



JUNE 2021



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# Yangon Food Security Monitoring

## May 2021

### HIGHLIGHTS

From 19 to 29 of May 2021, food security monitoring phone surveys were conducted in seven townships of Yangon: Dagon Myothit Seikkan, Dagon Myothit South, Dala, Hlaingtharya, Insein, North Okkalapa and Shwepyithar, 325 households were surveyed. The surveys shed light on the food security situation of peri-urban Yangon households, and the ways in which households are coping during the current political crisis.

- » **Households in surveyed peri-urban areas of Yangon are struggling to meet their food needs** and having to rely on a high utilization of negative consumption-based and livelihood coping strategies.
- » **Informal settlements are significantly more vulnerable than formal settlements on almost all key indicators;** inadequate food consumption is higher in informal settlements (32%) than in formal settlements (18%), the utilisation of consumption and livelihood coping strategies is significantly higher on almost all strategies, twice as many informal households reported no income, and for those that did have an income, earned 35% less than households in formal settlements.
- » **Taking on high risk jobs, which is an emergency strategy, is particularly pronounced** in informal settlements (45%), among households with people with disabilities (46%), and among households with no access to water (39%).
- » **Food was the preferred assistance modality in informal settlements** with 55% of households preferring food, as compared to 37% of households in formal settlements.
- » **An overwhelming majority of respondents in informal settlements needed to borrow money to be able to buy food** (89% compared to 60% in formal settlements), and to buy food on credit (69% compared to 36%). Borrowing money as a coping strategy was also high in other groups, notably in 90% of households with people with disabilities, 88% of households that had no access to water, and 89% of rural households.
- » **Accessing market does not seem to be an issue** with all surveyed households reporting having access.
- » **Incomes have been badly affected by the current crisis with 82% of surveyed households reporting a reduction in income** in the 30 days prior to the survey. Income reductions are considerable - more than 80% reported reductions of more than 25%.
- » **Over half of the surveyed households in Dala<sup>1</sup> township had unacceptable food consumption (52%),** over half have no access to water (56%), and the majority use surface water as their main water source (68%). Taking on high risk jobs was especially high (64%) as compared to other townships (22%)

<sup>1</sup> Results are indicative due to small sample size in Dala and will be investigated further

# Recommendations



**Assistance to surveyed Yangon townships should be expanded** with food assistance to be delivered to the most vulnerable households for 6 months. Households relying on informal income, households in informal settlements, households with high dependency ratio and people with disabilities appeared as the most vulnerable groups and should be targeted with food assistance as a priority.



**Beneficiaries' preferences should be considered** in the design of the response. Cash assistance may not be the most preferred transfer modality in all surveyed townships. Delivery of in-kind assistance or combination of cash and food are the most preferred favorite transfer modalities except for Dagon Myothit South. Among CBT transfer mechanisms the use of food vouchers might be the more appropriate given beneficiaries' preference to in-kind assistance.



**Security permitting, assess feasibility of delivering cash assistance** in surveyed Yangon townships given households' ability to access markets while price volatility may continue to hamper households' food affordability. Market monitoring should continue.



**Access to safe drinking water should be further assessed** by the WASH sector, and access to safe water in the surveyed Yangon townships enhanced; reasons for the use of unimproved drinking water sources should be monitored and options for the provision of an alternative protected water source considered.



**Continue monitoring households' food security** in the surveyed Yangon townships, and expand on assessments of other vulnerable Yangon townships and other urban centers outside Yangon expanded to the extent possible. Given the vulnerability of the households in informal settlements, it is recommended to continue to monitor the food security situation – food access, food prices and job opportunities.



A mother carries home emergency rice assistance from WFP in an impoverished township under martial law in Yangon Region

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## METHODOLOGY

From 19 to 29 of May 2021, food security monitoring phone surveys were conducted in seven townships of Yangon: Dagon Myothit Seikkan, Dagon Myothit South, Dala, Hlaingtharya, Insein, North Okkalapa and Shwepyithar. 325 surveys were completed; 50 households were interviewed in each township except in Dala where only 25 were conducted due to limited phone number availability. Thus, findings of Dala should be interpreted carefully.

The questionnaire covered basic household demographics, the food consumption score module, coping strategies (consumption-based and livelihood), income opportunities, expenditure on food (estimate), access to market, source of water, cooking fuel, assistance received and assistance preference modality.

