

# Limitations still exist for Women's Participation in Myanmar Politics



Photo:Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

**June 3, 2019**

Women's involvement in politics in Myanmar is still very limited, and there are weaknesses to repel male-dominated society.

More than half of Myanmar's population is women and they are also working abreast with men. Women have the same capacity as men, but men are positioned in decision making roles. The involvement of women leaders is limited in the following sectors: political, economic and social, therefore gender equality still remains weak.

**The practice of discrimination against women**

The cultures of discrimination against women in the old generation is still contributing to practices which lead to gender inequality. In ancient times, if boys or girls are born in the family, the boy is the only child to receive education. Girls take the responsibility for cooking. When women get married, they also take the responsibility of cooking and everyday tasks for her husband and children. Myanmar proverbs such as "Treat your husband as a god, treat your son as a master" are misguided notions which impact the discriminations against women.

This monthly newsletter is published with the support of International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Please contact [shweshwe.kyinhlaingg@gmail.com](mailto:shweshwe.kyinhlaingg@gmail.com) for free subscription.



Photo:Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

At present, women are working abreast with men. However, in most organizations, only men are working in decision-making positions. Women have to be the supporters of men although women are able to work with men. The power is only reserved for men.

### Women in the Political Sector

Although women are involved in political roles, this is still at a very low level. The National Congress is based on the 2008 Constitution, which should be amended or specific events in 1993 when only 5% of women were selected by the Tatmadaw. According to research, the 2010 general election which converted military rule to civilian rule, the rate of women's participation increased slightly; and in the 2015 general election, female candidates more than doubled, compared with the previous elected representative. However, the gender equality gap remains high in the administrative sector. According to SheLeads Myanmar's research, 1 out of 24 prime ministers are women, 10 out of 133 Ministers of the Union Minister of State / Regions are women, 2 out of 330 governors at the Township Administrator level are women, and only 101 female governors of 16,829 are at the Ward level Administrator. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the female figure who is 'head of state', in her role as State Counselor.

Myanmar is a country that emphasizes traditional culture practices which include discrimination against women. In the Buddhist Country of "Myanmar", we can see many signboards on some stupas which state "Women are not allowed to enter"; "Women are not allowed to climb" ; but there are specific prohibitions or rules by the Buddha in his real practice. There are also practices of discrimination against women in many religions. When these concept such as "Men only have high power"; "Men are sacred" are ingrained, the discrimination against women become fair. If people accept these discriminatory ideologies as religious truths, then no one will make an effort to combat gender inequality.

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## Gender Inequality and the Governance Sector

There is no gender equality in the Administration and Parliamentary sector, so there are laws and policies without verifying fair. The voices of women are missing. Gender equality must be included in discussions in order to draft laws and policies. If proposals are written, discussed, and decided upon by men, then women will not be represented and also women's need will not be addressed.

## Need to change Male-ruled society

We need to change the fact that Myanmar is a male-ruled society, which is the old cultural practice. Myanmar women won the right to vote in 1935, which is the earliest date among Asian countries. In 1997, Myanmar signed Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Women's



equal participation in all aspects of society, especially in leadership roles are goal of the National Strategic Plan (2013-2022) has been inserted as the main priority. The International Women's Day ceremony was celebrated on 8March 2019, and Vice President U Henry Van Thio said that the union government is working to improve women's rights, specifically full participation of women in various sectors(e.g: politics, peace, etc.) to achieve at least 30% .

Political parties need to encourage women to participate more in politics, by including women in dialogues and refraining from discriminatory practices. Women also need to become the high-performance and involved leading in the frontline actively. If women participate in the upcoming 2020 General Election, they will be supported in the country's journey towards genuine democracy.

*Shwe Lay*



## Is “Po VAW law (draft)” almost going to be approved?

June 5, 2019

The delay of the “Prevention of Violence Against Women Act (draft)” will soon be enacted, said Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Ministry.

Dr. Win Myat Aye stated “We are trying to enact soon. We would like to facilitate collaboration to ensure no delay because all are looking forward.”

He said at the coordination meeting of the Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs regarding the “Prevention of Violence Against Women Act (draft)” and the implementation of the normal review process of all the world’s human rights situations (Universal Periodic Review) which was held in Nay Pyi Taw on 3 June, 2019. The law was drafted to implement the policy to prevent and address all forms of violence against women. This is one of four policies laid down

by the Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs to prevent all forms of violence against women and girls including sexual violence. The law (draft) was submitted to the security, stability, and rule of law committee and has been modified with the committee’s remarks.

This draft law was collectively drafted by women’s organizations in the previous government since 2013, and it was sent to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Office to be amended in accordance with the current government’s policy. Women’s organizations have criticized the delay of the enactment of the law.

*Shwe Lay*

## Research findings indicate that NSPAW’s provisions are ambiguous to implement

June 3, 2019

The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW)’s provisions is aspirational and ambiguous, without clear guidance on implementation or benchmarks for meaningful evaluation, reported Women’s League of Burma (WLB)’s paper research.

NSPAW which was launched by the government in 2013 and proclaiming it a “comprehensive” ten-year plan embodying its “commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of women” in Myanmar. Framed as “an ambitious yet achievable” plan for progress towards women’s equality from 2013 to 2022 in 12 “Key Priority Areas”.

