

GENDER (IN)EQUALITY IN THE GOVERNANCE OF MYANMAR: PAST, PRESENT, AND POTENTIAL STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE



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Acknowledgements

Paul Minoletti is an independent researcher, based in Myanmar since 2012. His research covers a range of gender, governance, and economic issues. The author would like to thank everyone who gave up their time to be interviewed for this paper. Thanks to Zaw Min Htut for arranging, and providing translation for a number of these interviews. This report has benefited greatly from the research the author conducted with WON, ActionAid, CARE, and Oxfam on the Gender Budgeting in Myanmar research project. The author is grateful to all of the relevant staff members at those organizations for the insights and support they provided. Thanks to May Sabe Phyu and Kay Thi Myint Thein at the Gender Equality Network for sharing their database of all MPs elected in the November 2015 elections. Thanks to Hilary Faxon, Nilar Tun, Andrea Smurra, Poe Ei Phyu, Cate Buchanan, and the staff at The Asia Foundation for the highly useful feedback they provided on earlier drafts of this paper.

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Preface

Myanmar is undergoing dramatic social, political and economic changes as the country continues its transition from military to civilian rule, particularly with the electoral sweep by the National League for Democracy in November 2015. The new government that took office in April 2016 has signaled that it aims to push for fundamental transformation of how government will interact with citizens, achieve sustainable and responsible economic growth, provide better social services to the public, and improve transparency and accountability in government. Domestic and international expectations are high for the government to deliver on these important goals.

One critical dimension of Myanmar's reforms and balanced development agenda is the primary importance of ensuring gender equality of participation for increased likelihood of gender responsiveness of government structures and services. In the last few years Myanmar has seen limited growth in the level of women's participation in governance, but the November 2015 elections have increased significantly the number of female MPs in the Union parliament as well as state and region assemblies. Despite this significant upsurge, however, gender equality of participation remains largely an aspiration rather than the reality. There is only one female minister in the current cabinet, and senior positions in political parties and civil service remain male-dominated. Women still face numerous obstacles to participation, including cultural norms, bias against female leadership, restrictions on time and travel, and the influence or lack thereof of other women leaders.

Given the enormous potential for real change in Myanmar and because women still face many challenges in their ability to participate in the decision making process, it is important that the inclusivity and equality of governance is not sidelined but remains central in the public discourse. In this context, The Asia Foundation (the Foundation) is pleased to present this research report which discusses the importance of gender equality of participation in governance, past and current levels of participation in Myanmar, and current actions being taken by government and non-government actors to address the disparity. The report is authored by Paul Minoletti, an independent researcher whose research covers a wide range of governance and economic topics, and frequently focuses on how they relate to issues of gender equality.

We hope the Foundation's research agenda, of which this paper is a part of, will support the work of government, civil society, media, and development partners in contributing to an inclusive dialogue on Myanmar's reform process and development agenda. This report is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The opinions expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of DFID, DFAT or the Foundation.

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Acronyms

ANP – Arakan National Party
BPA – Beijing Platform for Action
CC – central committee
CEC – central executive committee
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CFGs – community forestry groups
CSOs – civil society organizations
DDG – director general and deputy director general
EAGs – ethnic armed groups
FGDs – focus group discussions
FY – fiscal year
GAD – General Administration Department
GEN – Gender Equality Network
GoM – government of Myanmar
GONGOs – government-organized non-governmental organizations
IFIs – international financial institutions
MIMU – Myanmar Information Management Unit
MMCWA – Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association
MoSWRR – Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement
MWAF – Myanmar Women’s Affairs Federation
NCA – Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
NCDDP – National Community Driven Development Project
NLD – National League for Democracy
NSPAW – National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, 2013-2022
PNO – Pa-O National Organization
PoVAW – prevention of violence against women
SC/STs – scheduled castes/scheduled tribes
SNLD – Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
TDAC – township development affairs committee
TDSC – township development support committee
TNP – Ta’ang (Palaung) National Party
TPIC – township planning and implementation committee
USDP – Union Solidarity and Development Party
VTA – ward/village tract administrator
WLB – Women’s League of Burma
WON – Women’s Organizations Network of Myanmar

Executive Summary

Despite some recent changes, participation in state and non-state governance bodies in Myanmar remains heavily male dominated, from the national level through to local levels. Gender inequality of participation is harmful for a variety of reasons, including:

- *Equity* – men and women, on average, have different preferences for what policies should be adopted and how budgets should be allocated, and women in decision-making positions are typically more likely to respond to women’s preferences. Thus, a high degree of inequality in participation typically leads to inequitable decision-making.
- *Efficiency* – increasing the gender equality of participation in governance bodies is likely to improve the quality of decision-making and lead to increased compliance with the rules they create. It is also likely to help reduce corruption.
- *Legitimacy* – increasing the gender equality of participation can lead all women to feel more included in decision-making processes, thereby increasing the legitimacy of decision-making bodies for women.
- *Agency* – the ability to participate in public decision-making and exercise control over one’s own life is a key aspect of an individual’s agency, and thus well-being.

Increasing the gender equality of participation is likely (although not guaranteed) to make policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery more gender responsive. However, technical analysis that incorporates gender considerations is also crucial to improving the gender responsiveness of these key aspects of governance. Improving the gender responsiveness of policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery will help to reduce existing social, economic, and political gender inequalities in Myanmar, thereby increasing citizens’ welfare and promoting economic growth.

The simplest and easiest-to-measure indicators of the gender equality of participation look solely at the relative number of women and men in governance bodies. However, to more fully understand the (in)equality of participation – and therefore the extent to which governance bodies are equitable, efficient, legitimate, and promoting citizens’ agency – we also need to consider the quality of participation that the members of these bodies enjoy, and the quality of citizens’ interactions with these bodies. The quality of people’s participation includes the extent to which they are able to voice their perspectives and interests, and the seriousness with which their views are taken by both key decision-makers and the broader citizenry. This report primarily focuses on the gender (in)equality of participation in the governance of Myanmar. But gender, of course, is not the only factor that affects individuals’ ability to participate or influence their needs and preferences. Other key factors are age, socioeconomic class, family background, ethnicity, religion, and geographical location. In future research and programming work on citizen participation, it would be desirable to more fully integrate analysis of gender with these other factors, and improve our understanding of how they interact with one another.

In 2011, the highly centralized state of Myanmar began to decentralize and democratize, transferring a (limited) degree of decision-making authority to existing and newly created bodies at the subnational level. Further decentralization is expected in the coming years, and Myanmar may move to a federal system. The potential benefits of decentralization are numerous, but this process also carries risks, and in some countries decentralization has led to a deterioration of the quality of governance. Ensuring that all citizens are able to participate in local decision-making and hold leaders accountable would help to reduce the risks of corruption and elite capture of subnational decision-making. Meanwhile, increasing the voice of all citizens in decision-making processes can help to improve the quality of planning and decision-making by providing planners and decision-makers with better information on citizens’ needs, constraints, and preferences.

The November 2015 elections saw a doubling in the percentage of female MPs in the national Parliament, and this figure is now considerably higher than at any other time in Myanmar’s history.

However, men still make up around 90 percent of Union parliamentarians, and the gender equality of representation in Parliament remains considerably lower than in most other countries in the region. The November 2015 elections also resulted in increased female representation in state and region parliaments, with women this time taking 12.7 percent of elected seats, compared to just 3.8 percent in the 2010 elections. When military appointees are accounted for, however, men make up around 90 percent of MPs in these bodies as well, and there are still three state/region parliaments that have no women MPs at all.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) was extremely successful in the November 2015 elections, winning outright majorities in both national houses of Parliament and 10 state and region parliaments, as well as a majority of elected seats in two more state parliaments. The NLD is the only major party to be led by a woman, has an unusually high level of female representation on its central executive committee (35 percent), and has adopted an internal party policy to promote the selection of women as parliamentary candidates. However, even in the NLD, women accounted for only 15.1 percent of winning MPs in the 2015 elections. Senior decision-making positions in the vast majority of political parties in Myanmar are still extremely male dominated, and apart from the NLD, only the Mon Women's Party and the Danu Nationalities League Party have a woman leader, chairperson, or deputy leader.

When the total number of employees is considered, Myanmar's civil service is very close to gender parity, with slightly more women than men; however, few women are found in the senior positions that carry significant decision-making authority. The peace process of the last few years has also been highly male dominated, as are most of the various state and non-state forms of governance at local levels.

A wide variety of factors affect Myanmar citizens' ability to actively participate in governance. The relative importance of these factors, and how they interact with one another, are still only imperfectly understood. Nevertheless, some of the most important factors shaping women's ability to participate in governance activities are: time constraints; cultural norms, including a bias against female leadership; restrictions on women's travel; and the presence or absence of other female leaders.

The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, 2013-2022 (NSPAW) was published in 2013 and is intended to enable the government of Myanmar to fulfill its international policy obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. NSPAW includes a call for the improvement of "systems, structures, and practices to ensure women's equal participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels of society." It suggests a variety of measures to achieve this aim, including the application of quotas "to ensure women's participation in decision-making in legislative, judicial, and executive bodies." However, despite NSPAW being a "government commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of women throughout our country," it is a non-binding commitment, and the government of 2011-15, with a few exceptions, generally did little to raise the gender equality of participation.

NSPAW also repeatedly calls for the increased participation of women in the development and implementation of government policy, and for the allocation of sufficient budgetary, human, and material resources by government and non-government organizations for the range of activities and policies described in the plan. The implementation plan for NSPAW was due to be completed by now, but these efforts have stalled, and so far, little has been done to translate the ambitious goals of this plan into practical action. The new government can be expected to show greater interest in gender equality issues, and greater concern for Myanmar's international policy commitments, than the previous one, and international donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), and UN agencies should take advantage of this opportunity to increase their financial and political support for the implementation of NSPAW.

Myanmar civil society and international development organizations working on gender equality issues have so far had only limited interaction with the government apart from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement and local authorities in a few project areas. With some notable exceptions,

there has also been relatively little interaction between these organizations and Myanmar political parties. Efforts to increase the gender equality of participation in governance would greatly benefit from increased collaboration, with civil society and international organizations sharing their technical expertise, and their ability to mobilize citizen inputs, with the government and political parties. Hopefully, the new political landscape will afford greater opportunities for such collaboration, and donors should seek to fund such work.

An increasing number of Myanmar and international organizations are now providing leadership trainings for women. These trainings generally appear to have been of benefit, but there is an apparent need to incorporate additional support with these trainings, such as mentoring or coaching for many of the training programs that do not already incorporate it. Current and potential male and female leaders also appear to need more training on technical issues. A few of the organizations working to promote women's leadership have arranged for Myanmar women leaders to travel abroad for exposure trips, and more of these are planned. However, there is also considerable potential benefit, hitherto largely ignored by donors, to be gained from exposure visits or knowledge exchange forums among subnational governance actors within Myanmar.

Over the last year or two there has been growing recognition within organizations working on women's rights and gender equality issues of the need to engage more with men, and this is important for work on women's participation in decision-making. Male attitudes are crucial to household attitudes towards women giving up time to participate in governance activities, and to the public response to women when they are participating, as well as to the broader social context that shapes men's and women's opportunities for participation. Men need to be engaged, not just at the household and community level, but also within the government, political parties, ethnic armed groups (EAGs), and civil society.

Community-driven development and other forms of local development planning that aim to promote citizen participation are increasingly being introduced by the government, international development partners, and Myanmar civil society. This important form of local governance offers new opportunities to increase the equality of participation, and a number of these programs have adopted gender equality of participation as a key goal. Perhaps most notable in this regard is the Department of Rural Development's pilot National Community Driven Development Project, which includes the requirement that the key local decision-making bodies have 50:50 male and female representation. However, there is considerable heterogeneity among such schemes as to how much effort is made to raise the gender equality of participation. Quotas mandating a minimum level of female representation are potentially one of the most effective ways of raising the gender equality of participation, and their introduction can be considered at all levels of governance.

There are currently few rules requiring local governance bodies and key decision-makers to interact with citizens. As a result, there are huge differences among communities in the opportunities citizens have to participate in local decision-making. This is already undesirable, and is set to become even more problematic as further powers are decentralized to local levels. Although a degree of flexibility ought to be maintained, minimum rules should be introduced stipulating how often village tract administrators, and possibly other local officials and bodies, must hold public meetings. Such rules could be usefully accompanied by provisions to raise the participation of women and other marginalized groups in these meetings.

Recent years have seen a few limited attempts by the government to use policy to promote gender equality, but gender considerations are still typically ignored in policymaking, budgeting, and the design and management of public service delivery. Government budget allocations appear to be quite heavily skewed towards sectors that are prioritized more highly by men than women. In general, Myanmar's budgeting and public service delivery systems are badly in need of improvement, suffering from a disconnection between policymaking and budgeting, many budget items being "off budget," inadequate data collection, low government capacity to analyze data, and poor transparency and accountability. Given the considerable weaknesses and constraints faced by these systems, it is not appropriate now to try and comprehensively implement the technical strategies that have been employed in "gender budgeting" exercises in other countries. Nevertheless, there is already

considerable potential for development partners to work with ministries and subnational bodies that show an interest in improving their policymaking, budgeting, and delivery of public services by accounting for gender considerations. There is also a need to raise awareness of the benefits of such an approach among political parties, ministries, and subnational bodies.

In Myanmar, a lot of the data required for good budgeting either does not exist or is of poor quality. However, there is also a pressing need for the government to make available to the public considerably more of the budget data that it does have. International development organizations operating in Myanmar also need to collect better data on the impact of their programs, and to make more of their data and analysis available to others. Donors have a key role to play in influencing the government, and international development organizations even more so, by releasing more of their data. Given the importance of good data for designing good policy, donors should support data collection on issues where it is currently particularly lacking, including the quality of citizens' participation in governance and decision-making, and citizens' preferences on budget allocations.

1. Introduction and Key Concepts

In the last few years there has been a limited increase in women's level of participation in Myanmar's governance bodies, but these bodies remain heavily male dominated. This report discusses why gender (in)equality of participation in governance matters; current and historical levels of (in)equality of participation; the extent to which policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery promote or fail to promote gender equality; and current actions by the government and non-governmental actors to increase the gender equality of participation and promote gender equality through policy-making, budgeting, and public service delivery. It also makes suggestions for how such actions can be expanded and improved.

Definitions of governance vary, but in this report, "governance" refers to the rules that govern a particular society, the extent to which these rules are adhered to and by whom, how decisions are made and who makes them, and the extent to which decision-makers are accountable to all citizens. Understanding governance processes and outcomes thus requires the analysis of (1) the bodies that are formally responsible for producing and implementing laws, policies, and regulations, and (2) how and to what extent other organizations and individuals are able to influence this process. This report explores the level of gender (in)equality in both of these aspects of governance in Myanmar, although the majority of attention is given to formal bodies.

The remainder of Section 1 describes why the gender equality of participation in governance matters and should be of interest to those looking to promote Myanmar's development; it introduces some key conceptual issues related to the equality of representation, participation, and decentralization; it briefly describes the research process used to write this report; and it finishes by outlining the remaining sections of the report.

1.1) Why the Gender Equality of Participation in Governance Matters

Increasing the gender equality of participation in governance is desirable as a means to increase the *equity* of decisions that are made. There is abundant evidence from detailed research, carried out in various developed and developing countries, that men and women have different preferences for policy and budgetary decision-making.¹ And research typically finds that women leaders are more responsive than men leaders to women's preferences.² The evidence base that we have for Myanmar is not as strong as in many other countries, but it strongly suggests that, here too, men and women have different preferences,³ and women leaders are more responsive to women's preferences.⁴ Thus, increasing the gender equality of participation in the governance of Myanmar is likely to result in more

¹ For example, see Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo, "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India," *Econometrica* 72, no. 5 (2004): 1429; Lena Edlund and Rohini Pande, "Why Have Women Become Left-Wing? The Political Gender Gap and Decline in Marriage," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117 no. 3 (2002): 917-20; Patricia Funk and Christina Gathmann, "Gender Gaps in Policy Making: Evidence from Direct Democracy in Switzerland," *Economic Policy* 30 no. 81 (2015): 152-55; John R. Lott, Jr. and Lawrence W. Kenny, "Did Women's Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government?" *Journal of Political Economy* 107 no. 6 (1999): 1163.

² For example, see, Chattopadhyay and Duflo, "Women as Policy Makers," 1431; Esther Duflo, "Why Political Reservations?" *Journal of the European Economic Association* 3 no. 2-3 (2005): 674-75; Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, "Gender Quotas and Women's Substantive Representation: Lessons from Argentina," *Politics & Gender* 4 no. 3 (2008): 407-17; Jennifer L. Lawless, "Female Candidates and Legislators," *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 no. 1 (2015): 358-59; and Irene Tinker, "Quotas for Women in Elected Legislatures: Do They Really Empower Women?" *Women's Studies International Forum* 27 no. 5-6 (2004): 359.

³ For a more detailed discussion of differences in Myanmar women's preferences, and explanation of some of the causes that drive these differences, see Paul Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*, ActionAid, CARE, Oxfam, and WON (forthcoming 2016); Paul Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, Subnational Governance in Myanmar Discussion Paper No. 3 (MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, 2014): 16-20, <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/WomensParticipationintheSubnationalGovernanceofMyanmar.pdf>

⁴Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 20-23.

gender equitable decision-making.

