to live separately for a time while they counsel their parents and try to get them to

consent to the marriage. In cases where parents agree, religious leaders will marry the parties – first overseeing the engagement.

Of importance is the impact of traditional gender roles on marriage and education. Expectations placed on females to fulfil other obligations in preference to their attainment of higher educational standards promote a climate in which marriage can take place at quite an early age. In the wider camp community, other ethnic and religious groups place a greater importance on education for both sexes (although some inequity still exists between them), and thus marriage does not commonly take place until young men and women exhaust and fulfil their formal educational opportunities.

Translation of the Islamic Marriage Certificate

All grown-ups who have the ability should marry. (Prophet)
The inexpensive marriage is a graceful marriage. (Prophet)

“Nikah” Marriage Contract

In Islamic (Hijiri) year 14__ , _____ month, _____ (/ /), _____ day, _____ hour,

_____ years old bridegroom, son of _____ who lives in _____ township, _____ street, _____ house no., and

_____ years old bride, daughter of _____ who lives in _____ township, _____ street, _____ house no.,

are married according to the Islamic faith at the presence of witness with the agreement to give “mahr” (dowry) as: _____ Kyats (_____ Kyats for now, and _____ later) at: _____ township, _____ street, _____ house no.

The wife has a right to divorce under any of the following situations:
(1) If the husband refuses to give “mahr” (marital gift) when the wife asks for it, without justifiable reasons.
(2) If the husband ill-treats and/ or physically abuses his wife.
(3) If the husband abandons the wife for more than six months continuously without justifiable explanation.

The wife can report her situation in the presence of at least one “Aalim” (a learned man) and two religious men, and if they decide that the case is warranted, the wife can divorce at the time or any time she wants to after Talaq ba-in (an irrevocable divorce) is ratified.

The wife also has the responsibility to be dutiful according to the Faith and to live harmoniously with her husband.

Sign of Bridegroom: _____ ID No: _____

Sign of Bride: _____ ID No: _____

1st witness: _____ son of _____
Address: House no. _____, _____ street, _____ township.

2nd witness: _____ son of _____
Address: House no. _____, _____ street, _____ township.

Other supporters:
 (1): _____ Address: _____
 (2): _____ Address: _____

Name of the person solemnising the marriage: _____
Title: _____

Live happily ever after with blessing of Allah. (Praises be to Allah)

Distributed by: Olama Islamic Theologian Association. No.18, 28th street, Rangoon. Phone: 77447

Post-nuptials:

After the wedding, the new couple will generally move into the husband's parents' home (in ~80% of cases). Otherwise, they will move into their own new home or, occasionally, into the wife's parents' home. However, staying with parents is temporary (usually less than a year), and certainly once the first baby is born, the couple moves out.

The Qur'an explicitly states that a child should typically sleep with her/ his parents until s/he is 7 years old. After this age, s/he must sleep separately. Even if, for example, the couple has 3 children all under 7 years old, they should all sleep together – the typical arrangement being the children all sleep between the father and mother.

Divorce:

(see also “Protection/ Justice – Access and Application:”)

As explained above, The Qur'an explicitly refers to the roles, rights and obligations of both females and males, including those relating to marriage and divorce; however, due to the strongly patriarchal nature of Islam society, the emphasis is placed on women to fulfil their roles and obligations in preference to the exploration and adoption of their rights. This is further strengthened by barriers to education which, particularly, young women face. Muslim women's

Cultural Note

In families with two or more daughters, when one of them gets married, she should not wear the same coloured clothing as her unmarried sisters to avoid inappropriate mis-identification by her husband.

organisations are specifically trying to redress this through education and exchange activities (see “Representation/ Muslim Civil Society”).

Due to these dynamics, Muslim leaders – women and men alike – concede that many women are unaware of their entitlements within a marriage, and unwilling to exercise them even if they do. As a result, despite many believing they have no right to divorce their husbands, both The Qur’an and the Islamic Marriage Certificate explicitly stipulate the specific terms under which women have the right to divorce.

Both texts enshrine three conditions under which a woman has the right to divorce her husband (although the marriage certificate lays down no such explicit entitlements for men):

1. If the husband refuses to give any outstanding “mahr” (dowry) whenever the wife asks for it, without justifiable reasons (the dowry, its amount and the amount outstanding is recorded on the marriage certificate);
2. If the husband ill-treats and/ or physically abuses his wife;
3. If the husband abandons his obligations to provide for his wife for more than six months continuously, without justifiable explanation.

Muslim religious leaders state that these three clauses, as well as the marriage certificate, are universal, inalienable entitlements and apply in all Muslim communities worldwide (although the example certificate shown above being only in Burmese language raises interpretation and authentication challenges).

“Yellow Card... Red Card...”

As in other societies, divorce in the Muslim community is considered a last response to seemingly irrevocable differences within a married couple. Prior to initiating such a process, parents and religious elders provide counselling and offer advice on ways to try and overcome their challenges. These might include spending a number of nights or a more extended period of time apart to reflect on their situation in a more rationalised environment.

However, if any of the above transgressions do occur and the wife wishes to pursue divorce, she has the right to be heard by religious leaders. A panel of three, including at least one religious elder, will then investigate the claims and rule on the wife’s right to seek divorce (Muslim spiritual leaders (*Imams*) are trained to apply Sha’ria law to resolve disputes such as these). If they substantiate her claim, she has the right to an immediate divorce or can choose to keep the incident recorded and if it happens again in the future, choose to effect a divorce. Clarification on the panel’s gender equity requirements could not be ascertained.



Entrance to MRML mosque (2009)

Men also have the right to divorce, although three verbal warnings must first be given – rather directly in the presence of witnesses or through religious leaders, after which a divorce can be enacted. Religious leaders in ML refer to The Qur’an, which states that the issuance of the warnings must not be taken lightly and must occur over a period of “no less than two years”. After the third warning, the panel of three will allow the parties to separate for a few months – when applied literally, this period of time should be “three menstrual cycles” or “3 months and 10 days” – before either party can make any relationship-related decisions. During this period, religious leaders monitor the couple and their behaviour to evaluate the suitability of possible re-union. In some cases, the parties will miss each others’ company and reunite. If not, and the parties still want to divorce after the period, religious leaders will grant them a divorce.

In practice, religious leaders are facing a growing problem of men not adhering to the time-bound requirement of issuing warnings referred to above, sometimes giving the three warnings all at once or in close succession – considered a mis-interpretation of the entitlements enshrined in The Qur’an, and can lead to problems, e.g. with dependent children and child support. The Qur’an also gives guidance on issuing the warnings, such as the second warning should be displayed in a slightly stronger manner than the first, e.g. by giving the wife a light slap – not on the face, but on the arm or leg – to indicate the severity of their situation and the likely impending consequences if there is no change in behaviour. Mis-interpretation of this traditional advice is also blamed for cases of domestic violence.

Settlement:

Either wife- or husband-initiated divorce claims are submitted to a religious panel of three elders established to rule on the case. After hearing and investigation, if the panel accepts the claim, it rules on the level of a monthly settlement that the husband has to pay to the wife to support the children up to their age of 18. If the couple are childless, then the panel will rule on a one-off settlement in gold that the husband must pay. The woman may also voluntarily return the dowry (if she still has it), symbolising herself to no longer be the man’s wife; however, this is a self-motivated act independent of the settlement process.

SOCIAL INCLUSION

(see also “Protection/ Religious (In)tolerance”)

Despite the differentiation between the “three sides”, most Muslims identify themselves as “equal members of a diverse community”. This is probably a reflection of a perspective developed through their historic position as a minority and their previous exposures to, and acceptance by and of more varied communities (in contrast to the homogeneity of traditional rural Karen communities from which the camp populations originate, and the national and political desires for ethnic recognition which organised Karens strive for).



Life goes on... (NP mosque, 2009)

In terms of corresponding perspectives from the wider community, perceptions of Muslims are widely based on their distinct physical appearance and customs; however, a substantial disparity exists between the recognition and acceptance of “Karen Muslims” to those whose residence in the camps is identified as being economically-motivated – and levels of inclusion vary accordingly.

The latter are widely perceived as taking advantage of the camps and the refugees, as they often “have access to the best of both worlds” – not only receiving the rations and free access to services as other residents do, but also

enjoy the freedoms and opportunities to travel and trade. The ability to travel has recently been further facilitated by their ability to enter the migrant worker registration scheme, and therefore acquire documents which enable them to pass through checkpoints. In contrast, any engagement by “Karen Muslims” in retail and service activities is generally embarked upon as an interim coping strategy while seeking asylum and resolution to the ongoing violations of their basic human rights.

Although many “Karen Muslims” in camps are still regarded by the wider population as different, nevertheless they share common geographical origins and mutually-respected lifestyles and, in many cases, a binding history (e.g. in the 1980s and ‘90s many Muslims fought alongside the KNLA under units of either the MLOB or ABMU, or within the KNLA itself).

Cultural Note:

In public fora, participants excuse themselves to the bathroom by gently raising their right hand, clenched but with the little finger extended vertically. No words are spoken – to explain verbally is considered rude and distracting.

Simply in terms of Muslim participation in camp-wide cultural activities (e.g. festivals, Karen national celebrations, etc), it is mainly the “Karen Muslims” who would most commonly get centrally involved - their participation often based on the self-identification of their “assumed place” in the particular cultural or national context of the event.

Unfortunately however, as a whole, all 3 sides of the Muslim community are still often too easily used as a scapegoat for a range of challenges the wider, largely-conservative community feels threatened by – from unbridled economic activities to domestic violence.

Shifting Lifestyles:

One visible, distinguishable trait of Muslims is their traditionally worn attire. The Qur’an requires females from the age of seven to cover themselves from head-to-ankle, and males from the age of ten midriff-to-calf. This practice is aimed to maintain the dignity and virtue of both sexes and avoid unnecessary inter-personal emotional stimulation.



While this is the expected standard, in the camps some relaxing of the decree is practiced at home when necessary; however, not when non-family members are present or within view. Strict adherence is also increasingly open to interpretation based on family and personal preferences, although departure from the original edict are seen as a lack of religious discipline; hence nowadays, when not participating in religious observance, it is common to see women not wearing a full *burqa*, but rather a headscarf (*hijāb*), and men dispensing with the skull cap (*kapiyoh* or *tagiyah*). In addition, short-sleeved shirts are often worn. The roots of these digressions from traditional practices in the camps’ Muslim communities are generally grounded in a

generational shift influenced by “western culture” and its underlying value of individualism, and especially within younger populations, enthused in their desires to “explore themselves”.

This change is further apparent in other lifestyle practices. For example, ML elders (including women) report a growing trend of Muslim women regularly consuming alcohol, an increase in substance abuse amongst male youth, and young couples showing affection to each other in public and engaging in pre-marital and casual sex in private – trends unheard of only a few years ago. This influence of “western culture” is blamed on the proliferation of television and videos, and relations with nearby Thai towns. The ensuing cultural shift is creating substantial and growing gaps between age groups, with consequential breakdowns in previously intimate generational bonds – the positions and roles of elderly persons and traditional leadership being increasingly less respected, and progressively further challenged by younger members of Muslim society in the camps.

Fishpaste:

According to Hanafi interpretation, fishpaste is *Haraam* – non-*Halal* – and therefore followers can not consume or derive any benefits from it, including money or goods bartered in kind.³⁷ Most Muslims from Burma are of this jurisprudence school – in ML, a minority of households (~20%) do collect their fishpaste rations, while in UM and MRML the practice is more widespread, with religious leaders reporting a large proportion of the rations are collected and either sold (1-2 Bt/ kg) or, more commonly, swapped with other households for other commodities, mainly yellow beans or charcoal, or bartered with people to carry their rations home. Donating the rations to needy households is also often reported, but the frequency of this is not known. There are also reports in ML and UM of impoverished, unregistered Muslim families actually consuming the commodity out of destitution. Collection practices in NP could not be conclusively gathered.

Misplaced Fishpaste
Being “Haraam” for Hafini followers, even gaining cash or kind from trading fishpaste is against religious belief.

In terms of TBBC programme, the most obvious output at odds with the needs and preferences of the Muslim community is the provision of fishpaste. The commodity is rarely, if ever consumed by the population, and therefore compromises our commitments to meet basic nutritional requirements of beneficiaries. In addition, low collection rates undermine the bartering of the “currency” for preferred dietary needs, and the widely unaccounted-for, unclaimed stock (widely reported as distributed in ration books), allows unscrupulous refugee leaders to abuse the system and substantially undermines our efforts to improve operational and financial efficiencies and provide greater accountability.



Muslim women at food distribution (John Hulme, ML, undated)

Many Muslims even consciously avoid coming into contact with the product and so, during the period of *Ramadan*, non-collection rates generally increase and trading practices reduce. Despite not being collected, ration books are often filled in to the contrary, with the unclaimed stocks often being used by section leaders to support voluntary workers in the camp (such as compensation for off-loading teams).

Muslim representatives have pointed out that despite appreciating TBBC's flexibility in allowing beneficiaries to manage their own rations, this doesn't accommodate the widespread practice of avoiding the commodity completely. Initial discussions on the topic of possible fishpaste substitution were met with a *laissez-faire* response, not wanting to be seen as different to the rest of the community; however now, and maybe due to a different consultative approach, strong requests are being made to address the issue. Tinned fish is widely proposed as a substitute.

In place of fishpaste, Muslim households typically use a mix of oil, salt, chili and onion to blend into their rice dishes.

AsiaMIX:

Although AsiaMIX is not well-suited to making breads typically consumed by Muslims – *ee-gyah-gweh* (traditional bread snack consisting of two parallel fried sticks), *paratha*, *roti*, or *naan* breads – the majority of the commodity collected is used to make other snacks and cakes for home consumption and/ or sale in the community.

In MRML, the majority of households use their rations for this – most commonly banana cake, as well as “fried worm” snacks. The same practice is reported in UM, where most families collect then consume their rations at home, although selling it raw (10 Bt/ kg) and as cooked items in camp, is common.

However in ML, it is reported that only about a third of Muslims – mainly children aged 5-9 – eat it – mainly as “*doe say*” (a pancake-like snack), *roti*, “fried worm” snacks, or *halva*, with only a minority cooking it in wet curries (rice soups, etc). It is reported that the majority who don't consume it all, collect the ration from the distribution point, and most sell it to snack makers in the camp (5-6 Bt/ kg).

In NP, up to an estimated 90% of households feed a proportion of their rations to domestic animals (cows, goats and hens). Reasons given why it is not widely consumed include it not being a traditional ingredient and people don't know how to cook it, and cooking it they way they like to eat it requires a lot of cooking oil – a commodity in high demand (see below) – as well as sugar/ eggs. Of interest was the almost complete lack of reports of AsiaMIX being used to make hot drinks, a practice more common in other sectors of the wider community.

Chili:

Muslims in various camps state that they are not known for consuming chili in the large quantities that “other Karens” typically are, but that they still eat a significant amount, therefore acceptance and adaption to recent reductions of ration levels is less challenging than for other community sectors.

Cooking Oil and Fuel:

Muslims state that insufficiencies in cooking oil and fuel rations are exacerbated by their particular cooking style. Muslim families generally fry most of their foods, and all dishes are cooked until they are “well-done, to ensure cleanliness”. This puts a greater strain on household ration management, and supplementation of these rations is a regular activity.

