



## Technical Note on Rakhine State Mapping Questions

### 09Jun20

This document and annexes provide clarification on issues raised on 28th May, 2020 concerning MIMU mapping of villages in Rakhine State.

### Summary

- **Sixteen villages close to Maungdaw Town were reclassified to Ward status in the Government Listing in 2019** – in being integrated into a Ward they no longer appear on MIMU maps as villages. The Wards into which they have been incorporated also do not appear due to lack of information on ward boundaries. These are among a total of 67 villages located close to the urban centres which were reclassified to wards countrywide in 2019, including 41 villages in Rakhine State. A further 6 villages which were removed from the Government Listing in 2013 and for which we have no further field confirmation no longer appear in MIMU’s latest map.
- **MIMU maps reflect the most recent administrative updates** for operational use by humanitarian and development agencies in Myanmar. This includes the recent reclassification of villages in Maungdaw to Ward status, hence these villages no longer appear on MIMU’s most recent maps reflecting the latest administrative updates. They continue to be listed in the MIMU Place Codes which maintains records of the classification changes, new villages and deletions.
- **The MIMU Place Codes retain information on these and other reclassified villages**, even when they no longer appear in the Government Listing. This information is gathered from government and non-government sources and is constantly updated and corrected to be as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.
- **MIMU does not define or alter place names.** The names of administrative divisions (from country to village level) in Myanmar are officially established with notifications issued by the Ministry of Office of the Union Government and published in the national gazette. As such, place names reflected on MIMU maps are the official names from the General Administrative Department, Ministry of the Office of the Union Government, in line with the general cartographic practice to reflect the names as designated by the government.
- **This does not indicate in any way endorsement or agreement with the formulation of official place names.** This is clearly noted in the disclaimers on MIMU products and maps and further explained in MIMU Terms and Conditions.

### The MIMU

The Myanmar Information Management Unit / MIMU is a project under the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator that provides information management services to strengthen analysis and decision-making of the humanitarian and development community in Myanmar. Established in 2007, MIMU provides information support to emergency, humanitarian, development and peace-focused actors and activities, countrywide, thus working closely with UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral donors, national and international NGOs, CSOs and CBOs across the country. This includes compiling the common and fundamental operational datasets, base and customized mapping and seeking information to complete datasets that are not collected by or available through government.

**MIMU produces publicly available maps and related data that reflect information from different sources.** The information contained in MIMU products is provided “as is”, for reference purposes only, based on current available information. Currently no government sources provide maps or village locations that could be used to support humanitarian and development activities in Myanmar. The MIMU Place Code initiative helps to temporarily fill this gap, compiling information on village listings and locations from various sources and sharing this information publicly to support mapping, analysis, programming, advocacy and aid effectiveness. As a result, 78% of 66,000+ settlements around the country can now be included in digital maps. While MIMU cannot make changes to the available information or resolve the issues regarding village names, it provides a resource through which they can be identified.

## Reclassification/mapping of villages in Rakhine

MIMU has not removed the names of villages from the Place code listing (described in the complaint as MIMU’s “mapping database”) – in reality, the MIMU Place Code Listing is the one place in which village names and administrative changes are recorded over time and publicly shared. The MIMU Place Code Listing provides the most comprehensive overview of settlements in Myanmar, with information on 3,200 villages reported by verified field sources in addition to those included in the Government Listing, and a record of changes in official administrative status. It is an extensive and complex living document which is constantly being updated, clarified and corrected based on available and new information.

Villages on which we have any information continue to be recorded in the MIMU Place Codes, regardless of their status (i.e. when merged with other villages, or if deleted from the official listing for any reason). By contrast, MIMU maps are updated with the most current information for operational purposes – hence they may not include villages which have been combined to new administrative units or declassified.

### **MIMU’s recent maps for Maungdaw Township no longer include:**

- villages reclassified as Wards (i.e. urban sub-divisions) – 16 villages close to Maungdaw Town were reclassified as Wards in 2019 (no longer appearing in MIMU village level maps in 2020), and a further 17 villages reclassified as Wards in 2016 in Kha Maung Seik Town and Myin Hlut Town (removed from MIMU maps in October 2019).
- villages that were no longer included in the 2013 Government Gazette (6 villages) – were removed by MIMU from the latest map after being found to have still been inadvertently included in earlier maps. No reason was provided for this government declassification. One of these villages cannot be mapped due to lack of geographic coordinates.