A number of studies carried out in South Asian countries have shown that increasing the gender equality of participation can result in government becoming more *efficient and effective*. It has been found that, on average, village councils in India provide more public goods, of equal quality, at a lower effective price when they are led by a woman rather than a man.⁵ Self-help groups set up by an NGO in the Indian state of Bihar with the aim of empowering women to engage in collective action were found to increase social capital, most notably by increasing levels of trust within local communities and by raising the likelihood that villages will work together to build infrastructure and schools.⁶ Bina Agarwal's research on community forestry groups (CFGs) in India and Nepal has found that increasing the gender equality of participation within these governance organizations resulted in increased compliance with the rules created by CFGs, a higher rate of growth of forest cover, and women being more likely to participate in security patrols – thereby making it easier to apprehend women who are trying to break the rules.⁷

For Myanmar, we do not have such strong evidence on the impact of women's participation on the efficiency and effectiveness of governance. However, several senior staff of LNGOs engaged in community-level development projects, interviewed in 2014, reported that higher levels of female participation in decision-making positions resulted in improved project outcomes.⁸ And the evidence we have suggests that increasing women's participation may help to reduce corruption – a significant consideration given the extremely high rates of corruption at all levels of government in Myanmar.⁹ It can also be noted that rule compliance is generally low for the vast majority of forests under the control of community forestry groups.¹⁰

Research conducted in the USA demonstrates how changing the gender composition of representation can change the *style* of governance. Women mayors have been found to be more willing to acknowledge and address fiscal problems in their cities, and women chairpersons of government committees are more likely to facilitate discussion, whereas men chairpersons are more likely to use their position to control and direct the discussion.¹¹ Previous research indicates that women leaders in Myanmar also tend to adopt a different style than men, including being less confrontational and more patient.¹²

Increasing the gender equality of representation in governance can also give female citizens a greater sense of the *legitimacy* of these institutions. As Jane Mansbridge eloquently describes:

Easier communication with one's representative, awareness that one's interests are being represented with sensitivity, and knowledge that certain features of one's identity do not mark one as less able to govern all contribute to making one feel more included in the polity. This

⁵ Lori A. Beaman and others, "Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?" *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124 no. 4 (2009): 1518-20.

⁶ Wendy Janssens, "Women's Empowerment and the Creation of Social Capital in Indian Villages," *World Development* 38 no. 7 (2010): 983-86.

⁷ Bina Agarwal, "Gender and Forest Conservation: The Impact of Women's Participation in Community Forestry Governance," *Ecological Economics* 68 no. 11 (2009): 2788, 2793-95; Bina Agarwal, "Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework," *World Development* 29 no. 10 (2001): 1636-37.

⁸ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 22.

⁹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 21-22.

¹⁰ Field Interview with staff member from a Myanmar environmental NGO.

¹¹ Lawless, 359.

¹² Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 22; Emilie Röell, *Women and Local Leadership: The Leadership Journeys of Myanmar's 42 Female Village Tract/Ward Administrators* (Yangon: UNDP, 2015): 31-33.

feeling of inclusion in turn makes the polity democratically more legitimate in one's eyes.¹³

Finally, the ability to participate in public decision-making and to exercise control over one's own life is a key aspect of an individual's *agency*. As the World Bank's 2012 World Development Report states, an individual's agency matters in and of itself:

A person's ability to make effective choices and exercise control over one's life is a key dimension of well-being. Women and men can contest and alter their conditions only if they are able to aspire to better outcomes, make effective choices, and take action to improve their lives.¹⁴

1.2) Conceptualizing Representation and Participation

When thinking about the gender equality of participation and representation, people often first consider the relative number of men and women in governance bodies, i.e., the gender equality of *statistical representation*.¹⁵ Measures of statistical representation can also include what types of men and women are represented, for example by including data on their age, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, etc. Although statistical representation is important in understanding the gender equality of representation, other aspects of representation must be considered as well. *Substantive representation* describes how a change in statistical representation affects a governance body's behavior – what policies are proposed and adopted, how effective and efficient the governance body is, and the style of governance and leadership. *Symbolic representation* describes how male and female decision-makers are perceived by male and female citizens when statistical representation changes, and whether the governance body's perceived legitimacy changes as well.¹⁶

The effect of statistical representation on substantive and symbolic representation depends considerably on the *quality* of participation by different individuals and groups. The quality of participation includes the ability to voice one's perspectives and interests and to be taken seriously by decision-makers and the broader public when doing so. This is strongly influenced by social norms and the power relations among different individuals and groups. It also depends heavily on whether the governance body in which they are participating has any real decision-making authority. Currently, women who are present on governance bodies and in other decision-making forums in Myanmar typically have less influence on decisions than their male counterparts.¹⁷

Throughout this report, it is often assumed that participation in governance is beneficial for the participants. If the quality of participation is low, however, increased participation may actually reduce their welfare. Increased participation requires citizens to invest their time – most obviously the time required to attend meetings, but also frequently the time entailed in delivering public services.¹⁸ Whether this investment of time is worthwhile depends on the quality of their participation: Does it promote the equality, efficiency, and effectiveness of decision-making and improve the style of

¹³ Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes,'" *The Journal of Politics* 61 no. 3 (1999): 651.

¹⁴ The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington: World Bank, 2011): 151.

¹⁵ N.b. this is referred to by some authors as *descriptive representation*.

¹⁶ For further discussion of the three aspects of representation, please see "Conceptualizing the Impact of Gender Quotas," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ For further discussion of conceptualizing the quality of participation, see Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 5.

¹⁸ Debbie Budlender and others, *Gender Budgets Make Cents: Understanding Gender Responsive Budgets* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002): 32; Katherine Casey, Rachel Glennerster, and Edward Miguel, *The Go-BiFo Project Evaluation Report: Assessing the Impact of Community-Driven Development in Sierra Leone, 3ie Impact Evaluation Report 3* (New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2013): 3.

governance (substantive representation)? Does it increase the legitimacy of the government bodies (symbolic representation)? Does it contribute to individual agency? As described in Section 2.3.1, rigid social norms assigning domestic tasks to women, regardless of other time commitments they may have, can make the additional demands of public participation a threat to their welfare. Many women who take on public leadership roles in Myanmar also face negative comments and criticism from their communities, a further threat to their welfare.¹⁹ These potential drawbacks of participation can be mitigated, however, by appropriate participation strategies and support mechanisms.

This report focuses on the gender (in)equality of participation in governance in Myanmar, but there are other sources of difference and inequality besides gender that can affect equity, effectiveness and efficiency, the style of governance, and citizens' agency. Research carried out elsewhere has shown, unsurprisingly, that party affiliation is a strong predictor of an MP's attitudes and behavior, and we should not necessarily expect gender to predominate.²⁰ Evidence from the voting patterns of state-level legislators in India and the decisions made by CFGs in India and Nepal shows that social class and economic status frequently override any solidarity decision-makers may feel with their own gender when making policy.²¹ To better understand how the composition of governance bodies influences how they behave, and what effect these bodies have on the welfare of Myanmar's citizens, it will be useful in future to integrate gender with socioeconomic class, the effect of political parties, and other key variables such as age, ethnicity, religion, and geographical location.

1.3) Decentralization and Subnational Governance

In 2011, the highly centralized state of Myanmar began to decentralize and democratize, transferring a (limited) degree of decision-making authority to existing and newly created bodies at the subnational level. Measures included creating state/region parliaments, granting greater decision-making powers to township and municipal authorities,²² creating various committees that include elected representatives at the township and municipal levels, granting greater powers to bodies at the village tract and village levels, and introducing elections for the position of village tract administrator. Further decentralization is expected in the coming years, and Myanmar may move to a federal system. The potential benefits of decentralization are numerous, and can include making government more responsive and accountable, improving political stability, increasing political competition, reducing abuses of power, and altering government spending allocations and public service provision in ways that improve development outcomes.²³

The benefits described above do not follow automatically from decentralization, however, and in some cases decentralization has worsened the quality of governance. The existing country context and the design of the decentralization process are crucial to its success. Risks that can accompany decentralization include: (1) the capture of resources and decision-making authority by local elites or interest groups who then distort policymaking and revenue allocation in their favor; (2) a lack of oversight, resulting in increased opportunities for corruption; and (3) a lack of local resources or capacity to effectively plan and implement development projects.²⁴ To avoid elite capture, decentralization in Myanmar must be accompanied by efforts to ensure that all citizens can participate and have their voices heard in

¹⁹ See Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead: An Assessment of Women's Leadership Training Needs and Training Initiatives in Myanmar* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, 2013): 9-10; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 31-32.

²⁰ Lena Wangerud, "Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (2009): 62.

²¹ Bina Agarwal, "Rule Making in Community Forestry Institutions: The Difference Women Make," *Ecological Economics* 68 no. 8-9 (2009): 2304-05; and Irma Clots-Figueras, "Women in Politics: Evidence from the Indian States," *Journal of Public Economics* 95 no. 7-8 (2011): 667, 677-80, 686.

²² N.b. in Myanmar municipal authorities are known as "development affairs organizations."

²³ Jean-Paul Faguet, "Decentralization and Governance," in "Decentralization and Governance," special issue, *World Development* 53 (2014): 2.

²⁴ Faguet, "Decentralization and Governance," 5-6, 8-9.

decision-making. This requires attention to the gender of participants and the gendered nature of participation, as well as to participants' age, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic class. As already mentioned, increasing the gender equality of participation may help to reduce corruption, and incorporating women's voices is likely to improve the quality of decision-making, thereby helping local governance bodies more effectively plan and implement development projects.

1.4) Methodology of This Report

This report is primarily based on a desk review of international scholarship and existing studies of Myanmar. However, interviews were also conducted in Yangon from December 2015 to January 2016 with representatives of 15 organizations to gain a greater understanding of what they have been doing, and plan to do, to increase the gender equality of participation in the governance of Myanmar. The organizations interviewed were the four political parties that won the most seats in the 2015 elections;²⁵ the four INGOs most prominent and well-established in working on women's leadership and gender equality of governance over the last few years;²⁶ an umbrella organization that has represented a number of Myanmar women's organizations since the late 1990s (historically in exile, although this has changed in recent years);²⁷ a Myanmar NGO that has been prominently working on women's participation in governance for several years;²⁸ a gender equality networking organization that includes Myanmar and international NGOs;²⁹ the two most relevant UN agencies;³⁰ and two major bilateral donors.³¹ Previous research conducted by the author of this report, and email correspondence with staff, provided information on the World Bank's activities.

The interviews conducted for this report cover only a limited selection of the organizations working in this field, provide particularly limited coverage of Myanmar NGOs, and the organizations interviewed all have their head offices in Yangon. As such, this report does not claim to provide a comprehensive overview of all the current efforts to increase the gender equality of participation. Nevertheless, this report is able to draw out some key themes, and by utilizing existing research is able to broaden coverage, and thereby reduce the Yangon bias in the interviews and discuss the situation across Myanmar.

1.5) Outline of the Report

Section 2 of this report describes the gender equality of participation in the governance of Myanmar, both currently and historically, and discusses the factors affecting it. Section 3 outlines current efforts by a number of governmental and non-governmental organizations to raise the gender equality of participation, and suggests potential approaches for building on, improving, and expanding this work in the future. Following the general assessment of gender equality in governance provided in Sections 2 and 3, Section 4 examines three key aspects of governance – policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery – considers to what extent these aspects of governance currently promote or fail to promote gender equality, and suggests reforms to promote gender equality. Section 5 suggests some priorities for both the government and non-governmental organizations to improve the quality of data collection, and urges that this information be more freely shared. Section 6 provides a general conclusion and some specific suggestions.

²⁵ The Arakan National Party, National League for Democracy (NLD), Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, and Union Solidarity and Development Party. N.b. the restrictions on NLD MPs speaking to journalists in the wake of the 2015 elections meant the discussion with an MP from the NLD was informal and off the record, therefore it was not possible to get much information from this interview that could be used in this report.

²⁶ ActionAid, CARE, Oxfam, and Trócaire.

²⁷ Women's League of Burma.

²⁸ Phan Tee Eain.

²⁹ Gender Equality Network (GEN).

³⁰ UNDP and UN Women.

³¹ DFAT and DFID.

2. Male and Female Participation in the Governance of Myanmar

2.1) Women's and Men's Statistical Representation in Government and other Governance Bodies – the Current Situation

2.1.1) Elected Officials

The November 2015 elections for Myanmar's Union and state and region parliaments resulted in huge wins for the National League for Democracy (NLD), a party that is led by a woman. Although Aung San Suu Kyi is currently constitutionally barred from becoming president,³² immediately prior to the election she stated, "If we win and the NLD forms a government I will be above the president. It's a very simple message."³³ This is the first time in history that Myanmar's government is to be led by a woman, and as discussed in Section 2.3.3, a unique set of factors contributed to Aung San Suu Kyi's ascension to this position.

Despite Myanmar's government now being led by a woman, and a higher proportion of MPs being female than at any previous point in Myanmar's history, there is still a very high level of gender inequality in statistical representation in the Union Parliament. As Table 1 shows, women account for only 13.6 percent of elected MPs at the Union level. This figure is extremely close to the percentage of candidates for Union-level seats that were women (13.5 percent),³⁴ showing that women are not systematically being assigned to less winnable seats.

Under the 2008 Constitution, 25 percent of the seats in all of Myanmar's Union-level and state and region parliaments are reserved for the military. No gender-disaggregated data is available for the current intake of MPs appointed by the military, and so it is not possible to say exactly what percentage of all MPs are women. However, past practice suggests that military appointees will be highly gender unequal: during the 2011-15 Parliament, all of the military appointees to the Amyotha Hluttaw were male. From 2011-13 this was also the case in the Pyithu Hluttaw, but in January 2014 two females were appointed by the military to this house.³⁵ If the gender balance of military appointees has remained the same, women will account for 10.5 percent of all MPs at the national level. This is more equal than Thailand (6.1 percent), but is considerably less equal than most other countries in the region, including the Philippines (27.1 percent), Singapore (23.9 percent), China (23.6 percent), Bangladesh (20.0 percent) and Cambodia (19.0 percent).³⁶

The Union-level cabinet is highly gender unequal, with Aung San Suu Kyi the only woman out of its 20 members.³⁷ The speaker and deputy speaker of the house are male in both the Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw.³⁸

³² The relevant article of the Constitution is 59f. This article bars anyone who has married a foreigner, or has children that hold foreign passports, from becoming president.

³³ "Suu Kyi 'Will Be Above President' If NLD Wins Myanmar Election," *BBC News*, 5 November 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34729659> [accessed 10 November 2015].

³⁴ Figure extracted from Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election* (Yangon: Phan Tee Eain, 2016).

³⁵ See Section 2.2.

³⁶ Figures extracted from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif011215.htm> [accessed 9th February 2016].

³⁷ "Suu Kyi Gives Up Two of Four Ministerial Posts", *The Irrawaddy*, 4 April 2016. <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/suu-kyi-gives-up-two-of-four-ministerial-posts.html> [accessed 6 April 2016]; "Who's who: Myanmar's new cabinet," *Myanmar Times*, 23 March 2016. <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/19609-who-s-who-myanmar-s-new-cabinet.html> [accessed 6 April 2016].

³⁸ "Daw Su Confirmed Speaker Posts," *Myanmar Times*, 28 January 2016. <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/18710-daw-su-confirmed-speaker-post.html> [accessed 10 February 2016].

Table 1: Women's Representation in Myanmar's Union-Level Parliament

	Constituencies (N)	Elected MPs (N)	Elected MPs Who Are Women (N)	Women as % of Elected MPs	Military MPs	Total MPs	Women as % of Total MPs
Pyithu Hluttaw (Lower House)	330	323	44	13.6%	110	433	≥10.2%
Amyotha Hluttaw (Upper House)	168	168	23	13.7%	56	224	≥10.3%
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Lower House and Upper House Combined)	498	491	67	13.6%	166	657	≥10.2%

Source: Database of MPs elected in November 2015 and subsequently approved by the Union Election Commission, supplied to the author by the Gender Equality Network in February 2016.

In aggregate, the gender equality of statistical representation in Myanmar's state and region parliaments is similar to that at the national level. Table 2 shows that women are 12.5 percent of elected state and region MPs, which is likely to be a little under 10 percent of total MPs. Again, the percentage of elected MPs who are women is extremely similar to the percentage of candidates for state/region-level seats who were women (12.9 percent).³⁹ It is important to note that there is considerable variation among states/regions in the gender equality of statistical representation, with more than one-quarter (26.1 percent) of elected MPs in the Mon State Parliament being women, while there are no women elected MPs at all in the Chin, Kayah, and Rakhine parliaments.

In February 2016, Daw Tin Ei became Myanmar's first-ever female speaker of the house, taking on this position in the Mon State Parliament. The speakers in the other 13 state/region parliaments are all male.⁴⁰ In March 2016 Dr Lei Lei Maw and Nan Khin Htwe Myint were appointed as chief minister in Tanintharyi Region and Kayin State respectively, becoming the first women to hold this position. The chief ministers in the other 12 state/regions are male.⁴¹

³⁹ Figure extracted from *Report on Observing Women's Participation*.

