

ELECTION DAY



Can we expect more women candidates to win seats in parliament in 2020?

May 23, 2020

Rwanda is a great example of more women's participation in politics. A record-breaking 64 percent of seats for women in the Parliament in the 2013 general election made Rwanda the top country for women's participation in politics. During the 1990s, women's participation in Rwanda's Parliament was about 18 percent and the 2003 Constitution set a quota of 30 percent for women's participation, which has had a positive impact and made up 56 percent in 2008. Thus, the number dramatically increased to 64 percent in the 2013 election.

In Myanmar, women account for 10.2 percent in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, including military MPs at the moment; however, this is only 13.6 percent of total elected MPs. Political parties are working to increase women's participation and also to be the candidates for the 2020 general elections. Some of the small ethnic parties are also building up their parties by adding more youth and women party members and its departments. According to the elite interviews data that Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) conducted for research titled "Party Building and Candidate Selection–Intraparty Politics and Promoting Gender Equality in Myanmar" with the



Photo: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the small ethnic political parties such as the Kachin State People's Party (KSPP) and Lisu National Development Party (LNDP) did not have proper plans or policies for candidate selection in 2015. There were a lot of cases where the candidates themselves were allowed to register and were approved by the party, so women's participation in parties' candidate selection was not acknowledged as an important factor. The main challenges for small ethnic parties were time constraints and lack of resources.

According to U Tu Raw, the joint secretary of the Kachin State People's Party: "There is a youth department but it

was not functioning well in 2015, but they are actively involving in party affairs now. As for the women department, we planned to form a wing but it was not easy for us so it did not actually happen". He continues, as the KSPP held the party conference on 20th January, 2020 in Myitkyina, Kachin State, and addressed several crucial issues such as candidate selection plans and policies for the 2020 general election which includes promoting women and youth participation. We are quite confident that there will be a positive change as compared to the 2015 general election. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), National League for Democracy Party (NLD), Shan

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Nationalities League for Democracy Party (SNLD) and some other ethnic parties are working on to promote women's participation in the 2020 general election in Myanmar.

Also, having a large number of women participate in politics may lead to a small social problem between wives and husbands, and the family. Women's time at home will be shortened, as women have their own roles to perform which can be an unwanted trigger for domestic violence, because their husbands may not like the fact that their wives are not able to be home as much as they expect them to be. This is what happened in Rwanda as a result of promoting women's participation in politics, or decision-making. This could also be a challenge for Myanmar, and this is a factor which should be taken into consideration if women are taking decision making positions in politics in Myanmar in the future.

In addition, according to the field experience interviewing Members of Parliament, Parties' gatekeepers and the ordinary citizens, many said that they do not agree with

the quota system but few said it should be a starting point. Succinctly, I also think that the quota system is a good solution for Myanmar, as a starting platform, similar to Rwanda. There have been discussions about implementing a 30 percent quota for women's representation in politics, but it has not yet been implemented. There should be a policy to promote women's representation from the township level, so that it will actually be reasonable because it is where the candidates are chosen from, although there are some parties which choose their candidates by the central executive committee (CEC).

In conclusion, having been able to meet and talk to many Members of Parliaments, and political parties' gatekeepers, as well as the ordinary citizens during the field data collection, and all the data collected obviously studied as a promising that there will be a slight change regarding gender representation in the 2020 general election.

La Ring



Photo: Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Women candidates need to overcome election challenges in a new way during COVID-19



June 11, 2020

Women candidates may face more challenges than usual for the upcoming election because of the COVID-19 pandemic; thus they need to adopt a new strategy to overcome new barriers.

This issue was raised during the “Gender and Election” discussion which was organized by Gender Equality Network (GEN) on June 6.

Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Member of Parliament of the Amyotha Hluttaw said “Despite having barriers, we, women need to overcome them in a new way. If not, we will not be able to enter the political field.”

Currently, the spread of COVID-19 is under control, so the meeting participants discussed the challenges ahead for the upcoming election during such a pandemic condition. The Union Election Commission (UEC) told the media that the general election will be held in November. The concern is whether the general election held during this pandemic can guarantee for inclusion and equal participation for all gender(s).

Even in a normal situation when there is no pandemic,

the challenges faced by male candidates and female candidates are not the same, remarked Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt. Most of the party leaders are men, and the party's support mostly goes to men candidates. Voters also seem to be supporting more male politicians and candidates. Female candidates have more challenges than their male counterparts in financial issues and campaigning. Such kind of challenges exist under normal circumstances; thus more will be coming during the time of COVID-19.

Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt said “Although it may be more difficult than usual, we may also have opportunities. We can do more engagement with people to promote our profile and to introduce ourselves by using online platforms in this COVID-19 pandemic.”

She suggests that it is not possible to go directly to the public during the COVID-19 period, so Information Technology platforms are a solution to get close to the public. Men have the advantage in IT knowledge. Similarly, male voters are also more proficient in using a smart phone; so they have more chances to receive information about the election and the candidates. In this light, it is

suggested that people develop their IT skills and knowledge of female candidates to prepare for the election.

Daw Khin Lay Nge, director of Phan Tee Eain organization working on women's empowerment, said that they are planning to launch an online campaign to increase the number of women candidates and to encourage women's participation in the election.

