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ADVANCEMENT
STRATEGIES FOR
**WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP**
IN MYANMAR'S POLITICS



Dr. Kerstin Duell

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ABOUT THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG

The basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) are freedom, justice and solidarity. KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), named after the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967), who united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany and his intellectual heritage continues to serve both as our aim as well as our obligation today.

We make a contribution underpinned by values to helping Germany meet its growing responsibilities throughout the world. With 100 offices abroad and projects in over 120 countries, we make a unique contribution to the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and a social market economy. To foster peace and freedom we encourage a continuous dialogue at the national and international levels as well as the exchange between cultures and religions.

We are guided by the conviction that human beings are the starting point in the effort to bring about social justice and democratic freedom while promoting sustainable economic activity. By bringing people together who embrace their responsibilities in society, we develop active networks in the political and economic spheres as well as in society itself. The guidance we provide on the basis of our political know-how and knowledge helps to shape the globalization process along more socially equitable, ecologically sustainable and economically efficient lines.

We cooperate with governmental institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, media and think tanks, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, we seek to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation at the national and international levels on the basis of our objectives and values. Together with our partners we make a contribution to the creation of an international order that enables every country to develop in freedom and under its own responsibility.

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- Building out the capacities of democratic and legal institutions as well as civil society and media
- Promoting a sustainable Social Market Economy
- Developing mechanisms of cooperation among Southeast Asian countries, Europe and Germany on the basis of democratic and peace-supporting principles

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The business case for women's leadership has long been made in the private sector, development studies, peace studies and other areas where women's empowerment clearly correlates with better outcomes. Myanmar ranks 106 of 189 countries in the UNDP's 2017 Gender Inequality Index, 148 in the Human Development Index and low in most other international indexes.⁽¹⁾ Women's equal participation in decision-making would substantially alter the very nature and outcomes of the interrelated processes of conflict-resolution, federalism, democratisation, legal reform, equitable natural resource management and overall national development. To date though, women remain almost excluded from the senior echelons of Myanmar's civil service and only field around 10% of parliamentarians. The positive trend of a growing number of women with higher professional experience and education joining politics in the second administration will likely be offset in 2020 by negative trends of identity politics and religious radicalisation.

A consistent theme throughout the report remains the mutually re-enforcing issues of restrictive gendered cultural norms and social practices on the one hand, and the omnipresence of the military institution on the other hand. Women as well as society at large all face repressive, masculinised power. Given that fostering cultural change to eliminate negative gender bias takes time, and that the military is unlikely to give up its prerogatives and agree to civilian oversight, other approaches to redress gender inequality are necessary.

Existing gender-related policy and legal instruments have hardly been implemented in Myanmar. The lack of political will and prioritisation also stem from a lack of awareness, even among male activists, of how missing gender- and conflict-mainstreaming respectively fuel inequality, conflict and underdevelopment. Moreover, the budgetary and formal decision-making processes are largely male-led, perpetuating male privileges and needs.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) could hence become an important tool to redress not only gender inequality but also other weaknesses in Myanmar's public financial management - government accountability, transparency, corruption and public service delivery in line with election promises. In addition, the examples of India, Indonesia and the Philippines demonstrate how GRB implementation in federal states can improve fiscal decentralisation by integrating gender budgeting at the sub-national and grassroots levels.

The South Korean case shows sustained government commitment and detailed legal backing of GRB based on extensive research and public consultation - all which increase government credibility. The Indian example proves how the mainstreaming of GBR in 'gender-neutral' ministries such as energy helps to design policies addressing women's needs. Crucially, women's needs always include the needs of their children and take into account those of the larger communities.

(1) UNDP Table 5: Gender Inequality Index 2017. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII> (accessed 2 July 2019).

The report's principal recommendations consist in:

- A call on the nation's leaders to drive a comprehensive initiative based on legal, financial and overall policy changes to include the other half of the population, especially the most marginalised women from ethnic and religious minorities;
- Measures to groom the next generation of female leaders through empowerment, the creation of women's mentoring networks, and financial, legal and technical support;
- Support to women MPs to form a cross-partisan, multi-ethnic, multi-religious platform to drive gender-sensitive policies across all issues in parliament; and support to women MPs to identify common unifying interests despite substantially different identities;
- Recommendations on how and where to integrate the GRB process in the existing budgetary process.

INTRODUCTION

Under the NLD administration, Myanmar's first generation of elected, non-military women entered parliament (2015-2020). How will these women retain their parliamentary seats and advance their political careers after the next national elections in late 2020? Taking stock of women's political leadership so far, which strategies and policies will pave the way for more women to enter parliament? ⁽²⁾

Women are not a minority but make up 52% of the general population, yet only field about 10% of parliamentarians of the overall (elected and appointed) seats at the national and sub-national levels. Women have been excluded outright or marginalised from Myanmar's polity, policies and politics since latest 1962, specifically

- From the top echelons of government reserved for (military) men under direct and indirect military rule (1962-2010) and also by the 2008 Constitution;
- From 25% of the national and sub-national parliaments reserved for military appointees;
- In ministries and across all levels of national and sub-national administrations where the majority of high and mid-level civil servants are retired military men while the key ministries for Home Affairs, Border Affairs and Defense remain under direct military control as per the Constitution;
- In the armed forces and non-state militaries (the latter have slightly more women than the Tatmadaw);
- From martial courts as well as in the judiciary;
- By policies and budgets that for decades have prioritised military interests, and now reflect male perspectives;
- In the media – both among practitioners as well as subjects of reporting;
- In most areas of society where deeply-entrenched social norms and cultural practices underwrite hierarchical, top-down styles of leadership and decision-making; not least by the fact that heads of households are predominantly men.

With very few decision making positions, women exert little influence over the key interconnected processes of democratisation, peace-building, decentralisation and federalism, and macro-economic development. Instead, women have reached leadership positions in civil society, community-based organisations and the private sector.

This comes as no surprise since the two best functioning state institutions that dominate state and society have been exclusively male institutions with a membership in the hundreds of thousands - the military and the Buddhist clergy. Both foster the narrative of a Burman-Buddhist nation-state in an actually multi-ethnic, multi-religious country. But then, gender equality has hardly fared better in ethnic political parties, non-state ethnic armies or the other religions.

(2) *Women from ethnic and religious minorities deserve particular attention but the scarcity of ethnic- and gender-disaggregated data leaves much to speculation. An intersectional approach to women in parliament was not possible with the secondary data available for this report.*

At a time of changing the political arrangement regarding the (im)balance of power between military and civilian forces, it is equally time to change existing arrangements pertaining to gender. Women and other marginalised groups should push to gain their rightful seat at the table. The literature on political transition, though, remains inconclusive with regards to women's agency during transitions.

Based on the November 2015 elections, parliaments are now composed of MPs with an activist background, MPs who were former political prisoners, MPs from ethnic political movements, MPs close to the military, and representatives of the military. This means more diversity than ever. Yet even these MPs would benefit from more knowledge of Burmese political history in particular, and political systems in general. During the KAS workshop for women MPs in June 2019, one MP asked in surprise whether other states had no military personnel sitting in parliament. Worldwide, there are very few countries where the military operates without any civilian oversight, and where military and business are that closely intertwined. The MP's question underscored the perceived normalcy of pervasive military presence across all sectors of state and society.

It seems that the legacies of a complex political history of numerous different state and non-state groups are not fully understood. The psychological scars of decades of censorship and surveillance, the deep distrust and ignorance of each other's concerns, particularly between Burmans and other nationalities play out in Myanmar's parliaments today.

De-militarising an entire state, including its public administration, not last requires an intimate, uncensored, impartial knowledge of the past. It also means giving female student, independence and other national leaders, intellectuals and artists due recognition in history books so that women and men internalise the fact that women's leadership is not a new, foreign concept but a historic reality.

Women are considered as lower capacitated as men although girls and women perform much better in schools and universities. Essentially, women MPs lack the same skills and knowledge as their male peers – where women usually differ is in their self-esteem and resulting confidence to speak up and act. Therefore, women do not necessarily require different capacity trainings but what they need is empowerment – through laws, through budgets, through respect and, crucially, through a thorough transformation of a militarised political culture.

Among most of Myanmar's politicians, administrators and even activists, achieving gender equity is not seen as an integral part of the transition process. Instead, many other issues are considered as more pressing. Myanmar will not meet its international commitments, notably the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) as long as the potential of the female half of the population is not tapped and women's needs remain under-prioritised.⁽³⁾

In order to lead alongside men in decision-making, law-making and policy-making processes, women can be empowered by dedicated budgets and gender-mainstreaming across all sectors of governance. A two-pronged approach would likely yield best results, with 1) gender-responsive budgeting at the national and sub-national levels, and 2) promoting

(3) For selected UN SDG sub-goals relevant to gender-budgeting in Myanmar, see Paul Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, August 2019), 10-11.

gender equality throughout the entire electoral cycle, starting with political parties nominating women candidates.

Decades of male leadership have left this country among the least-developed LDCs - at the bottom end of most development-related and at the top of most human security and human rights-related indices. Women need to become agents of change and start by fostering solidarity among women in a divided society.

The role of donors in empowering women

With the onset of top-down political changes in 2011/2012,⁽⁴⁾ international financial and development organisations started commissioning research on women in Burmese politics in key areas, notably 1) women in the peace process; 2) women in political parties and parliaments; 3) women in local administrations as well as at the Union level; and more recently 4) gender-sensitive budgeting.

