

VOICES OF ETHNIC PEOPLE IN SHAN STATE ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY



MYANMAR
INSTITUTE
FOR INTEGRATED
DEVELOPMENT



IDRC | CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada^{ca}

**VOICES OF ETHNIC
PEOPLE IN SHAN STATE
ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY**

Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development

and

International Development Research Center

2020

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this photo essay are those of MIID and MIID's CSO partners and do not necessarily represent those of IDRC or GAC.

Table Of Contents

Acknowledgements	8
Thank You	9
Project Background	10
Shan State Map	11
1. Women Advocate for Local Governance of Natural Resources	13
Case Study 1. Women Advocate for Land Rights	14
2. Men as Gender Champions	17
Case Study 2. Religious Leader Prioritizes Education and Gender Equality	18
Case Study 3. Young Women’s Leadership in Village Governance is Encouraged	20
Case Study 4. Raising Awareness about the Effects of Drug Use and Trafficking	22
3. Cultural Norms Inhibiting Women’s Participation in Village Affairs	25
Case Study 5. Cultural Norms Prohibiting Women from Participating in Village Affairs	26
Case Study 6. More Opportunities for Women are being created, but Change is Gradual	28
4. Perceptions of Women’s Leadership	32
Case Study 7. Perceptions of Women Leaders affect Leadership Terms	34
Case Study 8. Women Discourage Women from Participating in Village Affairs	36
Case Study 9. Women’s Participation is increasing, but they are not the Main Decision Makers	38
5. Women Working as Leaders at Different Levels of Governance	41
Case Study 10. The Role of the Women’s Affairs Commission in Village Governance	42
Case Study 11. Recognizing Women as Leaders at different levels of Governance	44
Case Study 12. Women as Innovators in Shan State Government	46
6. Women Take the Lead as Researchers	49
Biographies of Community Leaders	50
Case Study 13. Women must be included in Political affairs, regardless of Education	52
Case Study 14. Women’s Attitudes affect Education & Participation in Village Affairs	54
Case Study 15. Building Women’s Confidence to Participate in Village Affairs	56
Case Study 16. Changing Men’s and Women’s Attitudes about Leadership	60

Acknowledgements



MIID would like to acknowledge our CSO partner organizations as well as members of the Knowledge for Democracy Myanmar (K4DM) Initiative Gender cohort. Community participatory action research requires dedication, determination, and commitment, and we are grateful for community leaders who actively participated in every step of the research process. In addition, we would like to thank all volunteers in Kyaing Tung representing their respective Akha, Lahu, Shan, and Palaung communities. Without their participation, this research in Kyaing Tung would not have been possible, and we acknowledge their hard efforts in this research endeavour. MIID is also grateful for support from our donor, the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC).



MIID would like to especially thank leaders and participants from our CSO partner organizations:

Shwe Inlay (Nyaung Shwe)

Shwe Danu (Pindaya)

Parami Development Network (PDN) (Taunggyi)

Mawk Kon Local Development Organization (Kyaing Tung)

Thank you to the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC) for providing funding for this gender focused research.

Project Background

‘Pathways to economic and political empowerment for ethnic minority women in South and East Shan State, Myanmar’

This research identifies factors which affect women’s empowerment in three sectors: economic, political, and social. The aim is to identify opportunities for women’s economic and political participation and make recommendations to relevant stakeholders. Research was conducted among 7 ethnic groups in South and East Shan State by four local CSOs in Kyaing Tung, Pindaya, Nyaung Shwe, and Taunggyi. Ethnic groups included: Shan, Palaung, Akha, Lahu, Pa-O, Danu, and Intha. A community participatory approach was used during the research, and the methodology is both qualitative and quantitative. A quantitative household survey (including 280 households), three sets of focus group discussions, as well as key informant interviews were conducted in order to collect relevant data about women’s lived experiences in their respective communities. MIID’s partner CSOs will make recommendations to enhance gender equality based upon key research findings. This photo essay illustrates some key findings from 16 key informant interviews with a variety of stakeholders: community leaders, religious leaders, NGOs and CSOs, and government officials.

Shan State



Disclaimer: The names shown and the boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Women Advocate for Local Governance of Natural Resources



Loi Mwe National Forest, Kyaing Tung Township, Eastern Shan State, December 2019

In the area surrounding Kyaing Tung Township, women rarely have a voice in decisions regarding natural resource management. This is partly due to lack of women's representation on village development committees (VDCs) and the low rate of participation in village affairs overall. The VDC in the Shan village mentioned in the following case study is recognized by the general administration department (GAD). There is a community forest adjacent to Loi Mwe National Forest in Kyaing Tung, and there is a community forest user group (CFUG) which operates under the Forest Department. Most government officials working in the GAD and Forest Department in Eastern Shan state are men. However, Case study 1 examines how women can play an active role in natural resource management and environmental conservation, thereby advocating for women's rights at the individual and community level.

Case Study 1: Women Advocate for Land Rights



“When the Minister came, villagers warmly welcomed him while they were planting paddy. Then, I started to speak out; all villagers were clapping and cheering me on when I was speaking. The Minister was quite afraid. I said: Minister- Do not cultivate the farm on the paper.”



Community Forest, Wan Taung Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 1: Women Advocate for Land Rights

Daw Nang Late is an active leader within the Shan community, as she is a member of the Village Development Committee (VDC). She is the only woman among the ten member VDC. She was also appointed Chairwoman of the Community Forest User Group (CFUG) for the Community Forest bordering Loi Mwe National Forest in Kyaing Tung Township. She was appointed Chairwoman by the head of the Forest Department (Eastern Shan State division).

As a leader on the VDC and CFUG, Daw Nang Late advocates for people's land rights and for local governance of natural resources within the Shan community, both at the individual household and community level.

Her work on the VDC includes going to the Land Office, GAD office, Forest Department office, as well as working with other CSOs/NGOs in the community. Unlike other women in her Shan village, she is fluent in Burmese, so she is responsible for negotiating with government officials and keeping all village accounts and records. She noted that *“there is no discrimination against women in the community, but women cannot communicate in Burmese language, nor are they interested in village affairs.”*

Daw Nang Late is respected by both men and women in the community because she is a liaison with the GAD and also between Shan and Akha communities regarding irrigation and groundwater use management. She acts as a community liaison to ensure that both communities have proper access to water.

In January 2019, she was instrumental in getting community forest certification for 400 acres bordering Loi Mwe National Forest. Both Shan and Akha communities have access to this community forest. She monitors people's activity in the community forest to make sure that they do not illegally cut firewood, and she enforces CFUG rules and regulations as well as educating villagers about the value of community forestry and environmental conservation.

She has helped several households get joint land title (Form 7), so that both husband and wife have formal documentation as proof of land ownership. This is because in some cases, women cannot inherit land without formal documentation.

