

What should political parties do to get more women involved in Myanmar politics?



April 20, 2020

The UN World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, and delegates discussed how women's political under-representation is a problem for democracy. It is important that women, as well as men, participate in politics in order for countries to achieve gender equality.

Women's involvement in Myanmar is still weak; and currently women only represent 10% of MPs at both the Union and State/Region levels in Myanmar. Although more than half of Myanmar's population is female, women's participation in political affairs is limited.

Why are women MPs less involved?

The research "Party Building and Candidate Selection – Intraparty Politics and Promoting Gender Equality in Myanmar" examined the actions that political parties in Myanmar should implement to promote women's participation in politics. The research was conducted by Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) and published on April 19, 2020. According to these key research findings, there are a number of reasons why

women are under-represented as female MPs in Myanmar, including: a) cultural norms and biases that lead most citizens to prefer male political leaders; b) women have less confidence and ambition to try and become parliamentarians; c) it is more difficult for women to travel to remote areas and/or overnight; d) women are typically expected to balance family and household responsibilities with their participation in public life; and e) military representation in parliament – women are 13% of elected MPs but only 1% of military-appointed MPs.

Women's low level of participation in Parliament is related to political parties

The study suggests that the actions of political parties are a crucial reason for women's low parliamentary representation in Myanmar. Political parties remain highly male-dominated, with key positions at central and Township levels of parties overwhelmingly filled by men. For example, of nine prominent Myanmar political parties recently studied by EMReF, seven had less than 20% female representation on their Central Executive Committees, and very few women are found in the most senior

positions on these committees (e.g. chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary). Women's level of representation on Township Committees is also very low, especially in senior positions.

Eight Recommendations for Political Parties

Based on the research findings, the research provides eight recommendations for political parties to get more women involved in politics:

1) Build party organisation and establish rules. A key priority for parties to improve gender equality is to establish clear rules about how people get selected to key party positions, and clearly communicate these rules to all party members. Having clear rules will encourage transparency, accountability, and attract more potential candidates to self-nominate or run for elected positions. Provide training to party officials about meritocratic and professional recruitment processes.

2) Expand and diversify the pool of candidates from the bottom-up. Parties need to move away from relying on informal networks of identifying parliamentary candidates through family or community networks, and instead develop formal ways to recruit, nominate, and select their parliamentary candidates. Such a process should be bottom-up – i.e. led Township-level party organisations, working with ward/village level party organisations where these are present.

3) Establish a party quota or targets for women candidates. Parties should adopt quotas/targets for a minimum level of women's representation on key party bodies (e.g. Central Executive Committee, Central Committee, Township Executive Committee); as parliamentary candidates. A common minimum level for quotas/targets for women is 30%.

4) Provide financial support to women candidates. Financial dependency on husbands is one barrier to women joining politics in Myanmar. Therefore, parties can help to reduce the financial burden by providing a small subsidy for women to self-nominate as candidates. Many Myanmar political parties have limited financial resources, and so international donors should consider funding such initiatives.

5) Improve security and provide women candidates a party aide during campaigns in rural areas. There are still cultural norms that can act as a barrier to women travelling at night. Given Myanmar's violent past, there is a need to establish new norms and improve security for candidates, especially for women. One way to address the security of candidates is for the parties to establish a norm of providing candidates, especially women, a party aide to accompany the candidate when they travel to campaign.

6) Provide training to potential women candidates on practical campaign and parliamentary skills.

General trainings on women's empowerment to potential candidates do not seem to have had much impact in raising the number of women candidates and MPs in Myanmar. Instead, it is more useful if trainings to potential candidates focus on improving practical campaign skills, including: understanding the priorities of voters in their constituencies, and tailoring campaign messages accordingly; campaign logistics; improving knowledge of key policy issues; and how to 'get out the vote'. Similarly, women candidates can gain confidence, and also gain respect from voters and colleagues, if they can demonstrate knowledge of parliamentary skills such as scrutinising laws and policies, and analysing budgets.

7) Provide training classes and establish best practices for candidates' online activity. While all candidates face harassment, women are more likely to face personal accusations, degrading talk, and criticism about family members and their personal lives on social network platforms. Parties should consider providing training classes especially for ethnic and religious minority and women candidates to develop their professional online image, and to establish best practices to respond to disinformation, online hate speech, and harassment during campaigns.

8) Target party resources towards constituencies that the party has a good chance of winning. In the 2010 and 2015 elections, many small parties with limited financial and human resources ran candidates in a large number of constituencies, most of which they had very little or no chance of winning. These parties would stand a better chance of winning more seats if they first identified the constituencies in which they have the most chance of winning, and then targeted their resources towards these constituencies accordingly. As part of this process, these parties should nominate women candidates to some of their high priority constituencies.