Overall, 66% of the respondents lived in formal settlements and 34% in informal settlements. Informal settlements were self-identified by respondents' response to a question on whether they live in a *Kyu kyaw*, or informal settlement, which is defined by:

- » Substandard housing structures made of poor construction materials (uneven roof)
- » No systematic road networks
- » Vulnerability to hazards and settlements located at geographically hazardous areas which also have risk of collapsing (e.g. bank of river, creek, ponds etc.)
- » Very high density of settlements

Of the respondents, 26% had received some type of assistance (not necessarily WFP assistance) during the month before the survey.

Overall, survey findings are indicative due to the limited sample size and phone survey bias that excludes more vulnerable households without phones.

## HOUSEHOLDS SURVEYED AT A GLANCE

Gender of respondent:  
62% female and 38% male

Average household size: 5 members

23% of surveyed households had at least one member with a disability

54% of households had children under 5

## HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION

Overall, 22% of surveyed households have inadequate food consumption (borderline). Inadequate food consumption is higher in informal settlements (32%) than in formal settlements (18%). Dala township with 52% of households showed higher levels of inadequate food consumption.

Inadequate food consumption was also more than twice as high for those households with no access to water (43%), compared to those that had access to water (20%).

Figure 1. Food Consumption Score, Overall and by Settlement Type

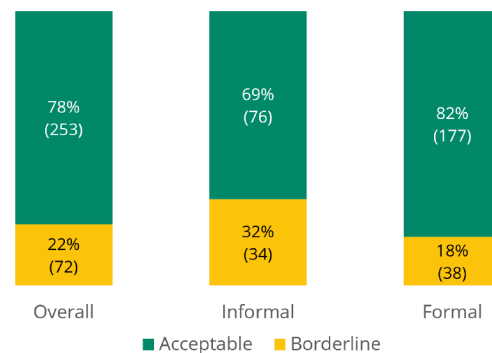
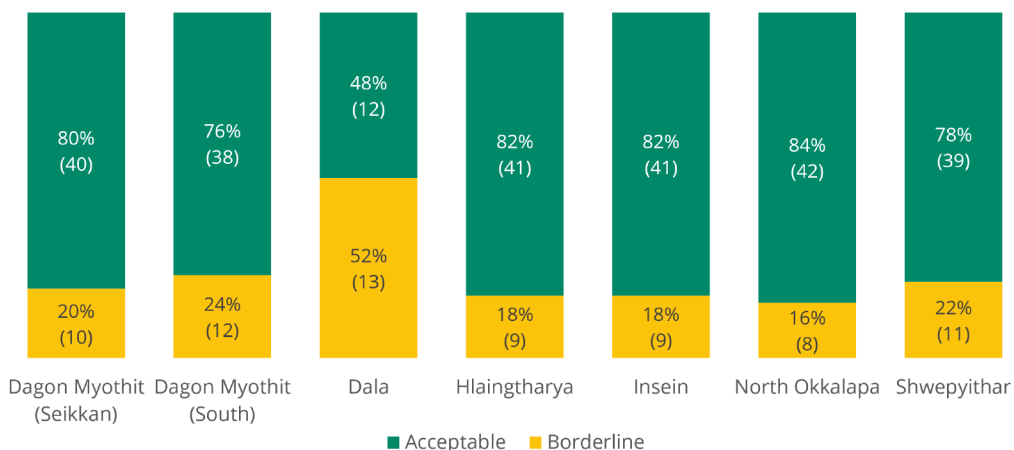


Figure 2. Food Consumption Score, by Township



## COPING STRATEGIES

### Consumption-based coping strategies

Overall 75% of households have reported having to use at least one consumption-based coping strategy in the seven days prior the survey, with 32% having to use four or more. Half or more of all households utilized the strategies of borrowing food, choosing less preferred and less expensive food, and limiting portion sizes. Restricting consumption was common among in 45% of households.

When comparing by township, households in Dala and Dagon Myoythit (Seikkan) on average relied on more coping strategies. Borrowing food, choosing less preferred and less expensive food, limiting portion sizes and restricting consumption are highest in the townships of Hlaingtharya and North Okkalapa.

Overall, a significantly higher proportion of households in informal settlements utilize coping strategies compared to households in formal settlements and on average significantly more strategies (4.2 vs 2.5).