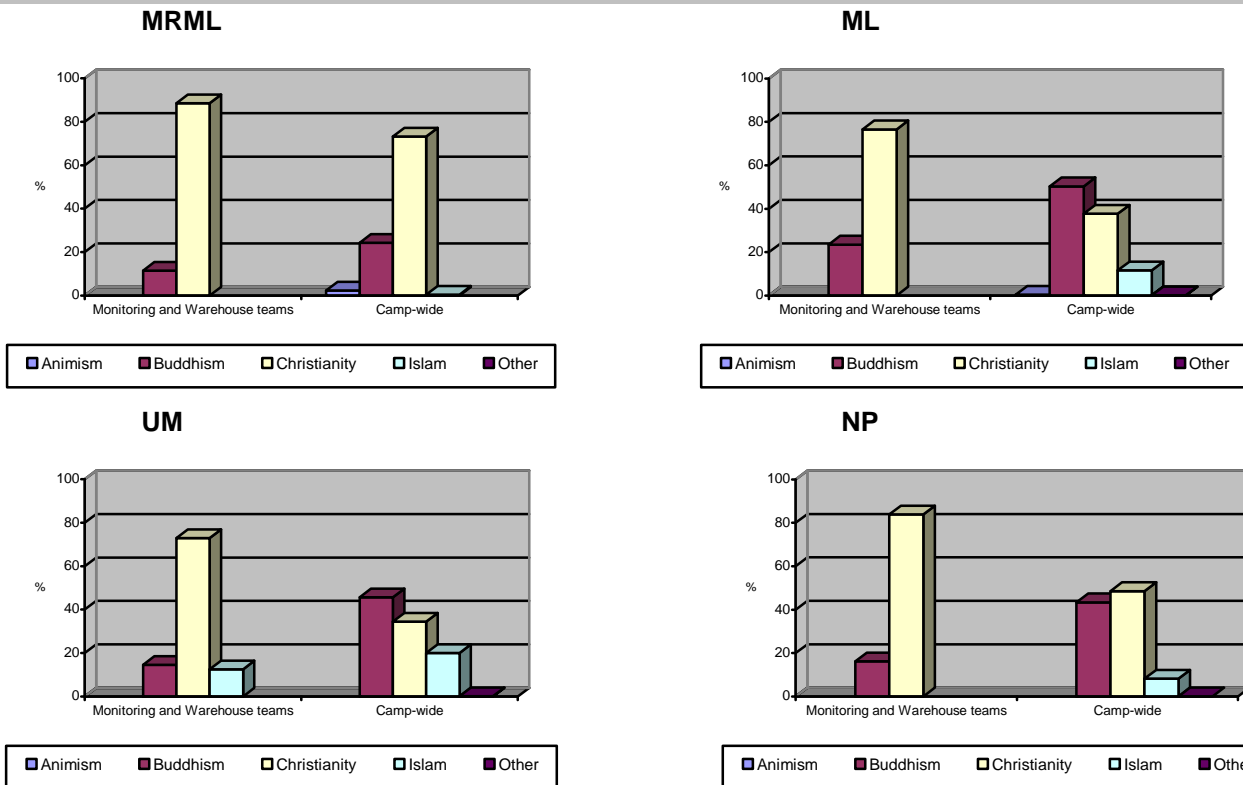
Culinary Challenges
Muslim families generally fry most of their foods, with dishes cooked until they are “well-done, to ensure cleanliness”.
This puts added strains on household ration management.

Monitoring:

³⁷ Although in the Hanifi sect, shellfish are often considered to be *Haraam*, interestingly this is not the case in the Malay-speaking south of Thailand which is 90 per cent Shafi'i jurisprudence school – here, seafood, including shrimp and fish paste, is an important part of the local diet.

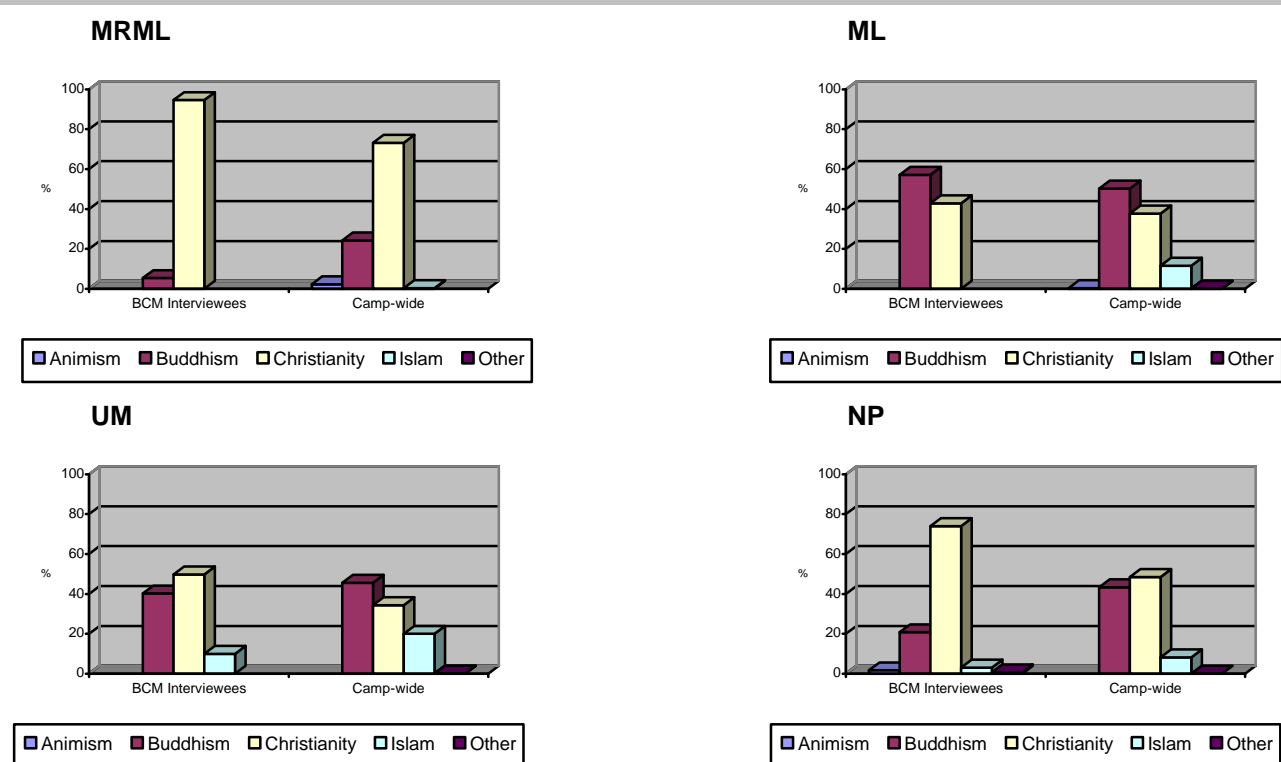
In order to strengthen the monitoring of distribution and utilisation of food rations, TBBC engages teams of residents outside of the central camp management structure to support the system through Monitoring teams. These assist Camp and Section Committees to validate the monthly changes in the eligible feeding population and support warehouse staff in validating and calculating household entitlements based on pre-determined eligibility criteria. The charts below detail the combined religious breakdown of these teams in comparison to the overall camp populations:

MONITORING AND WAREHOUSE STAFF VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, April 2010)



In addition to these systems designed to strengthen distribution efficiencies, TBBC field staff conduct monthly post-distribution monitoring exercises to ensure eligible households received their rations and to gather further information as to their utilisation. The following set of charts details the religious breakdown of households consulted during the second half of 2009 in comparison to the overall population, and shows a lack of equitable engagement with Muslims:

6-MONTHLY BENEFICIARY CONTACT MONITORING INTERVIEWEES VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb 2010)



RATION/ DIET SUPPLEMENTATION

(see also “Livelihoods”)

Chili:

With less focus on agricultural activities, and despite reports above that the typical Muslim diet is less reliant on chili, almost all Muslim households are reported to supplement their chili rations by buying from shops or local villagers as necessary. In UM, purchasing 1-2 kgs per month for a typical household is not uncommon, costing ~120 Bt/ month.

Fruit and Vegetables:

Although the research identified no significant difference of fruit consumption preferences between Muslim households and those of the wider community, it is worth noting that this food sector is not generally highly prioritised as a healthy food source within Muslim families (although significant consumption is reported during pregnancy).

Cooking Fuel:

As consumption of cooking fuel is comparatively high due to particular cooking techniques and dietary habits, Muslim households often forage for deadwood in the camp perimeters. If the security or family situation is not conducive to this, they buy charcoal in camp – commonly from needy families during distribution.

Shelter:

Muslim households very much involve themselves in the sourcing and production of building materials to supplement annual TBBC rations. In UM, many Muslims collect grass for making thatch, these days requiring a 2-3 hour walk to reach the harvesting area to the south. In ML, community leaders estimate 15-20% of Muslim households collect building materials outside camp, many staying away for a whole month, under contract from TBBC suppliers.



Shelter in Muslim communities is simple, yet functional (NP, 2009)

In terms of shelter design, the TBBC Shelter report 2009 “Twenty-Five Years under Thatch – Where To From Here?”, conducted by Benchmark Consulting, identified a number of traits of different ethnic/ religious groups:

“Size and type of housing is influenced by ethnic and regional traditions, which in turn are usually informed by the immediate circumstances of their area of origin. Some broad differences observed by the team and corroborated by experienced informants included:

- *Karen people appear to maximize the size of their house, and if further land and building materials are available, will extend further.*
- *Karenni people appear to have smaller family units, as newlyweds will often move out of their parents’ homes, keeping house sizes small.*
- *Mon houses appear to be smaller, but with overall closer attention to construction technique, and better durability.*
- *The Nepalese/ Burmese appear mainly from Yangon, and like other former urban dwellers, arrived in the camps with few or no construction skills suitable to building with bamboo in a rural environment.*
- *Rohingya/Muslim communities appear to have less obviously planned settlement, but houses show a greater degree of decoration and attention to detail, and generally sounder construction.*

EATING PREFERENCES

“The Teashop Culture”:

As with most people in the camps, Muslims typically eat three times-a-day. However, rice-based meals are typically only consumed at lunch and in the evening – the morning reserved for the male prerogative, the “teashop culture”.

This central practice in male Muslim life (women rarely being seen in front of the counter) is found throughout the Tak camps – social references to it also exist in MRML, despite there being no Muslim teashops in the camp. Young men are initiated into the culture when they reach adolescence, and it is as much a social gathering as it is nutritious; with a rich concoction of relaxed conversation and social debate over sweet coffees and teas, fried breads - *ee-gyah-gweh* (traditional bread snack consisting of two parallel fried sticks), *paratha*, *roti*, and *naan* breads – and savouries such as *samosas*, with meat curries and *daal* also often being available. More recently, the typical Burmese or Bengali background music has been increasingly supplanted by TVs playing Burmese films or karaoke music, and afforded a higher influence in the teashop atmosphere.



Fried breads form a vital part of “teashop culture” (unknown)

Almost all households partake in this cultural routine on a daily basis, with either the men eating there, or buying items for the whole family and eating back at home together. In MRML, with no teashops, Muslim families typically make their own sweet drinks and cake and consume them at home or with friends. Impoverished families which cannot afford to partake in this custom will normally just fry left-over rice and curry from the previous evening.

The other two meals of the day – lunch and dinner – are rice-based, ideally complemented with oily meat curries and often a fried omelette. Meats are the centre of Muslim cuisine, although many Muslim households are impoverished and are not able to enjoy these foods frequently. In most situations, families can

generally only afford to eat meat between twice-a-week and two-to-three times a month, and more usually eat a cuisine closer to that of non-Muslim households – typically fried bean curry (sometimes with bones added), boiled or stir-fried vegetables, and chili paste (made from tinned fish). Of course, fishpaste consumption remains a stark differential.

BREASTFEEDING PRACTICES

The Qur'an states that all female infants should be breast-fed until they are 14 months old, while males should be breast-fed for the first 18 months, although it provides no specific guidance to pregnant or lactating mothers as to particular foods to eat or avoid.

The Qur'an states that female infants should be breast-fed until they are 14 months old, while males should be breast-fed for the first 18 months.

As with other sectors of the community, Muslim mothers generally start to feed rice to their infants during this period (just plain rice prior to teething, then with “curry” once teathed). Some also feed them milk powder or fortified milk and honey, especially if the mother has difficulties producing enough breast milk. However, in MRML, Muslim women report traditionally breastfeeding infants up to, but not beyond 2 years, and commonly feed them rice soup from the age of 3-4 months, with “curry” introduced into the diet at 2 years – well after teething has occurred).

Lactating Muslim women and their infants avoid foodstuffs such as chili, dogfruit, pumpkin, certain fish, etc – “strong” foods which are reputed to bring on aches and ailments. Instead, mothers will place greater emphasis on intake of vitamins, commonly through vegetables and fruit. They also believe, as with wider populations, that the banana flower helps mothers to produce ample and healthy breast milk.

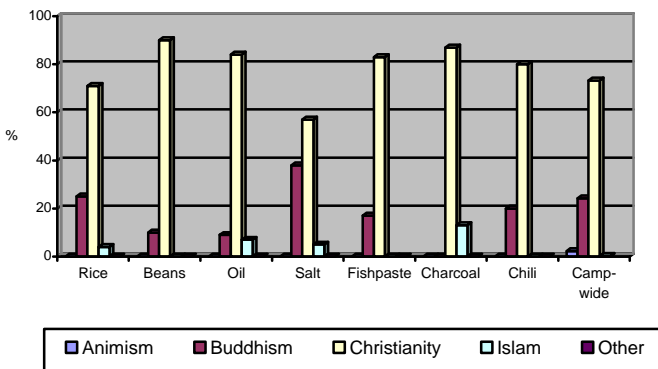
EXTRA NEEDS

TBBC supports Refugee Committees in providing extra quantities of food basket commodities to Camp Committees (CC), in addition to those for distribution to eligible beneficiaries, in order that they can manage additional requests, such as those for community festivals and maintaining relations.

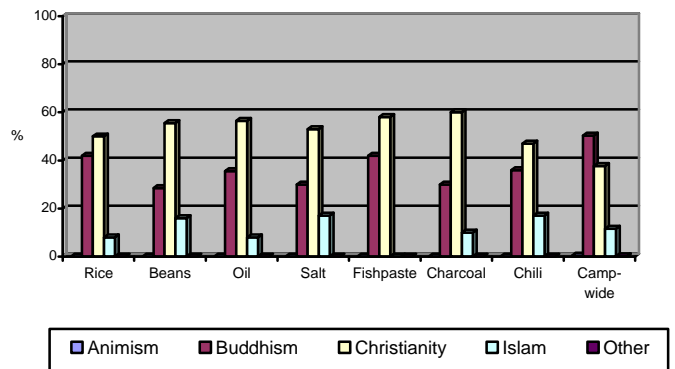
The following charts illustrate the amounts allocated to community groups by religion during a typical month (the statistics were gathered at a time when TBBC's database was in development, and so they are compared to more recent overall camp statistics). They illustrate that Muslim communities generally have good access to the commodities for their activities, with the exception of NP. Recent reductions in certain areas might well affect this availability.

CMP EXTRA NEEDS ALLOCATION VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (CMSP, July 2009 vs TBBC, Feb 2010)

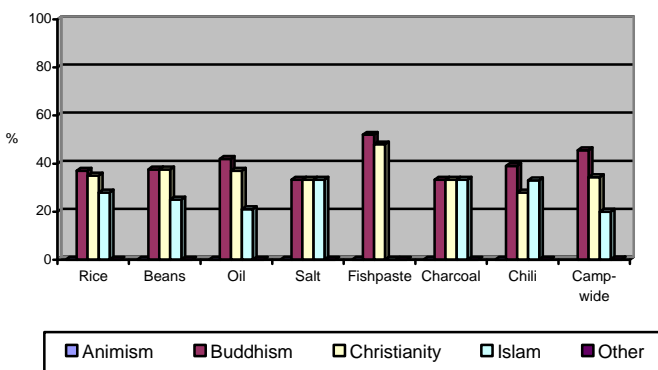
MRML



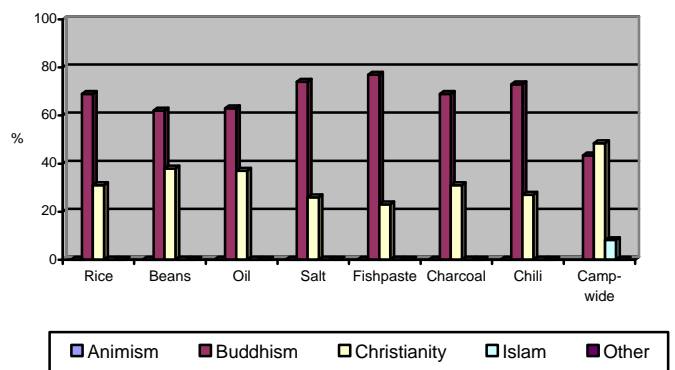
ML



UM



NP



FOOD AND SHELTER

HEALTH:

In consultations with community elders, religious leaders, women's and youth representatives and household visits, little information was gathered as to whether divergences existed on health issues between Muslim and the "mainstream" camp populations (although other sections of this report address cross-cutting aspects).