Most significantly, she advocates for farmers regarding land use. The Shan State Minister of Energy and Electricity visited their village prior to negotiating with the Union government about expanding the National Grid. She recounted how *“When the Minister came, villagers warmly welcomed him while they were planting paddy. Then, I started to speak out; all villagers were clapping and cheering me on when I was speaking. The Minister was quite afraid. I said: Minister- Do not cultivate the farm on the paper.”*

Daw Nang Late continues to advocate for her community, and she also coordinates with other land rights activists throughout Eastern Shan State.

Men as Gender Champions



Road to Tin Htet Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Men who are champions of gender equality encourage women's participation in village affairs because they see the link between women's empowerment and sustainable development. Specifically, some men in positions of authority encourage women to attend capacity building trainings in order to expand their knowledge and take on leadership roles. In the context of the Akha community, their aim is also to reduce gender-based violence by empowering women to know their rights. Similarly, some religious leaders in the Lahu community work collaboratively with civil society organizations to address drug use and combat human trafficking.

Case Study 2: Men as Gender Champions



“One day I will die (as well as the elders) so I hope that the next generation will change this society. So now I train youth to prepare for the future, especially young women.”



Walking to Tin Htet village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 2: Religious Leader Prioritizes Education and Gender Equality

U Eain Thaw Bar Tha is the founder of a monastic school (Kindergarten to grade 5) in a remote Akha village. He founded the school in 2009, and now he mentors teachers and students. He is the main patron of the school, supporting five teachers and 94 students. After teachers work at the school for several years, he encourages them to pursue higher education. He especially encourages young women to pursue their education.

He started the school to give children in this isolated village an opportunity to receive a quality education, since not all families can afford to send their children to the center of Kyaing Tung to study. As a venerable monk and community leader, he believes that education is the key to village development through encouraging active youth participation in village affairs. He emphasized the importance of giving women confidence to speak in public.

According to Akha tradition, women do not receive any inheritance. U Eain Thaw Bar Tha mentioned this is the reason that women migrate to Mine Lar, Thailand, and to China for work. They can earn more money working at casinos or doing casual labour.

Some women also leave the village because their husbands are using drugs. Drug use is common and often linked with domestic violence in the community. U Eain Thaw Bar Tha previously intervened in some cases. However, after seeing the negative effects on children whose fathers were sent to jail on drug charges, as well as having received some threats himself, he decided that the village head would be solely responsible for addressing and resolving conflicts related to drug use.

In order to combat drug problems and gender-based violence, he organized trainings along with Mawk Kon Local Development Organization. The trainings included strategies to prevent gender-based violence, delivering messages such as “don’t beat your wife” and they also introduced a complaint mechanism. These trainings included both men and women in the community.

As a result of the trainings, U Eain Thaw Bar Tha believes gender-based violence has decreased over the last three years. He is committed to educating youth and works for gender equality in the community as he sees links between education, gender equality, and sustainable development over the long term.

“One day I will die (as well as the elders) so I hope that the next generation will change this society. So now I train youth to prepare for the future, especially young women.”

Case Study 3: Young Women’s Leadership in Village Governance is Encouraged



“I am thankful to my father. If my father was a conservative person, I would not have become who I am today. I am able to communicate and express my opinion without any fear. I go alone wherever I have to go.”



Church at Naung Seng Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 3: Young Women’s Leadership in Village Governance is Encouraged

Ma Mi Shel is the daughter of a former Village Development Committee (VDC) member in the Akha community. Due to encouragement from her father, she is an active leader in the village. She makes decisions about which crops to grow on her family farm, and she will inherit land. According to Akha tradition, women do not inherit any assets from their family, so she is an exception. Her father encouraged her to be involved in village administration, and she has taken a leadership role.

Although she is only 27, she is respected as a leader by everyone in the village because she communicates with GAD officials, keeps village accounts, and went to the Department of Rural Development (DRD) when the government loan system (via Mya Sein Yaung) was implemented in the village. Due to her Burmese language proficiency, as well as her knowledge of village affairs, she is able to negotiate with the appropriate government officials. Ma Mi Shel mentioned that the official village heads are old and illiterate, so she must take care of village affairs, specifically village accounts.

Drug use is common in the village. According to Ma Mi Shel, there are very few households who do not use drugs. There is a direct link between drug use and gender-based violence, and she stated, *“Some women are tortured by their husbands”*.

Many women in the community think that this type of behavior is ‘normal’. However, Ma Mi Shel recognizes it as gender-based violence. Regardless, women often tolerate violent behavior from their husbands because of their children. The village head is responsible for resolving serious conflicts.

Also, Ma Mi Shel has confidence to speak in public and has attended trainings conducted by Karuna and Mawk Kon Local Development Organization. She encourages other Akha women to attend capacity building trainings and always looks for more training opportunities, so that they can gain more knowledge.

Specifically, she wants to encourage women to get involved in village affairs, and also give them more knowledge about strategies to enhance their livelihoods. She runs a small store in the village to earn additional income.

“I am thankful to my father. If my father was a conservative person, I would not have become who I am today. I am able to communicate and express my opinion without any fear. I go alone wherever I have to go. As for my mother, she is a normal person. She never tells me not to do this and not to do that.”

Case Study 4: Raising Awareness about the Effects of Drug Use and Trafficking



“Men are immersed in drug issues. Without the skills and power of women, the future will be difficult (I mean for Lahu ethnics). Women have never talked about how they can also become village head. They might talk about it from behind but not at the front of people.”



Nar Parkha Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 4: Raising Awareness about the Effects of Drug Use and Trafficking

Mar Lar Khi is the Coordinator of the Development Department from the Lahu Baptist Association, which mainly focuses on anti-trafficking initiatives. The organization coordinates with another Lahu organization based in Thailand to raise awareness about human trafficking. According to Mar Lar Khi, some women from his Lahu village are trafficked to China because young women cannot marry young men from the village. Consequently, some young women and their parents believe it is better to accept marriage proposals from Chinese men. He stated, *“Villagers are very simple and they think their daughter is getting married to a nice family. They do not know that their daughters are being trafficked.”*

He stated that because the majority of men use drugs, women have to do everything. Women are not able to speak out about drug issues in the community. *“Men have become drug slaves. That’s why women cover the fact that they have been living a hard life due to their drug addict husbands. They can’t express their feelings and suffer inside.”*

Men are the main decision makers in the community. However, Mar Lar Khi mentioned that Lahu women are also recognized. Women should be included in the decision-making process regarding buying and selling crops, as well as livestock. Joint decision making occurs in the economic sector, but women are still reluctant to participate in village affairs.

From Mar Lar Khi’s perspective, women do not participate in village affairs because of lack of confidence and the fact that they have never seen women involved in village administration. He compared Lahu women’s attitudes and involvement in leadership in Northern Shan to that in Eastern Shan: women in Northern Shan are more educated and are active in village affairs, whereas women in Eastern Shan are shy and are not interested.