This study has been a part of a three-year project funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The research is part of the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) program, which aims to promote the democratic transition in Myanmar.

The findings for this study are based on qualitative analysis of 72 in-depth key informant interviews conducted between November 2018 and March 2019 with members of nine political parties. Unlike most research studies, this study only identified the dynamics of intra-party politics. The full research paper can be downloaded on the EMReF website (<https://www.emref.org/>).

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How can we support women and children during the COVID-19 pandemic?

April 7, 2020

In the pandemic condition, a friend asked me what needs to be done to support women and children, and how to support them; so I wrote as much as I thought. Among several requirements for women and children, here is a checklist that they may need that I consider based on my experiences at the United Nations and international's studies.

1. Women and children need to be informed about the facts and information (about COVID-19) in a timely manner, so that they do not follow instructions from 'fake news'.
2. Women are responsible for the health and nutrition of their families according to community standards. They may forget to be adequately nourished themselves, and to take care of their health; therefore, they should be reminded to take care of their own health.
3. During the 'stay at home' period, improper ways of stress release may be taken. In this case, women may be the victims of domestic violence. Complaint mechanisms and counseling services should be available to provide them with adequate support.
4. At this moment, food and basic medicines are mainly donated to the community, while forgetting to provide sanitary pads for women's monthly use. So, sanitary pads should be included in the donation items.
5. Nutritious food and digestible food, including powdered milk and nutrient supplements, should be provided for children.
6. Women and children should not be seen as groups which need to be protected. They should be viewed as able groups who can be involved in virus outbreak prevention and awareness raising campaigns. Thus, their voices should also be heard. (Online services should be provided to listen to women's voices and to give them psycho-social support.)
7. Women are playing a key role in household affairs and community affairs, their suggestions and their needs should be taken into account since the beginning of the programme. (For instance, appointing them to committees as a member or an associate)



Daw Nang Phyu Phyu Lin

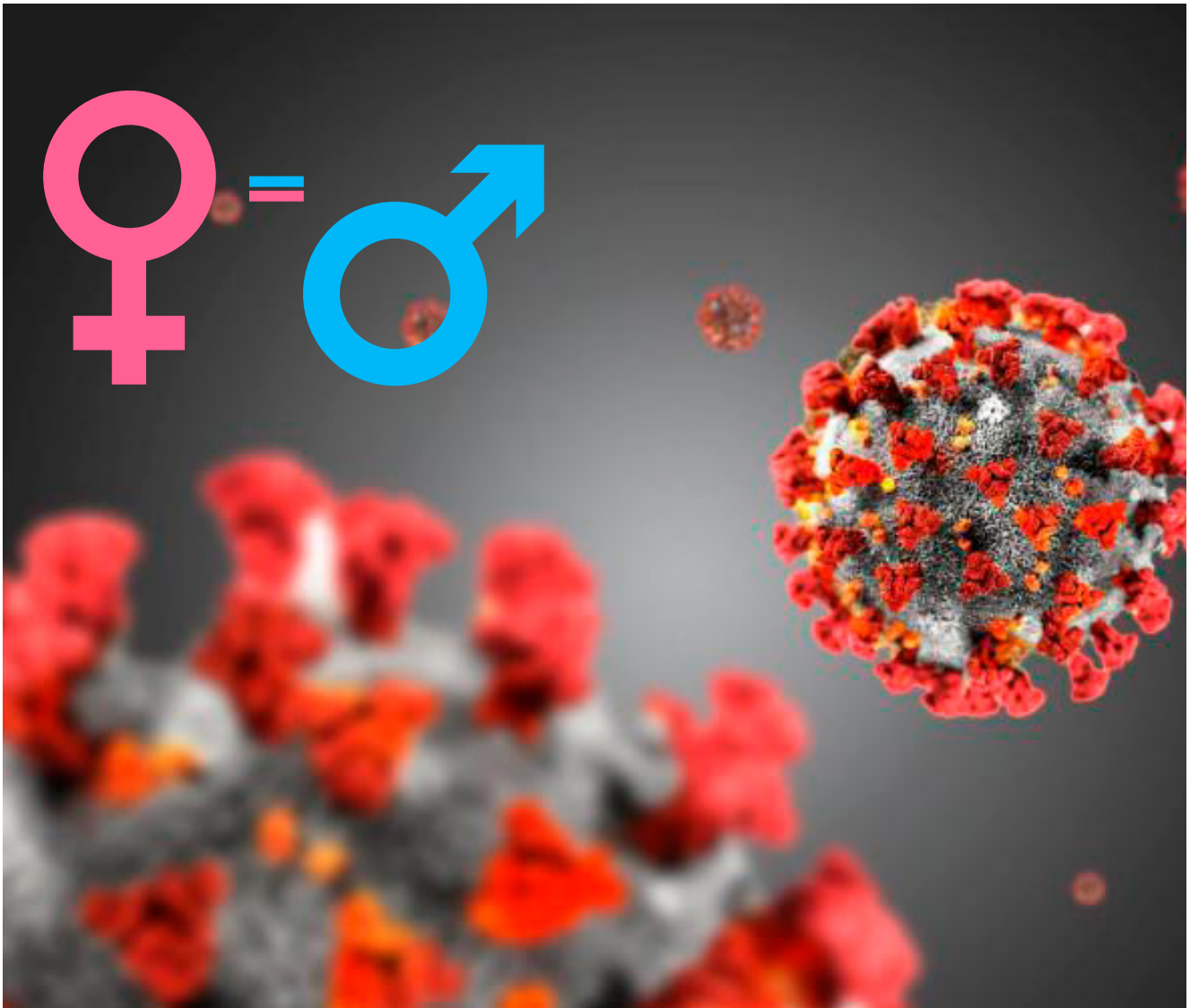
National Advisor
Alliance for Gender Inclusion in
the Peace Process (AGIPP)