The report includes NSPAW’s three main fundamental problems and recommendations. Three main fundamental problems include: NSPAW’s reliance on the 2008 Constitution, NSPAW’s issues regarding implementation and accountability, specifically regarding women,

peace, and security.

The report finds that NSPAW has failed to address issues including the 2008 Constitution, decades of armed conflict, the ongoing power of the military, and old laws and legal frameworks, which would lead to substantive gender equality in Burma. The report categorizes NSPAW as a disingenuous document that only pays lip service to Burma’s international human rights obligations and anti-discrimination promises, and calls for clear guidelines on implementation and benchmarks for meaningful evaluation of gender inequality in the country.

This paper was researched by WLB in collaboration with the Leitner Center for International Law and Justice, and educational center at Fordham University School of Law in the United States. This research began in 2008, and this key findings paper was launched on 21 May, 2019.

*Shwe Lay*

## Parliament discusses to support pregnant mothers and children under age two with loans

June 6, 2019

The US \$ 100 million borrowing plan from the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) to support pregnant mothers and children under age two for Ayeyarwaddy and Shan State was discussed at the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw on June 4.

This fund promotes the health of pregnant mothers and newborn babies, providing nourishment to support them with a (15,000) kyats per month program for pregnant women and children under age two. The program was initiated in 2016 and supports Rakhine, Chin, Karen, Kayah and Naga Autonomous Region. In other provinces and territories will continue to support, stated Dr. Win Myat Aye, Union Minister of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement Ministry.

Dr. Soe Moe Thu, Pyithu Hluttaw MP from Myung Mya constituency recommended "The children under five years in the Ayeyarwaddy Delta compared with other regions was 37.20 percent higher and found that this is the worst happened. This is urgently needed and the most effective way is to support this funding program for pregnant mother and children under age two years. This program is the most cost effective way according to research results."

The majority of MPs recommended this plan and some strategies were discussed to ensure effectiveness without wasting funds.

U Kyaw Thaug, Amyotha Hluttaw MP from Sagaing Region Constituency said "The Ministries of processing operations should the wastage loss and fully effective because it was the high rate loan to borrow US \$ 100 million and the amount of service charges and loan is about two percent interest rate."

The Ministry of Finance and Planning explained to Parliament that the loan period is five years and the repayment period is 30 years. Pregnant women can apply for this grant from the Social Welfare Department and can apply at the village administration office of the corresponding quarter. Application must include a copy of the applicant's national identification card and census, medical history, and the child's birth certificate.

**Shwe Lay**



Photo : Pyidaungsu Hluttaw



## Myanmar's fifth female ambassador

June 10, 2019

Daw Kay Thi Soe, formerly the Director General of the Department of Strategic Studies and Training at the Foreign Ministry has been appointed to the post of ambassador with special power for the Czech Republic of Myanmar, which will be re-opened, the government announced on June 6.

Daw Kay Thi Soe joined the Foreign Ministry in 1990 as Third Secretary. She has served as Director General of Political Department of European branch and minister counselor of Italy.

Daw Kay Thi Soe, who was appointed the ambassador of Czech Republic of Myanmar, is the fifth female ambassador of Myanmar. The former Female ambassadors of Myanmar include General Aung San's wife, Myanmar State Counselor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's mother, Daw Khin Kyi (India) and Daw Yin Yin Myint(Germany), Daw Maw Maw(Norway) and Daw Ei Ei Khin Aye(Indonesia).



Photo: MOI webportal Myanmar website



Photo : www.britannica.com

## World Famous Quotes

"A woman is like a tea bag- you never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water."

..... Margaret Thatcher

# Need to address gender issues in Myanmar's Film industry

June 14-2019

Myanmar's Film industry still needs to be more aware of gender issues as gender stereotyping practices have not changed much since previous decades, as reported from Gender Awareness research in Myanmar's Film industry.

The Livelihood and Gender Research Program Team at EMReF researched 83 films which were released from 2016 to 2017. The study about gender awareness in the Myanmar's film industry aims to investigate the knowledge of filmmakers regarding gender and its application, and to understand their challenges for creative work that seeks to transform existing social values.

In most cases, female actors' roles were shaped based on religious and cultural norms. The study indicated that 36 out of 83 films used discriminatory proverbs in defining the role of men and women. In Myanmar, men are assumed to have a superior power. Such superior power of men is praised in some movies. Also, widespread perceptions about male infertility are often reflected in films, as men are criticized and people in society put pressure upon a man about his infertility.

These films depicted gender stereotypes than knowledge. The study showed new thoughts and technologies have not arisen from these films.

This study recommended that Myanmar films should be ethical and responsible by respecting the dignity of all

## Gender Awareness in Myanmar's Film Industry

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people, regardless of gender. Gender mainstreaming is an approach to be applied in the development of all projects, and creating more films about empowered women is also encouraged by the study.

Not only the film industry is responsible to fight against traditional gender perspectives, but also the state's censor board should be aware that they need to accept the concept of gender equality.

Shwe Lay