

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES

Wa Self-Administered Division WFP Myanmar

OVERVIEW

Wa is a Self-Administered Division of Shan State, located on the China–Myanmar border. It has a total land area of 35,000 km² and a population of 558,000. It was formed in 1989 when the Communist Party of Burma fragmented into ethnic armed groups and is under the leadership of the United Wa State Army (UWSA). Shortly afterwards, a ceasefire was signed with the government and, since then, Wa Self-Administered Division has maintained its own autonomy and governance mechanisms. There are 16 minority groups in Wa. The ethnic Wa account for 70 percent of the total population, with Lahu and Shan as the second and third largest ethnic groups.

Wa Region is hilly, remote and isolated, with variable livelihood conditions. It is best-known to the international community as a former poppy producing region. Due to poverty, remoteness and localized armed conflicts, local farmers resorted to poppy cultivation.

Moreover, the faster economic return enticed the local population into opium production. A poppy eradication campaign was introduced in June 2005 by the Government of Myanmar, which deprived small ex-opium farmers of their major income source. Insufficient technical and financial support for livelihood alternatives put lives of smallholders at risk. Furthermore, agriculture is less viable as soil fertility was depleted by the poppy cultivation. The resultant food insecurity has persisted among small-scale farmers in isolated and impoverished villages.

Wa Region has also suffered from armed conflict. Recurrent clashes and political tensions resulted in precarious working conditions for international and national non-governmental organisations. In recent years, however, Wa Region has enjoyed relative stability. For years,

WFP has been the only UN agency present in Wa providing food and livelihoods assistance. In light of the increased international attention on democratic reform and political reconciliation in Myanmar, Wa Region and UWSA remain pivotal in the nationwide ceasefire and peace process.

According to local governance mapping by UNDP, poor education was identified as a major development issue by respondents. A 2008 report by Health Poverty Action indicated that the illiteracy rate in Wa was 90 percent with 82.7 percent of adults having less than a year of schooling, if any. The 2014 Myanmar Population Census also highlighted that 64.7 percent of people aged 5 to 29 did not receive an education, compared to the national average of 9.5 percent. Only 22.5 percent of people above 15 years of age were literate.

Health status is also extremely low. Health Poverty Action's 2016 health survey identified a stunting rate of 79 percent in two surveyed townships, where 55 percent of the population was also underweight. Based on a survey by UNICEF conducted in 2005, children under five showed a 57.7 percent stunting rate and 7.3 percent wasting rate, above the average in Shan State.

BENEFICIARIES IN 2018



School Feeding
14,200



Assets Creation
9,600



Photo: Happy students upon the arrival of a WFP food truck in Wang Leng Township

WFP'S RESPONSE

WFP's presence in Wa Region dates back to May 2004, when a field office was established in Pang Kham. Three operations have since been implemented with the main objective of covering the food gap faced by numerous ex-poppy farmers during the transition period to sustainable alternative livelihoods. Following military tension in 2010 between the Government forces and the UWSA, WFP withdrew at the Government's request in October 2010 and returned in November 2011, initially resuming operations in 11 townships. Since 2014, WFP's operation has gradually increased its coverage to 22 out of 23 townships in Wa, expanding back to pre-conflict coverage.

► School Feeding

The livelihoods of Wa people deteriorated drastically following the ban on poppy cultivation, despite the gradual phasing in of the poppy ban by local authorities. WFP started its school feeding programme in Wa in 2004 as parents could no longer afford school fees. From 2004 to early 2015, WFP provided 10 kg of rice as a take-home ration to every primary student and then gradually introduced high-energy biscuits (HEB) in all target schools. However, the HEB programme had to be suspended and came to a complete stop in late 2016 in the face of restrictions on food deliveries into Wa.

In early 2017, the school meals programme was piloted in 80 schools with locally-purchased food, and was later expanded to 114 schools. The strong participation and collaboration of the community and local authorities proved key in overcoming early challenges. In late 2018, the school meal programme shifted to cash-based

transfers, with the aim of supporting the local economy. The objective of the school meal programme is to improve and maintain enrollment and retention of primary school children with a special focus on nutrition. WFP's school meal programme targets children in primary schools in areas with high food insecurity and low enrollment rates. In 2019, WFP is feeding 11,500 students from 114 schools.

► Community Asset Creation

Asset creation activities started in Wa in 2004 to provide ex-poppy farmers with alternative work opportunities while simultaneously helping to build assets that benefit the entire community. The work was initially compensated through in-kind rations and later shifted to cash. In 2018, WFP created livelihood opportunities for over 9,600 people by renovating or constructing 12 hectares of terraced land, one irrigation canal, two village water supply systems, three schools and three village motorbike roads, as well as school and home garden development.

In 2019, WFP plans to complete eight projects, including terrace land, school gardens, home gardens, and canal and road projects. WFP expects to provide approximately US\$75,000 through cash-based transfers to 1,350 participants in return for involvement in the cash-for-assets activities.

PARTNERSHIPS

Local Authority Counterparts

- Ministry of Border Affairs (NaTaLa)
- Wa Central Authority

Other Local Authority Partners

- Wa External Relations Department
- Wa Agriculture and Irrigation Department
- Wa Education Bureau
- Wa Health Bureau
- Wa Woman Association

NaTaLa is WFP's only counterpart Government Ministry for the Wa operation. The Wa Central Authority holds and directs the administrative mechanism of the entire Wa Region. Chaired by the Vice Chairman of the Wa Central Authority, a coordination meeting between NaTaLa, Wa administrative departments and the United Nations and INGOs takes place once a month. This is the main coordination mechanism for the UN/INGOs with the Wa Central Authority and its administrative departments.

Community leaders, local authorities and women's associations are very active in monitoring activities. These groups independently organize frequent monitoring visits to project villages. In addition to WFP's regular monitoring, an alternative tech-based monitoring system has been set up, through which a WeChat group for teachers has been formed in each township. Through this social media group, teachers send their day-to-day cooking photos with embedded dates and WFP can efficiently verify whether the activity is proceeding as planned.

WFP ACTIVITIES IN 2019

