



She Leads in Myanmar

Inspiring Women Leaders





“As Australia’s Ambassador to Myanmar, I am proud to support the *We Stand Together* campaign for the influence of women in leadership. Ensuring that women participate in decision-making, leadership and peace-building is vital to the building of resilient and prosperous democracies. We must all work together to empower women to contribute perspectives, priorities and strengths from their life experiences, and thereby to develop strong and inclusive democratic representation. I congratulate the hard work and dedication of Yaung Chi Thit (YCT) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), on your efforts to promote women’s leadership, gender equality, human rights, democracy and good governance. *We Stand Together* for More Women Leaders”

Andrea Faulkner
Australian Ambassador to Myanmar



“As the Head of DFID in Burma, I firmly believe that tackling gender inequality is an absolute prerequisite for the development of Myanmar’s future democratic generations. That is why I am proud to support the *We Stand Together* campaign. Women, particularly in local communities, have fewer opportunities in a whole range of ways that make them less likely to become leaders and more likely to succumb to gender stereotypes. We must work hand in hand to empower women to participate in the future direction of their country. The achievements made by Yaung Chi Thit throughout these years have been truly ground breaking and I congratulate your dedication, along with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), towards your support to promote women’s leadership in the wider democratisation of Myanmar. *We Stand Together* for More Women Leaders”

Dr. Gail Marzetti
Head of DFID Burma



Acknowledgements

She Leads in Myanmar: Inspiring Women Leaders was written by Katie Ryan, IFES' senior gender and training advisor, in close cooperation with Yaung Chit Thit (YCT) and the IFES Myanmar team.

Katie Ryan has worked on IFES' women's leadership and empowerment initiatives for more than a decade. This has encompassed programmes in Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, in addition to Myanmar, and she will soon be working on a new IFES *She Leads* programme in Nepal. While all programmes are based on IFES' global expertise in this field, each is also undertaken in close collaboration with local partners, such as YCT, drawing on their unique knowledge of the local context.

YCT's vision is to build a peaceful and democratic society based on justice and gender equality. YCT aims to increase the active involvement of women and young people in the wider political, social and development process in Myanmar. *She Leads* is helping achieve this vision by building the capacity of a diverse group of women in Myanmar to participate in decision making at all levels.

IFES and YCT would like to thank Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) as well as the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for funding the *She Leads* initiative in Myanmar. We would also like to thank Khin Khin Mra, a gender expert, for her invaluable contribution to the *She Leads* Myanmar programme and to Daudai Jz for the design of this book. Finally, this programme would not have been possible without the active engagement and support of the Union Election Commission (UEC) and its' sub-commissions, government officials, *She Leads* participants, local civil society organisations (CSO), and community leaders.

Yaung Chi Thit (YCT)

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)

March 2019





Foreword Yang Chit Thit

Although women have become more active in the political sphere since the 2010 elections, the number of women at all levels of politics and decision making has been and continues to be extremely low. With only 13 % (as of February 14, 2019) of women in parliament, Myanmar has one of the lowest percentages of women in parliament in the world, and is currently ranked the second lowest in South East Asia. In line with its CEDAW commitments, the government has put in place many positive measures to address the lack of women's representation in Myanmar. However, as the current figures show, there is still a long way to go.

YCT's vision is to build a peaceful and democratic society based on justice and gender equality. To achieve this vision, women need to have the opportunities and skills in order to take on progressive leadership roles so that they can contribute to public and political life at all levels in a meaningful way and their voices can be heard.

Working in partnership with IFES since 2015, YCT has developed and implemented *She Leads Myanmar*, a multi-faceted women leadership programme in all 17 areas, 14 states and regions in Myanmar. The programme aims to create an enabling environment by addressing the barriers that hold women back from becoming leaders, and building their capacity by giving them the skills and knowledge they need to take on leadership roles.

YCT is proud to have trained over 1,800 women in Introductory and Intermediary leadership programmes, as well as a programme for young women and a pilot programme for women living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The success of the programme is reflected in the variety of leadership roles that the *She Leads* alumnae have gone on to take, and their commitment to advancing gender equality in Myanmar. This book outlines how this has been achieved and highlights the inspirational work of the *She Leads* alumnae.

Khin Hla
Director
Yang Chit Thit
March 2019



Foreword IFES

To help address the serious under representation of women at all levels of politics and decision making in Myanmar, as part of IFES Myanmar's broader work to promote gender equality and women's participation in elections, with the support of Australia's Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), we are delighted to have partnered with YCT over the past four years to develop and implement the *She Leads* programme in all states and regions in Myanmar.

She Leads Myanmar has been built on IFES' women's leadership programmes and experience in Cambodia, Indonesia, India and in partnership with YCT, has been tailored to the Myanmar context. This has resulted in a highly successful flagship programme, informing the development of subsequent IFES *She Leads* programmes, most recently in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Through this comprehensive and highly inclusive programme, over 1,800 women of all ages, from different religious and ethnic groups, including women with disabilities, have been given the skills and knowledge, and importantly, the confidence they need to take on progressive leadership roles. This has been done through the close collaboration and support of a number of stakeholders, significantly the UEC.

The impact of this intersectional programme has been far reaching with participants coming from diverse backgrounds, old and young, urban and rural, with different faiths, ethnicities, and languages, some with disabilities and some with less education than others. In a society where there can be multiple barriers to genuine participation, the *She Leads* programme has no barriers to join just a commitment to learning.

Participants have gone on to take leadership roles in the 2015 elections, with one participant becoming elected as an MP; many have set up their own organisations and groups to promote gender equality and respond to local issues that women face; and across the board, alumnae are advocating with decision makers, sharing information and taking leadership roles in their communities. This has been done against the backdrop of a high profile campaign, *We Stand Together*, to raise awareness with decision makers and within local communities, including male champions, of the need for more women leaders in Myanmar.

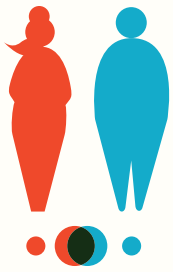
I would like to thank Yaung Chit Thit, the *She Leads* alumnae and the IFES team for their incredible commitment to this programme; to the UEC for their support of the progressive initiative and to Australian Aid and UK Aid for providing such generous support in between elections. Thanks to this collective effort, we have seen at first hand what can be achieved when you invest in women and unleash their potential.

Paul Guerin
Country Director
IFES Myanmar
March 2019



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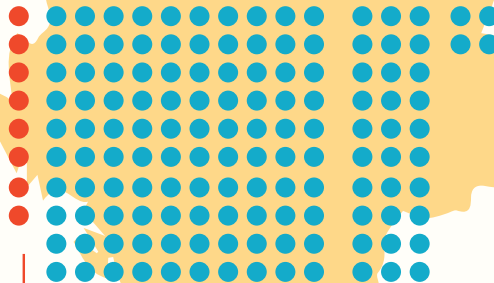


Women's representation in Myanmar

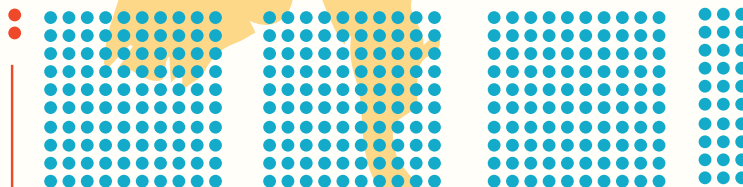
1 female Union minister out of **24**



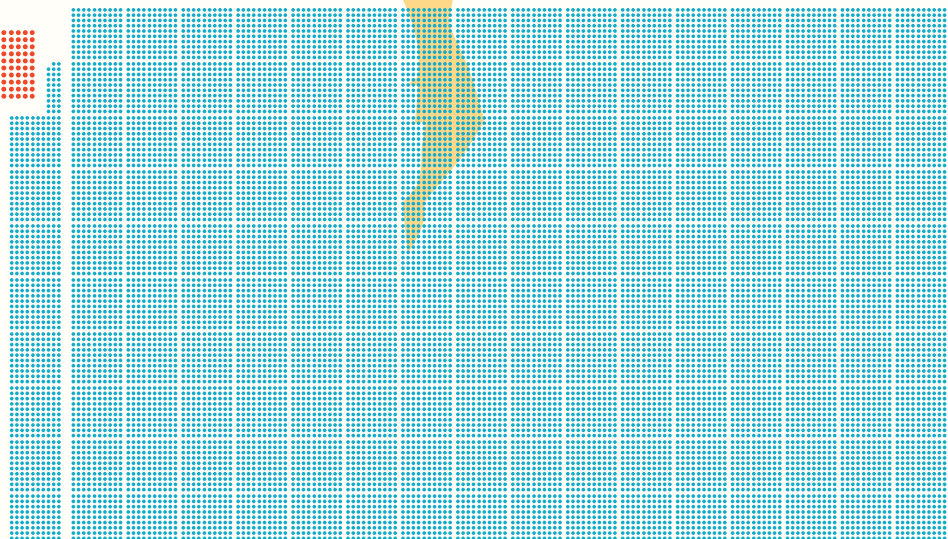
10 female state and region ministers out of **133**



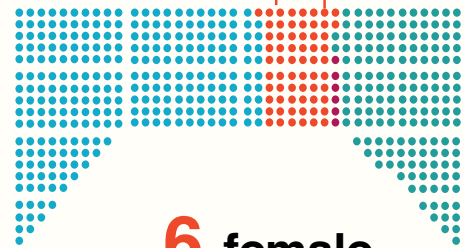
1 female township administrator out of **330**



101 female ward/village tract administrators out of **16,829**



63 female elected MPs out of **493**



6 female military appointed representatives out of **166**

in 2015, **800** female candidates nominated out of **6,038**

1. The Need for Women's Leadership



"Although women's representation in Myanmar has increased a bit, it is still very low. Women have a lot to offer and have capacities, which if tapped, will be beneficial for the state and for the country. We need to get far more women in senior positions and draw on their potential."