Topics broached included:

- Preferences towards "customary" vs "Western" medicine – in terms of beliefs, practices and medicines used;
- Access to in-patient, out-patient and outreach services;
- Suitability of services and treatment provided.

Greater access to health workers of the same faith would enable Muslim patients to broach sensitive health issues in a suitably supportive environment

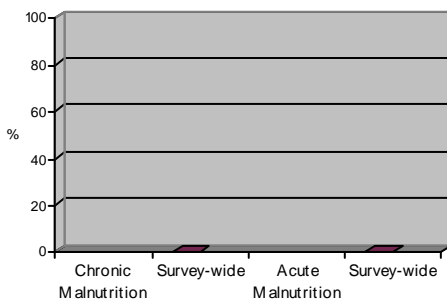
One general perspective was expressed however: that there are few practices in the health centres seen as inappropriate to Muslim customs, but also that few Muslims work in clinics, and that greater access to health workers of the same faith would enable Muslim patients to broach sensitive health issues in a suitably supportive environment.

As documented under the "Education" section, the reason seen for this relates to religious inequity in the hiring of NGO camp-based staff – mainly due to the inability of many Muslims to meet the educational requirements stipulated by agencies – specifically Karen and English language skills – and that this is due to inclusion issues, especially those surrounding the language of instruction.

Statistics regarding the comparative levels of malnutrition identified through the annual nutrition survey for children 6 months to 5 years of age conducted by health agencies are presented below. The statistics however, reflect low "confidence levels" due to the small numbers actually captured in the survey – for example, out of a total border-wide caseload of 4,822 infants surveyed for Global Chronic Malnutrition, only 215 identified themselves as Muslims, of which 60 were found to have GCM (27.9%, +/-6%); likewise for Global Acute Malnutrition, out of the 4,957 surveyed, only 220 were Muslims, of which only 10 were identified with GAM (4.5%, +/-2-3%). Despite this, the statistics imply that Muslim children under 5 have proportionately higher rates of acute malnutrition in comparison to their sample size:

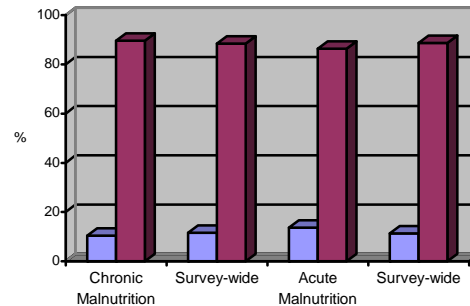
UNDER 5S IDENTIFIED WITH CHRONIC/ ACUTE MALNUTRITION VS OVERALL SURVEYED POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb 2010)

MRML



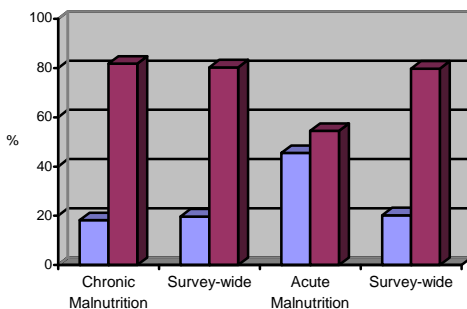
■ Muslims ■ Non-Muslims

ML



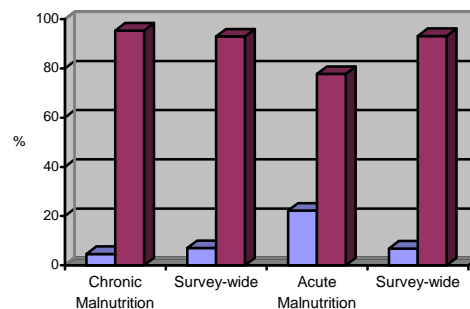
■ Muslims ■ Non-Muslims

UM



■ Muslims ■ Non-Muslims

NP



■ Muslims ■ Non-Muslims

There are also a number of preventive health projects running in the camps – one such being Right To Play’s sports-based programme which aims to “enhance healthy development of children and youth through regular sport and play programs”.

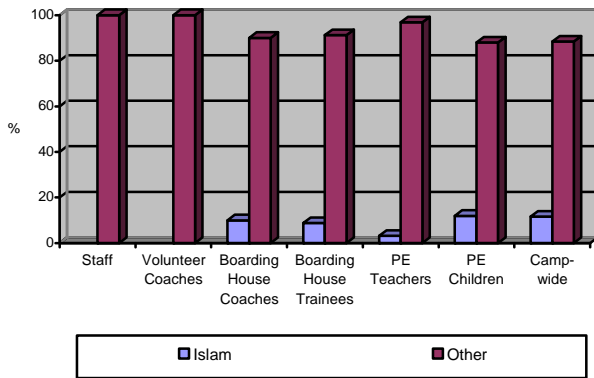
Following are statistics of refugee inclusion in RTP’s activities aggregated by religion (at the time of writing, RTP are not conducting activities in MRML):



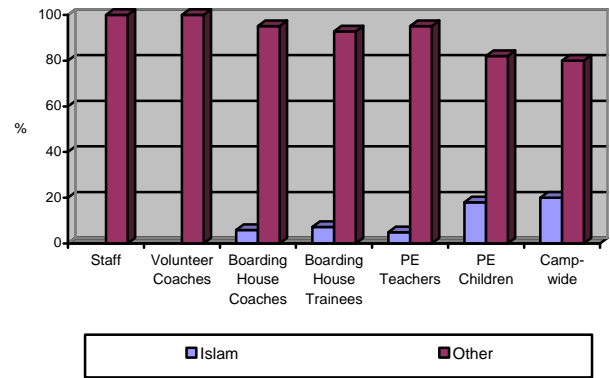
The mosque – social hub of the community (NP, 2009)

RIGHT TO PLAY PROGRAMME ENGAGEMENTS VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (RTP/ TBBC, Feb 2010)

ML

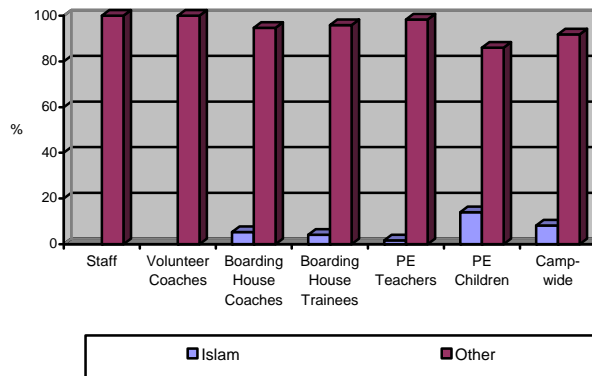


UM



NP

NP



HEALTH

EDUCATION

TYPES OF SCHOOLING

There are four main types of schooling which Muslim children attend:

- The mainstream secular community schools (administered under the Karen Refugee Committee's Education Entity – KRCEE).
- Mixed-curriculum schools set up by the Muslim communities offering instruction in standard subjects as well as religious teaching. These schools have a focus on religion and add classes like Farsi and Arabic to the curriculum. Instruction lasts ten years and is required to be eligible to become an *Imam*.
- “*Pondoks*” – traditional Islamic boarding schools, which male-only students typically enrol at the age of seven and attend for about 10 years, after which they often pursue further religious studies outside the camps. Some only attend for a few years to memorise the 30 chapters of the Holy Qur'an (thence known as '*Hafiz*'). Others continue their studies in the field of *Mawlawi*, in which they learn *Fique* (Islamic jurisprudence) and Arabic language, its grammar and the interpretation of the Qur'an.
- “*Maktab*” classes – offering religious teaching based on studying and reciting The Qur'an. These studies take place in the early mornings and evenings, supplementing the students' studies at other full-time schools.



Imam leading students to “maktab” classes (NP, 2009)

In addition to religious instruction in schools, Muslim males interested in pursuing a vocation as an Islamic scholar or *Imam* must attend a minimum 4-month training as part of their induction – either in the camp, or frequently outside in local Muslim communities. This includes being trained to apply Sha'ria law to resolve minor disputes, and is also a basic requirement for membership to mosque organising committees in the camps. Attending religious training for this purpose in other parts of Thailand, Burma and further afield is also reported.

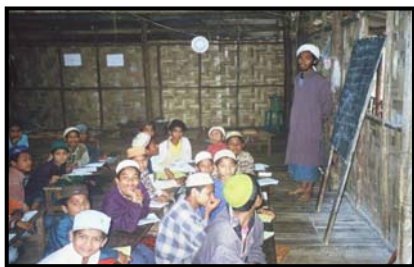
ACCESS AND INCLUSION

Many challenges faced by Muslims occur in the mainstream community schools, but there are also some universal in nature. These can be grouped into two areas: socio-cultural and institutional:

Socio-cultural Challenges:

These appear in various areas:

- As explained above in “*Socio-culture/ Marriage*”, due to well-defined gender roles in the Muslim community, expectations placed on girls to fulfil their obligations and household duties often takes precedence over the importance of attaining a high standard of education. This leads to lower attendance levels for Muslim girls, particularly in upper secondary and tertiary streams.
- Strict adherence to Qur'anic directives on attire is undermined, as community school uniform requirements allow a degree of flexibility in clothing styles, and Muslim students obviously wish to be seen as “fitting in”. Muslim households also face additional financial burdens, as following religious instruction requires their children to only wear full-length skirts/ trousers and long-sleeved shirts.
- Several young children pointed out that attending both mainstream community schooling as well as the supplementary religious classes at the “*Maktab*”, resulted in a total study time of up to 10 hours per day. Although they did not explicitly identify this as a challenge, it obviously puts great strain on the child to live up to expectations to succeed, and is contrary to international educational best practices.
- Studies are interrupted on Fridays when students attend the main mid-day prayers (which can require being excused from 11:00 to 2:00), although no issues are reported around seeking permission to be excused.
- Muslim children experience bullying at school due to their distinct attire and faith, typically in the form of verbal taunts.



Islamic school (unknown)

Institutional Challenges:

The main impediment here is the core language of instruction in the mainstream schools. Although in reality teachers use a mix of languages in the classroom, this is reported to be a significant barrier to effective learning, especially for those elements of the population less immersed in the community and for newer arrivals in camp. As a result, Muslims and other students for whom Karen is not their first language are more prone to failing their exams and, as is common in the camps, therefore more likely to withdraw from school after unsuccessful board examinations (at ages 9-10 and at 13-14). This has also been reported as a factor in schools under KNU administration in Eastern Burma.³⁸

Muslim children who have lived in camp for “a long time” – especially those who identify themselves as “Karen Muslims” – find the language of instruction issue much less of a challenge, although the educational load of acquiring functional skills in five languages (Burmese, English, Karen, Thai and Urdu) places an added stress on all Muslim students’ educational development. This is a greater issue in mixed-curriculum schools, where Farsi and Arabic are also often taught (meaning the required studying of a total of seven languages).

Muslim representatives also identified challenges relating to school registration fees and less-educated parents not installing educational aspirations in their children, but these are concerns common to those in the wider community.

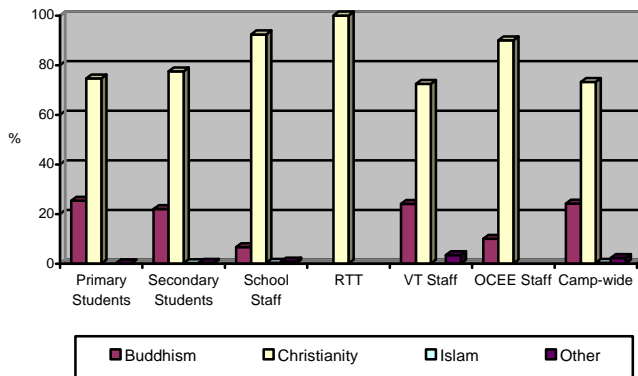
It is also important to note that, as a result of obstacles relating to educational access and inclusion, Muslim representatives in all camps express concern that humanitarian agencies do not pay enough attention to religious equity in recruiting staff, and that this phenomenon is fuelled by the inability of most Muslims to meet the education requirements stipulated by agencies – specifically Karen and English language skills.

The following charts show the enrolment of students in mainstream secular community schools and their education staff by religion in the 2009-10 academic year, and illustrate that Muslim children are poorly represented in the schools, and increasingly so in secondary level education; however, further statistical analysis of the data with regard to age breakdowns of the camp-wide religious populations would be required to draw any firm conclusions:

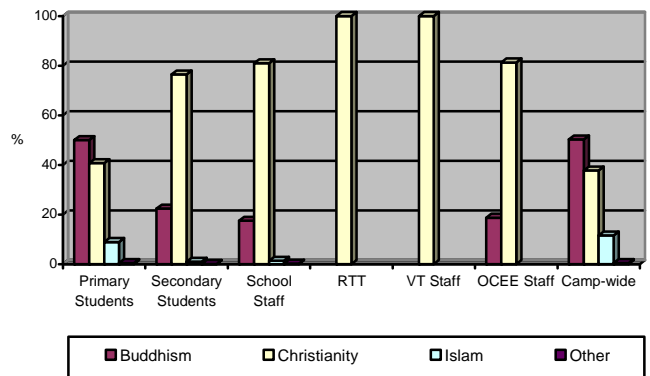
2009/ 10 ACADEMIC YEAR ENROLMENT AND STAFF VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (KRCEE/ TBBC, Feb 2010)

EDUCATION

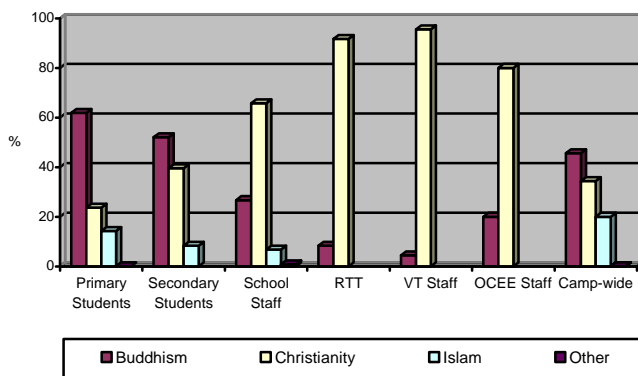
MRML



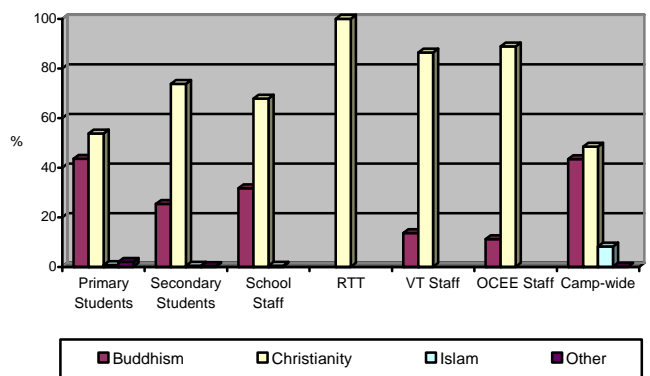
ML



UM



NP



³⁸ ABMU representative stated, “... the inclusion of the Karen language in the curriculum for Muslim children” was “helpful”, but that “it was difficult for the children to understand” and “as an unfortunate consequence, children did not want to continue their schooling after they had failed in their exams”. Thein Lwin, Barnabas and Nan Lung, ‘Children’s Opportunity to Learn in the Ethnic Nationality Areas in Burma’, April 2001, at <http://www.educationburma.org/Paper%203%20Children%20to%20Learn.htm>.

