

Gender Inequalities in a Decentralized Myanmar

By Paul Minoletti

May 2017 (Yangon)

Myanmar was ruled by successive (extremely male dominated) military regimes from 1962-2010. These regimes tended to reinforce traditional cultural norms that associate men with public leadership, and place women in domestic and supporting roles. The military governments' policies impoverished the country as a whole, but women have often been particularly badly affected. For decades, government spending on social sectors such as education and health, which tend to be prioritised by women more than men, was minuscule, and despite large recent increases the share of the budget allocated to these ministries remains extremely low by international standards.¹ Underinvestment in women's health care, together with Myanmar's long history of conflict, has contributed to an alarmingly high maternal mortality rate of 282 per 100,000 live births, which is twice the average for South-East Asian countries, and considerably above the average for all developing countries (230).²

In early 2011 Myanmar transitioned to a quasi-civilian government and within a few years relaxed many of the most draconian restrictions on political parties, civil society, the media, and individual freedoms. Although the military still holds vast political and economic influence,³ it is civilian governments at national and State/Region levels, that now pass laws, set many policies, and decide on budget allocations. There is now a greater level of female representation in positions of political influence, but this is still very limited with, for example, women still only accounting for one in ten MPs.⁴ Policy-making and budgeting has taken some tentative steps towards being more gender equal, for example the increased allocations to health and education, and the drafting of a Prevention of Violence Against Women (PoVAW) Law. Nevertheless, policy-making and budgeting remains largely gender-blind and tends to continue to privilege male needs and preferences.⁵

The period since 2011 has witnessed greatly increased freedoms for civil society organisations, including now having far more freedom to conduct and publish research. The last few years have seen a rapid increase in the number of researchers, Myanmar CSOs and international organisations engaged in such work, and our understanding of economic, social, political, and cultural processes is increasing accordingly. The Government of Myanmar (GoM), often with the assistance of international partners⁶, has also started collecting better data, and has been (somewhat) more willing to publish

¹ Paul Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar* (ActionAid, CARE, Oxfam and WON, Unpublished 2015); The World Bank, *Myanmar Public Expenditure Review 2015* (The World Bank, September 2015), pp.31-32.

² Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Maternal Mortality* (Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population - Department of Population, 2016), p.9.

³ For example: The 2008 constitution that was drafted by the military stipulates that the Ministers of Defence, Home Affairs, and Border Affairs are appointed by the military, rather than the civilian government. Further, the reservation of a minimum of 25% of parliamentary seats for military appointees gives the military an effective veto over any constitutional change.

⁴ See Section 2.1 below.

⁵ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁶ ADB, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women (2016). *Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Myanmar: A Situation Analysis* discusses Myanmar's rapid political and economic transition and the impact on women's rights. See <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/09/gender-equality-and-womens-rights-in-myanmar#sthash.3zYNeChE.dpuf>

data than they were previously.⁷ Despite these improvements, policy-relevant research remains in its infancy in Myanmar and continues to be hamstrung by: a lack of existing research and reliable data from which to draw on; and there being only a small number of people with advanced research skills due to a combination of low-quality education provision, and the extreme difficulty of conducting high-quality impartial research inside Myanmar during the decades of military rule. There is a particular need for high-quality research on issues related to gender (in)equality – such research is needed to disprove the still quite widespread view that gender inequality either does not exist in Myanmar or does not matter,⁸ and to inform effective action by government and civil society to reduce gender inequalities.

To assist Myanmar research organisations to conduct high quality research on issues of gender inequality, and to help these organisations to build their research ability, IDRC is launching a 2017 research call. Funding applications are particularly encouraged to focus on gender under the following topics:

1. inequality in political participation; and
2. budgeting and public service delivery.

⁷ Major data collection projects by GoM include the 2014 census and the 2015 Labour Force Survey.

⁸ Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar* (Yangon, 2015), pp.17-25.

Suggested Research Topic Areas

1. Gender Inequality in Myanmar's Governance Institutions

The November 2015 elections saw huge success for the National League for Democracy (NLD), with the party winning 79.4% of elected seats, and 59.4% of total seats,⁹ in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw (national parliament).¹⁰ The NLD was also extremely successful in the elections for State/Region hluttaws, and now has a clear majority of total MPs in all 7 Region hluttaws and 3 State hluttaws (Kayah, Kayin and Mon), and has virtual control of 2 further State hluttaws (Chin and Kachin).¹¹ Women are a higher percentage of MPs in the NLD than in most other Myanmar political parties, and the NLD's electoral success was accompanied by a doubling of the number of women MPs in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw, and a more than trebling of the number of women MPs in the State/Region hluttaws. Most famously, the NLD's leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is a woman, and despite being constitutionally barred from the presidency she is now the *de facto* leader of the country,¹² as well as being the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the President's Office.