Daw Nan Aye Kyi, Former member of UEC sub-commission, Kayin State

The 2015 elections in Myanmar saw a historic number of women candidates run for office, and resulted in more than twice the number of women in elected office. However, Myanmar remains significantly behind international standards in terms of representation and equality with one of the lowest percentages of women in elected office in Asia, and only one woman appointed as a Union Minister.



Myanmar is ranked 161 out of 191 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in terms of women's representation in parliament, making Myanmar the second lowest country in Southeast Asia.

IPU data February 2019

There are a wide range of reasons why women are currently so underrepresented in local, state/ regional, and national decision making processes. These range from access to education and resources to deeply engrained social and cultural barriers relating to the role of women in society.

Myanmar's democratic transition presents an important opportunity to advance gender equality and women's participation in political and decision making processes. This opportunity must be capitalised on as the benefits and rationale of involving women are clear.

Why women should be involved at all levels of politics and decision making

- Women make up over half the country's population (51.8%). If they are marginalised from full and equal participation in political and decision making processes, Myanmar cannot be considered fully democratic.
- Involving women helps ensure that the needs and interests of women and girls are taken into account in laws, policies, and programmes.
- Societies that are more inclusive of women, especially women with disabilities and women of marginalised groups, are often less violent and more tolerant. This has positive impact on everyone.
- Involving women makes economic sense. Significant research shows that gender equality leads to more prosperous societies and better performing businesses.



"She Leads is important for women in Myanmar because while other countries have many women in parliament, Myanmar only has a few representatives. It is very important to get more women elected. Women know the issues women face and need to raise their voices in parliament."

Nyunt Yee, She Leads participant, Taunggyi, Shan



She Leads participant, Nang Mya Aye from Kayin, speaking at the National Post-Election Conference in Yangon. Nang Mya Aye stood as an independent candidate in 2015 general elections



Alumnae at the *She Leads* International Women's Day event, Magway 2016

2. Myanmar's Commitments to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment



“There is a clear need for Myanmar to raise the gender equality of political participation, so as to improve the quality of democracy, and to meet the domestic and international policy commitments.”

Gender Equality Network

The government of Myanmar has made efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights. Myanmar has committed to several international conventions and regional agreements including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals. The government has also developed the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) 2013-2022, featuring women and decision making as one of the key priority areas.¹

The 2016 CEDAW Committee report on Myanmar highlights the low participation of women in all areas of public, political, and professional life and the low number of women in senior management.² The Committee recommended that the Myanmar government adopt measures to guarantee and accelerate women's full and equal participation at all levels including in the parliament, local government, ministerial posts, as well as in the judiciary, the military, the diplomatic service, and in academia.³

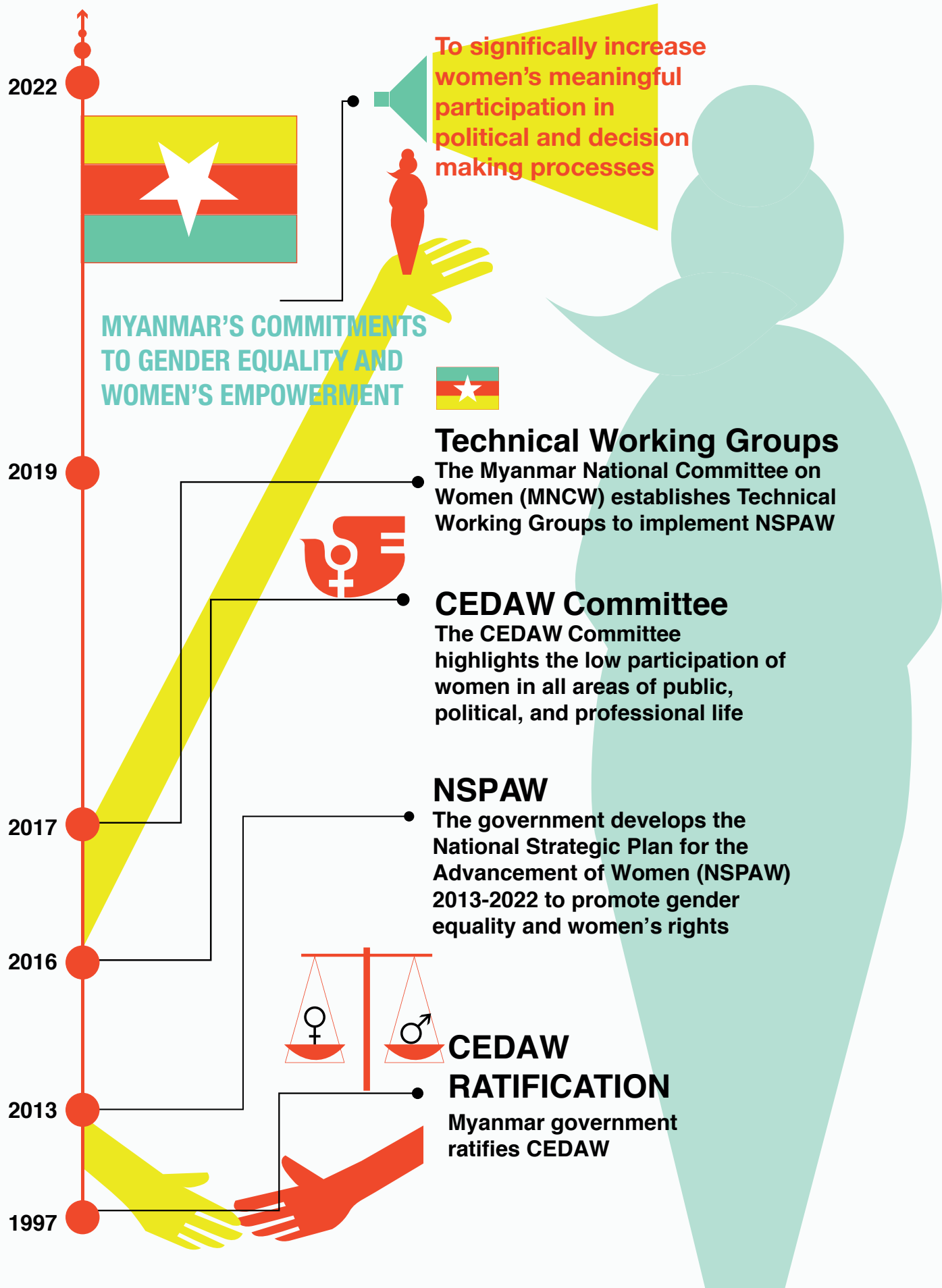
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- 1 NSPAW is made up of 12 priority areas: Livelihoods, Education and Training, Health, Violence against Women, Emergencies, Economy, Decision Making, Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights, Media, Environment, and Youth. The NSPAW is Myanmar's main policy document on gender issues.
 - 2 CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/4-5, para.30
 - 3 CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/4-5, para.31

The government has been working to enhance women's participation in decision making through other mechanisms. These include a Technical Working Group on women's participation in politics and economics under the Myanmar National Committee on Women and the Framework for Political Dialogue, a key part of the ongoing peace process, which calls for 30% women's participation. Civil society organisations CSO are also delivering a diverse range of programmes to increase women's participation. Women's networks such as the Women's Organization Network, Gender Equality Network, Women Can Do It, the Women's League of Burma, and the Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process are also advocating for the government to develop laws and policies that guarantee women's participation in decision making in different sectors and at all levels.



High Level Conference on Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls, Nay Pyi Taw 2017

Many positive measures are already underway to help address the barriers to women's participation, but much still needs to be done.





Participants carrying out a soap making teamwork exercise at the *She Leads* training for women living in IDP camps

3. About *She Leads*

a. Overview of the *She Leads* Programme



“The *She Leads* programme is very useful and important. Women need to come out of their homes and learn so that they can be involved in their communities in effective ways. They need to speak out and make a contribution. *She Leads* is very credible. I was at a peace process meeting and the Chief Minister of Bago, Win Thein, asked where I was from. I said I was a *She Leads* alumna and he knew about it!”

Yi Yi Soe, *She Leads* participant, Bago

To help address the lack of women’s representation and participation in decision making at all levels, in 2015 YCT, with support from IFES, has been implementing the *She Leads* programme in all states and regions. *She Leads* nurtures women leaders at the local level by building their capacity through targeted training programmes, as well as advocating with the national and state/regional governments to advance women’s equality.

The highly inclusive nature of the programme, combined with the partnership between YCT and IFES, is key to the success of *She Leads* in Myanmar. It draws on IFES’ global experience working on gender equality and women’s leadership programmes, and YCT’s knowledge of the Myanmar context and what is most needed to build the capacity of a diverse pool of women leaders.

The highly practical and participatory programme is designed to give participants the skills, knowledge, and confidence to participate in decision making and take on progressive leadership roles. Since 2015, over 1,800 *She Leads* alumnae from around Myanmar have been trained in a range of programmes, including Introductory and Intermediary programmes, a programme for young women and most recently, a pilot in Myitkyina, Kachin for women living in IDP camps. *She Leads* participants have gone on to reach over 200,000 people in local communities across the country as a result of their information sharing activities.