⁴⁰ "Mon State Elects Parliament's First Female Speaker," *The Irrawaddy*, 10 February 2016. <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/mon-state-elects-parliaments-first-female-speaker.html> [accessed 11 February 2016]; "NLD MPs Elected to Top Local Parliament Positions in 12 of 14 Assemblies," *The Irrawaddy*, 9 February 2016 <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/nld-mps-elected-to-top-local-parliament-positions-in-12-of-14-assemblies.html> [accessed 11 February 2016].

⁴¹ "Meet your chief ministers," *Myanmar Times*, 4 April 2016 <http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/nay-pyi-taw/19609-who-s-who-myanmar-s-new-cabinet.html> [accessed 6 April 2016].

Table 2: Women's Representation in Myanmar's State and Region Parliaments

State/Region	Elected MPs (N)	Elected MPs Who Are Women (N)	Women as % of Elected MPs	Military MPs	Total MPs	Women as % of Total MPs
Mon	23	6	26.1%	8	31	≥19.4%
Yangon	92	18	19.6%	31	123	≥14.6%
Ayeyarwaddy	54	10	18.5%	18	72	≥13.9%
Sagaing	76	14	18.4%	25	101	≥13.9%
Magway	51	8	15.7%	17	68	≥11.8%
Bago	57	8	14.0%	19	76	≥10.5%
Kachin	40	5	12.5%	13	53	≥9.4%
Kayin	17	2	11.8%	6	23	≥8.7%
Tanintharyi	21	2	9.5%	7	28	≥7.1%
Mandalay	57	4	7.0%	19	76	≥5.3%
Shan	103	7	6.8%	39	142	≥4.9%
Chin	18	0	0.0%	6	24	≥0%
Kayah	15	0	0.0%	5	20	≥0%
Rakhine	35	0	0.0%	12	47	≥0%
Total	659	84	12.7%	431	884	≥9.5%

Source: See Table 1.

Gender inequality of electoral representation is even starker at local levels than at Union and state/region levels. The position of ward/village tract administrator (hereafter VTA) became an elected one following the passage of the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law in 2012. So far, very few women have been elected to this position, with data supplied to UNDP by the General Administration Department (GAD) in 2014 showing that women made up only 42 of the 16,785 VTAs in Myanmar – just 0.25 percent of the total. This data showed that women were most likely to be found filling the position of VTA in Kayin State, but even here they accounted for just 2.4 percent of VTAs. Meanwhile, in Kayah, Mon, and Rakhine States there were no female VTAs at all.⁴² New elections were held nationwide for VTAs in early 2016. At the time of this writing, there was no gender-disaggregated data available on the new intake of VTAs, but it has been reported in the media that at least one female VTA has now been elected in Mon State.⁴³

As part of the previous government's efforts to make subnational governance more participatory, several wholly or partially elected committees have been introduced at the township level, notably the

⁴² Emilie Röell, *Women and Local Leadership: The Leadership Journeys of Myanmar's 42 Female Village Tract/Ward Administrators* (Yangon: UNDP, 2015): 18-19.

⁴³ "Female Candidate Wins Local Election in Mon State," *The Irrawaddy*, 18 January 2016. <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/female-candidate-wins-local-election-in-mon-state.html> [accessed 19 January 2016].

township development support committee (TDSC), the township planning and implementation committee (TPIC), and the township development affairs committee (TDAC). The level of influence and the exact role of these committees vary from township to township, but their activities typically include involvement in development planning and budgeting. No comprehensive data is available on the membership of these committees, but it is clear that women’s participation in these committees is very low, and in many townships the membership of all of these committees consists solely of men. The men on these committees typically come from local elites.⁴⁴

2.1.2) Political Parties

In the 2015 elections, the NLD won a majority not only of the elected seats, but also of total seats in both national houses of Parliament,⁴⁵ winning 79.3 percent of elected seats and 59.1 percent of total seats in the lower house, and 80.4 percent of elected seats and 60.3 percent of total seats in the upper house. The NLD also took 75.3 percent of elected seats and 56.1 percent of total seats across the state/region parliaments, and now enjoys an outright majority of total seats in all seven regions and three states (Kayah, Kayin, and Mon), and the majority of elected seats in two more states (Chin and Kachin).⁴⁶ As Table 3 indicates, NLD’s high level of success has helped to raise the gender equality of participation in Myanmar’s parliaments; of the major parties, only the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) has a higher proportion of MPs that are women.

Table 3 shows that female representation is far higher in the NLD (15.1 percent of total MPs) than in the next largest party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), with women accounting for only 2.6 percent of USDP’s total MPs. The Pa-O National Organization (PNO) is notable as the only party with more than three MPs (it has 10) of which none are women. The five MPs that are independent of any party are all male.

Table 3: Women MPs as a Proportion of Their Party’s MPs in Union and State/Region Parliaments Combined

Party	Total MPs	Women MPs	Women as % of Party’s MPs
SNLD	42	7	16.7%
NLD	887	134	15.1%
TNP	11	1	9.1%
ANP	45	2	4.4%
USDP	116	3	2.6%
PNO	10	0	0%
Other Parties ⁴⁷	34	4	11.8%
Independent MPs	5	0	0%
Total	1150	151	13.1%

Source: See Table 1.

⁴⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁴⁵ N.b. “total seats” includes the 25 percent of seats that are reserved for unelected military appointees in the lower and upper house and each of the 14 unicameral state/region parliaments.

⁴⁶ All figures are from the author’s analysis of a database of MPs elected in November 2015 and subsequently approved by the Union Election Commission, supplied to the author by the Gender Equality Network in February 2016.

⁴⁷ A total of 14 parties are included under “other parties,” most of which represent ethnic minority groups. The party in this group with the most MPs is the Lisu National Development Party, which has a total of seven MPs,

Women's representation in the highest positions in political parties is extremely low: apart from the NLD, only the Mon Women's Party and the Danu Nationalities League Party have a woman in any of the following positions: leader, chairperson, or deputy leader.⁴⁸

The field research carried out for this paper was intended to provide gender-disaggregated quantitative data for the membership of the central executive committees (CEC) and central committees (CC) of the four parties that won the most seats in the November 2015 elections, namely the Arakan National Party (ANP), NLD, SNLD, and USDP. Unfortunately, only the interviewees from the ANP and SNLD were able to provide this information.

In the ANP, women account for just two of 39 members of the CEC (5.1 percent) and 10 of the 110 members of the CC (9.1 percent). Women's representation in the SNLD is higher, although still very far from gender parity, accounting for one of the 10 members of the CEC (10 percent) and seven of the 35 members of the CC (20 percent). In both parties, men hold the key decision-making positions of chairperson and secretary of these committees.⁴⁹ Research conducted by Phan Tee Eain found that the membership of the NLD's CEC is 35 percent female, whereas only two of the USDP's 40 CEC members are female (5 percent).⁵⁰

2.1.3) The Civil Service

Table 4, below, shows selected statistics from the data the GoM publishes on female representation in the civil service. The data shows that, in contrast to the situation for elected officials, there is a high degree of gender equality among civil servants overall, with marginally more women than men so employed (52.3 percent versus 47.7 percent). There is also quite a high level of gender equality overall for "senior positions", with women accounting for nearly 40 percent of staff at the level of deputy director and above. As Table 4 indicates, there is wide variation between ministries and state administrative bodies in the proportion of staff who are female, both overall and in senior positions. Female representation is very high within bodies such as the Ministry of Education and the Auditor General's Office, but very low in bodies such as the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Forestry. In contrast to most countries, there is quite a high level of female representation in the Ministries of Finance and Planning.

Despite this somewhat rosy picture of gender equality, and although there are no publicly available figures on this, it is vital to note that women are almost entirely absent from the most senior civil service positions of director general and deputy director general (DDG).⁵¹ Despite some recent improvements, decision-making within ministries remains extremely top-down and hierarchical, and positions below DDG typically do not come with substantial decision-making authority. As such, care needs to be taken when examining this published data, so as not to overestimate women's opportunities for policymaking influence within civil service bodies.

one of whom is female.

⁴⁸ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation*.

⁴⁹ Field Interviews with Daw Soe Soe Thay, ANP Central Committee member, and Sai Nyunt Lwin, SNLD general secretary, December 2015.

⁵⁰ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation*.

⁵¹ N.b. these positions are almost all filled by former military officers. See David Hook, Tin Maung Than, and Kim N. B. Ninh, *Conceptualizing Public Sector Reform in Myanmar* (Yangon: MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, 2015): 13.

Table 4: Female Representation in Selected State Administrative Bodies and Ministries, 2014

	% of Staff Who Are Female	% of Staff at Deputy Director Level and Above (or Equivalent) Who Are Female
State Administrative Body		
Auditor General's Office	78.6	76.5
Union Civil Service Board	55.1	53.5
Attorney General's Office	46.8	47.7
YCDC	48.5	17.8
President's Office	51.3	10.6
Ministry		
Education	77.8	73.8
Border Affairs	51.2	43.6
Planning	61.7	40.0
Social Welfare	74.1	30.5
Finance	57.6	28.6
MOECAF*	23.1	13.4
Home Affairs	20.6	4.5
Average of all Ministries and SABS**	52.3	39.1

Source: <http://mmsis.gov.mm/statHtml/statHtml.do> [accessed 22 October 2015]

*MOECAF = Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Forestry

**Please note that the published data for "all" ministries does not include data for the Ministry of Defense, which can be expected to have a below-average level of female representation.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is one of the most powerful ministries in Myanmar, and this is particularly so at the township level, where the ministry's GAD is the dominant player in local development planning, revenue collection, dispersal of funds, and coordination of other state actors.⁵² The township GAD is headed by the (unelected) township administrator, the single most powerful individual at this level of the state. There are no female township administrators anywhere in Myanmar.⁵³

2.1.4) The Peace Process

Over the last few years, the attempt to reach a comprehensive ceasefire agreement has been one of the most important political and developmental issues in Myanmar, with wide-ranging ramifications, and this continues to be the case. Women's representation in this process has hitherto been extremely low. As of October 2015, only two of the 52 members of the government's Union Peacemaking Working Committee were women (3.8 percent), and the 11 members of the Union Peacemaking Central Committee were all men.⁵⁴ Of the representatives of the 16 EAGs that sat on their National Ceasefire Coordination Team, only one was a woman. The peace process has been extremely male dominated so

⁵² Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Matthew Arnold, *The General Administration Department: An Overview of Myanmar's Administrative Backbone* (Yangon: MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, 2014): 31-33.

⁵³ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 10.

⁵⁴ N.b. the gender balance on these committees was unchanged as of mid-February 2016.

far, although it should be noted that a number of women were able to play significant technical and facilitating roles in the process, and that a woman was elected in June 2015 to lead the EAGs' "senior delegation" for the most recent rounds of ceasefire talks.⁵⁵

By October 2015, only eight of the EAGs had signed the "Nationwide" Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), and this was still the case as of mid-February 2016. The bodies created as a result of the NCA also currently feature a low level of female representation: there are no women on the Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting or the Union-level Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee, and only three women on the 48-member Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (6.3 percent).⁵⁶ The highest level of women's representation on any of the NCA-related committees is on the Shan State Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee, where women account for three of the 14 members (21.4 percent). Women made up only a small percentage of invitees (7.7 percent) and attendees (8.0 percent) at the Union Peace Conference in Nay Pyi Taw in January 2016, although they made up a considerably larger proportion of facilitators (30.0 percent) at this event.⁵⁷

At the January 2016 Union Peace Conference, it was agreed to adopt a quota mandating a minimum women's participation rate of 30 percent in bodies responsible for political dialogue related to the peace process. This would seem to represent significant change, although it is not exactly clear how it will be implemented. And quotas alone may not be enough to equalize the quality of men's and women's participation: women attendees at the January 2016 Union Peace Conference reported not being taken seriously in the discussions, as a consequence of their gender, describing forms of discrimination including the official note taker not recording their comments, women's comments being diluted by the moderator, and women being referred to as "girl."⁵⁸

2.1.5) Other Governance Bodies and Actors

In addition to those already mentioned, there are many other forms of, and influences on, governance that are pertinent to the gender equality of governance in Myanmar. It is not feasible to cover all of them in this report, but some of the most important are discussed in the following paragraphs.

At the local level throughout Myanmar, a range of public services are frequently funded entirely by local communities, with no government revenues provided, and contributions collected without input from any government bodies or representatives: groups of citizens collect funds and arrange provision of the service(s) with no input from the state whatsoever. Which public services are funded in this way varies from place to place, but they can include roads, bridges, drainage, water supply, waste disposal, street lighting, and electricity. It is also common for these services, as well as others such as education and healthcare, to rely on a combination of state funding and funding by local communities. In the case of mixed funding, deciding which services to fund, how to provide them, and how to pay for them typically rests with the VTA and one or more of the other official committees at the village tract or village levels, the most prominent of which is normally the village tract development support committee. When services are entirely funded by citizens, the VTA and official committees sometimes participate in a planning or oversight role, but it is also common for the entire decision-making and management process to be conducted by independently organized and selected committees of citizens. Exact data on the composition of official and unofficial committees is absent, but the evidence

⁵⁵ Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP), *Women, Peace, and Security Policy-Making in Myanmar: Context Analysis and Recommendations – Edition 1* (Yangon: AGIPP, December 2015): 7-10.

⁵⁶ AGIPP, *Women, Peace, and Security Policy-Making*, 11-12.

⁵⁷ Figures supplied to author by AGIPP.

⁵⁸ "Women's Alliance Breaks Down Gender Disparity in Peace Process," *The Irrawaddy*, 22 January 2016. <http://www.irrawaddy.com/burma/womens-alliance-breaks-down-gender-disparity-in-peace-process.html> [accessed 11 February 2016]; "Peace Process Quota no Guarantee for Women's Participation," *Myanmar Now*, 15 February 2016. <http://www.myanmar-now.org/news/i/?id=09b86529-94a1-4620-9f4b-57de3a8b76b8> [accessed 21 March 2016].

we have suggests that these are highly male-dominated.⁵⁹ One notable exception is the (official) National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP), currently being piloted in 27 townships, which has a high degree of gender equality in its participation.

Myanmar's formal justice system has a high level of female statistical representation, with female judges slightly outnumbering male judges. However, at the highest levels of the judicial system men predominate: figures from 2012 show that men accounted for more than two-thirds of High Court judges, and all of the Supreme Court justices. Many cases that fall under Myanmar law are resolved outside of the formal legal system, with informal, community-level dispute resolution particularly prevalent in ethnic minority communities.⁶⁰ Village tract administrators often play a key role in such resolution processes, and as already noted, these are almost all male. The other community and religious leaders that occupy decision-making roles in these processes are also overwhelmingly male.⁶¹

Community-based forest management was first introduced to Myanmar in the 1990s, and as of 2014 there were 574 CFGs across the country. In CFGs there is a very low level of female representation on committees, and they are almost entirely absent from key decision-making positions. This is despite the fact that women often contribute a lot of their time to the initial stages of setting up a CFG, typically provide most of the labor for forest nurseries, and rely on forest resources in a different way than men, with women more likely to extract resources from the forest on a frequent basis and for household needs (e.g., firewood, medicinal plants, foodstuffs), and men more likely to use it less frequently and for goods to be sold for cash (e.g., timber).⁶²

As has commonly been the case in other countries, community and civil society activism has provided greater opportunities than formal politics and governance for women to take on leadership and decision-making roles in Myanmar. The recent expansion in the number and size of civil society organizations, and their growing opportunities to provide services to citizens and engage in policy advocacy, therefore offer increased opportunities for women to influence and participate in decision-making. It should be noted that even here, full gender parity is still some way off, but not only do civil society organizations often provide greater opportunities for women within their own ranks, they also tend to promote higher levels of female participation in the village- or village tract-level committees, that they help create to carry out local development projects, compared to other committees at this level.⁶³

The Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation (MWF) and Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA) are two very large organizations that have all or majority female memberships and are present throughout Myanmar from village tract up to Union level. As of 2011, MMCWA claimed to have 13.9 million members, and MWF currently claims to have 5.2 million members.⁶⁴ Although the number of active members is almost certainly far below these official figures, the numbers are still considerable. MWF aims broadly to "promote the welfare and advancement of women in Myanmar," and is particularly involved in anti-human-trafficking and health initiatives.⁶⁵ As the name suggests, MMCWA specifically focuses on maternal and child health, but it also works on other aspects of healthcare, and even on some household income generation activities.⁶⁶ Both of these organizations claim to be non-governmental, but in reality they have long had strong, informal links to the USDP and

⁵⁹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁶⁰ UN Women and Justice Base, *Voices from the Intersection: Women's Access to Justice in the Plural Legal System of Myanmar* (Yangon: UN Women and Justice Base, forthcoming 2016).

⁶¹ UN Women and Justice Base, *Voices from the Intersection*.

⁶² Field Interview with staff member from Myanmar environmental NGO, December 2015; Paul Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 14.

⁶³ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 13-14.

⁶⁴ Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, *Strategic Plan, 2012-2015*, October 2012; <http://www.mwaf.org.mm/en/about-us> [accessed 31 December 2015].