In view of slow cultural changes, development practitioners shifted towards identifying and eliminating institutional barriers to women's representation and advancement, particularly located in laws, policies and budgets. In terms of individual and group trainings, a growing number of international programmes seek to actively support women in developing confidence in their skills and abilities and gaining a seat at the table. Dozens of member organisations of the local Gender Equality Network (GEN) and the Women's Organisations Network of Myanmar (WON) offer women capacity-building through a wide range of technical trainings, mentoring, networking, exposure trips and other means.⁽⁵⁾

The amount of international funding to increase women's overall socio-political and economic participation by supporting women's rights, leadership and economic benefits is significant. Donors globally support girls and women as individuals but paradoxically fail to fund the collective women's rights movement, which has been sustained by local members.⁽⁶⁾ Criticism persists on donors overlooking barriers located in local power structures, women's socio-cultural status in their respective communities, access to household finances, and, most importantly, definitions of women's leadership and empowerment that do not match how women in Myanmar see themselves and their achievements to date.⁽⁷⁾ As in the country's past, donor agendas and underlying Western concepts tend to impact on the trajectories of social movements.⁽⁸⁾

(4) Prior to 2011, women's political agency was analysed in the context of the movement in exile and the women's rights movement. In addition, the majority of academic, NGO and activist publications on women in Myanmar focussed on a) human smuggling/ trafficking, resulting in illegal migration and sex work; b) gender-based violence mostly but not exclusively committed by the Tatmadaw; c) domestic violence; d) gender inequality rooted in cultural norms and resulting practices.

(5) WAVE, Akhaya Women and IWDA, Myanmar Women Parliamentarians mentoring pilot program: Increasing the influence of Myanmar's women political leaders through mentoring (Melbourne: International Women's Development Agency IWDA, March 2018).

(6) Angelika Arutyunova and Cindy Clark, *Watering the Leaves, Starving the Roots: The Status of Financing for Women's Rights Organizing and Gender Equality* (Toronto, Mexico City, Cape Town: AWID, 2013), 17.

(7) Maggi Quadri, *Donors Must Work with Women - Not for Women* (Tea Circle Oxford, 13 December 2018).

(8) Kerstin Duell, 'Sidelined or re-inventing themselves? Exiled Activists in Myanmar's Political Reforms' In *Debating Democratization in Myanmar*, eds. Nick Cheesman, Nicholas Farrelly and Trevor Wilson. (Singapore: ISEAS, 2014).

WOMEN IN THE 2020 ELECTION – SCENARIOS

If the 2015 elections paved the way for a (so far incomplete) transfer of power, the 2020 elections will demonstrate whether the country is on a path towards democratisation or authoritarian renewal. Transition to a civilian not ‘disciplined’ multi-party democracy would require constitutional changes, a security sector reform, and eventually transitional justice – all of which remain anathema to the military. Although some political parties proposed to eliminate all constitutional articles regarding military appointees to parliament, the NLD cautiously suggested a gradual reduction in numbers and phasing out military MPs by 2035 – similar to Indonesia.⁽⁹⁾

Except for the legacies from the 1990 elections – the National League for Democracy (NLD), military-led parties, 88 Generation and ethnic political parties - the majority of Myanmar’s political parties emerged prior to the 2010 and 2015 general elections. Very few parties published party manifestos in 2015, which then lacked detailed party policies and priority areas, least on gender.

In terms of gender equality among candidates, party leaders seemed to oppose mandatory quotas but a small number of parties adopted voluntary quotas for a minimum number of female candidates in 2015.⁽¹⁰⁾ The Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) worked with civil society organisations to raise women’s participation but despite a higher than average percentage, only 16.7% of the SNLD MPs elected in 2015 were women.⁽¹¹⁾ For 2020, women from ethnic political parties are calling for a 30 percent quota to increase inclusion of women in party leadership and the UEC.⁽¹²⁾

The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) led by former generals in contrast has no quota for any underrepresented population group and consequently the second lowest percentage of female MPs (2.6%) after the PNO (0%).⁽¹³⁾

(9) Phyo Thiha Cho, *NLD Wants Military Lawmakers Out Of Parliament By 2035... And A New National Flag* (Myanmar Now, 24 July 2019).

(10) Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women’s Participation in Myanmar’s November 2015 General Election* (Yangon: Phan Tee Eain, 2016).

(11) Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), 21.

(12) *Broadening Participation of Women of Ethnic Political Parties in the Peace Process: Needs and Recommendations* (Yangon: The Carter Center, Women’s League of Burma, March 2019).

(13) Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), 21.

The NLD stated that women, youth and ethnic minorities were prioritised among equally qualified candidates.⁽¹⁴⁾ Political strategy, conversely, seem to override gender policy. In the 2018 by-elections, only one of thirteen contesting NLD candidates was a woman. (Across all parties, seven of sixty-nine candidates were women.) In any case, support for the NLD decreased: In April 2017, the NLD won only nine of eighteen and in November 2018 seven of thirteen seats nationwide. Both by-elections saw a low vote turnout between 30-40 percent.

After rejecting quotas in 2018, the NLD renewed its commitment to increase female participation in March 2019 by calling for at least 30% of female representation in each sector of the government. ⁽¹⁵⁾

In preparation for the 2020 elections, both NLD and USDP formed women committees among others. The NLD set up a Central Women's Committee (with Dr. May Win Myint as Chairwoman and Daw Zin Mar Aung as Secretary) and Women's Work Committees at all administrative levels - regions and states, wards, and villages.⁽¹⁶⁾ The NLD held its first nationwide Women's Work Committee meeting in July 2018. In addition, during its second All-Myanmar Youth Conference in April 2018 reportedly some qualified youths were chosen as parliamentary candidates for the 2020 elections. ⁽¹⁷⁾

New political parties are registering with the Union Election Commission. Perhaps most importantly, U Ko Ko Gyi and other student leaders of the 88 Generation founded the 'People's Party' that could pose a serious challenge to the NLD. At the other end of the political spectrum, former generals launched the 'Democratic Party of National Politics'.

Ethnic parties in the Mon, Kayin, Kayah, Kachin and Chin States have merged into single parties in order to compete with the two large parties NLD and USDP. However, mergers might not be enough to beat the NLD in ethnic states, unless strategic alliances are made with the USDP. Taking advantage of the weakening support for the NLD, the USDP has been engaging with ethnic political parties, including with promises of a non-competition policy in ethnic regions in 2020.⁽¹⁸⁾

The USDP has been supported by Buddhist nationalist monks. The Mon and Kayin States are strongholds of Buddhist nationalism; the 969 Movement, which provided the foundation for the 'Organisation for Protection of Race and Religion' (MaBaTha), emerged in Mon State. ⁽¹⁹⁾

(14) Han Htoo Khant Paing and Richard Roewer, *Testing the Water: the 2018 By-Elections and Myanmar's Political Future* (Tea Circle Oxford, 9 December 2018).

(15) Maggi Quadrini, *Women's Participation in Politics Undermined by the NLD* (The Irrawaddy, 9 May 2019).

(16) Myanmar News Agency, *NLD concludes first Nationwide Women's Work Committees Congress in Nay Pyi Taw* (3 July 2018).

(17) Aung Aung, *Emerging Political Configurations in the Run-up to the 2020 Myanmar Elections* (Singapore: ISEAS, Trends in Southeast Asia Series, January 2019), 6.

(18) Aung Aung, *Understanding Ethnic Political Parties in Myanmar: The Cases of Mon and Karen States* (Singapore: ISEAS, September 2018), 6.

(19) *Ibid.*, 3.

Unhappy with the NLD's opposition to passing the four laws on interfaith relations in 2013 [further discussion below], the MaBaTha backed the USDP, while some Buddhist monks even campaigned against the NLD in the 2015 elections.⁽²⁰⁾

The politics of Myanmar ahead of the 2020 general elections are likely to be shaped by identity politics rooted in the sense that Buddhism is being degraded; issues relating to religion exacerbated by the Rakhine State crisis; ethnic politics related to fears of Burmanization among minorities and to the peace process; and the rise of what local media have coined 'the third force' appearing in the form of a powerful new political party.'⁽²¹⁾ In addition, Facebook, which is the main medium of communication and information used by Burmese on the internet, will most likely become the platform where misinformation as well as populist, racist and sexist slander are spread to manipulate the elections.

How will women's political representation fare in this scenario?

Neither religious nationalism in Bamar-dominant regions nor ethnic-based nationalism in states dominated by ethnic nationalities will work in favour of women's equal share in power. If women were allowed to rise in such parties, they would still have to espouse very traditional cultural norms and gender roles preventing gender equity at large.

The military as a predominantly male institution with a top-down command structure and seniority according to rank and intake in the two training institutions remains most unlikely to promote women. Especially in a power-sharing arrangement between the military-proxy party and proxies of the nationalist monks, including ethnic minority Buddhists, women who are non-Bamar and/or non-Buddhist will be completely marginalised.

Thus, the best chances for women to get elected is to be candidates for the NLD and possibly the 88 Generation. Unfortunately, as the NLD struggles for its majority, gender considerations run risk of being given low priority. When it comes to political survival, parties field their strongest candidates, not 'risk' candidates as women are often considered.

Another pool of women leaders with more political experience, education and international exposure to functioning democracies has been side-lined – women leaders of the pro-democracy movement in exile. The 2008 Constitution requires candidates to have lived in the country for the past 10 successive years without taking into account earlier years. Returned exiles, should they have re-instated their citizenship, will thus only be able to contest in the 2020 elections, as in the case of the Democratic Party for a New Society (DPNS) leaders. If not as candidates, women returnees could have served as trainers or mentors to women in the NLD and ethnic parties. Unfortunately, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD failed to tap women from exile as a formidable political resource while the ethnic political parties tend to be better connected with ethnic-based women and human rights organisations along and across the borders.⁽²²⁾

(20) Aung Aung, *Myanmar's Current Politics: Implications for the 2020 General Elections* (Singapore: ISEAS, October 2018), 2.

(21) *Ibid.*, 2.

(22) *Author's conversations with women activists in Myanmar and Thailand, 2012-2018.*

Especially in 2012-2013, women from exile organisations shared their frustration of being sidelined when compared to male returnees and the scope of the latter's political activities. There was also the sense that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi never recognised or engaged those who had campaigned internationally for her release and democracy in Burma.