BOARDING HOUSES

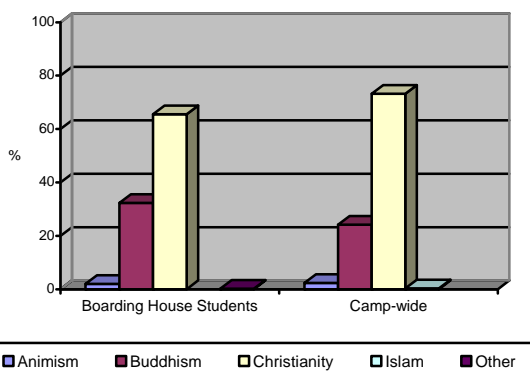
There are two general types of boarding house accommodation in the camps – those which house camp residents (mainly attached to post-high or religious schools) and those which accommodate children from outside camp (due to financial challenges or the lack of educational opportunities in Eastern Burma, especially in rural areas) – exploration of the wider migratory push-factors leading to this “IDP student” caseload is outside the remit of this research.

In relation to the latter group, those with family connections already residing in the camp will generally be accommodated; however significant numbers are without, and need alternative accommodation and supervision/support. The following two sets of charts illustrate the religious breakdown of boarding house residents – the first, the complete caseload and the second, those identified by COERR as unaccompanied or separated children. Both illustrate that Muslim children do not utilise the services of dormitories in the camps in significant proportions, and there could be a number of determining factors for this:

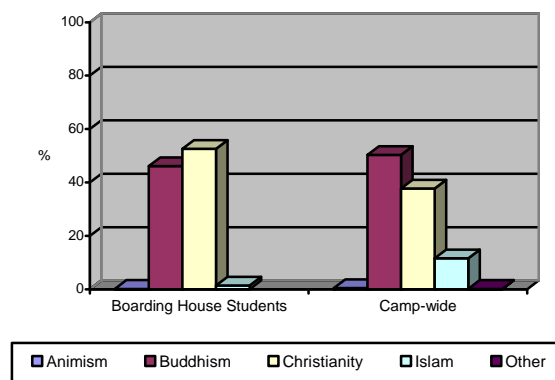
- Many boarding houses are established for “IDP students”, who are mainly from non-Muslim populations.
- A number of boarding houses are also religious in nature, commonly Christian.
- Boarding houses typically operate a system of communal cooking and eating, and this would challenge Muslim dietary requirements.
- Many of the unaccompanied Muslim children seeking education in the camps are doing so at religious schools, and these commonly have alternative accommodation arrangements outside of the “boarding house system”, usually housed by religious leaders or at the mosque.

TOTAL BOARDING HOUSE STUDENTS VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb/ Mar 2010)

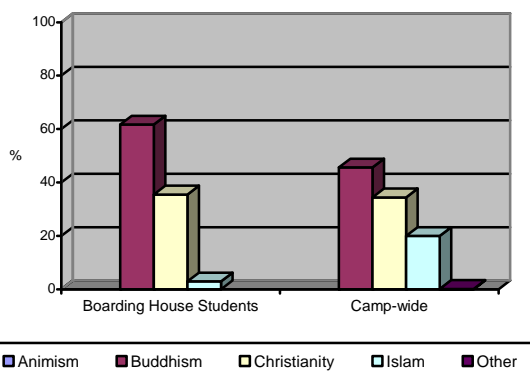
MRML



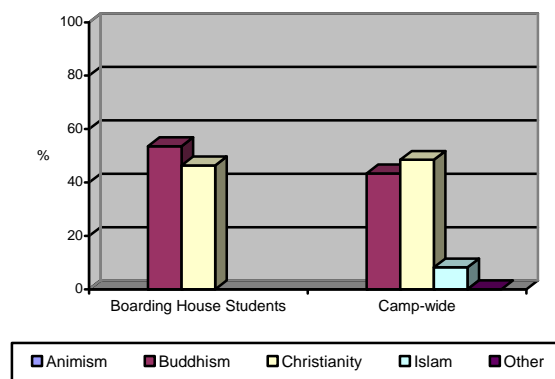
ML



UM



NP

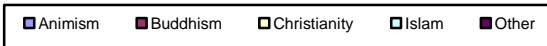
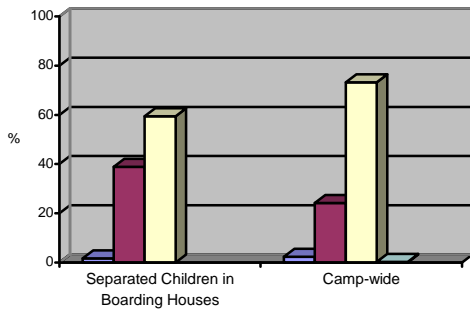


Note: Muslim dormitories exist in ML, UM and NP. In NP, one is attached to the main mosque, however is not included in either TBBC or COERR statistics, as it is a temporary arrangement frequented by children resident in the camp as part of their religious studies.

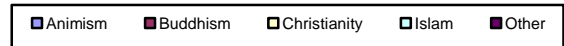
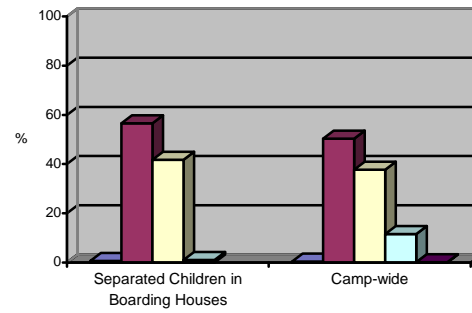
ML's Islamic Orphans Boarder (IOB) and UM's Darool U Loom are both recorded as part of TBBC and COERR monitoring activities.

SEPARATED CHILDREN LIVING IN BOARDING HOUSES VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (COERR/ TBBC, Feb 2010)

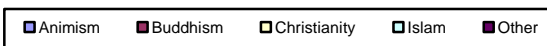
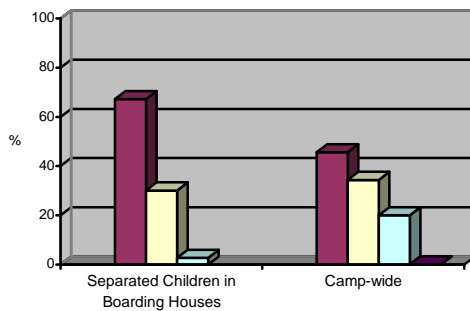
MRML



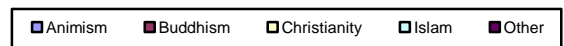
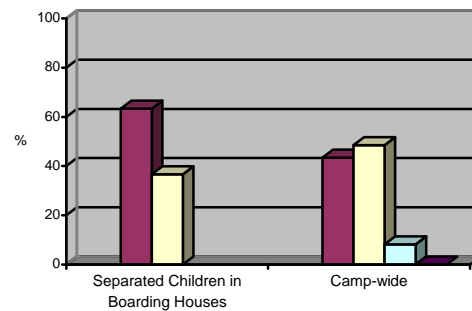
ML



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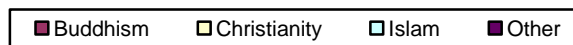
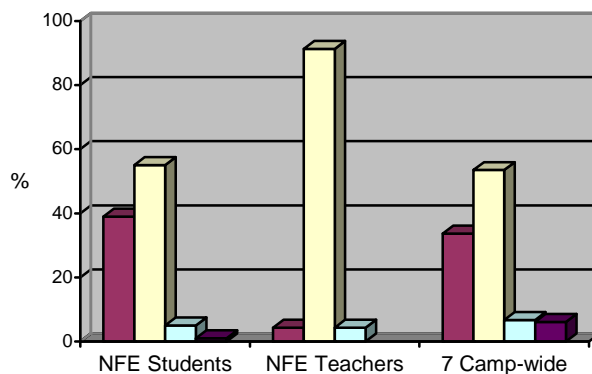
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NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

In addition to institutionalised education, various non-formal education (NFE) programmes have been established to provide alternative and/or complementary opportunities. The main agency organising these in the predominantly Karen camps is ZOA Refugee Care. Although the statistics below include camps where Muslim communities do not exist, the statistics nevertheless compare the religious breakdown of the programme's students to those of the total population.

NFE STUDENTS AND TEACHERS VS OVERALL 7 KAREN CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (ZOA, KRC-EE/ TBBC, Feb 2010)

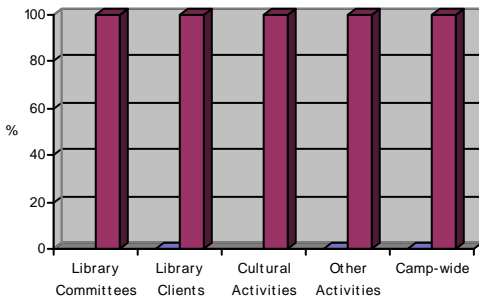
All Karen Camps



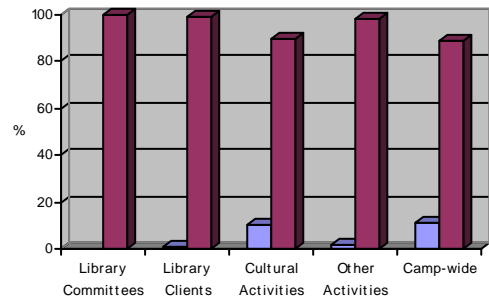
Another example is SVA's programme which aims to "develop children's values, attitudes and knowledge based on their rights to education and cultural inheritance, primarily targeting children under difficult condition through reading (habit) promotion programs". The following charts document the religious breakdown of participants in their activities, interestingly enough, illustrating the high level of Muslim involvement in cultural activities.

SVA PROGRAMME ENGAGEMENTS VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (SVA/ TBBC, Feb 2010)

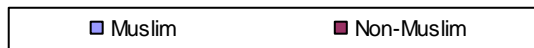
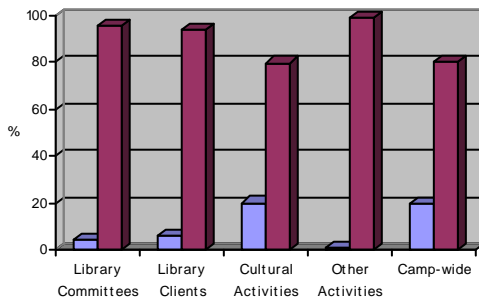
MRML



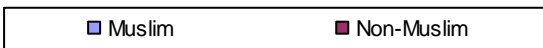
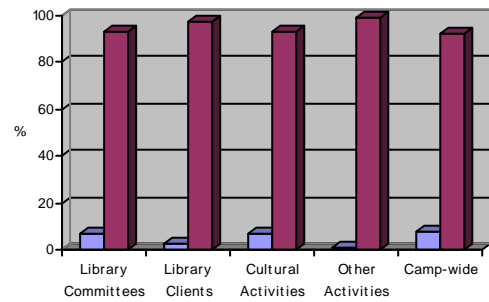
ML



UM



NP



LIVELIHOODS

Muslim communities in the camps identify two main economic activities which they are widely involved in: trade and services, and livestock breeding/ raising. As various agencies have established agricultural programmes to strengthen household food security (as well as to increase nutritional intake), the topic will be included in the livestock section.

TRADE AND SERVICES

Trading is the most visible Muslim economic activity in the camps, symbolised by its dominant presence in bazaars and travelling sales, and a significant movement of goods between urban centres and camps. The service industry as a whole is less monopolised by the Muslim community, although it is synonymous with certain services, particularly wristwatch, umbrella and bicycle repair.

Referring back to the three sub-sects of the Muslim community (see *“Muslim Lifestyle Practices and Preferences: Socio-Cultural”* section above), it is a mix of the second and third groups – the “central Burma/ Western Muslim caseload” and the “Thai-based Muslims” – which comprise the main actors in this economic activity.

Muslim entrepreneurial spirit is strengthened by a number of factors: contacts in Thai urban centres, their recent ability to register as traders under the migrant worker scheme and therefore travel more easily, and their seemingly apolitical stance, separating themselves from Burmese opposition groups which face increasing restrictions on movement.

This economic activity has had a substantial influence in community dynamics. For example, in July 2004, refugee leaders complained to UNHCR representatives about “problems with unwanted economic activities in the camps”, especially in ML. They stated that “since the arrival of new refugees from around Myawaddy -- many Muslim businessmen – ‘little Bengals’ popped up, with so-called economic refugees who make money with trading goods”.³⁹ However, this phenomenon has crucially contributed to the development of substantial and dynamic economies in the camps – a crucial element in the establishment of livelihoods in communities otherwise perceived as somewhat static by increasingly beleaguered donors and host authorities.

Financial Realities:

Despite this stereotype and the seeming wealth of shops and their owners, especially in camps serviced by significant Thai infrastructure, the reality is quite different – the economic capital is mainly owned by others. Sizeable shops work on credit – that is, all stock is provided to shopkeepers in advance by Thai entrepreneurs, with the original cost of any stock sold during the month required to be repaid prior to being replaced. Smaller shops work under similar agreements, but mainly through larger shops in the camp.

In MRML, most household income is generated through retail activities, with shopkeepers utilising credit services provided by traders from Mae Saam Laep and Mae Sariang. Shops in ML, UM and NP mainly rely on Mae Sot-based businesses, although those “lower on the ladder” also work through smaller networks both in nearer towns as well as in the camp itself (i.e. in ML, those in Mae Ramat and Tha Song Yang; in UM, those in Phop Phra; and in NP, those in Umphang). And these “middle men” affect profitability...

Profit margins vary, depending on the sector of the goods sold, although most follow wider market forces. For example:

- Manufactured foods and personal hygiene items follow the “12-for-10” wholesale system which is standard throughout rural Thailand and Burma (bags of 12 items are sold for the retail price of 10, constituting a 20% profit margin for the retailer);
- Clothing and household items generally attract a 25% mark-up.

Typically, urban-based credit providers deliver the stock into the camps, yet this is factored into the cost price of the goods. More affluent and/ or “serious” entrepreneurs in the camps buy (on credit) or rent their own transport to collect wholesale goods from town, and are thereby able to capitalise on better prices. Of course, wherever possible, camp-based entrepreneurs ensure their trip to town pays for itself as much as possible by organising a two-way service by also providing transport into town (e.g. sending goods for repair that cannot be performed in camp, taking fuel drums for refilling, transporting people, etc). Orders placed for purchases in town are also taken and a mark-up charged.



Mobile “roti” business (NP, 2009)

Prior to resettlement, camp-based Muslim retailers utilised their urban religious-based networks to facilitate their business development, but since then defaults on credit repayments prior to resettling have increased dramatically, and so now Thai-based Muslim traders are less willing to provide credit. Taking a longer-term



Grocery store in UM (unknown)

³⁹ Hugo Rami, ‘Mission Report: Mae Sot, ML Camp, NP Camp, Umpiem Camp, 19-24 July 2004’, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Regional Office for Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, Bangkok, 28 July 2004, p. 3.

perspective of the camp-based investment climate, it's notable that the Mae Sot Thai-Chinese business community is filling this growing gap, especially in ML, willing to "lose a few" to cement a central and enduring role in this "emerging market". There are no reports of Thai traders holding shop-keepers' ration books as collateral against their credit.

A hidden handicap to entrepreneurial profitability in some camps is a well-established, albeit informal "gratuity" system provided to local Thai authorities in order to maintain relations which in turn help to facilitate the extremely complex self-governance of the camps. Although this is not exclusive to the Muslim business community, and therefore outside the parameters of this research, the fact that Muslims enjoy a central position in camp trade and service provision in these camps means that this particular financial factor disproportionately affects the Muslim community. However, this reality should also be put in the context of other livelihoods options, including working outside the camp which, in order to reduce the risk of arrest and deportation, residents are able to seek a travel document from the Thai authorities (typically for a period of 3-7 days at a cost of 100-150 Baht, depending on registration status). Considering the daily wages residents would work for during that short period (50-100 Bt) and the cost of the document and travel, the in-camp gratuity system (as detailed below) and its impacts may well be less of a threat to livelihoods and profitability than other livelihood options.