Some men are sent to drug rehabilitation centers, but treatment has not proven to be effective. Drug abuse is addressed by religious leaders who hold prayer ceremonies. Regardless, village heads are responsible for addressing and resolving conflicts related to drug use. Mar Lar Khi emphasized that organizations which work intensively on drug issues should come to Eastern Shan state, as drugs are a widespread problem throughout Shan state.

“Men are immersed in drug issues. Without the skills and power of women, the future will be difficult (I mean for Lahu ethnics). Women have never talked about how they can also become village head. They might talk about it from behind but not at the front of people.”

Cultural Norms Inhibiting Women's Participation in Village Affairs



Palaung Woman Weaving in Wan Pawk Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Some cultural norms and traditions practiced for generations may reinforce discriminatory practices in communities, according to respondents. Ideologies regarding gender roles are changing in some instances. In other contexts, strict rules remain in place. In some cases, men reinforce cultural norms which discourage women's participation in village affairs; in other cases, women reinforce discriminatory practices against women. Understanding how discriminatory practices work, and who reinforces them is a key aspect of identifying factors that affect women's empowerment and disempowerment respectively. The data indicates that both men and women may enforce patriarchal norms.

In the Palaung community in Eastern Shan state, cultural norms prohibit women from participating in village affairs and male village heads reinforce these rules. Women also strictly adhere to these norms. This is also due to conflicts arising from drug abuse and fear of trafficking; it is assumed that women cannot resolve conflicts. However, Palaung village heads emphasized that lack of education (for both men and women) is a key factor directly affecting lack of sustainable economic development, as well as interest in village affairs.

Pa-O customary rules in the Pa-O Self Administrative Zone (SAZ) mandate that men are the main decision makers, however, there are more opportunities being created for women to participate in economic and political decision-making processes. This is due to the fact that women's education is being prioritized by the Pa-O National Organization (PNO).

Case Study 5: Cultural Norms Prohibiting Women from Participating in Village Affairs



“No women have ever participated in the village administration since the day the village was established. Women have never requested to participate, and neither have men thought about involving women. They didn’t recognize it as women’s responsibility. According to Palaung tradition, women are not allowed to participate. It is impossible.”



Hauling water at Wan Pawk Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 5: Cultural Norms Prohibiting Women from Participating in Village Affairs

Paw Saung serves as the village head. He is one of four village heads in his Palaung village. All village heads are men, and only they have the authority to make decisions. He has more responsibility because he does not travel as much as the other village heads. From his perspective, women's participation in village affairs is impossible. Women taking on any type of leading role is also impossible.

Men make all major decisions in the village, including what types of crops to grow, and what crops to sell and trade. Also, men keep and manage cash. Paw Saung stated *"My wife knows nothing"*. Therefore, he makes all major decisions for their household. There are only five female-headed households in the village, so he noted that it was *"impossible for women to lead households"*.

Although men and women work the same number of hours, men earn higher wages than women. According to Paw Saung, this is because men are responsible for heavier tasks, and *"women are weaker than men"*. Women help with planting and sowing seeds in the field and harvesting. However, they cannot make decisions about farming. Women can only lead for funerals and donation ceremonies.

According to Paw Saung's experience, women cannot be involved in village affairs because they do not have the proper skills and are not accepted as leaders in the Palaung community. Village affairs are not considered as women's responsibilities. He mentioned several other reasons for women's lack of participation including: Palaung tradition does not allow women to participate in village affairs, women are scared of being involved, and women are illiterate in Gon Shan language.

Currently, there are more girls attending school than boys. Paw Saung mentioned that girls seem to be more interested in education than boys. Despite more girls receiving education, he stated that they cannot be leaders because they will likely stop their education when they return from school holidays.

"No women have ever participated in the village administration since the day the village was established. Women have never requested to participate, and neither have men thought about involving women. They didn't recognize it as women's responsibility. According to Palaung tradition, women are not allowed to participate. It is impossible."

"I don't think that women can participate because women are naturally scared, and therefore they do not have capabilities, and it is impossible. It is also not possible for young women who are studying now to participate in the future."

Case Study 6: More Opportunities for Women are being created, but Change is Gradual



“Women do not like other women leading because they are not impressed with each other. That is one of the obstacles for women leading.”



Yoke Village, Hopong Township, December 2019

Case Study 6: More Opportunities for Women are being created, but Change is Gradual

Nang Wah Wah Ti is a Pa-O woman who works as Project Coordinator for Metta Development Foundation in the Taunggyi branch. She mentioned that Pa-O women's roles in the community are starting to change. For example, farming provides people with their main livelihood in the Pa-O region and historically brokers for selling and trading agricultural products were solely men. Now, some women are working as brokers, mainly to trade seasonal crops. In the past, only men produced bamboo handicrafts for additional income. Currently, women are also making and selling bamboo handicrafts such as baskets and mats. The education sector is also changing, as more Pa-O women are now working as teachers, instead of teachers of other ethnicities coming from other regions.

Women's participation in village affairs, specifically participating in village meetings, has also started to change. However, women living in remote villages still cannot attend meetings. So this change is happening gradually.

Some men respect women taking on leadership roles, but the older generation of men do not. According to Nang Wah Wah Ti, in order for real change to happen, older men's support is needed for women's participation.

Women's level of knowledge regarding business is a barrier, which affects women's ability to lead business operations. If women want to work and lead in the business sector, then they must enhance their knowledge. Also, within their individual households, some women lack the confidence to make decisions regarding income and expenses.

Pa-O tradition is another barrier to women's full economic and political participation. For example, Nang Wah Wah Ti stated *"Even though men know women are capable, they don't want to give them roles and places. Some even mentioned that the crow of a hen doesn't count as the beginning of a day."*

Also, women discriminate against other women who take on leadership roles. This also affects women's ability and level of participation in village affairs. Nang Wah Wah Ti pointed out that *"Women do not like other women leading because they are not impressed with each other. That is one of the obstacles for women leading."*

There is gender-based violence in the community. Nang Wah Wah Ti mentioned that women should learn about laws regarding gender-based violence in order to understand their rights. Also, women should learn strategies to eliminate violence against other women. Therefore, training is needed to understand these concepts, so that women can resolve such conflicts in their community.

Continue Reading on Page 26

From Page 25

To address challenges facing women, CSOs provide capacity building trainings specifically for women. The objectives of these events are to create awareness about women's rights, and to expand women's knowledge about current affairs. These trainings also encourage women to participate in village administration committees and aim to build women's confidence.

From Nang War Thi's perspective, change must occur at the community level, but also at higher levels of governance. It is positive that the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) is now training women as teachers. She noted that the Hluttaw (parliament) needs to create opportunities for women as well.

"I see that men have begun to trust women in the agricultural sector, in household matters, and leading the community as well. Women are given roles and places, and opportunities for women are being created."