Media coverage of women MPs and candidates

During the 2015 national elections, reporting on women candidates was low; women were rarely used as news sources or party spokespersons, while women's issues were rarely raised by female or male candidates but only by activists, observers and international organisations.⁽²³⁾ If at all, the media stressed the fact that the candidate was a woman but not gender equality issues.⁽²⁴⁾ Characteristic of a hierarchical culture, reporting in Myanmar almost exclusively focused on the highest-ranking party representatives.

Since the elections, criticism on insufficient information provided to the public and the media has never ceased. Women MPs and other women in the public sector could take this opportunity to foster better relations with the media and mainstream gender perspectives in reporting at large.

Women should also prepare a solid social media presence, campaign and strategies to pre-empt or counter online misinformation and sexism.

As in the past, the military still controls the general internet access and thus wields the power to shut down the country's internet, should it be considered 'a threat to national security'.

- In view of these challenges in election and post-election scenarios, it would be timely for women MPs to form a cross-partisan, multi-ethnic platform to drive gender-sensitive policies across all issues in parliament, to change legislation harmful to women's rights and to cultivate solidarity among women.
- The NLD should strategically groom female talent, especially in constituencies where female MPs have performed well, fostering changes in public perception of women in politics.
- Women MPs need to become (social) media-savvy and forge links with leading media outlets, so that their perspectives on constituents' concerns and policies addressing those, will be heard.

(23) Gender Equality Network, *Media Coverage of Women Candidates and Women's Issues during the 2015 Election Period in Myanmar* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, 2016), 8.

(24) *Ibid.*

Challenges For Myanmar's Women Parliamentarians

Chapter Summary

1. Gendered social norms block women's career advancement in many ways;
2. They strongly impact parliamentary work and the relationship between political parties and their female representatives;
3. The internalisation of negative gender stereotypes by women themselves leads to low self-esteem, distrust of other women's abilities, and lower performance;
4. Existing laws and most notably the 2008 Constitution continue to underwrite women's inequality and harm women's rights;
5. The presence of the military bloc strongly affects the content of proposed legislation, the nature of parliamentary debate and the way how conventional and human security matters are treated or ignored;
6. With a purely inward-looking focus on security, both the NLD-led Government and the Tatmadaw consider disunity and domestic instability as the main threat to their respective survival;
7. As a result, no civilian and parliamentary oversight has been established over the armed forces' activities or spending.

EXISTING LAWS UNDERWRITING WOMEN'S INEQUALITY

As colonial subjects, Burmese women were granted the constitutional right of equal political participation as early as 1935 (the right to vote) and 1946 (the right to stand for elections).

The 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar reserves a quarter of parliamentary seats for the military (Articles 109, 141, and 161).⁽²⁵⁾ Primarily designed to guarantee the military's role in politics, such constitutional clauses perpetuate a deeply-ingrained gender bias hindering women's advancement.⁽²⁶⁾ Based on the Beijing Declaration and on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the most important national policy on women, the 2013 'National Strategic Plan for

(25) *Ibid.*, 2008. CEDAW recommended to repeal the reservation of certain public offices for men and other discriminatory sections again eight years later in 2016.

(26) Gender Equality Network and Global Justice Center, *Shadow Report on Myanmar for the 64th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, July 2016)*.

the Advancement of Women 2013–2022’ (NSPAW) identified twelve priority areas to improve structures, systems and practices to foster women’s equal participation in decision-making and leadership.⁽²⁷⁾ As of late 2019, CEDAW, NSPAW and other gender-related instruments leave much to be implemented or even sufficiently communicated from the national to the sub-national level.⁽²⁸⁾ Different task forces have been formed under NSPAW to respectively prevent violence against women and girls, help them participate in politics and business, promote gender equality in all sectors, and ensure peace and security for women.⁽²⁹⁾ The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement also opened ‘one stop women’s support centres’ for women who experience violence in Yangon, Mandalay, Lashio and Mawlamyine with more in the planning.⁽³⁰⁾

Women’s rights groups criticised the Thein Sein administration for hastily passing new laws without mainstreaming gender or even taking women’s perspectives into account.⁽³¹⁾ In particular the swift adoption of the four ‘Laws on the Protection of Race and Religion’ in February 2015 was considered a significant setback in terms of democratisation and the observance of human rights and provoked outrage. The CEDAW Committee urged the government to repeal or amend the four ‘race laws’, due to concerns

‘(a) That the Buddhist Women Special Law imposes restrictions on Buddhist women who wish to marry outside their faith;

(b) That the Monogamy Law imposes penalties on unmarried couples who cohabit, and its implementation may have a disproportionate impact on women;

(c) That the Population Control Health-Care Law, which restricts the right of women to freely choose the number and spacing of children, could be used to further restrict childbirth among ethnic minority women, in particular Rohingya women in northern Rakhine State;

(d) That marriage of girls under 14 years of age, with parental consent, is legal.’⁽³²⁾

Parliamentarians should take note of further examples of gender bias enshrined in law, including in the Customary Law, Personal Law and Penal Code pertaining to inheritance, land rights, divorce and other areas of life.

(27) Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, *National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2002)* (Nay Pyi Taw, 2013). The twelve priority areas are livelihood, education and training, health, violence against women, emergencies, economy, decision-making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment, and girls.

(28) Over two years after the plan was drafted, some officials at the sub-national level had not even heard of it (author’s interviews with officials in the Mon and Shan States 2015-2016).

(29) Moe Moe, *Government Promises More Female Participation on Women’s Day* (The Irrawaddy, 8 March 2019).

(30) *Ibid.*

(31) Women’s League of Burma, *Long Way to Go: Continuing Violence of Human Rights and Discrimination of ethnic women in Burma*. CEDAW Shadow report (Chiang Mai: WLB, July 2016).

(32) Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of Myanmar, Sixty-fourth session 4-22 July 2016*.

Gender-based violence, especially intimate partner violence predominantly in marriages appears so common and accepted that women rarely seek support, which results in it 'remaining a silent epidemic across the region.'⁽³³⁾ The country-wide cases of rape and sexual violence against children reported in 2018 demonstrate the critical necessity of amendments to the colonial-era Penal Code of 1861 and of addressing serious failings in the judicial system.⁽³⁴⁾ The relevant 'Law for Protection from Violence against Women' first proposed in 2013 and drafted by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement and women's rights groups is still in process as of late 2019. If passed, this bill would protect women and girls from all forms of violence, including harassment and assault at the workplace and in public, and provide legal and medical support to survivors.⁽³⁵⁾

Striving for the advancement of women's leadership in the public sphere seems lofty as long as women (as well as girls and children) are not even protected from physical, and sexual violence. Women MPs need to focus on changing norms and practices with new legislation and social protection and encourage their male peers to join. Most importantly, law enforcement needs to be strengthened.

Amendments to existing laws to end gender-based discrimination and violence:

- 'Amend the Constitution, including Articles 109(b) and 141(b) which grant parliamentary seats to the military, 59 (d) and Article 352 which limits anti-discrimination provisions.
- Amend the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission Law to bring it into accordance with the Paris Principles; ensuring Article 7(c) explicitly defines the minimum number of women necessary in the Commission.⁽³⁶⁾
- Publicly commit to the need to challenge gender-based discrimination and reform all customs and laws that civil society identifies as either de jure or de facto furthering such discrimination.'⁽³⁷⁾
- Immediately repeal the Laws on the Protection of Race and Religion.
- Clarify that women can be heads of household and own land by enacting amendments to land laws and registration procedures.⁽³⁸⁾

(33) *United Nations Population Fund, Powerful Myths, Hidden Secrets (Myanmar: UNFPA, 2017). While this study focused on Southeast Myanmar, it can be expected that women in the rest of the country face similar violence.*

(34) *Janeen Sawatzky, Sexual violence against women and girls: A year in review (Tea Circle Oxford, 14 January 2019).*

(35) *Aung Myat Thu, Protection from Violence against Women Act likely to be passed next year (Mizzima, 27 November 2018).*

(36) *Article 19, Censored gender: Women's right to freedom of expression and information in Myanmar (London: Article 19, 2015).*

(37) *Ibid.*

(38) *Women's League of Burma, Long Way to Go: Continuing Violence of Human Rights and Discrimination of ethnic women in Burma. CEDAW Shadow report (Chiang Mai: WLB, July 2016).*

- Amend the Association Registration Law to allow for free and fair registration of organizations and the exercise of freedom of assembly; enact regulations designed to encourage the registration of women’s organizations, including by streamlining and expediting the registration process for women’s groups.⁽³⁹⁾
- ‘Draft a modern and coherent child protection policy; ensuring higher participation of women in judicial systems and processes, including juries; educating all parties involved in legal and judicial processes on sexual violence and gender equality; abolishing provisions in the penal code that allow for sexual violence; eliminating the use of customary law and village-level arbitration and compensation as a method of settling cases of sexual violence; and moving forward with the Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Bill in consultation with civil society.’⁽⁴⁰⁾
- Fully implement NSPAW.

WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS AND MILITARY MEN IN THE HLUTAWS

As 25% of parliamentary seats are reserved for the military, women can only compete for the 75% of elected seats. Consequently, women would need to win almost half of the elected seats in order to reach a critical mass of at least 30% in parliament.⁽⁴¹⁾

The fact that one quarter of all parliaments is occupied by Tatmadaw-appointed MPs, who are male except for 12 women representatives in the Union parliament impacts as much on the content of proposed legislation as on the nature of debate.⁽⁴²⁾ There are strong effects on gender in terms a) interactions, if any, between military and women parliamentarians in parliaments, committees and other occasions, and b) in focusing on national, conventional security rather than on transnational, human security, which disproportionately affects women.

Military MPs continue to dominate parliamentary debates on security and defence and pose obstacles to amending laws regarding security and, crucially, the national budget.⁽⁴³⁾ In parliament sessions since 2011, military MPs have consistently opposed all processes or proposals that they saw as contravening the provisions of the 2008 Constitution.⁽⁴⁴⁾

(39) *Ibid.*

(40) Janeen Sawatzky, *Sexual violence against women and girls: A year in review* (Tea Circle Oxford, 14 January 2019).