Despite the large increase in women's parliamentary representation following the 2015 elections, parliamentary representation remains highly gender unequal. Women currently fill only 10.5% of Pyidaungsu hluttaw seats and 9.7% of State/Region hluttaw seats,¹³ far below the female share of the population (51.8%),¹⁴ and also well below the level found in most countries (see Table 1).¹⁵ Women's representation is dragged down by the military reservation – there are only two women military appointees in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (1.2% of military appointees), and only two women military appointees in the state/region hluttaws (0.9%). Nevertheless, women are only 13.6% of the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw MPs elected in 2015, and 12.7% of the State/Region hluttaw MPs elected in the same year.¹⁶

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the only woman cabinet member at national level, and the two vice presidents the two Speakers of the House, and the two Deputy-Speakers of the House, are all men.¹⁷ At State/Region level two of the 14 Chief Ministers are women, and only four other cabinet members

⁹ 'Total seats' i.e. including the seats reserved for military appointees.

¹⁰ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?* (Transnational Institute, December 2015), p.6.

¹¹ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.7.

¹² N.b. not long after taking office NLD MPs passed legislation creating the position of State Councillor, which was designed to give greater official legitimacy to this state of affairs.

¹³ Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, May 2017).

¹⁴ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The Union Report: Census Report, Volume 2* (Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, May 2015), p.18.

¹⁵ N.b. on April 1st 2017 Myanmar held by-elections for 12 seats in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw, and 7 seats in State/Region hluttaws. These elections have resulted in a slight drop in the percentage of women in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw (now 10.3%), and a slight rise in the percentage of women in State/Region hluttaws (now 9.8%). Figures derived from, 'Results of 2017 By-Elections', *The Global New Light of Myanmar* (Nay Pyi Taw, 3 April 2017).

¹⁶ Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections*.

¹⁷ Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), p.6.

across all 14 States/Regions are women.¹⁸ Only one of the States/Region hluttaw has a woman as Speaker of the House, and 3 State/Region hluttaws have no women MPs at all (Chin, Kayah, Rakhine).¹⁹

Table 1: Women's Representation in Myanmar's National Parliaments Following the 2015 Elections, with International Comparisons²⁰

	Women as % of MPs in National-level Parliaments
Rwanda	55.7%
Bolivia	51.8%
Philippines	27.1%
China	24.2%
Bangladesh	20.3%
Indonesia	19.8%
Malaysia	13.1%
India	12.2%
Myanmar	10.5%
Thailand	4.8%
Global Average	23.3%
Asian Average	19.4%

Sources: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> [Accessed 25th April 2017]; <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> [Accessed on 25th April 2017].

In 2012 indirect elections were introduced for the position of Ward/Village Tract Administrator (VTA),²¹ and this is the most important elected position in local government. 2014 data shows that women were only 42 of the 16,785 VTAs in Myanmar (0.25%).²² However, the one elected body in Myanmar that has highly gender equal participation is also found at local level: the National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP),²³ has a requirement that representatives on the Village Tract committees created for this project are 50% female and 50% male.

¹⁸ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation & Phan Tee Eain, Forthcoming 2017).

¹⁹ Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, p.7.

²⁰ N.b. the figures in Table 1 for individual countries refer to all parliamentarians at national level, i.e. in countries with two houses of parliament, MPs from both houses are counted. Whereas, the figures for the global average and Asian average are based on MPs from the lower house/single house only.

²¹ In these elections, each Head of Household is granted one vote, and votes for their preferred 10 Household Leader. The 10 Household Leaders then vote for their preferred Ward/Village Tract Administrator. In most households a man is the registered Head of Household so the electorate is highly gender unequal.

²² Emilie Röell, *Women and Local Leadership: The Leadership Journeys of Myanmar's 42 Female Village Tract/Ward Administrators* (Yangon: UNDP, 2015), pp.18-19.

²³ N.b. the NCDDP began in 2013 and is now present in rural areas in 47 Townships.