Such a system exists in ML, whereby refugee authorities collect pre-determined monthly amounts from shop-keepers and other businesses in camps to support local Thai authorities. Levels are based on the size and type of their economic activity – the smallest, home-based outfits being rated at 10-30 Baht per month, while substantial commercial enterprises are levied as much as 500 Baht. Enterprises falling on bad times are able to defer the payment, although refugee authorities are expected to generate the same total gratuity each month. In contrast, Muslims in NP report that no such practice exists there. This element of the economy requires further research to fully understand the extent to which it exists and impacts on livelihoods.

In terms of other non Muslim-specific business costs requiring outlay, vehicles are required to be "registered" – the cost of annual registration of a motorcycle in ML is currently 500 Baht per year. Supply of mains electricity to the camp is charged at 5.7 Baht per unit, although residents with their own transformers supply electricity to others at 10-12 Baht.

LIVESTOCK...

Although far less structurally visible, livelihoods activities in livestock breeding and raising are also synonymous with Muslim communities in the Tak camps – particularly with cattle and goats (pigs, chickens and ducks being the main species of choice in the wider community). In parallel to the hidden credit-based realities of the otherwise deceptively "healthy and wealthy" appearance of the retail market economy, a significant proportion of livestock activities are also based on the refugee assuming the role of "middle-man", between back-producer and consumer.

Going Rates (NP)

Cows: 1,500 Bt for a young calf,
5-6,000 Bt for a mature beast.
Prize specimens ~8,000 Bt;

Goats: 3-400 Bt for a young kid,
7-800 Bt for a ready-to-eat adult.
Prize specimen 1,200 - 1,500 Bt.

In ML, for example, the evident presence of numerous cows and goats in and around the Muslim sections belies the reality that many of them are not owned or raised over the long-term by their Muslim "hands". Commonly, these livestock breeding and raising activities are the work of local Thai-Karen villagers (sometimes under the auspices of Thai entrepreneurs), and conducted at a distance from the camps. Only prior to slaughter will the animal be brought in or near to the camp and traded on credit to a household for an agreed price repayable once the meat is sold.

Of course, after many years of a fairly stable local economic climate, some Muslims have been able to save and/ or pool their income from this activity to be able to afford their own stock. In these cases, they will commonly go to villages in the area to buy the animals at a cheaper price and bring them back to the camp. These will then enter the food chain – either being immediately slaughtered, fattening prior to slaughter, or for breeding, depending on the degree of investment the household is willing and able to take. Although cattle are often seen at or outside the camp perimeters, they are rarely kept outside after dark, due to the high prevalence of cattle-rustling.

Scale of Livestock Activities

It's estimated that ~10% of Muslim households in UM raise cows or goats; the total head of cattle being 100-150.

This system is also applicable to cattle supplied from areas in Eastern Burma opposite the camps, especially in Tak province; however direct slaughter rarely takes place due to the poorer condition that the cattle arrive in. This phenomenon significantly increased last year,

following the taking-over of KNU-controlled areas and trading routes by the DKBA, especially in areas opposite ML.

... AND AGRICULTURE

Muslim community representatives and households identify three main agricultural activities that members of their communities engage in: kitchen gardening, managing plots outside camp, and working as farm-hands.

Unlike other livelihood practices, the research faced significant challenges in drawing generalised comparisons and contrasts between the first two areas of these activities in Muslim populations and those the wider camp communities engage in. In certain camps, Muslim representatives and households report high utilisation of limited space around homes for kitchen garden activities (similar to the wider camp population), whereas in other camps, behaviours seem to vary significantly depending on several factors: location within the camp, socio-economic status, and lifestyle. In general, kitchen-gardening for self-consumption seems to be less prioritised within the Muslim community than in other sectors of the population. Similar inconsistencies were faced with regard to overall Muslim involvement in managing

plots outside different camps; however, a consistent theme reported from all camps is that of Muslims working in Thai-owned farms in surrounding areas (although this activity is not likely very different from other sectors within the general populations).

Kitchen Gardening:

Inter-camp inconsistencies in the scale of kitchen gardening were reportedly due to a number of factors, including: the varying densities of shelter in different Muslim sections; the preferred meat-based diet of most Muslims, and therefore frequency of kitchen gardening may be higher in more impoverished households; and Muslim households prioritising different livelihood practices to any space available.

For example, in ML, Muslim elders and women report little or no growing of vegetables in home gardens - one main reason given being that vegetables are not considered an important element of the Muslim diet (consumption in the region of ~3-4 portions/ week being widely reported). However, in UM, NP and MRML, representatives estimate that 60-80% of households have home vegetable gardens (most produce being grown for consumption in the home or for selling in the community – but some also as animal fodder). In addition, due to their heightened livestock interests, Muslims are better placed than the wider community to source domestic manure for compost.

Managing Plots outside Camp:

Inter-camp inconsistencies in the degrees to which Muslims manage agricultural plots outside camps largely depends on existing land utilisation practices, and therefore availability of access to plots.

For example, the land surrounding UM is almost exclusively appropriated by large-scale commercial agriculture – symbolised by widespread mono-cropping – while, around ML, agri-business also dominates the landscape, although some swathes of land utilised by local villages for subsistence farming still exist. By contrast, NP is located in a restricted forest reserve, curbing commercial agriculture operations in the immediate area, although agri-business is widespread around its nearby perimeters, while the agricultural areas around the isolated MRML camp are off the radar of big-business and almost completely allocated to subsistence farming.

In both ML and UM, community representatives say that less than 5% of households grow vegetables outside the camp (most for eating or selling in the community – in UM, on local Hmong land), whereas managing agricultural plots around NP is reportedly a lot more common and provides a main source of fodder for its livestock – some Muslims utilising plots as large as 1 *rai* (1,600 m²). Members of the smaller Muslim community in MRML manage little or no agricultural activities in the surrounding area.



Livestock-raising requires access outside camp to collect fodder (NP, 2009)

Working as Farm-hands:

Although inter-camp inconsistencies exist between self-managed agricultural practices in as well as around camps, the practice of Muslims working as hired farm-hands is similarly reported from all camps – the main difference within this constant is that work around the Tak camps is generally based in the commercial agriculture sector, while in MRML people are hired more by villagers in subsistence-based farming (typically growing rice or picking chili for 50 Baht/ day). Despite other parts of the camp populations also engaging in this activity, Muslims report a high level of employment – probably significantly higher than in other sectors.

Although this activity is seasonally bound (with manual labour requirements peaking in the early and later parts of the year, during the planting and harvesting periods), some Muslim families are able to work in this sector almost all year round – especially in farming locations which are devoted to continual mono-cropping. For example, the majority of Muslim parents consulted in UM reported that they and some of their children spent 10-12 days a month working on local cabbage or corn farms, typically in 2-3 day stints, but constantly during planting and harvest seasons – only returning once a month for a few days. It is worth noting that the children they took out of school were boys, allowing those daughters at school to continue their studies (the decision being based on personal security issues).

Wages paid are in the region of 80-120 Baht per day, although Muslims in UM stated that it discriminates between the different tasks typically performed by men and by women/ children, with women and children being paid 10-20 Baht less per day, or about 80-90% of the daily wage.

OTHER COMMON LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES

In-camp Casual Labour:

There is a wide range of in-camp services which residents provide, some of which are synonymous with Muslim communities. These include:

- Portering (especially during distribution of rations);
- Laundry and other housekeeping activities;
- Recycling refuse (surprisingly lucrative, especially in glass and aluminium);
- Assisting Thai traders (loading/ off-loading).



Residential recycling centre (NP, 2009)

This sector of camp-based livelihoods has mushroomed in recent years, in line with the development of camp economies and subsequent increases in socio-economic opportunities and the ensuing disparities, and the growing class-base of the society which this generates. Responding to this phenomenon, another reason for the increase is the significant numbers of unregistered Muslims (as well as other groups) who are deemed ineligible to access rations and other services in the Tak camps, and who have embarked on these activities as a poverty-alleviation response to their limited opportunities.

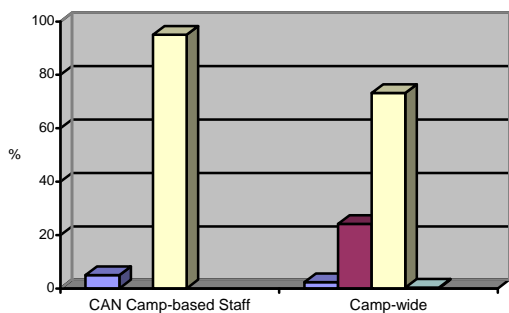
NGO Camp-based Staff:

NGOs hiring camp-based stipended staff represents one of the largest consistent sources of household income in the camps (TBBC "Livelihoods Vulnerability Analysis in Burmese Refugee Camps in Thailand", October 2009). Muslim representatives in all camps express concern that humanitarian agencies overlook religious equity in recruiting camp-based staff, and this inherently puts Muslim households at a disadvantage in terms of economic opportunities. This is reflected in the statistics NGOs have provided of their camp-based staff as part of this research.

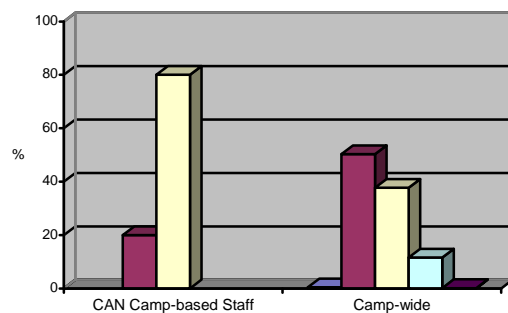
As part of TBBC's livelihoods initiatives, the Community Agriculture and Nutrition (CAN) programme promotes and supports household agricultural practices in the camps. The following charts illustrate the participation of different religious groups in its camp-based staff.

TBBC CAN CAMP-BASED STAFF VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb 2010)

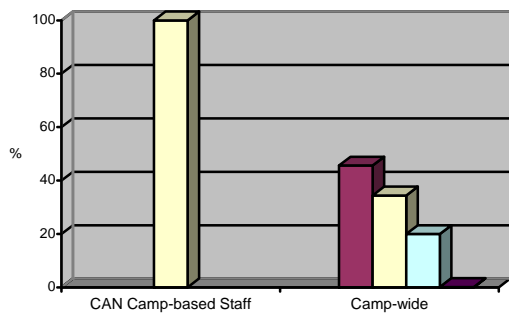
MRML



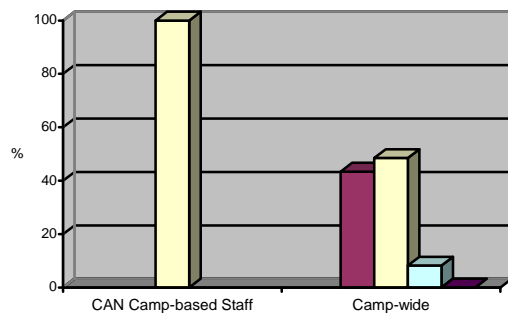
ML



UM



NP



LIVELIHOODS

REPRESENTATION

CAMP MANAGEMENT

Equitable representation within camp administrative structures has long been identified – internally and externally – as an area requiring improvement. Gender equity was the initial focus of efforts to address this and, despite significant progress, still is. Following the structural displacement of Muslim and other communities into the camps during the late 1990s, the need for improved representation expanded to include religion and ethnicity. In more recent years, especially since the RTG's granting of resettlement opportunities and the subsequent influx of people from more diverse geographical and social backgrounds, the prioritisation of ethnicity has been further promoted in efforts to improve equitable representation.



*Announcing election results
(Nu Po, Feb 2010)*

Mae La – a case in point:

Muslim community leaders in ML identify a significant weakness in the current camp electoral system. Despite the significant numbers of Muslims in the camp (over 10% of the population), it is difficult for them to vote representatives into positions of office higher than Section Leader – even just to the Zone level, as most of the camp's Muslim residents live in Zone C and are concentrated in a minority of its sections, so at Zone elections its Muslim section representatives are outnumbered. Opportunities at the Camp Committee level are even more unfavourable (although the NP community did recently elect a Muslim Section Leader onto its CC from the “Karen Muslims” sector of the “three sides”).

In light of this, the ML Muslim community strongly recognises the need for Muslim representatives to be included on the Camp Committee – preferably by quota (the CC is currently exploring ways to improve representation in its body, although any modifications are not likely to take place before its next scheduled election in 2013). Under the current situation, without a representative, the Muslim community is concerned that management of the camp is run purely by Karens and that the Camp Committee doesn't benefit from an internal perspective or resource from the Muslim community.

Muslim representation on camp committees

*“In the same way,
how can Karens in Burma expect
justice under a system completely
dominated by Burmans?”*

This is seen as a challenge in solving inter-religious conflict and other faith-related community issues – the following explanation was provided by a religious leader in ML: when a conflict occurs between Muslims and Karens, the exclusively Karen leadership – despite the significant levels of objectivity within it – are the ultimate responsible authority and therefore the mediator/ adjudicator is seen as being partial, as they symbolise only one of the parties to the dispute. Understandably, Muslims feel under-represented in such situations – it was explained in comparison to the situation in Burma... “In the same way, how can Karens in Burma expect justice under a system completely dominated by Burmans?” (also see “Justice – Application and Adjudication” under “Protection”).

In early 2010, KRC and ML Camp Committee implemented a restorative measure to address these concerns, by establishing a 5-member Camp Advisory Committee (CAC) which includes various religious, including Muslim, representation (a Collaboration Committee for Ethnic Groups (CEG) consisting of five members – Lisu, Kachin, Mon, Shan and Arakanese – has also been set-up, but this is aimed at being more of a social-welfare support mechanism).

Of interest was their further perspective that, with Muslim representation on the Camp Committee, the Muslim community would have less right to complain about the “Karen-controlled” resolution processes and outcomes of faith-based conflicts – the emphasis being shifted to the effectiveness of representation, and provoking further dialogue on ways to improve religious-related case management/ arbitration issues.

Muslim community leaders in UM and NP expressed similar desires for greater representation in camp management – especially at the Camp Committee level although, in MRML, the community made it clear that this was not a pressing issue, as the current camp administration worked in “the best interests of all the community” (further pointing out that their Section Leader was a Buddhist, and that all residents in the section “are treated equally, regardless of religion or lifestyle”).

Note: a Muslim Section Leader was elected onto the NP camp committee in Feb '10.



*Section representatives electing candidates
(Nu Po, Feb 2010)*

Camp Management Staff:

Despite the widely-recognised qualities of the self-governance model through which the camps are run, this presents its own representation issues and challenges, although, it could be strongly argued that the refugees themselves, regardless of their faith, are better positioned to manage their own communities, than any external agency. Muslim and non-Muslim leaders alike feel that ongoing efforts by external agencies to address representation issues are being conducted in a rather superficial way. As some in ML expressed, “Having representation on the committee would be great, but is only part of the answer. We need leaders who are sensitive to everybody's needs – regardless of faith”, explaining that having diverse representation in positions of responsibility is important, but that leaders should not be

*“We need leaders who are
sensitive to everybody's needs
– regardless of faith” ...
“If the camps were run by
UNHCR, would they take the
same [superficial] approach
over the religious
representation of their staff?”*

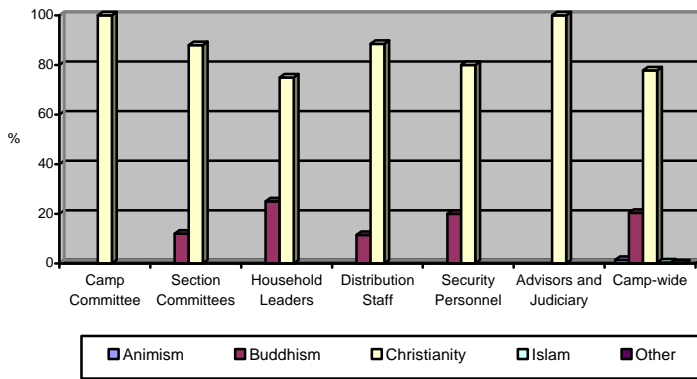
interested in only their own people. They further commented, “If the camps were run by UNHCR, would they show the same interest in the equitable religious representation of their staff?”

