

**THE REPUBLIC OF THE UNION OF MYANMAR**  
**RAPID URBAN DIAGNOSTIC REPORT**

**Prepared for**  
**Department of Urban and Housing Development,**  
**Ministry of Construction**

**With technical assistance from UN Habitat**



**UN HABITAT**

# RAPID URBAN DIAGNOSTIC REPORT MYANMAR

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## **A. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND OF RAPID URBAN DIAGNOSTIC REPORT MYANMAR**

### **A.I Executive Summary**

It is expected that Myanmar's urban population will grow from 15.4 million in 2014 to about 20.4 million in 2030. This trend warrants a wide-ranging modernization of both municipal governance and legal frameworks for urban development. Besides this, basic municipal services such as supply of drinking water and wastewater treatment as well as power supply need to be improved nationwide to offset decades of underinvestment, requiring huge outlays for facilities and networks. An important piece of a Union wide spatial orientation is in place already. The draft of the National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) provides a long term framework for nationwide spatial policy and reinforces the preponderance of the tri-polar development corridor Yangon - Nay Pyi Taw – Mandalay.

With a view on impending acceleration of urbanization, the structure of the current local administrative framework poses serious challenges to both rational integrated spatial planning and sectoral planning for local infrastructure provision. Within the Town Management Committees currently in charge of township administration and development, incentives for long-term strategic coordination seem to be weak. Combined with severe underfunding, persistent coordination issues appear to be one of the main causes of inefficiencies identifiable in the management of urban settlements. A 'unified' local decision-maker enjoying political legitimacy, such as a mayor or municipal chief executive accountable to a local assembly elected via universal franchise, is not at hand.

Spatial expansion in secondary cities as well as in Yangon and Mandalay is mostly shaped by the sectoral expansion of the road network and the cumulative effects of building permits, whose contents are based on a fusion of local standards and cultural consensus. Due to spatial demands caused by accelerating economic growth and economic transformation, these routines are approaching in-built limitations. Both Yangon and Mandalay are in the process of preparing long-term strategic urban development plans. Yet an operational legal framework to ensure subsequent implementation appears to be missing.

The current draft of the Urban and Regional Development Planning Law suggests a rather early stage of formulation. Central elements of urban planning such as rules and procedures for citizen and stakeholder participation in planning processes and the integration of strategic environmental assessments – critical with regard to the challenges posed by climate change - are not included yet. There is a vital need to embrace provisions on how to deal with conflicting objectives concerning land uses in a transparent, accountable, gender-neutral, and fair manner.

The momentum of on-going political transformation could be used to expand and revise legal frameworks for municipal and spatial governance, including establishing the constitutional foundation for a decentralized tier of municipal self-governance accompanied by an adequate devolution of responsibilities and fiscal resources.

## **A.II General Background**

1. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar is in the early stages of a protracted process of transformation from a militarily-dominated political system, towards a parliamentary democracy and market-oriented economy. Based on the 2008 Constitution, and following 2010 general elections, a reformist government under then-President Thein Sein undertook formal steps towards **decentralization through federalization** of the Myanmar state. In the regions and states elections were held. Afterwards, the process of establishing governments in the states and regions commenced. On November 8, 2015 another general election was held, in which NLD participated. The election resulted in a sweeping land-slide victory for NLD and brought about a super-majority for the NLD led by Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi. The new government came into office in March 2016. Under the new Government, urban development and issues arising from rapid urbanization have come to unprecedented prominence. These issues require a whole-of-government response, and UN Habitat is supporting the Government of Myanmar – through the Ministry of Construction – in preparing a National Urban Policy to respond to the challenges.

2. In October 2016, Myanmar participated in the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, in Quito, Ecuador. The Conference, which was attended by Union Minister of Construction H.E. U Win Khaing, saw the formal adoption of the New Urban Agenda, which set out a framework for sustainable urban development. Following Habitat III, the Union Minister has announced intentions to implement the NUA in Myanmar, including the establishment of a National Habitat Committee to oversee reforms. This Diagnostic Report is a first step towards both the development of a National Urban Policy, and full implementation of the NUA in Myanmar.