She said "We have many constraints and challenges; but we will create songs and share it on the social media platform to get a wider audience, which is aimed to vote female candidates and to trust in their capacities. This is the way we are thinking to overcome the recent constraint."

For a developing country, women's participation in development and politics is important; and the development of the country will not be achieved and sustained without women's involvement, said Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt. Women's involvement should be at least 30% or 40%; otherwise, the well-being and development of the country cannot grow equally. Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt said that provisional measures are needed at the national level which would be specifically designed for women to become more involved in politics. She recommended that there

should be logistical support for women, and reduction of candidate registration fees (500,000 kyats) for female candidates.

Daw Shwe Shwe Sein Latt said "At the national level, provisional actions are needed and parties must also need to do so. We need to support women in various sectors. We need to encourage women; vice-versa women should be more involved. For me, I will not compete to the coming election. Rather entering the election, I want to support and encourage more women to get involved. So, I am just sharing my experiences."

The speakers in the panel discussion pointed out that the Union Election Commission (UEC) should discuss and take the advice of civil society organizations and political parties about how to conduct elections in this pandemic condition. Finally, the speakers suggested that it is needed to work together with women and people with disabilities in the stage of building democratization; and we need to create space for them.

Shwe Lay

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/genmyanmar/videos/261812785060144/>)

More women will compete in the 2020 general election

June 2, 2020

More women will be competing in the upcoming 2020 general election, expected by U Myint Naing, a member of the Union Election Commission (UEC).

He said, "We added some important points into the Strategic Plan 2019-2022 to increase women's participation in politics. Women have the same capacities and political abilities as men have. I would like to encourage women to accelerate their participation in politics by applying their knowledge and skills." U Myint Naing shared this message about "Election and promotion of women's role and participation" via a video which was posted on the Union Election Commission Facebook page.

The seminar for countering disinformation and hate speech against women candidates, and supporting women leaders was held in Nay Pyi Taw in March, to achieve the elements of the Strategic Plan 2019-2022. At the seminar, 10 civil society organizations (CSOs) which are taking part women sector, and the members of the UEC commission on women affairs from the States/Regions sub-committees were attended.



Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/uecmyanmar/videos/>

Based on the points from the previous discussion about women's political participation, U Myint Naing revealed his opinion that after the 2020 election, female candidates would earn more support from the public by defeating hate speech against women. He expressed his view that achieving increased women's political participation would be accomplished by working together with the civil society organizations working for women.

The recent low rate of women's political involvement in Myanmar was related to cultural norms, according to U Myint Naing. Women usually give the highest priority and preference to male leadership, and women themselves are supposed to do domestic affairs. Such cultural

norms and gender stereotypes may have a huge influence over the political participation of men and women. In addition, U Myint Naing observed that political parties are more likely to prefer men in their candidate selection process. Even when women are participating in the election, there are likely to face some violence, harassment, and hate speech based on their gender.

U Myint Naing said, "The rate of women's representation in parliament has about 13%. This ratio also may reflect Myanmar's gender equality status which is ranked 159th out of 191 countries. That is why we need to play a higher role for women's participation."

Shwe Lay



Photo: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Preeti_Kaur

World Famous Quotes

“Politics is
a potent way
to empower
women.”

..... Preeti Kaur (Indian Politician)

“Youth perceptions of pluralism and diversity” research report was published

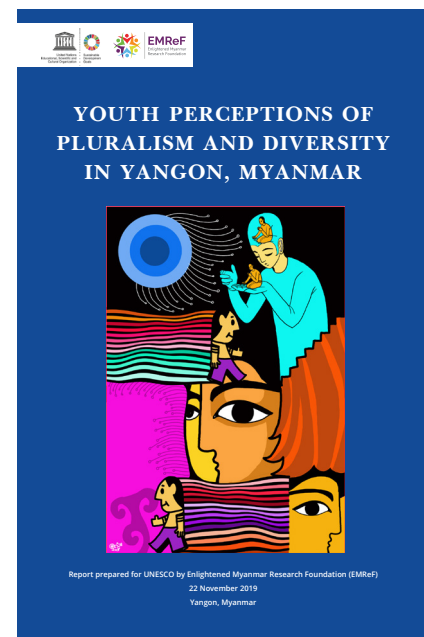
April 1, 2020

“Youth perceptions of pluralism and diversity” was published on November, 2019 by Enlightened Myanmar Research Foundation (EMReF) and funded by UNESCO.

This study explores youth’s perceptions and experiences of diversity. Nearly 300 youth, between ages 18 and 35 in 28 townships in Yangon were surveyed. The findings of the research are described in 11 sectors detailed in the reports.

The study explores the needs of youth, diversity, and pluralism in English literature in Myanmar. Specifically, the study highlights that

there is a major issue regarding “translation” from English to Myanmar. Existing Burmese literature lacks complete interpretation to fully understand concepts such as diversity, tolerance, pluralism, and discrimination. Literature still lacks a conceptual framework, and the study investigates ways that youth are using and learning about these social concepts. Secondly, the study explores where and how youth are exposed to lessons about the value of cultural diversity, and how youth learn to advocate for greater social inclusion. The ‘socializing agents’ and drivers of youth engagement towards understanding cultural diversity are not well documented or



understood, according to case studies in the report. The full research report is available for free at www.emref.org.

Shwe Lay