Number of women participating in *She Leads* training programmes

Type of Training Programme	Phase 1 2015-2016	Phase 2 2016-2017	Phase 3 2017-2018	Total
Introductory	813	568	62	1,443
Intermediary		157	135	292
Young women			123	123
IDP women (pilot)			34	34
TOTAL	813	725	354	1,892



She Leads alumnae group photo, International Women’s Day, Magway 2016

b. *She Leads* Programme Design, Methodology, and Curriculum



She Leads is so effective because the facilitators demonstrate everything and the training is highly practical and based on scenarios that are relevant to our lives. In the training and during the assignment we can practice what we have learnt and this builds our confidence.

Nang Aye Nyo, *She Leads* participant, Shan

She Leads is designed to respond to the identified needs of the women, and tailored to the local context. Each programme contains a mix of leadership topics such as teamwork, leadership, public speaking, and negotiation, together with more technical topics such as gender and gender equality, the system of government in Myanmar, human rights, and advocacy. In the run up to the 2015 elections, the training contained more electoral focused topics such as voter registration and polling and counting to facilitate participants' participation in electoral processes.



"The training is so useful because it includes topics such as women's leadership skills and how to build self confidence, which have really helped me. I have also learnt a lot about elections and as a result I actively participated in the 2015 elections."

Aye Aye Thin, *She Leads* participant, Nay Pyi Taw

Participants learning how to fill in forms for the voter list update



All of the programmes, apart from the Intermediary training, contain two or three modules. All involve assignments, one after each module, to give participants a chance to put into practice what they have been learning about. The programme is highly participatory. Each session has especially prepared lesson plans, PowerPoints, and hand-outs. The sessions provide participants with input on the content and incorporates interactive training techniques such as group work and activities, as well as time for individual and paired work.



“The content of the *She Leads* training is unique – it is easy to understand and it is good for beginners. All of the topics are very useful. I have learnt about the democratic process and the system of government—something I had never heard about before. I will vote for the first time in 2020 and now I understand what I am voting for.”

Nwe Ni Zin Win, *She Leads* Alumna, Bago

The Introductory and Young Women’s training programmes are delivered by YCT facilitators. In the case of the Intermediary programme, relevant topic experts such as former MP, Daw Nyo Nyo Thin, and gender expert, Khin Khin Mra, are invited to facilitate sessions. For the pilot programme for women living in IDP camps, *She Leads* alumnae from Kachin facilitated the training.



Learning about the role of elected representatives



Working on a group exercise in the young women’s training

c. Assignment Activities



“She Leads gives assignments that are very useful for women. I love She Leads and would do anything for this programme.”

Yee Yee, *She Leads* participant, Shan

The assignment component of *She Leads* is pivotal to building the self confidence of participants. It gives them the opportunity to consolidate their learning and put into practice what they have learnt, as well as helping them to establish links within their community and other *She Leads* alumnae. Since 2015, there have been a number of different assignments, all of which have had an information sharing and community mobilisation focus. Topics have included voter education related to the 2015 general elections, the role of elected officials, the importance of gender equality, the need for women leaders and the *We Stand Together* campaign. To date over 7,500 assignments have been carried out in all states and regions, reaching over 200,000 people.



“Before the 2015 election, for our assignment we talked to the parents about the importance of voting in the election. Many of them were reluctant to vote, but we explained to them that it is important for them to vote so that they can have a say in their children’s future.”

Ni Ni Aung, *She Leads* participant, Yangon

Alumna, Ni Ni Aung, Secretary of Myanmar Autism Association, Yangon



“I went to 6 local villages and promoted the We Stand Together campaign and collected around 100 photos. I really like the campaign. Because of the training and the assignment, I can speak in front of people. Before I was too scared and panicked.”

Tint Tint Swe, *She Leads* participant, Sagaing



Alumnae around the country carrying out assignments to mobilise voters to check the preliminary voter list; carrying out voter education; playing a team game to highlight issues about gender equality; and holding an information session on the need for women’s leadership in Myanmar

d. Inclusion



“I am very excited. I have only been at events with Muslim people before. At this event, we can exchange information about our organisation or group activities and gain more knowledge.”

Tin Moe Khaing, *She Leads* participant, Shan

A key aspect of the design of *She Leads* is the inclusion of women with disabilities and women from minority religious and ethnic groups. The highly inclusive nature of the programme has been extremely important in building relationships and fostering understanding of different cultures and issues amongst the participants. At the outset, YCT involved MILI (Myanmar Independent Living Initiative) to ensure that the YCT facilitators were trained in inclusive training techniques, and co-ordinated with MILI to invite women with disabilities to participate in *She Leads*.



Participants carrying out the *We Stand Together* assignment in Shwe Pyi Thar Township, Yangon

May Myo Thet from Lashio, worked for the police for 14 years. She lost her sight as a result of an illness in 2015. Following her involvement in *She Leads*, she became a community facilitator for the Shwe Palae Foundation in northern Shan and will stand for election for MILI's Vice President in Northern Shan.



May Myo Thet from Lashio (centre) with fellow *She Leads* alumnae from Lashio, Nhkum Kai Htang (left) and Nang Aye Nyo right.

"If there are more women in leadership positions, other women will look at them and realise that women can be leaders. For example, when I did my *She Leads* assignment other women saw me as a role model. They thought, if this woman, a woman with a disability can do this, then so can I. This is how things will change. *She Leads* has completely changed my outlook and mind-set. Following *She Leads*, I was encouraged by Disabled People's Organisations in Northern Shan to stand for election for the MFPP Chairman in Northern Shan. Before, I never would have had the confidence to take on this role. I now have my own motto that I live by: 'I can do it and I do!'"

May Myo Thet, *She Leads* participant, Shan

Nwe Ni Win Naing is a 19 year-old student at Bago University. Following her involvement in *She Leads*, she decided to stand as a candidate for a leadership position in the university. Her campaign was successful and she is now the Vice President of the Student's Union, a student body of 20,000 students. She is working hard to raise and address the concerns and the issues of the students to the university management.



"In the future, I also want to be a political leader. I am thinking of standing as a candidate in 10 years. I want to do this because there are still far more male MPs than female MPs in Myanmar. I want to be an MP and stand up for women and voice their challenges and needs. Also, in the Hluttaw, there are very few Muslim MPs. If I am successful, I will promote the message that all religions are equal and do everything I can to stop hate speech."

Nwe Ni Win Naing, *She Leads* participant, Bago

e. The Alumnae Network



“The training brings together women from different backgrounds and religions. For things to improve this is very important – we need to coordinate with each other, understand each other and work together.

Nhkum Kai Htang, *She Leads* participant, Shan

Establishing and maintaining a *She Leads* alumnae network is at the heart of the programme. YCT actively encourages *She Leads* alumnae to keep in touch and work with each other, as well as facilitating introductions to other CSOs and networks. In addition to providing the alumnae with assignments to work on together, Intermediary level alumnae had the chance to join together in state/regional groups and apply for a YCT small stipend to implement a project in their communities. Twelve such awards were made in January 2019. And, in July 2018, four *She Leads* alumnae were trained as YCT facilitators to deliver a training for women living in IDP camps. The provision of these capacity building initiatives following the training are important for the sustainability of *She Leads*.



Participants looking at *She Leads* participant contact book



YCT's Programme manager, Bawk Ra (centre), with two of the *She Leads* facilitators at the *She Leads* training for women living in IDP camps

YCT has also organised a number of events at the national and regional levels throughout the programme. These have included events related to International Women’s Day on 8 March and the 16 Days of Activism period from November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, until December 10, Human Rights Day. There have also been a series of seven YCT organised talks around the country. These were on a range of issues relevant to women’s leadership and have proven to be highly popular.



U Nay Win Naing , Director of The Fifth Pillar, speaking at a *She Leads* Tea Talk

In addition to the opportunities provided by YCT, alumnae often work together on relevant local issues. And, some have even joined together to establish their own organisations and CSOs, (See inside the case study page 61). Many of the older and more experienced alumnae have also become dedicated mentors to less experienced alumnae and the young women participating in *She Leads*, as well as to other women in their communities.

The alumnae keep in touch with each other using various Viber groups, as well as via the YCT maintained *She Leads* Facebook page, which shares details of activities and topical issues.



She Leads alumna, Rosie from Bago, mentor to Nwe Ni Win Naing, a participant in the young women’s training

f. Stakeholder Engagement



“The Union Election Commission UEC has established a Gender Working Group for headquarters and sub-commissions, and also developed a Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy and Action Plan. The UEC is very honoured to have supported the She Leads programme, collaborating with YCT and the She Leads alumnae on activities at the national, state/regional, district and township levels. Actively engaging women as voters and decision makers is key to an inclusive and democratic electoral process. The UEC is looking forward to continuing our successful cooperation in the lead up to the 2020 General Elections.”

U Khin Maung Oo
Director General of UEC

She Leads is not implemented in isolation. The programme is strengthened by the proactive engagement with various stakeholders at the national, regional and local levels. These include government institutions such as the UEC, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Myanmar National Committee on Women’s Affairs through the Women’s Participation Technical Working Group; as well as civil society partners such as the Gender Equality Network (GEN) and MILI. *She Leads* has also benefitted from the support of MPs such as Naw Susanna Hla Hla Soe and the extensive support of community and religious leaders across the country.