Yoke Village, Hopong Township, December 2019



Pa-O women from Yoke village, Hopone township, December 2019

Perceptions of Women's Leadership



Road to Yoke Village, Hopong Township, December 2019

Some women openly criticize other women who are outspoken and take leadership roles in the community. Such women act as gatekeepers and monitor the behavior of other women, often harshly criticizing them if they do not adhere to social norms. The data suggests that some women perpetuate patriarchal norms and discriminatory practices.

In the Lahu community in Eastern Shan state, women are in positions of authority on Religious Committees and some are active in village administration as well. Case study 7 examines the experience of one Assistant Village Head and the way in which she overcame challenges as a leader, especially in resolving conflicts. Due to drug abuse in the Lahu community, usually neither men nor women want to serve as village heads because conflict resolution is a difficult task.

Further, since many Lahu men and women work as casual laborers on the China border, economic decision making is complex; households are 'headed' by those who are physically present in the village and/or the family member who earns a higher wage. Due to drug abuse among men, many women do all practical tasks and manage all financial matters. However, men are still considered to be the main decision makers.

In the context of the Pa-O and Danu Self-Administered Zones (SAZs), both men and women respondents mentioned that women leaders are not often accepted by community members. Also, there is no precedent for women's participation in village administration. Therefore, there are few opportunities for women to participate in village affairs and their knowledge of political systems is limited. Case study 8 describes the experience of a Danu leader, highlighting the way in which women monitor each other's behavior within the family and within the community.

The Pa-O community often rely on the PNO. Although there have been some positive advancements in women's political participation within the Pa-O community, the PNO is still trying to develop strategies to include women in village administration and in other decision-making roles.



Loi Mwe Viewpoint, Kyaing Tung Township December 2019

Case Study 7: Perceptions of Women Leaders Affect Leadership Terms



“I resolved many problems. The villagers didn’t oppose me being a woman. They said I have a sense of influence and leadership skills when I talk, and I can talk to people to follow my orders. I don’t know if it is true or not. I enjoyed my work being assistant to the village head and leading the villagers.”



Outside Nar Parkha Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 7: Perceptions of Women Leaders affect Leadership Terms

Daw Na Bo was an Assistant Village Head in her Lahu village. She was Assistant Village Head for six years and the main decision maker for village affairs. She was also a mediator who resolved conflicts among villagers. After six years of serving her community, she resigned because her children asked her to spend more time with their family. Also, her husband criticized her involvement in village affairs.

Farming is the main livelihood in the village, and some people also do casual labor on the China border. Daw Na Bo and her son work as casual laborers on the China border, picking tea-leaves, cutting sugar cane, and sowing rice seedlings, after their other farming work is finished. Some men do not allow women to work on the border because of fear of trafficking. However, Daw Na Bo's husband trusts her and allows her to work on the border.

Daw Na Bo's husband was originally chosen as the Assistant Village Head. However, the village head trades cows and buffalo at the border, and her husband works for him as a herder. They are both frequently away from the village doing this business. Therefore, Daw Na Bo took on her husband's responsibility as Assistant Village Head. Therefore, Daw Na Bo took on her husband's responsibility as Assistant Village Head. According to Daw Na Bo, women do not participate in village affairs for the following reasons: men do not allow it, men do not believe that village affairs concern women, some women are illiterate, and men do not accept women in leadership positions because women do not have experience. Also, women do not think of taking on leadership roles, and some women believe that they can only do things with their husband's consent.

Despite the fact that Daw Na Bo is illiterate, she did not let this discourage her from being an effective Assistant Village Head. She learned many tasks by simply doing them, and gradually took on more responsibility. During her time as Assistant Village Head, Daw Na Bo attended administration meetings when the Village Head was away, led construction of the concrete road leading to the village, purchased land adjacent to the church, led water pipeline projects, arranged a Mya Sein Young loan project, and led funeral and merit making ceremonies.

She was respected by both men and women in the community for her leadership skills, as well as her ability to resolve drunken fights and fights among children. *"I resolved many problems. The villagers didn't oppose me being a woman. They said I have a sense of influence and leadership skills when I talk, and I can talk to people to follow my orders. I don't know if it is true or not. I enjoyed my work being assistant to the village head and leading the villagers."*

When asked for suggestions to encourage women to take leading roles in the Lahu community, Daw Na Bo replied, *"We need people who will encourage women to be capable, to pave the road for them, and to educate them so that they can participate in discussion."*

Case Study 8: Women Discourage Women from Participating in Village Affairs



“There are only men in the administrative sector; there are no women. Since ancient times, men have taken the role of village head, so women are not concerned with administration. They are also restricted from leaving the village. Only men can be nominated for positions in the administration. Nowadays, women take leading roles at the community level, even though they are not in village administration.”



Overlook to Kyae Dwin Gone Tea Fields, Pindaya Township, December 2019

Case Study 8: Women Discourage Women from Participating in Village Affairs

Daw Pyone Ye is a community leader and Dhamma schoolteacher in her Danu village. She is also trying to start a women's self-help group and produce coffee. She often attends workshops and trainings, as she is invited by organizations who are aware of her involvement in village development. In turn, she invites and encourages young women to attend capacity building trainings to expand their knowledge.

According to Daw Pyone Ye, most women do not 'speak out' during village meetings and are not knowledgeable about other organizations implementing projects in the village. Previously, women were not allowed to attend meetings and had to stay at home. Currently, more women attend meetings and discuss village affairs.

In spite of these changes, Daw Pyone Ye has received criticism from her elder sister. Specifically, her sister criticized her for participating in a meeting at night, including men. The meeting was regarding her future plans for coffee production. Her sister sarcastically taunted her about talking with men (some of whom had been drinking) after 10:30pm at night. Her elder sister mentioned that she "would die from being ashamed" due to people's criticism. She tried to stop her younger sister from doing development work. However, Daw Pyone Ye has continued actively participating in village affairs.

In the context of her Danu community, Daw Pyone Ye also noted that traditionally women do not take a leading role in village administration. Women's knowledge of village affairs is still limited. Regardless, more women are taking interest in village affairs, and there is room for growth.

"There are only men in the administrative sector; there are no women. Since ancient times, men have taken the role of village head, so women are not concerned with administration. They are also restricted from leaving the village. Only men can be nominated for positions in the administration. Nowadays, women take leading roles at the community level, even though they are not in village administration."

Case Study 9: Women’s Participation is increasing, but they are not the Main Decision Makers



“It is not like there are traditions that forbid women’s participation, but women worrying and being afraid is in their genes. Even though there are many women’s rights activities today, there are situations where women hesitate to participate. Therefore, we need to raise awareness for such kind of thing. We need to provide awareness to both men and women at the same time.”