The “home-grown” camp management model consists of a number of actors: Camp and Section Committees (as well as Zone and Household leaders in some camps), relief distribution teams, security personnel as well as judicial teams. The following charts show the religious breakdowns of these groups in comparison to the overall camp populations and generally illustrate that, although Muslim representation in the main camp committees is so far lacking, there is healthy inclusion in advisory and judicial positions as well as in other capacities – especially in UM and NP.

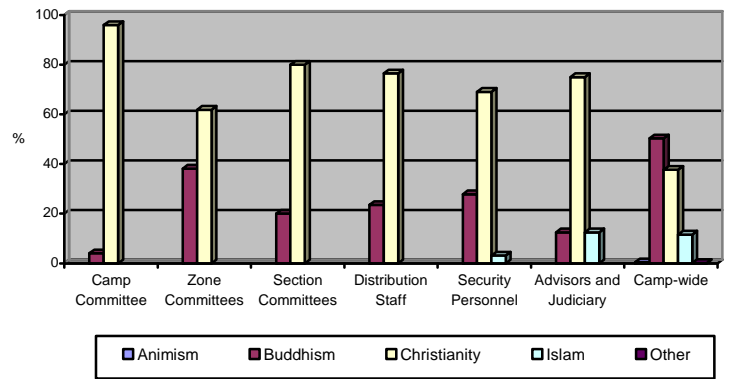
CAMP MANAGEMENT STAFF VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (CMSP, April 2010/ TBBC, Feb/ Mar 2010)

REPRESENTATION

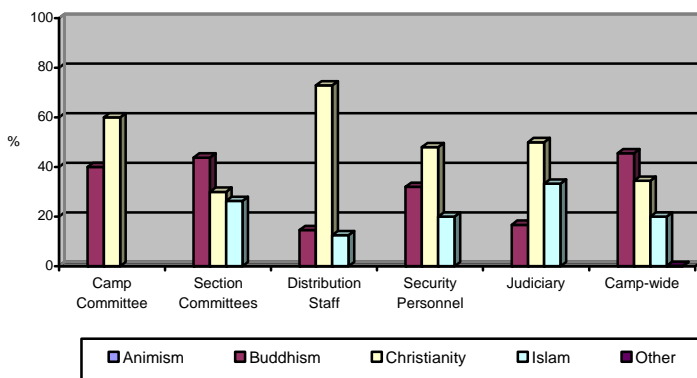
MRML



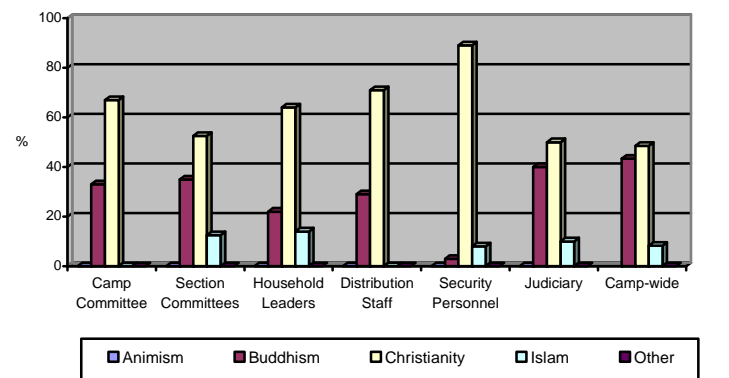
ML



UM



NP



MUSLIM CIVIL SOCIETY

As with the wider community, Muslim civil society comprises a range of actors, including CBOs as well as other networks and individuals well-placed to complement and influence and, if necessary, challenge the formal camp management structure. In Muslim communities, religious leaders take a central role in this dynamic, although they also represent the “establishment” within their own societies, and thus the independence of Muslim CBOs in being well-placed to perform a “check-and-balance” role within their own society is significantly compromised. Social dynamics further limit their influence to pursue this in the wider community.

In terms of CBOs, this report employs a broad definition of the term “community-based organisation”:

“A private, non-profit organisation which has been established by, and is representative of a community or significant segments of a community and which provides services to locally defined populations or individuals within it.”⁴⁰

CBOs – Prevalence, Activities and Influence:

- MRML: none
- ML: Muslim Women’s Organisation (*reforming – office in Zone C4*).
- UM: Muslim Women’s Association – Section 7.
Muslim Youth Association – Section 7.
- NP: *Re-formation of women’s and youth organisations under consideration.*



Muslim Youth Association flag (UM, 2009)
Note: the insignia is placed to the right, reflecting the right-to-left pattern of Arabic literacy

⁴⁰ Adapted from www.hivportland.org/resources/acronyms.html and www.state.nj.us/njded/grants/glossary.shtml

The activities of camp-based Muslim CBOs are similar in scope to social organisations in the wider community but, comparatively, lacking in scale. Women’s groups focus on the advancement and protection of women and girls (through education, and working to guarantee their physical, emotional and financial security), while youth groups tend to focus on the healthy development of young people – physical, spiritual and moral – (through sport and religious activities). The MYA in UM also runs a clinic outreach programme, providing regular cooked meals to all in-patients. This was originally aimed to support Muslim patients with a source of *Halal* food, but was expanded to include all in-patients in order to avoid (accusations of) discrimination.

Although Muslim CBOs are limited in terms of presence and capacity, Muslim individuals also assume influential roles in non-Muslim groups. Institutionally, Muslim organisations also maintain strong and supportive relations with civil society networks which enhance their position in the community – for example, the KWO regularly works in co-operation with their Muslim counterparts, and representatives regularly participate in KWO trainings, and activities.

In UM, CBOs have formed a network based out of the Community Support Centre (CSC). Their objectives are to share resources (human, material and technical), strengthen their collective and individual roles in providing services to the community, and to advocate on its behalf. The network comprises:



CSC Committee
(UM, 2009)

- Karen Student Network Groups
- Karen Women’s Organisation
- Karen Youth Organisation
- Muslim Women’s Association
- Muslim Youth Association
- SGBV Committee (*although this group is not recognised as a CBO*)

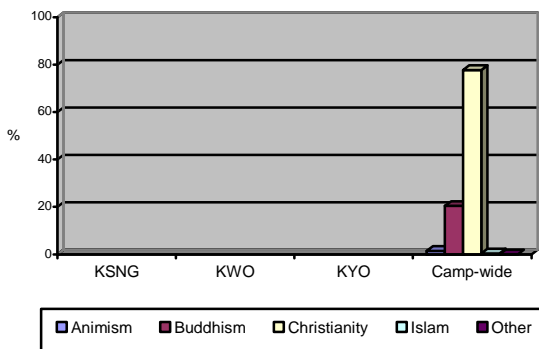
Another networking forum is the CCSDPT/ Partners meeting – a recent initiative, aimed to gather annual community inputs into agency planning and strengthen representation in the process. Unfortunately, this year’s forum took place on a Friday, conflicting with the Muslim holy day, resulting in no Muslim CBO representation. The first meeting last year took place on a Thursday, and attracted 2 Muslim community representatives.

As with all sectors of indigenous camp service provision (and thus strictly outside the parameters of the research), it is important to note that Muslim CBOs have suffered greatly from the impacts of resettlement – ultimately, resulting in the folding of both women’s and youth groups in NP and ML. This has had significant consequences on Muslim representation in both camp co-ordination and NGO programme planning.

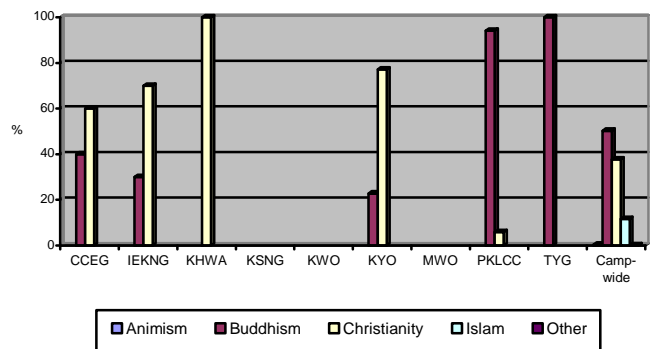
The following charts detail the religious breakdown of CBO staff, in comparison to the overall camp populations.

CBO STAFF VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Apr 2010)

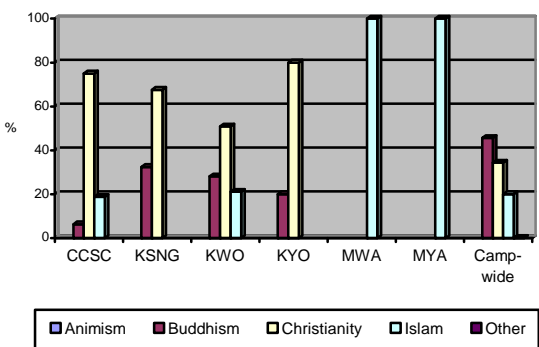
MRML



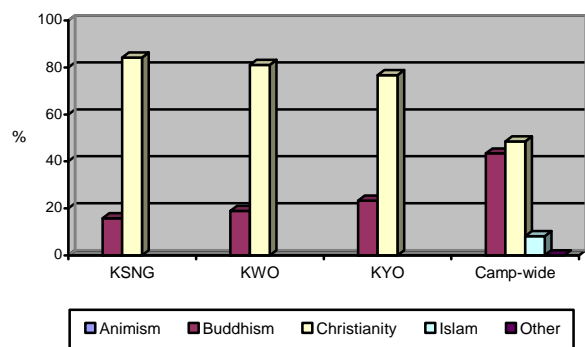
ML



UM



NP

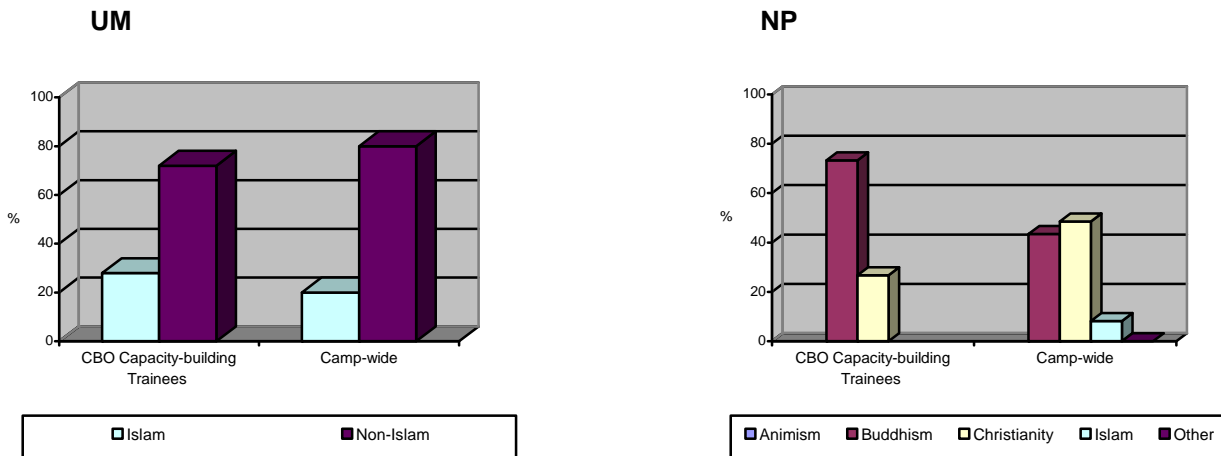


CBO Capacity-Building:

A number of CCSDPT agencies incorporate capacity building and/ or competency development into their partnership activities with CBOs (while the KWO implements its own capacity-building programme). In recognition of their contributions in different aspects of camp management and as indigenous service providers to their refugee communities, and in order to strengthen their abilities to perform these roles, TBBC undertook a pilot organisational capacity-building programme with CBOs in UM and NP in 2009. In other camps, CBOs are being invited to participate in capacity-building initiatives being conducted with camp management entities.

The following charts document the religious breakdowns of trainees in the CBO capacity-building programme. The difference in Islam representation between the two camps is directly attributable to the presence of Muslim CBOs in the communities – with two in UM, but none at the moment in NP.

TBBC CBO CAPACITY-BUILDING TRAINEES VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb 2010)



Wider Representation Issues:

Of equal importance to the CBOs' inherent lack of capacities and the negative effects of resettlement, Muslim communities are further frustrated by the lack of consultation processes and fora that NGOs and advocacy groups could and should engage them through. This is seen as a significant barrier to representation – both in terms of agency programme planning, implementation and evaluation, as well as not capitalising on valuable opportunities for greater stakeholder inclusion and sensitisation. When community representatives were approached about this issue on a number of occasions and in various camps, the responses followed a similar line, summed up by this quote, "NGOs? No, we never see them – well, only when they want something. Then, they just turn up, expect immediate attention and answers, and then disappear into the wind. We never get any follow-up."

"NGOs? No, we never see them – well, only when they want something. Then, they just turn up, expect immediate attention and answers, and then disappear into the wind. We never get any follow-up."

In addition to the formal camp management structure, and the role that CBOs play in providing complementary services, Muslim religious leaders also perform important roles in issues relating to protection. This is addressed in the following section...

REPRESENTATION

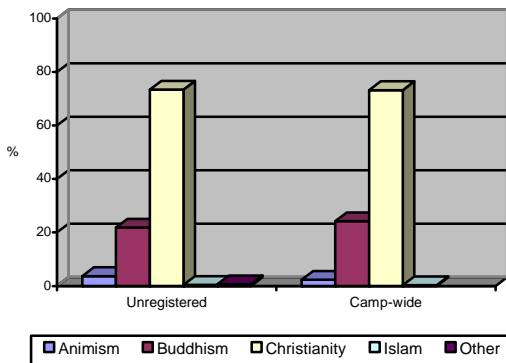
PROTECTION

“NEW” ARRIVALS AND REGISTRATION

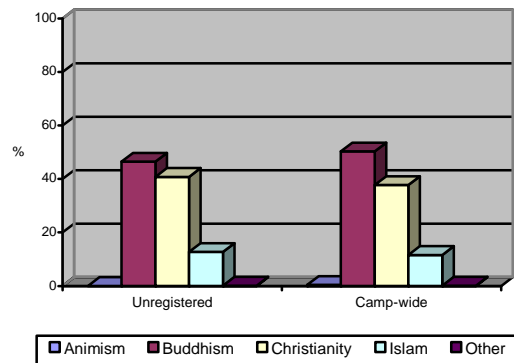
The last registration of the refugee caseload was completed by the Ministry of Interior (MoI) with support from UNHCR in November 2005. Since then – the period spanning “the resettlement years” – there has been an ongoing influx of newcomers, most of whom are thought to be genuine asylum seekers, while others may have entered the camps with the intention of gaining access to resettlement to third countries. Despite this, no complete refugee registration exercise has taken place. Following are religious breakdowns of the “new” arrival caseload compared to overall populations.