YCT Director, Khin Hla, running a gender awareness training for UEC officials in Nay Pyi Taw



MP Susanna Hla Hla Soe speaking at the young women's training in Hpa An



Village leader reading campaign materials at an information sharing session



May Sabe Phyu, Women's rights advocate

"Daw Susanna told us that we should take every opportunity that comes our way - we should seize these opportunities and learn from them. To be a female leader in Myanmar we need to try even harder than men."

Myint Myat Maw, *She Leads* participant, Tanintharyi

"The village will develop more quickly if both men and women are involved. There should be no discrimination between men and women and we can achieve this through the democratic process. In the future, I hope that women from the village will perform like the *She Leads* alumnae did today."

Kyauk Chaw Gyi, Village leader, Ayeyarwaddy

"When I was first became involved in *She Leads*, I noticed that the participants were very quiet and shy in the training. However, when I have subsequently run into them around the country, I have seen how confident and empowered they have become. They are speaking out and becoming more confident. That is what *She Leads* is doing."

May Sabe Phyu, Director, GEN



Angelina Jolie meets *She Leads* participants and the team at YMCA in Yangon, 31 July 2015



Carrying out voter education for the 2015 general elections in Yangon

4. *She Leads* and Elections



“I carried out voter education for persons with disabilities and their family members. It is really important that persons with disabilities know they have a right and a responsibility to vote. In the last election, I just did what I was told. Now, I am dealing with local authorities, organising events and speaking in public.”

Khin San Wei, *She Leads* participant, Bago

The first phase of *She Leads*, which took place in advance of the historic 2015 general elections, was designed to facilitate participants’ involvement in the elections. The curriculum contained sessions on the role of elections, the voter list update, voter education, polling and counting procedures and the role of elected representatives. The training was delivered in close collaboration with the UEC at the national and local levels, and involved guest speakers from the UEC. This helped participants establish useful contacts with UEC officials.



“We are responsible for the upcoming 2015 general elections. It is not a one-person job, we need your help, your coordination. You have a crucial role to mobilise your community because they listen to you.”

U Hein Lin Htet, Election Officer,
Mon Sub-commission

U Hein Lin Htet delivering a motivating speech to participants

The assignments following each module for this phase related to the elections. The first involved participants mobilising their local community to check the voter list, and the second focused on voter education on polling and counting procedures. The impact of these assignments was significant, with *She Leads* alumnae mobilising over 100,000 voters to check their names on the voter list and to cast their votes on Election Day.

The involvement of the alumnae in the elections went beyond the voter education activities with over 184 alumnae taking on leadership roles (15 candidate agents, 9 party agents, 124 observers, 15 witnesses, 13 polling station staffs, 6 candidates, 1 polling station officer, and 1 campaign manager). One of the candidates, Soe Nwe Aye, from Mandalay, was elected as the national MP for Tada-U Township (see case study page 51).

The alumnae's involvement and interest in electoral activities has continued, with many alumnae supporting the work of the UEC as voter educators for the 2017 and 2018 by-elections. For example, in the 2017 by-election in Ann township, Rakhine State, a team of 18 *She Leads* alumnae worked with the UEC to carry out out door to door voter registration.



She Leads alumna carrying out voter education for 2015 general elections in Yangon



She Leads alumnae in Ann Township, Rakhine State, preparing for door to door voter registration with UEC officials for the 2017 by-elections

Alumnae are already talking positively about the role they can play in the 2020 general elections, with one participant already planning to stand as a candidate and many others talking about their involvement in voter education.



"In 2015 two of the main parties approached me to run as a candidate but I said no. I did not feel ready. Instead I formed a women's organisation, Mettasanyay She Leads, for She Leads alumnae in the Magway region. Now, I do feel ready and have the confidence to run as a candidate in the 2020 elections. I will campaign on the issue of women's rights and participation."

Tin Tin Lay, *She Leads* participant, Magway



"I really want to carry out voter education in 2020. Of the 75 village tracts, only 15 are in the city area. Most are in rural communities. Here, people really need to understand the value of the vote, so that they are not susceptible to electoral bribery."

Win Mar Htwe, *She Leads* participant, Ayeyarwaddy



Community members in Khu Khat village tract, Eastern Shan State supporting the *We Stand Together* campaign

5. Advocacy and the *We Stand Together* Campaign



“We explained the campaign to men and women at an event attended by many ethnic people. Government officials were very supportive and said they would provide any necessary assistance and took part in the photo campaign. Through our outreach work we reached about 300 people.”

She Leads participant, Shan

In addition to the training and empowerment activities, advocacy has also been an important focus of *She Leads*. Under YCT’s umbrella campaign, ***We Stand Together*** for more women leaders, advocacy has taken place at the national as well as grassroots levels. The campaign has been supported by a range of campaign materials, including a position paper on the issue, a campaign leaflet and a photo petition.

1 female Union minister out of **24**

10 female ministers out of **133** in states/regions

2 female township administrators out of **330**

101 female ward/village tract administrators out of **16,829**

What are we calling for?

At the National and State/Regional Levels

- We call for the **National and State/Regional Governments** to ensure that laws and policies promote gender equality and enhance women’s leadership at all levels
- We call for the **elected MPs** to promote gender equality in their constituencies and advocate within parliament for gender positive legislation
- We call for the **Union Election Commission** to continue to implement its Gender Action Plan and take action to develop special measures to support female political candidates
- We call for **All Political Parties** to develop and implement a party gender policy and mentor female candidates within their party
- We call for the **Media** to carry out gender fair reporting and avoid negative gender stereotypes

At the Community Level

- We call for **Community and Religious Leaders** to encourage and promote women’s leadership and increase leadership opportunities

At the Individual Level:

- We call for **Women** to put themselves forward for leadership roles and work with each other to advance women’s participation
- We call for **Men** to champion and encourage women as leaders

Join our campaign for more women leaders

You can demonstrate your support by:

- Putting your face behind the campaign

I SUPPORT THE WE STAND TOGETHER Campaign for more women leaders

You can demonstrate your support by:

- Spreading the message to your family, friends, within your local community, and at work
- Advocating to your community leaders, religious leaders, government officials, and your elected representatives of the importance and need to involve women at all levels of decision making

Find out more about the We Stand Together campaign actions and all the latest news and events about our campaign and how you can help at:

www.youngchihill.org #westondtogethermm

No. 122(B), First Floor, Bargarh Road, Sanchuang Township, Yengon, 01-2304973, 09-779257863

We Stand Together for more women leaders

We Stand Together campaign leaflet.

At the national level, YCT’s director, Khin Hla has been advocating in various national forums for policies and programmes to increase women’s participation in decision making. In addition to her regular participation and advocacy work as a member of the Technical Working Group for Women’s Participation, a number of other significant advocacy meetings have taken place, for example, with:

- The Women and the Children’s Rights Committee, Amyotha Hluttaw (the upper house)
- Members of the UEC
- The Chairperson and members of the Central Women’s Committee at an event organised by the National League for Democracy (NLD) in Nay Pyi Taw
- The Deputy Speaker of the Amyotha Hluttaw and distribution of campaign materials to all MPs in the Amyotha Hluttaw
- The Director for the Women’s Department at the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement.



Khin Hla, YCT’s Director, highlighting key campaign information to U Naing Ngan Lin, the Regional Minister of the Ministry of Social Affairs, at the International Women’s Day event in Yangon, 10 March 2018



Khin Hla, YCT’s Director, highlighting key campaign information to the staff of Amyotha Hluttaw

YCT’s advocacy work has resulted in increased awareness of the urgent need to advance women’s representation with key decision makers. This is reflected in the subsequent use of the campaign information by various institutions in presentations and reports to highlight the issue. For example, in reports sent to the ASEAN Committee for Women, as well as in the action plan of the Technical Working Group for Women’s Participation.

The advocacy work has also been effective at the local level, helping gain the support of community and religious leaders for women’s participation. This has manifested in their support of *She Leads* alumnae carrying out their assignments in the local community, and their willingness to encourage women’s participation in future local activities and decision making processes.



“It is crucial time for our country’s democratisation. I recognise that people’s participation is really important, especially the participation of women.”

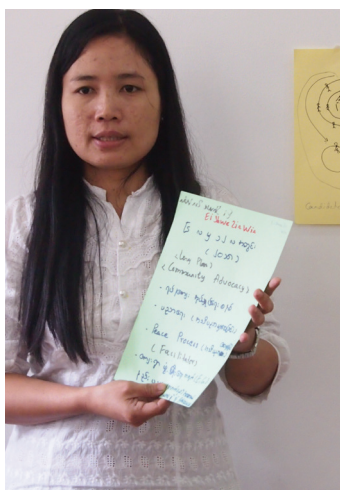
Reverend Ngox Saik Rong, Shan

In addition to this national level advocacy, a major public campaign was carried out, driven forward by YCT and *She Leads* alumnae across Myanmar. The campaign, which also involved a Facebook campaign, aimed to raise awareness of the need for increased women’s representation, as well as demonstrate public support for more women leaders through a photo petition.

The campaign has resulted in significant public support, with over 20,000 people ‘putting their face behind the campaign.’ These petitions will be used to demonstrate the strength of public support with key decision makers around International Women’s Day in March 2019.