Yoke Village Overlook, Hopong Township, December 2019

Case Study 9: Women’s Participation is increasing, but they are not the Main Decision Makers

Khun Saung Shwe is a member of the Central Committee of the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) and also a member of the Secretary supporting team. He explained that the PNO participates in initiatives to include women in governance and to provide more educational opportunities. Also, he mentioned that gender quotas mandating 30% women’s political participation in the administrative sector, or in the Hluttaw (parliament) is a good goal, but implementation strategies are still being developed. More village development committees include women now, however, there are advantages and disadvantages: He pointed out that *“Women get more experiences, and gain self-confidence. The community starts to acknowledge their capability as well. But the role of women is mostly as members.”*

Men and women make joint decisions regarding livelihoods in most households in the Pa-O region, although most business operations are owned and run by men. Khun Saung Shwe did note one exception: Ywut Pone Thee Coffee, which is popular in Pinlaung Township. It is operated by a woman, although she is not a local Pa-O woman. Other small businesses run by women include grocery shops, restaurants, beauty shops, and tailor shops.

He identified several reasons that men control the decision making process for agricultural business: men put more effort into business, women are afraid their businesses would not be successful if they disagree with men’s decisions, brokers do not always accept women’s negotiation strategies, and women’s technical knowledge of farming methods is lower. However, women’s participation in agricultural business is important, as men and women divide the labour between them, and many women manage household finances. In Khun Saung Shwe’s opinion, *“Emergence of women leaders in the business sector would lead to women’s participation in politics and governance in a shorter time.”*

Women’s participation in village affairs is increasing, but it is still limited. According to Khun Saung Shwe, some women do not participate in village affairs because they are not interested. Also, women do not take the lead in village administration due to fear regarding personal safety when they are involved in settling disputes, such as addressing drunken fights; the rule of law is weak. He highlighted the historical context of the Pa-O SAZ, as there was conflict until 1991. After 1991, women became involved in village administration, as regional security improved. Now more women are participating in village meetings and taking an interest in village affairs.

From Khun Saung Shwe’s perspective, decisions are made at the village level based upon the interests of the whole community, rather than to address men’s or women’s specific concerns. Therefore, women and youth may be marginalized, as decisions are made based upon a system where one representative per household attends village meetings. Women’s inclusion on village committees is not a factor considered in the decision making process.

“It is not like there are traditions that forbid women’s participation, but women worrying and being afraid is in their genes. Even though there are many women’s rights activities today, there are situations where women hesitate to participate. Therefore, we need to raise awareness for such kind of thing. We need to provide awareness to both men and women at the same time.”

Women Working as Leaders at Different Levels of Governance



Loi Mwe National Forest, Kyaing Tung Township, Eastern Shan State, December 2019

Women have innovative strategies to overcome challenges they face with regard to full economic and political participation in their communities. These strategies include forming separate women's groups, collaborating with other NGOs/CSOs, and communicating with village administration officials who are receptive to women's active involvement in village affairs. Women's groups also serve a specific role in Intha and Shan communities, as shown by the case studies below. Specifically, women's groups serve as social institutions, which provide women with support but may also play a mediating role when conflicts arise.

Further, women serving as government officials acknowledge the need to include and engage with women at different levels of government, from the village level to the national level. The case studies in this section explore barriers and opportunities for women working at different levels of governance.

In addition, the distinction between urban and rural women's experiences is important to acknowledge, as each context requires different strategies to create more opportunities for women's leadership in the economic and political sectors. Case study 12 highlights important contributions made by women to economic development and enhancing communities' livelihoods by giving women leading roles. Therefore, key findings indicated that women are indeed instrumental in the process of sustainable economic development in Myanmar, at the community, state, and national level.

Case Study 10: The Role of the Women’s Affairs Commission in Village Governance



“My personal challenge is getting women to attend trainings. Their families do not like it when they attend trainings. They must overcome criticism when they participate in politics and attend trainings. Family members are the issue. Some husbands come and grab their wives out of training.”



Canal to Hae Yar Ywarma Village, Inlay Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, December 2019

Case Study 10: The Role of the Women’s Affairs Commission in Village Governance

Sayama Hnaung Pa Pa Nyo is the Chairwoman of the Women’s Affairs Commission in her Intha village. Since 2019, she has worked as a teacher in a pre-school. Sayama highlighted the need for young women’s education in the Intha community.

She described the village administration structure which includes a Women’s Group in each of the thirteen wards. The Women’s Affairs Commission functions at the Ward level: women representatives from each of the thirteen wards participate in the village administration. Other women in the community respect their ward representatives.

She stated that women’s attendance and participation at village meetings has improved over the last five years. If a woman’s husband is away, then she can attend village meetings, participate in discussion, and be involved in decision-making. Women who speak out at meetings are respected.

In her role as Chairwoman of the Women’s Affairs Commission, Sayama Hnaung Pa Pa Nyo is involved in resolving conflicts in the village and reporting serious cases of gender-based violence to the relevant authorities. She mentioned two specific cases: a) a drunk husband who threatened to kill his family, and b) a case of child rape. In the first case, the women’s group took care of the children, and the Ward administration intervened and took the drunk husband away to his parents’ house.

In the second case, members of the Women’s Affairs Commission reported to and negotiated with the police and district judge. The perpetrator received seven years in prison in Taunggyi as punishment. The community respected the actions of Women’s Affairs Commission members, who helped to seek justice for the victim. However, the official village head at the time took no action during the case. Consequently, the community disliked him and he was not elected for a second term as village head.

From Sayama Hnaung Pa Pa Nyo’s perspective, women’s difficulties have decreased over the last five years. This is partly because husbands know women’s rights because many have received awareness trainings organized by Women’s groups. Trainings conducted by the organization Cherry Image have included topics such as child rights and land rights, as well as gender training. The Rule of Law Center (based in Taunggyi) has also conducted three trainings for women in the community to raise awareness of their rights and the legal mechanisms that exist to report any violations of human rights.

“My personal challenge is getting women to attend trainings. Their families do not like it when they attend trainings. They must overcome criticism when they participate in politics and attend trainings. Family members are the issue. Some husbands come and grab their wives out of training.”

Despite these challenges, Sayama Hnaung Pa Pa Nyo effectively leads the Women’s Affairs Commission in her Intha community, as she advocates for women’s political participation and improving education.

Case Study 11: Recognizing Women as Leaders at Different Levels of Governance



“No matter how much people talk about gender equality, there is no equality at all. We are still trying to achieve it. If you look at the ethnic people, only men take the lead and make decisions. Men are household heads. Women are followers. Although there are women taking the lead in some households to make a living, they are not acknowledged.”



Naung Tung Lake, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 11: Recognizing Women as Leaders at Different Levels of Governance

Sayama is a government official. She is committed to seeing more women involved in village affairs and improving women's education. In her community, most women are not involved in village affairs and administration, as men are recognized as main decision makers.

Sayama mentioned that more women are participating in village meetings, so some change is happening at the community level. *"At the present time, I think that people look for the capability, enthusiasm, and leadership skills, rather than being a man or a woman. In the past, they didn't look for such skills. Only people with better social connections were favored. Now, they respect and favor the discussion of women in meetings."* Also, some women are members of village committees.