Women make up more than half of Myanmar's civil servants, but they are almost entirely absent from the most senior positions at Union level: Director-General and Deputy-Director-General. And, only men are employed in the most powerful position at Township level: Township Administrator. Despite some recent improvements, civil service decision-making remains extremely top-down and hierarchical in Myanmar, and so despite the large number of women civil servants, decision-making is heavily male-dominated.²⁴

The high level of gender inequality of *statistical representation*²⁵ in Myanmar's governance institutions matters for several reasons:

- **Equity:** On average, women and men have different preferences for what laws and policies should be passed, and how budgets should be allocated. For example, the evidence we have on Myanmar suggests that women tend to the greater priority on education, whereas men put greater priority on road building.²⁶ And, the evidence we have suggests that in Myanmar women leaders are more responsive than men leaders to women's preferences.²⁷
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Evidence from other countries shows that making statistical representation more gender equal can often improve the efficiency and effectiveness of governance, partly through incorporating more and different information in decision-making.²⁸ Further, there is evidence to suggest that women leaders in Myanmar may be less corrupt than their male counterparts – given the high levels of corruption prevalent in Myanmar, increasing women's participation could have significant benefits.
- **Legitimacy:** Female citizens may find it easier to communicate with women representatives than men representatives, perceive that women representatives are more responsive to their needs and preferences, and/or derive confidence in their own opportunity to participate in governance. All of these factors may affect how legitimate Myanmar's governance institutions are perceived to be, although evidence on this for Myanmar is currently lacking.
- **Style of Governance:** Evidence from other countries shows that the gender equality of participation can affect the style of political debate and decision-making. For example, in the USA women mayors have been found to be more willing to acknowledge and address financial problems, and women chairpersons of committees are more likely to facilitate broader discussion that is more participatory.²⁹ Research on Myanmar suggests that women leaders here may be less confrontational and more patient than their male counterparts.³⁰
- **Rights and Capabilities:** The opportunity to participate in public decision-making, and have one's voice heard should be a right for all citizens. Having this opportunity increases individual

²⁴ Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, pp.10-11.

²⁵ 'Statistical representation' refers to the relative numbers of women and men within a governance institution. More advanced measures of statistical representation can incorporate additional measures on the type of women and men present, e.g. age, ethnicity, religion, and/or socio-economic class.

²⁶ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

²⁷ Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections*.

²⁸ Bina Agarwal, 'Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework', *World Development*, 29.10 (2001), pp.1636-37; Lori A. Beaman and others, 'Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124.4 (2009), pp.1518-20; Wendy Janssens, 'Women's Empowerment and the Creation of Social Capital in Indian Villages', *World Development*, 38.7 (2010), pp.983-86.

²⁹ Jennifer L. Lawless, 'Female Candidates and Legislators', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18.1 (2015), p.359.

³⁰ Paul Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, June 2014), p.22; Röell, *Women and Local Leadership*, pp.31-33.

citizens' capabilities and their well-being.³¹ The multiple forms of discrimination that currently limit women's political participation in Myanmar are thus a limit on women's rights, capabilities, and well-being .

Although many people in Myanmar assume that men are more educated than women, this is not the case, and among younger generations the opposite is true. Thus, access to education does not drive the inequalities in political participation we see, although educational curricula and how teachers interact with students can reinforce norms that associate leadership with males. Female labour force participation rates are significantly lower than male (50.5% vs 85.2%), and men are more likely to be found in the most senior positions within organisations. Nevertheless, women are employed in large numbers in most of the occupations in which MPs were formerly employed in, and occupational background does not seem to be a major factor in explaining women's low representation in governance positions.³²

Cultural norms are highly important for explaining the high level of gender inequality in governance in Myanmar, and operate in multiple important ways, including:

- The traditional association of public leadership with men, and a widely-held bias among both males and females in favour of male leadership.³³
- Women face criticism when travelling away from home, especially if this is overnight and/or they are accompanied by men other than their husband.
- Expectations that women continue to do 'their' domestic work, regardless of what other demands on their time they have.
- Women leaders are more likely to face harassment than men leaders, and this can often take a gendered form, such as being portrayed as sex workers on social media.³⁴

These cultural norms strongly shape females' and males' confidence and ambition to try and become political leaders; how citizens respond to male and female leaders; the level of support/opposition they receive from their family members; and the attitudes they face from fellow political party members, rival politicians, and civil servants.³⁵