Community members taking part in the *We Stand Together* campaign photo petition



“I conducted the advocacy campaign in two townships. I had to use my letter writing skills as I needed to submit a letter to government officials to get permission. I also had to negotiate to get the officials to agree because they were worried about a lot of people gathering in one place. It was really important to liaise with government officials first. I got the skills and confidence to do this from *She Leads*. I felt very empowered. There were quite a few hurdles, but finally I was able to go ahead. I got 168 photos and sent these to YCT.”

Nan Ei Shwe Sin Win, *She Leads* participant, Kayah

She Leads in numbers



1,892 women trained in progressive leadership skills in 17 areas of 14 states and regions



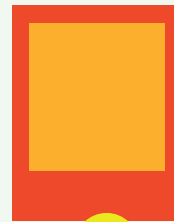
200,000 community members reached through information sharing activities, including voter education



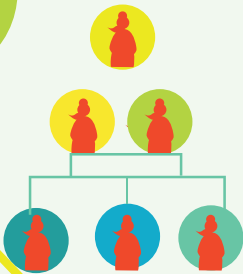
184 alumnae taking on leadership roles in the 2015 elections



18 women working as 10 and 100 head of households



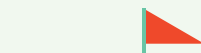
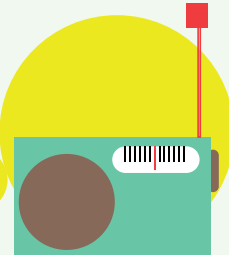
Over **20,000** photo petitions received



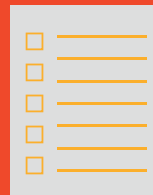
6 alumnae stood as candidates and **1** alumna elected as an MP

14 print and radio features and interviews

10,000 campaign leaflets and **10,000** position papers distributed



Over **10** women set up their own organisations, women's groups or networks



Over **7,500** assignments carried out

6. Impact of *She Leads*



“This training has really motivated me to become a leader. Before the training I hoped I might be a leader. Now I know I will be a leader.”

Su Hlaing Tun, *She Leads* participant, Bago

The results of *She Leads* have been impressive and far reaching. The programme has resulted in important changes in participants’ knowledge levels, their attitudes about leadership and the way they behave. There has been a powerful ripple effect beyond the training. Many alumnae have taken on important leadership roles within their communities, and awareness of the need for women’s leadership has increased amongst key stakeholders.

Key Areas of Impact

Numbers reached as a result of the training

The programme has trained over 1,800 women from all states and regions and reached more than 200,000 community members through 7,500 participant led mobilisation activities relating to elections and women’s leadership.

Knowledge gained

Rigorous pre- and post-tests for all training programmes show marked increases in participant knowledge gained for knowledge related questions. Importantly, interviews and focus groups months after the training show a high level of participant knowledge retention. This gain in knowledge has helped increase participants’ self confidence and build their credibility as role models and leaders in their communities.



“The most important thing for me has been learning how to advocate and how to ask questions. I am now able to ask questions to the government authorities. And, when I am asked questions, I know how to answer them.”

Myint Myint Hlaing, *She Leads* participant, Magway

Attitudinal changes and increased confidence

The programme has resulted in dramatic changes in participants' attitudes, particularly in terms of their increased self confidence, their attitude to women's leadership in general, and their belief that they can be leaders. This is particularly significant in Myanmar where there are ingrained cultural attitudes that women are not suited to leadership roles.

She Leads has also helped change attitudes of men towards women's leadership within the family and local community contexts.



"I have drawn a picture of a wilted flower to show how I felt before the training. After the training I feel as though I have been watered and have gained colour. Before I had no confidence at all and never dared speak. Now I have much more confidence and am taking part in activities."

Ja Seng Pan, *She Leads* participant,
Mina KBC Camp, Kachin

Ja Seng Pan taking part in a *She Leads* focus group after the training for women living in IDP camps



"When I talked to men, I had to explain that if the role of women improved, the situation for men would also improve. This resulted in men supporting what I was doing and they invited me to talk in three villages."

Aye Aye Myint, *She Leads* participant, Magway

Women taking on leadership roles

Many women have been motivated to take on leadership roles, using the knowledge and skills gained in the training to champion women's leadership and address issues that affect women and the broader community. As the case studies illustrate, this is happening in a variety of ways, including more than ten women setting up their own organisations, women's groups and networks to help tackle issues such as gender based violence, land reform and economic empowerment. Eighteen women are also now working as 10 and 100 household leaders.



"I now have the confidence to deal with senior level people for the development of my community. I learnt the necessary skills from She Leads. These skills have driven me to work as a 10 Household Heads. This is my first leadership step and I will strive for higher steps in the future."

Moe Moe Aye, *She Leads* participant, Rakhine

Participation in elections

She Leads has ignited the interest of the women in democracy and elections. In addition to participant voter education activities for the 2015 general elections reaching over 100,000 people, 184 participants had a formal role in the election, including 6 running as candidates, one of whom was elected as an MP. Since then, 43 *She Leads* alumnae have worked to support the UEC with voter education and door to door voter registration for the 2017 and 2018 by-elections reaching 10,000 people.

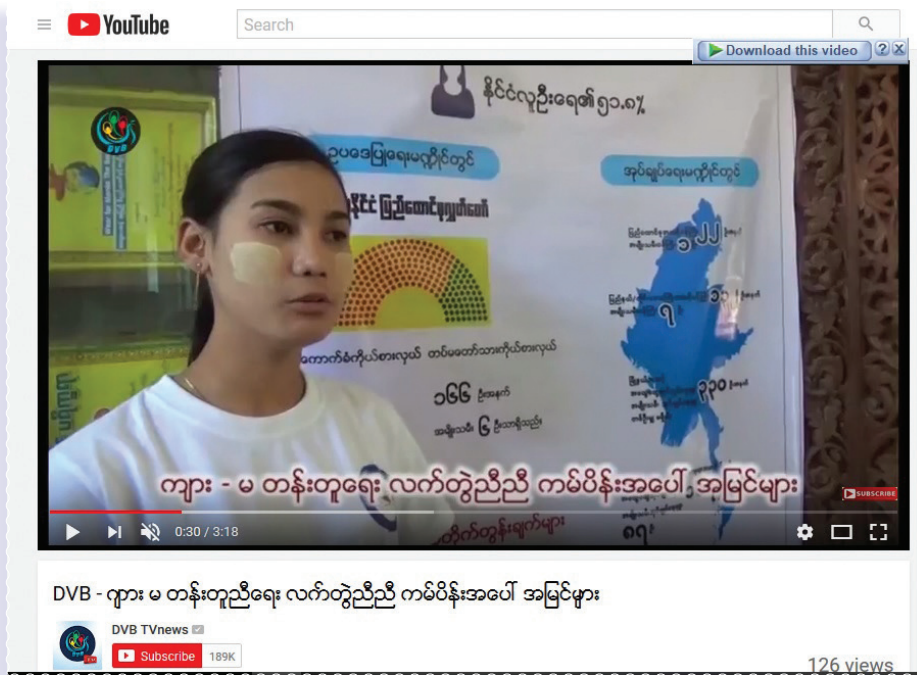


"I was a polling station staff member. I was responsible for checking the voter register. I was also involved in the counting process and used the knowledge from the training to identify the valid and invalid votes."

Khin Marlar Kyaw, *She Leads* participant, Bago

Media and public relations

A wide variety of media coverage was secured in national and International print and broadcast media, helping raise awareness of *She Leads* and the need for women’s leadership in Myanmar and overseas. A number of *She Leads* alumnae were involved in media activities, having learned about working with the media in the Intermediary training. A *She Leads* video was produced, and was played extensively on MRTV (Myanmar Radio and Television).



She Leads alumna, Khin Lan San from Monywa Township, Sagaing talking to the media about the need for more women leaders

ENGLISH | MYANMAR
HEARTBEAT OF THE NATION
MYANMARTIMES

Women’s empowerment has far to go in Myanmar

HTIKE NANDA WIN | 12 MAR 2018



High profile coverage of the *We Stand Together* campaign in the Myanmar Times

Influencing decision makers and raising awareness

As a result of ongoing advocacy efforts and the *We Stand Together* campaign, awareness has been raised amongst key decision makers at the national level, helping shape content of policies relating to the advancement of gender equality and women's participation in Myanmar. Over 20,000 people participated in the photo petition, over 10,000 campaign leaflets, and 10,000 position papers have been distributed and 2,500 assignments on the *We Stand Together* campaign have been carried out by *She Leads* alumnae.

Established *She Leads* network

A committed network of over 1,800 *She Leads* alumnae comprising women from different religions, ethnic groups, young women, and women with disabilities has been established. Strong relationships have been developed between the alumnae, as well as with other CSOs and networks. The women are united by a powerful sense of common purpose to tackle issues that affect women and children, and to promote democracy in Myanmar.



"If women are given the opportunity to equally participate in politics and decision making, our country will prosper. Women can make an invaluable contribution to policies and initiatives such as the peace process. She Leads has a crucial role to play in helping make Myanmar a peaceful and democratic society. We need to make every effort to encourage more women to become leaders."

Nang San San Win, *She Leads* participant, Kayin



7. She Leads Case Studies

a. Working with Stakeholders

What 33 year-old Mie Mie Thein has achieved in a short space of time is extraordinary. Following her participation in *She Leads* in 2016 she has progressed from a teacher working with children from ethnic minorities in Keng Tung, Eastern Shan to a high flying advocate working at the

"If I hadn't joined She Leads, I would still be working in a small community. I would not be pushing my limits and working at the government level."