Sayama noted that since the State Counselor of Myanmar is a woman, there have been some changes regarding women's participation at higher levels of government over the past five years. However, she mentioned that there should be more opportunities created for women to participate at lower levels of government also. For example, women are rarely in township administrator or ward administrator positions. She suggested that the leader of the country should develop a strategic plan for gender equality.

In Sayama's opinion, improving education is a crucial strategy to address gender discrimination. She believes that the reason she was chosen for her specific position is because of her consistent and active participation in trainings. She proved in trainings that she was equally as capable as men. However, other women in her community have not been able to receive a formal education or attend trainings. As a result, many women are not aware of the discriminatory practices being enforced in their communities.

According to Sayama, gender-based violence is seen as "normal" in many households. Specifically, she described a case involving a seventy-year-old woman who sells traditional snacks; her husband demanded that she give him 8,000 kyat per day. If she could not provide that amount, then she was beaten. Sayama stated that this is an example of the fact that men believe that they can bully women, regardless of age. She explained that drug abuse and quarrels among couples are also common, but women tolerate violence because they do not want their neighbors to know the real situation of their marriage.

Also, Sayama explained that marriage is arranged for some women when they are adolescents. She described her own mother's struggles as a young bride, as well as her determination to educate her five children, as she was a primary school graduate. Sayama explained that because she witnessed her mother's struggles, she is determined to raise awareness about women's rights through her work.

Sayama is committed to improving women's education and participation in village affairs. *"No matter how much people talk about gender equality, there is no equality at all. We are still trying to achieve it. If you look at the ethnic people, only men take the lead and make decisions. Men are household heads. Women are followers. Although there are women taking the lead in some households to make a living, they are not acknowledged."*

Case Study 12: Women as Innovators in Shan State Government



“Women have the eye of an artist and have the capacity to lead. The husbands have to support a little. Although men are working on plantations which needs strength, women are the ones leading the process, by thinking and acting on how the end products can be profitable.”



City of Kyaing Tung, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 12: Women as Innovators in Shan State Government

Daw Nang Kyauk Tit is a retired government official. She worked as a civil servant for 38 years in the Department of Cooperatives, as well as the Shan State Executive committee member of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). Now she advocates for women's education and women's leadership in the economic sector.

In the unique context of Kyaing Tung's political economy in the Golden Triangle, she reflected on women's potential for leadership in the business sector, stating: *"Women have the eye of an artist and have the capacity to lead. The husbands have to support a little. Although men are working on plantations which needs strength, women are the ones leading the process, by thinking and acting on how the end products can be profitable."* In this case, Sayama was referring to agricultural production. In addition, she explained that Lahu and Akha women have participated in trade shows in Kyaing Tung, Tachilek, and Taunggyi to market traditional products such as clothes, bags, and longyis, selling at competitive market prices.

However, Daw Nang Kyauk Tit differentiated between women's capacity for managing businesses in the city compared to in villages. She mentioned that women in the city are more capable and have more opportunities to run small businesses. They do not face the same challenges as women working in villages. She identified three specific challenges: many women in villages are illiterate in both Shan and Burmese languages; women must do more work than men, as many men are addicted to drugs (yaba); and women are busy with household chores. Women in cities are also affected by men's drug use, but not to the same extent as women in villages. In Daw Nang Kyauk Tit's opinion, women only have "full capacity and capability" in the economic sector if there is no discrimination and they are given opportunities by men.

According to Daw Nang Kyauk Tit, it is noteworthy that the Department of Education and Health has a higher percentage of women, and the percent of women involved in parliament has increased under the current government. However, she mentioned that some conservative people still adhere to traditional beliefs that limit women's full participation in political and religious affairs. Also, she emphasized that there are no restrictions for women to participate on pagoda trustee groups according to Buddhist traditions. She is currently one of two female members in a pagoda trustee group in her Shan community. She used this example to illustrate that both women and men can lead in social affairs.

As a civil servant, Daw Nang Kyauk Tit developed strategies to strengthen women's education and capacity for leadership in business management. *"It has been 15 years approximately that Shan lacquerware is taught in Bagan Lacquerware school. This was one of my innovative ideas while I was still working as a public servant at the Department of Cooperatives. This shows the leading and decision-making capacity of women living in the city. Women are capable of taking care of the children's education as well as health. They can do business and house chores in balance."* Currently, she continues to advocate for women's education and encourages women to take on leadership roles to improve livelihoods in their communities.

Women Take the Lead as Researchers



Community Leaders from Partner CSOs, December 2019

MIID's local CSO partners were the primary researchers for this gender focused research, and women from each CSO demonstrated their strong leadership skills. Four community leaders from Taunggyi, Pindaya, Nyaung Shwe, and Kyaing Tung contributed to the project by actively participating in research method and gender trainings, mobilizing their research teams to implement research tools, and doing outreach in their respective communities to raise awareness about women's rights. They effectively liaised with women in leadership positions, as well as men who are gender champions. The MIID research team conducted key informant interviews with these four community leaders to understand their perspectives regarding gender equality in their own ethnic communities; they provided in-depth information included in Case studies 13-16. Community leaders' biographies are also included in this section to highlight their work as strong leaders in their respective communities.

Biographies of Community Leaders



Daw Mu Mu Aye is 48 and is from Hae Yar Ywarma Village at Inlay Lake. She is an active community leader and runs her own small business, selling hand-made organic soap and traditional Intha bags and clothing. She completed grade 10. Currently, she is the Secretary of Shwe Inlay and also an active member of May Doe Kabar network. She lives in Hae Yar Ywarma Village and is very active in women's savings groups around Inlay Lake. She

was not able to finish her formal education, so she mentors younger women and encourages them to pursue their education and speak out in their respective communities. She has been providing free soap making training to women in and around Hae Yar Ywarma village since 2019, with the aim of increasing women's incomes and reducing housewives' expense. Also, she is a vocal advocate for women who are facing discrimination and who have faced different types of violence. She effectively collaborates with other women's groups and NGOs throughout Southern Shan state to work towards gender equality, by organizing awareness trainings regarding the rule of law, anti-trafficking, and women's rights.



Daw Mya Nang Khin is 37 and is from Zale Village, Lwe Taw Village tract, Taunggyi Township. She works as a Data Entry Officer at Parami Development Network (PDN). She completed a B.A. in Geography from Taunggyi University. Throughout the Pa-O region, she has been involved in the development sector, participating in women's self-help groups and microfinance programs. Through this gender focused research with MIID, she has learned new gender

concepts and is applying them in her work at PDN.



