

IFES: Increasing voter turnout with first time youth voters in the by-election in Laihka, Shan State

Laihka or Lechar is in Southern Shan States a few hours drive from Taunggyi. It is famous for its ironware and a place called Panglong after which the famous peace agreement was named. In Laihka there were 36 polling stations one of which was for military voters and their families. Laihka had 39,321 registered voters but voter turnout was relatively low at 31.58% with 10% invalid votes. For this Pyithu seat, the SNLD candidate was the clear winner with 76.5% of the vote followed by SNDP with 14.4% and NLD with 9%.

Approximately over 100 youth voters were participating for the first time in this by-election. There were 10 to 15 youth voters who came to vote in polling station 8. Four of them were trainees of IFES' **Your Voice, Your Vote, Your Future** youth civic education program. They encouraged their friends to come along with them to the polling station to vote and stressed that they did not force their friends to vote for any particular party, they let their friends choose by themselves. The following two young voters expressed their excitement about participating for the first time in an election:

Sai Junge Khay (Male) 20 years old: "I could not sleep last night. I phoned my friends to encourage them to join with me in going to vote. It was very exciting. I could bring four of my friends. There was no problem to queue. We arrived there at 6.30am and then we finished voting at 10am. No problem. We wanted to choose our representative."



"If we did not go and vote, maybe our preferred candidate would not win. I kept in mind that "just one vote from your heart" (A Tae Kyar Ka Mae Ta Pyar). Therefore, my friends and I could wait up until whatever time today. We were here to vote to choose a responsive leader who would care for the town and for us. I believe that the efforts of our representative can stretch his capacity to work for the country."

"The training curriculum has enlightened me a lot. Notice that I applied the knowledge of that training today. Even during the campaign period, I listened very carefully to what they were talking about and to what they would do for our town and us. All of those desires were inspired by the information I received in the training."

"I learned about the correct steps in the voting process from a friend at the Community Based Development Center (*where Mynfrel held the youth training*). There were civic education materials left in library and people also shared their experiences from 2015 and 2017."



Nang Khom Kham Khay (Female) 20 yrs. old: says "It was very exciting to come to the polling station for vote. This is first time for me to queue at the polling station to vote. Fortunately, I got a chance to know about elections, the value of the vote and representative in time. I read the book (participant's handbook) again last night to warm up my knowledge."

"I learned how to stamp through the internet where I saw the IFES valid/invalid poster, shared by her friend on Facebook. (Her friend is a trainee of Kunhein training). I needed to stamp in the correct place and make sure that the stamp actually marks the ballot."

"To be honest, I was very excited and scared to stamp the ballot. If my stamp was out of the box, my vote would not be counted, it would mean invalid. I did not want that to happen."

"I came here today because of what I learned from the training. It has transformed us to become voters. Not only me but also we all wanted to elect our representative. We believe that our elected representative will take care of us. Now was our time to vote, our right to vote to bring in the right leader into the hluttaw to represent our voice."

Your Voice, Your Vote, Your Future is a civic education project in Myanmar that aims to enhance the knowledge of first time youth voters in advance of elections with a particular focus on engaging young people in areas of low turnout. In coordination with Union Election Commission, Hornbill and MYNFREL have been implementing this project in 67 townships in 2018 in partnership with of IFES and with support from Australia Aid, UK Aid and US Aid.

www.facebook.com/YouthVotersFor2020

Photos from Laihka, Shan State, By-elections 2018



Advance voter list posted outside



Advance Ballot box arrived before 6am



Ballot box sealed in front of eyewitnesses



Check the serial number of their name along with household registration list and ID card



Polling staff helped the woman with the baby to find the name, who was happy to find it



Youth participating in the long line to vote



First time youth voters also encouraged their families and friends to vote