⁶⁵ <http://www.mwaf.org.mm/en/about-us>

⁶⁶ MMCWA, *Strategic Plan*, 8-16.

its predecessor, the Union Solidarity and Development Association,⁶⁷ and critics have referred to them as “GONGOS” – government-organized non-governmental organizations.⁶⁸ There is no doubting the high level of female participation in these organizations, but understanding their role in promoting or failing to promote gender equality is somewhat complex. This is discussed further in Section 3.2.8.

The discussion so far has focused on governance in the areas of Myanmar under the control of the GoM. However, a significant portion of the population in Myanmar’s ethnic states lives in areas under the authority of EAGs, or areas where authority is contested between EAGs and the central government. Community self-provision of public services is common here, but EAGs also provide public services directly, as well as allowing autonomous or semi-autonomous service providers to operate in their areas of control.⁶⁹ Detailed information on the gender equality of participation in these forms of governance and public service provision is lacking, but we know that EAGs have long been male dominated, with women’s roles largely limited to social welfare work.⁷⁰

2.2) Women’s and Men’s Statistical Representation in Government – Historical Trends

Although decision-making positions in most governance bodies in Myanmar are overwhelmingly filled by men, the current situation is actually somewhat more gender equal than has historically been the case. While it is not possible within the scope of this paper to give a wide-ranging assessment of men’s and women’s participation in governance bodies throughout Myanmar’s history, the remainder of this section offers an overview of the gender equality of statistical representation in Myanmar’s parliaments since independence (1948).

Table 5: Women’s Representation in Myanmar’s National Parliaments since 1948

Period	Total Number of Seats	Number of Seats Held by Women	% of Seats Held by Women
1948-50	255	7-8	2.7-3.1%
1951-52	380	8	2.1%
1953-56	375	2	0.5%
1957-61	375	2-4	1.1%
1974-87	444-489	7-15	1.5-3.1%
2011-Mar 2012	659	18	2.7%
Apr 2012-Dec 2013	657	30	4.6%
Jan 2014-Nov 2015	657	32	4.9%

Sources: Figures for 1948-87 from the Central Statistical Organization (2009); Figures for 2011-15 taken from Renaud Egreteau (2014), 99-101.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Field interviews conducted by the author in 2014 and 2015.

⁶⁸ Jessica Harriden, *The Authority of Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012): 239, 256-65.

⁶⁹ Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar’s Contested Regions* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, June 2014): 11-22.

⁷⁰ Jenny Hedström, “We Did Not Realize About the Gender Issues. So, We Thought It Was a Good Idea,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* (12 Feb. 2015): 7. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14616742.2015.1005516>

⁷¹ Central Statistical Organization, *Statistical Profile of Children and Women in Myanmar, 2009* (Nay Pyi Taw: CSO, 2010); Renaud Egreteau, “Legislators in Myanmar’s First ‘Post-Junta’ National Parliament (2010–2015): A Sociological Analysis,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 33 no. 2 (2014): 91-124. N.b. the source that the *Statistical Profile of Children and Women in Myanmar* cites for the figures used in the above table for 1948-87 is

Table 5 presents figures for Myanmar's single national Parliament for the periods 1948-50 and 1974-87, and combined figures for the upper and lower houses that were in existence from 1951 to 1961, and from 2011 to the present day. The periods of 1962-73 and 1988-2010 were periods of military rule, and parliaments did not sit at these times. The unicameral Parliament in place from 1974-87 had only very limited influence on government policy, and all electoral candidates were chosen by the ruling Burma Socialist Program Party.⁷² The figures presented in Table 5 for 2011 onwards include both elected representatives and military appointees. Initially, all of the military appointees to the Union Parliaments were male, but in January 2014 two female lieutenant colonels were appointed to the lower house.⁷³

Table 5 clearly shows how low women's participation in national parliamentary politics has been over the decades, with women never accounting for more than 5 percent of MPs prior to the November 2015 elections. Women have also been largely excluded from the executive. Ba Maung Chain was Myanmar's first female cabinet member, serving as first minister for Karen State for around one year in the 1950s.⁷⁴ It was not until March 2011 that a second female cabinet member was appointed, with Daw Myat Myat Ohn Khin taking charge of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement (MoSWRR). In early 2014, Daw Khin San Yi became Myanmar's third-ever female minister, taking over as the minister of education.

The 2008 Constitution laid out the framework for the creation of parliaments at the state/region level, and MPs first took their places in 2011. In the aggregate, women's representation here was even lower than in the national Parliament during the same period, with women accounting for only 3.6 percent of elected MPs for the period from 2011 to March 2012, and 3.7 percent of elected MPs from April 2012 to November 2015.⁷⁵ Shan State had the highest level of female statistical representation, with women accounting for 7.5 percent of elected MPs (i.e., over 5.5 percent of total MPs). Six state and region parliaments had no female elected representatives at all: Chin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Sagaing, and Tanintharyi.⁷⁶

2.3) Key Influences on Men's and Women's Participation

2.3.1) Time Constraints and Household Bargaining

Echoing the findings of previous research, a number of the people interviewed for this report stressed the importance of women's time constraints in limiting their ability to participate in governance, with many women already having to balance heavy loads of paid market work and unpaid domestic work. Interviewees also stressed the role of cultural norms as a factor in this regard, with men in Myanmar typically being strongly resistant to taking over domestic chores that are seen as a woman's responsibility, even if she is busy with paid work or participating in governance activities.⁷⁷ While we

simply "National Archives Department," and the author has not been able to independently verify them.

⁷² Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009): 328.

⁷³ Egretreau, 100.

⁷⁴ Harriden, 163.

⁷⁵ No data is available on the gender composition of 2011-15 military appointees to state and region parliaments, so it is not possible to provide figures for total MPs. Renaud Egretreau reports that there was a female military appointee in the Yangon Region Parliament during this period, so it is clearly incorrect to assume all military appointees are male, as was done in Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p. 11. See Renaud Egretreau, "Who Are the Military Delegates in Myanmar's 2010-2015 Union Legislature?" *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 30 no. 2 (2015): 338-70.

⁷⁶ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 11.

⁷⁷ Field Interviews conducted December 2015. See also The Gender and Development Initiative, *Gender-Based Constraints in Rural Areas and Women's Empowerment in HDI of UNDP Myanmar* (Yangon: GDI, 2011): 37; Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar* (Yangon: GEN, 2015): 71-79; Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead*, 17; Annami Löfving, *Women's Participation in Public Life in Myanmar* (Yangon: ActionAid, CARE, and Oxfam, 2011): 10-60; Minoletti, *Women's Participa-*

currently do not have detailed and statistically representative data for Myanmar on men's and women's time use and their time availability to participate in governance, the evidence that we have strongly indicates that this is one of the most important drivers of gender inequality of participation.

As in many other countries, research on Myanmar indicates that women who work outside of the home and have their own source of income have greater bargaining power within the household. Having such work can therefore sometimes help women to overcome opposition from other household members to their participation in governance activities. It also gives women more experience acting in the public sphere, and increases their confidence to act in this arena. However, taking on such work is likely to increase women's time constraints, which can limit their opportunity to participate.⁷⁸ Thus, taking on unpaid work outside the home may either raise or lower women's ability to participate, and we do not yet have adequate evidence to know which effect will predominate under what circumstances in Myanmar.

2.3.2) Cultural Norms and Biases

Cultural norms affect men's and women's opportunities for participation in several other important ways as well. Leadership in Myanmar is closely associated with "maleness." A 2014 survey found that the majority of Myanmar citizens think that men make better political leaders than women. Forty-two percent of survey respondents agreed strongly with the statement that men make better political leaders than women, and 29 percent agreed somewhat, with almost no difference between men and women in this perception.⁷⁹ Daw Soe Soe Thay, one of the female members of the ANP's central committee, perceives that the preference of both male and female citizens for male leaders is one of the main reasons for women's currently low levels of participation in politics. Although the preference for male leadership is found throughout Myanmar, it seems to be weaker in urban areas and among the educated middle class,⁸⁰ and women are nearly twice as likely to be ward administrators (urban) than village tract administrators (rural).⁸¹

A bias in favor of male leadership is common in both developed and developing countries around the world, and the leading economist Esther Duflo has concluded that "the widespread perception that women are not competent leaders is probably the strongest barrier to greater participation of women in policymaking."⁸² Detailed and rigorous studies of local leadership in India have found that citizens report being less satisfied with female than with male leaders, despite objective measures of the leaders' performance (i.e., quantity and quality of public service provision) showing the female leaders to be as, or more, effective.⁸³

The preference for male leadership and authority affects not only the number of women and men in leadership positions, but also the quality of their participation. Women who do attend public forums are less likely to speak up than men are, and if they do speak, their opinions are typically given less weight. Women in Myanmar typically have much less confidence than men to contribute to public discussion, and this lack of confidence is one of the key barriers limiting the quality of their participation

tion in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar, 26-28.

⁷⁸ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 25-28.

⁷⁹ N.b. responses were very similar for whether men made better business executive than women. See The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2014): 79; For the association of leadership with masculinity, see also, Löfving, 10, 62.

⁸⁰ The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society*, 79; Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain*, 65; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 30.

⁸¹ Röell, 18-19.

⁸² Esther Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development," *Journal of Economic Literature* 50 no. 4 (2012): 1062.

⁸³ Beaman and others, "Powerful Women," 1514-21; Duflo, "Why Political Reservations?" 674.

in decision-making.⁸⁴ This lack of confidence can be partially attributed to women's relative lack of experience in participating in public forums, but seems to be primarily due to cultural norms that associate leadership and knowledge of public affairs with masculinity, and femininity with modesty and politeness.⁸⁵

2.3.3) Family Members' Participation in Politics and Governance

Aung San Suu Kyi's background is unique, and has enabled her to sidestep or transcend many of the barriers faced by most women in Myanmar, including the bias against female leadership. Her rise to prominence was greatly assisted by the high regard in which her father is held by most people in Myanmar, and she and the NLD have repeatedly stressed the connection between father and daughter. In her first major political address (August 1988), she told the public, "I could not, as my father's daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on. This national crisis could, in fact, be called the second struggle for independence."⁸⁶ The NLD has continued to stress the father-daughter connection up to the present day, and NLD campaign posters for the November 2015 elections frequently featured side-by-side images of father and daughter. It is also relevant to note that in other South and Southeast Asian countries the daughters or wives of "martyred" male political leaders (that is, they had been assassinated, executed, or imprisoned) have taken on political leadership at times when unpopular, male-led political regimes were under pressure to reform. At such times, these women have been able to use their political inexperience and gender to their advantage, claiming the moral high ground over authoritarian, corrupt, male-led regimes.⁸⁷

In addition to the somewhat extreme case of Aung San Suu Kyi, and as noted in a recent UNDP study of female VTAs in Myanmar, if an individual's father or other family member has been involved in governance leadership positions, it is more likely that the individual in question will also be involved. Of the 15 female VTAs interviewed for the study, nine of them had a father or other close relative who had worked in the township or ward/village tract administration.⁸⁸ The presence of close family members with governance leadership experience can also be expected to make Myanmar men more likely to take on leadership positions; however, we do not currently have the data to assess the relative importance of this factor for men and women.

2.3.4) Role Models

Women taking on leadership positions can have a powerful effect in changing the participation of other women. This can be due to these women taking deliberate steps to promote the participation of other women,⁸⁹ but also to a "role-model" effect. Nilar Tun, national technical adviser (gender) at CARE Myanmar, described how the recent entrance of women into local leadership positions in the Kayah State townships in which CARE work has had a powerful effect in increasing the confidence of other women who wish to do the same.⁹⁰ Achieving greater equality in representation in leadership positions can also increase the likelihood that all citizens will feel able to contribute to public discussions. Research on local governance bodies in South Asia has found that, as the gender equality of representation on community forestry executive committees increases, women are more likely to speak up in meetings, and the same effect occurs when the village head is female.⁹¹ Increasing female

⁸⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 28-30.

⁸⁵ Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain*, especially 27-41; Löfving, 10, 62.

⁸⁶ Bertil Lintner, *Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Struggle for Democracy* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2011): 1-2.

⁸⁷ Harriden, 211-3.

⁸⁸ Röell, 22.

⁸⁹ For example, by introducing policies stipulating a minimum level of female participation in their organizations. See Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 32, 34.

⁹⁰ Field Interview with Nilar Tun, CARE national technical advisor (gender), December 2015.

⁹¹ Bina Agarwal, "Does Women's Proportional Strength Affect Their Participation? Governing Local Forests in

representation in local governance bodies in India has also been found to greatly increase women's willingness to report crimes committed against them.⁹²

2.3.5) Restrictions on Travel

Due to a combination of time constraints, cultural norms, and the threat of gender-based violence, women's mobility is generally more restricted than men's in Myanmar, and this is another key factor in the high degree of gender inequality of participation.⁹³ It appears that women's mobility has increased in recent years, along with their opportunities for social interaction outside of the home, but substantial gender differences remain, and there is also considerable heterogeneity among communities in how much change has occurred.⁹⁴ Conflict areas have long had a particularly high incidence of gender-based violence (as well as other forms of violence), and travel can be particularly restricted in such locations.⁹⁵ However, fear for women's safety when they are away from the home is widespread in Myanmar, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the level of fear may be greater than the actual threat in many areas. Better data is required on the prevalence of violence against women in Myanmar to determine the extent to which perceptions diverge from reality.

2.3.6) Education, Experience, and Skills

Differences in education levels between men and women do not seem to be a key factor in the gender differences in participation. Although it was traditionally the case that men in Myanmar were more likely to be educated than women, and men on the whole are still more likely to be literate than women (95.6 percent vs. 89.3 percent),⁹⁶ any gender bias in favor of male formal educational attainment has not been extreme for at least several decades. Data from 1990 shows that women were then already more likely than men to receive tertiary education.⁹⁷ And among the younger generations, females are considerably more likely than males to complete a high level of education. Recent data shows that 34.2 percent of females complete upper secondary school, whereas only 25.7 percent of males do so. Females also make up 65.2 percent of undergraduate students, 80.5 percent of masters students, and 80.8 percent of PhD students in Myanmar.⁹⁸

Although formal educational attainment appears to be insignificant in explaining women's low level of representation in decision-making positions, their historically widespread exclusion from these positions means that they have had less opportunity to acquire relevant skills and experience. Working in NGOs seems to be one way that women have been able to acquire these skills.⁹⁹ If women's representation in decision-making positions continues to increase, then the gender gap in experience and informally acquired skills will decline. However, such change will occur slowly, and this process can be hastened by providing training in leadership and specific technical skills to current and potential female leaders (see Section 3.2.4).

South Asia," *World Development* 38 no. 1 (2010): 107; Beaman, L., E. Duflo, R. Pande, and P. Topalova. 2010. "Political reservation and substantive representation: Evidence from Indian village councils." Paper presented at the 2010 India Policy Forum. New Delhi: National Council of Applied Economic Research: 10-12.

⁹² Lakshmi Iyer and others, "The Power of Political Voice: Women's Political Representation and Crime in India," *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4 no. 4 (2012): 176-85.

⁹³ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 28; Röell, 34.

⁹⁴ Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain*, 65.

⁹⁵ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 28.

⁹⁶ Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development (MNPED) and UNDP, *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey in Myanmar (2009-2010): Poverty Profile* (Yangon: MNPED, June 2011): 90.

⁹⁷ Röell, 24.

⁹⁸ UNESCO, *Comprehensive Education Sector Review: Higher Education in Myanmar* (Yangon: UNESCO, 2013): 13.

⁹⁹ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 24-25.

2.3.7) Institutional Factors

Institutional factors can be important for shaping men's and women's ability to participate. For example, multi-country studies have found that women in countries that have first-past-the-post, majoritarian electoral systems are less likely to be selected as candidates, and subsequently be elected as MPs, than those in countries that have proportional representation electoral systems.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the electoral system in place in Myanmar for Union and state/region parliaments is likely to limit women's access to electoral office.

2.3.8) Deliberate Actions by Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations

The actions of both governmental and non-governmental organizations working for economic and social change can potentially have a large impact on the gender equality of participation in governance. Although promoting gender equality has not been a key goal for many of these actors, when it has been, some progress has typically been achieved. The role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting or retarding change is discussed further in Section 3.

¹⁰⁰ Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo, 7.

3. Approaches to Increase the Gender Equality of Participation in the Governance of Myanmar

3.1) Recent and Current Efforts

3.1.1) Government of Myanmar

The National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, 2013-2022 (NSPAW) was published in 2013 and calls for the improvement of “systems, structures, and practices to ensure women’s equal participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels of society.”¹⁰¹ It suggests a variety of measures to achieve this aim, including the application of quotas “to ensure women’s participation in decision-making in legislative, judicial, and executive bodies.”¹⁰² However, despite NSPAW being a “government commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of women throughout our country,”¹⁰³ it is a non-binding commitment, and the government of 2011-15 took very little practical action to improve the gender equality of participation.