(41) The ‘critical mass theory’ after Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) and Drude Dahlerup (1988) relates the percentage of female legislators to the passage of laws beneficial to women. Originally, 30 percent of female representation was considered the tipping point for change, but critical debate continues.

(42) No female military MPs serve as members in any parliamentary committee.

(43) Min Than, *The Tatmadaw in the Hluttaw* (Singapore: ISEAS 2018), 5. [The author served as a military-appointed legislator to parliament in 2016-2017].

(44) *Ibid.*

'As it views itself as the embodiment of the Myanmar state, the Tatmadaw generally believes that any challenges to its own integrity constitute threats to the state as well.'⁽⁴⁵⁾ The NLD's aim for constitutional amendments, especially sections 59(f) and 436, will thus not only be rejected in the future but likely be seen as a provocation.

Similarly, when the State Counsellor position for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was discussed on 5 April 2016, all military MPs vehemently opposed the bill. However, since only constitutional changes require a supermajority of over 75% with military support, the bill could be passed with a simple majority.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In preparation for 2020, Tatmadaw MPs proposed a constitutional amendment to extend the clause used to bar Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from the presidency (those with foreign familial connections are excluded from high-level government positions) to the union and state-level ministerial level.⁽⁴⁷⁾

A culture of open and critical debate, in particular of sensitive policy issues, has not yet taken root in Myanmar's parliaments:

'The constitutional presence of the military in parliament serves as a powerful obstacle to critical debate on security matters and the two speakers over the past year have relentlessly attempted to deflect potential legislative disruptions, such as theatrical stand-ups by military MPs, rude interjections and potential stage walk-outs, that would threaten the "dignified" conduct of parliamentary business imposed by legislative procedures.'⁽⁴⁸⁾

Female (and male) elected parliamentarians face a force to be reckoned with and one that will not disappear from Burmese political institutions any time soon. After the USPD-Parliament, the military replaced its representatives with senior-level candidates who were all graduates from college or Tatmadaw institutions. In 2016, the Tatmadaw seconded three major generals, eleven brigadier generals, and ten colonels to the national parliament.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Caution and distrust towards the Tatmadaw MPs persist. During the NLD Central Women's Work Committee's first nationwide conference, applause ensued when some state MPs raised the topic of keeping the military out of politics; but the chairwoman Daw May Win Myint told the media 'that leaders would not permit discussion by representatives who wanted to raise issues relating to the military at the meeting.'⁽⁵⁰⁾

(45) Maung Aung Myoe, *The soldier and the state: The Tatmadaw and political liberalization in Myanmar since 2011* (South East Asia Research, 22, 2, pp 233-249, June 2014).

(46) Min Than, *The Tatmadaw in thle Hluttaw* (Singapore: ISEAS 2018), 5.

(47) Thet Su Aung, *Myanmar Military MPs Submit Bill to Bar Citizens With Foreign Ties From Top Government Posts*. Radio Free Asia (19 September 2019).

(48) Renaud Egretreau, *Marginalisation or Consolidation? The Parliamentary Year in Review* (Tea Circle Oxford, 14 May 2018).

(49) Renaud Egretreau, *Parliamentary Development in Myanmar: An Overview of the Union Legislature, 2011-2016* (Myanmar: The Asia Foundation, May 2017).

(50) Win Ko Ko Latt, *NLD-backed Women's Congress Rejects Talk of Removing Myanmar Military From Politics*. Radio Free Asia (2 July 2018).

Recommendations

- ▶ Women MPs should become well-acquainted with both human and conventional security matters. This would enable women MPs to speak the same language as the military bloc in parliament and bring women’s perspectives on security-related issues and, crucially, the peace process, to the table.
- ▶ The broad issue area of human security warrants particular focus since the use and trafficking of illegal drugs emerged as the third most important concern of constituents. Women MPs serving from 2011-2016 reported that after poverty and infrastructure development their constituents were equally worried about drug-related issues and education.⁽⁵¹⁾ Given that drug abuse is strongly linked to general and domestic violence, and has significant socio-economic impacts on local communities, women MPs need to raise the fight against transnational crime in parliament, in particular with military representatives.
- ▶ The inclusion of the very few female military MPs in cross-partisan women MP caucuses could be another avenue to further women’s interests as well as civil-military dialogue.

NO CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT OF THE DEFENCE SECTOR

Transition to democracy and eventually good governance includes civilian scrutiny of the defence sector’s activities and budget. The security forces must be fully accountable to parliamentary oversight to ensure that the state’s monopoly on violence is not abused. Myanmar’s security forces include an estimated 350,000-strong army, navy and air force.⁽⁵²⁾ In addition, the Commander-in-Chief directly appoints a senior army officer as Home Affairs Minister, who oversees an estimated 85,000-strong police force, that includes 30 well-armed security battalions.⁽⁵³⁾

So far, neither the NLD-lead legislature nor the new semi-civilian executive are empowered to fully check and oversee the security forces’ activities.⁽⁵⁴⁾ ‘The constitution has clearly placed the Tatmadaw and its associated components such as the intelligence services and police forces outside civilian supremacy, and immune to independent judicial scrutiny’ in Articles 6[f], 20[b] and 343 respectively.⁽⁵⁵⁾

(51) Shwe Shwe Sein Latt, Kim N. B. Ninh, Mi Ki Kyaw Myint and Susan Lee, *Women’s Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation and Phan Tee Ein, April 2017), v.

(52) Andrew Selth, *All going according to plan? The Armed Forces and Government in Myanmar* (Contemporary Southeast Asia 40, 2, pp 1-26, 2018), 12.

(53) *Ibid.* In addition, armed ethnic organisations and paramilitary groups opposing the Tatamadaw include up to 100,000 men and women (*Ibid.*, p 16) but there is no reliable data.

(54) Renaud Egreteau, *Negotiating Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector in Myanmar* (Singapore: ISEAS 2018), 2.

(55) *Ibid.*, 3.

The main focus of Myanmar's intelligence effort has been on domestic issues. This not only includes challenges to the government from ethnic armed groups and political activists, but also 'economic insurgents' and potentially disruptive elements of civil society. The security forces too are monitored closely.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Despite new external pressures, both the NLD-led Government and the Tatmadaw consider disunity and domestic instability as the main threat to their survival.⁽⁵⁷⁾

There is widely-shared recognition of the need to place Myanmar's defence services and broader security sector – including the police forces, intelligence community, and the legacies of active or former armed rebel organizations and paramilitary units operating in the country's war-torn areas – under civilian and parliamentary control [...] There is however an equally widely-shared consensus, even in the [...] NLD leadership, on the current impracticality of this goal.'⁽⁵⁸⁾

Regarding the state budget in a least-developed country with extremely low spending on public health and education, Myanmar's military spending in 2017 was the 15th highest worldwide, at an estimated 12.4% of the government expenditure. In Asia, Myanmar ranked 3rd after Singapore (17.2%) and Pakistan (16.7%), and higher than India and China.⁽⁵⁹⁾ This nevertheless constitutes a decrease from Myanmar's earlier state budgets of 2012-2016.⁽⁶⁰⁾

In addition, the military institution generates its own off-budget revenue through two military enterprises, the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEHL), and the Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC), which both pay taxes.

Although the percentage of the budget allotted to the three Tatmadaw-controlled ministries is now a matter of public record and proposals for budget increases have even been denied by parliament, there is still little information on how the Tatmadaw manages public funds or its off-budget income.⁽⁶¹⁾ Efforts to remedy this include the lower house' Public Affairs Committee scrutinising budget documents from the military-run Ministry of Home Affairs, which controls the police forces and until late 2018 the General Administration Department (GAD).⁽⁶²⁾

In December 2018, in the to date most important public sector reform towards demilitarising the state, the NLD administration moved the GAD from the Home Ministry into the Ministry of the Office of the Union Government under civilian control.

(56) Andrew Selth, *Myanmar's Intelligence State* (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 20 September 2018).

(57) *Ibid.*

(58) Renaud Egretreau, *Negotiating Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector in Myanmar* (Singapore: ISEAS 2018), 2.

(59) *Estimated indicators for Myanmar at Worldbank Development Indicators* (accessed 1 August 2019). <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=MS.MIL.XPND.ZS>

(60) *Estimated indicators for Myanmar at SIPRI Military Expenditure Database* (accessed 1 August 2019). <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/SIPRI-Milex-data-1949-2017.xlsx>

(61) Renaud Egretreau, *Negotiating Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector in Myanmar* (Singapore: ISEAS 2018), 4.

(62) *Ibid.*

Recommendations

- Remedy the overall lack of revenue transparency across all levels.
- Strengthen the Public Accounts Committees of both houses of the national parliament, which vet security-related budgets.
- Increase capacity-building programmes to MPs on oversight mechanisms to improve the legislature's budget scrutiny functions beyond the initial planning stage.
- Design instruments for incremental legislative oversight of the defence sector.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting For Socio-Economic Transformation

Chapter Summary

1. Myanmar's weak public financial management, corruption, lack of revenue transparency, especially from natural resources and taxes need improvement;
2. The budgetary and formal decision-making processes are dominated by men and their priorities;
3. Men, mostly retired military officers, hold most national senior positions of director-general and deputy-director-general; even the township administrators, the most powerful positions at the sub-national level, are men;
4. Internationally, Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is seen as an effective instrument to promote women's empowerment in order to transform economic productivity and overall development;
5. In Asia, only India, Indonesia and the Philippines have been implementing GRB for over a decade;
6. These countries demonstrate how GRB implementation in federal states helps to improve fiscal decentralisation by integrating gender budgeting at the sub-national levels;
7. In Myanmar, key players in GRB would be the MoPF, MNPED, National Statistical office, line ministries, relevant agencies and parliamentarians.