**All of the above-mentioned villages continue to be recorded in the MIMU Place Codes.** MIMU does not however have verified information on the status of these villages on the ground. The General Administration Department (GAD) publishes the Government Listing which serves as the official record of current Villages and the Village Tract/Ward, Township, District and State/Region they belong to, as well as the notifications of changes in government classification of settlements in the Government Gazette. Reclassification of Villages to Wards is a relatively common change as towns extend. From 2015-2019, 409 Villages were reclassified as Wards countrywide (See TABLE 1); these were from all States/Regions with the highest number in Ayeyarwady Region (86), followed by Sagaing Region (74) and Rakhine State (66). Wards may be given the previous Village Tract name, or the name of one of the larger Villages, or a serial number. Wards generally do not appear on MIMU maps due to lack of information on Ward boundaries.

**The 2019 Gazette reclassified 67 villages around the country to Ward status**, including 41 Villages in Rakhine State, 12 in southern Shan, and several in Kachin, Ayeyarwady, Mandalay and Chin. The reclassified villages in Rakhine State have been incorporated in existing towns of Maungdaw (16 villages) and Kyaukpyu (7 villages), as well as new towns in Ramree and Toungup Townships (14 and 4 villages respectively). The 16 villages reclassified as Wards of Maungdaw town are all located close to or already in the town area. Mapping produced by UNITAR based on satellite imagery indicates that the recent reclassifications of Villages to Wards include 5 villages which were visibly destroyed in 2017. For some, the previous Village Tract name has been carried into the name of the new Ward. Villages reclassified to Wards in Rakhine State as per the 2019 Government Gazette are reflected in the maps in Annex.

**The MIMU Place Codes retain information on these reclassified villages**, even when they no longer appear in the Government Listing. In this case they will be listed as “inactive” Villages, along with the reason for the change where this information is available (e.g. reclassified to Wards, merged with other villages etc). Reasons are generally not provided for removal or deletion of villages from the Government Listing so these cannot be reflected in the Place Code listing,

**MIMU township/village maps do not include these reclassified villages** as these maps provide the latest administrative updates for operational use at field level, and we are unable to map the Ward areas due to lack of information on Ward boundaries. Hence these settlements which appeared as Villages in previous MIMU maps would be considered part of the

town into which they have been administratively reclassified. Villages may also not appear on MIMU maps if we do not have the geographic coordinates or where a village label is obscured by others in densely populated areas (as noted in the map disclaimers). MIMU replaces earlier map versions with the latest one to keep the MIMU website manageable and avoid confusion for users - this was the case for the recent update of the Township and State/region maps countrywide, including that of Maungdaw Township and Rakhine State. Copies of previous versions of MIMU maps are also available on request.

## Village Name Issues

**Myanmar's government defines the official place/settlement names across the country, from village to country level.** Changes are communicated with the public through the official Government Gazette and official place names from country to village level are periodically updated and shared through the Government Listing provided by the General Administration Department (GAD). Changes to village names require a formal procedure which is documented in the 2008 Constitution and the Ward and Village Tract Administration Law promulgated in 2012 - it involves a recommendation from the State/Region Chief Minister to the President for changes to village names (see further information below).

**Countrywide there are over 40 different designations relating to village population included in the official place names** of villages, village tracts and wards. Many place names include this historical designation and there is no information to indicate whether this reflects the population in these villages in the present day. The most common is the term "Ku Lar" – spelled in various ways, and used in the names of over 320 villages in the current Government listing countrywide and 352 villages in the Place Code listing (includes villages that have been reclassified or removed between 2005 and 2019). This term has come to be used pejoratively in some contexts in Myanmar. Other village designations which appear more frequently are "Rakhine" (over 80 villages), "Shan", "Lar Hu" and "Chinese" (over 50 villages).

**The figures below have been taken from the MIMU Place Code Listing** and so include those villages in current Government Listings as well as those which have been reclassified or deleted from these lists between 2005 and 2019.

**Countrywide, the names of over 352 Villages and 49 Village Tracts include the term "Ku Lar" – the majority are outside of Rakhine State.** The highest number are found in Ayeyarwady Region, followed by Rakhine (90 Villages, or 26% of the total, as well as 9 Village Tracts and 3 Wards). 40 of the 49 Village Tracts whose name includes this term are outside of Rakhine State.