Help Line numbers released to report violence against women

April 19, 2020

24-hour help line numbers were released to report violence against women, including domestic violence by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement.

In those cases, the complainant (or the person who knows the case) can call and complain to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement's help line telephone no. 067-4040222, 067-404999. The ministry announced they would protect the privacy of complainants.



United Nations Secretary-General stated that Gender equality and women's rights are essential for getting through pandemic

April 10, 2020

"Gender equality and women's rights are essential for getting through the pandemic together, to recovering faster, and to building a better future for everyone," stated Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, on April 9.

He urged all governments to make prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary-General,

also said via video message, "We know lockdowns and quarantines are essential to suppressing COVID-19. But they can trap women with abusive partners. Over the past weeks as economic and social pressures and fear have grown, we have seen a horrifying global surge in domestic violence."

According to a UNFPA report, the COVID-19 pandemic will compound existing gender inequalities, and increase risks of gender-based violence. The report points out that when pandemics rage, women and men are affected differently.

According to UN Women, as many as 70% of people working in health and social services worldwide are women, and it is more likely that female health workers could be infected. Women and girls are more likely to suffer domestic violence, and this places more burden on women. In addition, access to sexual and reproductive health services may be limited. Therefore, the report recommends that the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls should be prioritized.

Shwe Lay

Call to prevent domestic violence during 'stay at home' period during COVID-19 outbreak

April 19, 2020

Some countries imposed lockdown measures to control the spread of COVID-19, and as a result domestic violence rates have increased. Also in Myanmar, urged to people avoid in acts of domestic violence during home stay and try to understand each other.

According to media reports, lockdown started in France in the third week of March to control the spread of COVID-19, and the rate of domestic violence increased by 30% within ten days. In Myanmar, domestic violence cases are common during the stay at home period, because of the COVID-19, according to a video message on the Legal Clinic Myanmar Facebook page. Despite the psychological problems caused by COVID-19, people should avoid acts that cause domestic violence and strive to live with mutual understanding.

"Domestic violence is a crime and other violence is based on domestic violence," said U Kyaw Moe San via video message. He is a senior lawyer at Legal Clinic Myanmar.

He said "If there is physical violence in the domestic violence, there are laws which can be enacted to take action and result in a prison sentence of between 1 - 20 years. When people are suffering because of the Coronavirus, I strongly recommend that women and men should abstain from violence and live with mutual understanding."

Shwe Lay





World Famous Quotes

“The best protection any women can have... is courage.”

..... Elizabeth Cady Stanton
 (American Suffragist & Social Activist, 1815-1902)

8 ways to ensure women are included in Coronavirus Response

April 3, 2020

UNWOMEN has provided eight useful tips to keep women out of harm's way during the COVID-19 pandemic. These tips include:

- 1) Make sex-disaggregated data available
- 2) Build gender expertise into response teams
- 3) Support women on the frontlines of the response
- 4) Include women in decision-making of the response
- 5) Ensure public health messages are properly targeted to all women
- 6) Boost women's economic resilience
- 7) Protect essential health services for women and girls
- 8) Prioritize services for prevention and response to gender-based violence

Source: LIFT Myanmar