International commitments to Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) date back to the Convention in the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the Beijing Platform in 1995 up to the United Nations Agenda 2030 formulated in 2015 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In line with these commitments, specifically to SDG 5 on Gender Equality, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) promotes a gender perspective in public financial management and fiscal policies - incidentally under the leadership of its first female director, Christine Lagarde. In 2015, women's economic empowerment was for the first time prioritised on the G7 Agenda during the German G7 presidency under the first female German chancellor. In 2017, Italy, too, put gender equality at the heart of its G7 presidency.⁽⁶³⁾ Canada even launched an entire 'feminist international assistance policy' in the same year. Thus, major players recognise the key importance of an enabling macroeconomic environment for women's rights and gender equality that in turn positively transforms national productivity, societies, and overall development.

(63) Gavin O'Toole, *IMF champions move towards 'gender budgeting'* (Global Government Forum, 23 July 2017).

'A country's budget can be a powerful lever for social transformation. A budget is the tool a government has to help it translate national resources into allocations which meet the needs and aspirations of its population and set the country on a path to sustainable and equitable development [...] National budgets tend to favour men and male-led institutions perpetuating inequality through biased spending because 'gender-blind' budgets fail to account for the different needs of women and men.'⁽⁶⁴⁾

In Asia, gender equality is enshrined in law in most countries and usually linked to national or sectoral plans, yet only a few countries have effective budget instruments to support the implementation of gender equality.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Gender budgeting is more a fiscal fiat than a legal fiat; legislation making gender budgeting mandatory is rarely found in the region except for the Philippines (since 1995) and Korea (since 2006)⁽⁶⁶⁾. Nevertheless, India, Indonesia and the Philippines have sustained GRB for up to two decades. Among the global best practice GRB leaders, India is ahead of the rest of Asia.⁽⁶⁷⁾

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CASED STUDY INDIA:

ONE OF THE GLOBAL BEST PRACTICE LEADERS

In India, the Ministry of Women and Child Development proactively leads all GRB efforts, which were initiated in 2000 based on the Ninth Five Year Plan and on the 'National Policy for the Empowerment of Women' in 2001. The key strengths include strong institutionalisation, active civil society engagement and budget transparency.⁽⁶⁸⁾

The Ministry of Finance leads the incorporation of gender budgeting in budget circulars, expenditure budgets, and the outcome budget. Its policy think-tank, the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, provides analytical templates to the Ministry of Finance to help translate the gender commitments into budgetary commitments.⁽⁶⁹⁾ For instance, India shows how prima facie gender-neutral ministries such as the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas can design policies to address women's needs: In the Union Budget 2016-2017, gender budgeting was integrated in the energy sector with a policy initiative to uplift poor women with energy subsidies⁽⁷⁰⁾.

(64) Jasmine Burnley, Melanie Hilton, Poe Ei Phyu and Nilar Tun, *A case for gender responsive budgeting in Myanmar* (Yangon: ActionAid, Care, Oxfam, WON, 2016).

(65) Teresa Curristine and Udaya Pant, *Gender Budgeting in South Asia* (Public Financial Management Blog, 5 July 2018).

(66) Lekha Chakraborty, *Asia: A Survey of Gender Budgeting Efforts* (International Monetary Fund, July 2016).

(67) *Ibid.*, 8.

(68) UNESCAP, *Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and good Practices* (Thailand: United Nations, 2018), 14-15.

(69) Chakraborty, 2016, 8.

(70) Chakraborty, 2016, 10.

Some countries generate Gender Budget Statements to articulate how much they spend on women. Gender budget statements help to ensure that budgets include allocations for women's development at both the national and sub-national governments, which in turn increases transparency and accountability in the budget exercises. ⁽⁷¹⁾

In the Indian case, the annual Gender Budget Statement demonstrates the possibility of institutionalising GRB at the national and state levels, along with the importance of creating a gender architecture across government agencies that engages senior officials whose mandate includes capacity building.⁽⁷²⁾ However, India's GB Statement is purely quantitative, which can be limiting and can lead to arbitrary reporting. Gaps remain in design and implementation, monitoring, and adoption at the sub-national level. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) recommended specifically measures to ensure the participation of the most marginalised women in the planning and budgetary processes. ⁽⁷³⁾

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CASE STUDY PHILIPPINES:

EARLY LEGISLATION ON GENDER BUDGETING IN 1995

The Philippines has been engaged in GRB, at the national and local levels, for over two decades based on its first Gender and Development budget in 1995, its 'Magna Carta of Women' (1999) and successive legislative mandates. Led by the Philippine Commission on Women, all government agencies must allocate at least 5% of their budgets to address gender issues – with the intention to influence the remaining 95%. The success factors consist of a strong institutional framework, capacity-building of government and non-government entities, monitoring and accountability mechanisms. GRB is also promoted at the sub-national level, including through the provision of technical assistance in conducting gender analysis of the socioeconomic situations of local government units. ⁽⁷⁴⁾

The principal lesson from the Philippine case is that earmarking a percentage of the budget for women in every ministry and department is only a second-best principle; in fact, setting a floor of 5% was taken as a ceiling in many departments, which then ignored the remaining 95%, resulting in the marginalisation of gender issues from mainstream budgeting as well as the misallocation of resources in various departments.⁽⁷⁵⁾ In 2012, the country moved away from this approach to results-linked gender budgeting with differential targeting of expenditures based on the identification of appropriate programs for women in various sectors. ⁽⁷⁶⁾

(71) Chakraborty, 2016, 8-9.

(72) UNESCAP, 2018, 14-15.

(73) UNESCAP, 2018, 16.

(74) Entire paragraph summarised from: UNESCAP, 2018, 13-14.

(75) Chakraborty, 2016, 24.

(76) Chakraborty, 2016, 24.

As a note on federalism, the 1991 devolution of basic functions like health, social welfare, and agriculture to the sub-national level created more space to address gender needs at the grassroots. ⁽⁷⁷⁾

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CASE STUDY INDONESIA:

STRONG INCLUSION OF WOMEN AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Based on Indonesia's Presidential Decree No. 9 in 2000 making gender-mainstreaming an integral part of all functions of government agencies and institutions, the drivers of GRB are the Ministry of Women's Empowerment, Ministry of Finance, and Bappenas (Ministry of National Development Planning).⁽⁷⁸⁾ The GRB work seems to be well aligned with budgetary reforms and the shift to performance-based budgeting, especially since Indonesia started making its key budget documents publicly available online in December 2016. ⁽⁷⁹⁾

Indonesia's key tools for GRB include the Gender Analyses Pathway (2009) and a comprehensive gender analysis, reviewed by the National Planning Board and the subsequent production of a Gender Budget Statement - comprised of a gender situation analysis, objectives, an action plan, activities and associated budgetary allocations, outputs, performance indicators and anticipated impacts. ⁽⁸⁰⁾

Indonesia nonetheless faces acute capacity limitations of decision-makers, administrators and key ministries in the implementation of GRB as well as insufficient data, specifically extensive sex-disaggregated data. ⁽⁸¹⁾

Key success factors of Indonesia's GRB implementation include:

- a. *'Its institutionalization at both national and local levels, with engagement of women generally and senior male public servants and office holders;*
- b. *The multi-sector planning that is enabled by the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee, in particular the close coordination between the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Bappenas (Ministry of National Development Planning);*
- c. *Strategic partnerships with a range of actors;*
- d. *A civil society that is actively engaged with the government's budgetary processes; and*
- e. *Budget statements being inclusive of qualitative and quantitative information.'* ⁽⁸²⁾

(77) Chakraborty, 2016, 25.

(78) UNESCAP, 2018, 16.

(79) UNESCAP, 2018, 17.

(80) UNESCAP, 2018, 16.

(81) UNESCAP, 2018, 16.

(82) UNESCAP, 2018, 17.

CASE STUDY SOUTH KOREA:

RESEARCH AND LEGAL BACKING

In Korea, (unlike in India) the gender budgeting statement was enacted through law in 2003 but performance indicators were not established. GRB has been institutionalised by numerous laws resulting in substantive and detailed legal backing.

GRB efforts are driven by the Gender Budgeting Task Force co-chaired by the director of social budget at the Ministry of Planning and Budget, and the director of women's policy at the Ministry of Gender Equality. The government also set up Women's Focal Points in key ministries such as Justice, Labour, Health and Welfare, Agriculture and Forestry, Education and Human Resources, and Government and Home Affairs.

The Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), a policy think tank, formulated a framework for gender budgeting and legal backing with provisions in national finance laws. First, KWDI undertook an extensive consultation process comprising international symposiums, field trips abroad and a Gender Budget Forum (with governmental officials from line ministries and agencies, academics, journalists, and civil society groups). As a result KWDI developed in 2008 a gender budget statement comprised of two parts: 1) expenditure targeting women and improving gender equality, and 2) all gender mainstreaming activities.

(83)

The business case for women's equal share in the private and public sectors seems particularly applicable to Korea, which, like Japan, suffers from an aging population and a culturally-conditioned low participation of women in the labour force despite high educational attainments. Cultural norms have impacted very negatively on national productivity. Korea's GRB efforts therefore also engendered programmes to reduce the home care duties of women to enhance their labour force participation.

LESSONS FOR MYANMAR:

BUDGET TRANSPARENCY, LEGAL BACKING, CIVIL SOCIETY COOPERATION & DECENTRALISATION

As all four cases demonstrate, GRB first and foremost needs political will that translates into legal backing, cross-ministerial cooperation, cross-sectoral implementation, availability of reliable, detailed and sex-disaggregated data, and, most importantly, budget transparency with publicly available data. The gender-responsive budgeting process thus lies at the heart of government accountability, transparency and public service delivery in line with election promises.

In all cases, the decision-makers worked closely with a diverse platform of stakeholders, especially civil society, women at the grassroots level and think tanks.

(83) *Entire paragraph summarised from Chakraborty, 2016, 27-31.*

For GRB implementation, the NLD Government needs the will to coordinate with civil society groups. This is currently missing, while restrictions imposed on civil society operations have increased and impacted negatively on CSO's working relationships with government authorities.⁽⁸⁴⁾ In particular the lack of public meetings with women MPs contributed to a notable gap in meaningful dialogue.

For Myanmar, the examples of India, Indonesia and the Philippines demonstrate how GRB implementation could work in federal states: One of the positive outcomes of GRB was that the advent of fiscal decentralisation raised the importance of integrating gender budgeting at sub-national levels of government. So far, such rare local initiatives were only undertaken in India, Indonesia and the Philippines.⁽⁸⁵⁾ In countries with diverse populations and regional contexts, decentralisation including sub-national gender budgeting is the key to address fiscal, administrative and socio-political challenges.

MYANMAR'S MALE-LED BUDGETARY PROCESS AND WEAK FISCAL ADMINISTRATION

Myanmar's weak public financial management, overarching lack of revenue transparency, especially from natural resources, patchy tax collection, and significant level of corruption require the strengthening of fiscal administration, which is underway with international assistance.

Especially fiscal decentralisation as part of the wider decentralisation process remains unfinished and indistinct. The expenditure responsibilities of Union and State/Region entities remain unclear, which makes it difficult to understand to which extent government expenditure has been decentralised. Moreover, some expenditure officially recorded at the sub-national level is actually decided on at Union level. Only about 11% of the overall Union budget is being controlled by the sub-national governments.⁽⁸⁶⁾ According to the Constitution, the Regions ought to collect taxes in over 30 sectors but insufficient laws and regulations hinder this.

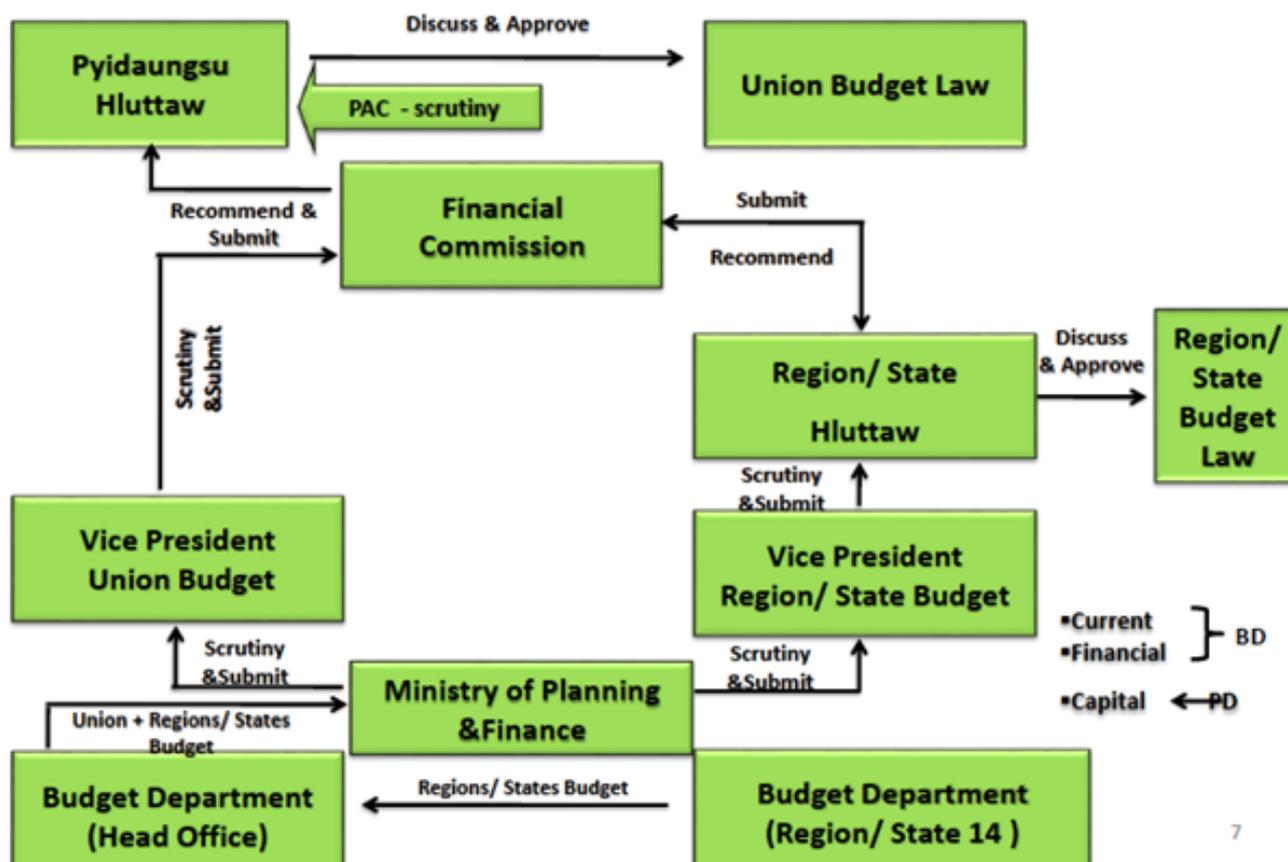
(84) Maggi Quadrini, *Women's Participation in Politics Undermined by the NLD (The Irrawaddy, 9 May 2019)*.

(85) Chakraborty, 2016, 44.

(86) Paul Minoletti, *Gender Inequalities in a Decentralized Myanmar (Quebec: IDRC, May 2017)*, 10.

Graph: 'Preparing the Union Budget and Region/ State budget' ⁽⁸⁷⁾

Preparing the Union Budget and Region/State Budget



'Budgeting is a cross-ministerial process that is central to how governments function. A participatory, gender-responsive budgeting approach can challenge the deep structural forces that systematically marginalize groups, especially women.'⁽⁸⁸⁾

In Myanmar, the budgetary process and formal decision-making is largely male-led and perpetuates male privileges and needs.⁽⁸⁹⁾ Although women make up more than half of Myanmar's civil servants, notably in the Internal Revenue Department and the Statistics Department, they are almost entirely absent from the most senior positions of director-general and deputy-director-general at the national level; similarly, township administrators, the most powerful position at the sub-national level, are all men.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Approximately 80% of

(87) *Gender Responsive Budgeting: Perspectives from Myanmar* (Bangkok: UNESCAP [no date]), 7.

(88) Jasmine Burnley, Melanie Hilton, Poe Ei Phyu and Nilar Tun, *A case for gender responsive budgeting in Myanmar* (Yangon: ActionAid, Care, Oxfam, WON, 2016).

(89) Paul Minoletti, *Gender Inequalities in a Decentralized Myanmar* (Quebec: IDRC, May 2017), 1.

(90) Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), 10-11.

director-general and deputy-director-general positions in ministries as well as directors of other civil administration units are retired military officers.⁽⁹¹⁾ Even after 2015, 'there is still resistance to change in the bureaucracy and considerable potential for its manipulation by the armed forces.'⁽⁹²⁾ Similar to the military, the civil service is characterised by steep hierarchies and top-down decision-making processes, which stand in the way of innovation and participatory approaches. Being differential to older leaders remains deeply ingrained in organisational culture.

A government-wide gender budgeting initiative could be achieved with the buy-in and lead from the Union level Ministry of Planning and Finance (MoPF) but so far there are no (international and local) engagement efforts.⁽⁹³⁾ The MoPF serves as the focal point for all development-related planning, so gender mainstreaming would be very effective if implemented through this ministry. The Budget Department under MoPF along with the Ministry of Electricity and Energy (MoEP) receive largest parts of the national budget.

An easier entry point could be the relevant line ministry on a specific public expenditure area (e.g. health, transport, agriculture etc.).⁽⁹⁴⁾ Another strategy would be to identify government entities that have significant levels of control over their own budgets and senior decision-makers interested in GRB (for example individual spending ministries at Union level; State/Region governments; Development Affairs Organisations; Township Planning and Implementation Committees).⁽⁹⁵⁾

Gender is hardly understood, therefore government requires knowledge and skills in gender equality and GRB application, budget preparation, implementation and monitoring (guidelines and tools for gender budgeting).⁽⁹⁶⁾

GRB should be integrated into the second stage (2018-2022) Implementation Plan in the under the government's Public Financial Management (PFM) system.⁽⁹⁷⁾ Supported by development partners, including the World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development and Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade, the PFM reform programme offers a promising springboard.'⁽⁹⁸⁾

(91) Maung Aung Myoe, *The soldier and the state: The Tatmadaw and political liberalization in Myanmar since 2011* (South East Asia Research, 22, 2, pp 233-249, June 2014).

(92) Andrew Selth, *All going according to plan? The Armed Forces and Government in Myanmar* (Contemporary Southeast Asia 40, 2, pp 1-26, 2018), 10.

(93) Paul Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, August 2019), 7.

(94) *Ibid.*

(95) *Ibid.*

(96) UNESCAP, *Gender Responsive Budgeting: Perspectives from Myanmar* (Bangkok: UNESCAP, no date).

(97) Myanmar Government, *2018 Public Financial Management Reform Program Strategy* [no date] <https://myanmar.gov.mm/documents/20143/9099620/Strategy+Eng%28PDF%29.pdf/6e278da4-3b5e-fb45-b37f-12434de58d79>

(98) Jasmine Burnley, Melanie Hilton, Poe Ei Phyu and Nilar Tun, *A case for gender responsive budgeting in Myanmar* (Myanmar: ActionAid, Care, Oxfam, WON, 2016).

RECOMMENDED STEPS TOWARDS GRB IN MYANMAR

In support of the Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action explicitly mandates financial management and budgeting processes to be gender-responsive. A 2016 paper on Myanmar proposes how gender-responsive budgeting could look at each stage of the annual budget cycle and recommends the following steps to render gender-blind into gender-responsive budgets: ⁽⁹⁹⁾

GENERAL BUDGETING

- Establish a universal and unified budget at the Union level, and for each State/Region;
- Increase the transparency of budget allocations and processes at all levels of government;
- Clearly link policy proposals to development goals and ensure that policy proposals are fully costed;
- Commit to scale up spending on key social sectors first (health, education and social welfare);

DATA

- Collect gender-disaggregated data on the sources of government revenue (e.g. taxes, fines, fees, natural resource revenues);
- Collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data on budget outputs and outcomes, including impact on reducing gender inequalities, and evaluate how these correspond to stated policy goals;
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on men and women's preferences for budget allocations at the national and sub-national levels;

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Increase opportunities for meaningful public participation, paying particular attention to the participation of women and other excluded groups;
- Increase the capacity of civil society and the population at large to engage in budget discussions and decision making, in particular at the sub-national level. Recognise that women may face additional barriers to participating in those due to wider gender inequalities that need to be addressed;
- Implement specific interventions to increase the capacity of women's organisations to engage in the budget process. These should focus both on technical skills and building voice and leadership;

POLICY

- Increase awareness across all ministries of the government's commitments to increase gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination (as described under NSPAW and CEDAW, among others);

(99) *Ibid.*

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- Build on the NSPAW to conduct policy appraisals that identify specific actions to be taken to challenge gender inequalities;

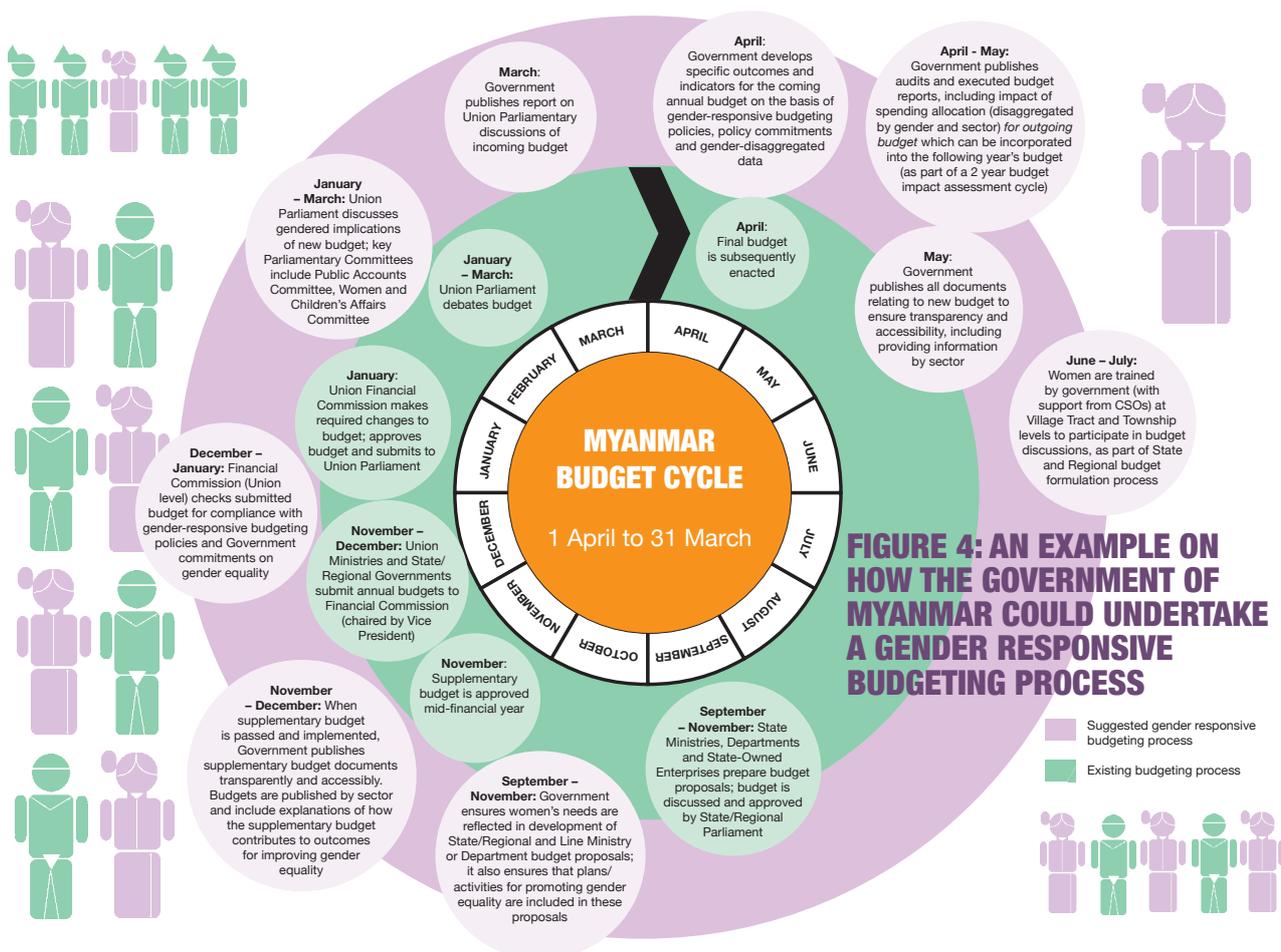
M & E

- Conduct more and better monitoring and evaluation of development projects relevant to gender budgeting and publish the results.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾

(100) All GRB recommendations taken from Jasmine Burnley, Melanie Hilton, Poe Ei Phyu and Nilar Tun, *A case for gender responsive budgeting in Myanmar* (Myanmar: ActionAid, Care, Oxfam, WON, 2016).

Graph: 'An example on how the government of Myanmar could undertake a gender responsive budgeting process'

(101)



(101) Ibid.

Table: Detailed Status of GRB in Asia-Pacific Countries ⁽¹⁾

Annex 1

DETAILED STATUS OF GRB IN ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES

		EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIA	SOUTH-EAST ASIA	SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA	PACIFIC (EXCLUDING AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND)
NATIONAL COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY					
Gender equality (GE) goals are reflected in:	Constitution	China, Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan	Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
	National law, plan, policy and/or strategy	China, Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan	Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
BUDGETARY INFORMATION					
Budget available on public platforms:	Aggregate budgets of individual ministries	Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka (Ministerial budget outline), Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam (Ministerial budget outline)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan	Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Vanuatu (Ministerial budget outline)
	Programme-based budget	Republic of Korea	Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka (limited), Thailand, Timor-Leste, Viet Nam (alongside line budget)	Afghanistan (operational budget), Bangladesh (available upon request), India, Nepal, Pakistan	Cook Islands
	Performance-based budgeting*	Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Timor-Leste	Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan (MTBF#)	Samoa
LEVEL OF BUDGET TRANSPARENCY (OBI SCORE^a 2015)					
	Sufficient (Substantial)	Republic of Korea	Indonesia, Philippines		
	Insufficient (Limited or Minimal)		Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan	Papua New Guinea
	Insufficient (Scant/None)	China	Cambodia, Myanmar, Viet Nam		Fiji
GRB MECHANISMS					
	GRB is mentioned in national plans	Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Timor-Leste	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan	Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea
	Legislation for GRB	Republic of Korea	Lao PDR, Philippines, Viet Nam		
	National plan/strategy specifically for GRB	China (Articles of Shenzhen's local regulation specifically mention GRB), Republic of Korea	Indonesia, Malaysia (in progress), Philippines, Thailand	Afghanistan, Bangladesh (no strategy but GRB is mentioned in the National Women Development Policy), Bhutan, India, Nepal	
	Directives/policy guidelines for GRB	Republic of Korea	Indonesia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Sri Lanka (limited to rural development), Timor-Leste, Viet Nam (guidelines for funding for GE)	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan (guidelines on GRB tools was developed but not widely used)	Samoa (large social sector projects must meet gender criteria; Sector Planning Manual refers to gender mainstreaming)
	Gender budget statement at national level	Republic of Korea	Indonesia	Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan	
	GRB mentioned in budget call circular	Republic of Korea	Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Timor-Leste	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan	
	Gender audit	Republic of Korea	Philippines	India, Nepal	
	Engagement at subnational levels	China, Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Sri Lanka (selected departments to allocate 25 per cent of funds for women under rural economic investment projects), Thailand (limited), Timor-Leste, Viet Nam (limited to implementation of national strategy for GE)	Bangladesh (limited), India, Nepal, Pakistan (gender mainstreaming initiatives by provincial governments)	Samoa
	Participatory GRB processes at the local level	China, Republic of Korea	Cambodia, Indonesia (limited), Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand (limited), Timor-Leste	India (limited), Nepal	Samoa (participatory processes although not specific to GRB)

(1) UNESCAP, *Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Asia and the Pacific: Key Concepts and good Practices* (Bangkok: United Nations, 2018), 22.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: ADVANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN A MILITARY-DOMINATED CONTEXT THROUGH GRB AND OTHER MEASURES

➤ How do women MPs perceive themselves in their roles?

Facing general discrimination, persistent doubt on women's leadership capabilities, and sexual harassment, women MPs tend to respond with insecurity and an acute awareness of their own perceived shortcomings. In addition, family and societal expectations even for MPs command that women continue to carry out their gendered work in household, children and elderly care, which results in a total work overload in family, parliament and constituency.

Those women who are capacitated in technical skills as well as communication, experience a significant shift in confidence to work with their constituents and male colleagues. Trainings also help women to contextualise and understand their challenges, specifically regarding what constitutes harassment.

Myanmar's women MPs in male-dominated environments essentially need support in two principal areas: First, to enhance their own leadership and technical skills to represent the interests of their constituencies effectively in national and sub-national parliaments; second, to become convincing cross-party and intra-party advocates for drafting and passing legislation that promotes gender equality across all areas of governance. At the time of writing, women MPs had not yet been able to drive substantial legislation or constitutional amendments.

➤ What were the learning experiences shared at the KAS June 2019 workshop of MPs from Germany, Indonesia and Myanmar during their countries' respective political transitions?