Daw Nang Seng Noon is 47 and is from Kyaing Tung. She completed a BSc. in Zoology at Taunggyi University. She currently lives in Taunggyi with her family and runs a small business, selling consumer goods. Previously, she coordinated with CSO networks operating in Kyaing Tung, including Mawk Kon Local Development Organization, Braveheart Foundation, and Paung Kuu. She is passionate about improving women's livelihoods and advocating for

communities' land rights. She has positively contributed to this gender focused research by mobilizing diverse volunteers from Akha, Shan, Lahu, and Palaung communities in Kyaing Tung, ensuring that it is inclusive. She also facilitated research training for volunteers. She plans to continue working towards gender equality by designing a women's leadership training program, to empower community leaders to enhance their livelihoods, participate in village affairs, and address conflicts within their respective ethnic communities.



Daw Mya Sandar Soe is 36 and is from Pindaya. She currently volunteers at Shwe Danu and also works as a clerk in a warehouse. She completed a L.L.B. (Legum Baccalaureus) from Taunggyi University via distance education. She has worked with Shwe Danu for two years and enjoys assisting with women's leadership trainings. Specifically, she has learned how to raise awareness about gender equality in the community by conducting this research

with MIID. Also, she can apply the gender concepts which she learned from gender and research trainings in her work.

Case Study 13: Women Must be Included in Political Affairs, Regardless of Education



“Whenever we say ‘women’s empowerment’ and ‘women who are leading’ they just think about educated women. It is not about ‘grading’. We have to think about rural women. We have to create training for them; not only focusing on educated people. Men who are leading the society have to think about women who are not educated; they have to think about women working at the village level. They are also capable.”



Hillside of Yoke Village, Hopong Township, December 2019

Case Study 13: Women Must be Included in Political Affairs, Regardless of Education

Daw Mya Nang Khin is a Data Entry Officer at Parami Development Network (PDN) in Taunggyi. She explained the Pa-O National Organization (PNO)'s plan to improve political participation through an intensive capacity building training program for youth in Southern Shan state, which they started in 2010. However, there is no specific strategy to include more women in political affairs. In 2020, the PNO plans to nominate a woman MP at the national level, and they "warmly welcome" women to participate in village affairs. According to Daw Mya Nang Khin, there is no practical plan in place to include women. Women are invited to be committee members and accountants, and now nominees for the position of 10 household head, but they are not invited to be a village head.

From Daw Mya Nang Khin's perspective, women's political participation is increasing, but women working at the village level must be considered, as well as uneducated women. She also drew a distinction between different branches of the PNO: political party, development sector, and education sector. She works in the local development sector.

While she was conducting the 2nd focus group discussion for this project, a male respondent who was an official from the general administration department (GAD) stated that he attended a PNO capacity building training in 2010. As a result, he became interested in village affairs and is now effectively carrying out his work as a government administrator and encouraging youth to participate in more capacity building trainings.

Daw Mya Nang Khin emphasized that education is one of the main challenges for women to do business and participate in village affairs. Before 2000, most Pa-O women only finished grade 3 or 4, and it was rare to see women pass the matriculation exam and attend university. Most Pa-O women only finish grade 3 or 4, and it is rare to see women pass the matriculation exam and attend university. She also acknowledged a link between education and awareness about gender equality.

The Pa-O National Organization (PNO) uses the training of trainers (TOT) method to conduct leadership, good governance, constitution, gender, and Pa-O history trainings. They connect with a lot of NGOs and have a designated Trainer Group, including both men and women that train people all around the Pa-O region. According to Daw Mya Nang Khin, after these trainings, women have more confidence to speak out, and their decision-making capacity increases. Many women ask for training because they want to speak out and make decisions independently.

When asked about specific barriers for women's political participation, Daw Mya Nang Khin stated, *"Whenever we say 'women's empowerment' and 'women who are leading' they just think about educated women. It is not about 'grading'. We have to think about rural women. We have to create training for them; not only focusing on educated people. Men who are leading the society have to think about women who are not educated; they have to think about women working at the village level. They are also capable. We also need to systematically support women to claim their rights through Parliament."*

Case Study 14: Women’s Attitudes affect Education & Participation in Village Affairs



“Women discriminate against other women. Women say that ‘this is men’s work’. Women gossip about women who talk during village meetings. Women say that ‘women are too tough’. Even after the meeting, women continue criticizing, gossiping, and talking against the women who speak at meetings and give their opinions. So sometimes women only speak at meetings one time.”



Overlook of City of Pindaya, Pindaya Township, December 2019

Case Study 14: Women's Attitudes affect Education & Participation in Village Affairs

Daw Mya Sandar Soe is a volunteer at Shwe Danu in Pindaya. She identified a lack of education as the root cause of women's lack of participation in village affairs. She noted that the highest level of education that most women in the Danu region complete is grade 5. As a result, they lack confidence, and they are afraid that if they attend meetings they would have to write. They are also afraid to speak and give their opinions about village affairs, and they do not want to be in charge of collecting donations for religious ceremonies. This is because they are ashamed to ask for money and do not want to be responsible for writing records of donations.

Daw Mya Sandar Soe mentioned that over the past five years, some parents have started to focus on their children's education, and some women have passed the matriculation exam and are encouraged to become schoolteachers or midwives. She stated that some women who did pass matriculation are now working as company staff in Taunggyi, Pindaya, Yangon, and Mandalay. However, most parents want their educated children to become schoolteachers because teachers are well respected in society.

From Daw Mya Sandar Soe's perspective, women's attitudes about decision making procedures in the village influence their participation in village affairs. She has noticed that women do not want to be involved in village affairs. *"Women just say 'let men lead'. Women do not complain, or discuss, or give advice. They let men take on leadership roles and do not want to be involved."* As a result, mostly men serve on village committees; if women are committee members they are just accountants.

According to Daw Mya Sandar Soe, women also discourage other women from participating in village affairs. *"Women discriminate against other women. Women say that 'this is men's work'. Women gossip about women who talk during village meetings. Women say that 'women are too tough'. Even after the meeting, women continue criticizing, gossiping, and talking against the women who speak at meetings and give their opinions. So sometimes women only speak at meetings one time."*

However, Daw Mya Sandar Soe said she has not personally received criticism for her work in the Danu community. She noted that this is probably because she is from the city of Pindaya. She said that both men and women respect her when she is working in villages. She helps villagers in every sector, and gives advice about their children's education and health. She also clearly differentiated between village and city life and cultural norms for women: women living in villages are more reluctant to participate in village affairs because they face harsher criticism than women in the city.

As a community leader, the main challenge for Daw Mya Sandar Soe is to get women to attend trainings. One of her strategies is to send women to trainings in pairs: one woman who is proficient in Burmese language accompanies one woman who has a lower level of proficiency. She also helped conduct exchange visits to tea-leaf farms and coffee farms; participants traveled to different villages and practiced speaking to new people and gained new experience. Daw Mya Sandar Soe continues to encourage women to attend trainings, and also encourages them to speak out in their communities.

Case Study 15: Building Women’s Confidence to Participate in Village Affairs



“Women do not run as candidates or nominate other women during an election. Women are less confident to nominate themselves because they are worried about other people’s perceptions.”