An exception to this general neglect has been the piloting of the NCDDP, which began in three townships in 2013 and was due to expand to 27 townships by the end of 2015.¹⁰⁴ The World Bank-funded NCDDP targets poor, rural communities and is intended to promote citizen participation in local decision-making so as to improve communities’ access to basic infrastructure. The World Bank was able to persuade the Department of Rural Development to adopt a quota mandating 50 percent male and 50 percent female representation on the village tract committees created for this project. These committees are the key decision-making bodies for deciding which infrastructure projects will receive funds. Training for women committee members to increase their confidence and capacity to contribute to decision-making is also part of the project design. Each village tract within the NCDDP’s selected townships is due to receive an average of 132,000 US dollars over the four-year cycle of the project, so gender equality of participation is being promoted in governance bodies that control significant budgets at the local level.¹⁰⁵

It is still too early to know what steps the new government will take to promote gender equality of participation in governance, and the NLD’s manifesto did not include a description of any planned policies in this regard.¹⁰⁶ However, it should be noted that the manifesto dedicates a page to women’s issues, covering the following topics: (1) effective implementation of existing laws to ensure gender equality in business, government, and the social sphere; (2) ending “the persecution, insecurity, violence, and other forms of harassment and bullying suffered by women”; (3) equal land tenure rights; (4) equal pay and promotion in the workplace; (5) gender equality of educational access; and (6) access to prenatal and postnatal care and maternity leave. It should also be noted that the NLD has done considerably more than the USDP to promote gender equality of participation within its own party, including having a high percentage of female members on the CEC and adopting a policy in late 2013 that gives preference to selecting women, ethnic minorities, and youth as parliamentary candidates when there is no clear difference in ability.

At the beginning of her political career, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi tended to shy away from speaking about women’s rights, preferring to stress instead the shared suffering of both men and women under

¹⁰¹ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs (MNCWA), “National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, 2013-2022 (Nay Pyi Taw: MNCWA, 2013): 21.

¹⁰² Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, 23.

¹⁰³ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, 1.

¹⁰⁴ N.b. it is currently planned to expand the project to 63 townships by 2019. See Bart Robertson, Cindy Joeline, and Lauren Dunn, *Local Development Funds in Myanmar: An Initial Review* (MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, forthcoming 2015): 4-5.

¹⁰⁵ World Bank, *Myanmar – National Community Driven Development Project: Additional Financing* (Washington: The World Bank, 2015): 4, 19; author’s correspondence with World Bank staff.

¹⁰⁶ National League for Democracy, “2015 Election Manifesto – Authorised Translation” (2015): 22.

military rule. Over time, however, she has been increasingly vocal about the need to work for women's rights,¹⁰⁷ and despite having publicly declared her opposition to the introduction of parliamentary quotas, her government can be expected to be considerably more supportive of efforts to increase the gender equality of participation than the previous government was.

3.1.2) Political Parties

A small number of parties running in the last election adopted voluntary targets for a minimum number of female candidates. However, only the National Democratic Force met its target, and the majority view in most parties appears to be opposed to mandatory quotas.¹⁰⁸

The SNLD has not adopted any formal policies to increase women's participation. However, when interviewed for this report, Sai Nyunt Lwin, the party's general secretary, said that he would not be opposed to the introduction of mandatory gender quotas for all parties.¹⁰⁹ SNLD has also been one of the more active political parties in taking advantage of the political training opportunities offered to women party members by Phan Tee Eain and member organizations of the Women's League of Burma. The proportion of the SNLD's MPs who are female (16.7 percent) is higher than for any other party that won five seats or more in the 2015 elections.¹¹⁰ Sai Nyunt Lwin was keen to stress that, although the membership and decision-making bodies of the party are male dominated, all of the party's township committees have at least one woman on them.¹¹¹

The ANP has a policy saying that participation by women and youth is important; however, it was reported in an interview conducted for this report that the party has not taken any practical steps to address this issue. In addition to the male dominance of the CEC, it can also be noted that there is very little representation of younger voices on this body, with the only "young" member being a 39-year-old male. The interviewee from the ANP also stated that most of her fellow party members do not see increasing women's participation as a priority.¹¹²

It was not possible in the course of this research to ascertain whether USDP had any particular strategies or policies for raising female participation within the party. However, it does not seem likely that the USDP has been particularly active in this regard.

3.1.3) The Peace Process

The peace process has hitherto had very low gender equality of participation, and gender considerations have received little attention in the discussions. In an attempt to help remedy this, the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) was formed in 2014 to advocate for greater gender equality in this crucial sphere of governance.¹¹³ AGIPP initially focused on getting a quota mandating a minimum 30 percent representation of women in bodies responsible for political dialogue related to the peace process.¹¹⁴ This call has now been heeded, with the participants at the January 2016 Union peace conference talks agreeing "to enable at least 30 percent participation by women at different levels of political dialogues according to the political dialogue framework of [the] Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement."¹¹⁵ However, it should be noted that, as of mid-February 2016, there is no clarity on which

¹⁰⁷ Harriden, 233-34.

¹⁰⁸ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation*.

¹⁰⁹ Field Interview with Sai Nyunt Lwin.

¹¹⁰ Author's analysis of database of MPs elected in November 2015 and subsequently approved by the Union Election Commission, supplied to the author by the Gender Equality Network in February 2016

¹¹¹ Field Interview with Sai Nyunt Lwin.

¹¹² Field Interview with Daw Soe Soe Thay.

¹¹³ See www.agipp.org

¹¹⁴ AGIPP, *Women, Peace, and Security Policy-Making in Myanmar*.

¹¹⁵ "Peace Process Quota no Guarantee for Women's Participation," *Myanmar Now*, 15 February 2016. <http://www.myanmar-now.org/news/i/?id=09b86529-94a1-4620-9f4b-57de3a8b76b8> [accessed 21 March 2016].

bodies this will apply to, or how it will be implemented.

3.1.4) Myanmar Civil Society and International Development Organizations

The combined membership of the Women's Organizations Network of Myanmar (WON) and the Gender Equality Network (GEN) includes most of the domestic and international non-governmental organizations working on gender equality and women's rights in Myanmar. The recent exercise to map the member organizations of these networks shows that a large number of them are already working in the NSPAW area of "women and decision-making" (36 WON member organizations and 35 GEN member organizations).¹¹⁶ Promoting "women's participation in leadership and public life" was one of GEN's five, high-level strategic objectives under their 2012-15 strategic plan, while "gender equality in governance and public life" is one of the three key objectives identified in the 2016-18 strategic plan.¹¹⁷

GEN and WON member organizations working on women and leadership/women and public life have primarily been engaged in advocacy work and providing leadership trainings to women.¹¹⁸ Working in Loikaw and Demosoe Townships (Kayah) since 2011, CARE Myanmar has implemented what is perhaps the most comprehensive and holistic approach to promoting women's participation. CARE stresses the long-term nature of its program, and the need to (1) increase the "individual agency" of women (through building their knowledge, skills, confidence, and awareness), and (2) influence "relations" (with family members, peers, friends, religious leaders) and "structure" (norms, tradition, policy, law, religion, regulations). CARE reports that it has already had some successes with its programming. Some women in the target townships have become 10-household and 100-household heads, and women have taken on leadership roles in other projects, like the woman who became chairperson of her village's Green Emerald Fund committee. CARE's program works directly with citizens, but it also involves engagement with township civil servants and state governmental bodies.¹¹⁹

Over the last 20 years, a number of Myanmar women's organizations operating in exile (primarily in Thailand) have been engaged in research and advocacy work to influence domestic policy and the policies of other countries towards Myanmar. Since 2011, there has been increasing space for Myanmar civil society and international development partners to conduct research and advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality and participation in governance. Despite the large number of non-governmental organizations now carrying out research, advocacy, and program activities promoting gender equality in decision-making and leadership, these organizations have had relatively little interaction with the government (outside of the MoSWRR) or political parties. One exception to this has been UNDP: they have been working with the Union Civil Service Board and the Institute for Development Administration, and these bodies now have gender trainers, and a gender module in their curricula.¹²⁰

Of the organizations working with political parties, Phan Tee Eain has probably been the most prominent, using their Women's Leadership Academy to work with a number of parties (although not

¹¹⁶ The NSPAW areas that have a higher number of GEN and WON members working in them are: women and livelihoods; women, education, and training; women and health; violence against women; and women and human rights. See Nang Phyu Phyu Lin, *WON-GEN Member Mapping Report, September 2014-March 2015* (WON-GEN, 2015): 9.

¹¹⁷ Gender Equality Network, *2014 Annual Report* (2014): 2; Gender Equality Network, *Strategic Plan, 2016-18* (2015): 16.

¹¹⁸ Field Interviews with GEN and various INGOs, December 2015.

¹¹⁹ Field Interview with Nilar Tun, December 2015. N.b. the Green Emerald Fund is a fund recently introduced by the Department for Rural Development that provides low-interest loans to individuals for agriculture and other entrepreneurial activities. Although a woman being made chairperson of this committee should probably be interpreted as a positive step for gender equality and the individual welfare of this woman, it should be noted that local government officials in Kayah State have reported facing difficulties getting anybody to act as chairperson on local committees because of the workload that comes with this role. See Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹²⁰ Field Interview with Allison Hope Moore, UNDP program specialist – civil society and media, December 2015.

the NLD or USDP) to provide capacity building workshops, advocacy workshops, and exposure visits (to India and Sweden) for women party members. Around 60-70 of the women party members that received their training went on to contest seats in the 2015 elections.¹²¹ Several Thailand-based women's organizations, such as the Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), have also provided trainings to women members of ethnic political parties.¹²² Prior to the 2015 elections, Oxfam worked with the Gender Development Initiative in Ayeyarwaddy and Yangon regions to provide trainings to female potential parliamentary candidates and run a public awareness campaign to increase the acceptance of female leaders among citizens.¹²³

It is hoped that in the coming years, international development partners and Myanmar civil society will increasingly engage with the Myanmar government and political parties on the issue of gender equality of participation, and share their technical expertise. International organizations can also provide funding for these activities, and Myanmar civil society can use their networks of members and contacts to increase citizen engagement with the government and political parties. However, it is also important to expand existing efforts, primarily focused outside of the government and political parties, to promote gender equality in leadership and public life.

3.2) Future Plans and Opportunities

3.2.1) Future Plans of Development Organizations Interviewed for This Report

When interviewed for this report, most development organizations had not yet finalized their plans for programs to raise women's participation over the next few years, as they were waiting for the new government to form and the opportunities for engagement to become clearer. Nevertheless, in addition to continuing and expanding their current advocacy work and leadership training, they mentioned several other new or expanded strategies, including working at the village tract and township levels to raise women's voices in local planning and budgeting, increasing the use of music and the news media to improve the effectiveness of public information campaigns, and doing more to engage men on gender issues. UNDP is also currently negotiating with relevant stakeholders to set up a caucus for women MPs in the Union Parliament.

3.2.2) Engaging Men and Changing Social Norms

Over the last one or two years there has been growing recognition within organizations working on women's rights and gender equality issues in Myanmar of the need to engage more with men, and GEN has recently created an "engaging men" working group comprising individuals from various member organizations. Engaging men is important, because male attitudes crucially shape household attitudes towards women's participation in governance; they determine how men respond to women when they do participate; and they affect the broader social context determining men's and women's opportunities for participation.

In addition to the household and community levels, it is essential to engage men in government, political parties, EAGs, and civil society. Some successful attempts have already been made, for example the gender sensitization training that CARE has delivered to local government officials in Kayah State.¹²⁴ However, strategies for "engaging men" are still in their infancy in Myanmar, and it is currently unclear which approaches are effective and which are not. Acquiring a better understanding of this will be key in the coming years.

¹²¹ Field Interview with Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Phan Tee Eain director, December 2015.

¹²² Field Interview with Sai Nyunt Lwin.

¹²³ Field Interview with Oxfam, December 2015. N.b. the training covered topics including campaigning, financing, gender issues, and debating skills. For future iterations of this program, it is planned to include exposure trips abroad (possibly to Indonesia and/or Cambodia).

¹²⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

Hitherto, many of the activities of development organizations promoting women’s empowerment and leadership have focused on trainings to raise women’s knowledge, skills, and confidence. Although such trainings are certainly needed – as reported, by women who received them, in GEN’s *Taking the Lead* report, and by several interviewed for this report – the broader social context must also change if significant gains in gender equality of participation are to be achieved. This is closely related to the need to engage men, and the women interviewed for *Taking the Lead* mentioned the need to change attitudes within their own organizations, in political parties and the government, and among friends, colleagues, and the public.¹²⁵

CARE’s work in Loikaw and Demosoe townships is perhaps the most concerted and sustained effort so far to combine women’s leadership trainings with attempts to change the social structure more broadly. No impact evaluations of this program have yet been published, but it appears to have high the potential for promoting sustained changes in the gender equality of participation. One possible downside of this approach, however, is that it is costly in both financial and human resources, and it may be difficult to scale up.

3.2.3) The Role of the Media

Access to international media has been shown to affect gender norms in a number of developing countries.¹²⁶ Access to media sources such as cable television and, even more so, the Internet is expanding rapidly in Myanmar, and can be expected to promote greater acceptance of female leadership.¹²⁷ Greater exposure to role models of female leaders in Myanmar and other countries is also likely to give more women the confidence to seek leadership positions. These changes will take place even in the absence of deliberate efforts to use media to promote gender equality in decision-making, but deliberate efforts can strengthen this effect. Several individuals interviewed for this report also suggested that music can play an important role with other media in influencing social norms and promoting women’s leadership.

3.2.4) Trainings and Exposure Visits

The women leaders from political parties, NGOs, and CBOs interviewed for *Taking the Lead* who had attended leadership training workshops found the training useful. Women from CBOs typically referred to the “knowledge” they gained; women from NGOs mentioned improvements in specific leadership skills such as public speaking, prioritizing issues, motivating themselves and others, and critical thinking; and women from political parties spoke of their increased understanding of women’s rights, legal issues, and governance issues. The women also spoke positively of the opportunity to network with other women leaders that the trainings provided. However, only around half of the interviewees received follow-up support such as mentoring or coaching after the training. Providing such support was a key recommendation for improving the effectiveness of trainings. Women from political parties also mentioned that training workshops were generally too short and provided only basic knowledge on introductory topics, and suggested that they should focus more on technical skills and exposure to political systems in other countries.¹²⁸ It is important to note that there have been very few leadership trainings specifically targeting women in Myanmar’s civil service,¹²⁹ although ActionAid plans to begin trainings soon for female township-level officials.¹³⁰

Women political party members clearly want more training in technical skills. In some cases, it may

¹²⁵ Field Interviews, December 2015; Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead*, 10.

¹²⁶ The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*, 268.

¹²⁷ Although see Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain*, Section 12, for ways in which the media can also perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequalities.

¹²⁸ Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead*, 11-12. N.b. for a list of the various ways to improve leadership training suggested by women from CBOs and NGOs, please see p. 12 of the report.

¹²⁹ Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead*, 21.

¹³⁰ Field Interview with Melanie Hilton, ActionAid women’s rights advisor, December 2015.

make sense to incorporate this into leadership trainings. In other cases, separate trainings focused on specific technical skills may be preferable. Sometimes it may be more appropriate or practical for such trainings to be given to mixed-gender groups.

During the last government, exposure visits for MPs and political party members typically involved going abroad. Such trips are undoubtedly useful, but donors and development agencies have overlooked the potential benefits of exposure trips and knowledge exchanges within Myanmar for subnational political actors. Different state and region, municipal, township, and village tract bodies face different challenges, and have progressed at different rates. Increasing the opportunities for subnational actors in Myanmar to learn from one another could help to spread new discoveries and best practices, and is less costly than sending people abroad. If certain government bodies at state/region or township levels take the lead in trying to increase the gender equality of participation or make policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery more gender equitable, then development actors should provide support for other subnational actors to learn from them.

3.2.5) Local Development Programs

“Community-driven development” (CDD) projects have been a popular approach in recent decades for donors and international development organizations, most notably the World Bank, looking to increase citizen participation in decision-making and the provision of public services, with the concomitant benefits that increased participation can potentially provide. Such projects often include measures to increase the gender equality of participation in local decision-making. In some cases this has included quotas mandating gender equality of representation in decision-making bodies, as is the case in the NCDDP currently rolled out in Myanmar.

A CDD program in Afghanistan, where gender inequality is extremely high, included quotas mandating equal male and female representation. This program was found to result in women having increased levels of activity outside the household, and in men becoming more accepting of female participation in local governance. However, it did not lead to a change in attitudes regarding women’s role in society more broadly or the position of women in the family.¹³¹ This suggests that it will be necessary to go beyond providing only trainings and quotas if social norms are to be significantly and sustainably altered. A CDD program in Sierra Leone was found to be fairly effective in achieving many of its goals, but the gender equality of participation in decision-making remained unchanged,¹³² despite specific measures to increase it.¹³³ Again, this indicates that making local decision-making more gender equal is not straightforward, and a broad and sustained approach is often required.

A number of international NGOs and at least one Myanmar NGO (METTA Development Foundation) involved in creating local decision-making bodies to improve the provision of public services have included a strong focus on gender equality of participation in these bodies.¹³⁴ This approach is not universal, however, and there is insufficient information to judge the success of these interventions.

CFGs are an important area of local governance for gender equality of participation. But CFGs have received scarce attention from development organizations working on women’s rights and gender equality issues. Meanwhile, development organizations that are working on CFGs, alongside the male-dominated MOECA (see Table 4), have made little effort to address the extremely high levels of gender inequality in CFG decision-making bodies.

¹³¹ Andrew Beath, Fotini Christia, and Ruben Enikolopov, “Empowering Women through Development Aid: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan,” *American Political Science Review* 107 no. 03 (2013): 554-55.