UNREGISTERED CAMP POPULATION VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (TBBC, Feb 2010)

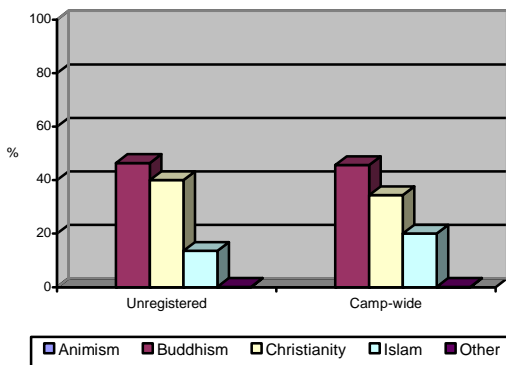
MRML



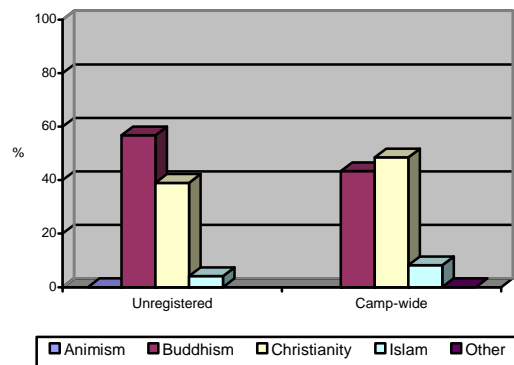
ML



UM



NP



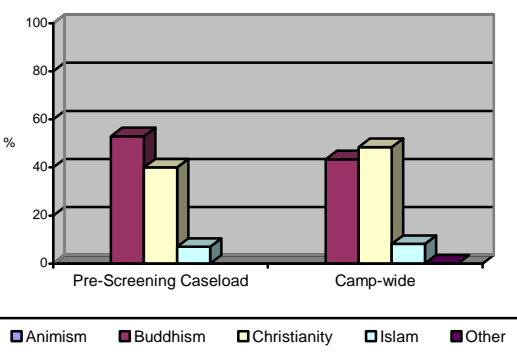
Pre-screening:

In response to the lack of progress in refugee registration since 2005, MOI with UNHCR support initiated a pilot screening process in 2009 to address the unregistered population issue – the plan being to screen out residents without just claims to asylum before presenting those “screened in” for interview by the Provincial Admission Boards (PAB). Of the four camps housing Muslim communities, the process has so far only been conducted in NP.

The following chart provides a comparison between the pre-screening caseload in NP and the overall camp population (the statistics were gathered during the development of TBBC’s population database, and so they can only be compared to more recent overall camp statistics by religion).

PRE-SCREENING CASELOAD VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (UNHCR, June 2009 / TBBC, Mar 2010)

NP



In addition to the obvious need and wider benefits, the establishment of a comprehensive and regular registration process based on internationally-recognised standards (as well as appropriate options for those screened out) would further shed light on the definition of the “3 sides” of camp Muslim populations by which this research identifies them.

PROTECTION

An Overview:

In 2006/ '07, the IRC's Legal Assistance Centre project conducted a comprehensive study of refugee perspectives on issues relating to justice in three camps in order to inform programme design. In ML, the only camp subject to the study housing a significant Muslim community, 1,011 residents were interviewed, including 153 Muslims. The following paragraphs summarise and reflect on its findings in relation to ethnic and religious diversities.

"Perspectives on the suitability and equity of application of camp regulations varied between different ethnic and religious groups, with many minorities expressing greater challenges in gaining access to justice and their comparative lack of confidence in camp justice committees. Within religious groups, the report identifies that Muslims express less concern about this than others, and surmises that this may be, in part, due to the unique and parallel channel of recourse for minor transgressions (mainly for civil disputes/ family law) through the application of *Sha'ria* law by Islamic religious leaders. However, this does not address the greater frustrations felt by other under-represented groups, nor explain away the apparent inequities in access to, and application of camp justice:

"As a general comment, religious minorities in the three camps showed similar views with respect to camp authorities, and similar levels of concern about access to justice, with the exception of Muslim and Animist respondents.

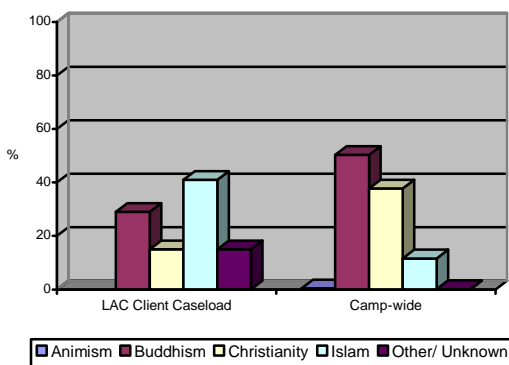
... in Mae La only 41% of Muslim respondents identified lack of access to justice as a threat to their safety and security, compared to 56% of Christian respondents ... [and] only 11% of Muslim respondents are concerned about abuse of leadership authorities, as compared to 27% of Buddhist and 22% of Christian respondents. The lower levels of concern on the part of Muslim respondents may in part be attributed to the fact that they can seek out their spiritual leaders to resolve their disputes. In Mae La, Muslim spiritual leaders or imams are trained to apply Sha'ria law [to] resolve smaller disputes."⁴¹

For civil disputes, Muslims enjoy access to a unique parallel system to camp justice – that of recourse through the application of Sha'ria law.

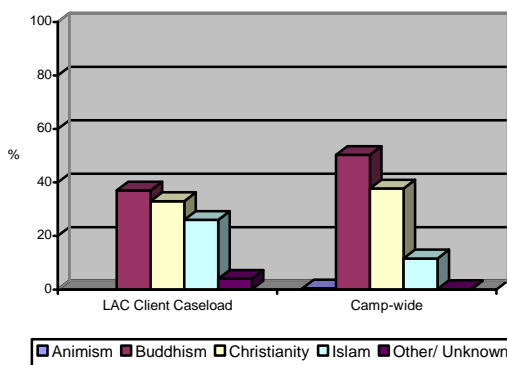
In terms of non-civil disputes (more serious crimes), ethnic minorities and particularly Muslims access LAC legal advice in disproportionately higher rates than majority groups, further suggesting that they lack confidence in the camp-based system. The following charts clearly illustrate the disparate levels to which Muslims access LAC legal advice, although the statistics do not differentiate between actual requests to help manage cases/ incidents (civil or criminal) and those approaches simply seeking non-case-related information – which can constitute a significant proportion of clients. Nevertheless, the statistical disproportion between client and camp-wide breakdowns is stark, and supports the observations stated above.

LAC CLIENT CASELOAD VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION IN ML – BY RELIGION/ PERIOD (IRC-LAC, April 2010)

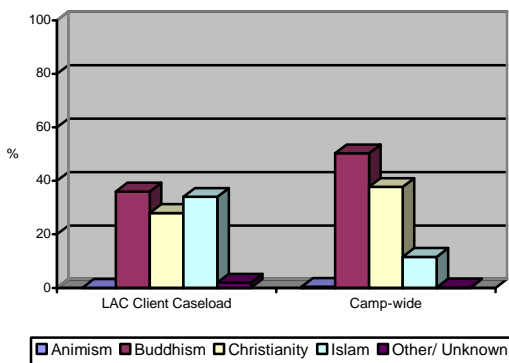
ML, Jan-Apr 2010



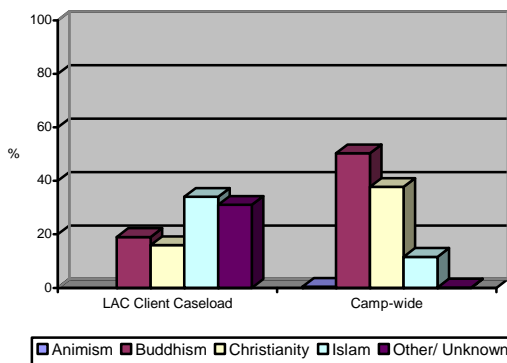
ML, Jan-Dec 2009



ML, Jan-Dec 2008



ML, Jan-Dec 2007



⁴¹ Edited from IRC's "LAC Justice Survey Report", 2007.

Roles of Religious Leaders:

Most cases which religious leaders deal with relate to family and wider social problems within the Muslim community, with the role performed being one of counsellor, advisor and, when necessary, adjudicator – the vast majority of these being marital disagreements, alcohol and substance abuse, and physical violence.

In cases which religious leaders intervene in and which relate to both religious law and camp regulations (for example, brawls between intoxicated youth), religious leaders co-ordinate with Section/ Zone Leaders – with the Section Leader taking the lead on case management, while seeking advice and recommendations from religious leaders. If religious leaders are presented with a case involving a criminal act, they will not get involved and instead pass it on to the relevant camp authorities.

“Jala”

A social re-education programme for youths with drug and alcohol problems, in which youths spend time attending religious study in Mosques in order to reform their behaviour.

In cases where camp authorities know of youth with a drug or alcohol habit, they often ask religious leaders to “keep an eye” on them. This might extend into a religious tour (“Jala”), where they will be sent on a circuit of mosques for religious group study, typically spending about three days at each, in order to try and reform their behaviour – the total circuit lasting from 10-40 days. This is an adaptation of “Chillah” (40 days), long practiced in Burma by particular streams of *madrasah* schools where graduates travel to different parts of the country

to strengthen their Islam faith and which, in current times, this noble act has become an institution of “rehabilitation” to which disappointed parents send their mischievous youth with the aim of their sons becoming better Muslims.⁴² This camp-based initiative is seen as an effective counselling strategy in preference to overloading the formal judicial system.

Religious (In)tolerance:

(also see “Social Inclusion” under “Lifestyle Practices and Preferences”/ “Socio-Cultural”)

The existence of faith-based prejudice between Muslims and other religious groups in the camps is a complex issue to address and examine – further compounded by the existence of the “three sides” of camp-based Muslim society. What does exist is a generally unsophisticated recognition of “differences” – mainly based around lifestyle preferences – and any subsequent differentiation is based around this (as “Karen Muslims” are more aligned with the non-Muslim community, this differentiation is more apparent towards the other “two sides” of Muslim society).

The existence of faith-based prejudice between Muslims and other religions is a complex issue, with “Karen Muslims” being more aligned with the non-Muslim community.

Tangible segregation between the communities – both in terms of physical location in camp and social activities – is generally a mutual arrangement, with Muslims wishing to maintain their identity and social cohesion by physically clustering themselves, as much as that of non-Muslim sectors. This is a common trait which runs through many aspects of camp life, for example, external agencies refer to the administrative sections of ML camp by its externally-imposed numbering (e.g. Zone C1A, B5, etc), however, the community itself still refers to the different physical sectors of the camp by their geographic origins (and so, what externally is known as Section B5, is generally locally referred to as “Boh Noh” – the location where most of the residents lived prior to moving to ML).

With this in mind, categorisation based on religion – rather than intolerance *per se* – commonly does exist (as it does with other diverse sectors); however, it is mainly generated purely from a “natural” recognition of lifestyle divergences, rather than any explicit “crusade” against the group as a whole.

The prevalence of this “us-and-them” dynamic in the minds of residents is widespread, but generally latent and rarely materialised – the inherent values of social cohesion and avoiding conflict helping to ensure that tangible disputes remain largely unexpressed.

However, Muslims clearly do sense the dynamic, although more at the personal, rather than on the community level (although personal conflicts have often been known to quickly expand into a wider “us and them” situation). Having said this, and as has been alluded to above, any “discrimination” is not specifically aimed at targeting Muslims *per se*, but rather part of a “natural” response by a largely and historically homogenous and conservative community – with a strong ethno-nationalist identity – to the sudden ethnic and religious diversification of their society. This dynamic of historically singular and isolated communities battling to come to terms with a rapid exposure to, and integration of new social constructs is widely-recognised in mainstream anthropological study, and that genuine acceptance and adoption of the changing landscape takes place on a generational timescale.



Distinct attire draws attention (ML, 2009)

Following are examples of where individual conflicts (religious differences used to agitate the situation) can spread into wider violence. These generally follow a similar pattern – beginning with an unresolved one-on-one dispute between Muslim and non-Muslims over what can best be termed “social territory” issues (often related to alcohol-fuelled “boyfriend/ girlfriend” jealousies) – the individual parties often enhance the dispute by mobilizing friends to show their strength and further exacerbate the conflict. If local security personnel are still unable to effectively diffuse the situation, ultimately this can lead to widespread inter-faith violence. Despite the occurrence of numerous, yet generally isolated incidents easily categorised as racially- or religiously-based, Muslim leaders warn external actors and observers they

⁴² Adapted from ‘Islamic education in Myanmar: a case study’, Mohammed Mohiyuddin Mohammed Sulaiman, from ‘Dictatorship, Disorder and Decline in Myanmar’, Monique Skidmore and Trevor Wilson (editors), The Australian National University, 2008.

would be well-advised to resist drawing broad conclusions based on stereotypical social dynamics they may have experienced elsewhere.

- In MRML, Muslim religious leaders report that fighting has erupted twice between youths in recent years (and seen as religiously-charged). The worst incident occurred during the Water Festival in 2009, involving three inebriated Karen youths. They entered the compound of the house of one of their Muslim class-mates from a few years before and asked for money to buy alcohol to “continue their merriment”. When their Muslim friend refused and suggested they leave, a fracas erupted with religious slurs and physical threats. Camp security personnel were able to control the situation before it got further out-of-hand.
- “On 27 October 2004, there was a large-scale brawl between about 300 Karen and 200 Muslim refugees in [ML] camp. It was started by a group of apparently drunk Karen teenagers who, armed with knives and wooden batons, attacked four living quarters in the Muslim section. The brawl was subdued by the Or Sor with the assistance of Karen camp security members and soldiers from the Army camp across the road. The new camp chief, Akkharaphan Poolsiri, alerted the district authorities in Tha Song Yang. The Muslim-owned shops in the camp were ‘temporarily closed’.”⁴³

There have also been examples of where Thai security personnel have been directly involved as a party to the conflict:

- “On 10 April 2003, a fight occurred with Or Sor personnel in ML camp: Several Or Sor had intervened in a dispute between some Muslims and Karen residents over a water pipe-line connection, and had detained a Muslim; he was tied to a tree and his beard was cut with a knife. About 100 Muslims gathered and attacked the Or Sor with bamboo poles; the Or Sor opened fire on the crowd, wounding a Karen woman and a Muslim man. According to one report, “the injured Or Sor had fallen and hit his head on a rock, knocking him unconscious, but other accounts said that he was beaten unconscious by the crowd. He spent a month in Mae Ramat hospital.”⁴⁴

Religious leaders only handle cases involving Muslims. If non-Muslims are involved, they will pass the case onto the Section or Zone leader.

In addition to these specific incidents, ongoing acts of intimidation continue to take place, such as, religious leaders in UM and ML report that stones are regularly thrown at their mosques at night-time. Clearly, these are acts aimed to instil fear in the community and further heighten underlying inter-faith tensions.

Personal Security:

Adolescent Muslim girls and young women widely report being scared to walk through camp after dark, out of fear of being assaulted by men. This risk is obviously not exclusive to Muslim women, nor is the perceived threat particular to any religious or ethnic demographic, and, although therefore outside the parameters of the research, the trend in communal violence is one worthy of mention. Older Muslim women expressed they feel less at risk than their younger brethren and, in fact, express a degree of confidence under any such incident, due to the respect still held for older generations.

This real sense of insecurity has been exacerbated in recent years, with the formation of youth gangs in all camps becoming an increasingly evident and influential social dynamic – young Muslims also being part of this trend. The shift is recognised as a response to frustrations of their protracted existence in the encamped environment. Even in MRML – a camp considered comparatively peaceful and with strong social cohesion – Muslim women expressed real concerns on this issue, with “gangs [made up of a handful of known individuals in each section] hanging around after dark. [Especially in the last two to three years] no-one walks around long after dark on their own anymore”.

In all camps, Muslim communities are experiencing dramatic increases in the prevalence of theft – from shops and homes (the day I met with Muslim elders in MRML, the head *Imam* had had his mosque’s complete savings stolen two days before). To counter the trend, they suggested that camp regulations be enforced far more strictly and those found guilty harshly punished to dissuade others from getting involved.

Young Muslims, as with others of this generation, face increasing threats to their personal safety – due in large to the increasing presence of youth gangs in the camps, borne out of a sense of frustration with their situation.

⁴³ Shah Paung, ‘Fracas in ML Refugee Camp’, The Irrawaddy Online Edition, 27 October 2004, at <http://www.irrawaddy.org/>; ‘Refugee Camp Raided’, Bangkok Post, 28 October 2004, p. 4; and interviews in Mae Sot, Tak province, 15 December 2004.

⁴⁴ Interviews with NGO workers, Mae Sot, Tak province, 2 May 2003 and 3 May 2003.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS

VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION:

Without making assumptions of the terms and climate of any repatriation process, in general Muslims believe they would be able to return under a better protective environment than their Karens counterparts due, in the main, to the perspective that Muslims would generally be perceived by potential recipient host communities as being less aligned with non-ceasefire groups. Members of the “Karen Muslims” sector of the Muslim community express understandably greater concerns under such circumstances, due to their stronger, historic affiliations to the KNU and the wider political opposition.