Transitioning from dictatorship - communist or military - towards a democratic political system does not automatically usher in women's leadership. Women still have to struggle to gain their rightful places in all systems and societies; somehow their equal share is never easily handed to them.

Where women reach leadership positions, these tend to be either in 'soft' policy areas associated with less power, in positions that lead to a dead-end in career-development or in challenging positions with a high risk of failure.

The experiences MPs from Germany, Indonesia and Myanmar shared of being undermined by their male peers and opponents were strikingly similar despite the cultural and economic divide. Women's performance is always assessed more critically than men's performance - so women's work record needs to be impeccable. If it is, opponents will usually focus on women's personal lives - again, what is permissible for men is not for women as long as double standards persist.

Perhaps most importantly, women remain other women's harshest critics! How will women enlist male support unless they achieve solidarity among themselves? If everyone would become aware of the prejudices and premature judgements that happen in the mind every second, and of the double standards that women, too, have internalised about their gender, this could pave the way towards fostering solidarity.

➤ **What needs to change in Myanmar and why has this not happened?**

Even after the onset of political transition in 2011, the legacies of military rule impact very negatively on women's rights and gender equality at large.

Most of the structural, technical, political, and cultural obstacles stem from norms and practices that are direct or indirect results of decades of military authoritarian rule. These include first and foremost a traditional preference for male leadership by both men and women, a top-down male leadership style based on steep hierarches and discouragement of personal initiatives and out-of-the-box-thinking, and weak state institutions except for the military institution that historically had supplanted all other institutions. The latter are slowly being strengthened with international assistance. Similarly, education, trainings and international exchanges were severely curtailed under military rule and international sanctions, resulting in a lack of skilled manpower and international exposure. Women face another formidable challenge in the form of military men occupying 25% of parliamentary seats and most of the upper and middle echelons of ministries.

Women MPs need to become well-versed in both human and conventional security matters in order to bring women's perspectives on security-related issues, including the peace process, to the table. Women MPs should raise transnational human security issues traditionally overlooked by national militaries, and do so especially in the parliamentary committees on International Relations, Mineral, Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation, and Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace Making respectively. Trainings for female MPs should include communication strategies specifically tailored to interactions with military MPs.

➤ **How does gender-responsive budgeting remedy women's marginalisation?**

'Women's programmes' often have the unintended effect to further marginalise women, especially since men have no interest in 'women's issues'. GRB in contrast focusses on where the power lies, in money and resources. GRB constitutes a very hands-on approach to rectify social exclusion and power imbalances right at the heart of government accountability, transparency and public service delivery in line with election promises. Instead of waiting for slow 'cultural change', GRB is a measure that can be implemented relatively swiftly to create new realities.

So far, Myanmar's budget remains 'gender-blind', favouring male interests and male-led institutions, which is best embodied in extremely low spending on health and education combined with a tremendously high defence budget. Instead, a budget in a democratic system should translate national resources into allocations that meet the needs and aspirations of the general population, in particular its 52% women.

In the peculiar Myanmar context, democratically-elected MPs ought to represent their constituents' interests not last in view of their re-election, whereas military-appointed legislators are free from considering re-election. This results in parliaments where two types of representatives who have fundamentally different mandates are pitted against each other – with mandates for achieving the 'common good' and the military-defined 'national interest' respectively – notions that are almost diametrically opposed to each other.

In any case, mainstreaming gender across all ministry budgets would also have the desirable effect of improving overall revenue transparency and increasing legislative oversight of the defence sector. If institutionalised, GRB could become an avenue for successful fiscal decentralisation and devolution of power to the sub-national level.

► **Have Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership role and the NLD victory challenged the existing political arrangement in terms of gender?**

Despite some efforts towards constitutional change, the NLD meets with strong resistance from the military and USDP. Consequently, the clauses excluding women from power remain intact.

While Daw Aung San Suu Kyi has certainly inspired women in her own party and the broader population, it is doubtful that the public preference for male leadership would change so soon, especially since hers presents a classic case of dynastic leadership through association with a male relative. Moreover, the country's ethnic divide makes it less probable that non-Burman women outside of the NLD would consider her a role model.

Social norms in terms of gender will likely only change with more women in visible leadership roles. The NLD should spearhead women's empowerment nationwide by strategically grooming female talent for leadership both in the NLD-led administration at large and in the party, especially in constituencies where female MPs have performed well, fostering changes in public perception of women in office.

► **In an extremely divided country, how can women foster unity and solidarity?**

It would be timely for women MPs to form a cross-partisan, multi-ethnic platform to drive gender-sensitive policies across all issues in parliament. Female solidarity across ethnic, religious and party lines to advocate for new legislation would set an example and provide another avenue for conflict-resolution and peace-building. This would be even more salient if the few women from the military bloc would join such a platform.

Women's networks linking MPs with senior government officials would foster professionalism, identifying common interests in legislation and policies and possibly pave the way for mentoring relationships later on.

In addition, women MPs should forge links with potential supporters among the public, leading media outlets, and identify other champions of women's rights. Women also should enlist male advocates to combat gender roles.

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- Most importantly, the work of female parliamentarians benefits greatly when embedded within the (local and international) women's movements. As the Akhaya-International Woman's Development Agency (IWDA) mentoring pilot 2018 demonstrated, women's rights organisations can play a crucial role in supporting progressive women parliamentarians in strengthening their political skills, enhancing cross-party networks, deepening political ties across countries, and strengthening links between women MPs and women's rights movements.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN MYANMAR'S POLITICS

Recommendations on establishing gender equality and women's rights in political processes and governance:

- Guarantee constitutional rights for voting and to hold public office and eliminate residual forms of sex discrimination or limits to equal citizenship;
- Collect and make available sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on women's participation in politics and governance (on women's role, status, and position in political parties and in the party laws and procedures governing their participation); on women candidates, officials, and/or holders of elected or appointed public office, and as voters, at all political and administrative levels;
- Ensure that data collection takes into account age, economic, ethnic, educational, marital and religious status, geographical location, etc. This will help in gender-sensitive policy formation and implementation in public decision making and governance in ways that also account for other intersecting identities;
- Promote electoral system and policy reforms, such as special temporary measures, that fast-track women's participation in political decision making;
- Promote gender-sensitive reforms in political parties that democratise governance within parties, that enhance women's chances to compete for public office, and that respond to gender equality issues and women's rights:
 - Develop party platforms and manifestos responsive to women's rights. This demonstrates accountability to women;
 - Introduce party quotas and targets that draw more women into party membership and senior leadership positions. This ensures that women's issues are well embedded into party platforms and that there is a stronger pool of women candidates who can contest elections;
 - Strengthen the women's and youth wings of political parties by encouraging policy debates on gender issues or the gender impacts of larger political issues, and capacity strengthening for women party members. This will ensure that a capable and enlightened pool of women, including young women, is nurtured. Support stronger campaign financing of women candidates;
 - Address violence against men and women members and candidates;
- Ensure a gender-sensitive parliamentary culture that promotes women's participation, political influence, and a gender equality agenda;

- Promote gender-sensitive reforms in the Union Election Commission and region and state sub-commissions;
- Enhance the position within the national and local bureaucracies of women's machineries and gender units so they have the resources, authority, and institutional location that can drive a gender equality and women's empowerment agenda across the government;
- Introduce gender-sensitive security (police, military) and justice sector reform;
- Ensure democratic space for civil society; ⁽¹⁰²⁾
- Empower women to reach elected and appointed office and enhance support for a gender equality agenda:
 - Remove financial, legal, social and other barriers that prevent capacitated potential candidates from entering parliament and the government;
 - Raise awareness of the leadership and male members of political parties, local authorities, and communities on the suitability of women as candidates and in elected office, and encourage their support to a gender equality agenda;
- Train women MPs as their male peers in all steps of the different processes of elections, law- and policy-making and budgeting. Encourage women to master and focus on 'hard', not only 'soft' policy issues. Strengthen soft skills such as public speaking, debating, presentations and social media;
- Support the development of women's detailed campaign strategy, financial plan, and political goals in addition to their respective party programme, if any,
- For mentors and trainers, draw on the pool of returnees with experience either in political advocacy abroad or international business and other relevant fields.

Recommendations on supporting women in parliament based on the Akhaya-IWDA mentoring pilot programme in 2018:

Mentoring for women is a novel concept in Myanmar, whereas men have advanced through traditional formal and informal networks and mentoring.

- Increase and expand mentoring programmes for female MPs such as the IWDA-Akhaya, WLB, DIPD, and UNDP pilots and initiatives; invest more in political skills as part of mentoring programmes (crucial skills include packaging key political messages, effective campaigning, and keeping continuous communication with constituents);
- Expand the types of supports for women MPs by establishing formal partnerships with other NGOs in Myanmar;

(102) Section extracted from ADB, UNDP, UNPFA and UN Women, *Gender equality and women's rights in Myanmar: A situation analysis (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: ADB, 2016), 215-217.*

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- As MPs struggle to manage their constituency demands with the parliamentary schedule in Naypyidaw, provide support staff in both locations for administration and research needs;⁽¹⁰³⁾
 - Promote female solidarity in parliament ‘when women support women – women win’. Address the root causes of women’s tendency to scrutinise other women even more fiercely than men do in order to effect behavioural changes;⁽¹⁰⁴⁾
 - Change an inadequate culture of cooperation across parties with enhanced cross-party networks, in particular a cross-party parliamentary women’s caucus where women MPs from different ethnic groups could collaborate regarding conflict-related issues;
 - Form broad-based, cross-party coalitions in order to successfully campaign for new legislation on gender equality; mentoring programmes should include broader advocacy strategies on set areas of legislation. ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾
 - In particular, connect female MPs to the women’s rights movement and embed their training programmes within a broader women’s rights agenda.

(103) Newstone Global Consulting, *Learning Review: Myanmar Women Parliamentarians mentoring pilot program* (Melbourne: International Women’s Development Agency IWDA, August 2018), 22.

(104) *Ibid.*, 18.

(105) *Ibid.*, 20.

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