Since Myanmar gained its independence on 4 January 1948, it has passed through several highly distinct phases of development: decades of isolation, at first self-imposed and later the result of sanctions, then the introduction of a market economy in the late 1980s, with various watershed moments in the country’s politics, ushering in a period of transition which has recently gathered pace. This has been accompanied by radical political and economic changes, mainly at the national level but also in the international context as the country has opened up to the outside world. In Myanmar itself, at the level of the Union Territory of Nay Pyi Taw, the 14 states and regions and the 330 townships, dramatic changes are taking place: the massive expansion of infrastructure, the intensive development of formerly peripheral areas of the country, much of which has been driven by resource extraction, and stronger links with neighbouring countries, all of which are focusing interest on the nature and pace of, and potential for, development in individual regions. In this setting, the purpose of this ‘Socio-Economic Atlas of Myanmar’ is to provide, for the first time, a geographical overview and analysis of the country’s development progress and the spatial characteristics and disparities in its socio-economic transition using maps and texts.

The idea for the Atlas evolved over the last 21 years, since February 1996, as a result of the increasingly intensive cooperation between the Departments of Geography at the University of Yangon, Myanmar, and the University of Cologne, Germany. The signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Universities on 23 August 2003 – highly unusual at the time – led to even more intensive cooperation in the fields of research and teaching. In 2011, the Centre of Excellence (CoE) for Urban and Regional Development was established as a partnership between the University of Yangon and the University of Cologne. Following various joint workshops between Germany and Myanmar, a partnership was also established with the then Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development (DHSHD), now the Department for Urban and Housing Development (DUHD) at the Ministry of Construction. Here too, many years of positive and increasingly intensive cooperation culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on 13 June 2012 and the founding of the Myanmar German Research Centre for Urban and Regional Development (MGRC). The results of a joint research project – ‘The 81+ urban network system of Myanmar’ – were also incorporated into the Socio-Economic Atlas.

Since 2011, an intensive partnership has also developed with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, which is a German federal enterprise and supports the German Government in international cooperation for sustainable development via technical advice and capacity building. GIZ operates in more than 130 countries and employs approximately 17,000 staff worldwide. On behalf of the Federal German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), GIZ resumed its activities in Myanmar in 2012 in the area of sustainable economic development. The GIZ Private Sector Development Project (PSD) in Myanmar aims to strengthen capacities for sustainable private sector development with the focus on improved framework conditions for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Myanmar.

All parts of this atlas, from the single maps to the texts, have been created and written with the utmost diligence and care. However, the maps in particular are based on information and statistical data which sometimes may contain errors and uncertainties. They reflect and visualise the current state of knowledge. Any errors and shortcomings in data other than that provided to us by other
institutions remain our own. In order to contribute to the further improvement of knowledge about
the country and the current socio-economic transformation processes, we encourage the readers of
the Atlas to notify and discuss with us any errors which may come to their attention.

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