Thapyay Bin Village, Inle Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, December 2019

Case Study 15: Building Women’s Confidence to Participate in Village Affairs

Daw Mu Mu Aye is the Secretary of Shwe Inlay and head of the Nyaung Shwe chapter of May Doe Kabar network which represents women in the Intha community. Specifically, she is an advocate for women who have faced different types of gender-based violence, and she organizes and facilitates trainings regarding women’s rights and laws affecting women. She also operates a self-help group and manages her own business, selling handicrafts and home-made soap.

Her aim is to build women’s confidence to participate in village affairs, enhance livelihoods, and empower women to speak out in their respective communities. Currently, Shwe Inlay coordinates with Cherry Image, Southern Shan CSO network, and the Rule of Law Center in Taunggyi, in order to conduct capacity building trainings. She believes that if more women attend trainings, then they will have more confidence to participate in village affairs.

From Daw Mu Mu Aye’s perspective, barriers to women’s political participation stem from women’s lack of confidence and knowledge. For example, she stated that before 2010, women could just sit and listen during village meetings; they never talked back to men. After 2010, many CSOs and NGOs began conducting leadership and gender trainings, so women gained more knowledge and began to actively discuss village affairs at meetings. She noted that now the entire community accepts women’s participation in village affairs. Consequently, women now serve on village development committees and are members of women’s groups in their villages.

According to Daw Mu Mu Aye, another challenge for women is that they have not seen examples of women’s leadership in the government administration. There is only one woman who is the 100 household head; otherwise, there are no women in the village administration. During elections, women do not often participate, as she stated, *“Women do not run as candidates or nominate other women during an election. Women are less confident to nominate themselves because they are worried about other people’s perceptions.”*

Advocating for women who have experienced gender-based violence is a critical part of Daw Mu Mu Aye’s work: she has assisted in rape and trafficking cases, seeking justice for victims. For example, she prevented a young woman from being trafficked, as she was traveling from Loikaw to Yangon by bus. She then organized an anti-trafficking awareness training outside of Loikaw. She also assisted the Women’s Affairs Commission from Hae Yar Ywarma Village to take legal action in a child rape case. The perpetrator was prosecuted due to the persistence of Daw Mu Mu Aye and the Women’s Affairs Commission members who insisted that the district judge prosecute the perpetrator to the full extent of the law. Therefore, Daw Mu Mu Aye is confident to speak and liaise with government officials and judicial officials.

Continue Reading on Page 54

Although her formal education was limited, Daw Mu Mu Aye has confidence to be a leader in the Intha community. *“I do not have a degree, but I attended a lot of trainings. In 2014, I did not get any salary. Then I brought my loom from Inlay to Nyaung Shwe at the Shwe Inlay office. I had to weave and then sold bags at the market. I was a volunteer. Then I learned how to use a computer. People asked me why I was learning how to use a computer because I was too old. People criticized me a lot. Now I have a salary, I go to Yangon, Mandalay, and I do NGO work and attend a lot of trainings.”*

Daw Mu Mu Aye shares her experience with others to encourage young women. She mentioned that she wants to change parents’ opinion and ideologies about their daughters’ education. Parents often favour their sons and give them more opportunities. Therefore, she encourages women to continue their education and also to attend capacity building trainings. Daw Mu Mu Aye is an effective community mobilizer, and she strives to raise awareness about gender equality in the Intha community.



A fisherman in Inlay Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township, December 2019



View of Inle Lake, Nyaung Shwe Township December 2019

Case Study 16: Changing Men's and Women's Attitudes about Leadership



“The main problem is the men; not the women. I can persuade women easily to come to the training. Actually, we need to change men’s attitudes (vision) first. If men’s attitudes do not change, then women will come to the training only for a while, but then it is not sustainable. So men’s attitudes have to change.”



Naung Seng Village, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019

Case Study 16: Changing Men's and Women's Attitudes about Leadership

Daw Nang Seng Noon is a community leader from Kyaing Tung. She has collaborated with many CSOs and NGOs operating in the Kyaing Tung area, including Mawk Kon Local Development Organization, Braveheart Foundation, and Paung Kuu, to advocate for migrants' rights, child rights, women's rights, and land rights. She has also been active in several small micro-finance programs to enhance women's livelihoods in Shan, Akha, Lahu, and Palaung communities.

Addressing women's lack of political participation, Daw Nang Seng Noon stated that most women accept paternalistic ideology with regard to village administration. Therefore, they believe that women should not work outside the home and should not take a leading role in the village administration, especially the position of village head. They believe it is men's job. She said, *"Men never think that they have to create a space for women. Women are the same- they never think that they can think for themselves; they think that they do not need to get involved in village affairs."*

As a result, women are generally not household heads. However, Daw Nang Seng Noon mentioned that when she encounters women who believe they should rely solely on men, she asks them *"What will you do for income if your husband dies?"* Then, they begin to think about income generation and the skills they can use.

Daw Nang Seng Noon described a common problem for women in Eastern Shan state: they must work on the border or migrate to Thailand and China in order to provide for their families. This is because their husbands are addicted to drugs and alcohol and do not earn any income. She also explained the link between drug abuse and gender-based violence, which also drives women to leave their village and work on the border, and sometimes take their children with them to work. Daw Nang Seng Noon mentioned that in such cases, mothers want to protect their children, but it is difficult for them to work day and night. She explained that most women who work on the border send money back to their parents and grandparents. If their husbands receive the money, they just buy more drugs and alcohol; therefore, the cycle of drug abuse and violence continues.

To combat these issues, Daw Nang Seng Noon has conducted many trainings for women and men, and she is always developing new strategies. Past trainings have included anti-trafficking initiatives, child rights, labour rights, and women's rights. She emphasized that trainings are more effective when young women can identify women role models in their community, then adopt attitudes which accept and promote women's leadership.

Continue Reading on Page 58

In order to strategically plan trainings, Daw Nang Seng Noon noted that there are two steps: a) giving women confidence to come out in public and participate in training, and b) helping women learn new technical skills. It is a ‘step-by-step’ process, as training is a new concept for many women, and each individual has different skills.

According to Daw Nang Seng Noon, *“The main problem is the men; not the women. I can persuade women easily to come to the training. Actually, we need to change men’s attitudes (vision) first. If men’s attitudes do not change, then women will come to the training only for a while, but then it is not sustainable. So men’s attitudes have to change.”* She is committed to working with a team of ethnically diverse women in Kyaing Tung to create a network to enhance women’s livelihoods and create more opportunities for women’s leadership in village governance.



View from Loi Mwe Mountain, Kyaing Tung Township, December 2019



Sunset of Taunggyi, Taunggyi Township, December 2019



MYANMAR
INSTITUTE
FOR INTEGRATED
DEVELOPMENT



IDRC | CRDI

International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada