Resources on Women's Participation & Gender Justice of Relevance to the Myanmar Peace Process
This document aims to provide an overview of relevant resources for a range of readers to promote better understanding of gender inclusion in peace processes, the status of women in Myanmar, and related topics. AGIPP aims to update it annually with additional entries and descriptions. To increase accessibility of these resources, the Alliance will encourage the organizations that published these reports to translate them into Myanmar language. Hyperlinks are added into most entries and are valid in September 2016. It is important to note that this is a partial annotated bibliography, not every listing has a summary.
ActionAid, CARE, and Oxfam (2011), *If given the chance: women’s participation in public life in Myanmar, Yangon: ActionAid. In Myanmar*

This report was commissioned by Oxfam, CARE and ActionAid in Myanmar to increase the evidence base regarding women’s participation in public life and decision-making in Myanmar. The report includes recommendations for programming, further research and learning and policy and advocacy.

The study was carried out from November 2010 January 2011. Spanning 30 villages across seven States and Regions, the study documents the extent of women’s participation in local governance structures and public life and assesses the impact that social and cultural norms, attitudes and practices have on their involvement (or lack of involvement) in these structures. The study also explores ways to increase women’s involvement in public decision-making through highlighting factors that promote women’s participation.

The study found norms that discourage women’s participation in public life and decision-making in all study areas. These norms are framed differently based on culture, religion, ethnicity and location and the degree to which these norms are contested differs. Norms around household division of labour and decision-making, gender stereotypes and the notion of ‘complementary’ gender relations proved influential in regulating women’s spaces of participation. Barriers to women’s participation in public life were found to be strongly linked to the coupling of development and security, and backed up by a range of male dominated institutions at local level such as auxiliary militias, fire guards and Village Peace and Development Councils.

The study found women’s near complete absence government leadership and decision-making structures, but relatively large presence in CBOs (mostly in supporting roles). Women’s groups proved to be important for women to exercising leadership roles. Women’s participation in decision-making roles were found to have positive impacts on the individual level, as well as organizationally and was shown to support positive development outcomes at the community level. Appeals to ‘the greater good of the community’ were found to be the most effective arguments for women’s participation in public life.

This paper was developed as a resource for the meeting ‘Building Feminist Leadership: Looking Back, Looking Forward’, held in 2008. The purpose of this paper is not simply to theorise feminist leadership, but also to create a useful framework, or lens, through which to scrutinise feminist leadership development programmes, strengthen them, and enhance the quality and impact of such leadership.


This edited collection explores the underrepresentation of women in peace processes in different country contexts across the Asia Pacific region. It prioritised contributions from women involved in peace processes in Mindanao, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Northeast India, the Solomon Islands, and Nepal. The report also identifies women’s contributions to peace, rather than focusing simply on women’s exclusion. It provides a ‘scene setting’ introduction providing analysis on women’s exclusion from peace processes globally including common arguments for why the status quo persistently remains. It concludes by identifying concrete recommendations related to improving inclusion in peace processes both quantitatively and substantially. These recommendations range from including gender expertise to creating and supporting safe spaces for women’s inclusion on both a practical and technical level. It also has an annex to practically guide mediators, facilitators and advisers in their preparations or review of interventions.


This article reflects on resilience within and across movements for gender justice in Myanmar at a time of rapid and uncertain change and transition. Drawing from the experience of the Gender Equality Network (GEN), the article examines three cases in which GEN sought to document resilience and expand mechanisms of resilience (fostering personal and collective security, vibrant livelihoods, and political engagement) through national-level advocacy.

The first case describes attempts to publicise and eliminate, violence against women (VAW). The second focuses on women's (lack of) access to natural resources and economic decision-making, drawing on gender-focused inputs into the National Land Use Policy. Finally, the article examines the impacts of conflict on women's resilience, and women's increasing participation in the peace process. In all three cases, effective mobilisation and networking not only increased female political voice, but also enabled creation of a more resilient democracy by modelling effective policy, research, advocacy, and communication strategies.


Fischer, Rahel (2012), KOFF Factsheet: Gender Dimensions of Conflict and Peacebuilding, Bern, Switzerland: KOFF Center for Peacebuilding.


This chapter is part of a working paper series reflecting on international and local actors involved in Myanmar’s political, governance and economic transitions. This chapter describes the extent of the limited representation of women in the peace process, their participation has been constrained in the Myanmar context with low levels of women’s representation and participation in government structures, negotiation teams, and ceasefire monitoring teams. Further, agenda items and ceasefire agreements up to the NCA do not contain gender sensitive texts.