The differences in consumption coping strategies are not so stark between households with children under 5 years of age for most of the consumption-based strategies but the difference in adults restricting consumption so that young children could eat was lower at 26% for no-child households, versus 62% in households with children.

### Livelihood coping strategies

Overall, more than half of the households (53%) used at least one Crisis or Emergency coping strategy during the 30 days prior the survey to cope with the lack of food or money to buy food. Most common strategies employed included borrowing cash (70%), spending savings (59%), selling of household assets (52%).

Dagon Myothit Seikkan and Dala townships showed higher level of use of crises and emergency mechanisms. In Dagon Myothit Seikkan 74% respondents resorted to crisis strategies such as reducing health and education expenditures. On the other hand, in Dala 64% respondents indicated use of emergency coping strategies such as taking on risky activities. However, as indicated before, findings in Dala should be taken with caution due to smaller sample size.

When looking into informal and formal settings, higher level of coping was observed in informal settlements, particularly in the use of emergency strategies (46%). Among these, taking on risky activities was the most common (45%). Worryingly, the use of this emergency strategy was also observed among households with people with disabilities (46%).

Figure 3. Consumption Coping Strategies, Overall and by Township

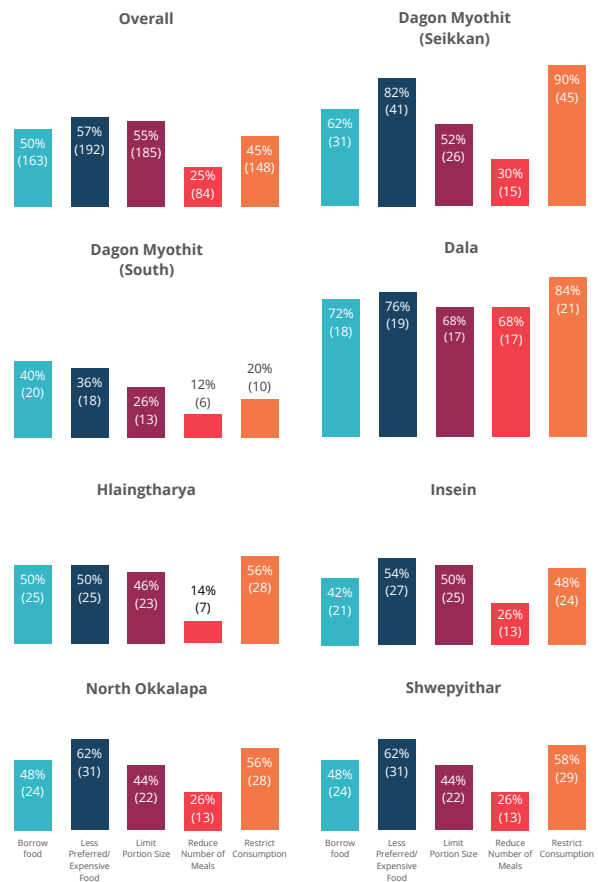


Figure 4. Consumption Coping Strategies, by Settlement Type

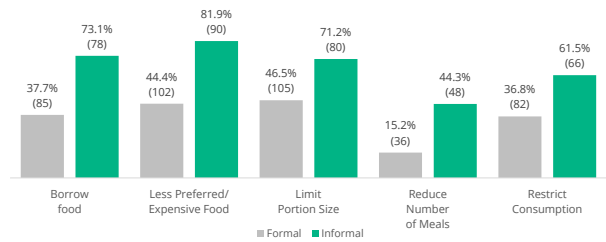