**Mie Mie Thein,
Eastern Shan**



community, state, and national levels to champion the interests of young people, women, and communities affected by mining.

The outstanding contribution she is making was recognised on International Women's Day in 2018 when she won a women's empowerment award from the Shan government. Her success is down to her passion to make a difference, her natural leadership ability and the way she is able to work with different stakeholders at all levels.

Her leadership journey began during *She Leads* when she learnt about leadership and advocacy and how she could use these skills to bring about positive change. Recognising that there was very little for youth to do in Eastern Shan, she decided to start a youth network. In September 2016, she formed the Keng Tung Youth Network for the whole of Eastern Shan.

"I wanted to start a network that brings young people together to give them something positive to do and help tackle social problems such as drugs and migrant labour."

Working with young people and members of the local community, the network has become sustainable and even has a youth centre in Keng Tung, thanks to local fundraising efforts and the support of a foundation in Thailand. Mie Mie Thein says that many young leaders have emerged from the network and are actively contributing to youth policy at the national level.

Mie Mie Thein's current focus has been on environmental issues, particularly relating to mining, and it here that her ability to work at all levels with different groups has really come to the fore. In 2016, she became involved with MATA (Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability), providing input relating to environmental issues. She has subsequently gone on to become Secretary of the Shan State EITI (Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative) and is the only female member of the group. She is also the only non-government official involved in drafting the legislation and policy relating to mining. In these roles, she represents the interests of local people, and works with government officials, CSOs, and companies. She says that listening and having an ability to have a constructive dialogue is crucial.

In all of her work, Mie Mie Thein is particularly driven to ensure that the voices of women are heard. As she says:

"Women tend to think that resources, the environment, and the revenue of the country is not their concern because they are not engaged in the process and there is often no transparency with government decisions. I want to make sure they are consulted and that they know their rights."

b. Women Living in IDP Camps

Lu San, a single mother of four and camp manager of Bethlehem IDP camp in Kachin State, brims with energy and enthusiasm as she discusses the *She Leads* pilot leadership training for women living in IDP camps. Lu San, and three other *She Leads* alumnae from Kachin were selected as facilitators for a two-module training for 34 participants from 9 IDP camps in and around Myitkyina.

"As a leader, you need to lead by doing."

**Lu San,
Kachin**



Lu San and her football team ready to play in the tournament



"This is the first time I have worked with *She Leads* alumnae like this and I really loved being a facilitator for this IDP programme. The mentoring and encouragement we received from IFES and YCT was inspiring. I always felt the team was behind me. I was worried about my session on leadership and how I would manage the time, but I did it and feel very proud."

Originally from Jaipur village in Kachin State, Lu San has been living with her family in the camp for eight years as a result of the conflict. She feels strongly that leadership training for women living in the camps is much needed and highly relevant. She explains that most of the IDPs come from villages in rural communities. Now, they need to engage and build relationships with people in Myitkyina, and the skills and knowledge from the training are really useful for this.

"I have seen participants from our training in other trainings. I observed that they are now very active and confident, leading group work and standing up and presenting. Before Module One they didn't have confidence to talk in front of people, now they do."

Lu San, a natural leader, has also benefitted from her participation in *She Leads*. She explains that before *She Leads*, she always tried to take a dominant role and didn't listen to people. After *She Leads*, she realised that she needed to practice self reflection and work out what she needed to do to improve and change.

"Before She Leads I didn't involve other people in decision making, I just made decisions by myself and was not always successful. Now I realise that I need more discussion and teamwork with other people. I have started collecting ideas and opinions from other people and working to achieve consensus."

Lu San is putting what she learnt from *She Leads* into practice in her role as camp leader. For example, working with others to find solutions to the drugs and alcohol problems that exist, so that people don't have to be expelled from the camp. Another example is her organisation of team events and camp activities, such as a football tournament, to help reduce the tensions that sometimes exist between people as a result of living in such close proximity, as well as building the confidence of women - a strategy that clearly worked as the women's team won!

Lu San's new facilitation role is one that comes naturally to her, and one she wants to build on in the future. As she says:

"I am really interested in teaching and sharing knowledge. Before I became an IDP I was a teacher in a primary school for 10 years. Because of She Leads I am a facilitator, a teacher again."

c. Gender-based Violence

Win Thaw Tar Swe is driven by a powerful sense of justice, something that started when aged 13, she took part in the 1988 student pro-democracy protests. Her sense of fairness was strongly influenced by her father.

"I have empathy for the victims. I always think, what if it was me, what if it was my family member? I am motivated by humanity."

**Win Thaw Tar Swe,
Southern Shan**



Together with, Sai Myo Myint MP from Southern Shan, taking part in the campaign photo petition

"My father was my hero. He didn't put people in boxes and believed in equality. He let me dress how I wanted. He encouraged me to get involved in the first civilian election in 2010. I worked for a candidate for the Federal Union Party because I had a strong feeling of frustration, so much needed to change."

Her focus on politics shifted in 2016 when the Southern Shan State Women Organisation suggested she take part in *She Leads*. During the training she met women from other CSOs and networks and she decided to direct her attention and energy to work at the community level. Inspired by *She Leads*, she set up a Facebook page for people in Taunggyi to raise issues of local concern and established her own organisation called Legal Aid for Human Rights. The organisation is run on a voluntary basis and has seven staff, including a lawyer. The cases Win Thaw Tar Swe and her team focus on relate to gender-based violence and harassment. The issue is close to Win Thaw Tar Swe's heart. She explains:

"Ever since I was a child, I have received verbal abuse and harassment because of my gender expression. This is not right. People need to understand that all people have equal rights. I am fighting for this."

One case she has been involved with concerns the rape of a 6-year old girl from a poor family by her neighbour in May 2018. Determined to bring about justice for the girl and her family, she supported them throughout the ordeal, documenting the evidence and holding those in authority to account. A key part of her strategy was to mobilise CSOs and women's networks to support the family, as well as to engage the media to raise awareness of the case. In spite of pressure from the perpetrator's family to settle out of court, she encouraged them to hold fast and prosecute.

"Rape and child rape is very common in Myanmar. Many people, like this family, are not educated and very poor. They do not know the law. They are very vulnerable and settle out of court for relatively small amounts of money. The girl's family were offered 20 lakhs (\$1.300) by the perpetrator's family. They refused. I told them this is a serious case. You are role models fighting for justice for your daughter. Don't give up. I stood by the family and fought for them. They put their trust in me."

The bravery of the family and the trust they placed in Win Thaw Tar Swe, and others that supported them, was rewarded when the court found the perpetrator guilty and sentenced him to 20 years in prison in December 2018.

d. Becoming an Elected Representative

After an intense campaign, on the morning of Monday 9 November 2015, Soe Nwe Aye heard that she had been elected MP for Tada-U Township winning 49,559 votes. Her victory in these historic elections is the result of a life long interest in politics, hard graft, and a desire to work at the national level to represent the needs of her constituents.

"I want to do a lot for my township. So many things need to be done – improvements are needed in education, health care, and the roads which are in a bad condition. I want to work towards real democracy in Myanmar."

**Soe Nwe Aye,
Mandalay**



Soe Nwe Aye celebrating her victory



Soe Nwe Aye became interested in politics and leadership when she was a child.

"I remember my mother telling me stories about the village leaders when I was little and whenever I played with my four brothers, I always took the leadership role! I was also very curious about the national leaders in Myanmar and was always asking my parents questions."

The eldest of four, Soe Nwe Aye studied zoology, gaining a masters in 2006. She then joined her parents' business making traditional mats in her village and took responsibility for the management side of the business.

Her childhood interest in politics and leadership continued. She initially became interested in standing as a candidate in 2012 when she worked as a party agent for NLD (National League for Democracy) and became a member of NLD's Young People's Development Movement in 2013. In March 2015, she decided to apply to be a candidate in the 2015 elections.

"I wanted to be a role model for women and young people. I wanted to get involved in politics at a national level to help take a stand against cheating and corruption. I want to be accountable to my constituents."

Her participation in the *She Leads* training in Mandalay was a great help to her. She was inspired by the empowerment aspect of the training. She says that *She Leads* gave her the self confidence and motivation she needed to stand as a candidate and run her campaign.

"She Leads training has given me so much. The training has made me think about a lot of things. We learnt that women can be just as good as men, often better. I want to demonstrate this. All the content, elections and leadership skills have been useful, but the most important thing has been helping change my mind-set."

Soe Nwe Aye went on to run a tiring 38-day campaign visiting 164 villages. She says that the public speaking skills she gained from the training helped her to tailor her campaign speeches to her audience who were mostly from farming communities and fairly uneducated. She kept her message simple. She said she would take her responsibilities seriously and would be accountable to them, doing as much as she could to promote their interests.

"I listened to the villages words with my heart and will always remember them when I am working as their elected representative."



e. Elections

Rosie is a Muslim woman, living in a mixed community in Bago. She exudes an inner self confidence and is highly committed to Myanmar's democratic journey, particularly the electoral process. This has not always been the case.

"I became interested in the value of the vote. Every vote can change our lives, our community, and our country."

**Rosie,
Bago**



Rosie carrying out voter education

"Before 2015 and my involvement in She Leads, I had no knowledge of elections and had no interest in them. But in She Leads, we learnt about elections and the Hluttaw, the electoral cycle and the role of elected representatives."