**In Rakhine State, 183 villages have some sort of designation in the place name** (of 4,197 total villages in Place Code v9.2 or 4,145 in the Government Listing). The term "Ku Lar", spelled variously, is the most frequent (90 villages); this term appears as a suffix (at the end of the name) in 62 villages, and as a prefix/mid-name in 27 villages. The official names of 54 of these villages are the same as that of another village except for this term. "Rakhine" is the second most frequent designation, found in 61 villages in Rakhine State and a further 23 villages elsewhere in the country. This is followed by Myo/Mro (14 villages) and Daing Net (13 villages). The MIMU Place Code listing includes commonly-used local names provided by field sources for 27 of these villages with the term "Ku Lar" and a further 45 villages which have no designation in the official village names.

**The issue of place names has resonance in other areas of Myanmar.** Government listed place names may be a translation of the local language name to Burmese/Myanmar (so looking and sounding quite different), a transliteration which attempts to match the sound in Myanmar language characters, or something entirely different harking back to historical sources. As a result, village names in the government listings may be quite different to those used locally. Hence the MIMU Place Code listing includes provision, countrywide, for "commonly-used local names" – this recognizes that the official name may not be used locally for different reasons, and helps avoid confusion and duplication when villages are identified by these locally-used names.

The process to change place names is outlined in the 2008 Constitution and the Ward and Village Tract Administration Law. Amendment of village names requires a proposal for the change to be submitted to the President's Office with the recommendation of the State/Region Chief Minister. By this stage the proposed change should have been reported via the administration departments at the various levels (from Ward/Village administration to Township level, then to District level and finally to State/Region level). The report requires approval of the residents and field reports (compiled with the inputs of respective local stakeholders including village/town elders, MPs and administration staff). From the President's Office, the case is then referred to the Office of the Union Government to proceed in line with the procedures. Once approved by respective institutions, the Ministry of Office of the Union Government would issue the notification.

Relevant provisions to change in place names	
Constitution, 2008	<p><b>Chapter 2, State Structure.</b></p> <p>54. Where there arises a situation to alter or form the territorial boundary or change the name of a village, village-tract, ward, town, township or district of a Region, State, Self-Administered Division or Self-Administered Zone concerned, the President shall act, as necessary, upon the recommendation of the Chief Minister of the Region or State concerned.</p>
<p><b>The Ward or Village Tract Administration Law,</b> 24th February, 2012</p> <p>Unofficial translation</p>	<p><b>Chapter II, Formation of Wards or Village Tracts.</b></p> <p>3. With the approval of the President of the Union under the recommendation of the relevant Prime Minister of the Region or State or Nay-Pyi-Taw Council, the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Union Government, by issuing the notification, may:</p> <p>(a) make forming, amending or altering the name of wards within the town boundary;</p> <p>(b) make forming, amending or altering the name of villages outside the town boundary;</p> <p>(c) make forming, amending or altering the name as the village tract of a village or by collecting the villages formed under sub-section (b);</p> <p>(d) make forming, amending or altering the name as town or township by collection the wards formed under sub-section (a);</p> <p>(e) make forming, amending or altering the name as township by collecting the wards or village tracts and towns</p>

## ANNEXES

02. MAP - MIMU1698v01\_ Reclassification of Villages to Ward in 2019\_Maungdaw, Kyaukpyu, Ramree, Toungup, Rakhine State\_01Jun20

- shows the location of Villages reclassified to Wards in Rakhine State (Government Listing)

03. MAP - MIMU1700v01\_Village Status Change in Maungdaw Township (2010 -2019) A4 With Table\_03Jun20

- shows the various reclassifications over this period with village names.

04. MAP - MIMU1699v01\_ Reclassification of Villages to Ward in Maungdaw town\_A4\_08 Jun20

- shows more detail of the locations of Villages reclassified to Wards in Maungdaw town

05. Summary Tables on Village reclassification and designation\_Jun20

- provides additional detail on the figures noted in the text

06. Villages with designations\_PCodeVersion9.2\_Jun20

- a listing of villages with designations included in village names from the MIMU Place Codes v9.2