## **A.III Background of Rapid Urban Diagnostic**

3. UN-Habitat's Country Programme Document (HCPD)<sup>1</sup> for the Republic of Myanmar for the period 2014 to 2016 presents the operational context for the Rapid Urban Diagnostic for Myanmar.

HCPD 2014/2016 comprises four thematic focus areas:

- (1) Participatory urban planning, management and governance;
- (2) Pro-poor housing, land and tenure;
- (3) Improving human settlements and rebuilding communities;
- (4) Environment, resilience building and climate change, including the promotion of environmentally sustainable cities.

4. Thematic Focus Area No. 1 entails the adoption of new urban planning frameworks to guide urban development and urbanization on a nationwide scale in Myanmar during the next years. Hence, a National Urban Policy (NUP) – to be formally adopted by the Government of Myanmar – will establish a core output of the activities in Thematic Focus Area No. 1.

5. UN-Habitat's activities towards a NUP consist of a series of building blocks. The first step was the preparation of a **National Urban Policy Note** for the Union of Myanmar (December 2014). The **National Urban Policy Note** outlines themes and topics in a broad manner to be addressed by a **National Urban Policy** for Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> The second step is the **Rapid Urban Diagnostic**. The Rapid Urban Diagnostic is an analytical tool developed by UN-Habitat to support and streamline the formulation of National Urban Policies (NUP) in developing and rapidly urbanizing countries. The findings of the Rapid Urban Diagnostic Report Myanmar (RUDRMYA) will shape the contents of the subsequent **Framework for a National Urban Policy**, the third building block. Both documents, the **Diagnostic** and the subsequent **Framework** aim at engaging UN-Habitat Myanmar in an urban development dialogue.

#### **A.IV Purpose of Rapid Urban Diagnostic Report Myanmar**

6. The purpose of Rapid Urban Diagnostic Report Myanmar is to give a brief and concise snapshot of the fundamental conditions of the urban sector in Myanmar as observed at the end of 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Informed by UN-Habitat's generic guidelines, the Report addresses the following topics:

- 1) Urbanization drivers, trends, and projections, based on recent population data gathered through the 2014 census;
- 2) The existing system of cities, including consideration of national economic development policies, the impact of special economic zones, and broader regional plans the (particularly the GMS sub-region transport corridors);
- 3) An overview of urban legislation, including the draft of the Urban and Regional Planning Law;
- 4) Urban regulations including plotting, public space, and building codes;
- 5) Urban planning, implementation, and enforcement, including the process of urban expansion in Yangon, Mandalay, and secondary cities; and
- 6) Infrastructure and basic services (existing conditions and provision).

## **B. RAPID URBAN DIAGNOSTIC REPORT MYANMAR**

### **B.I Urbanization**

#### **B.I.1 Current Level of Urbanization**

7. The Union of Myanmar consists of seven states and seven regions. The term “region” is used for the areas that have a bamar ethnic majority, whereas the term “state” is used for the territorial units predominantly populated by non-bamar ethnic groups. From the constitutional perspective, both states and regions enjoy the same status vis-à-vis the national level government. In addition, there is the special Union Territory of Nay Pyi Taw, the new capital city of Myanmar, which covers around 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 1.16 million in 2014.<sup>4</sup> States/regions as well as the Union Territory of Nay Pyi Taw consist of districts, which in turn are comprised by townships. Townships form the basic element of the municipal administrative topography of Myanmar. A central feature of townships is that they often encompass urban areas which are called (urban) wards and rural areas called village tracts. Village tracts frequently encompass several villages as spatially distinct settlements. Further spatial-administrative categories other than urban wards and village tracts do not exist. The classification of an area as urban/rural is carried out by the General Administration Department (GAD), a department of the national level Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA). Village tracts generally are areas with low population density and a land use which is predominantly agricultural. Conversely, urban areas have an increased density of building structures and population and enjoy better infrastructural services.<sup>5</sup> A township as an administrative entity can include several separate towns and, likewise, a number of distinct villages. The census of 2014 categorized the population based on residency either in an urban ward or in a village tract. There is only a very limited number of townships (in Yangon and Mandalay) that do not include any rural area. The census data deliver static snapshots and virtually do not reflect any of the functional interlockings between urban and rural areas that frequently characterize townships.