Rosie's interest in elections was fuelled by her two *She Leads* assignments, which involved her mobilising voters to register for the historic 2015 elections, and then in the run up to the elections, providing them with information on the polling and counting procedures.

“With another participant we went to the Muslim quarters and the slums in the outskirts of town. We wandered around with a loudspeaker and carried out door to door voter education. We went to a lot of villages and reached around 5,000 people. A lot of Muslim people in the villages had no confidence and I encouraged them to participate in the election. Other organisations were coming to me to ask about the electoral process and how to fill in the forms. I even did this for the ward/village sub-commissions office!”

Motivated by what she had learnt and the practical insight she had gained through the assignments, in August 2016 Rosie applied for a job with PACE (People’s Alliance for Credible Elections), an independent electoral observation group. Rosie credits *She Leads* with her success in the interview.

“She Leads helped me with the interview process for my job working for PACE. I had to do two telephone interviews and I felt very confident answering the questions. Before She Leads, I was very scared of interviews and didn’t have a proper job for 15 years because I couldn’t do interviews. She Leads gave me the knowledge about elections. It gave me self confidence and the ability to present myself and carry out an interview.”

As the PACE co-ordinator for Eastern Bago, Rosie has been involved in the observation of two by-elections in 2017 and 2018, as well as a survey about the democratic expectations of voters. She has also recently been involved in observation of the Bago regional Hluttaw for the local organisation, Pace on Peaceful Pluralism (PoPP).

In all her work, Rosie is particularly keen to champion women’s involvement in elections and decision making, and frequently mentors and encourages young women to become leaders.

“The message that I want to give to young women is that everyone, including them, has a role to play in elections. Young women need to have a mind-set that they are important for the country. If women can play their role, things will be better for the next generation.”

"I noticed that her capacity, capability, and confidence greatly increased after the training. She started talking about democracy, politics, and the role of elected representatives, and encouraged other women and men to talk about these issues. She brought members of the community together and talked to them about the importance of women leaders."

Reverend Ngox Saik Rong gives two examples of the powerful impact relating to the empowerment of Aye Aye Mu. The first concerns an incidence of domestic violence that took place in the local community. Hearing about the incident, Aye Aye Mu contacted two other *She Leads* alumnae, Thida Myint and Ma Moe Moe. Initially they tried to resolve the situation informally, but when the husband threatened them, they reported the incident to the police, resulting in criminal charges being made. The second relates to Aye Aye Mu's key role, with the support of the pastor, in helping resolve a trafficking case involving four young women from the area, something she undertook at great personal risk.

Reverend Ngox Saik Rong is committed to championing other women to take on leadership roles in the community, just as Aye Aye Mu has done.

"I am very proud of Aye Aye Mu, a woman from an ethnic minority, for taking on a leadership role in the community. Women from the Wa area are afraid of taking part in social affairs, but Aye Aye Mu is different. She now has the confidence and leadership capacity. I believe that she can change the conventional attitudes of our people and lead the young generation for the betterment of our society. I do hope many other Aye Aye Mu will emerge in our community."

g. Inclusion

Tin Nwe Oo has just finished filming for her weekly sign language news feature. This week she is raising awareness about a child labour case involving a deaf child. She is a frequent presenter for iSchool Myanmar, a local non-governmental group, providing an online platform providing persons with disabilities equal access to new technology. She is also one of the leading deaf activists in Myanmar.

"I would like to say to women with disabilities: Do not stay at home, go out and work with men and women and raise your voices. This way we can attain equal rights for people with disabilities."

**Tin Nwe Oo,
Yangon**



Tin Nwe Oo on a Yangon bus, showing the electronic sign she successfully lobbied for so deaf people know when to get off the bus

Having lost her hearing when she was eight years old, her life has changed significantly since she participated in *She Leads*. She joined the Introductory programme before the 2015 elections. Previously scared to speak in public, as a result of what she learned in the training about public speaking and elections, she carried out voter education work for over 100 deaf people

encouraging them to participate in the elections. She told them about the electoral cycle, the importance of registering to vote and how to vote in the elections.

By the time Tin Nwe Oo participated in the Intermediary training in 2016, she was married and had a three-month old baby. She is very grateful to YCT for enabling her to participate in the training by encouraging her to bring her baby to the training and providing childcare.

She Leads has had a significant impact on her, building her self confidence, and helping with her career. As she says:

"I didn't have a job for many years and then after the training, I got this job with iSchool Myanmar. I gained self confidence and I developed good communication skills even though I am a deaf. I learned how to communicate with people in the training, and that is why the manager gave me this job."

In addition to her work with iSchool Myanmar, she provides training on issues faced by deaf persons at Eden School where her husband, who is also deaf works. She has also become a passionate advocate for the rights of deaf people.

"At first I didn't know how to successfully advocate. In the YCT training, I learned what advocacy is and how to use it. I came to understand the whole process of how to achieve change and that helped me gain confidence."

Tin Nwe Oo's advocacy work is having an impact. She successfully lobbied the Ministry of Transport to install electronic signs on Yangon buses so deaf people know when to get off at their stop. She has also been part of an effort to lobby business leaders to employ deaf people, as well as lobbying MRTV (Myanmar Radio and Television) to increase the size of the visual on the screen where the person is signing so that deaf people can see it.



h. Community Leadership

Kyi Kyi Khin wears many leadership hats at the community level. She is Chairperson of the SRG (Self Reliance Group) initiative in her area, a UNDP initiated credit and saving scheme. The SRG involves 22 groups in 10 villages and has around 300 members in Kyi Kyi Khin's area. She is also Chairperson of a Health Nutrition Committee to help improve child nutrition. Recently she was elected as Chairperson of the Village Development Committee, which identifies and oversees community development projects funded by local government.

"If we have more female leaders at the township level, this will lead to more female leaders at the state and national levels. This is how we will build strong women's leadership in Myanmar."

**Kyi Kyi Khin,
Kayah**



Kyi Kyi Khin carrying out We Stand Together campaign assignment with community members

Such is her commitment to women and her community, she does all of this on a voluntary basis, whilst running a grocery store and juggling her role as a mother to her 4 children aged 12, 14, 17, and 20.

She credits her participation in *She Leads* for giving her the energy to undertake all this work:

"Before She Leads, if I faced a problem, I would feel stressed and would want to stop. After She Leads, I found a new energy and confidence to do all these things. I am motivated to be a leader in my community and want to be a role model for other women. I want them to take on leadership roles like me."

In her various leadership roles, she draws on the knowledge and skills she learnt in the *She Leads* training. Her work involves bringing people together, sharing information, solving problems, and making decisions to benefit the groups she works with and the community. She says all the topics have been useful, but particularly public speaking because as Chairperson of the three committees, she has to speak in public a lot.

She Leads has shifted her perception of herself as a leader. Since her participation in *She Leads* she has stepped into progressive leadership roles, becoming Chairperson of the 22 groups involved in the credit and savings scheme and the Village Development Committee. She now views herself as a leader and is very happy that others also regard her as a leader.

"I feel very proud to be recognised as a leader. I was elected to become a Chairperson of the committees. People come to me for advice and respect my opinion. The village Ward Administrator often discusses issues and problems with me and involves me in decision making."

It is clear that what Kyi Kyi Khin is most proud of, is the impact of her work on women and their families. As a result of her efforts, through the credit and savings initiative, which she expanded to include seven more groups, families have better lives because of the additional income they receive. The initiative has resulted in the men trusting the decisions of their wives and now women play a very active role in decision making in the villages.

"I feel most proud when I see the fruits of my work. Nurturing other women and giving them knowledge cannot be measured in money."



i. Women's Economic Empowerment

Down a small narrow lane outside Patheingyi, Ayeyarwaddy is where you will find office of Pan Pyo Thu. Pan Pyo Thu (which means 'nurturer') was founded in 2015 by Win Mar Htwe, with the support of other *She Leads* alumnae, following their participation in *She Leads*. Motivated by what she had learnt and the voter education work she carried out in rural communities before the 2015 elections, Win Mar Htwe wanted to do something to help empower local women.

"The women are very happy. They have been able to earn additional money which they can use for their children's education and to help run the home."

**Win Mar Htwe,
Ayeyarwaddy**



Win Mar Htwe and She Leads alumnae carrying out the We Stand Together assignment



"Women in the rural areas around Patheingyi are not interested in politics and they don't know their rights. I want them to know what I now know. I realised that the most effective way to do this would be to set up an organisation."

The goal of Pan Pyo Thu is to increase women's engagement in political, economic, and social spheres throughout Ayeyarwaddy, a large, agricultural based state. As a result of Win Mar Htwe's participation in a CSO township working group supported by GRET, a French INGO, she applied for

a grant to empower local women by giving them an income generation opportunity. In November 2017, Pan Pyo Thu was awarded its first grant of \$30,000 from GRET to develop a women focused livelihood project in 10 rural and economically deprived villages.

“When I found out, I was so excited I couldn’t sleep all night.”

The project established women led groups in each of the villages and distributed 45 ducks to each of the 50 participating households. The duck eggs are sold to provide an income for the families. Each member of the group contributes a set amount of their egg income to a joint savings funds, which is then used to support and expand the group’s efforts to include other women. This has proved to be very effective, with 30 new households participating as a result of the savings scheme. In addition to earning income, the women have learnt about teamwork and business skills, which will help them in the future. The provision of skills for the local community is something that Win Mar Htwe is keen to develop and Pan Pyo Thu is currently providing computer training for different groups in its office.

