

2016-7 Metta In Action Update (4)
December 2017/January 2018

Grace in the Face of Change:

Getting by With a Little Help from Our Friends

Community Support



In the course of distributing your donations, we do *a lot* of walking. And over the years, we have seen so many changes in the village – changes that have come from development and creeping urbanization, from real estate speculation, and from increasing population. Some of these have been obvious but many have snuck up on us – like the proverbial frog in hot water, we’ve only noticed the differences once the neighborhood has become completely transformed.

One by one paths have become lanes, lanes have become roads, dirt roads have been paved, and paved roads have been widened. All this has brought more traffic, and more construction. Places that ten years ago were a patchwork of little fields and bamboo houses are now bustling neighborhoods. A lot of the fields have vanished, replaced by shops, homes and monasteries behind their protective walls, clumps of densely packed rentals, and a smattering of factories. And the roads echo with the constant buzz of passing motorcycles. And in the face of all this change, people living in the village are doing the best they can to adjust to the new and sometimes bewildering conditions.



A Neighborhood in transition: Photos taken from the same location, 2011 (left) and 2017 (right). (In the photo on the right, the bridge's concrete guardrail can be seen at ground level behind the right shoulder of the walking boy.)



It's easy for us to get nostalgic, missing walks along quiet lanes, and the easy-going pace of life in the village before the motorcycles came. But our hazy romantic notions of what is 'nice' don't take into account what life is like for the people who actually live here. A rented room made of brick is much more durable than a bamboo house; a concrete road is vastly better than a muddy one in the rainy season; and motorcycles are faster and easier than cycle rickshaws any day.



But it all comes at a cost, which will only continue to accelerate: it's the creep of 'modernization' and urbanization, Myanmar-style, without planning, forethought, or regulation. (The bottom photo to the left shows how everyone deals with trash – since in most places there is no other way to deal with it!)

This community is a microcosm of the country as a whole. The outer changes in the roads and buildings are the physical manifestation of the many cultural shifts that have been happening in the last several years. And naturally there is tension between the old and the new.

Fortunately, many of the old rhythms and traditions of life *do* remain intact, providing an anchor for people's day-to-day lives. For example, every morning, the monks go on their almsrounds, walking silently through the village, collecting food for the day from the villagers who wait by the side of the road for them to pass by. But sadly, the old ways cannot make up for a speed and intensity of change that far outpaces the community's ability to absorb it. There is little infrastructure, and no safety net for people who for any reason cannot sustain themselves through commerce or paid employment.





Old ways and new 'development' exist side by side.

So the tension here between the old and the new is not a 'creative tension,' but merely a daily source of grinding difficulty. Without new skills, many are left behind – because of age, lack of education, or merely the difficult circumstances of life. In the face of the magnitude this there is little we can do, but knowing the potential benefits of even tiny acts of generosity, we always earmark some of your donations to 'fill in the gaps' – responding to urgent requests that come to us from the community – as well as to make donations to a number of deserving people and projects in the community that we have been helping in an ongoing way.

Housing



All over the village now, cheaply built rental units fill up what was once open space. The one on the right has over 60 rooms jammed together on a piece of land that is less than a quarter acre. Places like these are used as income generators by the relatively rich, at the expense of those who have much less.



But here and there, people manage to live more or less as they always have, while the neighborhood changes around them. And there *are* honest landowners who care about people. It's so heartwarming to learn of landowners like this who choose not to 'cash in' with mass rentals or by selling their land to investors. And for several years now we have been supporting two families who live near the monastery on a piece of land owned by one landlord like this who has no intention of making a quick buck by kicking them or the nearby families out.



Daw Wato and U Pi Nan

Daw Wato (Photo left, on the right) volunteers at the monastery, and is beloved by foreign yogis for her skill in making suitable and very delicious food for them. The little house she shares with her extended family is built almost entirely of bamboo – and each year we offer support so that they can repair whatever parts have succumbed to rot, age, or termites. This year we offered dana to repair one entire wall (which had developed sizeable holes in



the bamboo latticework), as well as making additional repairs to the kitchen. The house is small and incredibly simple – one open room plus an adjoining kitchen area – but it provides shelter for three generations. Daw Wato cooks at the monastery, and her daughter works, while her husband (who cannot work because of an injury) stays home and takes care of the grandkids.



Bamboo houses like Daw Wato's are still very common in rural Burma. They are very easy to build but unfortunately they do not last long, and need frequent repair to stay habitable. So we were happy to offer Daw Wato and her family the means to repair their home, and to keep a roof over their heads.



We also offer the yearly rental for U Pi Nan, an elderly widower who lives near Daw Wato and her family. When I came to see him in December, he was tending his small but immaculate garden – and he beamed with happiness when I told him that he did not need to worry about the rent again this year! (And in a typically Burmese way, there was also delight from the rental agent who had said when we gave her the money for his rent, “Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu for supporting this grandfather every year!”)

Education: Kaung Kaung

We also provide individual support for education, when we learn of a family that needs assistance – such as Ko Kaung Kaung's. When Kaung Kaung was very little, his father died of cancer, leaving his mother to raise him single-handedly.

She ably supports the family by running a shop in the village, but cannot afford to pay for the extra tuition that is expensive and so essential for every student in Burma. He is very bright and eager to learn – as well as being funny and quick, and so we are delighted to offer ongoing support for Kaung Kaung's success in school. He is only 8 but his English is already very good; this is his favorite subject. Because of your dana, we have no doubt that some day he will be able to succeed at whatever he wants to do in his life!



Above: Kaung Kaung and his mother in March 2017. Already in the months since he has grown several inches and acquired many new English words!



Left: A small neighborhood shop in the village where people can buy dry goods and – everything from laundry soap and tea, to toys and snacks.

Ko Htoo Ko Ko and Ma Khin Thant Nwe

It is always gratifying to see how our dana has changed lives. In January 2017, we met Ko Htoo Ko Ko (right), who we had supported to finish his education several years ago: thanks to your help he earned a chemistry degree at university. He was once stuck doing manual labor, carrying bricks and concrete at building sites, but now oversees entire building projects and is the supervisor of a sizeable crew of construction workers.



We were also happy to see Ma Khin Thant Nwe (left) last January, who we supported between 2011-2015. She visited to tell us that she was finally able to finish her distance learning BA, having supported herself in the last two years of study. Now she and her younger sister share a flat together, and she wants to make a career in fashion design.



Aye Mettā Ayn Dana Medical Clinic

At the Chanmyay Myaing Monastery, there is a weekly clinic that offers free medical and dental care to the villagers every Saturday and Sunday. In 2018, the clinic celebrated its 10th anniversary and since it opened, about 300,000 people have been treated there! So we are happy to support the clinic with substantial offerings so that the people in the village can continue to receive essential medical care.

We will soon be sending out the first update of the 2017-18 offerings, showing you some of the wonderful work that the clinic does: health and freedom from pain are precious gifts to offer – and so there is an immense amount of gratitude coming to you for this, and for *all* your dana – it continues to make such a big difference so many people!

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu!

Ayya Virañani

CMMC

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