8. According to the census of 2014, about 15.2 million people - 29.6% of the entire population – was living in urban areas in 2014.<sup>6</sup> This is substantially lower (about 11%) than the latest estimate of UNESCAP for 2014, which reckoned Myanmar’s urbanization rate to stand at 33.6%.<sup>7</sup> The states/regions with the highest portions of urban population are Yangon Region, Kachin State, and Mandalay Region, while Ayeyawady Region, Rakhine State and Magway Region are the federal entities that have the lowest shares of urban population. Table I displays a few key features from the census.

**TABLE I: URBAN POPULATION AND URBAN CENTERS BY STATE/REGION (CENSUS OF 2014)**

I	II	III	IV	V	VI
STATE/REGION	URBAN POPULATION (%)	NO. OF TOWN-SHIPS / SUB-TOWNSHIPS	NO. OF TOWNSHIPS / SUB-TOWNSHIPS WITH SHARE OF URB. POP. ≥ 40%	NO. OF TOWNSHIPS / SUB-TOWNSHIPS WITH SHARE OF URB. POP. ≥ 40% AND TOTAL POP. ≥ 100,000****	NO. OF TOWNSHIPS / SUB-TOWNSHIPS WITH SHARE OF URB. POP. < 40% AND TOTAL URBAN POP. ≥ 50,000
Kachin State	36.1	29	8	2 (Myitkyina; Bhamo)	1 (Phakant)
Kayah State	25.3	8	3	1 (Loikaw)	--
Kayin State	21.9	16	3	1 (Myawady)	1 (Hpa-an)
Chin State	20.8	13	2	--	--
Sagaing Region	17.1	45	3	1 (Monywa)	3 (Kalay; Sagaing; Shwebo)
Tanintharyi Region	24.0	16	4	3 (Myeik; Dawei; Kawthoung)	--
Bago Region	22.0	20	3	3 (Bago; Toungoo; Pyay)	2 (Pyu; Nyaunglebin)
Magway Region	15.0	26	--	--	3 (Magway; Pakokku; Aunglan)
Mandalay Region	34.8	30	7*	7****	3 (Meiktila; Myingyan; Amarapura)
Mon State	27.9	11	1	1 (Mawlamyine)	2 (Thanbyuzayat; Thaton)
Rakhine State	16.9	20	1	1 (Sittway)	--
Yangon Region	70.1	46	35**	22****	1 (Thanlyin)
Shan State	24.0	83	8	3 (Taungyi; Lashio; Muse)	1 (Kalaw)
Ayeyawady Region	14.1	33	1	1 (Patheingyi)	2 (Hinthada; Myaungmya)
Nay Pyi Taw***	32.3	8	2	1 (Zabuthiri)	1 (Pynmana)

Source: Ministry of Immigration and Population, The 2014 Population and Housing Census, The Union Report (Census Report Vol. II), Nay Pyi Taw, May 2015; author's compilation.

\* Five townships located in Mandalay District have a share of urban population of 100%. Together with two additional townships, these make up the area under the jurisdiction of Mandalay City Development Committee (MCDC), which is colloquially called "Mandalay City".

\*\* 28 townships located in Yangon Region have a share of urban population of 100%. Together with five additional townships, these make up the area under the jurisdiction of Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), which is colloquially called "Yanooon City".

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