Setting up and running Pan Pyo Thu, which now has 4 paid staff and 30 volunteers, has been a steep learning curve for Win Mar Htwe. As she says:

“Before She Leads, I had no experience working in an organisation, let alone running one. I have had to learn so much through training and hands on experience.”

Her hard work is paying off. Win Mar Htwe is now a member of the township working group committee to review funding proposals from CSOs, and Pan Pyo Thu has become a focal point for women’s empowerment work in the Pathein area. In 2018, it spearheaded the 16 Days of Activism global campaign against gender-based violence in Pathein.



Community members discussing the duck egg initiative

j. Advocacy

Aye Aye Myint lives with her mother and two daughters, aged 20 and 25, in a Saung Chan Gone village, a rural area in Magway. She graduated in mathematics and now works as a farmer growing rice, sesame, chickpeas, and mung beans.

"Before *She Leads*, we dared not speak out. Now, we have changed ourselves, our mind-set, and we must tell the truth."

**Aye Aye Myint,
Magway**



*Aye Aye Myint carrying out a *She Leads We Stand Together* assignment*

Her participation in *She Leads* began in 2015 and since then she has become increasingly involved in her community and regional initiatives, and is a strong advocate on issues that are relevant to her such as women's and farmers' rights. Such is her commitment to these issues, that she formed her own organisation, Tawin Thazin Women Society, which now has 20 members and focuses on the promotion of women's rights and the participation of women from rural areas in decision making.

She says that *She Leads* gave her the skills, confidence, and knowledge, particularly relating to advocacy to speak out.

“Thanks to the knowledge I got from the training, I now have the confidence to talk to MPs and senior people such as Ministers. I am a farmer and I now know how to ask the right type of questions at farmers’ group meetings and hold people to account.”

Aye Aye Myint’s ability to advocate and her knowledge of the issues has meant that she is increasingly invited to participate in consultation processes. For example, at the request of the Environmental Conservation Department, she was recently involved in discussions and gave recommendations on a draft law relating to mining regulations. She also participated in a Magway regional multi-stakeholder Forest Law Enforcement, Governance, and Trade consultation workshop concerning environmental management planning. During this consultation, Aye Aye Myint advocated on behalf of local people and the farming community, highlighting the need for environmental management plans to be made before companies start working in an area to limit the environmental impact.

“When companies dig mines and leave mining refuse at the entrance of a village and besides our paddy farms, when the rain falls the water mixed with the coal refuse flows into the paddy fields and damages the crops. Rice cannot be grown anymore in the field. We raised this in the workshop.”

Aye Aye Myint is also a passionate advocate on issues relating to violence against women. In addition to the awareness raising and training she does on the issue at the local level, in August 2018, as Chair of her organisation, she met with the Director of Women’s Development Department, Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement in Nay Pyi Taw and stressed the need for the law for the Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women to be enacted as soon as possible. She also met with MP, Naw Susana Hla Hla Soe (former Secretary of Amyotha Hluttaw Women and Children’s Rights Committee), and advocated for a special court for rape cases to speed up the time it takes to process them.

k. Young Women

Kyi Phone Win is a gentle 23 year old, living with her mum and four siblings in Pyimana, near to Nay Pyi Taw. She has a BA in Economics and is an avid reader. Her love of literature led her to join the Myanmar Literary Support Group in Nay Pyi Taw. She is currently the Secretary and a member of the Executive Board for this group, which has around 50 members.

“Before, I thought it was enough to read. Now, I know that people have rights. We need to work with the government to change the country.”

**Kyi Phone Win,
Nay Pyi Taw**



Kyi Phone Win carrying out her women's leadership assignment

She joined *She Leads* young women's programme in March 2018, and said that this has completely changed her outlook.

“She Leads really opened my mind and expanded my knowledge. Before I did not think about women's participation. I was not interested in politics. I did not know about CEDAW. I have learnt that women can do what men do. Leadership should not be based on gender it should be based on what a person can achieve.”

Determined to spread the word, as part of the *We Stand Together* campaign, Kyi Phone Win has single handedly been running the campaign and holding information sessions in four villages. Setting off on her moped with materials strapped to her back, she first had to meet with the Head of 100 Households and the Village Administrators, who are all men, to get permission.

At first they were reluctant, but when I explained the topic and why it is important for women to learn about it, they agreed. They also trusted me because I am a volunteer teacher in the community."

Kyi Phone Win didn't just need to get permission from the village leaders, she also needed to persuade her mother. She explains that her mother initially thought that this was too political and not suitable for her to be doing. Kyi Phone Win invited her to attend one of the sessions and inspired by the content, her mother is now completely supportive.

She Leads has given Kyi Phone Win the confidence and skills to become a young leader in her community.

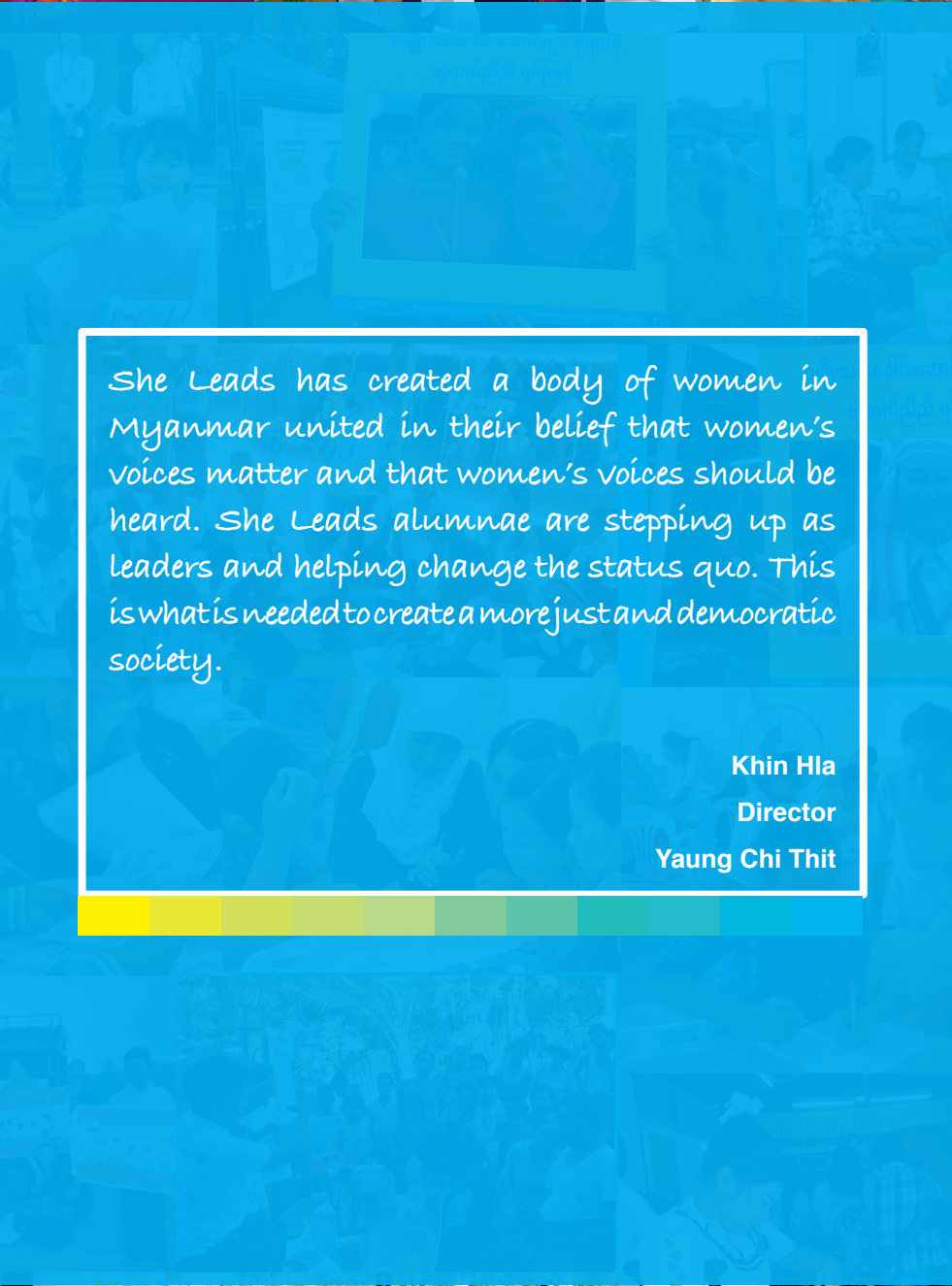
"Learning about leadership, teamwork, and public speaking has been so useful. Before I was scared to speak in public. My knees and voice would shake. Now I write down what I want to say and I practice in front of my family. I am confident and can do it. Now I feel like a leader."

Buoyed up by the positive response of the women who are very interested in her sessions, she wants to continue raising awareness relating to women's empowerment in her local community. She is particularly interested in gender-based violence and wants to learn about the laws relating to this so she can let women know what their rights are. She also wants to encourage more women to become involved, as she now is.

"I don't want women to stand back because they are female. I want them to know that they can do the same as men."



Women in traditional dress, supporting the campaign in Namlan village in Northern Shan



She Leads has created a body of women in Myanmar united in their belief that women's voices matter and that women's voices should be heard. She Leads alumnae are stepping up as leaders and helping change the status quo. This is what is needed to create a more just and democratic society.

Khin Hla
Director
Young Chi Thit