The chapter outlines barriers, and cultural and contextual challenges women face when trying to participate in the peace process. Some of these barriers include cultural norms, the military background of key actors, and the absence of gender expertise in the main negotiating parties. It describes the various phases of a programme undertaken by Swisspeace and the Shalom Foundation, and its transition from working with 200 women from varies parts of society, which generated interest in WPS on a broad level, to working with and training a smaller number of influential women who were seen as individuals who could impact the process. It outlines next steps which include promoting greater women’s involvement in the national dialogue, and finding a balancing between seeking a normative agenda and advancing women’s inclusion in the process. The chapter argues that this balance is necessary in order to accept the reality that the peace process is exclusive and has limited seats at the peace table, and has many constraints. Lastly, it raises the question of what the international community’s role may be to provide training and
opportunities without creating a form of disempowerment. The report also states that training and capacity building is just one aspect of the work that can be done to support the peace process; others include supporting the development of locally led publications on different topics and establishing long partnerships with local organisations.


Gender Equality Network (2013), *Taking the lead: an assessment of women’s leadership training needs and training initiatives in Myanmar*, Yangon: GEN. In Myanmar.


This paper explores women’s exclusion from participation in the peace process. It examines different dimensions of the peace process, from past ceasefires to the current architecture for peace, and argues for greater inclusion through both the increased participation of women in peace negotiations and the inclusion of gender-sensitive elements in written agreements. The research and data found on Myanmar’s specific institutions concerned with peace are particularly helpful to bolster argumentation and advocacy.

The research conducted for the report reveals that less than a handful of women have participated in the official peace talks that began in 2011. The vast majority of the government delegation are men and only three ethnic armed organisations (KNU, KNPP, and CNF) had women as part of their delegations at the time of publication. From a substance angle, the report finds that none of the 12 preliminary ceasefire agreements included any references to women. The report ends with a call...
to the international community and national actors to take action to advocate for women’s rights and inclusion in the political process as well as in the current peace negotiations.


Hedström, Jenny (2015), “We Did Not Realize about the Gender Issues. So, We Thought It Was a Good Idea’ -Gender Roles in Burmese Oppositional Struggles,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. This article explores the relationship between ethnic and student armed opposition movements in Burma and the emergence of the Women’s League of Burma (WLB). In focusing on women's involvement in resistance activities, this article aims to broaden our understanding of gender and conflict by highlighting women’s involvement in and response to civil conflict. Drawing on primary interviews carried out with founding members of the women’s movement, non-state armed groups and others active in civil society, the article investigates how a gendered political consciousness arose out of dissatisfaction with women’s secondary position in armed opposition groups after the 1988 pro-democracy demonstrations. By invoking solidarity based on a gendered positioning, the women in the WLB were able to create a movement that is inclusive of multiethnic differences.


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This paper is part of a series of publications by local authors involved in the ongoing peace process, and starts by acknowledging the need for a systematic gender analysis in and of the peace process. It identifies three major barriers for including women's rights and gender issues in the peace process:

First, women are excluded and denied access to the negotiation process. Second, there is no National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in Myanmar. Third, there is a considerable lack of awareness and knowledge on gender issues in the peace process by the various stakeholders. Khen and Nyoi’s paper gives an extensive description of the perception of gender within the context of Myanmar’s armed conflict. It explores how men and women experience conflict differently, and describes women’s minority position within the peace processes. Ongoing incidences of gender discrimination found in conflict and post-war settings in Myanmar and within the structure of peace initiatives themselves show that the current peace initiatives and the actors that conduct them have yet to grasp the meaning of gender issues. This lack of understanding exacerbates women’s marginalization in economic, social and political processes and undermines their well-being and quality of life.

It concludes with a set of recommendations targeting four key groups: Government of Myanmar, armed groups, international actors, and civil society. These include additional research on gender in Myanmar, improving efforts to disseminate the gendered information to all stakeholders in order to build awareness and exposure, appointing a gender advisor to the negotiation teams, and a call to address gender issues during the ceasefire and peace talks. The paper also stresses the need for temporary measures, such as quotas, to include women as negotiators in the peace process and national dialogue until the government develops and adopts a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325.


This opinion paper was produced as a part of the now defunct “Women at the Peace Table – Asia Pacific” project of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. It assesses the roles of women in the peace process and their contributions in the current dynamics in Myanmar. Women’s exclusion in
the peace process is due to several factors identified in the report. First, peace talks before 2011 were closed to the public which contributed to the exclusion of women. Second, culturally, women in Myanmar are seen as being in charge of the home, and are not considered to have a role in politics or the public sphere. Traditionally, women who made efforts to be involved in these more political processes were cast as villains. Lastly, obedience to male figures is central to the social fabric, and men are seen as having a “know everything” attitude towards women’s issues and needs.

The authors note that women are slowly becoming a part of the process, and the space for their needs must be created by women themselves. Women in the past have contributed to peacebuilding through broader needs such as livelihood creation, social services and trauma healing. However, there has been a shift in women’s perspectives on peace processes due to two factors: the growth and organisation of women’s networks, and the changing political environment and the international pressure it faces to be more inclusive and transparent.

The paper ends by providing several recommendations for the inclusion of women in the peace process, which included the need to gather information about women’s concerns and perspectives, push for women’s capacity building within peace building, and increase support programmes to further empower women in and around the peace table.


Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs (2013), National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2020), Naypyitaw: MNCWA.