¹³² Katherine Casey, Rachel Glennerster, and Edward Miguel, *The GoBifo Project Evaluation Report: Assessing the Impact of Community-Driven Development in Sierra Leone, 3ie Impact Evaluation Report 3* (New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, 2013), especially p. 33.

¹³³ E.g., separate women’s and youth groups being formed in each village, and a woman having to be present on the decision-making committee in each village, and a woman having to be a signatory on the joint bank account.

¹³⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; Minoletti, *Women’s Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 33.

3.2.6) Quotas

As already mentioned, the NCDDP includes a quota mandating 50:50 representation of males and females on the relevant village tract committees. In India, the use of quotas in local governance has not only raised the gender equality of statistical representation, but has also in some cases led to changes in budget allocations and who receives public services, improvements in the quality of public services, a reduction in the bias of male citizens against female leaders, and a greater likelihood that women will report crimes committed against them.¹³⁵ A study of the introduction of quotas at both national and subnational levels in Rwanda concluded that they helped to increase women's self-respect, raised the willingness of women to speak out in public, increased girls' access to education, and led to more equal bargaining power and decision-making within households.¹³⁶

The impact of quotas has varied according to the nature of the quota system and the political and social context. In a number of cases, quotas appear to have had little or no impact on the gender equality of substantive or symbolic representation, and in some instances they have even failed to substantially alter the gender equality of statistical representation.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, a well-designed quota system, particularly when combined with appropriate additional measures (such as trainings and public awareness campaigns), remains one of the most potentially powerful tools for increasing the gender equality of statistical, substantive, and symbolic representation. Quotas mandating a minimum level of gender equality of participation can be considered for a wide range of governance bodies and positions, including Union MPs, state/region MPs, the elected committees at township level, village tract administrators, and various committees at the village tract and village levels.

3.2.7) Actions to Promote Participation at Local Levels

The 2012 Ward or Village Tract Administration Law introduced indirect elections for the position of VTA. The elections have not all been conducted exactly as called for in the law, but in theory, household heads elect someone to represent their designated group of 10 households, then the 10-household heads elect the village tract/ward administrator from among themselves.¹³⁸ Most household heads in Myanmar are men, so in practice this electorate is highly gender unequal, restricting women's participation and voice. It is recommended that this system of indirect elections be replaced by direct elections in which all adult citizens are able to vote for their preferred candidate for VTA.

Currently, opportunities for citizen participation in local decision-making in Myanmar vary greatly among village tracts and townships. A key reason is the absence of any rules stipulating when, or for what reasons, local officials should meet with the public, leaving it to the whims of local village tract and township administrators.¹³⁹ Although some local flexibility ought to be maintained, there should be a policy that stipulates a minimum level of engagement between VTAs and the public – an open, public meeting at least once a month, for example. Similar requirements for key committees at the township and state/region levels of government might also be worth considering.

The 2012 Ward or Village Tract Administration Law officially abolished the position of 100-household head (a position that in rural areas was equivalent to village head). Although this change was probably justified in urban areas, in rural areas, where the village is a natural social unit and travel times can make it difficult for citizens to attend meetings outside of the village, it is problematic to have no official representation at the village level. In practice, village heads continue to play a key role in rural

¹³⁵ Lori A. Beaman and others, *Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?*, 1516-32; Chattopadhyay and Duflo, 1431; Duflo, "Why Political Reservations?" 671, 674; Iyer and others, 176-85.

¹³⁶ Jennie Burnet, "Women's Empowerment and Cultural Change in Rwanda," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Fanneschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 196-99.

¹³⁷ Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo, *Impact of Gender Quotas*, 6-12.

¹³⁸ *The Ward or Village Tract Administration Law*, 2012, Section 7.

¹³⁹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

areas, and township and village tract administrators still generally recognize their value. In some villages, these individuals already play an important role promoting citizen participation in decision-making.¹⁴⁰ It is recommended that the position of 100-household head/village head be formally reinstated in rural areas, and that rules be introduced stipulating a minimum level of engagement of this individual with the public.

Full citizen participation in subnational decision-making requires not only that public forums be held to which all are invited, but also that all citizens be able to contribute. Increasing the ability of all to contribute requires, in part, building the confidence and capacity of currently marginalized groups, such as women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, and those from lower socioeconomic classes. Also needed, however, will be a significant change of attitude among the government staff who lead such meetings. Currently, public “consultations” often involve one or more officials speaking to all present, with little or no opportunity for the rest of the attendees to contribute. Raising citizens’ voices can also be achieved through small practical measures such as providing a community suggestion box, or by changing the times of meetings to make it easier for most people to attend.¹⁴¹

3.2.8) Women’s Organizations Operating at Local Levels

In many townships in Myanmar there are still no local women’s civil society organizations (CSOs). As one interviewee noted, these can be a vital avenue for promoting women’s participation in public life and getting women’s interests better represented in local decision-making. The interviewee went on to suggest that donors and development agencies provide micro-grants and organizational development support to help address this CSO gap.¹⁴²

MWAF and MMCWA have nationwide coverage within the government-controlled areas of Myanmar from the village-tract level upwards. They are able to mobilize a large number of members to engage in development activities, and can provide women with leadership experience that can help prepare them for other governance roles. Several of the female VTAs interviewed by UNDP had previously been members of MWAF and MMCWA,¹⁴³ and a number of female USDP MPs who served in Parliament in 2011-15 had also been active in these organizations prior to becoming MPs. Members of one of the organizations interviewed for this report spoke positively of their experiences engaging with these organizations in certain localities, praising the commitment of the members there.¹⁴⁴

Despite the positive role that MWAF and MMCWA can sometimes play, these organizations also have some notable drawbacks. A number of senior figures in these organizations have conservative positions on gender roles and women’s rights, and have sometimes sided with the government of the day to oppose women’s rights.¹⁴⁵ Though less prevalent than before, the practice of women assuming leadership roles in these organizations because their husband is the senior official at the corresponding level of government is still fairly common. This is antithetical to promoting equal opportunities for participation, and ultimately reinforces male dominance. And while accurate data is unavailable, active participation in these organizations appears to be considerably higher among Bamar women than ethnic minority women; therefore, any development organizations looking to work with MWAF or MMCWA must take care not to exacerbate ethnic inequalities within the program area.

In sum, the wide coverage of MWAF and MMCWA, and the commitment and skills of some of their people, can sometimes make them good partners for development organizations looking to promote gender equality. However, the nature of these organizations in the locale of a particular project, and the social context in which they are operating, should be carefully assessed. It should also be noted

¹⁴⁰ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁴¹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁴² Field Interview with Allison Hope Moore, December 2015.

¹⁴³ Röell, 27.

¹⁴⁴ Field Interview with GEN, December 2015.

¹⁴⁵ See Harriden, 257-65.

that the future scale and influence of these organizations is currently somewhat unclear given their historically close links to the USDP.

3.2.9) The Need for Coordination

As in many other sectors, many international development organizations are starting to work for the first time on promoting gender equality of leadership and participation in governance in Myanmar. The funding available for Myanmar organizations working in this field is also increasing. Some local organizations are working in this field for the first time, and a number of existing organizations are expanding their programs. The potential benefits from increasing gender equality of participation in governance are considerable, and the changing political landscape has made it easier to work productively in this field. As such, this increased attention and funding is welcome. However, this sudden expansion also carries potential risks, including a possible lack of coordination resulting in overlapping projects, and insufficient numbers of appropriately skilled staff to implement the projects. And international organizations newly entering the field may lack sufficient knowledge of the country to design appropriate programs and effectively carry out their operations.

3.2.10) Understanding and Prioritizing the Factors That Shape the Gender (in)Equality of Participation

Section 2.3 described many of the key factors influencing men's and women's ability and opportunity to participate in governance, and suggested tentatively that time constraints and resistance to, and bias against, female leadership are two of the most important. The various factors listed in Section 2.3 have been described in previous research,¹⁴⁶ and are already well known among those working in this field, but their relative importance is still poorly understood. Many are interrelated, and all are shaped by cultural norms. Further research and discussion of these factors and their relative importance is needed to target effort and resources more effectively.

¹⁴⁶ The Gender and Development Initiative, *Gender-Based Constraints*, 8-10, 21; Löfving, 13-14, 17-19, 29-32, 58-64; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 24-35.

4. Gender (in)Equality and Policymaking, Budgeting, and Public Service Delivery

4.1) Why Incorporating Gender Equality Considerations into Policymaking, Budgeting, and Public Service Delivery Matters

Gender inequalities in a country's economy, society, and access to public services are unfair and reduce the welfare of the "less equal" gender (typically women), but they also limit economic and social development in general. To give just a few examples:

- Inequality in property rights and inheritance rights: A lack of property rights reduces the incentive for women to invest time, money, or other resources in land or other forms of property.¹⁴⁷ Such underinvestment limits productivity, thereby reducing household and national income. Although Myanmar's national laws support equal property and inheritance rights for both genders, customary law differs in some places and is frequently given precedence. For example, in Kachin and Chin communities, women are typically completely excluded from inheritance.¹⁴⁸
- Inequality in public service provision: In many countries, women and girls spend a lot of time on unpaid work, due to underinvestment in certain types of public infrastructure such as electricity and water supply. Improved provision of these public utilities would reduce women's and girls' time burdens, and therefore give them more time for paid work, study, and/or leisure.¹⁴⁹ In countries where there has historically been underinvestment in these utilities, increased investment can deliver particularly high returns in terms of economic growth (due to increased labour force participation and increased skills of the workforce) and citizen wellbeing (due to increased household income and/or female leisure). The potential benefits from such a reallocation of spending appear to be clearly applicable to Myanmar, with electricity and, to a lesser extent, water supply currently being highly inadequate or totally non-existent for many households.¹⁵⁰
- Gender differences in how income is allocated: In most countries, it has been found that when women's income increases, they invest a larger proportion of the increase in their children's human capital than men do if their income increases.¹⁵¹ Whether the income takes the form of wages or government payments to the head of household, gender inequalities can affect the welfare of the family and of society at large.

By challenging the kind of gender inequalities described above, adopting a gender perspective in policy-making and budgeting can lead to a more efficient use of government resources. An appreciation of gender differences in access to public services can also increase efficiency and equitability. For example, women in Myanmar are typically less able to travel than men, especially if it requires staying away from home overnight, and this ought to be considered when providing trainings, healthcare, and a range of other public services.¹⁵²

Increasing citizen participation, and the equality of participation, is in most cases welfare enhancing in itself. And by harnessing the knowledge of more members of society, it can improve the quality of decision-making and result in more effective and efficient delivery of public services. As already noted, men and women have different preferences with regard to policies and spending, and so accounting for, and responding to, these differences will also increase equitability.

¹⁴⁷ Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development," 1068-69.

¹⁴⁸ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, 19.

¹⁴⁹ Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development," 1058-59.

¹⁵⁰ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁵¹ The World Bank, 151.

¹⁵² Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

Policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery ought to be considered hand-in-hand. As the World Bank states, “Government targets are more likely to be achieved when budgets are prepared in a manner that is deliberately supportive of government policies.”¹⁵³ Yet, at the moment, Myanmar’s budget largely follows prior practice, and there is little central strategic oversight or control of spending allocations.¹⁵⁴ Although some measures to promote gender equality can be relatively low cost in budget terms (e.g., removing any laws that explicitly discriminate against women), policies aimed at promoting gender equality, as with most government policies, need adequate funding to be implemented effectively.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, paying attention to gender differences in access to public services will allow budgeted funds to be spent more effectively, and lead to greater gender equality in budget outputs and development outcomes.

4.2) The Current Situation in Myanmar

4.2.1) Government of Myanmar’s Commitments under CEDAW and NSPAW

In 1997, Myanmar became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In 2008, GoM reiterated that CEDAW is “directly applicable” in Myanmar law.¹⁵⁶ CEDAW requires that states “agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women,” and “take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women.”¹⁵⁷ The CEDAW Committee has indicated that states have obligations to use budgetary measures to achieve women’s equality.¹⁵⁸ Further, Myanmar is also a signatory to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPA), which states:

Full and effective implementation of the Platform for Action...will require the integration of a gender perspective in budgetary decisions on policies and programs, as well as the adequate financing of specific programs for securing equality between women and men...Governments should make efforts to systematically review how women benefit from public-sector expenditures, [and] adjust budgets to ensure equality of access to public expenditures.¹⁵⁹

To facilitate implementation of CEDAW and BPA, in 2013 GoM published the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women. NSPAW covers 12 priority areas for carrying out CEDAW and BPA.¹⁶⁰ For 11 of these priority areas, NSPAW calls for an “increase in the participation of women in the development and implementation of these policies.”¹⁶¹ For all 12 priority areas, NSPAW states that laws and policies should be reviewed, developed, and applied so as to promote the rights of women and girls – doing so

¹⁵³ The World Bank, *Public Financial Management Performance Report: Republic of Union of Myanmar* (Washington: World Bank, May 2013): 51. based on the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA)

¹⁵⁴ The World Bank, *Public Financial Management Performance Report*, 51-54. based on the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA)

¹⁵⁵ Diane Elson, *Budgeting for Women’s Rights: Monitoring Government Budgets for Compliance with CEDAW* (New York: UNIFEM, 2006): 32.

¹⁵⁶ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, “Responses to the List of Issues and Questions with Regard to the Consideration of the Combined 2nd and 3rd Periodic Report: Myanmar,” 2008.

¹⁵⁷ UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, 1979, Article 2.

¹⁵⁸ Elson, *Budgeting for Women’s Rights*, 13.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations, “Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women” (1995), paragraphs 345-46.

¹⁶⁰ The 12 priority areas are: women and livelihoods; women, education, and training; women and health; violence against women; women and emergencies; women and the economy; women and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; women and human rights; women and the media; women and the environment; the girl child.

¹⁶¹ The only priority area for which this sentence is not included is women and decision-making; the rest of the text for this priority area would make including this additional statement superfluous.

in accordance with CEDAW and BPA is frequently mentioned. Further, NSPAW calls for the “allocation of budget, human, and material resources to the above-mentioned activities by all stakeholders including government and non-government organizations.”

Unfortunately, despite NSPAW’s bold aims, it has so far had very little impact on actual policymaking or budgeting, and there has been little commitment shown by Parliament or state entities outside of the MoSWRR – a ministry that in FY 2014-15 received just 0.1 percent of the government budget.¹⁶² It is also a problem that, as yet, the implementation strategy for NSPAW has not been finished, and completion appears to be still some way off, making it difficult to undertake practical policy action.

4.2.2) Recent Legislative and Policy Changes

The term of the last government saw some limited legislative progress towards promoting women’s rights and gender equality, including the development of a draft Prevention of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) Law, and certain aspects of the land use policy (although the provisions to promote gender equality and women’s rights in the current drafts of these documents are not as strong as they could be). GEN and its member organizations have also been able to raise gender equality issues within Myanmar’s universal periodic review process. However, 2015 saw the passing of what are commonly referred to as the “four bills to protect race and religion.” These bills contain provisions that clearly contradict Myanmar’s commitments under CEDAW, and are regressive for women’s rights.¹⁶³ And there is little understanding within government of the need to consider gender differences when designing and implementing policies or allocating budgets.

4.2.3) Gender Differences in Policy and Budget Preferences

Research conducted in other countries clearly shows that men and women have different priorities for what policies governments should adopt and how budgets should be allocated. Conclusive data for Myanmar is lacking, and there are methodological problems, but the available evidence strongly suggests that there are gender differences in budget and policy preferences in Myanmar as well. It seems that women in Myanmar give higher priority to health and education, whereas men give higher priority to transportation (including roads). It can also be noted that the services provided by the dramatically underfunded MoSWRR are far more closely aligned with the activities that women spend their time on than men.¹⁶⁴

Although spending on education and health has increased rapidly in the last few years, the Union budget for FY 2014-15 allocated less money to the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the MoSWRR *combined* than was given to the Ministries of Energy, Defense, or Power.¹⁶⁵ At the subnational level, just over half of state/region government expenditure was spent by the Public Works Department, which is responsible for building and maintaining roads and other forms of physical infrastructure.¹⁶⁶ Accurate data is not available, but anecdotal and impressionistic evidence suggests that road building has probably been the biggest item of expenditure at the township and village tract levels over the last few years. There is no doubt that Myanmar’s road network badly needs improving, but there are many other pressing infrastructure and social sector needs, and the bias of subnational spending towards road building would appear to reflect the male dominance of decision-making. This is perhaps an early indication of how decentralization of policymaking and budgetary authority can be accompanied by inequitable decision-making if strategies are not put in place to promote gender

¹⁶² Zaw Oo and others, “Making Public Finance Work for Children in Myanmar: An Overview of Public Finance Trends 2011-12 to 2014-15” (Yangon: UNICEF and MDRI-CESD, 2014): 27.

¹⁶³ Chloé White, *Protection for Whom? Violations of International Law in Myanmar’s New “Race and Religion Protection” Laws* (Washington: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security, 2015).

¹⁶⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁶⁵ Oo and others, 20.

¹⁶⁶ Giles Dickenson-Jones, S. Kanay De, and Andrea Smurra, *State and Region Public Finances in Myanmar* (Yangon: MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, October 2015): 34.

equality of participation.

4.2.4) Measuring Budget Outputs and Outcomes

Ultimately, including detailed analysis of budget outputs and outcomes by gender is the best way to use budgeting to promote gender equality. However, as described in a forthcoming report on “gender budgeting” in Myanmar, this will not be feasible in the immediate future, and there are more basic changes to the budgeting process that should be made first, including establishing clear policy priorities and setting budget allocations accordingly, establishing a universal and unified budget, increasing the transparency of budget allocations and processes, and increasing opportunities for all citizens to meaningfully participate in budget decision-making at all levels of government.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, there is already data available on a few budgetary outputs and outcomes issues related to gender in Myanmar. For example, Myanmar’s rate of maternal mortality – 200 per 100,000 live births – is worse than all but four countries in Asia (Afghanistan, Laos, Timor-Leste, and Yemen).¹⁶⁸ For another example, most of Myanmar’s states and regions allow only registered land titleholders to receive agricultural loans, and although gender-disaggregated data on recipients is unavailable, the titleholders in most households are men, so men have preferential access to the budgetary output of agricultural loans.¹⁶⁹

4.2.5) Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Accountability

The current absence or low quality of much of the budget data required to carry out effective quantitative analysis of Myanmar’s budget allocations, outputs, and outcomes,¹⁷⁰ means that decision-makers have much to gain from the insights provided by citizen participation in budgeting and public-service delivery. However, citizens’ ability to participate here is hampered not only by the factors described in Section 2.3, but also by the extremely low level of awareness they have of budgeting processes, responsibilities, and allocations. This low level of awareness is especially prevalent among women. In particular, the general ignorance as to which individuals are responsible for decisions on planning, budgeting, and public service delivery at subnational levels severely limits citizens’ ability to hold decision-makers to account. Many CSOs also have a low level of awareness on these issues, limiting their capacity to represent citizens’ voices and demand accountability. The lack of awareness is partly due to budget information not being publicly available, and to the ineffective communication of the information that is available.¹⁷¹

4.2.6) Existing Efforts in Myanmar to Integrate Gender Considerations with Policymaking, Budgeting, and Public Service Delivery

Political parties, and government bodies at all levels, generally have little idea on how to make budgeting and public service delivery more gender responsive, or why this would be desirable. As a result, these aspects of governance typically do not promote gender equality, and often reflect existing gender inequalities in Myanmar society. A rare exception is the preparatory documents for the Chin State government’s Five-Year Development Plan, 2016-21. These documents note the high levels of discrimination faced by women in Chin State; list five specific projects to improve women’s lives and reduce gender inequality, with estimated costs for each; and list anticipated development outcomes.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁶⁸ World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators> [accessed 31 October 2015].

¹⁶⁹ N.b. an exception to this national policy is in Mon State, where the high levels of male outmigration led to the state government introducing a policy under which the wife of a migrant can sign for and receive government loans with the approval of her VTA. See Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁷⁰ See Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; The World Bank, *Public Financial Management Performance Report*, 37-51.

¹⁷¹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁷² Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development, *Support to Chin State’s Comprehensive 5-Year Development Plan and Annual Planning 2016-2021, vol.1* (Yangon: MIID, October 2014): 18, 30, 34, 37-39.

The NLD and several other political parties have policy subcommittees dedicated to women's issues, and these committees are among the obvious potential partners for those looking to promote gender responsiveness in budgeting and public service delivery.

Over the last few years, GEN, WON, and many of their member organizations have been involved in policy advocacy on a number of issues, with varying levels of success, including gender-based violence and the draft PoVAW law, NSPAW, the four bills on race and religion, the National Land Use Policy, constitutional reform, and the universal periodic review.¹⁷³ And a number of Myanmar CSOs and INGOs have been active on budget issues (most notably through the "citizens' budget" process). However, hitherto, GEN and WON members have had little involvement in budgeting and public service delivery. In the last year or so, a number of member organizations of these networks have shown increasing interest in these topics, and ActionAid, CARE, Oxfam, and WON will soon publish a detailed report on gender budgeting in Myanmar.¹⁷⁴ GEN wants gender budgeting included in the government's Framework for Administrative Reform.¹⁷⁵ But aside from ActionAid, there have so far been few concrete plans made for programming work on these issues. The next section outlines some potential approaches that can be used by any organizations looking to make policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery more gender responsive.

4.3) Potential Approaches to Increase the Gender Equality of Policymaking, Budgeting, and Public Service Delivery in Myanmar

4.3.1) Increasing Participation in Decision-Making

The extent of male dominance in decision-making positions, the factors driving it, and its impact have already been discussed at some length. It should be added that any arguments justifying the exclusion of women from participation in budgetary decision-making based on a lack of education or technical skills are particularly invalid. Women are responsible for managing much of the day-to-day household budget, which is relevant when considering participation at the village/village tract level, and the occupations of finance and accounting are extremely feminized in Myanmar, with few men employed in such roles. Although gender-disaggregated data on university admissions by subject of study is not available, it can also be noted that, in contrast to most countries, the majority of economics students in Myanmar are female.

The experience of the Indian state of Kerala in the 1990s indicates how much the inequality of participation can be reduced when there is sufficient will to do so, even in a very short period of time. In 1996, Kerala embarked on a large devolution of budgetary authority to local levels of government (village councils, blocks, and districts), with these local entities gaining discretionary control of over 40 percent of the state's budget. Under the new system, the key decision-making took place at community-level public forums, lasting five to seven hours, that were open to all citizens and held at the beginning and end of the annual budget cycle. Citizen participation in these forums was high, comprising a little over 10 percent of the rural electorate in the first year. However, the rate of participation of women and scheduled castes/scheduled tribes (SC/STs) was well below average,¹⁷⁶ with both of these groups roughly half as likely to participate in the forums as the population in general. By the second year of the scheme, however, women's participation rate was 82 percent of the general population rate, and SC/STs were nearly 1.5 times as likely to participate as the population in general.¹⁷⁷ This rapid and dramatic improvement in the equality of participation has been attributed to the deliberate efforts of the state government and local NGOs (most notably the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad – KSSP), which conducted an extensive review of the scheme, focusing particularly on participation, and subsequently

¹⁷³ Field interview with GEN, December 2015.

¹⁷⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁷⁵ Field Interview with GEN, December 2015.

¹⁷⁶ N.b. SC/STs are caste/ethnic minorities that have historically faced a high level of discrimination in India.

¹⁷⁷ Shubham Chaudhuri and Patrick Heller, "The Plasticity of Participation: Evidence from a Participatory Governance Experiment" (ISERP Working Paper, 2003): 5-10.

adopted the following measures to increase the equality of participation:

- The State government increased the transparency and accuracy with which funds reserved for women and SC/STs were targeted to these groups, increased training programs for women and SC/STs, and changed some procedural rules.
- The KSSP and women's CSOs stepped up their efforts to mobilize these groups, and in hundreds of villages, women's neighborhood groups were formed with the aim of raising women's participation.¹⁷⁸

It would be overly optimistic to assume that such dramatic improvements in the equality of participation can easily be achieved in Myanmar. Kerala's government has long been relatively good at providing public services, and the state has a vibrant civil society, with the KSSP being particularly well established and influential.¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, this example gives hope for what can be achieved when there is a strong will to succeed, and when government and civil society are able to work together productively.

The potential approaches to increasing participation discussed in Section 3.2 remain relevant here, including the option of quotas. From a planning and budgeting perspective, it is worth noting that a considerable number of "local development funds" or other, similar types of funds have been introduced at the subnational level in the last few years. The funds include the Poverty Reduction Fund, the Rural Development Fund, the Border Affairs Fund, the Constituency Development Fund, the NCDDP, the Green Emerald Fund, and the Ministry of Cooperatives' Agricultural Loan Program.¹⁸⁰ Decision-making authority for how these funds are spent rests at one or more of the village tract, township, and state/region levels. In practice, which individuals or committees decide how funds are spent varies from place to place, and opportunities for broad-based citizen participation in these decision-making processes are highly variable for most of these funds. As yet, the NCDDP is the only program that includes a strong commitment to raising the equality of participation in all places, although in some locations local authorities, INGOs, constituency MPs, and Myanmar civil society are making efforts to promote the equality of participation in other funds.¹⁸¹ Much scope remains for government efforts to increase the equality of participation in the decision-making bodies of these funds.

4.3.2) Altering Budget Allocations

The government can also improve the gender equality of budgeting by increasing allocations to the "social sectors" (i.e., health, education, and social welfare). As mentioned previously, we do not have accurate data on the relative budget preferences of males and females in Myanmar, but the evidence strongly suggests that health and education are higher priorities for women than men. Increasing the share of the budget that goes to these sectors would also be popular with many men, and the need for considerable investment in these sectors to catch up with international levels of spending and standards of service provision is clear. Accordingly, such a change in budget allocations would seem to have little downside.¹⁸²

4.3.3) The Role of the Ministries of Finance and Planning

The Ministries of Finance and Planning currently have a low level of authority in planning and budgeting,

¹⁷⁸ Chaudhuri and Heller, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Chaudhuri and Heller, 5-6.

¹⁸⁰ For a description of these funds, please see Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; Robertson, Joeline and Dunn, *Local Development Funds in Myanmar*.

¹⁸¹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁸² Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*. N.b. there is a potential risk that if funding to a particular ministry is increased too quickly, it may face "absorptive capacity constraints," i.e., the inability to spend all of the new money effectively or efficiently. Thus, while the case for increasing allocations to these sectors is clear, some careful thought needs to be given to how quickly this should happen.

and as part of Myanmar's reform of public financial management their role should be increased, to help ensure fiscal discipline and to make it easier to align budget allocations with policy priorities.¹⁸³ As this change (hopefully) takes place, the ministries will play a key role in determining whether budgeting is used in a way that promotes gender equality or not. The experience of other countries indicates that if these ministries are not on board, attempts to promote gender budgeting will be hobbled.¹⁸⁴

The most senior positions in the Ministries of Finance and Planning are still filled by men. However, in contrast to most countries, these ministries have a higher proportion of women working for them than is average for other ministries, and a considerable number of women are found in positions such as director and deputy director at the Union level, and township officer.¹⁸⁵ Going forward, this relatively high level of female representation may make it easier to interest these ministries in using budgeting to promote gender equality than has been the case in many other countries.¹⁸⁶

Although the high proportion of women employed in the Ministries of Finance and Planning may increase these ministries' interest in using budgeting to promote gender equality, there is currently a low level of awareness of gender issues in these ministries, and little experience with the technical skills needed to analyze budgets from a gendered perspective. The World Bank already plans to provide financial and technical assistance to these ministries to help them raise the voices of women and minorities in local-level, bottom-up planning and build the capacity of the Budget Department "to undertake basic analysis on the incidence of public spending across genders and ethnicities."¹⁸⁷

Although, hitherto, Myanmar civil society and INGOs have tended to work either on gender equality issues *or* budgeting, this now looks set to change, and these organizations can play a useful role in channelling technical expertise and support to government ministries in addition to their advocacy role. Knowledge sharing can also be promoted between ministries. For example, although the MoSWRR is inexperienced and has little capacity on budgeting issues, it is the most experienced and knowledgeable ministry on gender equality issues and NSPAW, and staff from the Department of Rural Development who have been working on the NCDDP have already gained experience raising the equality of participation and trying to make planning and budgeting more gender equal.

4.3.4) Opportunities and Challenges for Engagement by Myanmar Civil Society and INGOs

Until now, CSOs, Myanmar NGOs, and INGOS working on gender equality issues have had limited interaction with ministries other than the MoSWRR. WON and GEN's member-mapping exercise shows that very few of their member organizations have been working in the CEDAW and NSPAW area of "institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women."¹⁸⁸ Under the new government, there are likely to be more opportunities for these member organizations to engage with ministries, and this represents a major avenue to advance gender equality through policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery. However, many of these organizations also currently lack technical capacity to engage on these issues, and there is a need for donors to support them in developing this capacity.

During the last Parliament, GEN and WON members were able to engage with MPs to advocate on

¹⁸³ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁸⁴ Debbie Budlender, *Expectations Versus Realities in Gender-Responsive Budgeting Initiatives* (Geneva: UNRISD, March 2005): 12; Budlender and others, *Gender Budgets Make Cents*, 12; Janet Stotsky, "Gender Budgeting," IMF Working Paper No. 06/232 (Washington: International Monetary Fund, 2006): 15.

¹⁸⁵ Section 2.1.3, above; Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁸⁶ N.b. in many countries there is a single Ministry of Finance that is solely responsible for the roles of the Ministries of Finance and Planning in Myanmar. For difficulties faced in engaging these ministries, see Budlender and others, *Gender Budgets Make Cents* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002): 73-74; Janet Stotsky, "Gender Budgeting" (IMF Working Paper, 2006): 15.

¹⁸⁷ The World Bank, "Myanmar – Modernization of Public Finance Management Project," (World Bank, 2014): 13.

¹⁸⁸ Lin, *WON-GEN Member Mapping Report*, 9-10.

policy issues,¹⁸⁹ but this engagement was limited, and they recognize that more would be better.¹⁹⁰ The new Parliament may present more opportunities for engagement, but these organizations need to build their technical capacities regarding budgeting and public service delivery issues. If a caucus of women MPs is set up at the Union level (see Section 3.2.1), this can be an extremely useful channel for sharing technical knowledge and generating momentum for policy change.

4.3.5) NSPAW

NSPAW, among other things, repeatedly calls for more participation by women in the development and implementation of government policy, and for the allocation of sufficient budgetary, human, and material resources by government and non-government organizations for the activities and policies described in the plan.¹⁹¹ As previously noted, however, although NSPAW is a “government commitment,” it is non-binding, and has so far had little effect. With sufficient government commitment, and a well-designed implementation strategy, NSPAW could be an important guiding document affecting policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery. It would be beneficial if international donors, international financial institutions (IFIs), and UN agencies could direct their financial support and political influence towards making this happen.

4.3.6) Sequencing, Prioritizing, and Targeting Efforts at Reform

Gender budgeting initiatives in other countries have often begun with a policy appraisal to identify gender issues, resource allocations, and how policies affect existing inequalities.¹⁹² However, given the many pressing issues facing Myanmar’s various ministries, and the generally low level of familiarity with gender issues, it is unrealistic to expect the government to conduct a comprehensive policy appraisal of this nature covering all ministries or levels of government. For policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery to be significantly altered in ways that promote gender equality, and for these changes to endure and be further improved and developed, the relevant government bodies must see the benefits of such an exercise and be committed to it. There is no point in foisting a donor-led initiative on unwilling government entities. Similarly, a gender budgeting initiative driven solely by civil society, with little or no input from government, is likely to have little impact on the government budget.

As mentioned above, the Ministries of Finance and Planning will be the most important ministries to convince of the benefits of integrating a gender approach into their work, and advocacy efforts should be targeted towards them. However, all ministries can potentially improve their policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery by integrating gender analysis and trying to raise gender equality. Thus, organizations looking to promote this approach can productively work with any ministries that are interested in doing so, and such collaboration can be used to demonstrate the approach to others.

For organizations looking to assist the government in integrating gender into policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery, it will also pay to be flexible regarding which level(s) of government to engage with. The last few years have already witnessed some devolution of policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery powers to state/region governments, township authorities, development affairs organizations, and village tract authorities. Various state and non-state decision-making bodies operating at the village level can also be useful partners. Again, the willingness and commitment of these bodies is key, and initial efforts to promote gender equality through policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery should be targeted accordingly. The kind of subnational knowledge exchange programs already discussed would then be an ideal way to share experiences from early initiatives.

A number of development organizations working at the subnational level conduct gender sensitization

¹⁸⁹ Lin, *WON-GEN Member Mapping Report*, 16.

¹⁹⁰ Field Interview with GEN, December 2015.

¹⁹¹ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs.

¹⁹² Stotsky, “Gender Budgeting,” 16.

trainings for local government officials. Currently, such trainings typically do not cover gender differences in preferences for how budgets should be allocated, and local officials have low awareness of this.¹⁹³ It is recommended that this topic be integrated into future training curricula.

As already noted, self-provision of basic public services by local communities is common across Myanmar, and this is likely to continue for some time to come. Myanmar CSOs and international development partners working in these communities can try to encourage raising the gender equality of participation in the decision-making bodies set up to plan, fund, and manage this form of public service provision.

The peace process still has a long way to go in Myanmar, and it is currently unclear what role EAGs will have in the long run, for governance broadly, and for policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery specifically. However, the policies adopted by EAGs have a significant impact on many citizens in Myanmar, and many of these organizations are directly involved in providing social services or physical infrastructure.¹⁹⁴ Writing in June 2014, Kim Jolliffe made the case for more international development aid for service providers linked to EAGs.¹⁹⁵ This now seems to be happening, particularly for service providers linked to EAGs that have signed the NCA. EAG decision-making processes are typically very male dominated, and as such engagement takes place, it is important for international actors to pay close attention to who is involved in making decisions on how this money is spent, and who benefits from this.

Good data improves the quality of policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery. Collecting good data, and making it available to other organizations and the public, is imperative. As discussed in more detail below, the government currently lacks much desirable data, and the data that the government, IFIs, UN agencies, and INGOs do have needs to be more easily available to other organizations and the public.

¹⁹³ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁹⁴ For a summary of various EAGs' involvement in social service and infrastructure provision, see Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2015): 100.

¹⁹⁵ Jolliffe, *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions*, 46-47.

5. Transparency and Data Collection Priorities

The last few years have seen a considerable expansion of the evidence base on gender and governance in Myanmar, and on a variety of measures that are pertinent to policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery. However, much data is still needed to analyze these issues effectively that either does not exist, is of low quality, or to which access is heavily restricted. This section discusses some key priorities for improvement.

5.1) Budget Data

Although the GoM publishes the annual and supplementary budgets, it currently does not publish the executed budget, Union budget reports, external audit reports, all contract awards above \$100,000, or a range of other budget information.¹⁹⁶ Also, although GoM collects highly detailed, disaggregated data on various types of spending by each ministry (excluding the Ministry of Defense), and shares this data with the World Bank, the budget data that is publicly released is highly aggregated.¹⁹⁷ The published data is only disaggregated by ministry, and within each ministry by capital and current spending, making it very difficult to track spending by sector,¹⁹⁸ or on cross-sectoral or cross-ministerial issues. Another major problem with the budget data is that revenues and expenditures that are entirely controlled by line ministries or state-owned enterprises are off budget, and even the Ministries of Finance and Planning do not necessarily know the exact size of these revenues/expenditures.¹⁹⁹ Bringing all revenues and expenditures on budget, and making more budget data publicly available, should be clear priorities for the new government.

Currently, there is only limited evidence by which we can measure budget outputs and outcomes in Myanmar. A variety of data types can be used to measure outputs and outcomes, ranging from broad, multi-purpose surveys (e.g., household consumption surveys such as the IHLCA, or the Labor Force Survey), to targeted beneficiary assessments that look at the impact of one particular service on its users. Datasets that can be used to measure outputs and outcomes are increasingly being collected by the GoM, often in conjunction with international development partners. With the assistance of the World Bank and others, the government is also set to develop its capacity to effectively analyze this data over the coming years.²⁰⁰ When quantitative data sets are collected by government ministries or international development organizations, it is important that other research organizations and individuals that can demonstrate a legitimate interest in accessing this data be able to do so, unless there is a *compelling* reason to the contrary.

Although it is perhaps not an immediate priority, in the medium term it would be highly beneficial if detailed time-use surveys could be conducted, either as standalone surveys, or as a module of other household surveys such as the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS). With accurate data on the time use of household members, which can be disaggregated by gender and age, we can better understand a variety of issues, including access to public services, time available to participate in governance activities or public life, and likely policy and budget needs and preferences.

5.2) Data on Representation and Participation

Relatively good data is now available on the gender equality of statistical representation in Myanmar, but researchers should try to collect data that also includes information on other variables that may affect an individual's participation in governance, such as age; ethnicity; religion; educational

¹⁹⁶ The World Bank, Public Financial Management Performance Report, 37-38, 40, 42, 50-51.

¹⁹⁷ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

¹⁹⁸ Oo and others, 24.

¹⁹⁹ Zaw Oo, Cindy Joelene, and others, *Fiscal Management in Myanmar*, ADB Economics Working Paper No. 434 (Manilla: Asian Development Bank, June 2015): 35; The World Bank, Public Financial Management Performance Report, 37, 42.

²⁰⁰ World Bank, *Myanmar – Modernization of Public Finance Management Project*, 5.

attainment and/or professional background; and family background.²⁰¹ Further, there is little data on the composition of township committees or the various committees at village tract and village levels; the gender-disaggregated data on senior civil servants is still not sufficiently disaggregated by seniority; and there is almost no data on the size and composition of attendance at public meetings. And, we still lack solid data on many of the aspects by which the quality of participation can be assessed. It would be useful to have gender-disaggregated data on:

- Frequency of speaking in meetings and other decision-making forums, and issues raised when speaking.
- Frequency of meeting with or speaking to local officials and elected representatives.
- Frequency with which citizens discuss village and political issues with friends and neighbors.
- Seating arrangements in meetings – who sits at the front, and who at the back, who sits on chairs, and who has to stand or sit on the floor.

5.3) Data on Citizens' Preferences

Collecting accurate quantitative data on gender differences in policy priorities and budget preferences can be difficult. Opinion surveys tend to underestimate gender differences due to one or more of the following sources of bias: (1) survey respondents have little incentive to think seriously about the question; (2) survey questions are often too vague on how additional spending would be financed;²⁰² and (3) respondents may report what they deem to be “socially acceptable” rather than what they really believe or desire. These biases can be particularly problematic if public discourse is dominated by one gender (as is the case in Myanmar). When there is no material cost/benefit associated with their answer,²⁰³ respondents are more likely to report what they have heard from the media, or family and community members, rather than giving careful consideration to the issue, and to be less willing to contravene social norms and expectations. These effects are likely to particularly bias females' survey responses towards the male-dominated social norm.

Solving the methodological issues associated with collecting data on budget preferences is hard, and no method is free of problems, but several alternative approaches to perception surveys, of varying degrees of expense and complexity, deserve consideration:

- Conduct focus group discussions (FGDs). The small number of FGDs carried out for the *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar* report show much clearer gender differences in policy and budget preferences than the data collected in the civic values survey conducted by The Asia Foundation in 2014.²⁰⁴ An obvious downside of FGDs, however, is that it is impossible to control for the bias introduced by the words and actions of the facilitator or by group dynamics: those participants who are more likely to dominate or influence the discussion may tend to have preferences that are different from the average participant.

²⁰¹ N.b. educational attainment and professional background can be used as an imperfect but easy-to-measure and non-invasive proxy for socioeconomic background, as well as being interesting variables in their own right. Renaud Egretau used the biographies of Union-level MPs provided in *The Parliaments of Myanmar 2013* to create a dataset on Union MPs that includes their gender, age, religion, ethnicity, educational level, and professional background. See Egretau, “Legislators in Myanmar’s First ‘Post-Junta’ National Parliament (2010–2015): A Sociological Analysis.”

²⁰² Funk and Gathmann, 159-60.

²⁰³ E.g., the answer they give to the person conducting the survey does not directly affect what public services they receive, or who pays for them.

²⁰⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*. N.b. it should be noted that The Asia Foundation’s survey did not directly ask about policy or budget preferences. The above comparisons are based on analysis of female and male responses to these questions: (1) What are the biggest problems facing Myanmar at the national level? (2) What are the biggest problems in your local area?

- Collect gender-disaggregated data regarding which issues are raised by citizens attending public meetings and by committee members (in public or private forums).
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on voting patterns. This is normally done by asking voters after they have voted.
- Develop an interactive budget tool or application similar to that described in a recent paper by Adam Bonica,²⁰⁵ and use tablets to deploy it in surveys or FGDs. For example, the application could include data on budget allocation, by ministry, in last year's budget, and then allow users to adjust the allocations for each ministry, under the constraint that any increase for one ministry must be accompanied by an equivalent decrease elsewhere. Bonica's early trials with his application (using US budget data) yielded responses very different from standard budget surveys, probably due at least partly to the greater level of information this gives to respondents than standard budget surveys do, and to the requirement to make trade-offs.²⁰⁶ An application of this kind would also be very useful in educational settings such as trainings, workshops, and discussions with MPs, civil society, or government.

5.4) Evaluating the Impact of Development Programs and Sharing Lessons Learned

It is very important that IFIs, UN agencies, and INGOs improve the quality of their program/project evaluations and increase the availability of their findings to other organizations. Traditionally, international development agencies have tended to view program evaluations as a way to learn lessons internally and to demonstrate the impact of programs to donors. Internationally there has been a shift, however, towards viewing program evaluations as something that governments, domestic civil society, and other international development agencies can all learn from. Along with this shift has come an emphasis on collaborating with researchers from universities in the program country and abroad, rather than conducting evaluations strictly in house. Development agencies working in Myanmar should emulate this change, and it is promising that a few organizations (such as LIFT) are already beginning to do so.

Impact evaluations, baseline assessments, and continuing assessments carried out by IFIs, UN agencies, and INGOs operating in Myanmar are often kept for internal use only, as is much of the research commissioned by these organizations. Such studies often cost considerable sums of aid money, and unless there is a *compelling* reason not to do so (such as a connection to a highly sensitive political issue), quantitative data sets and analytical reports should be made easily available to any research organizations or individuals with a legitimate interest.²⁰⁷ Donors can play a key role here by making easy access to data and reports a condition of funding.

Standardized data collection will also yield knowledge-sharing benefits. Surveys by international development agencies are conducted for different purposes, and some flexibility must be maintained, but knowledge will be more cheaply and easily shared if datasets from different organizations are made more directly comparable with each other, and are disseminated and accessible as a public good. For example, now that there is data from the 2014 census, it ought to be possible for different organizations to adopt a common sampling strategy. It would also be beneficial for them to agree on common phrasing for key questions that recur in many surveys. The Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) has already taken effective steps to standardize certain aspects of data collection and to make data more widely available, and it is the obvious channel for pursuing this work. Hitherto, UN agencies and other international organizations that collect large amounts of data have had inconsistent engagement with MIMU. To maximize knowledge-sharing benefits, agencies should embrace these collaborative opportunities.

²⁰⁵ See Adam Bonica, "Measuring Public Spending Preferences Using an Interactive Budgeting Questionnaire," *Research and Politics* (April-June 2015): 1-9.

²⁰⁶ Bonica, 3-8.

²⁰⁷ N.b. sharing original qualitative data in this way is typically not feasible due to confidentiality issues.

Project evaluations in Myanmar frequently rely on data from project recipients who are asked for their assessment. Such feedback is undoubtedly useful and can provide many insights, but it can also produce biased results, especially when the implementing organization is the one collecting the feedback. In Myanmar and other Southeast and East Asian countries, such an evaluation approach is likely to have a large positive bias towards program effectiveness, due to cultural norms of avoiding confrontation and not wishing to make the person being spoken to feel bad. But such data remains the cornerstone of many organizations' evaluation strategies: UNDP, for example, intends to rely solely on this source of evidence for evaluating the effectiveness of its women's leadership program in the coming years.²⁰⁸

When evaluating the impact of a program, it is useful to have some objective measures to compare with the richly detailed but possibly biased data obtained by speaking directly to program recipients. The Trôcaire staff member interviewed for this report described the difficulty of accurately evaluating the impact of women's leadership trainings. Trôcaire has tried a variety of methods to evaluate their women's leadership trainings, including pre- and post-training tests of trainees, external observation of trainings to record the nature of participants' contributions, and FGDs conducted with training recipients.²⁰⁹ Using a variety of methods like this can help reduce the biases or incompleteness that can occur when relying on one data source.

A major problem with collecting data only from program participants is discerning "causal impact" – i.e., how much of the measured change over the course of the program was due to the impact of the program itself, rather than to other social, political, and economic influences in participants' lives. Well-designed, randomized impact evaluations provide greater certainty than other methods of the causal impact of a program, and therefore whether the program is worth the money and should be continued or replicated elsewhere. Randomized impact evaluations can also give better insight into the causes of economic, social, or political change within a country.²¹⁰ The benefits of randomized impact evaluations have made them, over the last 10 to 15 years, the international gold standard for quantitative evaluation of governmental and non-governmental development projects. However, they are only just beginning to be used by a small number of organizations working in Myanmar.

Randomized evaluations can be very useful for assessing different modes of public service delivery and the impact these have on gender equality. They can also be useful for assessing initiatives to increase the equality of participation in local governance, and they have been widely used to assess the impact of gender quotas on local governance bodies in other countries.²¹¹ Despite their advantages, however, randomized impact evaluations also have certain significant drawbacks and limitations. They are not useful for assessing macroeconomic policy; they are often not useful or feasible for evaluating smaller-scale programs;²¹² they typically fail to capture broader economic, social, and political effects and interactions of a project (what economists refer to as "general equilibrium effects"); and they tend to be expensive, and can be technically complex to design and manage.

In practice, randomized impact evaluations conducted in other countries have typically relied only on

²⁰⁸ Field Interview with Allison Hope Moore, December 2015.

²⁰⁹ Field Interview with Pyae Phyo Swe, January 2016.

²¹⁰ A useful basic introduction to randomized impact evaluations can be found at: <http://www.povertyactionlab.org/methodology/what-randomization>. For those interested in exploring the technique further, videos of the lectures (plus other course materials) can be downloaded free of charge via iTunesU, and are highly recommended, as is the following book: Rachel Glennerster and Kudzai Takavarasha, *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

²¹¹ For example, see Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov; Lori Beaman and others; Chattopadhyay and Duflo; Iyer and others.

²¹² For example, if a program is aimed at changing participation and decision-making in village tract-level committees (as in the case of NCDDP and various other local planning and budgeting initiatives), a randomized evaluation, to have a reasonable chance of obtaining useful results, would need to include all village tracts within at least two townships in the same state/region, and depending on the nature of the intervention, a minimum of three or more townships might be required.

quantitative measures. Depending on the nature of the program being evaluated, this can limit the ability of the evaluation to discern *how or by what mechanisms* the program had an impact, and it also means that project impacts that were not anticipated at the start of the project may not be captured. There is no reason, however, that qualitative data cannot also be collected in a randomized impact evaluation to address these shortcomings.

The drawbacks and limitations of randomized impact evaluations mean that they are only useful for a minority of programs. However, a range of other non-randomized, quantitative or qualitative methods can be used to improve on the self-reported views of program recipients. The optimal evaluation approach will depend on a variety of factors, including the anticipated impacts and the scale, budget, and timeframe of the program. As with randomized evaluations, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods will deliver the best results in most cases. Common evaluation methods include setting performance indicators, collecting and analyzing survey data, participatory action research, interviews, focus group discussions, and cost-benefit analysis.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

Despite some recent improvements, participation in the governance of Myanmar remains highly gender unequal, from the Union level to the village tract and village levels. The available evidence strongly suggests that this inequality contributes to inequitable decision-making and limits women's agency and well-being. The low level of female participation, together with the widespread lack of awareness of the relevance of gender issues, also acts as a barrier to more effective and equitable policymaking, budgeting, and public service delivery.

The following suggestions include key ideas for the government, political parties, Myanmar civil society, and international development partners to promote citizen participation, and gender equality of participation in particular, in the governance of Myanmar. They also suggest ways to use gender-sensitive approaches to improve the quality of policymaking, budgeting, and public-service delivery.

For the Government of Myanmar

- GoM should implement the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women.
- GoM should consider expanding the use of quotas for female representation in governance bodies. Quotas could be applied to one or more of the following: Union MPs, state/region MPs, elected township committees, village tract administrators, and village tract and village-level development committees.
- To promote democratization and improve the quality of local governance, GoM should:
 - Restore the position of 100-household head/village head in rural areas.
 - Introduce direct elections for the positions of village tract administrator and 100-household head/village head, with one vote for each adult in the constituency.
 - Introduce rules for ward/village tract and village-level authorities stipulating a minimum level of engagement with the public.
- In community-level development projects, GoM and non-governmental organizations should take concrete steps to promote equality of participation in the local decision-making forums that are created.
- Possibly working with non-governmental organizations, GoM should provide trainings for local officials to help them change attitudes and behaviors in ways that promote the participation of all citizens in public meetings.
- To increase budget transparency at Union and subnational levels, GoM should:
 - Release more budget data to CSOs and the public in easy-to-understand formats.
 - Clearly communicate, to CSOs and citizens, which individuals, communities, and government bodies are responsible for making decisions on policy and budgets, especially at local levels.
- GoM, with the assistance of international development partners, should continue to improve the quality of budget data that is collected, and pay particular attention to gender differences as they collect data on budget outputs and outcomes.
- GoM should increase budget allocations to the “social sectors” – health, education, and social welfare. The need to increase allocations to social welfare is particularly acute.

For International Development Partners

- International donors, international financial institutions, and UN agencies should support implementation of the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women.
- International and Myanmar organizations should collect better data on citizen participation in decision-making and citizens' preferences on policies and budget allocations.
- International development organizations operating in Myanmar should collect better data on the impact of their programs, and make their data and analysis more readily available to other organizations and individuals.
- Donors should provide funding for exposure visits and knowledge-exchange forums for subnational governance actors.
- Despite incomplete data, international financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, and UN Agencies should help GoM, using existing data, to begin integrating gender considerations into policymaking, budgeting, and public-service delivery at both the Union and subnational levels. This work should be tailored to the available data and to the willingness and technical capacity of the participating government agencies.

For Political Parties

- Political parties should create *and implement* policies increasing the gender equality of participation in their parties. They may wish to adopt quotas to ensure a minimum level of female participation in their central committees and central executive committees.
- Political parties should seek technical support from international development partners and Myanmar civil society for how to integrate gender considerations into policy, budgeting, and public service delivery.

For Myanmar Civil Society

- Organizations providing leadership training to women leaders should offer more trainings focused on specific technical issues.
- Organizations working on women's rights and gender equality should expand their recent efforts to engage men, and donors should seek to fund such work. Given the present state of uncertainty about what works, knowledge sharing will be particularly important in this area.
- Non-governmental organizations working on gender equality should increase their engagement with GoM and political parties. In order to influence budgeting decisions and support effective policy implementation, it is particularly important to build relationships with the Ministries of Planning and Finance.
- Individuals and organizations conducting research on participation and decision-making in governance in Myanmar should work to integrate gender with other key factors, such as age, socioeconomic class, family background, ethnicity, religion, and geographical location.

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