Women's political participation is also strongly limited by men's dominance of 'gatekeeper' positions in political parties – i.e. positions such as Central Executive Committee member, Township Chairman, and Township Secretary, which are particularly important for encouraging women and men to apply to become candidates, and for influencing other party members to decide who to select as candidates. In some instances these gatekeepers are actively hostile to women's participation, but their negative impact on women's participation more often occurs indirectly, e.g.: men's personal and professional networks tend to be male dominated, and so they are more likely to notice other men as having potential and encourage them to try and become candidates; men's dominance of these positions is likely to have a symbolic effect, which discourages women from trying to become candidates; men are less likely than women to be aware of gender unequal opportunities within their party, and are therefore less likely to take deliberate steps to correct this disadvantage.³⁶

³¹ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.31-33, 152-59; The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, 2011), p.151.

³² Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections*.

³³ The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society* (Yangon, 2014), pp.78-79.

³⁴ Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections*

³⁵ Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections*.

³⁶ Gender Equality Network, *Women's and Men's Participation in Myanmar's 2015 Elections*.

Myanmar's previous government produced the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, 2013-2022 (NSPAW), which calls for the improvement of "...systems, structures, and practices to ensure women's equal participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels of society."³⁷ NSPAW includes a number of suggested measures to achieve this aim, including the application of quotas, "...to ensure women's participation in decision-making in legislative, judicial, and executive bodies."³⁸ However, there was little interest in (or often even awareness of) NSPAW in government bodies apart from the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, and there has generally been little done to implement it. The one notable effort by GoM to raise women's participation in decision-making has been NCDDP (see above).

The NLD has a considerably higher level of female representation within the party than the previous ruling party (USDP). The NLD's 2015 election manifesto also dedicated a page to women's and gender equality issues, which few other parties did. However, no clear mechanisms for improving the gender equality of participation in governance were suggested, and the party has opposed the introduction of parliamentary gender quotas.

A small number of the political parties running in the 2015 elections adopted voluntary targets for achieving a minimum number of female candidates. However, only the National Democratic Force (which did not win any seats) met its targets, and the leadership of most parties appears is opposed to mandatory quotas.³⁹ Some parties, such as the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), have been relatively active in working with civil society organisations to try and raise women's participation and have higher than average numbers of female MPs. However, even in the SNLD women are only 16.7% of the MPs elected in 2015. Some other major parties have done little to promote women's participation and have extremely low proportions of female MPs, e.g. ANP (4.4%), USDP (2.6%), PNO (0%).⁴⁰

Quite a large number of Myanmar CSOs and international organisations are working on issues related to promoting gender equality in governance: a 2014-15 survey of Gender Equality Network (GEN) and Women's Organisations Network of Myanmar (WON) member organisations found that 36 WON member organisations and 35 GEN member organisations working in the NSPAW area of "women in decision-making." Perhaps the most intensive NGO program aimed at raising the gender equality of participation in governance, was CARE's program in Loikaw and Demosoe Townships in Kayah State that ran from 2011-16.⁴¹ GoM and the World Bank's NCDDP is also quite intensive, and has extensive reach. Several Myanmar and international NGOs have been quite active in providing the trainings and other forms of support to female potential candidates for elections to the Pyidaungsu and State/Region hluttaws.⁴² The Alliance for Gender Inclusion in the Peace Process (AGIPP) was formed in 2014 with the intention on raising women's representation in the peace process, and there has been some limited increase in the last few years, but it remains heavily male dominated.

³⁷ Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, 'National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022)' (Nay Pyi Taw, 2013), p.21.

³⁸ Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, 'National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022)', p.23.

³⁹ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*, 2016.

⁴⁰ Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, pp.9, 21.

⁴¹ For details, see, Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, p.22.

⁴² Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, pp.22-23.

Unfortunately, there has been very little information published on the effectiveness of Myanmar or international NGO, GoM or World Bank efforts to raise the gender equality of participation in governance, and so it is difficult to know which approaches are most effective.

Possible Research Questions

Below is a list of possible research topics related to the theme of gender inequality in Myanmar's governance institutions. These can be thought about for Pyidaungsu Hluttaw MPs, State/Region MPs, local elected officials, or civil servants at any level from Union to Village Tract/Ward. You are also welcome to think of other interesting topics and suggest these instead in your proposal.