Figure 5. Livelihood Coping Strategies, Overall

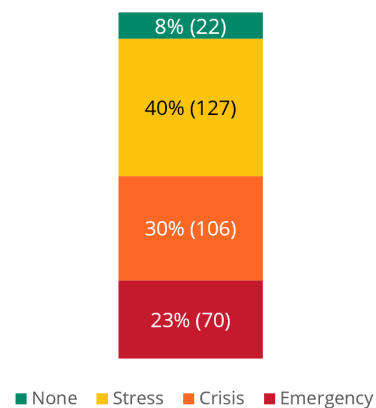
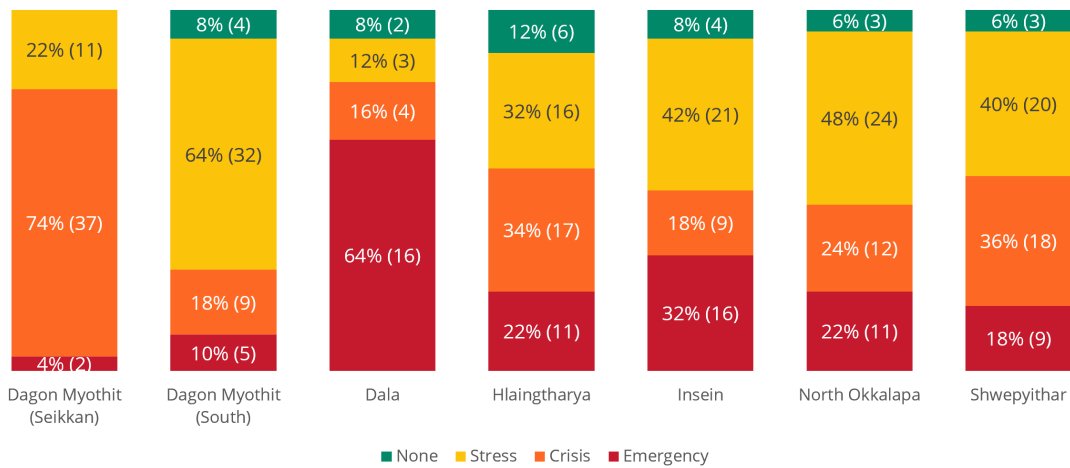


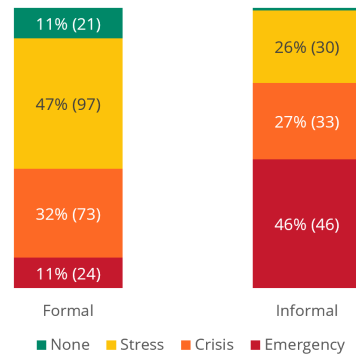
Figure 6. Livelihood Coping Strategies, by Township



Overall, the use of coping strategies was significantly different on all livelihood and reduced food coping strategies when comparing by settlement type. With the exception of the utilization of savings – perhaps because those in informal areas have less savings to tap into – more households in informal settlements had to use strategies in order to get by. An overwhelming majority of informal settlements needed to borrow money to be able to buy food (89% compared to 60% in formal areas), to buy food on credit (69% compared to 36%), and the largest difference of all was in engaging in high risk jobs in order to be able to afford food (45% compared to 10%, a four-fold difference).

When aggregating these individual coping strategies into four groups – None, Stress, Crisis, and Emergency coping strategies, we can see more pronounced comparisons in the most extreme coping strategy a household used, as not all strategies are the same. A much higher proportion of households in informal settlements have utilized emergency coping strategies, likely driven by the high engagement in high risk activities, and begging.

Figure 8. Livelihood Coping Strategies, by Settlement Type

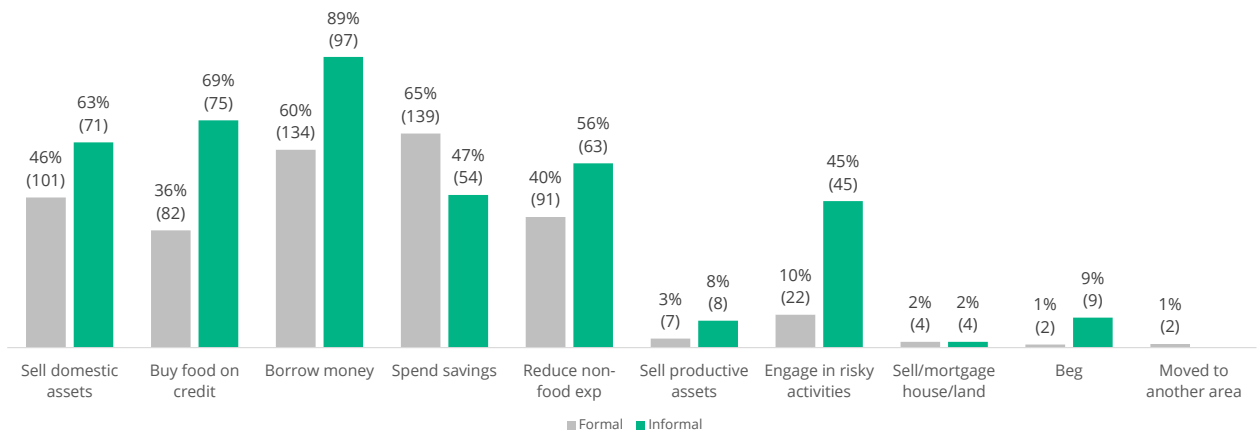


### Other comparisons

The utilization of borrowing money as a coping strategy was also high in other groups, notably in 90% of households with people with disabilities, 88% of households that had no access to water, and 89% of rural households.

