

Illegal Settlements in Ward 12

The Mohinga Shop of Daw Ngwe

Daw Ngwe, is a cheerful, retired lady that runs a mohingha (fish soup) stand in her ward in Patheingyi Township. She had to move her shop, because the Patheingyi municipality indicated it was an illegal settlement.

Ward 12 lies on the outskirts of Patheingyi and has 7000 inhabitants. The Ward Administrator said they used to have 32 illegal settler families in the ward. Currently, there are only five illegal settlements left. How did this communication between illegal settlers and the municipality go, since the topic remains sensitive for both sides.



"I knew that opening my shop on top of the stream, would mean I had to move some day. Though, I tried to make as little trash as possible, a mohinga shop uses a lot of plastic bags"

Daw Ngwe

Her ward, ward 12, consists of four main roads horizontally and eight lanes vertically. Each road has streams on the sides, for the water to flow away during rainy season. Shop owners like to build their stall on top the streams, because it is close to the road and close to the customers. Their waste ends up in the streams, since there is no proper waste collection system in place. The municipality's truck is too big to enter the lanes of ward 12. Furthermore, the streams are public ground and fall under the municipality's jurisdiction. Daw Ngwe knew that opening her shop would mean changing the location at one point, because the municipality sees the shops as illegal settlements.

The municipal law states that the municipality has to inform illegal settlers three times in writing – hereafter they have the right to demolish the shops and homes. Daw Ngwe said that she moved her shop away from the stream, because if everybody just rebuilds their place on top of the stream the issues on waste and flooding will never be solved. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a free lunch. Before Daw Ngwe's turnover was 40.000 MMK (€25,-) per day. Today it is only 14.000 MMK (€9,-)

Regarding the remaining five families the Ward Administrator says that he watches them. Ward 12 is a low-income ward. So sometimes, he says, it is better to turn a blind eye certain wrongs, because abiding the law would entail removing the entire livelihood of the remaining families. This does causes tensions within the community, Daw Ngwe stresses. She had to demolish her shop and rebuild it from scratch, which cost her about 1 lakh (€65,-), while her profit is only €3,- per day. People stopped talking to each other.

Daw Ngwe's shop is on the same location, only now it is behind the stream and not on top of the stream. One could argue the shop's waste does not end up in the stream, but next to it. Which of course prevents it from clogging and from flooding during rainy season. However, the issue of disposing and collecting the waste is not solved. This remains a salient issue in the shared ambition embodied in the Patheingyi City DEAL.