Nderitu, Alice and O’Neill, Jacqueline (2013), Getting to the Point of Inclusion: Seven Myths


Open Society Foundation (2014), Rights based women’s organisations, Burma: An assessment and mapping of the work of women’s organizations in Burma, Burma Project, New York: OSF.


Oxfam, Care, and Troicare produced this report which summarizes the findings of surveys on women, gender and leadership in Myanmar. Areas of inquiry included how women in Myanmar overcame obstacles to become leaders, their experiences with leadership, and what needs to be changed to increase the amount of women in leadership and decision-making roles. Overall, 756 women leaders were involved from various parts of the country, spanning multiple sectors including business, politics and non-profits.

The report highlights eight findings which have implications for policy makers seeking to create enabling systems, structures and practices to ensure women’s equal participation in decision making and leadership roles. These included: the need to better understanding leadership, drivers behind women’s journeys to leadership, the norms and stereotypes that block women’s paths to and in leadership, gender-based violence, balancing home and work life responsibilities, women’s role in contesting discrimination, recognising gender equality as a legitimate struggle, and the importance of supporting future women leaders.

Women and Leadership concludes by stating that the Government of Myanmar will struggle to achieve long-lasting inclusive peace and development for its people if it fails to address women’s rights and needs. The report provides various recommendations split into three categories: changing laws, politics, and the political process; changing social attitude and cultural norms; and supporting women in leadership roles aimed at addressing the eight areas discussed throughout.


Peace Support Fund (2016), The women are ready: An opportunity to transform peace in Myanmar, Yangon: PSF.

This Discussion Paper provides the first detailed assessment of women’s participation and gender inclusion in the Myanmar peace process up to the end of 2015. The report provides an assessment of how the Government, ethnic armed groups, civil society, and international actors engage with gender justice concerns. Next, the report identifies eight inter-related factors that inhibit women's participation in the peace process and public life more broadly. These include socio-cultural gender norms and expectations; Women’s caregiving and caretaking roles (‘triple load’); negotiating multiple
identities—ethnicity, class and gender; gendered leadership cultures in Myanmar; the paradox of the ‘high status’ of women; gender-based violence; broader human security issues; and the underrepresentation of women in politics and the security sector. The final section provides a framework of practical strategies for redressing the inequities women experience in Myanmar, in particular, related to participation in the peace process. All of the strategies outlined are based in international evidence and best practice. This framework is relevant for Government, NGOs, armed groups, international actors and others. It also provides suggestions of themes that would benefit from more research and analysis. Each section of the report concludes with a set of questions to prompt discussion and debate. (Myanmar based organisations: If you would like hard copies of this report to support your organisational work, please contact the PSF.)


UN Women, Gender and Development Initiative-Myanmar, Swisspeace (2015), Why Gender Matters in Conflict and Peace: Perspectives from Mon and Kayin States, Myanmar, Yangon: UN Women. In Myanmar


This briefing paper explores the gender dimensions and gender impact of conflict and peacebuilding, particularly for communities in ethnic areas in Myanmar. This paper discusses how women’s human rights are underpinned by international law and international instruments, such as human rights conventions and UN Security Council Resolutions. At present, women’s organisations from and in Myanmar are highly active in informal, community-level peace-building and reconciliation activities, while remaining largely excluded (with a few notable exceptions) from formal and high-level peace initiatives such as bilateral ceasefire negotiations and the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement process. It argues the need for, and benefits of, greater involvement of women, in particular women’s rights representatives, in the peace process as a whole and recommends ways to achieve this. It is structured in the following sections: a conceptual framework explaining gender equality, conflict and peace concepts; an overview of the main issues related to gender inequality and violent conflict in Myanmar; a description of the contributions of women’s organisations and women’s rights activists to peacebuilding and reconciliation in Myanmar; a discussion of the current participation of women’s organisations’ representatives in the formal peace and democratisation processes in Myanmar and a concluding paragraph with recommendations for strengthening women’s participation in all aspects of peacebuilding.
Women’s League of Burma (2005), *Any Progress for the Lives of Women in Burma since Beijing?*, Chiang Mai: WLB.


This report shows how women from ethnic communities in Myanmar experience gender-based violence (GBV) carried out by the Tatmadaw, Myanmar’s Army. It lists over 100 cases where ethnic Kachin, Karen and Shan women have been sexually violated by state troops, including by army officers. Importantly, these violations have taken place after the elections of 2010, highlighting the security issues women and girls face in a supposedly democratic Myanmar. The report argues that the use of gender-based violence by the state is a strategy of warfare to ‘demoralise and destroy’ ethnic communities, and this is therefore in clear violation of international human rights. The report ends with recommendations aimed at both the Government of Myanmar, ethnic armed groups and international actors. Paramount among these recommendations is the need to change the 2008 Constitution which, the report notes, provides the main obstacle to women’s full and substantial participation in Myanmar by providing impunity for crimes committed in war affected areas and ensuring continued military control over the Government.

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