A large majority (90%) of households with people with disabilities also had to borrow money for food, as well as reduce non-food expenditures.

Figure 7. Individual Livelihood Coping Strategies, by Settlement Type



## LIVELIHOODS AND INCOME

The current political crisis has affected livelihoods and household income earning opportunities with 83% of surveyed households reporting a reduction in income in the 30 days prior to the survey. Income reductions are considerable: more than 80% of those interviewed reported reductions of more than 25% compared to January.

The majority of households (57%) had one income earner in the household, 34% of households had two income earners, 4% said they had three and similarly 4% said they had none.

Assistance-receiving households earn about 30% less than households that don't receive assistance. But despite this, households that had received assistance have about the same level of food consumption as households that said they had not received assistance, and food expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure is also similar (65% for those who receive assistance, compared to 69% for those who don't).

Dala township had the lowest household income across the other townships, at 143,500 MMK per month, and they also had the highest proportion of households reporting no income (32%).

The most prevalent source of income was non-agricultural wage labour, with 43% of households citing it as their primary source of income overall, but as many as 78% of households in rural areas, and 53% of households in informal saying the same.

In rural areas, the spread of responses was much more limited than that of urban areas, with households only responding in one of three categories; Non-Agricultural Wage Labour, No Income, or Self-Employed. Those in urban areas had a much larger range of employment opportunities, such as factory work (13%) or working in a store/retail (12%).

## INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

The median household income among surveyed households was 180,000 MMK per month, and the median expenditure was 200,000 MMK per month, of which, an average of 68% is spent on food. Household income was significantly lower in informal settlements (130,000 MMK compared to 200,000 MMK in formal areas), in households with disabled persons (130,000 MMK compared to 200,000 MMK in households without), and in rural households (100,000 MMK compared to 180,000 MMK in urban households).

In rural households, households in informal settlements, and households with persons with disabilities, average

total expenditure exceeded total income by 18% to 34%. With a high incidence of borrowing money to purchase food, and purchasing food on credit, this is a plausible but worrying scenario to find households in.

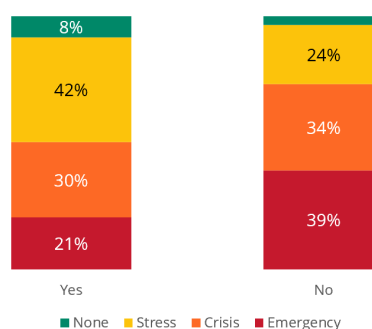
## WATER ACCESS

88% of households reported being able to access potable water safe for drinking and cooking. Overall, the main drinking water source for more than half of households' was bottled water (37%), followed by tanker truck or a cart with small tank (17%), followed by surface water (8.4%); all considered unimproved drinking water sources. For improved sources of drinking water, 12% of households accessed a tube well/bore hole (12%), followed by protected well or spring (11%), public tap or standpipe (11%), and rainwater collection (2%).

In formal settlements, 15% of households used public taps or standpipes compared to 3% of households in informal settlements. For unimproved drinking water sources, a high proportion of households in informal settlements used tanker trucks or carts with a small tank (28%) and surface water (13%).

Access to water seems to be strongly correlated with key indicators of vulnerability. Those without access to water earned, on average, 37,000 MMK less than households who had access to water. Households without access to water also had twice as many households with inadequate food consumption (43%) compared to those with access to water (20%). Households without access to water also engaged twice as often in taking up high risk activities (30% compared to 19%), which then drives the high incidence of using emergency coping strategies compared to households with access to water.