- How does the behaviour of male and female leaders differ? And does it matter for the effectiveness of the governance body?
 - How active are they? *For example, for MPs how many questions do they ask in parliament, how many bills do they submit, how many days do they attend parliament, how often do they meet with constituents?*
 - What is their style of leadership? *For example, how quickly do they make decisions, how many people do they consult with before taking decisions, who they consult with before taking decisions?*
 - Which issues do they prioritise? *For example, which issues do they say that they prioritise, and which issues do they actually take action on? (For example, which issues are covered in bills submitted, questions asked in Parliament)*
- How does the proportion of men and women in governance body affect how this body is perceived by the citizens it represents? Does it affect the effectiveness of the governance body? *For example, does increasing the level of female representation: i) increase/decrease female citizens' confidence in this body; ii) increase/decrease male citizens' confidence in this body?*
- Which interventions by the Government of Myanmar, civil society or international organisations are effective in making participation in governance more gender equal, and why? Which interventions are not effective, and why?
- What attitudes do Myanmar political parties have towards raising women's participation, and what action are they taking?
- What opportunities do citizens have to influence decision-making by governance bodies, and how is this different for male and female citizens? Does it matter?
- What happens to female opportunities for participation in local governance in areas where many men are absent due to migration or conflict? What happens to female opportunities for participation in local governance in areas where there are high rates of drug addiction among males?
- Which factors shape men's and women's opportunities to participate in local governance, and influence decision-making? What strategies are needed to promote more gender equal participation in decision-making at local levels?
- How does gender interact with other key variables (e.g. age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic class, rural/urban dweller) in shaping citizens opportunities to participate in governance?

2. Gender and Policy-Making, Budgeting, and Public Service Delivery

Gender inequalities in a country's economy and society are not only unfair to the 'less equal' gender (typically females), they also limit a country's development more broadly. Some examples include (but are by no means limited to):

- If women have unequal property and/or inheritance rights they have less incentive to invest time and money in improving land, housing etc.⁴³ This underinvestment lowers productivity, thereby reducing household and national income. Myanmar's national laws support equal property and inheritance rights for males and females, but in practice in a number of non-Bamar communities customary law, under which females are excluded from inheritance, frequently overrides national law.
- Inequality in public service provision: For decades Myanmar has underinvested in infrastructure that would help to reduce the time that women and girls spend on unpaid work, for example electricity and water supply. Improving the electricity and water supply would reduce the amount of time that all citizens need to spend on unpaid work, but this change would be especially dramatic for females, enabling them to earn more income and/or have more leisure time.⁴⁴ A study of the rollout of the electrical grid in South Africa showed the particular benefits that electricity can bring for women - villages being connected to the electrical grid resulted in women's paid employment rising much more than men's, as households switched from collecting and burning wood to using electric cooking and lighting, thereby reducing women's household time constraints.⁴⁵

Policies are needed in Myanmar to challenge prevailing gender inequalities, and such policies need to be adequately funded if they are to be successfully implemented. Ensuring such funding is available is one key aspect of integrating gender into budgeting decisions. Currently, there is a disconnect between policy priorities and budgeting in Myanmar,⁴⁶ and there is a clear need to more clearly link budgeting to policy priorities, including policy priorities related to gender equality.

Another key aspect of integrating gender into budgeting is to change budget allocations at all levels of government so that they are less biased towards male preferences and do more to reflect the needs and preferences of female citizens – initial research on gender budgeting in Myanmar suggests that men are more likely to prioritise road building and military spending, whereas women are more likely to prioritise health and education.⁴⁷ However, the evidence base of male and female budget preferences in Myanmar is still quite limited, and further research is needed on this topic.

Another key aspect of gender budgeting is incorporating an appreciation of gender differences in access to services into the design of service delivery: for example, females are often less able than males in Myanmar to travel far away from home to access services (particularly if this involves staying

⁴³ Esther Duflo, 'Women Empowerment and Economic Development', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50.4 (2012), pp.1068-69.

⁴⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁴⁵ Taryn Dinkelman, 'The Effects of Rural Electrification on Employment: New Evidence from South Africa', *American Economic Review*, 101.7 (2011), 3078–3108.