Despite this self-identified and comparative security under such a programme, certain potential receiving communities may not offer them the welcome they anticipate. Col. Chit Thu, Commander of the DKBA's 999 Special Battalion, has already made his position known – Muslims are not welcome in his town and no Muslims would be accepted under any repatriation exercise.⁴⁵ Considering that Chit Thu's headquarters, “Shwe Ko Ko”, is the largest and most prominent community on the Karen side of the central border not under SPDC control, and which would be the most obvious host community for any large-scale organised repatriation from ML, alternative arrangements would have to be made for any envisioned safe return of Muslim populations from the camp.

LOCAL INTEGRATION:

For the most part, Muslim leaders and households consulted for this report envisioned local integration to be the most appropriate and feasible solution under the current circumstances. Repatriation is seen as a step backwards both in economic and political terms, and resettlement only suitable for households with existing networks in the receiving country. They refer to their communities' strong existing links with urban centres, both in the border areas as well as in Thailand-proper, as making such a move a relatively “small and painless step”.

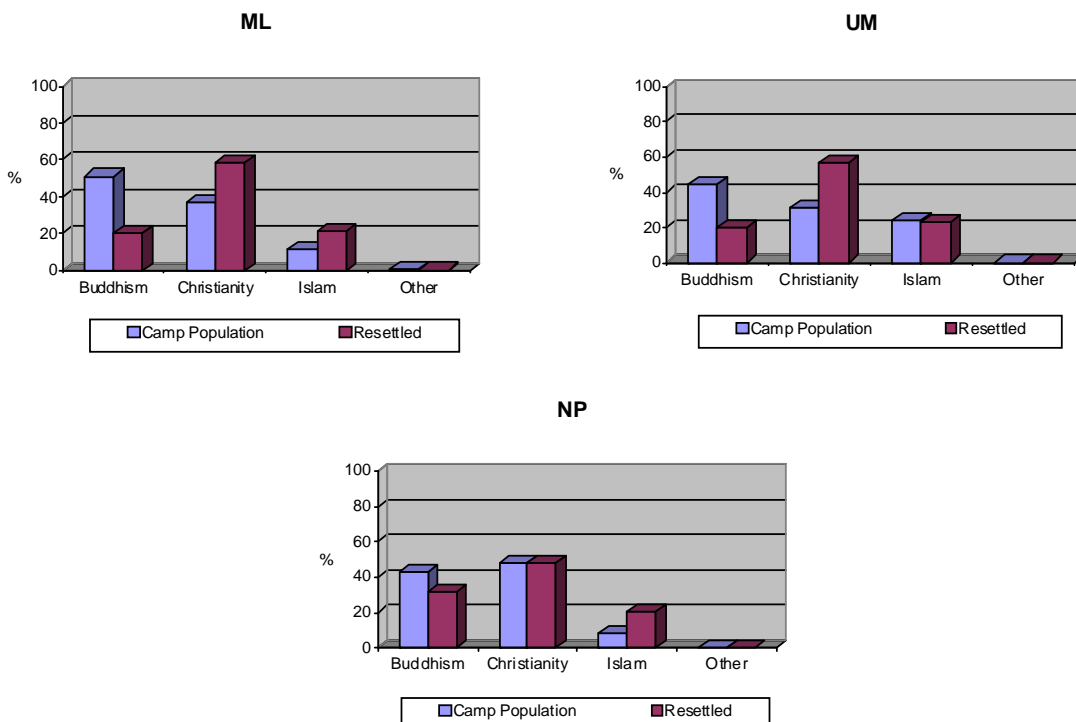
RESETTLEMENT:

When large-scale resettlement opportunities to the USA were opened for the Tak camp caseloads, a lack of information on the process and the potential prospects it offered led some Muslims to think that conversion to Christianity would improve their chances for resettlement and, according to UNHCR field staff, towards the end of 2005, Muslims in ML were indeed converting. However, when UNHCR officials were formally approached on the issue, they denied that this was the case.

Muslims in MRML reported that the majority of the 13 Muslim families in the camp wanted to resettle – their motivation driven by the fact that many have relatives already living in resettlement countries, especially Canada, and the isolation and lack of economic opportunities available in the camp.

Although up-to-date statistics are not available, UNHCR data from early 2009 (see charts below) indicates that Muslims have generally been accepted in higher proportions to their prevalence in the camps. No resettlement statistics from MRML aggregated by religion were available at the time of writing.

RESETTLEMENT CASELOAD VS OVERALL CAMP POPULATION – BY RELIGION (UNHCR, Mar 2009/ TBBC TPD Mar 2010)



⁴⁵ Interviews with xxx, yyy, Mae Sot, Tak Province, June 2007.

CONCLUSION

The Muslim communities in the refugee camps along the Thailand-Burma border maintain lifestyles quite distinct from their counterparts in the rest of the population, and this is apparent in most sectors of camp life – from socio-cultural and livelihoods practices to issues surrounding representation and protection.

This distinction reflects in the levels of their inclusion in the wider community, with a lack of representation in camp management and networks, as well as in programme design and implementation with external service providers and other agencies.

Considering the divergences in Muslim practices and preferences to the larger community, and with a population totalling as many as 15,000 in the camps borderwide, representing up to a fifth of camp residents in the Tak camps, it is clear that this sector of the community requires and fully deserves a “seat at the table” – whether the table is the centre of discussion for camp committees, external service providers, or agency co-ordination.

This is being addressed to some degree through recent improvements in representation in camp decision-making bodies – especially in ML and NP – and the establishment of civil society organisations, especially in UM. Greater sensitivity to religious and ethnic diversity is also apparent in the individual planning and operations of external service providers as well as in their collective co-ordination meetings; however, a great deal of work needs to be done to support Muslim communities in the full realisation of their aspirations.

They have the desire, energy, ideas and commitment to further this process; however, due to the rapid shifts away from ethnic and cultural homogeneity in recent years, current camp bodies and structures have been caught somewhat off-balance in adapting to, and adopting the changes in a strategic and timely manner. Any effective transition to more equitable representation will require the full support, encouragement and constructive participation of all stakeholders in a locally-owned and -initiated process of inclusive discourse, strategic planning and intervention development – beneficiaries, their management bodies, and NGOs and UN agencies alike.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations propose areas for improvement in the suitability and effectiveness of TBBC's current programme in relation to Muslim practices and preferences, as well as their more equitable inclusion.

General:

- Ensure appropriate staff sensitisation on issues surrounding Muslim practices and preferences, particularly within the context of diversity and equity, as well as those directly related to programme.
- Ensure equitable inclusion of Muslim communities in programme planning processes and implementation, including operational and strategic planning, and that community leaders are kept informed of these initiatives.
- Ensure equitable access for beneficiaries to programme-related information and resources.
- Encourage application by, and focus on equitable recruitment of Muslims for camp-based staffing positions - both within TBBC and CMSP - and heighten sensitivities of all parties involved in recruitment.
- Encourage application by, and focus on equitable recruitment of Muslims for field staff positions.
- Continue to monitor the equitable access of Muslim communities to all programme outputs.

Socio-cultural:

- In Muslim settings, staff adhere to behaviours appropriate to Islamic customs and culture.

Food and Shelter:

- Field Officers work with camp supply chain teams to ensure proper management and recording of fishpaste distribution and surplus stock control.
- Consider alternative mechanisms to replace fishpaste with a more suitable commodity. As TBBC has never provided different commodities to different sectors within the same camp, TBBC may need to consider an adjustment to the current supply chain arrangement, including the practicalities of moving towards some form of coupon system.
- Ensure all commodities supplied for consumption in camps meet *Halal* standards under *Hanafi* interpretation.
- Conduct further research on the utilisation of cooking fuels in Muslim households to see if significant divergences to wider community practices exist, and consider appropriate responses if so.
- Through CMSP, encourage the equitable representation of Muslims in warehouse staff and distribution teams.
- Ensure that TBBC Distribution and Monitoring teams have equitable Muslim representation.
- Ensure Muslim households are equitably represented through post-distribution monitoring, by conducting sector-targeted interviews.
- Conduct further research on the participation of Muslim communities in building material procurement/preparation.

Health:

- Ensure community health outreach workers regularly visit Muslim households and screened for possible inclusion into Supplementary/ Therapeutic Feeding Programmes.
- Health agencies consider equitable Muslim representation in clinic staff and other health teams, and to adapt recruitment processes accordingly.
- Encourage the Muslim community's regular participation in Asiamix cooking demonstrations through co-ordination with Muslim women's groups.
- Conduct further research to identify if Muslim children suffer from higher proportions of acute malnutrition to the wider community and, if so, the causes. Based on the findings, consider interventions to mitigate the trend.

Education:

- Education agencies consider equitable Muslim representation in camp-based education staff, and to adapt recruitment processes accordingly.
- Through the CCSDPT, draw education agency attention to the other obstacles expressed relating to education.
- Through CCSDPT/ UNHCR explore ways to strengthen linkages between camp-based Muslim communities and local Islamic institutions in Thai towns/ cities in the North.

Livelihoods:

- Utilise the strong business skills within the Muslim community for Business Development, Grant and Savings Programme initiatives and activities, especially those relating to trade and the service and livestock industries. *It should be noted that many Muslim livelihoods activities are interconnected with those of host communities, and thus developments in these sectors could play an important role in advocacy and furthering strategic aims.*
- Based on the findings of further research, consider targeting Muslim communities in any livelihoods initiatives surrounding building material procurement/ preparation.
- Encourage the Muslim community's regular participation in CAN trainings, recognising the current lower prioritisations afforded to self-consumption.
- Through targeted information campaigns, ensure Muslim households are informed of, and those interested receive, seed distributions.
- Further explore the existence, scope and scale of "hidden" taxation systems in all camps, and analyse the impacts on the economies of households and the community as a whole.

Representation:

- Through CMSP, advocate for the active participation and candidacy of Muslims in camp elections, and consider appropriate revisions to camp election procedures to ensure equitable Muslim representation in camp management structures, especially at the camp committee level.
- In the meantime, through CMSP, advocate for Ethnic Collaboration Committees in UM and NP (as in ML), and ensure that their Camp Advisory Committees include Muslim representation.
- Encourage the Muslim communities in MRML, ML and NP to establish Muslim women's and youth groups, and equitably engage all Muslim CBOs in programme activities.
- Continue to support the Community Support Centre in UM as, amongst other deliverables, a vehicle for the development and strengthening of Muslim civil society and its representation in the camp.
- Ensure Muslim communities are regularly consulted as part of community outreach activities, and that their needs and aspirations are integrated into programme planning and evaluation.
- Through the CCSDPT, encourage NGOs to widen their community consultations and activities to ensure equitable inclusion of Muslim communities.
- Through the CCSDPT and PWGs, advocate for the appropriate representation of Muslim issues within camp management structures (not simply having a token figure).

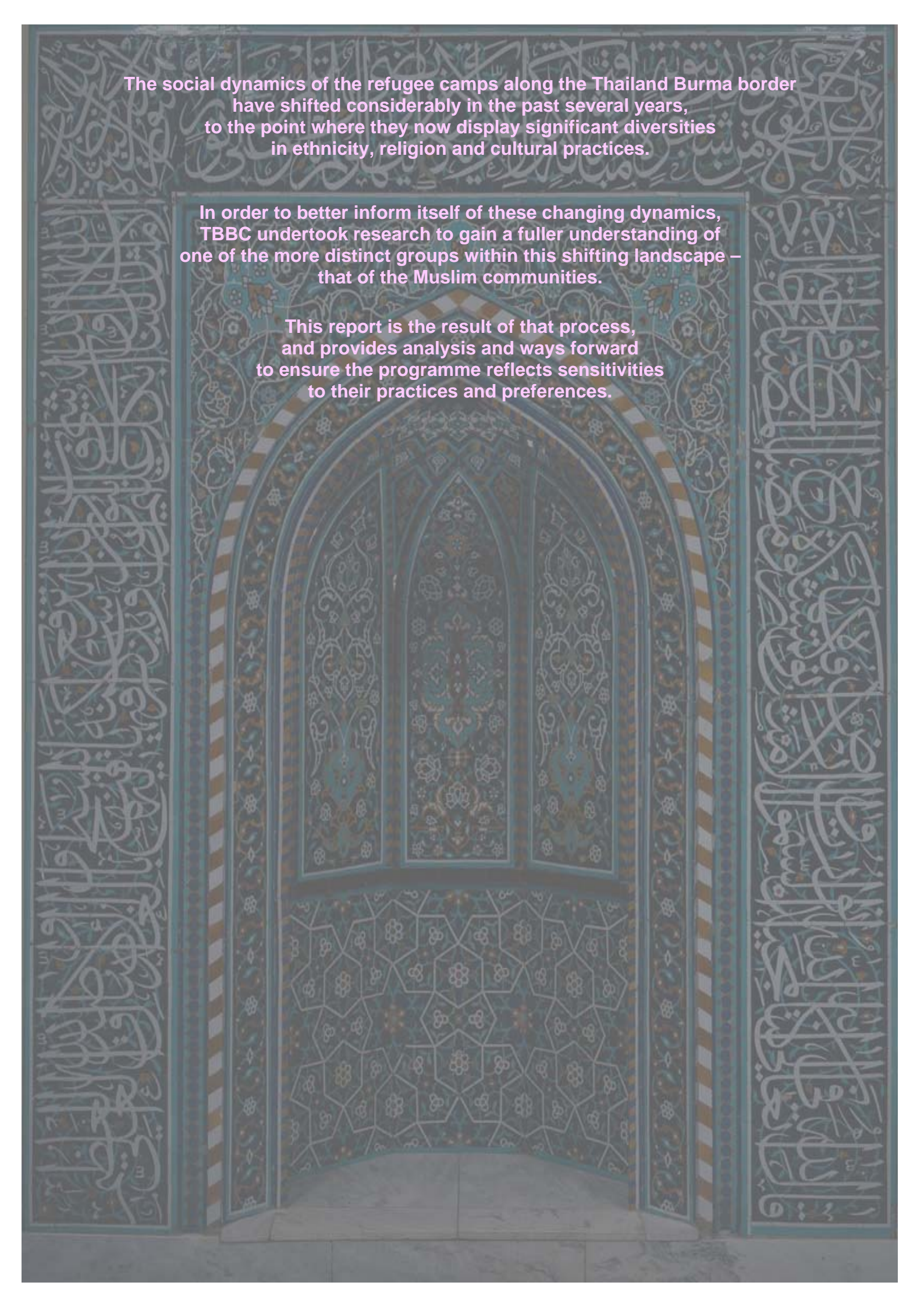
Protection:

- With the UNHCR and through the CCSDPT, continue to advocate with the RTG for the establishment of a comprehensive and regular registration process based on internationally-recognised standards.
- With the UNHCR and through the CCSDPT, ensure all unregistered persons residing in the camps, including those within the Muslim communities, are afforded equal access to services.
- Through the CCSDPT, encourage the IRC's LAC project to conduct further research into the causes for members of Muslim communities to seek legal advice through its services, and the correlation of this to the lack of confidence in access to legal recourse through camp justice committees, and the role that hearings under *Sha'ria* law play in the justice dynamic.
- With the UNHCR and through the CCSDPT, continue to advocate with the RTG to seek durable and appropriate solutions to the ongoing encampment of all refugees from Burma, recognising the Muslim community's expressed desires for local integration strategies.

APPENDIX – BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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The social dynamics of the refugee camps along the Thailand Burma border have shifted considerably in the past several years, to the point where they now display significant diversities in ethnicity, religion and cultural practices.

In order to better inform itself of these changing dynamics, TBBC undertook research to gain a fuller understanding of one of the more distinct groups within this shifting landscape – that of the Muslim communities.

This report is the result of that process, and provides analysis and ways forward to ensure the programme reflects sensitivities to their practices and preferences.