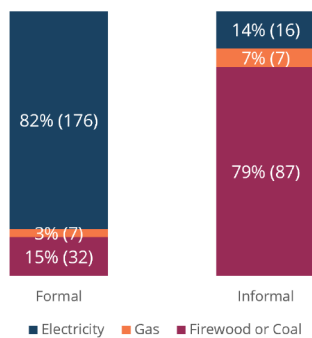
Figure 9. Livelihood Coping Strategies, by Access to Water



## ACCESS TO COOKING FUEL

The most common cooking fuel was electricity (60% of households overall), followed by firewood or coal (36%), and gas (4%). There are significant differences between types of cooking fuel used by formal and informal settlements. In formal settlements, households have greater access to electric stoves (82%) while in informal settlements, only 14% of households use electric stoves. The use of firewood or coal was much more common in informal settlements (79%) than in formal settlements (15%).

Figure 10. Cooking Fuel Used, by Settlement Type



## ASSISTANCE

Households that were interviewed were not WFP beneficiaries, but 26% of households reported receiving some type of assistance from friends and relatives, the UN, or NGOs to meet immediate, basic needs.

### Assistance Preference

Overall, food was the most preferred modality of assistance for 43% of households, followed by cash (27%),

and food and cash (24%). The remaining households either mentioned not needing assistance or wanted some other form of assistance.

In informal settlements, food was a more preferred modality, with 55% of households preferring food, compared to 37% of households in formal settlements. Instead, 32% of households in formal settlements preferred cash, as compared to 15% in informal settlements. This might suggest that in-kind assistance is preferred in informal areas possibly due to more difficult market access, increased food prices or lack of food stocks at household level, while formal areas might prefer the flexibility of cash to purchase food or other necessary items.

When comparing by townships, over half the households in Dala (56%) preferred food as an assistance modality, and no household in Dala answered that assistance was not required. In Dagon Myothit Seikkan, half of households (50%) preferred both food and cash, while in Dagon Myothit South, the most popular option was for cash (42%).

Figure 11. Assistance Preference, Overall and by Settlement Type

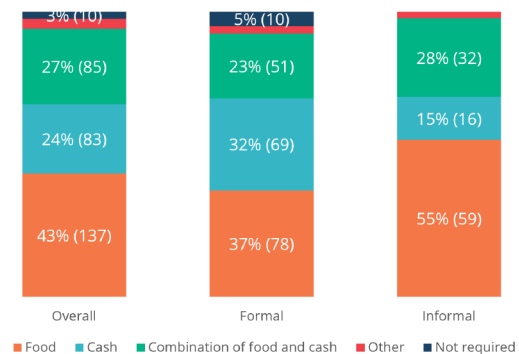
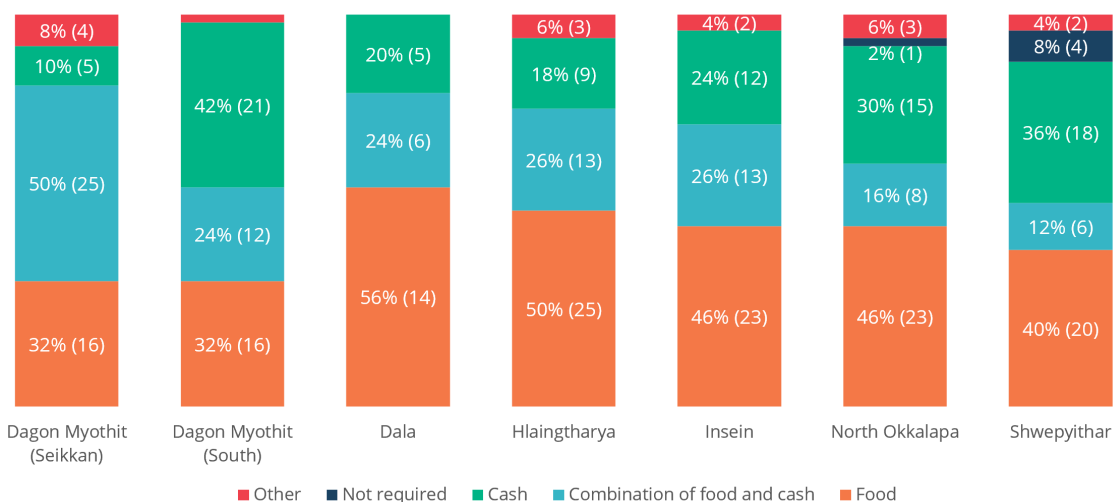


Figure 12. Assistance Preference, by Township



Cover photo: A young woman walks to her home in an informal settlement in Yangon  
Credit: ©WFP / Htet Oo Linn