⁴⁶ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁴⁷ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*. See also, the policy priorities expressed by male and female MPs and candidates in Minoletti, Paul, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Elections* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, Forthcoming 2017).

away overnight); and males and females may find it easier to access services at different times of the day.⁴⁸

A lack of clarity on the expenditure responsibilities of Union and State/Region entities makes it difficult to say exactly how much of government expenditure is decentralised, and for example some expenditure officially recorded at State/Region level is actually decided on at Union level. Nevertheless, a rough indication of how centralised government spending in Myanmar is, is given by official figures for financial year 2014/15, which show only 11% of total budgeted expenditure being controlled by State/Region governments.⁴⁹ State/Region governments are required to submit their annual budget proposals in November, and following negotiations with the Union government, these budgets are enacted on the beginning of the financial year (1st April). More than halfway into the financial year, a “supplementary budget” is submitted to parliament for approval, which typically results in increased expenditure allocations to States/Regions.

Below State/Region level, Districts level authorities do not have any control over expenditure allocations. Township authorities carry out much of the government’s service provision and tax collection, and have begun to be given some limited planning and budgeting decision-making power, by the vast majority of their spending is still controlled at Union level. Although they only account for a small fraction of total government expenditure at Township level, it is worth noting that several local development funds have been introduced in recent years, and key decision-making positions for how these are spent are the Township Administrator, various Township committees, and the MPs that represent that Township in the Union and State/Region parliaments.⁵⁰ The process through which the local development funds are allocated, and who decides on allocations, varies between Townships, partly be due to and absence of clear rules on how this should be done.

In urban areas Development Affairs Organisations and City Development Corporations have significant autonomy over both collection of revenues, and expenditure and are responsible for providing municipal services such as: waste removal, street lighting, water supply, drainage, local infrastructure, business licensing, and permits and inspections.⁵¹ At the most local level of government administration, Village Tract/Ward authorities are officially responsible for providing local security, administration and dispute settlement; and also hold decision-making roles on official and unofficial local level development committees.⁵² Research in this area is just emerging.

When thinking about budgeting in Myanmar, it is important to bear in mind that a considerable amount of revenue collection and public service provision is carried out by non-governmental entities, e.g. Ethnic Armed Organisations, Border Guard Forces and militias; and local communities organising revenue collection and service provision themselves with limited or no input from the government. Which services are provided by communities themselves varies from place to place, but can include: local roads, bridges, drainage, water supply, waste disposal, street lighting, electricity, and insurance. There is also a lot of local service provision that is partially funded and organised by local government

⁴⁸ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁴⁹ World Bank, *Myanmar Public Expenditure Review 2015*, p.83.

⁵⁰ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁵¹ Minoletti, Paul, *Fiscal Decentralisation and National Reconciliation in Myanmar: Key Issues and Avenues for Reform* (International Growth Centre, 2016), .

⁵² Matthew Arnold and others, *Municipal Governance in Myanmar: An Overview of Development Affairs Organisations* (MDRI-CESD & The Asia Foundation, July 2015), pp.23-24; Giles Dickenson-Jones, Giles, S. Kanay De, and Andrea Smurra, *State and Region Public Finances in Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD - The Asia Foundation, October 2015), pp.13-14; Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

officials, and partially funded and organised by local citizens.⁵³ The aid sector is now expanding rapidly, with local and international NGOs, UN agencies, and International Financial Institutions all active in providing services across Myanmar.

Representation on governmental and non-governmental decision-making bodies operating at the subnational level is heavily male dominated, and there is typically little consideration given to gender differences in needs, preferences, or access to services. The extent to which local decision-making bodies consult with citizens varies considerably from place to place, but even where relatively good mechanisms for citizen feedback are in place, citizen feedback and participation also tends to be male dominated: for example, women are less likely to attend meetings than men, and those women that do attend are less likely to speak up.⁵⁴

Government of Myanmar (GoM) is currently developing the draft Prevention of Violence against Women (PoVAW) Law. A large body of research on gender-based violence has emerged in Myanmar (see annex). In 2014, the Chin State government (with the assistance of international partners) published preparatory documents for their Five Year Development Plan: these documents note the high levels of discrimination faced by women in Chin State, and then go on to list five specific projects designed to improve women's lives and reduce gender inequality, with estimated costs for each project, and anticipated development outcomes.⁵⁵ However, aside from these GoM has generally done little to integrate gender into policy-making, budgeting and public service delivery.⁵⁶

Budget data is a major problem in Myanmar: most of the data that is collected is not suitable for modern and effective budgeting, and too little of the data that is collected is currently made publicly available. Major priorities for improving budget data include: recording all government spending in the budget (a large portion of spending currently carried out by certain line ministries and State-Owned Enterprises is not); collecting more data on budget outputs and outcomes; and improving transparency. Improving transparency requires not only that more budget data is published, but also that important information is made available to citizens in easy to understand formats. The recent introduction of a Citizen's Budget is an important step in this regard, but much still remains to be done, particularly at local levels where currently most citizens have very limited understanding regarding the funds that are available to local authorities, and who is responsible for allocating them.⁵⁷

The World Bank is engaged with GoM in trying to reform and improve budgeting Myanmar, under the 'Modernisation of Public Financial Management (PFM) Project.' The plans for this project include several positive steps for advancing gender budgeting, including: referring to NSPAW when discussing how to use PFM to promote gender equality; the World Bank to help the Ministry of Planning and Finance to incorporate gender considerations and planning processes, and to collect and analyse gender disaggregated data on budget outputs and outcomes; and specifying that, 'Project level monitoring will keep track of mechanisms identified for bottom-up planning at the local level

⁵³ Gerard McCarthy, *Building on What Is There: Insights on Social Protection and Public Goods Provision from Central East Myanmar S-53308-MYA-1* (International Growth Centre, September 2016), pp.2, 4, 5, 12-13; Minoletti, Paul, *Fiscal Decentralisation and National Reconciliation in Myanmar: Key Issues and Avenues for Reform*, p.8.

⁵⁴ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

⁵⁵ Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development, *Support to Chin State's Comprehensive 5-Year Development Plan and Annual Planning 2016-2021, vol.1* (Yangon, October 2014), pp.18, 30, 34, 37-39.

⁵⁶ Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, pp.30-33.

⁵⁷ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

responding to women's and minorities' needs.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, implementation of the PFM modernisation project has been badly delayed, and few of the planned activities have been put into practice yet. Further, it can be remarked that the World Bank's 2013 Public Financial Management Performance Report made no mention of gender considerations, and despite a few references to maternal health indicators the World Bank's 2015 Public Expenditure Review was only a small improvement in this regard.⁵⁹

Possible Research Topics

Below is a list of possible research topics related to the theme of gender and policy-making, budgeting, public service delivery in Myanmar. You are also welcome to think of other interesting topics and suggest these instead in your proposal.

- How do gender-sensitive policies and budgets impact the effectiveness of service provision?
- How do male and female citizens' preferences differ for what policies should be passed, or how budgets should be allocated? Aside from gender what other characteristics influence citizens preferences?
- To what extent do elected representatives respond to male and female preferences for laws, policies and budgets; and to what extent do they take action to promote women's rights and gender equality? What reforms and support are needed to enable elected representatives to more fully promote gender equality?
- What level of awareness and interest do GoM staff currently have in making policy-making, budgeting and public service delivery more gender responsive? Which strategies are likely to be most effective in generating greater interest among GoM staff?
 - What about State/Region development plans? For instance, a case study of Chin State Development Plan would show to what extent were the gender equality provisions and targets in the supporting documents included in the final Chin State 5 Year Development Plan 2016-21?
 - Have the gender equality provisions in the 5 Year Development Plan been implemented? If not, why not? If yes, what impact are they having citizens' lives?
- What is the Ministry of Planning and Finance (MoPF) currently doing to integrate gender considerations into how budgets are allocated, and measuring budget outputs and outcomes? What should the MoPF do to improve in this regard?
- What has been the impact of attempts at introducing more gender sensitive budgeting in other countries that shared some of Myanmar's current characteristics (e.g. long and complex conflict history, transitioning away from military dictatorship, a history of public decision-making being heavily male-dominated)? What lessons can be learned for trying to make budgeting more gender sensitive in Myanmar's?
- What policies and changes in budget allocations are needed to fund programs that reduce the time women spend on unpaid work (e.g. caring for family, collecting water, collecting fuel)?
- What can be done to make local planning and budgeting more accountable to all local citizens?
- How do health outcomes of men, women and children differ? What policies and changes in budget allocations are needed to improve the health outcomes of all, and to make outcomes more equal?

⁵⁸ World Bank, 'Myanmar - Modernization of Public Finance Management Project', 2014, pp.6, 13, 17.

⁵⁹ The World Bank, *Public Financial Management Performance Report: Republic of Union of Myanmar* (The World Bank, May 2013); The World Bank, *Myanmar Public Expenditure Review 2015*.